TURNING POINTS, IDENTITY CHANGE, AND COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH: THE PROSOCIAL BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

by

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(Under the Direction of Sarah K. S. Shannon)

ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, the incarcerated population in the United States has grown exponentially. The country currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world and disproportionately incarcerates members of marginalized communities despite the known negative impacts on life chances and prosocial behavior. Because of these established consequences, educational programming is becoming more prevalent among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Previous research links participation in higher education during or after incarceration to reductions in recidivism and increased employment opportunities upon release. However, there is little inquiry into the mechanisms driving these results or the nonmaterial resources allowing certain individuals to be successful in their pursuit of higher education. There is also limited focus on the potential benefits of higher education beyond recidivism or job attainment.

To address these gaps in the existing literature, I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals. I also use multiple regression models to test life course theory mechanisms and community cultural wealth moderators linking higher education to

reincarceration, voting history, paid time off, and annual income. The analysis of my interviews identifies several nonmaterial resources that influence an individual's decision to participate in higher education and impact their academic and social success in the process. Further, my qualitative results indicate that participation in higher education has positive outcomes beyond reincarceration and job attainment, including increased confidence or self-esteem and higher job satisfaction. Responses show a link between job satisfaction and occupations that help or give back to the community, particularly among women. My quantitative analysis supports the qualitative results. Findings show a significant direct relationship between community cultural wealth and reincarceration, voting history, paid time off, and annual income, though the moderating relationship is less supported. Findings also show a significant relationship between life course theory mediators and these outcomes.

INDEX WORDS: punishment, higher education, life course theory, community cultural wealth, desistance, recidivism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The consequences of mass incarceration are well-established and include negative impacts on job prospects (Pager 2003), health (Massoglia and Pridemore 2015), and civic engagement (Lerman and Weaver 2014) for more than 5 million formerly incarcerated people in the United States (Shannon et al. 2017) Members of already marginalized communities are disproportionately represented in this population and in these negative outcomes (Clear 2007; Sampson and Loeffler 2010; Travis et al. 2014). Because of these consequences and the increase in individuals experiencing reentry, there is a growing population with reduced life chances and delayed entry into the stability of adulthood (Bushway and Uggen 2021).

Evidence suggests that correctional education programs and access to higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals moderates the relationship between incarceration and negative outcomes (see: Davis et al. 2013; Gorgol and Sponsler 2011; Mercer 2009). Two benefits emerge repeatedly in multiple studies: reductions in reincarceration and increased employment opportunity upon release. Lack of education and skills is a key reason for reincarceration; this connection is the basis for many academic programs offered in the United States correctional facilities. On average, incarcerated individuals are less educated than the general population; in 2004, 36 percent of individuals aged 16 and up housed in state prisons did not have a high school diploma compared to 19 percent of the general population in the same age range (Davis et al. 2013). Individuals who took part in correctional education programs had 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than did their peers who did not have any form of education

while incarcerated (Davis et al. 2013; Bozick et al. 2018). This study includes all forms of correctional education, including vocational programming, GED classes, adult basic education (ABE), and college-level programming.

Evidence also indicates that there are positive results from correctional higher education programs other than reduced reincarceration rates. Some findings suggest that students in correctional education programs are likely to have an easier time finding employment post-release than individuals who do not participate in these programs, though these results are largely divided by program type. Employment chances improve slightly as the result of correctional education in general, but individuals who participated specifically in vocational training have 28 percent higher odds of post-release employment than those who did not participate in any postsecondary correctional education (Davis et al. 2013; Bozick et al. 2018).

However, the availability of educational programs in U.S. prisons has declined over time. The number of programs offered to incarcerated individuals decreased in the punitive era of the late 20th century. Participation in the remaining programs declined as well, with educational programming experiencing the largest reduction of any program category. By 2004, only 27 percent of incarcerated individuals were participating in prison programming of any kind as opposed to 43 percent in 1990 (Phelps 2011).

In this dissertation, my discussion of educational programming will refer specifically to post-secondary education, also referred to as higher education. According to Castro et al. (2018), the Department of Education (DoE) and the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) have similar conceptions of correctional education, or postsecondary correctional education (PSCE), defining it as any post-high school coursework that confers credit toward an academic or

vocational certificate or degree. Adult basic education (ABE), high school/GED, and basic life skills classes are not included.

Potential students in correctional facilities face additional barriers to higher education, largely in funding their educational pursuits. Before 1994, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals had the same access to the Pell Grant as other students. However, the Violent Crime Control Act of 1994 removed this access to federal funding. In the years prior to the exclusion of incarcerated students from Pell access, 92 percent of state correctional systems offered educational programming across 772 prisons, with more than 38,000 students enrolling in these programs. In the first year after Pell was blocked, enrollment in these programs decreased by 44 percent and the number of systems offering correctional education dropped by 63 percent (Tewksbury et al. 2000). These decreases were consistent across all forms of correctional higher education.

In 2016, the Department of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, which lifts the restriction on access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students for a period of three years; the program was extended for another three-year period in 2019 (Department of Education 2015). While the reintroduction of federal funding for correctional education is promising, it does not address all barriers to eligibility. Factors such as citizenship status, length of sentence, and nature of original crime among others still limit access to correctional education for many incarcerated individuals (Tahamont et al. 2020).

Although the existing literature on participation in higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals has identified some positive impacts, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms that drive these results. First, despite the emphasis on reduced reincarceration, we still do not know how or why participation in postsecondary education

reduces the likelihood of reincarceration for formerly incarcerated people. The second limitation of the existing literature is that it largely neglects to address potential benefits of correctional higher education beyond reincarceration or job attainment. Leaving other potentially positive outcomes unidentified, such as productivity and community engagement, limits the scope of our knowledge (see: McCorkel and DeFina 2019) and efforts to support successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into their communities.

This study uses semi-structured interviews to identify mechanisms through which participation in higher education reduces reincarceration among formerly incarcerated people and to suggest other positive outcomes of higher education that are related to these mechanisms. Additionally, this study tests mechanisms linking higher education to reincarceration and other positive outcomes using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97). From a life course perspective, higher education may function as a turning point that leads to desistance from criminal behavior (Sampson and Laub 1993). At the very least, attaining a college degree may provide a base of stability for individuals to build from. This study examines the benefits of higher education beyond reincarceration through the lens of community cultural wealth, which identifies multiple types of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant) possessed by members of marginalized communities (Yosso 2005).

My overarching research question is: What are the mechanisms through which higher education leads to reduced reincarceration and other positive outcomes for formerly incarcerated people? To address this broad question, this study addresses the following specific questions: 1. What factors motivate incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals to participate in higher education? 2a. What nonmaterial resources do incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals possess that contribute to their success in higher education? 2b. Which turning points mediate the

relationship between higher education and reincarceration? 2c. Which components of community cultural wealth moderate the relationship between higher education and reincarceration? and, 3. Are the same mechanisms and moderators that lead to reduced reincarceration linked to other positive outcomes for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals?

To answer these research questions, I conduct a two-pronged, multi-method approach. First, I conduct 14 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated people who have pursued higher education during and/or after incarceration. Second, I analyze data from the NLSY97 to examine how individual motivating factors and nonmaterial resources, as aligned with the types of capital identified in community cultural wealth, influence success in higher education and the specific mechanisms that link success in higher education to reductions in reincarceration and other positive outcomes.

The outline of this dissertation is as follows: Chapter One is a summary of the existing literature, including research on the barriers to higher education that come with being incarcerated or having a criminal record as well as the general benefits of higher education. Chapter One then considers the benefits, shortcomings, and outcomes of higher education in prison. Chapter Two is an explanation of my theoretical framework focused on life course theories of desistance and community cultural wealth. Chapter Three describes the research methods used in this mixed methods approach, including long-form interviews and multilevel regression analysis. Chapter Four examines the results of the qualitative prong of this study, and Chapter Five examines the results of the quantitative analysis. Finally, Chapter Six provides an in-depth discussion of this study's findings and their contribution to the discipline.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The lifetime risk of incarceration is highly stratified by age, race, and education (Pettit and Western 2004). Individuals who drop out of high school before graduating are three to four times more likely to be imprisoned than those who have earned a high school diploma, and Black individuals are eight times more likely to experience incarceration than White individuals. Race also intersects with gender as a factor; almost 60 percent of Black men who dropout of high school will experience incarceration at some point in their lives compared to less than 30 percent of White men (Pettit and Western 2004; Western 2006). Among formerly incarcerated individuals, only four percent have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 29 percent of the general population (Couloute 2018). Mass incarceration not only disrupts individual life courses but also perpetuates the cycle of inequality and poverty for already marginalized communities (Wakefield and Uggen 2010).

Benefits of Higher Education

Educational attainment for formerly incarcerated individuals is a pressing issue, since earning a college education is one of the most direct ways to achieve social mobility in the United States. By 2000, the median income for college graduates was more than double that of individuals with just a high school diploma. By 2010, 42 percent of jobs expected applicants to have a post-secondary degree (Haveman and Smeeding 2006). Two-year postsecondary programs aid in social mobility more than a high school diploma alone, but the benefits of a four-

year bachelor's degree greatly outweigh the benefits of a vocational, technical, or community college degree.

Critics of higher education argue that its cost has become not only prohibitive in the past few decades but also that the cost outweighs the benefits received from more advanced degrees. In fact, the cost of higher education has risen at a faster rate than inflation. The average cost of a public, four-year institution in 1981 was $6,200, and in the 2008-2009 school year, it was $14,100. At private four-year institutions, rates rose from $13,700 to $31,300 in the same time period (Hout 2012). However, evidence shows that the benefits of a college degree have risen as well, especially for students from poor or working class families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), scholarships and grants reduce college costs for 64 percent of full-time students, but do not diminish benefits for individuals with financial need. Over 40 years of working, men with a bachelor's degree will accumulate 1.1 million more in earnings compared to men with just a high school diploma. Women with a bachelor's degree will out-earn their counterparts with high school diplomas by $636,000 over the same time period (Hout 2012).

Like incarceration, postsecondary educational attainment is highly stratified by race. In the United States in 2022, the vast majority of individuals have a high school diploma, regardless of race (National Center for Education Statistics 2023). However, the differences in attainment among each racial group become more pronounced with higher education. For example, 45 percent of White individuals had a bachelor's degree or higher degree compared to only 28 percent of Black individuals and 25 percent of Hispanic individuals. Asian Americans earned bachelor's degrees at a rate of 72 percent, by far the highest of any racial category (National

Center for Education Statistics 2023). Among individuals who identified as multiracial 28.3 percent had earned a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics 2016).

Benefits of Correctional Higher Education

Researchers and policymakers define correctional education in multiple ways.

The Department of Education and the Institute for Higher Education Policy have similar conceptions of correctional education, or postsecondary correctional education (PSCE), defining it as any post-high school coursework that confers credit toward an academic or vocational certificate or degree. RAND Corporation[1], on the other hand, uses a broader definition, including adult basic education (ABE) courses that teach basic math, reading skills, or English as a second language (ESL) classes as well as high school/GED courses, and programs that provide classes but do not contribute to any higher goal like an associate's or a bachelor's degree (Davis et al. 2013). For the purposes of this study, I use a combination of these two definitions, focusing on credit-bearing programs that offer certificates and college degrees as well as those who do not offer credit but offer similar college-level coursework. I do not include ABE, high school/GED, and basic life skills classes in my analysis. This combined definition of correctional education that centers higher education aligns with the research questions this study seeks to answer.

[1] The United States Department of Education (DoE), the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), and RAND Corporation are three prominent organizations in the field of correctional education research. The Department of Education is a governmental agency that conducts research on all levels of education and has a direct role in creating educational policy (U.S. Department of Education 2024). The Institute for Higher Education Policy is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization based on the mission to increase access to higher education for marginalized groups. They focus on conducting research that will directly influence policy (Institute for Higher Education Policy 2024). RAND Corporation is a think tank and research institute in the United States that conducts policy-oriented research across a broad spectrum of specialties, including education (RAND Corporation 2024).

Research to-date has identified several benefits to participation in correctional education programs. Two particular benefits emerge repeatedly in multiple studies: reductions in reincarceration and increased employment opportunity upon release. In this section, I describe existing evidence on these well-known benefits of higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. I then elaborate on two emerging perspectives: markers of desistance and social capital.

Reduced Reincarceration and Economic Benefits. Job opportunities and financial safety nets are limited for formerly incarcerated individuals. Living wages are difficult to access for these individuals because their criminal records function as barriers to employment, whether directly or indirectly (Pager 2003; Pogrebin et al. 2014). For example, estimates place the individual wage penalty for incarceration between 10 percent and 30 percent (Geller et al. 2006; Pettit and Lyons 2007). In other words, individuals who have a history of incarceration tend to earn hourly or salary wages that are 10-30 percent lower than their peers without a history of incarceration. Limited educational attainment and gaps in work history also contribute to difficulty securing employment post-incarceration. Formerly incarcerated individuals have limited access to government benefits like TANF and SNAP, and in some states, they are banned from voting (Pogrebin et al. 2014; Bryan et al. 2008; Uggen 2015). Further, many individuals released from incarceration are responsible for additional fees associated with parole or debts accrued while they were housed by the state (Harris 2016). Because of these additional costs, formerly incarnated people need greater income to maintain their freedom and meet their basic needs (Pogrebin et al. 2014).

The idea that lack of education and skills contributes to reincarceration is the basis for many academic programs offered in correctional facilities (Tewksbury 2000; Allen 2006). Davis

et al. (2013) found that incarcerated individuals are on average less educated than the general population. For example, 36 percent of individuals aged 16 and up housed in state prisons in 2004 did not have a high school diploma compared to 19 percent of the general population of people aged 16 and up. In a meta-analysis of studies from 1980-2011 that looked at the relationship between correctional education and individual outcomes, Davis and colleagues found that individuals who took part in correctional education programs had 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than did their peers who did not receive any form of education while incarcerated. Bozick et al. (2018) find similarly positive results; individuals participating in correctional education programs are 28 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than their counterparts who do not receive any correctional education. Further, a recent analysis of the Bard Prison Initiative finds a significant reduction in reincarceration rates for program participation. Program completion decreases reincarceration at even lower rates regardless of race, and completion of a bachelor's degree decreases reincarceration more than completion of an associate's degree (Denney and Tynes 2021).

Some findings suggest that students who participate in correctional education programs are likely to have an easier time finding employment post-release than individuals who do not participate in these programs, though these results vary by program type. Both Davis et al. (2013) and Bozick et al. (2018) find support for improved employment chances as the result of correctional education in general. There is an established inverse relationship between postsecondary correctional education and involvement in crime; earning a college degree while incarcerated increases an individual's chances of gainful employment as well as reduces their likelihood in criminal participation upon release (Runell 2018).

Additionally, correctional education programs are cost-effective, which may be one of the most consequential benefits of these programs in terms of policy. Davis et al. (2013) created a model to calculate the direct costs of the correctional education programs in their study. Using a hypothetical pool of 100 incarcerated individuals, they found that the three-year reincarceration costs for non-participants is $2.94 million to $3.25 million as compared to the three-year reincarceration costs for program participants, which is $2.07 million to $2.28 million. In comparison, the cost of providing education to incarcerated people would range from $140,000 to $174,000 for the same hypothetical pool; these costs translate to $1,400 to $1,744 per student. In terms of a reduction in reincarceration, correctional education programs would need to reduce three-year incarceration rates by 1.2 to 2.6 percentage points to break even. Davis et al.'s (2013) analysis shows that they reduce these rates by 13 percentage points. Notably, these figures only include direct costs to the system and do not include indirect costs like financial or emotional costs to families or financial costs to the system as a whole. This is likely, then, a conservative estimate of the cost effectiveness of these correctional education programs.

Markers of Desistance. Much of the existing literature on the effects of prison education focuses on reductions on reincarceration and economic benefits, such as job attainment and increased wages. However, focusing strictly on these two outcomes limits the scope of research in this field and favors a neoliberal stance that the benefits of these programs is in their value to the economy (McCorkel and DeFina 2019). Further, reincarceration rates are a flawed measure of success because of their binary nature; attitudinal and behavioral change are nuanced and should be measured as such (Klingele 2019).

The relationship between work and what an individual deserves is not limited to incarcerated individuals; "earning one's keep" is an idea heralded in the United States and is

built into the fabric of the idealized American Dream. As McCorkel and DeFina (2019) point out, work is tied to almost every benefit provided by the government. For example, eligibility requirements for safety net programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) required that individuals be employed or actively looking for employment. Similarly, the criminal justice system has linked freedom to job requirements for parolees. Through this lens, higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals is less about holistic rehabilitation or the needs of the community and more about the demands of the market and the state (McCorkel and DeFina 2019). Expanding current research to examine additional prosocial outcomes would acknowledge that successful reentry involves more than economic participation and reduced criminal behavior. It would shift the focus to benefits for communities as well as include a new population of incarcerated individuals, long-termers and lifers. Conducting research that includes outcomes like job satisfaction, community or civic engagement, health, and improvements in parent/child relationships, for example, could illustrate how impactful successful reentry is in multiple areas of an individual's life.

One potential solution is to turn the focus to a broader conceptualization of markers of desistance. Desistance is defined as "the process by which individuals move from a life that is crime-involved to one that is not" (Klingele 2019, 769). Pivoting to studying markers of desistance rather than reincarceration allows for the possibility of progress. Markers of desistance may include psychological, social, physical, or environmental factors that allow an individual to more easily avoid criminal behavior. Desistance may include behavior changes that no longer include committing criminal offense, but it may also be longer periods between criminal offenses and other patterns of increased prosocial behavior (Klingele 2019). These

markers include increased time between offenses and new patterns of positive behavior (Klingele 2019). Butts and Shiraldi (2018) identify nine critical factors of desistance: getting older and maturing, family and relationships, sobriety, employment, hope and motivation, having something to give others, having a place within a social group, not having a criminal identity, and being "believed in." Employment, for example, may no longer be an outcome or a goal on its own but may function as a marker of desistance, where those who are gainfully employed commit fewer crimes than they would have if they were unemployed, and they show higher rates of other behaviors like social and civic engagement.

Toward a Desistance Framework. Reincarceration has long been the primary measure of rehabilitative success. Methods of calculating recidivism rates vary, but it is usually comprised of some combination of rearrest, rebooking, reconviction, or reincarceration within a specified timeframe – often 6 months, one year, or three years – after release from incarceration (Urban Institute 2015; Lyman and LoBuglio 2007). Much of the existing peer-reviewed research on the benefits of higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals uses reincarceration as its dependent variable; it is viewed as an objective measure that is easily understood and easily replicable. However, there are serious shortcomings in the ways researchers measure reincarceration and with the status it has gained in academic research and policy-making. Butts and Schiraldi (2018), argue that reincarceration is not as objective as once thought and is actually a "gauge of police activity" (1) that disproportionately impacts minority populations since policing policies and practices vary among different precincts as well as among different neighborhoods within the same precinct. Minority neighborhoods are policed at higher rates than white neighborhoods, and people of color are stopped with more frequency than

white people. The larger police presence increases the likelihood of people of color having police encounters, and therefore, increases the likelihood of rearrest.

The appeal of reincarceration as a measure of success is largely based on its presumed objectivity, but its binary structure is also a shortcoming. There is no nuance in reincarceration; individuals either commit crimes once they are released or they do not. Relying solely on reincarceration to measure the success of a criminal justice intervention underappreciates incremental changes made by individuals and undervalues interventions overall (Klingele 2019). An individual who regularly sold drugs before incarceration may have gotten clean while in prison, but a year after his release is rearrested for a bar fight in which he was not the aggressor. This individual's progress is not measured by reincarceration data. He is now identified as just another failure of the system though he had been rehabilitated.

The solution to these problems is to move toward a desistance framework rather than focusing primarily on rates of reincarceration (Kazemian 2015). Using desistance rather than reincarceration as a measure for success allows attitudinal and behavioral change to be a process rather than an all-or-none ultimatum. One misstep does not erase progress. Further, markers of desistance are multi-faceted, so success is measured in multiple ways. Higher education can serve as a marker of desistance. Participation in higher education may provide individuals with all four factors identified by Klingele (2019) – psychological, social, physical, and environmental. Participation in higher education may provide a sense of purpose for individuals who plan to use their degree to improve their employment opportunities, and they will be in classes with similarly goal-oriented individuals. Research, like this study, should examine the relationship between higher education and other known markers of desistance like employment,

sobriety, family relationships, and hope about the future as well as its impact on outcomes beyond reincarceration.

Prosocial Benefits. Correctional higher education provides an opportunity for "transformative learning" (Tewksbury 2000) that can lead to positive changes in cognition among participants, which then shift attitudes and behaviors from an antisocial perspective to a prosocial one. Results include improved coping skills, increased self-concept and improved behavior (Bozick et al. 2018; Tewksbury 2000). Postsecondary correctional education also plays a vital role in the maturation process of program participants. Tewksbury (2000) argues that higher education functions as an initial step in the life course for incarcerated individuals because it aids in the development of a more prosocial worldview and improved self-esteem often associated with productive adulthood. These new attitudes and behaviors reduce discipline problems and are linked to lower levels of violence in correctional institutions, providing benefits for society as well as the individual students (Zoukis 2014). Postsecondary correctional education also improves self-confidence and improved coping strategies among participants, particularly for women. In addition to reductions in criminogenic attitudes and behaviors, which are necessary in avoiding reincarceration upon release, a study of college students at a women's prison finds that program participants report feeling more empowered and confident as a result of their involvement (Baranger et al. 2018).

