SUCCESSFUL REENTRY THROUGH THE EYES OF FEMALE EX-OFFENDERS
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

SABRINE LARSEN
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The thesis aims to highlight successful stories of female ex-offender reentry into the community. Success, rather than failure, seems to be a current research gap in reentry literature. To gain an insight on the matter, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with seven female ex-offenders. These women had previously taken part of the program, Exodus Ministries in Dallas, Texas. Systematic Text Condensation (STC) was utilized to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews. The results were then discussed in a theoretical framework in regard to previous research. Two theories were utilized; namely, the theory of “making good” by Maruna (2001) and the theory of cognitive transformation by Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002). In conclusion, the results of the thesis point to reentry programs, such as Exodus Ministries; motherhood; religion; fundamental life changes; identity transformation and utilizing resources as essential factors needed for successful reentry into the community upon release from institutionalization.

Keywords: cognitive transformation, female ex-offender, making good, semi-structured interviews, successful reentry, qualitative research.
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INTRODUCTION

Within the field of criminology, ex-offender reentry and reintegration into the community are urgent topics of growing concern (Maruna, Immarigeon & LeBel, 2004, p. 4). Knowledge within this area has undoubtedly advanced with time, however research and empirical evidence is still not fully adequate (Maruna, 2001, p. 130; Maruna, 2010, p. 12). Qualitative research is lacking in general, and more specifically, longitudinal data on female ex-offenders needs to be developed more in criminological research (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002, p. 1009). Likewise, personal accounts and insights from ex-offenders themselves constitute a critical need in research as well (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 5). Promoting and utilizing the ex-offender perspective in research may be able to alter and improve reentry policy and practice (Schlager, 2013, p. 247). With this, it may be possible to shift the connotation of the dialogue regarding reentry from negative to positive.

Ex-offenders typically follow a zigzag path. This means their life is usually constituted by periods of criminal activity and intermittency: they may be good for some time, but eventually fall back into the deviant lifestyle (Maruna, 2001, p. 156). As a result, these individuals typically experience incarceration multiple times throughout their life. Therefore, reentry not only affects ex-offenders themselves, but their families and the community at large (Schlager, 2013, p. 247). During reentry, issues of public opinion and stigmatization commonly arise and become problematic (Schlager, 2013, p. 247). It is evident through this that conviction haunts an individual long past they have paid their debt to society (Petersilia, 2005b, p. 71). Ex-offenders continually suffer as they “pay, economically, politically, socially, or morally, for their criminal acts long after” their release from prison (Urbina, 2008, p. 191).

Female and male ex-offenders tend to resemble one another. However, there are specific differences between the two sexes which are evident (Urbina, 2008, p. 29). Female ex-offenders encounter a multitude of challenges males typically do not face. Among others, women tend to be single mothers with complex substance abuse problems (Urbina, 2008, p. 29). Due to the differences between males and females, it is proposed that there are gendered pathways to crime, and therefore also gendered pathways out of crime (Schlager, 2013, p. 223). Fortunately, many women upon release from prison “have hopes [and] dreams, and they wish to stay out of trouble and become productive members of society” (Urbina, 2008, p. 192). As a result, there are success stories (Pollock, 1998, p. 191). These stories of successful reentry should be shared and celebrated more often.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to highlight success rather than failure during ex-offender reentry into the community. This seems to be a pressing research gap in current criminological literature because the negative side to reentry is typically in focus. Furthermore, an important insight into female ex-offenders is found necessary as the female population in prison is growing drastically in comparison to the male population. Research on women here is also inadequate. Therefore, the research questions thus ask:
1. What factors do female ex-offenders identify as necessary for successful reentry due to their own experiences?

2. How do these factors compare with previous research and theory on the matter?

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND CONCEPT OPERATIONALIZATION**

Reviewing previous research regarding successful reentry is necessary to gain an understanding of the literature that already exists. The literature review enables the research of this thesis to stand out as either new or additional knowledge in comparison to the current literature (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 82; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 107). The literature review also provides the opportunity to operationalize different concepts which arise throughout criminological literature regarding reentry; this is also an important part (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 15). To begin, the ‘typical’ ex-offender will be described. Then, reentry will be defined and the challenges faced during reentry will be explored. Successful reentry will also be defined and thus previous research on factors for successful reentry will be outlined and discussed. Finally, the importance of reentry and thus successful reentry will be argued for.

**Ex-Offenders: Who Are They?**

It is noted in criminological literature that the majority of prisoners and thus released prisoners are male, as they are typically incarcerated more than women (Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 66; McIvor, Murray & Jamieson, 2004, p. 182; O’Brien, 2001, p. 4; Schlager, 2013, pp. 10, 14; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 4). However, in recent years the female prisoner population has continually grown (Arditti & Few, 2006, p. 103; Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 313; Hattery & Smith, 2010, pp. 66, 82; Lilly, Cullen & Ball, 2015, p. 279; Petersilia, 2001, p. 367; Pollock, 1998, pp. 1, 20; Richie, 2001, p. 369; Schlager, 2013, p. 16; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 2): “since 1990, the female prisoner population has nearly doubled (92 percent) as compared to men (67 percent)” (Covington, 2003, p. 68; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 995; O’Brien, 2001, p. 4; Pollock, 1998, p. 24). This intense growth has primarily been due to an increase in drug offenses (Covington, 2003, p. 68; Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 79; O’Brien, 2001, p. 6; Petersilia, 2003, pp. 25-26; Pollock, 1998, pp. 11, 68; Richie, 2001, p. 369; Schlager, 2013, p. 7; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 4; Urbina, 2008, pp. 23, 187). Unfortunately, many of the individuals who receive drug offense sentences return to their communities still addicted to drugs or alcohol (Haney, 2003, p. 49; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 66; Richie, 2001, p. 370). As a result, a sobering number of offenders have multiple convictions and incarcerations under their belt (Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 4).

Male and female inmates resemble each other closely in regard to ethnicity, age and educational attainment (O’Brien, 2001, p. 6). Throughout history, incarcerated African Americans and Latino(a) individuals, generally individuals of color, have been disproportionately represented (Arditti & Few, 2006, p. 104; Covington, 2003, p. 69; O’Brien, 2001, pp. 6, 65; Richie, 2001, p. 369; Schlager, 2013, pp. 7-8, 10): “nearly two-thirds of offenders leaving prison at any given time are racial or ethnic minorities” (Schlager, 2013, p. 16; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 4). Regarding age, ex-offenders are typically older today than they were in the