Barriers to Higher Education

Students with a history of incarceration face barriers to higher education during incarceration and post-incarceration. Some of these barriers, like funding, are present regardless of when an individual pursues higher education, but the limitations will vary. For example, availability of Pell and other grants may be limited for students participating in higher education

while incarcerated. Other barriers are specific to correctional education or post-correctional education.

Correctional Education. The availability and characteristics of rehabilitation programs in U.S. prisons have changed substantially in recent decades. Prison programming decreased in the "get tough" era of the late 20th century, including a significant decline in educational staff in prisons (Phelps 2011). At the same time, program participation among people incarcerated dropped from the 1970s to the 1990s, with educational programming showing the largest decline of any category. This decline in participation, largely due to the removal of Pell Grant access, continued into the 2000s, with 27 percent of incarcerated individuals participating in prison programs in 2004 as compared to 43 percent in 1990 (Phelps 2011).

There are additional issues with the implementation of these programs. Instructors in correctional education programs may not be trained in the specific subjects they are teaching, and even when they are, resources such as textbooks, classrooms, and technology may be outdated or broken (Pryor and Thompkins 2013). In some institutions, access to correctional education is used as a form of social control rather than as a form of rehabilitation, with facility staff having discretion over who participates and when. Pryor and Thompkins (2013) find that education is used as a "carrot for good behavior," (461) requiring clear conduct reports for up to a year prior to being eligible for program participation or reducing one's sentence upon completion of an educational program. Though this policy is not a problem, it does provide the opportunity for abuse of the system. Interviews show that incarcerated individuals in facilities where program participation is used as social control have the perception that facility staff delay program participation, and thus early release, to punish individuals for bad behavior or personal reasons (Pryor and Thompkins 2013).

Incarcerated individuals also face issues of funding for higher education in prison. Being transferred from one prison to another may impact a student's ability not only to finish a specific class but to be eligible for future classes because of unforeseen complications with their funding sources. Transfers between correctional facilities are common and often unavoidable; they are just a part of life in prison. However, Pryor and Thompkins (2013) illustrate how random transfers may impact an individual's ability to get financial aid. One of the individuals they interviewed recounted a hurdle he came up against when he was transferred to a new facility in the middle of a course. He was unable to finish the course since he was no longer physically there to take it, but he also received notification at his new facility that he could only participate in future programs if he paid for them out of pocket. He had not completed his "obligation to his student loans" (468) because he did not complete the course they paid for.

Though cutting through the proverbial red tape for financial aid would benefit students in correctional facilities, the biggest problem with funding is the lack of Pell Grant access for incarcerated individuals. Before 1994, incarcerated individuals had the same access to the Pell Grant as other low income students. In an effort to get "tough on crime," President Clinton and congress passed the Violent Crime Control Act of 1994, which among other things, took this access away. In the years prior to the exclusion of incarcerated students from Pell access, 92 percent of state correctional systems offered correctional education across 772 prisons, with more than 38,000 students enrolling in these programs (Tewksbury 2000).

In just the first year after Pell was blocked, enrollment in these programs decreased by 44 percent and the number of systems offering correctional education dropped to 63 percent. By the third academic year after Pell was eliminated for incarcerated students, the number of state correctional systems offering correctional education dropped to 54.9 percent, and the range of

programs decreased as well. Systems offering certificate programs dropped from 52 percent to 39 percent, systems offering associate's degree programs dropped from 71 percent to 37.3 percent, and systems offering bachelor's degree programs dropped from 48 percent to 19.6 percent. Access to graduate degree programming also dropped over this time period, though the Pell Grant does not provide funding for graduate studies. It is possible, though, that graduate programming was indirectly impacted by this loss of funding because of the reduction in availability of prerequisite programming like a bachelor's degree program (Tewksbury 2000). Buser (1996) directly measured the impact of losing access to Pell on incarcerated individuals. Overall, he found that people who participated in correctional education in the year prior to its elimination, spent approximately four times as many days in disciplinary segregation during the year when no college programming was available compared to the previous years.

In 2016, the Department of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program (Second Chance Pell), an Experimental Sites Initiative that lifted the restriction on access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students for a period of three years; 69 colleges and universities partnered with correctional facilities for the program (Castro et al. 2018). Because the program is so recent, there is little research on its impact on correctional education, though early results are promising. Forty-seven states now have at least one postsecondary educational institution providing credit-bearing coursework in correctional facilities. In the United States, 202 (4 percent) postsecondary, Title IV institutions offer correctional education that provides college credit; before the inception of Second Chance Pell, at least 24 of those institutions were not providing this service (Boldin 2021).

Roughly one-third of these institutions nationally are fully or largely funded through Second Chance Pell, so without Pell funding, many of these programs will not survive past

experimental window, which is set to be expanded into 200 facilities in all 50 states by the 2022-2023 academic year (Gravely 2021). Ninety percent of these institutions in Texas are fully or largely funded through Second Chance Pell, and of the 10 states where only one institution of this type exists, over half are funded through Second Chance Pell (Castro et al. 2018).

Despite the progress made by the implementation of Second Chance Pell, there are issues the program needs to address. There are a number of federal criteria that must be met past an individual's financial need, leaving only 28 percent of the incarcerated population eligible for the grant. When state-specific criteria are included, that number drops as low as four percent (Tahamont et al. 2020). Additionally, the application process itself is arduous and may require access to resources not available to many incarcerated individuals. Policy initiatives, such as universal registration for selective service, have been suggested but are not total solutions to the problem (Tahamont et al. 2020).

Higher Education after Release. Upon release from incarceration, individuals often refrain from participation in certain institutions that require official surveillance (Brayne 2014). Banks and other financial institutions, for example, require specific records and identification to open accounts, and medical institutions keep detailed records of an individual's health and wellness status. Opting out of these resources isolates formerly incarcerated individuals even further through a process called "system avoidance" (Brayne 2014). Individuals with any criminal justice system contact are more likely to avoid surveilling institutions of all types, including medical, financial, employment, and educational institutions, than individuals who have not had contact with the criminal justice system. Because formerly incarcerated individuals are disproportionately poor people of color, this process contributes to increased disadvantage for this population.

Institutions of higher education, in particular, stigmatize formerly incarcerated students. Many members of this population do not participate in these institutions for multiple reasons including system avoidance and its cost prohibitive nature, but there are additional hurdles even for those who do opt-in to higher education. Institutional discrimination, surveillance, and media shaming isolate and stigmatize formerly incarcerated college students. To avoid this stigma formerly incarcerated college students may choose not to share their backgrounds, which can impact their educational outcomes and strengthen the stigma against them (Fretwell 2019). This isolation within an institution can have negative impacts on mental health as well as negate some benefits of higher education like increased economic opportunity and social mobility.

Funding is often also a barrier to accessing higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals. Though most convictions, including drug charges, no longer disqualify an individual from federal financial aid eligibility, they do require an extra time commitment for completing financial aid applications as well as admissions applications. An analysis of institutions within the SUNY system, the median attrition rate (beginning but not completing the admissions application) was three times higher for individuals with a criminal history than for the rest of the population (Stewart and Uggen 2020). Drug crimes require additional paperwork and information, provided by the individual, for each application, though these previous acts are not legally allowed to impact any approval decisions. Further, convictions for crimes that are sexual in nature still exclude one from government-funded grants and loans for higher education upon release from incarceration (Federal Student Aid Office 2022).

Difficulties in accessing higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals is not limited to funding concerns. Stewart and Uggen (2020) reformulated Pager's (2003) research on the job market to examine admissions into non-elite, four-year colleges and universities. The

rejection rate increased by 2.5 times for individuals who disclosed a previous felony conviction, and Black applicants were disproportionately impacted. Overall, racial differences were smaller in Stewart and Uggen's (2020) study of college admissions than they were in Pager's (2003) original study of job applications, but race interacted with institutional context more specifically. At institutions with higher rates of crime, Black male applicants with criminal records were less likely to be accepted into the college or university (Stewart and Uggen 2020).

Once admitted to institutions of higher learning, formerly incarcerated students who disclose their status experience institutional discrimination and surveillance that further stigmatizes their experiences, leading many individuals to keep their status confidential (Fretwell 2019). Increased economic opportunity and upward social mobility are benefits of higher education but concealing one's status as formerly incarcerated may lead to emotional and psychological distress and limit social capital opportunities and can limit the advantages of higher education (Fretwell 2019).

The existing literature highlights the benefits of higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, with an emphasis on reduced reincarceration and improved job opportunities upon reentry. Other economic benefits of correctional education include decreased costs of operation in correctional facilities due to reductions in reincarceration leading to housing fewer second-time offenders. Barriers to higher education for this population include access to programs, funding availability, and stigma associated with their history of incarceration.

The economic and reincarceration benefits are well-documented, but this study aims to shift the focus to a desistance framework that measures progress. Reincarceration is a key measure in understanding the impact of higher education among this population, but in a desistance framework, prosocial outcomes are equally as important as reincarceration and

economic benefits. This study builds on the existing literature, framing the current research in the ideas of life course theory and community cultural wealth to further understand the relationship between higher education, reincarceration, and other positive outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this dissertation, I aim to identify the mechanisms that make participation in higher education a potential life course turning point for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals and how community cultural wealth impacts participation in higher education for this population. I draw from two theoretical traditions to frame by analysis: life course theory and community cultural wealth. Life course theories posit that over the course of a lifetime, different stages of life provide different opportunities for bonding and control, and trajectories toward desistance with life events and cognitive development (Sampson and Laub 1993). I argue that higher education may be one such opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals. Community cultural wealth is a set of nonmaterial assets possessed by members of socially marginalized communities as defined by six types of capital: social, aspirational, familial, resistant, linguistic, and navigational (Yosso 2005). I argue that possessing these types of capital may benefit incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals as they pursue higher education.

Life Course Theory

Life course theorists track the offending patterns of individuals over their lifetimes in an effort to understand why engagement in crime varies over time. The life course can be broken down into three stages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. There are two main schools of thought within life course criminology: process-based models and identity-based models (Bushway and Uggen 2021).

Process Models. In life course theory, one explanation for criminal behavior, or lack thereof, is that individuals experience events in their lives that change their outlook and their behavior. Bushway and Uggen (2021) refer to this explanation as the process model because they focus on the process of creating bonds with other individuals through building personal relationships and social connections to society and how those bonds impact criminal behavior. Sampson and Laub (1993) find both stability and change in criminal behavior over the life course. Decreases in criminal behavior can be attributed to strong bonds and social control through formal and informal means. There are four steps in this process of change (Sampson and Laub 2005). First, the individual experiences a structural turning point such as a new job or romantic relationship. Second, as a result of this turning point, the individual experiences increased informal social control and support; this increased support has both indirect and direct impacts on criminal or deviant behavior through strengthened social bonds. Third, the individual's regular activities will change from unstructured to structured, with a higher level of prosocial responsibility. Finally, as a result of the first three steps, the individual develops a commitment to their new life and to the connections that come with it.

These new trajectories function as the opportunities for desistance from criminal or deviant behavior, but this change in behavior is not inevitable. Human agency and individual choices are a key component of life course theories (Sampson and Laub 1993). People are impacted by their circumstances, but they also make choices. However, these choices may be impacted by circumstance. For example, an individual has a choice which jobs to apply for or what type of work to go into, but they may be limited by the qualifications for certain positions. Things like college degrees, previous experience, or physical attributes necessary for certain labor may limit one's access to these careers. So, these situated choices are influenced by

individual circumstance (Laub and Sampson 2014). Individual choices are also affected by contingencies (Becker 1998). Because individuals make up a society, events in their lives and the resulting actions are contingent upon other events and resulting actions. In other words, individual behavior impacts and is impacted by other people and society overall through a series of social processes.

This combination of circumstance and human agency into situated choices impacts both persistence and desistance of crime. Desistance, in particular, is facilitated by these trajectories. Unlike cognitive transformation theorists, Laub and Sampson (2014) argue that desistance is not a conscious decision but is the result of an individual's change in circumstance. Individuals who desist from criminal or deviant behavior during their life course experience the linking structures of each phase of life, particularly regarding relationships and support. For desisters, turning points such as marriage, employment, parenthood, or education provide stability in their lives (Laub and Sampson 2014).

Identity Models. The other prominent branch of life course theory regarding desistance revolves around the idea of cognitive transformation or shifts in identity. Creating a new identity may involve a change in social environment, including personal relationships and physical space (Bushway and Uggen 2021). These perspectives argue that cognitive shifts are necessary for individuals to engage in behavioral change. The social environment may provide opportunities for behavioral change, but cognitive shifts must also occur for change to happen (Giordano et al. 2014). In other words, an individual has to want the stability traditionally associated with adulthood and make the effort to change their behavior. Once again, human agency is a core component.

Giordano and colleagues (2014) assert that there are four components of identity shifts (Giordano et al. 2014). The first, and arguably most fundamental, is cognitive openness. Cognitive openness refers to one's willingness to change in general. The second component is also cognitive openness, but it is more specific to the individual; one must also be exposed to the opportunity for change. This aspect of identity shift acknowledges the relationship between an individual and their social environment. Attitude and opportunity are equally important, and perception of change – i.e. availability, salience – must be accounted for. These opportunities, or hooks, allow an individual to experience the third type of identity shift: cognitive connection. Individuals trying to desist from criminal behavior must view change in a positive light and acknowledge that their current behavior is inconsistent with the desired future outcomes. They must view stability and prosocial responsibility as possible and constructive; it must align with their desired identity. Finally, the fourth identity shift occurs when the individual's view of their previous deviant lifestyle changes. With this last identity shift, individuals see their previous deviant behavior in a negative light and no longer identify with it as they once did, which leads to desistance from criminal behavior.

Recent evidence supports this identity model of desistance and suggests that higher education directly impacts this identity-driven change through transformative learning. According to Lerman and Sadin (2023), an individual's identity, particularly how they see themselves, impacts their self-confidence; a positive identity allows them to believe they will accomplish goals they set for themselves and impacts how likely they perceive their chances of desistance.

This identity model is compatible with the process model. Human agency is vital to both schools of thought and acquiring consistency and maintaining new benefits from stable

employment and family life are the catalysts for change. Identity models may also fill in some gaps for the process models. For example, individuals exposed to the same turning points do not all shift to desistance; identity shift may explain these individual differences.

Reframing Reentry as Entry. Travis (2005) identifies the reentry framework as the idea that researchers should always be working toward an answer to the question, "how can prisoners best be prepared for their inevitable return?" Prioritizing finding an answer to this question changes the goals and expected outcomes of incarceration. Typically, incarceration is accepted as a disruption to one's life course, but Bushway and Uggen (2021) argue that most people who experience incarceration were not accomplishing traditional markers for adulthood prior to incarceration. Bushway and Uggen (2021) call for a reframing of desistance research from a focus on reentry to a focus on entry. The notion of reentry implies that something was lost and needs to be regained, yet many incarcerated individuals did not have jobs or stable housing to lose. Because the majority of the incarcerated population in the United States are among the most marginalized and disadvantaged before their incarceration, they did not have the opportunity to join mainstream society in terms of how it views adulthood. There is no career, education, marriage, or stable housing to return to; therefore, desistance research should shift its language to that of an "entry" framework rather than a reentry framework.

The first step in making this theoretical shift is to "flood the zone" (Bushway and Uggen 2021, 37) with programs for incarcerated adults. Correctional facilities should offer numerous programs in multiple areas from higher education to relationship literacy to facilitate the maturation into a productive adult for the individuals they are housing, and policy decisions should aid in this effort (Bushway and Uggen 2021). One recent step in this direction is the introduction of the Second Chance Pell Act which reinstates access to federal funding for higher

education through the Pell Grant for incarcerated college students through certain programs. Life course theory provides and explanation for an individual's desistance from criminal behavior.

Access to higher education during or post-incarceration functions as a turning point for system-impacted individuals that may provide the social control and social bonds necessary for desistance from crime. Further, the decision to pursue higher education illustrates an individual's cognitive openness. This study supplements the life course framework with the ideas of community cultural wealth to understand how possessing certain forms of capital may improve an individual's likelihood of success in a particular marker of desistance, higher education.

Community Cultural Wealth

The concept of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) is built on several frameworks, including critical race theory (CRT), funds of knowledge, and Bourdieu's conceptualizations of cultural and social capital.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory is a body of theory focusing on how the American legal system created racial inequality despite efforts toward improving material equality. Critical race theory is a way of looking at the legal system to identify which of its components are institutionally structured to maintain racial inequality (Delgado 1988; Solorzano 1997). For example, critical race theorists may examine how sentencing practices, such as mandatory minimums, disproportionately impact communities of color and contribute to higher rates of incarceration for members of this population.

Funds of Knowledge. Funds of knowledge originated in the educational literature to function as a counternarrative to existing deficit models of low-income Latinx families and to highlight the resources they possess. The basic concept is that every household is an educational environment, and its members learn techniques to help them navigate a society that is not built

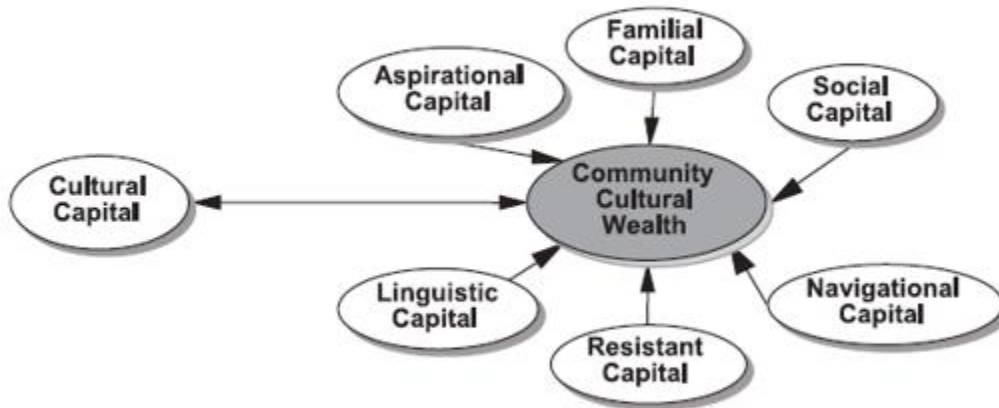
for them (Moll and Greenberg 1990). Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) furthered the discussion of funds of knowledge in their study of previously incarcerated, formerly gang-involved men and women of color. Their research adds a capital perspective that addresses issues of power and ideology in the higher education system and identifies four processes through which under-represented students try to achieve their educational goals: (mis)recognition, transmission, conversion, and activation/mobilization (Rios-Aguilar et al. 2011).

Previous best practices recommended that educators recognize the funds of knowledge brought into the classroom by their under-represented students, but despite these efforts, these nonmaterial resources were misrecognized. Instead, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) argue that under-represented students should "(1) recognize their funds of knowledge, (2) access various forms of capital, (3) convert their funds of knowledge into forms of capital, and (4) activate/mobilize their funds of knowledge and/or social and cultural capital" (176). The funds of knowledge perspective has been used to frame the higher education experiences of previously incarcerated individuals, expanding the definition of family to include strong relationships formed while incarcerated (Giraldo et al. 2017). Giraldo et al.'s (2017) findings that funds of knowledge from this created family are key to their formerly incarcerated sample avoiding reincarceration and setting goals for success in higher education provide a conceptual foundation for community cultural wealth.

Community Cultural Wealth. Through her experiences with students of color, Yosso (2005) created a framework of community cultural wealth to highlight the nonmaterial assets people of color access when interacting with institutions and to challenge Bourdieu's definition and usage of cultural and social capital (Giraldo et al. 2017). Community cultural wealth is defined as "the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially

marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (Yosso 2005, 1). This framework is a continuation of funds of knowledge, specifying the six types of capital possessed by people of color. Figure 1 shows the community cultural wealth model.

Figure 1: Community Cultural Wealth Conceptual Model



Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital is the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style. Familial capital is the cultural knowledge nurtured among family that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. Social capital is the networks of people and community resources; provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate society's institutions. Navigational capital is the skill of maneuvering through social institutions that weren't created with communities of color in mind. Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso 2005).

Formerly incarcerated individuals possess capital from their families of origin (Moll 1990; Rios-Aguilar 2011) as well as from their social networks formed while incarcerated (Giraldo et al. 2017). This capital can function as a nonmaterial resource in certain institutions.

For example, community college students used their community cultural wealth, specifically navigational and social capital, to navigate racial microaggressions from authority figures including security guards and instructors in their higher education experience. Those with social bonds with individuals of a similar background also reported higher levels of comfort and academic success (Giraldo et al. 2017).

Community cultural wealth adds a critical race perspective to the funds of knowledge perspective, which is a key factor in studying the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated population in the U.S. As of February 2022, 38.3 percent of individuals housed in federal prisons are Black and 30.5 percent are Hispanic (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2022) compared with 13.4 percent and 18.5 percent of the total population, respectively (United States Census Bureau 2021). Community cultural wealth provides a conceptual framework for the role nonmaterial resources play in a formerly incarcerated individual's success in higher education.

Using both life course theory and community cultural wealth to frame the discussion of higher education's role in reincarceration and other positive outcomes allows this study to understand the full scope of the relationship. Life course theory explains the identity and process models that lead to desistance from criminal behavior. Including community cultural wealth in the framework provides a deeper understanding of the nonmaterial resources, conceptualized as types of capital, that create an easier path toward desistance for some individuals than for others. The life course and community cultural wealth framework for this study is illustrated in my conceptual models.

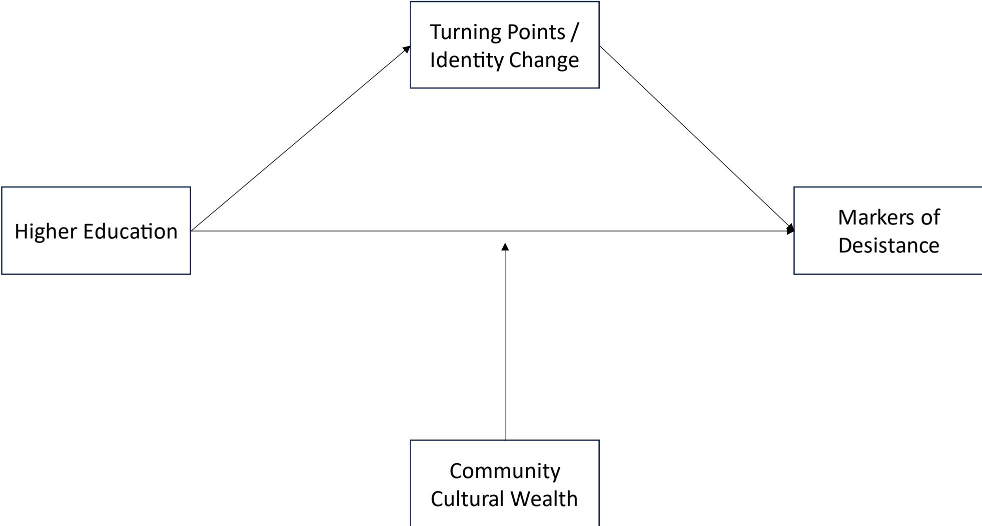
Conceptual Model

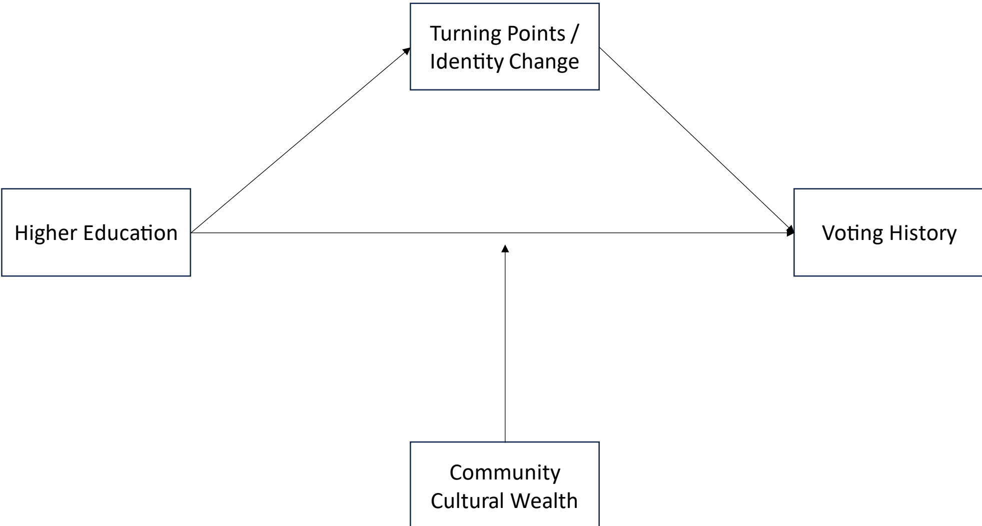
Figure 2 depicts the overall conceptual model of this dissertation. Based on life course theories of desistance, I expect that participation in higher education will generate turning points

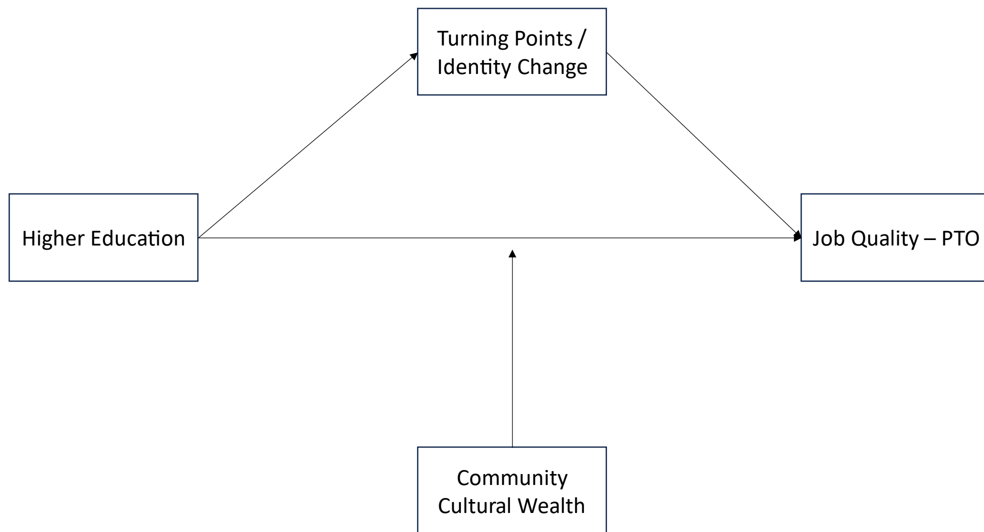
and identity change that mediate the relationship between participation in higher education and reincarceration, along with other markers of desistance. In line with the community cultural wealth framework, I expect that pre-existing nonmaterial resources, such as time, emotional support, and institutional support, will impact the decision to participate in higher education and strengthen the relationship between higher education and reincarceration, as well as other markers of desistance.

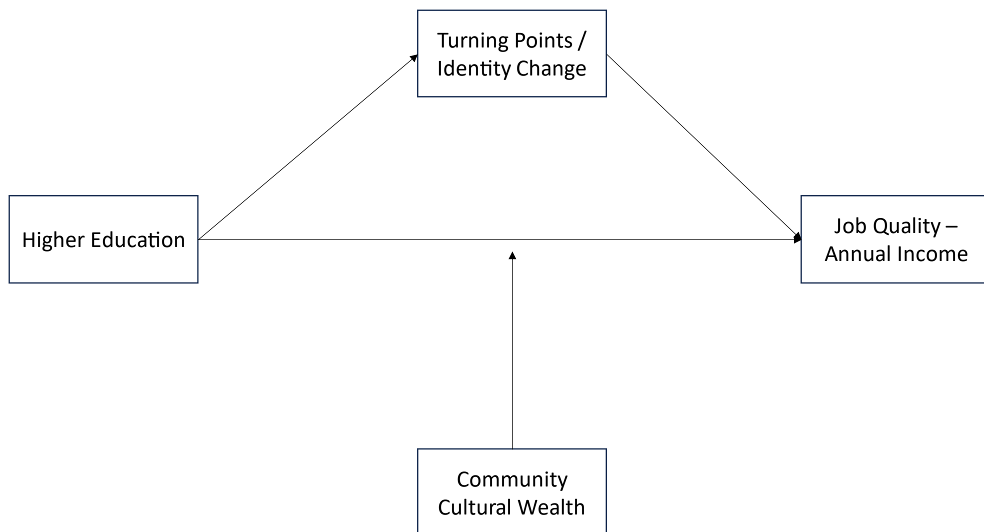
As evidenced in the desistance literature, focusing solely on reincarceration as an outcome provides limited answers because it does not capture incremental improvement or other prosocial benefits. Reincarceration and other positive outcomes are equally relevant to understanding the value of higher education in desistance from criminal behavior. Previous research establishes that participation in higher education is directly related to reduced reincarceration. However, the specific mechanisms that indirectly link this participation to reincarceration and previously unexamined outcomes, such as voting history and job quality, are not yet fully understood. This dissertation addresses these gaps by identifying the intervening mechanisms between higher education and lower reincarceration for formerly incarcerated people as well as identifying nonmaterial resources that may moderate this relationship. Further, this study examines previously understudied outcomes beyond reincarceration.

Figure 2: Regression Models






Turning Points /
Identity Change
Higher Education
Job Quality – PTO
Community
Cultural Wealth


Turning Points /
Identity Change
Higher Education
Job Quality –
Annual Income
Community
Cultural Wealth

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Understanding the mechanisms that lead to reduced reincarceration, as well as other less recognized individual and social benefits of higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, is important for sociological theory as well as policy and practice. I add to the literature by identifying the specific attitudinal and behavioral changes that lead to positive outcomes such as reductions in reincarceration and increased economic opportunity, and by assessing whether the attitudinal and behavioral changes linked to reductions in reincarceration and economic opportunity also connect with other, less-studied positive outcomes. My overarching research question for this dissertation is: What are the mechanisms through which higher education leads to reduced reincarceration and other positive outcomes for formerly incarcerated people? Specifically, my study will address the following questions:

1. What factors motivate incarcerated individuals to participate in higher education?

2a. What nonmaterial resources do incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals possess that impact their success in higher education?

2b. Which turning points mediate the relationship between higher education and reincarceration?

2c. Which components of community cultural wealth moderate the relationship between higher education and reincarceration?

3. Are the same mechanisms and moderators that lead to reduced reincarceration linked to other positive outcomes for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals?

Based on the existing literature and theoretical framework, I propose the following hypotheses for my quantitative analysis:

Hypothesis 1: Turning points, including employment, marriage, parenthood, and investment in retirement, will mediate the relationship between participation in higher education and reduced risk of reincarceration.

Hypothesis 2a: Individuals with higher levels of individual community cultural wealth components, including familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and cultural capital, will have better outcomes from participation in higher education than individuals with lower levels of individual community cultural wealth components.

Hypothesis 2b: Individuals with higher levels of individual community cultural wealth components, including familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and cultural capital, will have a lower risk of reincarceration than individuals with lower levels of individual community cultural wealth components.

Hypothesis 3: The same turning points, markers of desistance, and community cultural wealth components that reduce an individual's risk of recidivism will also increase other prosocial outcomes, including likelihood of voting in national elections and measures of job quality.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

To answer my research questions, I used a mixed methods approach. To address all three questions, I performed semi-structured interviews with 14 formerly incarcerated individuals about their experiences, motivations, and perceptions about the benefits of and barriers to higher education. To address the second and third questions, I used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth at Rounds 6-17 to analyze the relationships between prior incarceration, higher education, the mechanisms identified in previous research, the mechanisms suggested by my interviews, and outcomes including reincarceration, health, job quality, and voting history.

Interviews

Population of Interest and Inclusion Criteria. The population of interest for this dissertation is formerly incarcerated individuals who have participated in college-level courses while incarcerated or after release. Eligibility criteria for participation includes being at least 18 years of age, having a history of incarceration in the United States, having participated in higher education programming during or post-incarceration, and being fluent in English. I included the English requirement because it is the only language I speak fluently.

Recruitment. The goal for this dissertation was to interview enough formerly incarcerated adults who have previously participated in or are currently participating in higher education courses to reach theoretical saturation (Charmaz 2014; Small 2009). Initially, I contacted members of the Georgia Coalition for Higher Education in Prison (GACHEP) organization, of which I am a member, to share the study information with their networks.

Members of this organization include educators, activists, and formerly incarcerated individuals navigating reentry. Through GACHEP, I recruited several participants who had previously participated in a degree program at a women's correctional facility in Georgia as well as participants from across the state.

The degree program five respondents participated in is a cohort-model program that offers associate's and bachelor's degree programs. Individuals must submit their applications to the university providing programming and be accepted by the school as well as approved by leadership at the correctional facility. Students first enter the program at the associate's degree level, completing coursework and graduating in two years. They complete all classes and graduate with the same group of students, building relationships and support systems. Upon completion of their associate's degree, the cohort begins coursework at the bachelor's degree level, again graduating with their peers in two-years. The program takes four years overall to complete.

Subsequently, I asked participants to assist me with recruitment by sharing the project information with their networks, working toward a purposive snowball sample. The advantage of this sampling method is that I gained access to additional participants that I may not have otherwise been able to contact. Because of the stigma around incarceration, having other formerly incarcerated individuals make initial contact aided in recruitment. Upon first contact, I conducted an initial screening for eligibility and willingness to be audio recorded.

These recruitment methods resulted in 14 interviews of formerly incarcerated individuals who had previously or were currently participating in higher education courses. According to existing research in qualitative methods and my data analysis, this number of interviews is

sufficient to reach saturation (see: Namey et al. 2016; Hagaman and Wutich 2016; Coenen et al. 2012; Francis et al. 2010; Guest et al. 2006).

Sample. Ten of the interview participants were female and four were male. The interview sample includes more women than men because one of my primary recruitment tools was a connection to a degree program in a women's prison in Georgia. Ages ranged from 21 to 68, with a median age of 38. Seven participants identified as White, four identified as Black or African American, and three identified as Other Race. All participants lived in Georgia at the time of the interview, though they were not all incarcerated in Georgia. Six participants were on probation and four participants were on parole at the time of the interview. Ten participants were employed at the time of the interview, and two were self-employed. Table 1 below displays the demographics of the sample.

Table 1: Interview Respondent Demographics

Alias	*Age*	*Gender*	*Race*
Megan	21	Female	White
Jasmine	68	Female	Black
Portia	41	Female	Black
Brittany	38	Female	White
Jonah	52	Male	Other
Eddie	32	Male	White
Jameel	45	Male	Black
Sheree	49	Female	Black
Pamela	38	Female	White
Mary	37	Female	White
Sean	40	Male	White
Anita	33	Female	Other
Chelsea	38	Female	White
Sonja	53	Female	White

Data Collection. I conducted semi-structured interviews, using a set of questions and prompts as a guide. Because I used a semi-structured interview guide, I was able to follow the

conversation where each participant took it, allowing flexibility in the discussion (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Each interview lasted approximately one hour. I transcribed and analyzed my data on a rolling basis throughout the research process, so I was also able to adjust interview questions over time as themes emerged.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked for participants' verbal consent to participate and informed them that they may stop the interview at any point or refuse to answer any questions. I conducted interviews in-person or virtually (via Zoom), depending on the participant's preference and availability. I compensated participants with $25, given through Visa gift cards, Venmo, or CashApp. Participants who began but did not complete the interview were still compensated. I explained the purpose of the study and my plan to keep their personal information confidential. I also paused the interview or steered the discussion in a different direction if the participant appeared to be experiencing emotional strain because of a topic or question.

Data Management. I stored audio files, transcriptions, and other materials on a password-protected hard drive that only I have access to in my office. I kept these files long enough to anonymize the data and then deleted any files containing identifying information, as specified by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board. I maintained a spreadsheet containing demographic information and linking participants' ID number, alias, and full name on the same secure hard drive. I deleted recorded interviews from recording devices once they were transcribed.

Coding. I transcribed the interviews using Express Scribe Software and used ATLAS.ti to code the interview transcripts. To code the data, I followed a grounded theory approach using open coding, axial coding, and analytical memoing (Charmaz 2014). My first step in analyzing

my data, open coding, involved going through each interview transcription line by line to identify themes within individual responses. Next, I identified themes between responses as I identified patterns across the data, a process called axial coding in grounded theory (Charmaz 2014).

I began coding after I had conducted five interviews because it was possible to identify themes at that point. Early coding allowed me the flexibility to adjust my interview questions as new codes became clear. I adjusted my interview guide accordingly when I identified new codes or themes as salient or problematic. I analyzed the data for negative cases, which are data that contradict other codes or omit certain events (Lewis and Lewis 1980). After my initial open coding, I completed the subsequent axial coding, which included comparing individual codes and combining them when patterns emerged. At the end of the coding process, I had 13 axial codes across five overarching categories. These overarching categories and axial codes are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2: Interview Themes

Motivation	*Nonmaterial Resources*	*Mechanisms Reducing Reincarceration*	*Impacts Beyond Reincarceration*
Time	Financial Situation	Community	Job Satisfaction
Limited Options	Social Connections	Confidence/Self-Esteem	Improved Reputation & Family Relationships
Overcoming Personal History	Institutional Support	Restored Identity & Humanity	
	Personal Support		

To further analyze the data, I produced analytical memos. I organized these memos so that I had one memo per research question, resulting in three total. Each memo began with the relevant research question, and I included an outline of themes with supporting quotes from each interview. I also included my thoughts on how each theme related to the research question and context to make a cohesive narrative around the data. These memos allowed me to identify existing gaps in my data and to collect additional data to remedy this issue. I copied and pasted a quote or event and notated everything that was relevant to this particular code, including other quotes or events from other participants. These memos influenced subsequent interviews. I then used these memos as outlines to guide writing the qualitative results chapter of this study.

Regression Analysis

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. To answer my second and third research questions, I use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), which is a nationally representative, longitudinal study conducted by the U.S. Bureau for Labor Statistics. The initial sample in 1997 included 8,984 participants, aged 12 to 18 at the beginning of 1997 and oversampled Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks. The initial sample was approximately 51 percent male and 49 percent female. The racial makeup of the sample is 51.9 percent non-Black/non-Hispanic, 26 percent Black non-Hispanic, 21.2 percent Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9 percent multiracial respondents.

I use Round 6 (2002) to control for juvenile delinquent behavior and education level prior to adult incarceration and to capture demographic information about individuals. I chose this wave because it is the first wave when all participants are 18 or older and eligible for enrollment in higher education. Starting my analysis at this round allowed me to set the baseline at what is traditionally considered "college age." Further, beginning with this round of data allowed me to

measure the impact of incarceration in early adulthood on later educational attainment. I then analyzed subsequent Rounds 7-15, conducted in years 2003-2011, 2013, and 2015 to measure change over time both within the same individual over time and between different individuals over time. At each round, respondents reported their incarceration status for each month of the year. I combined each of these monthly variables into one, overarching incarceration status variable and kept only the individuals who reported experiencing incarceration at some point during data collection, 1997-2020, resulting in a sample size of 959.

Using a longitudinal data set allowed me to effectively account for change over time and examine mechanisms at work between incarceration and subsequent educational attainment. Specifically, the NLSY97 contains variables that allowed me to create a subset of cases that have been previously incarcerated to examine the mechanisms which lead to educational success as well as to other positive outcomes associated with participation in higher education for this subpopulation.

Dependent Variables

In addition to analyzing effects on reincarceration related to participation in higher education, the quantitative chapter of this study examines the relationship between higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals and additional potential positive outcomes. The alternative outcomes this study includes are voting history and two measures of job quality: amount of paid time off and annual income from wages or salary.

Reincarceration. At each round, respondents reported whether they were incarcerated during each month of a given year, resulting in twelve "yes" or "no" responses per year. I combined each of these monthly variables into a dichotomous reincarceration variable for each year from 2003 to 2015.

Voting History. At Rounds 8, 10, 12, and 14, the survey asked respondents whether they voted in the most recent national elections – 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010, respectively. Response options included 1 – I did not vote in the election this November, 2 – I thought about voting this time but didn't, 3 – I usually vote but didn't this time, 4 – I am sure I voted, and 5 – Respondent is not eligible to vote. I recoded each variable at each individual wave into a dichotomous variable where 1 is "I am sure I voted" and 0 is all "no" responses. Then I combined the waves into one overarching Voting History measure ranging from 0 – didn't vote at all in 2004, 2006, 2008, or 2010 to 4 – voted in each year 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010.

Job Quality – Paid Time Off. At each round, respondents reported the number of paid vacation days and number of paid sick days they accumulated over the last 12 months for up to 9 jobs. I combined each of these individual job variables into one overarching Job Quality – Paid Time Off measure for each wave by averaging the responses for each respondent. Higher numbers of paid time off indicate higher levels of job quality.

Job Quality – Annual Income. At each round, respondents reported their total income per year. Higher reported annual income indicates higher job quality.

Independent Variables

Higher Education. At each round, respondents reported on their current educational enrollment for each month of the year. They reported whether they were enrolled in any form of higher education, including 2-year degree programs, 4-year degree programs, and graduate programs. I created a dichotomous variable for any participation in higher education to serve as an independent variable in my analyses.

Familial Capital. To measure familial capital, I combined each of these measures – Lives with Biological Parents, U.S. Citizenship at Birth, Index of Family Routines, Family Religiosity,

and Index of Family/Household Risk by averaging each of these responses together. This new combined variable is a measure of Familial Capital for each respondent in adolescence.

At Round 1, respondents reported whether they lived with both of their biological parents. Response choices were 1 – yes and 0 – no.

At Round 1, respondents reported their citizenship status at birth, with response options 1 – Citizen, born in the U.S.; 2 – Unknown, not born in the U.S.; and 3 – Unknown, can't determine birthplace. I recoded this measure into a dichotomous variable where 1 is "U.S. Citizen" and 0 is "Other/Unknown."

At Round 1-4 (1997-2000), respondents reported an index of the routine activities they participated in with family. Scores ranged from 0-28, with higher numbers indicating more days each month spent in routine activities with family. I averaged each of these responses together to get a combined Index of Family Routines measure for respondents during their teen years.

At Rounds 1-4 (1997-2000), respondents reported the number of days per week their families did something religious, with response options ranging from 0 to 7. I averaged each of these responses together to get a combined Religious Frequency measure for respondents during their teen years. At Round 1, respondents reported their parents' religiosity on a scale of 0-6, with 0 being not religious and 6 being very religious. I combined these two measures of parents' religiosity and religious frequency by averaging responses together to form an overarching Family Religiosity measure for respondents during their teen years.

At Round 1, respondents reported an index of their family/home risk. Scores ranged from 0-21, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of risk in the household. I reverse coded this measure so that higher scores indicated lower levels of risk in the household.