Although criminological literature surrounding ex-offender reentry is generally gender neutral, there are notable differences between males and females (Schlager, 2013, p. 211). One major difference is that of parenthood and the relationship to their children (Covington, 2003, p. 76). Many female ex-offenders are mothers and more than half are the primary caretaker of their children up until incarceration (Arditti & Few, 2006, p. 103; Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 314; Covington, 2003, p. 76; Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 83; Petersilia, 2001, p. 367; Pollock, 1998, pp. 8, 70; Schlager, 2013, pp. 104-105, 219; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 4). Another difference is that female ex-offenders tend to have “more extensive and serious histories of drug use than” males, which is highly linked to their criminality (Covington, 2003, p. 71; Maruna, 2001, p. 62; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 220; Pollock, 1998, p. 68; Travis & Waul, 2003, pp. 7). In addition, female ex-offenders typically do not get the family support they need as many come from dysfunctional families where multiple forms of abuse were present (Petersilia, 2003, pp. 3-4; Pollock, 1998, p. 21). Furthermore, Caucasian female ex-offenders, in comparison to their male counterparts, are more likely to exhibit mental illness (Covington, 2003, p. 69; O’Brien, 2001, p. 6; Rossman, 2003, p. 352; Schlager, 2013, pp. 18, 220; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 7). Poor mental health, developmental disabilities, issues with poverty, low or no education attainment, troublesome relationships, and victimization are abundantly evident features in female ex-offender populations (Arditti & Few, 2006, p. 104; Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 320; Haney, 2003, p. 50; James, 2015, p. 15; Petersilia, 2001, pp. 364, 368; Richie, 2001, pp. 369, 374; Schlager, 2013, pp. 218-220).

In sum, criminological research on female ex-offenders indicates that there are substantial differences between both sexes indicating possible pathways to crime. This may highlight the notion that there are gendered pathways out of crime as well (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 996; Schlager, 2013, p. 218). Therefore, this thesis will solely focus on female ex-offenders. It is important to reiterate here that ex-offenders are human beings and citizens of society alongside everyone else: they drive cars, drink coffee at Starbucks, go grocery shopping and may even be neighbors or friends (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 23; O’Brien, 2001, p. 133; Schlager, 2013, pp. 265-266).

**Defining Reentry**

For this thesis, *reentry* will be defined as the process in which former offenders are released from institutionalization and thus attempt to rejoin and reintegrate back into society following a punishment (Clear, Waring & Scully, 2005, p. 182; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp. 3-4; James, 2015, p. 12; Maruna et al., 2004, p. 5; Petersilia, 2001, p. 360). This entails “the post-release experience of any offender
who completed any sentence in the correctional system and is transitioning back into the community” (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 6). For most, except those who die or are executed during incarceration, reentry is the inescapable outcome (James, 2015, p. 12; Travis & Visher, 2005, p. 3). Reentry ultimately means that the freed ex-offender finally rejoins the community in hopes of beginning a legitimate life (Clear et al., 2005, p. 182).

**Challenges Faced During Reentry**

To appreciate stories of successful reentry, it is important to outline the various challenges that female ex-offenders face upon release and thus reentry into their communities. In opposition to popular belief, ex-offenders face a plethora of challenges and barriers during this process (Berg & Cobbina, 2016, p. 2; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 2; Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 1; Mears & Mestre, 2012, p. 5; Schlager, 2013, p. 3; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 22; Urbina, 2008, p. 192). Not only is prison a part of the punishment process, but it seems that life after prison has become part of it as well (Schlager, 2013, p. 20). When ex-prisoners are released into the free world, they “must face the task of piecing together their lives again” while withstanding temptation and apposition (Pollock, 1998, p. 164; Rose & Clear, 2003, p. 331). In reality, ex-offenders are ill prepared for the difficulties they come across (Schlager, 2013, p. 265; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 2). Ex-offenders are typically unaware of possible resources that may in fact ease the transition and the unknown can be haunting to them (Richie, 2001, p. 380). They are faced with punishments and restrictions, often from the community, that make successful reintegration only a distant hope (Maruna, 2001, p. 70; Schlager, 2013, pp. 20, 209).

Issues with employment, housing, obtaining identification, education, credit, governmental benefits, substance abuse, physical health, mental health, reestablishing relationships, family, basic needs and deficiencies, general responsibilities and collateral consequences are quite common for ex-offenders to face upon reentry (Covington, 2003, p. 78; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp. 2, 44-63, 117; Haney, 2003, pp. 47-48; Hattery & Smith, 2010, pp. 14-25; O’Brien, 2001, p. 27; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 217; Pollock, 1998, p. 80; Rose & Clear, 2003, p. 331; Schlager, 2013, p. 265; Travis & Waul, 2003, pp. 2, 22-26). These challenges include political, social and economic consequences not only for the ex-offender, but also for the family and the community at large (Petersilia, 2003, p. 9). Collateral consequences can include any of the following: not allowing offenders to vote, terminating parental rights, using a felony conviction as legal grounds for a divorce, not allowing offenders to every hold public office or public employment/ government jobs, permanently barring offenders from serving on juries or owning a firearm, requiring offenders to register with law enforcement, denial of all federal assistance including food stamps and housing, and inability of offenders to access student loans (Maruna, 2001, p. 164; Petersilia, 2001, p. 369; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 67; Rose & Clear, 2003, p. 329; Schlager, 2013, pp. 21-22).

These collateral consequences seem to lurk in the background and only become evident to the ex-offender once they have been released (Petersilia, 2001, p. 373; Richards & Jones, 2004, p. 204; Schlager, 2013, p. 21). Ultimately, ex-offenders are socially excluded as they are left with diminished and restricted resources and possibilities (Richards & Jones, 2004, p. 204; Schlager, 2013, p. 21).


**Defining Successful Reentry**

Since this thesis not only focuses on reentry in general, but rather successful reentry, it is likewise imperative to discuss this notion. Successful reentry can be described as the lack of reoffending which further initiates community safety (Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 314; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 150). Desistance becomes relevant here as well, as it is the disengagement from criminal action and thus the “continued state of non-offending” (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1032; Maruna, 2001, pp. 6-7; Maruna et al., 2004, p. 18). Furthermore, successful reentry is supported by the notion of secondary desistance where individuals move beyond just abstaining from crime; they become a changed person through the changing role of their identity (Maruna, 2001, p. 26; Maruna et al., 2004, p. 19).

Furthermore, the focus typically lies on recidivism rates to measure success or failure (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 151; James, 2015, p. 5; Pollock, 1998, pp. 5, 191; Schlager, 2013, p. 154). This is sufficient; however, it does not complete the picture for what successful reentry is or may look like (Pollock, 1998, p. 191). It may be beneficial to research other forms of success, such as changes within the
ex-offender, restored family life and employment attainment (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 151). In other words, successful reentry for the ex-offender may include various improvements to their life (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 150). These improvements may be big or small and may carry different levels of importance for the ex-offender (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 151). It is apparent here that leading a successful life is dependent upon “subjective and objective features of success” (Pollock, 1998, p. 152). Here, extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors should be included to complete the entire picture of successful reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 169).

**Factors for Successful Reentry**

Although research on successful reentry for female ex-offenders is still quite limited, previous studies have found a plethora of factors which have been identified to promote successful reentry. Within criminological research, it is typically known that incarceration and criminal behavior can become a family pattern (Pollock, 1998, p. 107). Although life skills are taught in prison, such as keeping a bank account and checkbook, parenting and self-esteem classes, the pattern of illegal behavior seems to persist throughout generations, thus becoming intergenerational (Pollock, 1998, pp. 107, 152). Fortunately, criminological theory posits that almost all offenders eventually burn out and become sick of the criminal lifestyle; this is due in part to age (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001, p. 8; Waldorf, 1983; West, 1978). Here, the topic of desistance repeatedly surfaces criminological literature. Desistance, and thus reentry, can be viewed as continuity rather than change: desistance is ultimately continuity of non-criminal behavior (Maruna, 2001, p. 27).