Aspirational Capital. To measure aspirational capital, I combined the variables Likelihood of Dying within a Year, Likelihood of Going to Jail by Age 20, Likelihood of Violent Victimization within a Year, Likelihood of Arrest within Five Years, Likelihood of Death within Five Years, Likelihood of Arrest within a Year, Likelihood of Earning a High School Diploma by Age 20, Likelihood of Working at Least Part-Time by Age 30, Likelihood of Being in School in One Year, and Likelihood of Earning a College Degree by Age 30, and Highest Grade in School Expected to Complete by averaging them together. Respondents rated each on a scale of 0-100. I reverse coded the measures for likelihood of death within a year, likelihood of jail by age 20, likelihood of violent victimization within a year, likelihood of arrest within five years, likelihood of death within a year, and likelihood of arrest within a year. Then, I combined each of these individual measures by averaging the responses for each one to create an overarching aspirational capital measure for respondents. Higher numbers indicate higher levels of aspirational capital.

At Rounds 1 and 6, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to die within the next year. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 0-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of death within the year. I averaged these two responses together to get one overarching measure of respondents' thoughts on death during their teen years.

At Round 1, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be in jail by the age of 20. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of jail by the age of 20.

At Round 4 and 6, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be the victim of a violent crime within the next year. Respondents answered in the form of a

percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of victimization within the year. I averaged these two responses together to get one overarching measure of respondents' thoughts on victimization during their teen years.

At Round 4, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be arrested within five years. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of arrest within five years.

At Round 6, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to die within five years. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of death within five years.

At Round 6, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be arrested within the year. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of arrest within the year.

At Round 1, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to earn a high school diploma by the age of 20. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of earning a high school diploma by the age of 20.

At Round 1, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be working at least 20 hours per week by the time they were 30. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of working at least 20 hours per week by the age of 30.

At Round 4, respondents reported on how likely they thought they were to be in school by the next year. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of school enrollment by next year.

At Round 5, respondents reported on how likely they were to have earned a college degree by the age of 30. Respondents answered in the form of a percentage, 1-100, with higher percentages indicating higher perceived likelihood of earning a college degree by the age of 30.

At Round 5, respondents reported on the highest grade in school they expected to complete. Responses were given on a 1-18 scale, representing first grade through the 6th year of college. Higher numbers indicate higher expected grade completion.

Navigational Capital. To measure navigational capital, I combined the variables Highest Grade Completed by Biological Mother and Highest Grade Completed by Biological Father by averaging them together. This new combined variable is a measure of Navigational Capital for each respondent in adolescence.

At Round 1, the NLSY97 reports the highest grade completed by the respondents' biological mother and father in two separate variables. Response options range from 0 – none to 20 – 8th year of college or more. I combined each of these individual variables by averaging the responses together.

Social Capital. To measure social capital, I combined the variables Peers that Attend Church Regularly, Peers that Smoke Cigarettes, Peers that Drink Alcohol, Peers that Are Involved in School, Peers Planning to Attend College, Peers that Do Volunteer Work, Peers that Use Drugs, Peers that Skip School, and Peers that Are in a Gang by averaging each of these responses together. I reverse coded the measures for percentage of peers who smoke cigarettes, percentage of peers who drink alcohol, percentage of peers who use drugs, percentage of peers who skip school, and percentage of peers who are involved with a gang. This combined variable is a measure of Social Capital for each respondent in adolescence.

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that attended church regularly. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that smoked cigarettes. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that drank alcohol. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that were involved in school. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that were planning to attend college. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that did volunteer work. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that used drugs. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that skipped school. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

At Round 1 (1997), respondents reported on the percentage of their peers that were in a gang. Response options were 1 – Almost none (less than 10 percent); 2 – About 25 percent; 3 – About half (50 percent); 4 – About 75 percent; and 5 – Almost all (more than 90 percent).

Linguistic Capital. The NLSY97 collected transcript data for each respondent at Round 3 (1999), including the number of foreign languages they had attempted in school. Response options were 0-4, indicating 0 foreign languages attempted in school to up to 4 foreign languages attempted in school. Higher responses indicate higher levels of linguistic capital among respondents during adolescence.

Cultural Capital. To measure cultural capital, I combined measures of participation in gifted programming in school, participation in non-gifted special education programming in school, program of study, and overall GPA by averaging each of these responses together. The combined variable is a measure of Cultural Capital for each respondent in adolescence.

At Round 3 (1999), respondents' transcripts report whether they participated in gifted programming in school, with records showing 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no." I recoded this variable so that 1 was "yes" and 0 was "no."

At Round 3 (1999), respondents' transcripts report whether they participated in non-gifted special education programming in school, with records showing 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no." I recoded this variable so that 1 was "yes" and 0 was "no."

At Round 3 (1999), respondents' transcripts report the program of study (i.e. track) they participated in while in school. Records show 1 for Academic Specialist, 2 for Vocational Concentrator, 3 for both Academic Specialist and Vocational Concentrator, and 4 for neither Academic Specialist nor Vocational Concentrator. I recoded this measure into a dichotomous variable where 1 is "Academic Specialist" and 0 is "Other."

At Round 3 (1999), respondents' transcripts report their overall GPAs in school. Records use the 0.00-5.00 scale, with higher numbers indicating a higher GPA.

Mediating Variables

Stakes in Conformity. I combined measures for Married/Cohabitating, Living with Biological Children, Saving for Retirement, and Employment Status into one overarching Stakes in Conformity scale for each year by averaging these responses together. Responses range from 0 to 4 and higher numbers indicate higher stakes in conformity for each respondent.

Beginning at Round 7 (2003), respondents reported their marital/cohabitation status, whether they lived in a household with any biological children, whether they had any money saved for retirement, and their employment status for each month of each year. Responses for marital or cohabitation status as of the survey date included 1 – Never married, cohabitating, 2 – Never married, not cohabitating, 3 – Married, spouse present, 4 – Married, spouse absent, 5 – Separated, cohabitating, 6 – Separated, not cohabitating, 7 – Divorced, cohabitating, 8 – Divorced, not cohabitating, 9 – Widowed, cohabitating, and 10 – Widowed, not cohabitating. I recoded this measure into a dichotomous variable where 1 is all married or cohabitating

responses: never married, cohabitating; married, spouse present; married, spouse absent; separated, cohabitating; divorced, cohabitating; and widowed, cohabitating. 0 is all not married and not cohabitating answers: never married, not cohabitating; separated, not cohabitating; divorced, not cohabitating; and widowed, not cohabitating. I created this dichotomous measure of married and/or cohabitating for each year.

Beginning at Round 7, respondents reported on whether they lived in the same household as any of their biological children. The survey asked the number of biological children born and residing in their residence as of the survey date at each wave. Respondents reported the number of children currently living with them. I recoded this measure into a dichotomous measure of whether any biological children lived in respondents' household each year, where 1 is "yes, there are biological children in the household" and 0 is "no, there are no biological children in the household." I did this for Rounds 7-17 (2003-2015).

Beginning at Round 7, respondents reported on their financial planning for retirement. They reported any savings in retirement-specific plans, with responses 1 – Yes, respondent has own plans, 2 – Yes, respondent has own plans and also plans jointly with spouse/partner, 3 – Yes, respondent only has plans jointly with spouse/partner, 4 – Yes, spouse/partner has own separately from respondent, or 0 – No. I recoded this measure into a dichotomous variable where 1 is "yes, respondent has savings in a retirement-specific plan" and 0 is "no, respondent does not have any savings in a retirement-specific plan." I did this for Rounds 7-17 (2003-2015).

At each round, respondents reported their employment status for each week of the year. Possible responses included options for "no information available, "not associated with an employer," "not working," "unemployed," "active military status," and "employed." I combined each of these weekly variables into one Employment Status variable for each wave. I recoded

this measure into a dichotomous variable where 1 is “employed or active military status” and 0 is “unemployed.” I did this for Rounds 7-17 (2003-2015).

Deviance – Criminal Behavior. At each round, respondents report whether they have intentionally destroyed property since the last survey date, stolen anything valued under $50 since the last survey date, stolen anything – including cars – valued over $50 since the last survey date, committed any other property crimes since the last survey date, attacked anyone to hurt or fight them since the last survey date, and/or sold drugs since the last survey date. Response options for each of these questions are 1 – yes and 0 – no. I combined each of these individual measures by averaging their responses together to create an overarching Deviance – Criminal Behavior measure.

Deviance – Marijuana Use. At each round, respondents report whether they have used marijuana since the last survey date. Response options are 1 – yes and 0 – no.

Deviance – Cocaine Use. At each round, respondents report whether they have used cocaine since the last survey date. Response options are 1 – yes and 0 – no.

Control Variables

Sex. Respondents provided their sex at Round 1 (1997). The only two options were male and female.

Race. Respondents provided their race at Round 1 (1997). Response options included 1 – White; 2 – Black or African American; 3 – American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; 4 – Asian or Pacific Islander; 5 – Something else; and 0 – No information. I recoded this measure into two dichotomous variables: one where 1 is “White” and 0 is “Other” and one where 1 is “Black” and 0 is “Other” so that I can run my analysis to check for differences among both of these groups.

Age. Respondents provided their age at each round.

Analytic Strategy

I use regression models to identify the relationships between participation in higher education and my dependent variables as well as to test mediators that align with life course theory and community cultural wealth. Further, my community cultural wealth models are hierarchical in nature where participation in higher education is the level-1 (time-varying) indicator and individual types of capital as defined in community cultural wealth are the level-2 (between-person) indicators. Measures include familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and cultural capital. I do not examine resistant capital in my models because there were no relevant variables to operationalize it within the NSLY97. I utilize logistic regression and two-level logistic regression to analyze the relationships between reincarceration and my independent or mediating variables, ordinal logistic regression and two-level ordinal logistic regression to analyze the relationships between voter participation and my independent or mediating variables, poisson and two-level poisson regression to analyze the relationships between paid time off and my independent and mediating variables, and linear regression and two-level linear regression to analyze the relationships between annual income and my independent or mediating variables.

I perform all analyses in Stata version 17 and account for missing data with full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. Multilevel modeling is the appropriate modeling strategy to analyze community cultural wealth mediators because it allows for the analysis of behavioral change over time within and between individuals. Using this research method lends itself to answering this study's research questions about the impact of motivating factors and nonmaterial resources as well as the relationship between these variables and

outcomes other than reincarceration. Further, the model allows for the comparison of individual and group change.

I standardized all control, independent, and mediating variables that are not dichotomous. For my multi-level models, level-1 measures are time-varying and measure change within individuals over time. The measure I use at Level-1 is participation in higher education, measured at each round. Level-2 measures are between-person and measure change between individuals. The Level-2 measures I include are the mediating variables as defined by community cultural wealth – familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and cultural capital.

Descriptive Statistics.

Descriptive statistics for categorical variables are in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – Categorical

Measure	Frequency	percent	*N*
Higher Education			8,418
Yes	554	6.58	
No	7,864	93.42	
Reincarceration			8,214
Yes	1,836	22.35	
No	6,378	77.65	
Voting History			2,781
Yes	499	17.94	
No	2,282	82.06	
Deviance – Marijuana Use			6,841
Yes	2,287	33.43	
No	4,554	66.57	
Deviance – Cocaine Use			6,180
Yes	651	10.53	
No	5,529	89.47	

The frequency of participation in higher education during or after incarceration is 554 out of 8,418, or 6.58 percent. The frequency of reincarceration at some point in the time period of

the survey was 1,836 out of 8,214, or 22.35 percent. The frequency of health issues limiting possible types of work for individuals during the time period of the survey is 521 out of 5,307, or 9.82 percent. The frequency of health issues limiting the amount of work possible for individuals during the time period of the survey is 500 out of 5,308, or 9.42 percent. The frequency of voting in national elections during the time period of the survey is 499 out of 2,781, or 17.94 percent. The frequency of employer-provided health insurance during the time period of the survey is 2,005 out of 4,127, or 48.58 percent. The frequency of marijuana use during the time period of the survey is 2,287 out of 6,841, or 33.43 percent. The frequency of cocaine use during the time period of the survey is 651 out of 6,180, or 10.53 percent.

Descriptive statistics for continuous variables are in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics – Continuous

Measure	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max	*N*
Familial Capital	0.004	0.728	-2.470	2.450	15,816
Aspirational Capital	-0.232	0.574	-2.450	0.847	20,592
Navigational Capital	-0.036	0.901	-3.642	3.008	20,712
Social Capital	-0.342	0.393	-1.404	0.713	21,864
Linguistic Capital	0.000	0.999	-0.809	4.565	12,864
Cultural Capital	0.030	0.437	-2.237	1.060	12,864
Stakes in Conformity Scale	0.000	0.999	-1.906	17.403	11,856
Deviance – Criminal Behavior	0.000	1.000	-0.482	9.777	10,032
Job Quality – Paid Time Off	0.000	0.999	-0.648	14.852	4,984
Job Quality – Annual Income	0.000	0.999	-1.318	7.202	4,338

CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Participants' narratives gathered through qualitative interviews provided data that addressed all three of this study's research questions. Responses gave insight on the motivations leading individuals to participate in higher education during or after incarceration and the nonmaterial resources that contribute to this population's success in higher education. Participants also discussed mechanisms that reduced their likelihood of reincarceration as well as positive outcomes beyond reincarceration that came from their participation in higher education.

Motivating factors included having the time to focus on and complete a college degree, believing that higher education was the best way to create a life upon reentry, and overcoming the stigma around a history of incarceration with credentials and work ethic. Nonmaterial resources participants identified as valuable were social connections, institutional support, and personal support. Mechanisms reducing reincarceration included community, confidence and self-esteem, and restored identity and humanity. Participants identified job satisfaction, improved reputation, and improved family relationships as benefits of higher education beyond reduced likelihood of reincarceration.

These findings contribute to better understanding the role of higher education in the reentry process, specifically how participation in higher education may reduce the likelihood of reincarceration for participants. These findings also extend our understanding of benefits beyond reduced reincarceration, which allows us to broaden the discussion of higher education for this population for both research and policy.

Motivation to Participate in Higher Education

Respondents discussed multiple motivating factors for participating in higher education in prison based on their personal histories and experiences. Themes that emerged consistently include time, college as the only path forward, and overcoming incarceration history through increased work ethic. These themes directly align with the theoretical framework of this study including increasing navigational capital through funding options and help navigating the system as well as a pathway to a new trajectory via college as the only way forward to a productive future.

Time. For respondents who participated in higher education programming during their incarceration, access and time were particularly motivating factors. They specifically acknowledged that boredom impacted their decision to pursue a college degree. For Jasmine, the empty time she had during the day while she was incarcerated motivated her to take college-level courses that were offered to her.

> "I didn't have nothing to do but go to school and do the class. That's it. And I liked what I was doing, and it was a good distractor from what was going on around me that I could control and what was going on around me outside of me that I could not control. So, I could plunge into school." (Jasmine)

Subsequently, filling her time with classwork provided her with the additional benefits of distraction from the chaos around her and control over a piece of her life. She goes on to say:

> "But once I got out and got back into the world, back into my family, the tugging of 'we got to pay these bills' or 'I want to try to get back for the loss', those kind of things. So I wasn't able to continue right then." (Jasmine)

Upon release, Jasmine's responsibilities to her life and her family took precedence, and the time that had motivated her to start her coursework was no longer available to her.

Other respondents likewise discussed that having time in prison to focus on education was key:

> "[college while incarcerated] is definitely easier. When I was there, I was having more time…so you don' have as much free time as you think, but you do have these periods of time during the day where you're locked in your room for, like, an hour. That's a great time to study and read. And then your classmates, you live with a lot of them, and then you see them on lab days and stuff like that. And so you're able to have a lot of conversations, which is like, just connecting the ideas and making them make sense to you." (Brittany)

Brittany acknowledges that incarcerated individuals do not have as much empty time as other may think, but they do have blocks of time with nothing to do that they need to fill. She used these blocks of alone time as motivation to study and keep up with her coursework. Further, she states that her access to and time with her classmates outside of the classroom provides an additional opportunity to gain understanding of class topics through discussions with other students.

Finally, Jameel discusses his motivation to use his empty time during his incarceration in a productive way:

> "And I tell a lot of people, when you are incarcerated, you have time. You have nothing but time. While you have that time, you had to utilize that time in the most positive aspect that you could be able to do, which is all your self-help programs, educational programs, because it's like building a resume." (Jameel)

Jameel adds that his motivation was to fill his empty time in positive ways that would "build a resume" and contribute to his success upon release. In my conversations with respondents about time, most did not explicitly link their studies to their post-release plans, but Jameel provides

insight into how incarcerated individuals use their current resource of time to prepare for success when they rejoin society. He elaborates, saying:

> "I knew that I had been in prison for a long time, and I knew that society had changed. I'm talking about drastically…People have this thought that everybody in prison is angry, they don't know how to communicate…So I started realizing, man, when I do get out of here, because that's one of the things that kept me grounded – I kept the faith and the hope that one day I would be released – and when that release came, I needed to be in a better mental position." (Jameel)

Jameel's motivation to use his time to participate in higher education programming while he is incarcerated participating in higher education programming also evokes the second theme identified in the interviews: college as the only way forward.

College as the Only Way Forward. Beyond filling empty time, respondents cited college as their only or best option in changing the direction of their lives while incarcerated or upon release. Specifically, they talked about the lack of options for employment they saw ahead of them because of their incarceration:

> "I had eight felonies on my record. Wasn't nobody hiring me. I can't get no job. So, I had to make myself more marketable." (Sheree)

Sheree's comments are short and to the point: she was motivated to participate in higher education classes because she felt she had no other options. Because of her history of contact with the criminal justice system, she was at a disadvantage in the job market and needed a way to increase her likelihood of employment. From her perspective, getting a college degree was the best option available to her. Other respondents echoed Sheree's thoughts:

> "A friend helped me get a customer service job when I got out, and I hated it. I mean, it was awful, but I didn't think I could do anything else, I mean I knew I didn't have options – I had help even getting this job. So, what could I do? I went back to school thinking it would open some doors." (Chelsea)

Chelsea’s comments further illustrate the feeling of being backed into a corner with very few options. She was able to find employment, with the help of her social network, but she felt like it was a job she had to take because she did not see any other choices. Her employment opportunities were limited, and she did not see the possibility of exploring more fulfilling work opportunities because of her personal history. She viewed returning to college as her best opportunity to change the direction of her life and to overcome her criminal record.

Sheree and Chelsea’s responses focus on their lack of job prospects after incarceration and the additional opportunities available to them with higher education. They see their participation in higher education as the best way forward for them in terms of economic opportunity, and their experiences are supported by the work of Davis et al. (2013) and Bozick et al. (2018), which found significant reductions in reincarceration among formerly incarcerated individuals who subsequently went to college.

Jameel, however, provides an example of a slightly different perspective:

> “You just want to be educated because, unfortunately, sometimes when you’re in that criminal element and you’re having to cut ties with a lot of people that’s in the element and they’re not trying to progress forward, they tend to kind of shun you because you think you better.” (Jameel)

Jameel’s comments illustrate that higher education may provide a path forward for reasons other than economic opportunity. For him, motivation to pursue higher education goes beyond improving economic opportunity because he created entirely new social connections for himself after incarceration. His previous support system is no longer available to him because he does not participate in their criminal behavior. He elaborates on his decision to pursue a college degree, knowing that he may lose some social support:

> "I just knew that I was a juvenile that had been led down the wrong path. So, I figured anything that would be available and assistance that would help me become a better person and be productive out of prison, I had to participate in it." (Jameel)

Sheree's, Chelsea's, and Jameel's responses are in line with the life course theoretical perspective and support the idea that participation in higher education can function as a turning point by creating a new trajectory for participants (Sampson and Laub 1993). They credit their experience with higher education in helping them desist from criminal behavior and focus on their futures outside the criminal justice system. Their employment opportunities are increased, when then provides a new trajectory with more integration into mainstream society, including new social networks.

Overcoming History of Incarceration through Increased Work Ethic. In addition to citing college as their best way forward post-incarceration, respondents also reported the desire to overcome the negative impact of their history with incarceration as a motivating factor for pursuing higher education. They specifically identified an increased work ethic as their way of enacting this motivation. For example, Megan discusses her experience compared to non-system-impacted students:

> "[college students without a criminal record] will be like, 'oh, Cs get degrees. I'm going to skip class,' all this kind of stuff. And I realized and was telling my mom about it, and she was just like, 'well, you can't do that. You have a criminal record. You have to work harder than they do.' And I was like, sometimes that kind of sucks, but I'm willing to do the work. And I really enjoy it." (Megan)

Megan is aware that her situation is different than that of other students who have not been incarcerated. While she acknowledges the differences and possible unfairness of her situation, she also states that knowing she must work harder to succeed contributes to her motivation in the first place. Brittany reiterates this point:

> "Yeah, I don't think I took it for granted the way that a lot of kids or a lot of people take it for granted. I didn't think I was ever going to get the opportunity to have a college education. I thought especially because I was going to be gone away for so long…so when I got the opportunity, I was very grateful for it." (Brittany)

Brittany's response builds on Megan's comments that she must work harder than other students without a history of incarceration. She explains that part of her motivation for having a strong work ethic is that she is aware of the opportunity higher education provides and is making a conscious effort not to take it for granted because of her background. Chelsea's experience is similar:

> "I thought I had ruined the rest of my life when I got locked up. And then I decided to go back to school a few years later, and it was so different being around the students who were taking it for granted. Going back as an adult and knowing that I had to explain my record to employers, I couldn't imagine skipping class or being okay with a C. I wanted As to prove to myself that I wasn't wasting my time or my money, but also to be able to walk into interviews with something to show for my time and to, like, say 'hey, I have this history, but look at what I've done since then.'"

Brittany and Chelsea's statements further illustrate that respondents see overcoming their past as a strong motivating factor for their participation in higher education, and they perceive themselves as having a stronger work ethic than students who do not have a history of incarceration because of this motivation. Chelsea's remarks align with Megan and Brittany's experiences but add an additional level of nuance. Chelsea acknowledges that her increased work ethic stems, in part, from her desire to prove to herself and potential employers that she is capable despite her history of incarceration.

Megan, Brittany, and Chelsea's responses exemplify the perception of study participants that a strong work ethic among formerly incarcerated individuals helps them succeed in higher education. Respondents gave multiple explanations for this motivation to work hard including

Megan's appreciation for the opportunity, Brittany's awareness of her privilege, and Chelsea's connection of work ethic back to higher education as the only path forward after incarceration.

Nonmaterial Resources Contributing to Success in Higher Education

The motivation to participate in higher education is facilitated by the nonmaterial resources that make participation possible. Nonmaterial resources include abstract assets like emotional support and help navigating unfamiliar institutions, which I explore through the community cultural wealth framework. Particularly helpful to individuals in this population are mentors (social capital, navigational capital), connections to navigate the system (navigational capital), institutional support specific to their needs (social capital), and social support from their personal networks (social capital, familial capital).

Connections to Navigate the System (Navigational Capital). Respondents attributed their success in higher education to the connections they had and how those connections helped them navigate the educational system. Respondents discussed the role of their social connections with other system-impacted students, prison staff, and instructors in their ability to successfully navigate the criminal justice and higher education systems.

> "Being around other people who were formerly incarcerated who had went to school, or being around formerly incarcerated people who were telling me about free educational classes where I get college credits. So, all of this was just being exposed to people who knew the resources and programs. So, for me, that was what was beneficial because once I knew where they were, I was able to access them." (Sheree)

Sheree's comment illustrates the most basic of resources that her social and navigational capital provides: access. Because of the connections she had in her social network, she had information about programs and financial options that were available to her, directly impacting her access and ability to begin coursework. Her response implies the importance of these connections; her access was dependent on them. Without her social network, she would have had more difficulty

navigating the system, which could impact her ability to successfully participate in higher education programming.

Jameel credits new social connections he formed in prison with giving him the idea to pursue education in the first place:

> "…you have to remember as me going in as a young teen, didn't really have no interest in school. So, when I started getting with some of the older guys that had been in there and now here I'm learning and understanding what I'm faced with…So when I start understanding that education will play a big part, not just in my release but my life afterwards, that's when my thinking started leaning toward education." (Jameel)

Jameel points out that his social capital not only led him to think of higher education as a realistic option, but it also helped him navigate the prison environment and the reality of his circumstances. His social network helped him navigate the world of incarceration and influenced his decision to pursue higher education.

Sheree's and Jameel's experiences illustrate an important aspect of the community cultural wealth framework: the forms of capital are interrelated. Because of their social connections, or social capital, their navigational capital increases as they learn the rules of the institution themselves. They also credit their social capital with increasing their aspirational capital, which is their desire and commitment to pursue higher education in the first place.

Pamela's connections also had an impact on her navigation of the educational system:

> "I had a friend who was in the teaching group, that was her detail in prison…So she came and found me and told me that she had heard that there was a college group coming in and would I like to be on the list, that she could put me on an early list. And I was like, absolutely." (Pamela)

Pamela's social network and her connection to others with educational experience helped her navigate the system first by becoming aware of the opportunity to participate in a higher

education program. Then, she was able to bypass certain hurdles to the process by gaining access to an "early list."

Correctional education programs are vital in facilitating social connections and access to resources for system-impacted students. Participants build social capital through connections with classmates and instructors that can extend beyond the program or correctional facility. These connections may function as access to turning points like jobs or community relationships that will improve an individual's likelihood of desistance (Sampson and Laub 1993).

Each of these respondents possesses both social and navigational capital as discussed in Yosso's (2006) idea of community cultural wealth. But, Pamela's situation exemplifies both of these forms of capital. She was able to use her connections to navigate multiple institutions she is unfamiliar with but also had the social connections to help her overcome the obstacle of transportation once she was released.

Having navigational and social capital is a vital part of making participation in higher education more realistic for this population, but the absence of these resources can be equally difficult. According to Mary:

> "I know that I wish that I had had somebody like me here to help have that self-directed care and figure out what I wanted to do and not just tell me, this is who you are." (Mary)

Mary's comments illustrate her difficulty with navigating the system and participating in higher education because she did not have the same connections and support system that Pamela, Jameel, or Sheree had. Mary pursued her education independently upon her release, so her social networks and navigational capital were less developed than respondents who had the support of correctional education programs with the infrastructure to continue supporting them outside of the correctional facility.

Institutional Support. Similar to connections to navigate the system, institutional support describes how respondents were aided in their educational experiences, but the nuance between the two is that institutional support comes directly from individuals who work within the prison and educational systems, as well as policies designed to aid individuals as they interact with the system. For example, Pamela discusses her experience of beginning but not completing her degree while incarcerated:

> "…one of the promises that they make, which you kind of let roll off your butt, you just assume that they'll do their best, but it's not necessarily going to happen, is that they will keep in touch with you and that they'll help you finish if you get out and stuff like that. So when I was released and went to a transitional center for a few months, for about four months. And then when I got out, they got in touch and said, 'we heard you were released. We'd love to help you finish the classes. If you need a ride, we'll get you there, we'll get you the bus, whatever it is.' And I finished classes." (Pamela)

Pamela's experience is indicative of the cynicism individuals may feel about the benefits of correctional programming because of possible disappointments from other institutions and individuals in their lives. Pamela is a success story, in part, because of the commitment her connections show to helping her navigate the educational and correctional systems after her release. She has social capital that manifests itself in support of her educational pursuit as well as in the logistical and transportation support necessary to succeed. The support offered to Pamela begins with an individual with institutional knowledge, and it continues as institutional support when program representatives maintain contact with her after her release. These connections increase her social and navigational capital while she pursues higher education during and after her incarceration.

Megan echoes the role institutional support when pursuing higher education upon release:

> "I have like one or two, like specifically one professor who has just, like, who heard my story, and has just helped me at every step. And I'm about to take my 4th class with her." (Megan)

Megan's professor has provided her with institutional support that helps her navigate the educational system and succeed in her classes. As an employee of the college where Megan is enrolled, this professor is an example of institutional support. Institutional support can also come from other sources and at different stages of the process. Institutional support may be provided throughout an individual's entire interaction with a system. For example, institutional support in the educational system may include assistance with the application process, support from instructors and administration while enrolled, and mentorship upon leaving the institution upon graduation or reentry.

As evidenced by Sheree's experience, institutional support does not have to come from someone within the educational system. According to Sheree:

> "It was actually a behavior health service center that helped me. One of the case managers at a behavior health center helped me with the application, and that's how I got my FAFSA." (Sheree)

Counselors, guards, or other support staff in other institutions can provide this support in navigating the educational system. However, institutional support is not universal, and when it is not offered, participation in higher education can be more difficult to access and engage.

> "So, I ran into a problem with that because the woman who was my last counselor, she didn't like my attitude, but wasn't bad or anything. It's just that you think too much of yourself. You need to come down a little bit…they don't think about you being like that or having the ability to do [well in college]. So that could have been some of it, too. Like, who do you think you are?" (Jasmine)

Jasmine's comment is in response to a question specifically asking about institutional support. She felt her counselor had a personal problem with her and was making her participation in higher education while incarcerated more difficult.

Employees within institutions can make participating in higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals easier or more difficult, but so can broader circumstances that individuals may have no control over:

> "…And it was supposed to have been set up where no matter where you transition to, you'll still have access to a laptop and those type of sessions where you could be able to further your education only if you was already currently in class. Well, unfortunately, when I got to the transitional center that I was at, they didn't have none of the capabilities, so I ended up getting further and further behind. But I was still struggling trying to do it with my phone." (Jameel, when asked if he completed his degree)

As we can see with Jameel's experience, not all facilities are equally equipped to support higher education. Jameel and other individuals who transfer during their coursework may lose the institutional support that was present at one facility when they arrive at a new facility, especially if the new facility does not offer similar programming options.

Additionally, Chelsea commented on the hurdles she faced in applying to colleges once she was released and had to include her incarceration history on the application:

> "When I was applying to graduate school, one of the places, like, responded to my application and said they needed me to write a letter explaining my criminal history before they would consider me for admission. So, like, I'm already working and trying to graduate and I finally think I've gotten all my applications done because they take forever, but now I have to go back and rehash my personal experience and try to explain to someone I don't know, who probably doesn't know anything about the system, why I should get to go to grad school even though I [have a history of incarceration]." (Chelsea)

Chelsea's experience illustrates the bureaucratic hurdles in the system that make it more difficult for formerly incarcerated and other system-impacted individuals to access higher education. Combined with the higher rejection rate for individuals with a history of incarceration (see: Stewart and Uggen 2020), these additional steps in the application process create more stress and may discourage individuals from pursuing higher education while managing the difficulties of reentry. Sean adds:

> “But yeah, they [the school] got some letter and it was like, due to the criminal background check, they wanted me to explain my criminal history…Like, I just wrote all this stuff and turned it in. And then a guy actually was unpleasant. He was kind of, he was snarky with me. Like, and I almost, almost just said eff it and walked away because he was like ‘this is unacceptable; I need to know the context of each arrest, and I need to know all the details.’…and I almost didn’t do it.” (Sean)

Sean’s experience illustrates that formerly incarcerated individuals may encounter individual discrimination due to the stigma around their history of incarceration. Employees with biases against formerly incarcerated individuals have the ability to make additional bureaucratic hurdles even more difficult to overcome.

Sean and Chelsea’s experiences illustrate how a lack of institutional support can also negatively impact formerly incarcerated individuals’ experience of higher education, possibly to the point of not finishing. Sean explicitly states his frustration with the extra bureaucratic hurdles he must overcome because of his history and Chelsea implies her frustration as well. These systemic barriers make it more difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to pursue higher education upon reentry, which can impact their ability to reintegrate into society. Further, Sean’s experience exemplifies that individual biases also play a role in the difficulties this population faces. Gatekeepers who are biased against formerly incarcerated individuals can complicate the process, possibly dissuading some people from pursuing higher education at all.

Conversely, Megan strikes an optimistic note about institutional support for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students:

> “Formerly incarcerated people just recently as last week became a protected class. So, I think it would be interesting if in [the school’s] diversity and inclusivity initiative, they included formerly incarcerated people and started educating their students about interactions with formerly incarcerated people…things like that, that people will understand.” (Megan)

Megan attends college in a large, metropolitan city that created an ordinance to add formerly incarcerated individuals to the city's list of protected classes. The ordinance was adopted by the city council, so it is only enforceable within the city limits. With the changes in the protected status of formerly incarcerated individuals, Megan argues that institutions should include them in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to further support this population on campus.

Personal Support. Respondents also discussed the role of familial and social capital in terms of personal support. Individuals reported emotional support from loved ones in the form of navigating the system, encouragement, pride, and instilling confidence in their abilities. Overall, respondents were consistent in their comments: personal support is key to successful participation in higher education during or after incarceration.

> "[applying] was a really lengthy process because they couldn't speak to me on the phone and my mom had to email them for me. They ended up having me sign a [Writ of Fieri Facias] form, but that required a lawyer coming to the jail, which was, like, hundreds of dollars." (Megan)

As Megan discusses, she would not have been able to apply to her college program without her familial capital. Her mother provides support by contacting the school and going through the application process for her in addition to paying for the lawyer to complete the necessary paperwork.

Not all the personal support given to respondents was practical. Pamela's comments below illustrate the emotional support she received:

> "I had the resource of, like, my mom and my sister, who were both brilliant women that I could discuss stuff with, who were very proud and made it something that I was, like, it's definitely easier to continue doing something like that when you have people in your life that are motivating you and supporting you through that." (Pamela)

Pamela's mother and sister expressed their pride in her for pursuing higher education, which gave her the motivation she needed to continue. Sean's mother also provided him with emotional support:

> "The one probably really good thing [my mom] did for me…was she did instill in me, I guess, that I was smart and I was capable and I could go to college. And she wanted me to go to college and encouraged me to go to college." (Sean)

Sean's mother encouraged him, giving him the self-confidence he needs to succeed in the higher education system.

As evidenced in Pamela's and Sean's responses, familial capital has benefits beyond logistical or financial support. These comments illustrate how emotional support is an important nonmaterial resource for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals participating in higher education. Personal support from family members increases respondents' aspirational capital, which allows them to be hopeful and motivated despite barriers they encounter in life (Yosso 2005). Pamela's mom and sister both provided her with motivation to keep going and support through difficulties. Sean acknowledges that, even though his mother messed up in a lot of ways, she did provide the basis of emotional support when he was growing up to help him believe he was capable of being successful in higher education.

Though family and friends on the outside provided a base of personal support, respondents also discussed the support they found among their fellow students while they were incarcerated:

> "But then we had the resource of having each other and the girls that were involved with [the program] were extremely involved and would pass each other papers sometimes through the officers…So we had the resource of each other of having some girls in the area…that could maybe help us with little grammar things." (Pamela)

The higher education programs my respondents participated in provided personal support for their students through the use of the cohort model, moving their students through the program as a whole. This way of organizing students allows for the students to support each other and help each other throughout the program.

Each of these nonmaterial resources identified through my interviews align with Yosso's (2006) community cultural wealth paradigm, which asserts that members of marginalized populations possess navigational capital, aspirational capital, familial capital, and social capital. Connections, institutional support, and personal support all provide respondents with navigational capital, making higher education easier to access and maneuver while incarcerated. Personal support has provides some respondents with aspirational capital and is provided through their familial capital, allowing them to believe they can be successful in higher education and giving them financial and emotional support.

Mechanisms Impacting Reincarceration

Multiple nonmaterial resources contributed to respondents' participation in higher education, and they discussed the importance of education through its impact on their success in reentry. Most respondents identified several mechanisms they believe have an impact on their likelihood of reincarceration and that link their participation in higher education to other positive outcomes, including a sense of community, confidence/self-esteem, and a restored sense of humanity and identity.

Community. Respondents who participate in higher education programming during or after incarceration name a sense of community as one possible protective mechanism against reincarceration. Specifically, they discuss feeling like they belong somewhere and their relationships to mentors, which aligns with the community cultural wealth definition of social

capital as social networks and community resources that provide practical and emotional support (Yosso 2005). For example, Megan described her increased sense of community during and after incarceration:

> "So, for a while, I really didn't have any interest in completing college, just because I had other things going on…but I eventually realized when I kind of came out of my depressive state that college was the only thing keeping me afloat. So it was, like, the only community that I had. I was on house arrest while I was on school enrollment as well…so it was really, like, the only community and human interaction I had, and it was really the only thing keeping my mind distracted." (Megan)

As Megan discusses, college can provide connections and a sense of community for both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. Further, a sense of connection may lead to the integration into society necessary for desistance from crime as described in life course theory (see e.g.: Sampson and Laub 1993).

In addition to the general sense of belonging and community described by Megan, Sean explains how mentors within the higher education system create a specific link to community:

> "There were some people who were, like, really great mentors to me, and they encouraged me to get my master's degree, so I got my master's degree…So they were always, like, encouraging me and, like, really helping me out. Helped me to write scholarship stuff and got me scholarship money." (Sean)

Sean's comments illustrate the role mentors can play in the lives of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated students. Specifically, providing them with practical help navigating the educational system as well as a source of emotional support throughout the process.

Pamela echoes Sean's experience and discusses the role of instructors in creating community for formerly incarcerated students:

> "…the teachers, the professors that are involved in it are so caring and so genuine about what they do…that they think about you and remember you and stuff like that. So, it definitely became something that I was looking forward to for that connection as well as the classes." (Pamela)

As these quotes illustrate, connections, mentors, and a sense of community are beneficial to system-impacted students navigating the educational system.

On the other hand, when such social capital is not present, the process of reentry can be daunting at best and overwhelming at worst:

> "I definitely saw the kind of circumstance where if it weren't for college, if it weren't for somebody giving a damn about what else you've got going on, what else you're worth, that you would have gone back to…that it was just enough to push you over the line towards 'I can do something else.'" (Pamela)

Pamela's response demonstrates the benefit of social capital in making positive change in one's life. She, and other respondents, had support systems through friends, family, and mentors, but she has seen the difficulty that accompanies reentry if an individual has to navigate these new experiences without personal or institutional support.

Confidence/Self-esteem. Respondents who participated in higher education programming during or after incarceration identified renewed confidence and increased self-esteem as one of the key mechanisms linking their education to a lower likelihood of reincarceration, which supports the community cultural wealth framework's definition of aspirational capital (Yosso 2005). They commented on their restored overall confidence in themselves and the skills they had to succeed upon release in line with existing research on the prosocial and social capital benefits of prison education (Tewksbury 2000; Bozick et al. 2018; Baranger et al. 2018).

Brittany describes participants' increased confidence in themselves as a result of college in prison:

in

> "I think it's more of just, like, a feeling, and idea of just knowing that everything's going to be okay, like everything will eventually be okay. There's not a formula that I can click that's going to make it just easy straight from here on out. You're going to have bad times, but everything will be okay. And I think that it just makes things easier for me." (Brittany)

Brittany's experience with higher education changed her outlook on life in general. Because of her participation in higher education, she has renewed optimism for her future. She goes on to say:

> "So you can pretty much almost guarantee that if a woman puts herself into a college program in prison, she's probably not going to come back. If she even tries, she's already on the right track." (Brittany)

Brittany's assertion about how higher education, and prison education specifically, positively impacts her confidence and that of other women like her is echoed by Sheree:

> "So it just gave me the confidence in my overall life. It gave me a bit of confidence…that I can do it." (Sheree)

Mary's response takes Brittany and Sherre's perspective a step further by giving a specific example of how her experience of higher education in prison increased her confidence:

> "I just know that the more education I have, the more knowledge. And also when I walk into rooms where I don't feel comfortable and feel very out of place, that stuff is what helps me speak up anyways because I do, in fact, belong here, and I did earn my seat." (Mary)

Mary believes in herself and her abilities, and she knows that she earned her spot in rooms where she previously felt out of place. Jasmine similarly describes her new confidence to "stay in front of" people even when they turn her away at first.

> "And I had that job two weeks after I got out of prison. The first week I went there as a participant in their program, and it was job skills and life skills. And then when that happened, I said, 'Well, can I volunteer?' Because I felt like if I stayed in front of them, then they would look for me a job that I felt I was good enough to take." (Jasmine)

These responses from Brittany, Sheree, Mary, and Jasmine provide support for the argument that participation in higher education during or after incarceration increases the confidence and self-esteem of participants that may serve as a mechanism linking education to decreased risk of reincarceration.

Finally, these responses by formerly incarcerated individuals add to existing research on the prosocial and social capital benefits of higher education among this population. Bushway and Uggen (2021) argue that researchers should shift the focus from reentry to entry because the experience of incarceration delays the maturation process and individuals did not experience the initial developmental entry into adulthood in their late teens or early twenties. From this perspective, participation in higher education provides a first step toward the maturation process in the life course of formerly incarcerated individuals because it improves self-confidence and self-esteem, which in turn, fosters a more prosocial worldview often associated with productive adulthood (Tewksbury 2000; Bozick et al. 2018). In their study of incarcerated women participating in higher education, Baranger et al. (2018) find that these women feel more empowered and confident as a result of their involvement.

Restored Identity & Humanity. Respondents who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration reported feelings of restored individual identity or personal humanity as a direct result of their involvement with these programs. Specifically, respondents described their renewed sense of individualism and personhood that had been stripped from them by the correctional institutions during their incarceration. For example, Sonja explains the process by which incarceration takes someone's humanity:

> "Prison just wears you down. I remember when I first got there and I found out someone I knew died, I just lost it. Then another person died, and I was sad but didn't really have the ability to show it. By the time a friend of mine was murdered in [the facility], I barely had a reaction. I was numb. I didn't feel human anymore. Since I've been out, I realized I also needed a lot of counseling [laughs] but getting involved in the [education program] helped pull me out of that a little and I felt like a person again." (Sonja)

Over time, Sonja began to feel numb instead of feeling her feelings, and she attributes that to her incarceration and the correctional facility, at least in part. But she then links her participation in

higher education while incarcerated with her starting to feel like a whole, functional person again.

Pamela expands on Sonja's experience of losing her ability to feel her emotions, which she likened to losing her sense of personhood. Pamela goes on to explain that she associates her humanity with her intellect and ability to think.

> "It reminded me of my humanity. It reminded me of my intellect. You're in a circumstance for years where you are a number and you're working for the state and you are the physical that you can do, whether that's in the kitchen or anything else. So, it's the first time in a long time you get to think." (Pamela)

According to Pamela, life in a correctional facility limits opportunities to do intellectual work in favor of monotonous work assignments that keep individuals busy and institutions running.

> "There are core aspects of who you are as a person that I think I have gotten back to now that maybe I got away from during the decade [I was incarcerated]." (Pamela)

Mary specifically references the fact that incarcerated individuals are often referred to by their ID number or their last name rather than their first name or preferred name, which intentionally or not, limits their individuality and personhood. In higher education settings, though, Mary notes that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals are treated the same as other students, where their individuality and ideas are valued:

> "They look forward to going to class, and it does…they know what they want to do when they get out. So, they get to keep…they're not just a number and they're not just a name. They go into the classroom and they're humanized and treated just like a regular student." (Mary)

These situations where one is encouraged to think critically and share their thoughts provide the opportunity to regain some lost identity and humanity.

Jasmine points out the ways this reintroduction of identity and humanity persists into life after incarceration:

> "Life starts back right on up, you know? And when it starts right back up, they don't take into consideration that you've been away so many years…My husband says, 'oh, my wife is back.' He wasn't so much talking about from prison. He was talking about from the desolate place of drugs because he knows, when I'm not using drugs, I'm very productive and able to introduce them to a lot of things." (Jasmine)

Jasmine alludes to the lack of transition time between release and rejoining society. The return of one's feeling of identity or link to one's own humanity that is regained through participation in higher education may ease the shift into post-release life, thus directly impacting formerly incarcerated individuals' ability to avoid reincarceration.