Motivation is claimed to be a major factor in kick starting and thus sustaining desistance (Farrall, 2002, p. 99; Schlager, 2013, p. 257). It is proposed that if motivation is not present within the individual, then change will not be initiated (Schlager, 2013, pp. 257, 270). On the contrary, just because motivation is present does not necessarily mean that change will automatically occur. The difficult task for the ex-offender is to determine what the most important and helpful motivational factor is. Motivation can be divided into two different types: internal and external. Internal motivation, such as children and living a legitimate and productive life, are far more effective in sustaining change, in comparison to external motivation, such as the fear of arrest or returning to prison (Amodeo, Kurtz & Cutter, 1992, p. 709; Earls, Cairns & Mercy, 1993, p. 291; Clark, 2009; Schlager, 2013, pp. 258, 279). It is important for motivation to be utilized. Research indicates that most ex-offenders upon release house a strong will and motivation to succeed. However, if this initial catalyst is not grasped from the beginning then it commonly becomes a missed opportunity for change (Petersilia 2003, p. 14).

Literature also proves that choices and decisions made by the ex-offender play a vital role in desistance and maintaining legitimate behavior (Maruna, 2001; McIvor et al., 2004, p. 181). To quit the criminal lifestyle, it is commonly seen that desisting ex-offenders owe their success to their free will (Mischkowitz, 1994). Their free will is exercised through decisions which can come from traumatic events or moments of clarity and insight (McIvor et al., 2004, p. 193; Pollock, 1998, p. 103). This, to some ex-offenders, has been seen to come from the experience of being locked up (Pollock, 1998, p. 81; Urbina, 2008, p. 191). Although the prison experience is discouraging for most, some are released from
prison with new found energy and motivation to change (Urbina, 2008, p. 191). Due to this, they experience a readiness for change and feel renewed hope for themselves. They must be able to control the newfound freedom upon release in order to successfully reintegrate (Bahr, Harris, Fisher & Armstrong, 2010, p. 687; Haney, 2003, p. 47).

Empirical research conducted by Galbraith (1998) on successfully reintegrated female ex-offenders recognized that relationships with people who cared and listened, and who could be trusted, relationships with other women who were supportive and who were role models, proper assessment/classification, well-trained staff, especially female staff, proper mediation, job training, education, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and parenting programs, inmate-centered programs, efforts to reduce trauma and revictimization through alternatives to seclusion and restraint, financial resources, safe environments were the factors that assisted the women in their successful transition from prison to their community (as cited in Covington, 2003, p. 97).

Furthermore, desistance, and thus successful reentry, is also commonly associated with marriage, location change, education, family roles, peer relationships, sobriety and work (Bahr et al., 2010, pp. 684-686; Farrall, 2002, pp. 7, 8, 15; James, 2015, p. 14; McIvor et al., 2004, pp. 181; Pollock, 1998; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 67; Uggen, Manza & Behrens, 2004, p. 263). Strength of bonds within marriage, the family, towards peers and at the ex-offender’s job seem to be important factors for conformity and desistance (Giordano et al., 2002, pp. 993-994). Marriage is especially influential for the male ex-offender, in opposition to women, as it brings about positive lifestyle changes (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 994; Laub & Sampson, 2003). For women, it is a different case. It is typically seen that most women are introduced to drug culture through males, their husbands or boyfriends, and therefore marriage may not bring about positive changes (Pollock, 1998, p. 78). Throughout literature, the geographic cure has also been found to help ex-offenders leave their criminal past by physically moving away from what they call home. Interestingly though, ex-offenders commonly reject this notion themselves (Maruna, 2001, p. 153). It has also been found that the ex-offender’s attitudes towards education correlate with desistance rather than the education itself (Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen & Farrington, 1991, p. 71). As aforementioned, many ex-offenders lack formal education, but for successful reentry, previous literature has found that education is very important (Schlager, 2013, p. 63).

When specifically looking at female ex-offenders, their children seem to be most important to them (Pollock, 1998, p. 102). Desistance commonly occurs more abrupt for women, as it is usually paired with the birth of their child (Graham & Bowling, 1996, p. 9). In addition, literature has shown that female ex-offenders themselves owe their successful reentry to their children (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1052). They finally view themselves as good mothers since they feel motherhood has allowed them to develop a more conventional and legitimate identity script to structure their lives upon (Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 331; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1053). Motherhood is viewed as a hook for change, as it allows for personal growth and change in self-conception (Giordano et al., 2002, pp. 1039-1040). The literature points to an interesting fact here though: many female ex-offenders have
multiple children. Research further shows that they typically do not have custody of their previous children (Richie, 2001, p. 379). For many women, their most recent child constitutes a large portion of motivation for them to continue on the straight path for sobriety and a non-criminal lifestyle (Pollock, 1998, p. 32; Urbina, 2008, p. 195).

Furthermore, some studies have found that successful reentry is not dependent upon female “reunification with children”; while other studies disagree, finding “that the threat” of losing custody of their child yields terminated criminal activity (O’Brien, 2001, p. 120; Schulke, 1993). This translates to the fact that reunification with children can be a major motivation during successful reentry of female ex-offenders (Covington, 2003, p. 77). Not only can children play an important role during reentry for the ex-offender, but the family can as well (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 10). It has been found that the family can be the defining characteristic between recidivism and success (Schlager, 2013, p. 90; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 10). Not only can family impact be important during the reentry process, but if the family has been present and involved during imprisonment it can decrease recidivism and therefore promote reentry (Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 10). Research conducted on male ex-offenders indicate that men who “assume conventional roles in their families have greater success upon release” (Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 12). Even though this is only true so far in regard to men, it might be indicative “about the role families can play in providing a measure of stability and structure in the transition from prison” (Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 12). All in all, families influence how well ex-offenders do upon release from prison in their ability to modify their lives (Schlager, 2013, p. 85).

There is a proven link between lower levels of offending and occupational stability (Petersilia, 2005b, p. 67). However, contrary research suggests that work can both be rewarding and punishing. Rewarding work supports desistance, while work found punishing draws the ex-offender back to the criminal lifestyle (Maruna, 2001, p. 128). It is thoroughly noted that employment is difficult for ex-offenders to obtain, but necessary for a chance at successful reentry (Schlager, 2013, p. 63). Job stability eases the transition from institutionalization to freedom, which helps the ex-offender adjust to life after prison (Schlager, 2013, p. 73; Uggen, Wakefield & Western, 2005). This positive change due to employment can even be labeled as a turning point, transition or hook for change (Giordano et al., 2002, Laub & Sampson, 2003; Schlager, 2013, p. 73).