Higher Education's Impact on Outcomes beyond Reincarceration

Much of the existing research on the benefits of higher education participation for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals focuses on reductions in reincarceration or risk of reincarceration as the sole outcome (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022). However, my study respondents discussed other positive outcomes that resulted from involvement in higher education programming. Specifically, respondents identified job satisfaction, improved family relationships, and rehabilitated reputations as positive results they gained from their experiences in higher education programming during or post-incarceration. In the case of job satisfaction, respondents explicitly discussed the skills they learned as mechanisms linking their experience with college-level coursework to later positive outcomes.

Job Satisfaction. According to respondents, their participation in higher education programming during or after their incarceration led directly to increased job satisfaction. Specifically, they attributed increased job satisfaction to the new interests and skills they developed through higher education, as well as increased job opportunities that meet their new

professional and personal goals. For example, Jasmine discusses how her professional interests changed from before her incarceration:

> "Well, my interest would have been business administration…Now it's criminal justice and human services…So it's because of my experience with being incarcerated or being or drugs or being whatever I was doing out there. It's like, I don't want nobody to go through that. I want them to know somebody compassionate about what they do and what that person who's sitting in front of me does. This is who I am, and it's possible that we can break, change, and do things." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's comments exemplify the theme of respondents, particularly women, changing their career aspirations over the course of their higher education experience in prison to focus on more prosocial professions. She wants to help others who have similar experiences to hers. She goes on to say:

> "And then the next thing I know, two weeks after that one first class, they said, 'Jasmine, we want to make you an offer, and we want you to come and join our team.' Those are the kind of things that happen to me. And then I could talk to people. I could raise good money. Yeah, that's just how life was going." (Jasmine)

Jasmine's participation in higher education programming and college-level coursework opened the door for her to volunteer with a political nonprofit that she was interested in working for. Once she had a foot in the door and they were able to see her skills she developed through her programming skills like communication and persuasive writing, and they hired her as a full-time employee. She learned the skills and earned the credentials through higher education to get a job that provided her with fulfillment and satisfaction.

Other respondents discussed specific skills gained through higher education programs in prison that enhanced their job prospects. One of the skills associated with a college degree is the commitment to finish what one starts and the ability to complete difficult tasks. Brittany's comments speak to her development of these skills to get a job working with a government

agency or as a social worker, once again with the goal of helping others. Brittany explains how earning the degree itself helps with job opportunities:

> "And then it's like, are you going to be able if you got your bachelor's or your master's, maybe you could work in social work if the government would hire you. So, I knew that just having college looks good because it shows that you are somebody who will make a big commitment and finish it." (Brittany)

Likewise, Mary discusses communication skills that she developed through participation in higher education:

> "A lot of communication and yeah, I picked that up too. So with school, even just in interacting with my professors and stuff like that, but also interacting with other students and other like-minded people, that's been something my introverted-self lacked." (Mary)

Participating in higher education programming allowed Mary the opportunity to develop her communication skills with other students and professors, which will help her professional communication with management and supervisors.

Pamela links her newfound skills to her desire to stay connected to her past and have a positive impact on the future:

> "After my release, the emotion of what it had done for me shaped my need to stay connected to it and affect any change. Also, being a felon now and not having the ability to vote and things like that, you have to reassess what change you can affect. So for me, it was like, oh, here's this ability I have to still impact legislation, to still impact lives and change lives and not do it necessarily with your traditional channels. And this is how you pay it forward, this is how you pay it back." (Pamela)

Pamela's experience with higher education gave her the skills and the opportunity to make a difference in her community. She views her participation in higher education as an opportunity to learn skills that she can use to benefit others who may be in similar circumstances she has been in but without the resources or opportunities.

Improved Personal Reputation and Family Relationships. Respondents reported improvements to their personal reputations and their family relationships as positive outcomes of

their experience with higher education beyond reduced likelihood of reincarceration. Specifically, these outcomes are linked through the theme of personal change and growth. For example, Jameel states:

> "For me, I think that what I tried, I tried to change the narrative, because when people heard my name, heard of me, or saw me, they just automatically knew, 'oh that boy is no good. He's up to no good.' So, I think for me, I was always trying to change that." (Jameel)

This response illustrates how Jameel is using his participation in higher education programming to improve his reputation as that of a trouble-maker. One of his goals in higher education is to rehabilitate that reputation into something more positive.

Sheree and Mary also talk about personal changes they've made through their involvement in higher education, but they discuss their evolution specifically in terms of its impact on their family relationships. Sheree notes, "It made my children look at me with a different light, so that's a plus." Mary describes how her success in higher education while incarcerated impacted her children. "I've got four kids. What they see is the resilience and the fact that it doesn't matter. Times you have to try, you can still accomplish it. They see me do all of these things and run myself ragged sometimes, but they know what it's for." Both Sheree and Mary discuss how their participation in higher education programming has improved their relationships with their children and the way their children view them. These women now see themselves as mothers who have demonstrated resilience and hard work to their children, and their relationships and reputations reflect that. Further, these improved relationships potentially increase familial capital for their children.

Changes in Maturity and Attitudes

Respondents report their experiences with higher education contributed to the maturation process during and after incarceration, a process that may have been delayed because of their personal experiences. Respondents discuss the ways in which their individual experiences with higher education have impacted their late transition into the maturity associated with adulthood. Jonah says:

> "I went in angry. But I came out educated because I had the time to sit down and think about what I need to do, because now I'm not young anymore." (Jonah)

Once again, we see that Jonah's attitudes toward his previous criminal behavior have shifted as he has matured. However, Jonah explicitly credits this maturation process to his participation in higher education while incarcerated. It provided him with a pathway to change his trajectory and desist from his previous deviant behavior.

Finally, respondents provided support for Bushway and Uggen's (2021) argument that we should reframe reentry as entry. As Mary states:

> "[College was] an era of actually figuring out who I am. So, I know most people probably go through that when they're, like, 18 to 24 or whatever, but I just happened to do it when I wass 33, I guess. 35? It's only been about, I can say, within the past couple of years is when I really hit my groove. I know myself now." (Mary)

Mary explicitly states that her maturation process was delayed because of her incarceration, and she feels as if she is experiencing things that most people experience in their transition to young adulthood. Because she was incarcerated, she missed that transition and is entering into her productive adulthood years now, in her 30s. Megan agrees, but from a different perspective:

> "[on how her younger age was a benefit] Definitely specifically with making friends. If you're a little bit older than someone on a college campus, I think if you're in your 30s or 40s doing undergraduate, definitely look at you differently. And it's not like you're going to be making a bunch of friends, unfortunately. So, I do have a colleague who went to college in his 30s after he was incarcerated. And it was, like, kind of a thing where it's not like he's getting drinks with friends after class, like, that kind of thing. So I do think

> my age, like, thank goodness I got out when I did because I'm on track to graduate when I would have graduated if I had not had a conviction." (Megan).

Megan's perspective as an individual who was incarcerated as a teenager and released in time to meet the traditional milestones in life still supports the argument for shifting the conversation from reentry to entry. She discusses her observations of other formerly incarcerated students and the difficulties they have navigating the educational system because of their age and delayed maturation process. With the way society is currently set up, those individuals who have delayed onset of productive adulthood are at a disadvantage in many situations. It draws attention to them or changes the ways they may interact with other individuals or the institution itself, as seen with Megan's friend who does not get the full college experience because of the age difference between him and his classmates.

The results in this chapter address all three of my research questions: What factors motivate incarcerated individuals to participate in higher education? What nonmaterial resources do incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals possess that contribute to their success in higher education (2a)? Are the same mechanisms that lead to reduced reincarceration linked to other positive outcomes for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals? This study captures the ways formerly incarcerated individuals understand their experience with higher education and its benefit to their lives. The first themes that emerge are time, college as the only way forward, and overcoming one's history of incarceration through increased work ethic. These themes fall under the category of motivation to participate in higher education. Respondents who started their higher education journey while they were incarcerated identify time as one of the main motivations to pursue higher education. While many aspects of life during incarceration act as hurdles to bettering oneself, participants in this study suggested that the amount of free time

available to them was a strong factor in their decisions to join higher education programs. Further, higher education functions to prevent boredom and distract from the chaos of daily life in a correctional facility.

Several respondents discuss college as their only path forward after they are released. They are aware of the residual consequences of their incarceration history including limited job prospects and the wage penalty (Holzer et al. 2007; Raphael 2014), and they view higher education as the best, if not only, way to change the direction of their life and increase their economic opportunities. These results suggest that formerly incarcerated individuals hold attitudes consistent with the process models in life course theory (Sampson and Laub 2005). They see higher education as their only path to the turning point of gainful employment, which will change the direction of their life from criminal behavior toward desistance.

Finally, respondents are motivated to pursue higher education because they want to overcome their history of incarceration and the stigma that accompanies it. The mechanisms through which they try to shed this stigma is a strong work ethic. As with their limited economic prospects, respondents are keenly aware of the stigma associated with previous incarceration (Pager 2003; Stewart and Uggen 2020), and they want to prove to themselves and potential employers that they are as capable as their peers who have not been incarcerated.

The second question the qualitative results address is: What nonmaterial resources do incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals possess that contribute to their success in higher education? The themes that emerge from this study are connections to navigate the system, institutional support, and personal support. Respondents use their social connections to other incarcerated individuals as well as staff to navigate both the correctional and educational system. Social networks function as social capital for incarcerated students, providing them with

support and understanding. These connections may begin while an individual is incarcerated, but they are also present upon release, easing the transition to reentry in the form of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). These social networks at reentry provide support (social capital) in addition to practical help in navigating the educational system, including funding options, application processes and deadlines, and logistical hurdles like transportation (navigational capital). Further, this social and navigational capital may function to increase access to turning points, including jobs and personal relationships, that decrease an individual's likelihood of reincarceration (Sampson and Laub 1993).

Institutional support plays a pivotal role in this population's interactions with the educational system. Though similar to connections in general, support from individuals working in the correctional or educational system offers specific benefits and policies may help or hinder individuals as they navigate these systems. These policies range from individual classroom policies allowing incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals to thrive to system-wide policies including this population in the protected-class status. Simultaneously, a lack of institutional support, through extra bureaucratic hurdles like transferring credits or extra steps in the application process, can make it more difficult to successfully interact with the system. Individuals may opt out of the system rather than attempt to overcome the bureaucratic difficulty (Brayne 2014).

Lastly, respondents identify personal support as a key component in their success in higher education. Personal support may illustrate multiple types of capital as defined in community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005): navigational capital, aspirational capital, familial capital, and social capital. Friends and family who are not incarcerated may provide emotional support and navigational support by completing steps in the application process while individuals

are incarcerated. Personal support from incarcerated peers may take the form of relating through similar experiences or practical help studying and understanding class content.

Though this study focuses on nonmaterial resources, respondents consistently discuss financial support as well. Particularly for incarcerated students, the timing of their decision to pursue higher education is partly based on funding. Grant programs and financial aid options, including the recently renewed access to Pell Grants, played a vital role in students' decision to participate in higher education programming because they now had the financial ability to do so.

Participants in this study addressed the final research question in two parts. First, they identified the mechanisms that reduced their risk of reincarceration. Second, they discuss other positive outcomes as a result of their participation in higher education. Respondents name a sense of community as one mechanism that decreases their risk of reincarceration. They develop social capital through their relationships with their peers and create an environment where they belong, which may improve integration into society and reduce their likelihood of reincarceration. Mentors, in the form of other formerly incarcerated students and helpers within the educational system, further contribute to this sense of community and social integration.

Increased confidence and self-esteem is a result of participation in higher education for this population, and they directly link it to their chances of reincarceration. Respondents, particularly women, link their experiences in higher education with increased optimism for the future and confidence that they belong in institutions and jobs they previously felt were not built for them. These findings support the previous findings of Bozick et al. (2018) and Baranger et al. (2018) that correctional education increases self-concept. These results further support reconceptualizing reentry as entry because many members of this population did not experience the maturation process at the expected ages in their life course because of their incarceration.

Therefore, upon release from incarceration, they are experiencing the roles and responsibilities of adulthood for the first time, regardless of age (Bushway and Uggen 2021).

The final mechanism this study identifies is restored identity and humanity. Participants credit participation in higher education with a renewed sense of individualism and personhood. Life in a correctional facility erodes an individual's ability to feel emotion and reduces them to an identification number or last name. Participating in higher education, whether during incarceration or while reentering society, allows an individual to use their intellect and think critically in a setting where their perspectives have value, both of which respondents acknowledged as part of the rehumanization process.

In addition to identifying mechanisms that link participation in higher education to reductions in reincarceration, study participants discussed benefits of their experience beyond desistance from criminal behavior. Participation in higher education leads to increased job satisfaction for respondents. While the quantitative results of this study also examine job satisfaction as a benefit of higher education for this population, the qualitative results specifically confirm Maruna's (2001) argument that formerly incarcerated individuals "make good" by giving back to society in order to redefine themselves in a positive light. Respondents, particularly women, identify careers in the advocacy or service sectors as increasing job satisfaction. Further, they credit the skills learned through higher education with giving them the qualifications for these jobs. These skills include persuasive writing, critical thinking, and commitment to seeing tasks through from start to finish.

Improved personal reputation and family relationships also emerge as themes in the qualitative results of this study. Respondents credit these positive changes to personal growth, including reduced anger and resentment, facilitated by their participation in higher education.

These shifts in identity and improved relationships provide further evidence for the identity models of life course theory as well as the argument that the maturation process occurs at different points in life for this population (Giordano et al. 2014; Bushway and Uggen 2021). The results from this qualitative research demonstrate that formerly incarcerated students possess specific resources that may lead to success in higher education. Just as evident in these results are the obstacles this population faces when interacting with the correctional education and higher education systems without access to these resources. These results provide data for a gap in the current research. Identifying the mechanisms linking higher education to potential reductions in reincarceration furthers our understanding of potential rehabilitation efforts and allows us to enact policies that benefit system-impacted students and society overall. Further, discussing potential benefits to this population beyond reductions in reincarceration expands the conversation to include a wider range of outcomes that have a positive impact on the individuals and systems in question.

In summary, my conversations with the respondents offered insight into all three of my research questions. Findings are consistent with the theoretical framing of life course theory and community cultural capital; specifically, participation in college-level classes during or after incarceration provides a necessary turning point to a new trajectory for my respondents (Sampson and Laub 1993). Further, respondents discussed resources that provided them with multiple types of capital as outlined in community cultural wealth (Yosso 2006). Additionally, these results provide additional support for Bushway and Uggen's (2021) framing of release from incarceration as entry into adulthood rather than reentry into society.

In the next chapter, I use a multilevel modeling analysis to further examine the themes addressed by interview participants. I do so in order to build on the qualitative portion of this

study to gain a more complete understanding of the mechanisms through which higher education leads to reduced reincarceration and other positive outcomes for formerly incarcerated people. Specifically, my statistical analysis tests potential mechanisms linking higher education and reduced reincarceration as well as outcomes beyond reincarceration, including health outcomes, voting history, and job quality.

CHAPTER 6

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

In this chapter, I use multiple types of regression to conduct an analysis of the relationships between forms of capital identified in community cultural wealth, higher education, and prosocial outcomes including reduced reincarceration, voting history, paid time off, and annual income. First, I examine correlations between key variables. Then, I discuss the results of my statistical models. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief analysis of my findings.

Correlations

Table 5 displays a correlation matrix for all dependent and independent variables in my analyses.

Dependent Variables

Reincarceration. There are several significant correlations between the independent variables and reincarceration. As expected, the focal relationship between participation in higher education during or after incarceration and reincarceration is negative and is significant ($r = -0.029$, $p < .001$) as is the relationship between reincarceration and stakes in conformity ($r = -0.114$, $p < .001$). Therefore, when participation in higher education and other stakes in conformity increase, reincarceration decreases. Reincarceration also decreases among older individuals ($r = -0.037$, $p < .01$). Further, higher aspirational capital early in life is associated with lower rates of reincarceration ($r = -0.040$, $p < .01$). Higher levels of anxiety and depression are associated with higher rates of reincarceration ($r = 0.095$, $p < .01$). Increased marijuana and cocaine use is also associated with higher rates of reincarceration ($r = 0.161$, $p < .01$ and $r =$

0.184, $p < .01$, respectively). Additionally, self-reported criminal behavior after release is associated with higher rates of reincarceration ($r = 0.253$, $p < .01$).

Table 5: Bivariate Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Reincarceration	1.000												
2. Voting History	-0.068**	1.000											
3. Paid Time Off	-0.049**	0.014	1.000										
4. Annual Income	-0.003	0.130**	0.082**	1.000									
5. Higher Ed	-0.029**	0.147**	0.047**	0.071**	1.000								
6. Stakes in Conformity	-0.114**	0.067**	0.090**	0.091**	-0.012	1.000							
7. Criminal Behavior	0.253**	-0.016	-0.032*	0.017	0.003	-0.006	1.000						
8. Familial Capital	-0.019	0.091**	0.002	0.006	0.015	-0.010	-0.042**	1.000					
9. Aspirational Capital	-0.040**	0.062**	0.052**	0.024*	0.021*	0.012	-0.103**	0.078**	1.000				
10. Social Capital	-0.006	-0.021	-0.007	0.064**	0.033**	-0.010	-0.012	0.139**	0.167**	1.000			
11. Linguistic Capital	-0.004	0.103**	0.033^{+}	0.131**	0.084**	0.032**	0.019	0.081**	0.055**	0.057**	1.000		
12. Cultural Capital	-0.024^{+}	0.108**	0.050**	0.078**	0.057**	0.082**	0.014	0.105**	0.042**	0.095**	0.229**	1.000	
13. Navigational Capital	-0.008	0.142**	0.052**	0.136**	0.064**	-0.037**	0.025*	0.027**	0.006	-0.039**	0.113**	0.094**	1.000

Voting History. There are multiple significant correlations between whether an individual voted in national elections 2004-2010 and other variables. The relationship between participation in higher education during or after incarceration and recent voting history is positive and is significant ($r = 0.147$, $p < .001$) as is the relationship between voting history and stakes in conformity ($r = 0.067$, $p < .001$). Therefore, individuals with higher levels of education and more stakes in conformity are more likely to have voted in recent elections (Ahearn et al. 2023). Likelihood of voting in recent elections also increases as work ethic increases ($r = 0.096$, $p < .01$), and men are less likely to have voted than women ($r = -0.070$, $p < .01$).

Most of the variables operationalizing forms of capital within the community cultural wealth framework are positively and significantly associated with recent voting history. Higher levels of familial capital ($r = 0.091$, $p < .01$), aspirational capital ($r = 0.062$, $p < .01$), linguistic capital ($r = 0.103$, $p < .01$), cultural capital ($r = 0.103$, $p < .01$), and navigational capital ($r = 0.142$, $p < .01$) at a young age are all associated with increased voting in recent elections. Interestingly, social capital was not significantly correlated with recent voting history. One possible explanation is that other forms of capital, such as cultural or navigational, may play a stronger role in voting than social networks.

Job Quality – Paid Time Off. Job quality, as measured by the amount of paid time off provided by the employer for both vacation and sick leave, is significantly correlated with several variables. Participation in higher education during or after incarceration and paid time off is positively correlated and significant at the $p < .05$ level ($r = 0.035$). Therefore, individuals with higher levels of education have more employer-provided paid time off from their jobs. Higher stakes in conformity are also associated with more paid time off ($r = 0.102$, $p < .01$).

Continued self-reported criminal behavior is associated with less paid time off from work (r = -0.044, $p < .01$), and men receive less paid time off than women (r = -0.039, $p < .01$).

Further, most forms of capital as defined in the community cultural wealth framework are associated with more paid time off from work. Higher aspirational capital (r = 0.060, $p < .01$), linguistic capital (r = 0.066, $p < .01$), cultural capital (r = 0.060, $p < .01$), and navigational capital (r = 0.049, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are all associated with more paid time off from work. Familial capital and social capital are not significantly correlated with increased job quality, as measured by the amount of paid time off for vacation and sick leave. These associations align with the community cultural wealth theoretical framework because aspirational capital and cultural capital are more related with professional goals and skills. Black individuals report less paid time off than individuals of other races (r = -0.031, $p < .01$).

Job Quality – Annual Income from Wages or Salary. There are multiple significant correlations between job quality, as measured by an individual's annual income, and other variables. The focal relationship between participation in higher education during or after incarceration and annual income is negative and significant at the $p < .01$ level (r = -0.051). Therefore, individuals with higher levels of education have lower annual incomes. This negative relationship is unexpected, but one potential explanation is supported by the qualitative findings of this study. Formerly incarcerated individuals who complete their college degree may be more likely to opt into service or helper occupations, which tend to have lower salaries or hourly wages than trades this population may train for while incarcerated. Higher stakes in conformity are associated with higher annual income (r = 0.167, $p < .01$), and so is higher reported work ethic (r 0.190, $p < .01$). Individuals with lower levels of anxiety and depression have higher

annual incomes ($r = -0.094$, $p < .01$). Individuals who participate in more continued criminal behavior have lower annual incomes ($r = -0.059$, $p < .01$).

Further, multiple forms of capital as defined in the community cultural wealth framework are associated with higher annual income. Higher aspirational capital ($p < .01$), linguistic capital ($p < .01$), cultural capital ($p < .01$), and navigational capital ($p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are all associated with higher annual income. Men have higher annual incomes than women ($p < .01$), and Black respondents have lower annual incomes than respondents of other races ($p < .01$). Older individuals have higher annual incomes than younger individuals ($p < .01$).