Cognitive changes, such as alterations to identity and self-concept, are shown in research to be correlated with desistance as well (Leibrich, 1993, p. 86; Shover, 1983, p. 208). Even though ex-offenders have been able to change and even maintain that change, they often have a hard time putting words to it. Ultimately, they may not know exactly what made them change; it is seen that they have a difficult time describing it (Maruna, 2001, p. 167; Shover, 1996). It is also found in literature that ex-offenders often describe themselves as always having been a good person. Ex-offenders are likely to posit themselves positive characteristics, regardless of their adverse pasts (Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, O’Connell & Smith, 2016; Bahr et al., 2010; Maruna, 2001, p. 91; O’Brien, 2001, p. 146).

Acceptance, from themselves and their community, is also a determining agent in successful reentry (O’Brien, 2001, p. 146). Research shows that if ex-offenders forgive and accept their own past, they can progress and thus rehabilitate during
the transition process of reentry. Literature also notes that if they are denied acceptance from their community, the path of successful reentry becomes more troublesome (O’Brien, 2001, p. 146).

Research conducted in the United States commonly finds that ex-offenders turn to faith to find purpose to desist (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1052; Lofland, 1969, p. 283; Maruna, 2001, pp. 8, 99, 129). With this, they see their new self as a child of God. Many ex-offenders claim to owe their success to God (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1053); this is evidently true in non-profit groups or charities (Lofland, 1969, p. 283; Maruna, 2001, pp. 99, 129). Ex-offenders also want to feel stability and predictability in their community when they are released from prison; religion can provide this to ex-offenders (Richie, 2001, p. 386). In addition, throughout literature, ex-offenders typically describe their success in regard to generativity: they measure their success based upon responsibility to their children, family and ultimately their neighborhood (Richie, 2001, p. 385). They want to do good for future generations. This is further reiterated by the fact that many ex-offenders want to become counselors to help other individuals with similar life histories. Many eventually go back to prison, but on the other side of the wall, as a staff member or counselor (Pollock, 1998, p. 191).

Previous research has also proposed that resources should be readily available to help ex-offenders. Material resources are of much importance, but emotional resources are just as important (Richie, 2001, p. 381). An important emotional resource is the family of the released ex-offender (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 686). It has also been found that successful reentry is dependent on the available resources and support they can rely on. Here it is strongly noted that quality trumps quantity (Haney, 2003, p. 60). Furthermore, it has also been found that if women have supportive networks that can provide information or references on employment and housing, they have a better chance for success as well (Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 7). The ability for women to find affordable housing allows them to be independent and thereby locate resources that enable them to meet their basic human needs (O’Brien, 2001, p. 128).

Previous studies have also found support for the notion that female ex-offenders who are willing and dedicated to turning their lives around should receive more help and resources to do so (O’Brien, 2001, p. 144). Therefore, it has been proposed that for women to reach success upon release, the community must continually care for them (Covington, 2003, p. 85). Services found in the community which assist with reentry have a possibility of lowering recidivism rates. If done correctly, ex-offenders receive the help they need to have a shot at reintegrating successfully (Richie, 2001, pp. 370-371). This is where treatment programs in the community are mentioned. Treatment programs can be very important and sticking to them is also of importance for the women. As noted in research, there is a positive correlation between success and the length of time the women have spent in treatment. The more time they dedicate to a treatment program, the more likely they are to succeed (Covington, 2003, p. 88; Wellisch, Anglin & Prendergast, 1994). Unfortunately, literature also notes a common downfall to treatment programs viable in the community. Many treatment programs in the community keep female ex-offenders from living with their children. They simply do not allow children to live with their mothers while they are undergoing treatment. As a result, many women turn down treatment, because reunification for them is of more importance. Unfortunately, this means that
children may become a deterrent rather than a factor for success since housing is not available for them to live together in treatment (Collins, 1997; Pollock, 1998, p. 83; Urbina, 2008, p. 190; Wellisch et al., 1994).

Interestingly, previous research indicates that celebrating the success of ex-offenders whether big or small may help sustain positive and successful reintegration for the long term (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 169). It can be concluded that successful offender reentry comes down to application of a single basic idea: when ex-offenders reenter the community, they need to be welcomed as whole, contributing, productive citizens, not rejected as distrusted, stigmatized, and excluded outsiders. They need gestures of support, help in making connections, assistance in meeting their needs and challenges, and opportunities in their communities to live hopefully and meaningful lives. Adopting optimistic attitudes about success during reentry has been linked to desistance from crime for females and males (Burnett, 2004; Cobbina and Bender, 2012; Maruna, 2001). Thus, family members, CCOs, treatment providers, and members of the public need to work together to help ex-offenders develop positive outlook on their success. Ex-offenders need to be given the benefit of the doubt, through second chances and opportunities to show they can be trusted, until they demonstrate otherwise. They should be recognized for their success while held accountable for their failures. Additionally, they need understanding and gestures from the community that invite them in rather than keep them out (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp. 192-193).

As depicted above, previous literature views successful reentry as a two-way relationship. It is not only dependent upon the individual ex-offender, but also their community at large (Maruna, 2010, p. 11). It is evident that punishment is highly ritualized in society; this is evident through arrest, court hearings and even media coverage. On the other hand, reentry is not ritualized in society (Maruna, 2010, p. 11; Schlager, 2013, p. 270). Research therefore finds that reentry courts, modeled after drug courts, could positively influence the process of reentry for the ex-offender and the community (Petersilia, 2001, p. 370). Ultimately, all parties involved could benefit. Ex-offenders will be recognized for their contributions and accomplishments, which further empowers them. The reentry court may recognize for example their volunteer work, community service, mentoring or parenting. Moral inclusion must occur here for ex-offenders to be completely successful upon reentry. This must include notions of “atonement, forgiveness, and redemption” on part of their community (Maruna, 2001, p. 4; Schlager, 2013, p. 270). The process of reentry can be destigmatized by reentry courts: holding ex-offenders responsible and accountable for their actions, while giving them the pat on the back that they most likely need and are longing for while trying to stay on the straight path (Maruna & LeBel, 2003; Schlager, 2013, pp. 262, 281).

**Importance of Reentry and Thus Successful Reentry**

The gradual increase of individuals who are imprisoned has thus resulted in a substantial amount being released back into the community (Petersilia, 2005b, p. 66; Schlager, 2013, pp. 24, 265). Nonetheless, this means that “state officials, government agencies, community-based programs, and neighborhood residents all face a new set of challenges in maximizing these prisoners’ successful reentry into the freeworld” (Cadora, Swartz & Gordon, 2003, p. 285). Reentry is important to
discuss since a staggering “93 to 95 percent of all prison inmates are eventually released” (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 668; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 17; James, 2015, pp. 1, 3; Petersilia, 2003, p. 3; Petersilia, 2005a, p. 45; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 66; Schlager, 2013, p. xv; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 3). Unfortunately, within the first six months of release, one in three ex-offenders are rearrested (Petersilia, 2003, pp. 11-12; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 70). This proves that the first six months outside of prison walls are crucial for the individual to renew their life, relationships and nevertheless their well-being (O’Brien, 2001, p. 24; Petersilia, 2003, p. 18; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 70). Within the first year 44 percent are rearrested, and within three years 67.5 percent are rearrested (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 668; Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 1; Maruna, 2001, pp. 17, 71; Maruna et al., 2004, p. 6; Mears & Mestre, 2012, p. 5; Petersilia, 2003, pp. 11-12; Schlager, 2013, p. 14; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 2). It is evident that the system returns these individuals to society ill-prepared and ill-equipped for the reentry process (O’Brien, 2001, p. ix; Petersilia, 2003, p. 14; Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 2).