Independent Variables.

Participation in higher education is significantly correlated with several demographic, deviance, and community cultural wealth variables. Men in the sample participate less in higher education than women do ($r = -0.102$, $p < .01$), and Black individuals participate less in higher education than individuals of other races ($r = -0.024$, $p < .01$). Younger people participate in higher education more than older people ($r = -0.049$, $p < .01$). Higher cocaine use is associated with lower participation in higher education ($r = -0.018$, $p < .05$). Higher aspirational capital ($r =$ 0..041, $p < .01$), familial capital ($r = 0.024$, $p < .05$), social capital ($r = 0.072$, $p < .01$), linguistic capital ($r = 0.172$, $p < .01$), cultural capital ($r = 0.111$, $p < .01$), and navigational capital ($r =$ 0.133, p < .01) in late adolescence/early adulthood are associated with more participation in higher education.

Multiple demographic, life course, deviance, and community cultural wealth variables are also correlated with stakes in conformity. Men report fewer stakes in conformity than women ($r = -0.167$, $p < .01$), and Black people report fewer stakes in conformity than people of other races ($r = -0.143$, $p < .01$). Older people report more stakes in conformity than younger people ($r =$

0.079, $p < .01$). Increased work ethic is associated with more stakes in conformity ($r = 0.076$, $p < .01$). Less marijuana ($r = 0$-$.062$, $p < .01$) and cocaine use ($r = -0.069$, $p < .01$) is associated with more stakes in conformity. Higher levels of linguistic capital ($r = 0.032$, $p < .01$) and cultural capital ($r = 0.082$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are associated with higher stakes in conformity. Unexpectedly, lower rates of navigational capital ($r = -0.037$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are associated with more stakes in conformity. This finding may be due to the limited nature of measuring navigational capital only by parents' highest level of school completed.

Marijuana use is associated with several demographic variables. Hispanic individuals report less marijuana use then individuals of other ethnicities ($r = -0.060$, $p < .01$), and younger individuals report more marijuana use than older individuals ($r = -0.090$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, there is no significant difference in marijuana usage between men and women. Other measures of deviance are also correlated to marijuana use. Marijuana use is positively associated with cocaine use ($r = 0.281$, $p < .01$) and continued criminal behavior ($r = 0.271$, $p = .01$). Various community cultural wealth variables are also associated with marijuana use. Higher linguistic capital ($r = 0.068$, $p = .01$), cultural capital ($r = 0.070$, $p < .01$), and navigational capital ($r = 0.072$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are associated with higher marijuana use. Lower familial capital ($r = -0.035$, $p < .05$) and aspirational capital ($r = -0.072$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are associated with higher marijuana use.

Cocaine use is correlated with multiple demographic variables. Women are more likely to use cocaine than men ($r = -0.051$, $p < .01$), and younger individuals are more likely to use cocaine than older individuals ($r = -0.088$, $p < .01$). Black individuals report less cocaine use than individuals of other races ($r = -0.151$, $p < .01$). Cocaine use is also associated with another

measure of deviance, continued criminal behavior. Individuals who report cocaine use are also more likely to continue other criminal behavior ($r = 0.355$, $p < .01$). Various community cultural wealth variables are also associated with cocaine use. Higher social capital ($r = 0.027$, $p < .05$), linguistic capital ($r = 0.106$, $p < .01$), cultural capital ($r = 0.098$, $p < .01$), and navigational capital ($r = 0.037$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood are correlated with more cocaine use. Lower familial capital ($r = -0.063$, $p < .01$) and aspirational capital ($r = -0.028$, $p < .01$) are associated with more cocaine use.

Multiple demographic and community cultural wealth variables are correlated with continued criminal behavior. Black individuals are less likely to continue criminal behavior than individuals of other races ($r = -0.038$, $p < .01$). Unexpectedly, men report less continued criminal behavior than women ($r = -0.043$, $p < .01$). Higher navigational capital in late adolescence/early adulthood is associated with more continued criminal behavior in adulthood ($r = 0.025$, $p < .05$). Lower familial capital ($r = -0.042$, $p < .01$) and aspirational capital ($r = -0.103$, $p < .01$) in late adolescence/early adulthood is correlated with more continued criminal behavior.

Higher Education & Reincarceration

I use multiple regression models to further analyze the relationships between focal variables and to identify behavioral change within and between individuals over time based on their participation in higher education.

Life Course Explanations

Table 6 presents logistic regression models that predict reincarceration and test life course mediators among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Model 1 is a baseline equation that establishes a relationship between higher education and reincarceration when accounting for the control

variables. Models 2-7 illustrate a step-wise analysis of aspects of life course theory that may mediate this relationship.

Table 6: Logistic Regression Model of Reincarceration – Life Course Theory

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)	Model 4 OR (95% CI)	Model 5 OR (95% CI)	Model 6 OR (.95% CI)
Higher Education	0.759** (.627,.919)	0.736** (.608,892)	0.746* (.591,.941)	0.768* (.611,.964)	0.754** (.619,.919)	0.777⁺ (.600,1.006)
Stakes in Conformity		0.733** (.689,.779)				0.793** (.730,.861)
Marijuana Use			2.208** (1.938,2.516)			1.416** (.1.210,1.658)
Cocaine Use				3.243** (.2.73,3.858)		1.722** (.1.380,2.149)
Criminal Behavior					1.607** (1.531,1.686)	1.478** (.1.388,1.573)
Controls						
Age	0.944** (.911,.979)	0.955* (.921,.990)	0.955* (.914,.998)	0.962⁺ (.921,1.005)	0.958* (.924,.994)	0.979 (.932,1.028)
Pseudo R^2	.002	.014	.026	.029	.053	.081
LR Chi Square	17.40	123.64	153.59	175.13	454.65	409.65

$^{+} p < 0.1$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $N = 5{,}194$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

The baseline results from Model 1 indicate that individuals who participate in higher education during or after incarceration are about 24 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.759, $p = .005$). In line with life course theory, older individuals are less likely to be reincarcerated than younger individuals (OR = 0.944, $p = .002$).

The step-wise analysis in Table 6 demonstrates that individual components of the life course theory model partially mediate the relationship between higher education and reduced reincarceration. In Model 2, individuals who participate in higher education are 27 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.733, $p = .000$). The significant relationship between participation in higher education and

reincarceration remains after accounting for stakes in conformity; individuals who participate in higher education are roughly 27 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.736, p = .002).

Models 3 and 4 illustrate that drug use also significantly impacts one's risk of reincarceration. Individuals who use marijuana are more than twice as likely to be reincarcerated as individuals who do not use marijuana (OR = 2.208, p = .000), and individuals who use cocaine are more than three times as likely to be reincarcerated as individuals who do not use cocaine (OR = 3.243, p = .000). Participation in higher education continues to significantly lower the risk of reincarceration in Models 3 and 4 (OR = 0.746, p = .013; β = 0.768, p = .023, respectively).

As expected, individuals who self-report continued participation in criminal behavior upon reentry are more likely to recidivate than individuals who report desistance from criminal behavior. A one unit increase in criminal behavior increases the risk of reincarceration by almost 61 percent (OR = 1.607, p = .000). Participation in higher education remains significant in Model 5 as well, decreasing the likelihood of reincarceration by roughly 25 percent (OR = 0.754, p = .005).

All measures mediate the relationship between participation in higher education and likelihood of reincarceration in the full life course model. A one unit increase in stakes in conformity increases the likelihood of being reincarcerated by 21 percent (OR = 0.793, p = .000). Individuals who use marijuana are 42 percent more likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not use marijuana (OR = 1.416, p = .000), and individuals who use cocaine are 72 percent more likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not use cocaine (OR = 1.722, p = .000). A one unit increase in self-reported continued criminal behavior increases the risk of

reincarceration by almost 48 percent (OR = 1.478, p = .000).

Community Cultural Wealth Explanations

Table 7 presents multi-level logistic regression models that predict reincarceration and test community cultural wealth moderators among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Models 1-7 illustrate a step-wise analysis of community cultural wealth components that may moderate this relationship.

Table 7: Two-Level Logistic Regression Model of Reincarceration – Community Cultural Wealth

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)	Model 4 OR (95% CI)	Model 5 OR (95% CI)	Model 6 OR (95% CI)	Model 7 OR (95% CI)
Higher Education	0.766** (.632,.928)	0.796* (.639,.991)	0.788* (.648,.958)	0.766* (.621,.945)	0.763** (.625,.930)	0.814 (.618,1.072)	0.811 (.603,1.089)
Familial Capital		0.917^{+} (.840,1.001)					
Aspirational Capital			0.864** (.798,.936)				
Navigational Capital				0.986 (.925,1.051)			
Social Capital					0.901* (.813,.999)		
Linguistic Capital						1.002 (.931,1.079)	
Cultural Capital							0.883 (.750,1.039)
Higher Ed*Familial		1.204 (.881,1.647)					
Higher Ed*Aspirational			1.011 (.758,1.349)				
Higher Ed*Navigational				1.062 (.865,1.304)			
Higher Ed*Social					1.119 (.816,1.534)		
Higher Ed*Linguistic						0.897 (.689,1.167)	
Higher Ed*Cultural							0.854 (.368,1.983)
Sex[a]	1.004 (.880,1.144)	1.079 (.927,1.257)	0.994 (.867,1.140)	0.9095 (.869,1.139)	1.015 (.889,1.157)	0.878 (.742,1.040)	0.872 (.737,1.032)
Race[b]	1.071 (.961,1.194)	1.053 (.928,1.196)	1.135* (1.015,1.269)	1.070 (.956,1.197)	1.067 (.958,1.190)	1.084 (.939,1.252)	1.065 (.921,1.232)
Age	0.944** (.911,.978)	0.956^{+} (.913,1.001)	0.941** (.907,.976)	0.944** (.910,.980)	0.929** (.892,.967)	0.907** (.865,.951)	0.905 (.863,.949)
Pseudo R^2	.002	.002	.004	.002	.003	.005	.005
LR Chi Square	18.53	12.74	32.55	17.12	22.47	22.98	24.94

$^{+}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $N = 4{,}858$

[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

Model 1 illustrates the baseline results that there is a significant relationship between participation in higher education and reincarceration when control variables are accounted for (OR = 0.766, *p* = .006). Model 2 shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on reincarceration, indicating that individuals who participate in higher education are roughly 24 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.766, *p* = .041) .

Model 3 also shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on reincarceration. Individuals who participate in higher education are more than 21 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.788, *p* = .017). There was also a significant main effect of aspirational capital on reincarceration, indicating that a one unit increase in aspirational capital decreases risk of reincarceration by almost 14 percent (OR = 0.864, *p* = .000). In Model 4, individuals who participate in higher education are almost 24 percent less likely to be reincarcerated than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.766, *p* = .013).

The results in Model 5 show a significant main effect of both participation in higher education and social capital on reincarceration. Individuals who participate in higher education are less likely to be reincarcerated than those who do not participate in higher education (OR = 0.763, *p* = .007), and a one unit increase in social capital decreases likelihood of reincarceration by approximately 10 percent (OR = 0.901, *p* = .047).

Higher Education & Voting History

Life Course Explanations

Table 8 presents ordinal logistic regression models that examine voting history among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or

after their incarceration. Model 1 is a baseline equation establishing a relationship between participation in higher education and voting history when accounting for control variables. Models 1-6 include concepts from life course theory that may mediate this relationship.

Table 8: Ordinal Logistic Regression Model of Voting History – Life Course Theory

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)	Model 4 OR (95% CI)	Model 5 OR (95% CI)	Model 6 OR (95% CI)
Higher Education	2.819** (2.130,3.731)	2.892** (2.183,3.831)	2.697** (2.026,3.590)	2.682** (2.009,3.582)	2.828** (2.136,3.743)	2.702** (2.020, 3.615)
Stakes in Conformity		1.191** (.1.072,1.325)				1.096 (.981,1.225)
Marijuana Use			1.152 (.930,1.427)			1.197 (.948,1.510)
Cocaine Use				0.980 (.709,1.354)		1.051 (.739,1.493)
Criminal Behavior					0.945 (.853,1.047)	0.887* (.790,996)
Controls						
Age	1.027 (.963,1.095)	1.017 (.954,1.085)	1.046 (.978,1.119)	1.041 (.974,1.113)	1.025 (.961,1.093)	1.038 (.969,1.111)
N	2,781	2,781	2,431	2,377	2,781	2,308
LR Chi Square	48.34	58.67	45.46	42.23	49.58	49.57

$^{+} p < 0.1$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $N = 2{,}308$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

The baseline results from Model 1 indicate that individuals who participate in higher education during or after incarceration are almost three times as likely to vote as individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.819, p = 0.000). The step-wise analysis in Table 8 demonstrates that individual components of the life course theory model partially mediate the relationship between higher education and voting history. In Model 2, a one unit increase in stakes in conformity increases likelihood of voting by 19 percent (OR = 1.191, p = .001). The significant relationship between participation in higher education and voting history remains; individuals who participate in higher education are still almost three times as likely as an

individual who does not participate in higher education to vote in national elections (OR = 2.892, p = .000).

Self-reported continued criminal behavior partially mediates the relationship between participation in higher education and voting history in the full life course model. A one unit increase in continued criminal behavior upon reentry decreases likelihood of voting by more than 11 percent (OR = 0.887, p = .042). Individuals who participate in higher education are 2.7 times as likely to vote as individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.702, p = .000).

Community Cultural Wealth Explanations

Table 9 presents multi-level ordinal logistic regression models that examine voting history and test community cultural wealth moderators among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Models 1-7 illustrate a step-wise analysis of community cultural wealth components that may moderate this relationship.

Table 9: Two-Level Ordinal Logistic Regression Models of Voting History – Community Cultural Wealth

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)	Model 4 OR (95% CI)	Model 5 OR (95% CI)	Model 6 OR (95% CI)	Model 7 OR (95% CI)
Higher Education	2.749** (2.072,3.648)	2.454** (1.724,3.494)	2.679** (2.000,3.590)	2.455** (1.793,3.361)	2.745** (.2.053,3.670)	2.195** (1.445,3.333)	1.772* (1.075,2.919)
Familial Capital		1.353** (.1.124,1.630)					
Aspirational Capital			1.211* (.1.023,1.435)				
Navigational Capital				1.601** (1.388,1.847)			
Social Capital					0.868 (.713,1.057)		
Linguistic Capital						1.242** (1.089,1.417)	
Cultural Capital							1.968** (1.361,2.845)
Higher Ed*Familial		1.025 (.611,1.719)					
Higher Ed*Aspirational			1.275 (.812,2.002)				
Higher Ed*Navigational				0.754^{+} (1.388,1.847)			
Higher Ed*Social					1.158 (.728,1.842)		
Higher Ed*Linguistic						1.037 (.707,1.520)	
Higher Ed*Cultural							2.641 (.655,10.648)
Sex[a]	0.684** (.540,.865)	0.689* (.517,.919)	0.667** (.525,.848)	0.665** (.522,.849)	0.692** (.547,.878)	0.794 (.588,1.070)	0.782 (.579,1.056)
Race[b]	1.225^{+} (.997,1.504)	1.398* (.1.082,1.804)	1.219^{+} (..987,1.505)	1.245* (1.008,1.539)	1.215^{+} (.989,1.493)	1.511** (.1.167,1.957)	1.563** 1.205,2.027)
Age	1.033 (..967,1.102)	0.944 (.878,1.016)	1.035 (.968,1.106)	1.029 (.964,1.099)	1.013 (.945,.1086)	1.009 (.935,1.089)	1.014 (.938,1.096)
LR Chi Square	60.28	58.02	71.97	102.26	62.00	47.16	56.22

$^{+} p < 0.1$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $N = 1,641$

[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

Model 1 illustrates the baseline results that there is a significant relationship between participation in higher education and voting when control variables are accounted for (OR = 2.749, p = .000). Model 2 shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on voting, indicating that individuals who participate in higher education are roughly 2.5 times more likely to vote than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.454, p = .000). There is also a significant main effect of familial capital on voting. A one unit increase in familial capital increases likelihood of voting by more than 35 percent (OR = 1.353, p = .001).

Model 3 also shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on voting. Individuals who participate in higher education are almost 2.7 times more likely to vote than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.679, p = .000). Further, a one unit increase in aspirational capital increases likelihood of voting by roughly 21 percent (OR = 1.211, p = .026). In Model 4, individuals who participate in higher education are almost 2.5 times more likely to vote than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.455, p = .000), a one unit increase in navigational capital increases likelihood of voting by 60 percent (OR = 1.601, p = .000).

The results in Model 5 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education and on voting. Individuals who participate in higher education are approximately 2.75 times more likely to vote than those who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.745, p = .000). Model 6 indicates a significant main effect of both participation in higher education and linguistic capital on voting. Individuals who participate in higher education are almost 2.2 times more likely to vote than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 2.195, p = .000), and a one unit increase in linguistic capital increases likelihood of voting by almost 25 percent (OR = 1.242, p = .001).

The results in Model 7 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education on voting, indicating that individuals who participate in higher education are more than 77 percent more likely to vote than individuals who do not participate in higher education (OR = 1.772, p = .025). There is also a significant main effect of cultural capital on voting, indicating that a one unit increase in cultural capital almost doubles and individual's likelihood of voting (OR = 1.968, p = .000).

Higher Education & Paid Time Off (Job Quality)

Life Course Explanations

Table 10 presents poisson regression models that predict paid time off from work among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Model 1 is a baseline equation establishing a relationship between participation in higher education and paid time off when accounting for control variables. Models 1-6 include concepts from life course theory that may mediate this relationship.

Table 10: Poisson Regression Models of Paid Time Off – Life Course Theory

	Model 1 β (SE)	Model 2 β (SE)	Model 3 β (SE)	Model 4 β (SE)	Model 5 β (SE)	Model 6 β (SE)
Higher Education	0.751** (.016)	0.828** (.016)	0.835** (.016)	0.887** (.016)	0.755** (.016)	1.001** (.017)
Stakes in Conformity		0.493** (.006)				0.538** (.007)
Marijuana Use			-0.178** (.014)			-0.058** (.016)
Cocaine Use				0.144** (.021)		0.577** (.024)
Criminal Behavior					-0.288** (.010)	-0.335** (.012)
Controls						
Age	0.147** (.004)	0.122** (.004)	0.152** (.004)	0.163** (.004)	0.142** (.004)	0.135** (.005)
N	4,984	4,984	3,875	3,853	4,984	3,330
Chi Square	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

$^{+} p < 0.1$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $N = 3{,}330$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

The baseline results from Model 1 indicate that participation in higher education during or after incarceration increases an individual's paid time off from work by 0.751 standard deviations (β = 0.751, *p* = .000). In line with life course theory, stakes in conformity and deviant behaviors including marijuana use and continued criminal behavior also significantly impact an individual's paid time off. As stakes in conformity increase, an individual's paid time off increases by 0.493 standard deviations (β = 0.493, *p* = .000). Also in Model 2, the participation in higher education increases an individual's paid time off by 0.828 standard deviations (β = 0.828, *p* = .000).

Model 3 illustrates that marijuana use also significantly impacts one's paid time off. Marijuana use predicts a decrease in paid time off by 0.178 standard deviations (β = -0.178, *p* = .000), and in the same model, participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.835 standard deviations (β = 0.835, *p* = .000). In Model 4, cocaine use predicts an increase in paid

time off by 0.144 standard deviations (β = 0.144, p = .000), and participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.887 standard deviations (β = 0.887, p = .000). Finally, continued criminal behavior negatively impacts paid time off. As criminal behavior increases by one standard deviation, the amount of paid time off an individual receives decreases by 0.288 standard deviations (β = -0.288, p = .000) and as participation in higher education increases by one standard deviation, paid time off also increases by 0.755 standard deviations (β = 0.755, p = .000).

The full life course model shows significant relationships between all mediating variables and paid time off as well as between participation in higher education and paid time off. A one standard deviation increase in stakes in conformity increases paid time off by 0.538 standard deviations (β = 0.538, p = .000). Marijuana use increases paid time off by 0.058 standard deviations (β = 0.058, p = .000), and cocaine use increases paid time off by 0.577 standard deviations (β = 0.577, p = .000), meaning that one of the other life course mediating variables moderates the relationship between drug use and paid time off. As expected, a one standard deviation increase in continued criminal behavior decreases paid time off by 0.335 standard deviations (β = -0.335, p = .000). Paid time off increases by 1.001 standard deviations (β = 1.001, p = .000) with a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education.

Community Cultural Wealth Explanations

Table 11 presents two-level poisson regression models that predict paid time off and test community cultural wealth moderators among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Models 1-7 illustrate a step-wise analysis of community cultural wealth components that may moderate this relationship.