Successful reentry is challenging, difficult and eluding for most (Hattery & Smith, 2010, p. 13). This is indicated by the fact that many of the women who are released from prison are ineffective in establishing a non-criminal life in the free world (Hatter & Smith, 2010, p. 5). Due to the plethora of restrictions that prove counterproductive during reentry, it is possible to question whether it has been made too challenging for ex-offenders to obtain successful reentry (Petersilia, 2003, p. 105; Petersilia, 2005b, p. 70). It has been proposed that policy surrounding reentry should not only focus on recidivism but also on helping ex-offenders upon release to shape them into productive and responsible citizens of the community (Petersilia, 2003, p. 15). Future crime can be reduced and in fact hindered if ex-offenders are able to successfully reintegrate by living a meaningful and thus productive life (O’Connell, 2006, p. 1).

It is clearly evident throughout criminological research that failure tends to be the hot topic when discussing reintegration and reentry of ex-offenders into the community (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp. 3, 29; O’Brien, 2001, p. 18). Unfortunately, this seems to overshadow success stories. This has made it difficult for researchers to pinpoint which factors promote successful reentry and thus what a well reintegrated ex-offender may look like (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 668; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, pp. 3, 30; Mears & Mestre, 2012, p. 12). Redemption may not be possible for all released ex-offenders, but it seems unethical to assume this fate for all (Schlager, 2013, p. 255). Ultimately, a society that does not believe in genuine change produces ex-offenders that do not believe in change for themselves (Maruna, 2001, pp. 80, 166). Fortunately, there are ex-offenders who fight through the obstacles to renew their lives in a socially acceptable manner (O’Brien, 2001, pp. ix, 23). This emphasis on success, rather than failure should be highlighted more often in literature, and will therefore be highlighted throughout this thesis.

**Method**

This portion of the thesis will focus on the method employed, namely qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female ex-offenders to highlight their personal stories of success. The present section will cover qualitative semi-structured interviews, recruitment and participants, data
collection, data treatment, data analysis, and finally measures of scientific quality. Ethical issues will also be explored throughout, as this was a major concern in many aspects of the thesis. Before the research process could be initiated, it was important to gain the approval from Malmö University Ethics Council. All the necessary paperwork was filled out and sent to the Ethics Council. Their opinion, reference number HS2017 lop nr 27, has been attached as an appendix.

**Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews**

In criminology, the vast majority of research is quantitative in nature (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 1). Recently however, qualitative research has gained recognition as it is able to supplement quantitative research with real world accounts from offenders regarding criminal behavior (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 1). During interviews, informants give their accounts which connect their behavior to social and environmental influences (Maruna, 2001, p. 8; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 1). The beauty of this is that it can benefit all parties involved. Not only can researchers and policy makers benefit from the detailed accounts given by informants, but the informants also benefit personally by sharing their stories (Maruna, 2001, p. 104; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 1). When ex-offenders choose to participate in qualitative research, they “transform public discourse regarding crime and criminality” and “societal understanding” (Maruna, 2001, pp. 6, 167).

To understand experiences first-hand, it is important to give a voice to those in question (Richards & Jones, 2004, p. 208). Travis and Waul (2003) propose that “the true experts in understanding a woman’s journey home are women themselves” (p. 97). Semi-structured qualitative interviews were employed to do exactly this. As stated by Crow and Semmens (2008), qualitative interviews, “that of listening to what is being said”, have become quite fruitful (p. 116). The goal of the interviewer was to “talk less and listen more” in order to uncover and understand the subjects’ experiences and life world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 1, 24; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 13). Constructions of reality were brought to the surface (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 75), and during this process, themes and meaning unravel from their told life world experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 1, 24). All in all, the qualitative interviews yielded qualitative knowledge rich in detail (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 30).

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used to uncover a process or event sequence. This uncovers the different experiences which hold certain meanings for the individual (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 119; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, pp. 7-8). Since desistance and thus successful reentry are seen as a process, this specific type of interviewing was a perfect fit. The aim of describing successful reentry from the ex-offender perspective also supported the use of semi-structured interviews. The interviews provided detailed accounts of each informants’ lived world from their own perspective, which uncovered themes in their everyday life (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27).

An interview guide was employed during the semi-structured interviews. This aided in organization and preparation as it outlined questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 27, 130). Most of the questions used were taken from previous studies, where it was established that the questions were reliable. Before questioning began, the informant was briefed. They were informed of the purpose of the interview again, use of the sound recorder and asked if they had any
questions before getting started. At this point, to protect their anonymity, a pseudonym was established for their name for use throughout the thesis (Bachman et al., 2016, p. 173). Upon completion of the interview, the participant was debriefed. The interviewer shortly summed up what the interviewee had said. The interviewee was then able to correct any misunderstandings. The interviewees were also asked about the interview process and how they had experienced it. At this time they were also thanked for their contribution to the thesis. Below, the original interview guide is present that was used for each interview.

1. How long of a prison sentence did you serve?
   a. For what offense(s)? (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 197).
2. How long has it been since you have reentered your community?
   (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 197).
3. How do you feel about the term ex-offender?
4. What have your experiences been in regard to reentry?
   b. Does it differ at different points in reentry (i.e., initial versus several years later)? (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 197).
5. Would you describe yourself as having successfully reintegrated into society?
7. What do you attribute your success since release to? (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 197).
9. What do you identify as necessary for making it in the free world that could be applied to the benefit of others currently in the transition from prison? (O’Brien, 2001, p. 124).
10. Do you keep your past a secret, or are you open to talk about your past with others?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add, bring up or ask about regarding your success or on the topic of successful reentry before we finish the interview? (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013, p. 197; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 129).

The semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility for both the interviewer and the interviewee as there was “more opportunity for dialogue and exchange” (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 79). This was an advantage since the interview guide does not need to be followed chronologically and therefore questions could be asked in any order. It was also possible to insert follow-up questions as necessary during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 130; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 79). “Active listening, following up, and exploration” were key during the interview process to result in more rich data (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 13). In addition, preconceptions on the side of the researcher were pushed aside to focus on the reflections made by the informants (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 15). The interviews allowed for an insight into the female ex-offender’s goals and concerns. This in turn uncovered the process and factors necessary for successful reentry (Urbina, 2008, p. 192). This means that the topics covered in the interview were sensitive. It was therefore wise to begin the interview “by asking about less emotive issues” (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 84). Then, as the interview carried on, more sensitive questions were introduced (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 84).
This possibly helped the individual to feel at ease, which may have led them to opening up more.

**Recruitment and Participants**

Exodus Ministries, a “non-denominational Christian organization”, is run by Executive Director, Susan Stephens, in Dallas, Texas ([Exodus Ministries, 2016](#)). The ministry, founded in 1985, “empowers formerly incarcerated mothers and their children to achieve a productive and fulfilling life through Jesus Christ” ([Exodus Ministries, 2016](#)). This is done by assisting “female ex-offenders from all ethnic backgrounds that are re-entering society after incarceration in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice system and have demonstrated a willingness to make positive changes in their life” ([Exodus Ministries, 2016](#)). During their one year stay at Exodus, the women re-invent themselves by developing life and money management skills, becoming employed, starting a savings account, and most importantly – becoming a positive influence for their children to make correct life choices. Purpose, self-esteem, courage and trust are integrated into the “new” parent role model and passed on to their children where the wounds from incarceration are most often the deepest ([Exodus Ministries, 2016](#)).

The women are held accountable to certain responsibilities during their year at Exodus:

- Each resident works with a staff member to complete the Overcomers Program (a Christian based 12-step program). The resident must also complete all court mandated classes, probation stipulations and other classes, such as courses on relationships or parenting. Each resident is responsible for maintaining their own apartment, preparing meals for their family and helping with community chores, such as sweeping sidewalks or cleaning the offices. Upon gaining employment the resident’s focus will shift to successfully balancing her new job and family skills. She will learn to begin a savings account and work to maintain her employment. Upon successful completion of the program, she will use these skills to continue to support herself and her children. After the resident’s initial thirty day reintroduction, their children are enrolled in child care programs through the Vogel Alcove. When this transition occurs, the resident’s focus shifts to preparing herself for long-term employment. She will take classes, prepare for interviews and begin her job search ([Exodus Ministries, 2016](#)).

To begin the research process, the first step was gaining access to the chosen field through a gatekeeper ([Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 16; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 55](#)). Contact with Exodus Ministries was established and the Executive Director, Susan Stephens, granted access to former participants of the program who wished to participate in the interview. Ms. Stephens provided seven interview participants who were all female. They ranged in age from 26 to 42 years old. The majority of the women were Caucasian, while one was Hispanic. The women had been incarcerated anywhere from 8 months to 9 years, due to multiple convictions. Their convictions were typically drug related, such as possession, delivery, theft, burglary or prostitution. The women had been out in the real world anywhere from 1 year to 6 years. Finally, all the women had children: about half had more than one child.

Once access was granted, informed consent was gained from each interview participant ([Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 45](#)). The interview informants were
advised about the voluntary aspect of their participation and were told that they could deny participation and therefore withdraw at any given point (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 45). The participants were also informed about the purpose and use of the study and were encouraged to speak up if they did not feel comfortable answering certain questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, pp. 45, 83, 86). Protecting the rights of the interviewees, granting and maintaining confidentiality, was also a dire need (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 52; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, pp. 43-44).

With qualitative research, as especially seen with interviewing, a plethora of ethical and moral concerns arise (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62). The knowledge produced by qualitative work needs to consider “the social contributions of the study”: positive consequences should out rule the negative consequences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62). The participants were informed of the possible consequences, both harmful and beneficial (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 52; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 70, 73; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 44). For this thesis, the benefits outweighed any possible negative consequences since the focus was on positive aspects of the reentry process (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 44). Throughout the entire research process, ethical issues of confidentiality, privacy and handling of the data were highly considered and cared for as it should in any study (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 52; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 85).

It was determined that the best possible location for the interviews to take place was at Exodus Ministries in Dallas, Texas. Susan Stephens agreed right away and allowed the interviews to take place in private rooms for total privacy without interruptions (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 121). “Peace of mind” for both the interviewer and the interviewees was of high importance, so it was critical for the setting to be a neutral space (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, pp. 78-79). Additionally, it was particularly beneficial, having the interviews at Exodus Ministries, since the women felt safe and at home there. It was paramount as well, for comfort and trust to exist between the interviewer and the interviewees. Once comfort and trust was built, it allowed the women to disclose all that they were comfortable with sharing. The women’s openness was encouraged by telling them continuously how important they were for the research and thus the final results (Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 18).

Data Collection
Regarding data collection, it was established whether the women were comfortable with doing the interview face-to-face or through email. Of the seven interviews, six were conducted face-to-face and one was conducted through email. The six face-to-face interviews ranged in time from roughly 15 minutes to 49 minutes. A major advantage of doing most of the interviews face-to-face meant that there could be a link established between both verbal and visual interactions (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 132). This meant that the informant could reveal and share their “personal [and] private self” (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 132).

It was decided that the best option for collecting data during the face-to-face interviews was audio recording (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 86). The advantages and disadvantages of the other methods of data collection, “video recording, note taking and remembering”, were considered carefully before the decision was made to use audio recording (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 86). Audio
recording was chosen because it allowed the interviewer to concentrate on what was being said on the different topics of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 178-179). With consent from all the informants, their interviews were recorded. To ensure consent, the women were asked during recruitment and again right before the interview began if they were okay with being recorded (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 121; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, pp. 10-11; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 86).

**Data Treatment**

Once the data was collected, it was imperative to transcribe it (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 129). The recorded interviews were transcribed, transforming “oral conversation to written text” so it could be analyzed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 183). Measures were taken to keep the original voices of the participants by transcribing the audio recording almost verbatim. However, every single ‘um’ and ‘uh’ and continually repeated words were left out (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 187; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 130). The transcribed interviews do not reflect anything negative about the female ex-offenders since the differences in oral and written language are relevant for all human beings, not just the participants selected here (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 187; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 130).

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis develops knowledge from interpreting and analyzing narratives supplied as empirical data. The data is constituted of the written material and the sound recording (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27; Malterud, 2012, p. 795). The thesis employed systematic text condensation (STC) as a strategy for qualitative analysis (Malterud, 2012, p. 795). Rather than digging into the meanings behind the narratives, STC presents the life world and experiences of interview participants (Malterud, 2012, pp. 796, 802).

First and foremost, an overview of the data was achieved (Malterud, 2012, p. 796). A major benefit of this type of analysis was that the overview established in the beginning over all the narratives, both individually and across cases, was possible to uphold throughout the entire analysis (Malterud, 2012, p. 803). This was a clear advantage due to the small sample size, and would have been almost impossible in a larger study (Malterud, 2012, p. 804). Organizing the data by preliminary themes began the process so then meaning units could be identified. Meaning units were used to connect the research question and aim to various fragments of the empirical data across the different narratives simultaneously (Malterud, 2012, pp. 797, 802). While pinpointing, classifying and categorizing meaning units, these connections were eventually paired with a code (Malterud, 2012, p. 797; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, pp. 22, 24). Thus, the data was condensed down to code groups, that highlighted meaning units, which connected back to the research question. This was done through “systematic abstraction of meaning units” (Malterud, 2012, p. 799). Eventually, “the category heading [became the] final result” (Malterud, 2012, p. 800). The last step and final step was consumed with recontextualization where it was critical to validate the interpretations against the original transcripts (Malterud, 2012, p. 802).