Table 11: Two-Level Poisson Regression Models of Paid Time off – Community Cultural Wealth

	Model 1 β (SE)	Model 2 β (SE)	Model 3 β (SE)	Model 4 β (SE)	Model 5 β (SE)	Model 6 β (SE)	Model 7 β (SE)
Higher Education	0.686** (.016)	0.471** (.024)	0.288** (.022)	0.531** (.019)	0.679** (.016)	0.286** (.026)	0.595** (.026)
Familial Capital		0.204** (.012)					
Aspirational Capital			0.447** (.012)				
Navigational Capital				0.279** (.008)			
Social Capital					0.121** (.013)		
Linguistic Capital						0.026** (.008)	
Cultural Capital							0.714** (.025)
Higher Ed*Familial		-0.873** (.029)					
Higher Ed*Aspirational			0.987** (.035)				
Higher Ed*Navigational				-0.027 (.017)			
Higher Ed*Social					-0.032 (.027)		
Higher Ed*Linguistic						0.614** (.020)	
Higher Ed*Cultural							0.330** (.063)
Sex[a]	-0.402** (.014)	-0.275** (.019)	-0.361** (.014)	-0.431** (.014)	-0.419** (.014)	-0.479** (.016)	-0.429** (.016)
Race[b]	-0.384** (.015)	-0.388** (.020)	-0.383** (.015)	-0.355** (.015)	-0.372** (.015)	-0.138** (.017)	-0.088** (.017)
Age	0.149** (.004)	0.084** (.006)	0.185** (.004)	0.150** (.004)	0.173** (.005)	0.240** (.005)	0.247** (.005)
Chi Square	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

$^{+}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $N = 3{,}103$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

Model 1 illustrates the baseline results that there is a significant relationship between participation in higher education and paid time off when control variables are accounted for ($\beta = 0.686$, $p = .000$). Model 2 shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on paid time off, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education leads to a 0.471 standard deviation increase in paid time off ($\beta = 0.471$, $p = .000$). There is also a significant main effect of familial capital on paid time off. A one standard deviation increase in familial capital increases paid time off by 0.204 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.204$, $p = .000$). These effects are qualified by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and familial capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education on paid time off is stronger for individuals with lower familial capital ($\beta = -0.873$, $p = .000$).

Model 3 also shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on paid time off. A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.288 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.288$, $p = .000$). Further, a one standard deviation increase in aspirational capital increases paid time off by 0.447 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.447$, $p = .000$). These effects are qualified by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and aspirational capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education on paid time off is stronger for individuals with more aspirational capital ($\beta = 0.987$, $p = .000$). In Model 4, a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.531 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.531$, $p = .000$), and a one standard deviation increase in navigational capital increases paid time off by 0.279 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.279$, $p = .000$).

The results in Model 5 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education and on paid time off. A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education

increases paid time off by 0.679 standard deviations (β = 0.679, p = .000). There is also a significant main effect of social capital on paid time off. For every one standard deviation increase in social capital, paid time off increases 0.121 standard deviations (β = 0.121, p = .000). Model 6 indicates a significant main effect of both participation in higher education and linguistic capital on paid time off. A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.286 standard deviations (β = 0.286, p = .000), and a one standard deviation increase in linguistic capital increases paid time off by 0.026 standard deviations (β = 0.026, p = .007). These effects are qualified by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and linguistic capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education is stronger for individuals with more linguistic capital (β = 0.614, p = .000).

The results in Model 7 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education on paid time off, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education increases paid time off by 0.595 standard deviations (β = 0.595, p = .000). There is also a significant main effect of cultural capital on paid time off, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in cultural capital increases paid time off by 0.714 standard deviations (β = 0.714, p = .000). Further, these effects are modified by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and cultural capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education is stronger for individuals with more cultural capital (β = 0.330, p = .000).

Higher Education & Annual Income from Wages/Salary (Job Quality)

Life Course Explanations

Table 12 presents linear regression models that predict paid time off from work among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Model 1 is a baseline equation establishing a relationship between

participation in higher education and paid time off when accounting for control variables. Models 1-6 include concepts from life course theory that may mediate this relationship.

Table 12: Linear Regression Model of Annual Income – Life Course Theory

	Model 1 β (SE)	Model 2 β (SE)	Model 3 β (SE)	Model 4 β (SE)	Model 5 β (SE)	Model 6 β (SE)
Higher Education	-0.144** (.049)	-0.117* (.049)	-0.164** (.057)	-.115* (.056)	-0.151** (.049)	-0.137* (.061)
Stakes in Conformity		0.161** (.015)				0.155** (.019)
Marijuana Use			-0.045 (.036)			0.015 (.040)
Cocaine Use				-0.033 (.056)		0.060 (.066)
Criminal Behavior					-0.052** (.015)	-0.067** (.019)
Controls						
Age	0.090** (.010)	0.080** (.010)	0.079** (.012)	0.098** (.012)	0.088** (.010)	0.073** (.012)
Constant	-2.361** (.271)	-2.143** (.269)	-2.018** (.311)	-2.507** (.305)	-2.296** (.272)	-1.965** (.332)
N	4,338	4,338	3,358	3,366	4,338	2,956
R^2	.020	.044	.018	.023	.023	.044

$^{+} p < 0.1$, $^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $N = 2{,}956$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

The baseline results from Model 1 indicate that participation in higher education during or after incarceration decreases an individual's annual income by 0.144 standard deviations (β = -0.144, p = .004). Multiple measures of life course theory partially mediate the relationship between higher education and annual income. In Model 2, an increase in one standard deviation of stakes in conformity increases annual income by 0.161 standard deviations (β = 0.161, p = .000) and participation in higher education decreases an individual's annual income by 0.117 standard deviations (β = -0.117, p = .017).

Model 5 illustrates that a one standard deviation increase in continued criminal behavior decreases annual income by 0.052 standard deviations (β = -0.052, p = .000). In the same model,

participation in higher education decreases annual income by 0.151 standard deviations (β = -0.151, p = .002). The full life course model illustrates that stakes in conformity and continued criminal behavior partially mediate the relationship between participation in higher education and annual income. A one standard deviation increase in stakes in conformity increases annual income by 0.155 standard deviations (β = 0.155, p = .000), and a one standard deviation increase in continued criminal behavior decreases annual income by 0.067 standard deviations (β = 0.067, p = .000). A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education decreases annual income by 0.137 standard deviations (β = -0.137, p = .024).

Community Cultural Wealth Explanations

Table 13 presents two-level linear regression models that predict annual income and test community cultural wealth moderators among formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in higher education programming during or after their incarceration. Models 1-7 illustrate a step-wise analysis of community cultural wealth components that may moderate this relationship.

Table 13: Two-Level Linear Regression Models of Annual Income – Community Cultural Wealth

	Model 1 β (SE)	Model 2 β (SE)	Model 3 β (SE)	Model 4 β (SE)	Model 5 β (SE)	Model 6 β (SE)	Model 7 β (SE)
Higher Education	-0.089+ (.048)	-0.091+ (.053)	-0.110* (.049)	-.104* (.052)	-0.126* (.050)	-0.138+ (.071)	-0.160* (.079)
Familial Capital		0.088** (.024)					
Aspirational Capital			0.171** (.024)				
Navigational Capital				0.096** (.017)			
Social Capital					0.050+ (.030)		
Linguistic Capital						0.129** (.019)	
Cultural Capital							0.190** (.053)
Higher Ed*Familial		0.005 (.077)					
Higher Ed*Aspirational			0.097 (.074)				
Higher Ed*Navigational				-0.141** (.049)			
Higher Ed*Social					0.170* (.080)		
Higher Ed*Linguistic						-0.094 (.068)	
Higher Ed*Cultural							0.004 (.230)
Sex[a]	0.427** (.039)	0.384** (.042)	0.443** (.040)	0.424** (.039)	0.417** (.039)	0.395** (.048)	0.365** (.048)
Race[b]	-0.525** (.033)	-0.538** (.036)	-0.525** (.034)	-0.519** (.034)	-0.522** (.033)	-0.438** (.041)	-0.438** (.042)
Age	0.086** (.010)	0.085** (.012)	0.089** (.010)	0.090** (.010)	0.099** (.011)	0.092** (.012)	0.092** (.012)
Constant	-2.462** (.264)	-2.408** (.311)	-2.558** (..271)	-2.568** (.271)	-2.815** (.299)	-2.608** (.330)	-2.592** (.333)
R^2	.093	.101	.104	.099	.095	.093	.083

$^{+}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $N = 2{,}709$
[a] male is reference, [b] Black is reference

Model 3 also shows a significant main effect of participation in higher education on annual income. A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education decreases by 0.110 standard deviations ($\beta = -0.110$, $p = .025$). Further, a one standard deviation increase in aspirational capital increases annual income by 0.171 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.171$, $p = .000$). In Model 4, a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education decreases annual income by 0.104 standard deviations ($\beta = -0.104$, $p = .045$), and a one standard deviation increase in navigational capital increases annual income by 0.096 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.096$, $p = .000$). These effects are moderated by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and navigational capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education is stronger on individuals with less navigational capital.

The results in Model 5 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education and on annual income. A one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education decreases annual income by 0.126 standard deviations ($\beta = -0.126$, $p = .012$). This effect is moderated by a significant interaction between participation in higher education and social capital, meaning that the impact of participation in higher education is stronger for individuals with more social capital. ($\beta = 0.170$, $p = 0.034$). Model 6 indicates a significant main effect of linguistic capital on annual income. A one standard deviation increase in linguistic capital increases annual income by 0.129 standard deviations ($\beta = 0.129$, $p = .000$).

The results in Model 7 show a significant main effect of participation in higher education on paid time off, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in participation in higher education decreases annual income by 0.160 standard deviations ($\beta = -0.160$, $p = .044$). There is also a significant main effect of cultural capital on annual income, indicating that a one standard

deviation increase in cultural capital increases paid time off by 0.190 standard deviations (β = 0.190, p = .000).

The results in this chapter address three of my research questions: Which turning points mediate the relationship between higher education and reincarceration (2b)? Which components of community cultural wealth moderate the relationship between higher education and reincarceration (2c)?, and Are the same mechanisms and moderators that lead to reduced reincarceration linked to other positive outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals? To answer these questions, I use multiple types of regression models. This study analyzes the ways in which mechanisms associated with life course theory concepts and moderators associated with community cultural wealth impact the relationship between participation in higher education and personal outcomes including reincarceration, voting in national elections, paid time off provided by employers, and annual income.

These results confirm the findings of existing research in the area of correctional education and higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals. According to Davis et al. (2013) and Bozick et al. (2018), participation in correctional education programs leads to a 43 percent reduction in the likelihood of reincarceration. My findings support that conclusion, as seen in the significant relationship between participation in higher education and reduced reincarceration in Model 1. Further, the results from my logistic regression models indicate that other factors at least partially mediate this relationship between participation in higher education and the reduced likelihood of reincarceration.

Existing research finds that participation in higher education during or after incarceration moderates the relationship between incarceration and negative outcomes (see: Mercer 2009; Gorgol and Sponslor 2011; Davis et al. 2013). But, the results of this dissertation indicate that

there are also mediating factors in this relationship. Perhaps unsurprisingly, higher levels of marijuana use and higher incidences of criminal behavior will lead to a higher likelihood of reincarceration despite the benefits of higher education. However, the more stakes in conformity and individual participates in, the less likely they are to be reincarcerated. Participation in higher education may lead directly to these connections to mainstream society. As measured in Model 2, stakes in conformity include domestic partnerships and marriage, cohabitation with one's biological children, employment status, and saving money for retirement. Participation in higher education may contribute directly to factors such as employment status and the ability to save money for retirement, further integrating individuals into society and increasing their stakes in conformity.

The results of the reincarceration models support the theoretical framing of this dissertation in life course theory. Within life course theory, both the cognitive transformation (Giordano et al. 2014) view and the process perspective (Laub and Sampson 2014) can explain the results of my reincarceration models. From the process perspective, higher education and stakes in conformity work in conjunction with one another to aid in desistance from criminal behavior. Participation in higher education or other stakes in conformity may function as a turning point for formerly incarcerated individuals as they reacclimate to society. These turning points increase social integration through informal control and support, which in turn, provides structure in an individual's life. This structure allows them to commit to a new path and the social connections that go along with it.

Though these new connections, such as employment or children, are the catalysts for desistance from criminal behavior, a cognitive transformation must also happen. Individuals must shift their thinking and make a situated choice to follow their new, more stable path. The

results from my logistic regression analysis support these ideas with higher education, age, and stakes in conformity each significantly decreasing the likelihood of an individual to be reincarcerated.

Examining the relationship between higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals and their voting habits is an important step in moving the field of research in the direction of markers of desistance and away from a strictly binary measure of reincarceration or employment. The benefits of higher education for this population go beyond its value to the economy; rather, this dissertation illustrates that benefits include increased social and civic engagement. Klingele (2019) argues that measuring markers of desistance rather than reincarceration allows for the possibility of progress rather than just success or failure. From this perspective, higher education functions as a marker of desistance because it is linked to reductions in reincarceration and increased civic engagement through voting. This relationship implies social benefits of higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals such as increased community involvement and civic engagement.

Though these voting models produce significant findings, we are limited in what we can learn about the relationship between higher education and voting for formerly incarcerated individuals because of significant disenfranchisement of this community. As of 2023, 48 states limit the voting rights of individuals with criminal records, particularly those with felony convictions. These felony disenfranchisement laws impact 4.6 million US citizens, many of whom have already completed their sentences (Uggen et al. 2023). The exclusion of this group of people from the political process likely has an impact on the results of these voting history models. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine why individual respondents did not vote in national elections between 2004-2010, but the disenfranchisement of such a large portion

of this population may explain any differences between formerly incarcerated individuals' voting habits and the rest of the population. The inclusion of these 4.6 million individuals would undoubtedly have an impact on voting history and other positive outcomes beyond reincarceration and employment.

The results of my ordinal logistic models further illustrate the need to move from a focus on economic benefits of higher education for this population, such as employment and wages, and instead frame research in the markers of desistance literature. Reframing the discussion of higher education and other prison programming to include positive outcomes not measured by reduced reincarceration or economic benefits broadens the field and allows us to identify other benefits of higher education that improve quality of life for this population.

The results of my community cultural wealth models further support the theoretical framing of this study. Community cultural wealth functions as a shift in perspective from a deficit model to an assets-based model to highlight the resources people of color, a group that is disproportionately represented in the incarcerated community, possess. The results in this chapter illustrate two important findings. First, this population possesses components of community cultural wealth, including familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and cultural capital. Second, possession of these forms of capital directly and indirectly benefit formerly incarcerated individuals. Components of community cultural wealth positively impact all measured outcomes: reincarceration, voting history, paid time off, and annual income. Further, the impact of higher education on job quality outcomes like paid time off and annual income is stronger for individuals with more community cultural wealth.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between incarceration and higher education. It extends our knowledge of the motivating factors leading incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals to participate in higher education, the nonmaterial resources this population possesses that contributes to their success in higher education, and the mechanisms linking higher education to outcomes other than reincarceration, such as civic engagement as measured by voting history and job quality as measured by paid time off and annual income. Findings from qualitative interviews and statistical modeling provide support for both the life course theory and community cultural wealth frameworks. I first review the qualitative and quantitative results as well as how their findings work together. Then, I discuss the policy implications of this study and directions for future research.

The qualitative and quantitative results of this study together tell a comprehensive story. The interview responses identify nonmaterial resources like time, personal support, and institutional support that contribute motivation and perceived capability to initially participate in higher education among formerly incarcerated participants. Respondents also link their experiences to reincarceration and other possible benefits of participation in higher education during or after incarceration. The quantitative analysis subsequently uses this exploratory research as a foundation for statistical models that test the theoretical basis of this study. Specifically, the qualitative data consistently supports the role of community cultural wealth, and the quantitative analysis finds the relationship between components of community cultural

wealth and several markers of desistance to be statistically significant. Further, interview respondents also identify participation in higher education as a turning point in their lives, which the quantitative analysis also supports. The quantitative results are less supportive of the moderating role components of community cultural wealth play in the relationship between higher education and reincarceration or other outcomes. However, this may present an opportunity to further examine these relationships as qualitative findings illustrate the possibility of participation in higher education mediating the relationship between community cultural wealth and reincarceration or other outcomes.

The qualitative findings of this study may also explain unexpected quantitative findings. For example, the negative impact of participation in higher education on annual income is unexpected and does not align with existing literature at first glance. However, when we examine the qualitative and quantitative data from this dissertation together, we begin to see a clearer picture. Many interview participants, particularly women, explained that they are using their degrees to get jobs in service fields. For example, formerly incarcerated individuals may pursue careers as drug counselors, non-profit workers, or other jobs that provide a benefit not explicitly measured in this model.

Policy Implications

This dissertation contributes to the existing research establishing the connection between higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals and benefits such as reduced likelihood of reincarceration and increased economic opportunities. It also fills an empirical gap by looking at outcomes beyond reincarceration and individual financial benefits. Increasing access to these evidence-based opportunities calls for new policies and legislation. One example of such legislation is the proposed “Ban the Box” policy across states and at the

federal level. Enacting this statute would remove the question about criminal history, particularly felony convictions, from initial job application forms and would allow formerly incarcerated individuals the opportunity to explain their history and present their relevant skills to employers before a background check (Raphael 2021). This policy would address the stigma associated with criminal history and improve job opportunities for this population (see: Pager 2003; Stewart and Uggen 2020).

Findings from this dissertation further support policies like Ordinance 22-O-1748 (2022) and Second Chance Pell. Ordinance 22-O-1748 (2022) classifies formerly incarcerated as a protected class and outlaws discrimination against them based on their legal history. Implementing more policies like this one would not only increase legal protections for system-impacted students, but it would also provide a foundation for institutions of higher education to include system-impacted students in their campus-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, these policies should be ratified at the state or federal level to ensure equity for all students rather than just for those who live in large, progressive metropolitan areas.

Second Chance Pell, initiated in 2016 and made permanent in 2021, renews access to Pell Grant funding for correctional higher education, and changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) policy allow students with criminal convictions to apply for other types of federal aid. Results of this dissertation support expanding access to these financial resources for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. Further, the application process for these funding sources should be streamlined and simplified, and the agencies responsible for these policies should provide assistance to individuals who cannot navigate the bureaucratic process themselves.

Limitations

Despite the strength of the findings and the multi-dimensional methodological approach, this dissertation has limitations. First, the number of interviews I conducted is less than the typical number (approximately 20) for a mixed methods study. Though there is existing empirical research consistent with the use of 14 interviews (see: Namey et al. 2016; Hagaman and Wutich 2016; Coenen et al. 2012; Francis et al. 2010; Guest et al. 2006), the norm and other existing research points to 20 as the ideal number (see: Creswell and Poth 2018).

Second, my qualitative results cannot be generalized to all formerly incarcerated students. My sample were all residents of one state and many participated in the same two programs due to my use of snowball sampling. The results, however, demonstrate the motivations, mechanisms, and outcomes for this group of formerly incarcerated students and provide a first step in further understanding the benefits of higher education for this population.

--qualitative results largely from one program and mostly women, so could be case study

Third, the measures in my quantitative model are limited to the data available in the NLSY97 dataset. For example, using high school transcripts of foreign language classes may not encompass the full definition of linguistic capital for individuals who are truly bilingual due to multiple languages spoken in their home or active participation in cultures the speak languages other than English.

Directions for Future Research

There are several opportunities for future research based on the findings from this dissertation. First, this dissertation is an attempt at exploratory research on the motivations and mechanisms linking higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to reductions in reincarceration and other positive outcomes. More research is needed to identify other potential motivations and mechanisms. Additional interviews with formerly incarcerated

individuals from multiple states and multiple higher education institutions would expand our understanding of the relationship between higher education and positive outcomes for this population.

Second, future research should further explore the legal barriers to accessing higher education for this population. Because educational and correctional policy varies by state and by local jurisdiction, a legal review comparing ordinances and legislation from multiple states would present a fuller picture of the inequity in the system and the multiple barriers to education produced by a system that is not uniform across the country.

Third, the quantitative results of this study provide a baseline for discussing higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals in terms of outcomes beyond reincarceration and economic opportunity. The outcomes measured in this dissertation are limited by the data in the NLSY97. Future research should pursue this line of questioning and examine other outcomes. Examples of potential benefits to be examined include improvements to family and other personal relationships, health outcomes, higher self-confidence, and community service behaviors.

Finally, future research should build on the quantitative results of this study by including individuals who have never been incarcerated in the sample. This dissertation provides information on the motivations, mechanisms, and outcomes formerly incarcerated students experience as they interact with the higher education system. The logical next step is to compare these results to those of students who have never been incarcerated to see which aspects are specific to this population. With this information, we can identify ways specifically to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students succeed in higher education, thus experiencing the benefits that go along with it.

Conclusion

This dissertation makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding the relationship between incarceration and higher education. Theoretically, this study provides insight into how participation in higher education functions as a turning point for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals to put them on a trajectory toward desistance and productive adulthood. Identifying the mechanisms linking higher education to reductions in reincarceration furthers our understanding of behavioral change and desistance from crime over an individual's lifetime. This study also reframes the approach to studying this population to an assets-focused perspective through the lens of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005), recognizing the various forms of capital possessed by this population and the ways in which they are used to successfully navigate the environment of higher education with a history of incarceration.

Empirically, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the mechanisms that lead to behavioral change and academic success among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals who participate in higher education. Identifying these mechanisms expands the conversation around correctional education and access to higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals. With a deeper understanding of the specific ways that higher education contributes to positive outcomes like lower reincarceration and greater economic opportunity for members of this population, practitioners and policymakers can focus programming to further improve these outcomes. Moreover, investigating these mechanisms and their links to additional positive outcomes increases our knowledge of the role higher education plays in behavioral turning points.

Much of the existing literature identifies reducing rates of reincarceration as a primary goal for many rehabilitative projects within the criminal justice system. Empirically, this project

identifies the specific mechanisms through which participation in higher education leads to reduced reincarceration. Recognizing these mechanisms and linking them with other positive outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals is the first step in moving toward a more holistic model that includes positive outcomes beyond reduced reincarceration and economic benefits. Particularly if current trends of decarceration continue, it is important to understand the process through which participation in higher education leads to behavioral change and entry into the stability traditionally associated with adulthood for formerly incarcerated people.

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