**Measures of Scientific Quality**

The knowledge produced in all research should adhere to a high standard of “scientific quality”; this means that the findings should be “as accurate and representative of the field of inquiry as possible” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.
As aforementioned, by relying upon an interview guide which had questions used in previous research, and using a strategy for analysis that indicates positive outcomes “regarding utility, feasibility and transparency”, scientific quality could be attained (Malterud, 2012, p. 795). Furthermore, reliability and validity ensure scientific quality as well. Reliability, refers to consistency, in that the research findings should be able to be reproduced by future research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 245; Miner-Romanoff, 2012, p. 26). Validity concludes if the method investigates what it intends to investigate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 246). Validity is dependent upon informant willingness to open up and “reveal sensitive facts or information”; unwillingness and a defensive attitude may negatively impact validity (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 46). Fortunately, the women interviewed were very open and more than willing to share personal details. This supports a high quality of validity. The ethical issue here may be that of balance; the balance between “the interviewer’s concern for pursuing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 16). The balance was continually checked and respected throughout all interviews.

Finally, “if the findings of an interview study are judged to be reasonably reliable and valid, the question remains whether the results are primarily of local interest, or whether they may be transferable to other subjects and situations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 260-261). A common argument regarding qualitative work is that it cannot be generalized because there is not a substantial number of informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 261). However, it is thus possible to question why it must be generalized (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 261). Scientific knowledge is typically seen as “universal and valid for all places and times, for all humankind from eternity to eternity” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 261). This has unfortunately caused such a demand for the social sciences as well (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 261). Even though the findings may not necessarily be generalizable to all female ex-offender populations across the globe, it is hopefully an achievable goal that some identified factors for success may be generalizable to other women with similar life histories.

**THEORY**

Two theories have been selected to analyze and discuss the qualitative data: the theory of “making good” by Maruna (2001) and the theory of cognitive transformation by Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002). The theory of “making good” resulted from research conducted in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) (Maruna, 2001, p. 7). This theory was chosen because the LDS used both men and women for research. Therefore, the theory is applicable to women just as much as men. The theory of cognitive transformation was an attempt to fight and correct the limitations evident in Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory. Sampson and Laub’s theory solely focused on white male offenders, therefore Giordano et al. (2002) contributed with a similar longitudinal study including both men and women (p. 991; Bachman et al., 2016, pp. 164-165). In fact, their theory works best with female offenders (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1010). Both theories will be outlined and explained below before being utilized thoroughly in the discussion of the analysis.
**Theory of “Making Good”**

“Making good”, according to Maruna (2001), is the ability for an individual to find a renewed purpose in life, despite their desolate life story (p. 9). Through this, the individual is thus able to establish newfound order from their previous disorderly life (Maruna, 2001, p. 10). This is essential for ex-offenders who are continuously attempting to sustain life change and thus desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001, p. 10). According to Maruna (2001) there is a clear connection between the bad past and the good present: the present seems to be an unavoidable outcome (p. 87). In other words, ex-offenders believe their past experiences have brought them to where they are today (Maruna, 2001, p. 87). Rather than finding a new identity, the ex-offender restores their old identity to desist (Aresti, Eatough & Brooks-Gordon, 2010, p. 171; Bahr et al., 2010, p. 672; Maruna, 2001, p. 89). Instead of dismissing their prior identity, the ex-offender maintains it and therefore combats feelings of shame (Maruna, 2001, p. 87). This reconstruction allows the ex-offender to accept her past rather than running from it (Maruna, 2001, p. 105).

The first step for change and reform is for the ex-offender to own up, accept, and forgive themselves for past behavior (Maruna, 2001, p. 131). Ex-offenders also benefit from being in communities surrounded by people who have similar life histories. Although change is often kick started from within the individual, a supportive network or community is greatly beneficial. Furthermore, the sense of being a part of something larger can be vital during desistance and reintegration so the ex-offender does not feel alone (Maruna, 2001, p. 119). In addition, an outside force can play a vital role (Maruna, 2001, p. 96). An outside force is an individual who believes in the ex-offender by giving them opportunities. This person makes it possible for the ex-offender to regain a sense of their value as an individual (Maruna, 2001, pp. 87, 96). Ultimately, this enables the ex-offender to obtain and reach some of their goals and further encourages them to give back to the community (Maruna, 2001, p. 87).

The phenomenon of *generativity* can be introduced here. Generativity is when the ex-offender measures their achievement based on their contribution to their community, family and ultimately the next generation (Aresti et al., 2010, p. 171; Bahr et al., 2010, p. 672; Erikson, 1968, p. 141; Healy, 2013, p. 561; Healy, 2014, p. 875; Maruna, 2001, pp. 97, 99; Richie, 2001, p. 385). This becomes evident through mentoring, teaching, parenting and the notion of professional exes (Maruna, 2001, pp. 99, 102). The notion of *professional ex* is applicable to many ex-offenders. For example, many want to become counselors to help individuals with homogeneous life histories who therefore are going through similar struggles they have (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 672; Brown, 1991, p. 219; Lofland, 1969; Maruna, 2001, p. 102). Here the ex-offender may feel “morally superior”, in comparison to another counselor who has never used drugs or committed any criminal acts. The ex-offender may feel they can help others more because they personally experienced the struggle (Maruna, 2001, p. 99). Generativity gives the ex-offender renewed purpose in their life, which becomes a motivating factor in making and maintaining good (Maruna, 2001, p. 102). Motivation is an important factor as well (Link & Williams, 2015, p. 152). It is more than just the ex-offender knowing that criminal behavior is wrong (Maruna, 2001, p. 101). Motivation may very well come down to the ex-offender’s own stance on success and what matters most to them (Maruna, 2001, p. 101).
As especially seen with female ex-offenders in the United States, religion is relied upon by many (Lofland, 1969; Maruna, 2001). Many believe their life is arranged by God through His purpose. The women freely give up individual control and lay it in the hands of the Lord, thereby displaying agency (Maruna, 2001, p. 150). Furthermore, ex-offenders typically believe that they are good people, even though they recognize that from the viewpoint of society they are seen as criminals (Maruna, 2001, p. 135). This can make the task of reintegration even more challenging. Finally, the ex-offender must accept their community and in return the community must also accept the ex-offender (Maruna, 2001, p. 155; Maruna, 2010, p. 11). Unfortunately, this process is rather unsuccessful as this is evident through the grand scale of individuals returning to prison upon release (Maruna, 2010, p. 2). Redemption rituals may benefit this process (Maruna, 2001; Maruna, 2010). Graduation ceremonies, reentry courts and job training programs for ex-offenders are examples of redemption rituals (Maruna, 2001, p. 162). Playing an even more critical role, redemption rituals organized through the State, may be the exact turning point that ex-offenders need in order to move on and be successful in their desistance and reentry process (Maruna, 2001, p. 163). As supported by Maruna’s later work (2010), punishment has always been a utilized ritual. The punishment of an offender is seen through courtroom visits, possible media coverage and eventual institutionalization of the individual in prison for example (Maruna, 2010, p. 2). On the other hand, reintegration works in quite the opposite way. There are no exercised rituals of turning released ex-offenders back into citizens of society (Maruna, 2010, p. 2).

Theory of Cognitive Transformation
The theory of cognitive transformation highlights and explores cognitive shifts, the building blocks for transformation, that often occur during the process of desistance and thus reentry (Giordano et al., 2002, pp. 991, 1000). Most importantly, the ex-offender’s own role is highly emphasized, especially regarding “hooks for change” (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 992). Hooks for change allow the ex-offender to select which prosocial elements from the environment that will serve as catalysts for long-term change (Giordano et al., 2002, pp. 992, 1000). Here, there is a mutual relationship evident between the ex-offender and their environment. In this relationship, agency is central (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 999). This means that the individual selects which hooks for change are most appealing to them. Agency and will to change are important factors to initiate the transformation process. However, resources need to be available as well. Ex-offenders should recognize that they may need help, and if so, they should not be afraid to trust and rely upon others who exhibit a prosocial lifestyle (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1056). It is important to note that the narratives given by the ex-offenders will impossibly be able to account for all the influences that may have had a role in their transformation. This is due to agency and the fact that the ex-offender specifically chooses which opportunities to latch onto (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1000).

Within the theory of cognitive transformation, there are four different types of transformations (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 671; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1000). The first, and most central, is the ex-offender’s “openness to change” (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 671; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1000; Healy, 2013, p. 562). Openness to change initiates the change process (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1032). Furthermore, lasting and sustainable change cannot solely rely on “desire and good intentions”; action must occur (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1032). Although openness to change
Prominent hooks for change are prison, treatment programs, religion and children (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1033). Regarding prison and treatment programs, ex-offender narratives may focus mostly on their personal actions and attitude shifts rather than that of the staff (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1034). Again, there is a focus on agency and the agentic moves of the individual (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1034). Additionally, treatment programs can pave a path for success by helping ex-offenders with a cognitive blueprint: how they can go about as a changed individual (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1035). It is also undeniable that networking of friends and peers is essential throughout the entire process of identity transformation (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1035). Moreover, religion as a hook for change, is a “whole-hearted and up-front commitment” (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1036). It may benefit some by providing a blueprint for their new prosocial self and legitimate behavior (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1037). Networking is also critical here as religion may bring about new interpersonal associations, which positively influence the ex-offender’s new way of life (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1037). Resistance and thus reentry is not a direct result from religion, treatment or prison, but these hooks are in fact catalysts for change (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1038).

Motherhood, and thus the ex-offender’s children, seem to be a prominent hook for change among female ex-offenders as well (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1039). Motherhood allows for change in self-conception (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1040). The ex-offender recognizes that their new lifestyle and persona is not compatible with their old criminal lifestyle (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1040). Ultimately, chances for success increase when the ex-offender focuses on positive aspects of motherhood (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1040). On the contrary, many ex-offenders tend to focus on the possible negative outcomes associated with motherhood: the intergenerational transference of adverse outcomes (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1041). As children grow older this becomes a pressing issue for the mother as they do not want to expose their children to anything resembling their own childhood (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1041). Similar to prison, treatment and religion as hooks for change, motherhood and the children of ex-offenders can provide changes in network associations. This further reinforces the ex-offender’s ongoing identity transformation if positive relations are made (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1042).

The third type of cognitive transformation is when the ex-offender is able to build a replacement self while leaving the marginal one behind (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 671; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1001). For long-term success of maintaining change, the newly found replacement self is key (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1002). This can be upheld by the various hooks for change aforementioned. The fourth and final type of transformation refers to the altered views of the ex-offender towards criminal behavior and the deviant lifestyle (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 671; Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1002). The goal here is that the ex-offender no longer views criminal behavior as a feasible option (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1002).
These four cognitive transformations go hand in hand. The ideal sequence, according to Giordano et al. (2002), is as follows: “an overall “readiness” influences receptivity to one or more hooks for change, hooks influence the shift in identity, and identity changes gradually decrease the desirability and salience of the deviant behavior” (p. 1002). The result should thus be continued behavioral change (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1003), which can be a pathway for successful desistance and thus reentry.

Theory of “Making Good” and Theory of Cognitive Transformation: Commonalities and Differences

Between the two theories above there are several commonalities and differences to be explored. One commonality between them is that both theories recognize religion as a factor for successful reentry. Giordano et al. (2002) find religion to be a hook for change (p. 1033, 1036), while Maruna (2001) believes that many ex-offender populations come to rely upon their faith to change. Both theories indicate that women are more likely to rely upon God as a catalyst for change (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1036; Maruna, 2001, pp. 97, 150). Maruna (2001) finds that when female ex-offenders submit to a higher power and thus follow God, change can occur. Giordano et al. (2002) argue further that interpersonal relationships are positively affected, and a blueprint for maintaining prosocial behavior is sustained through the replacement self (p. 1037). Both theories believe that religion can be an important catalyst for change, thus encouraging and therefore maintaining desistance and successful reentry (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1033; Maruna, 2001).

Another commonality between the two theories is their thought behind the first step to reform and transformation. Maruna (2001) finds that acceptance and forgiveness of the ex-offender’s own past is highly critical, while Giordano et al. (2002) find openness to change of upmost importance. The two seem to go hand in hand. It can be hypothesized that openness to change cannot be experienced until self-forgiveness is achieved. Thus, both theories agree that these are viewed as the building blocks for change and successful reentry by allowing the individual to become open and ready for prosocial opportunities (Bachman et al., 2016, p. 165).

The other side of the coin shows a major difference between the two theories. Maruna (2001) believes the ex-offender’s ‘new’ identity is restored from the ‘old’ identity. This means that no entirely new identity is ever created. In opposition, Giordano et al. (2002) believe that an identity transformation occurs through a replacement self, which entirely replaces the old self. In the theory of “making good” the ex-offender accepts their past and thus combats feelings of shame since they restore their old identity in a new way (Maruna, 2001). Rather, in the theory of identity transformation, the key to long-term success is the new replacement self which has left the preexisting marginal self behind (Giordano et al., 2002).

In addition, the two theories place emphasis on agency and motivation. Maruna (2001) declares motivation to be an important factor in maintaining good. It has also been found that motivation initiates change (Farrall, 2002; Schlager, 2013). Motivation depends on each ex-offender and what they find most important to them (Maruna, 2001). Giordano et al. (2002) find agency, and thus the ex-offender’s agentic moves, as a central role in hooks for change. However, it has been proposed that motivation is inadequate without agency (Healy, 2013, p.
Motivation does not prove adequate on its own. Change will not automatically follow if agency and agentic moves are not present alongside motivation (Berg & Cobbina, 2016). Relating to the notion of agency, Maruna (2001) focuses on the individual and their sense of success, how they personally define it. This is evident in the final steps to change as they grow aware of doing more than just abstaining from criminal behavior (Healy, 2014, p. 875). In opposition, Giordano et al. (2002) focus on agency through the direct relationship between the ex-offender and their environment, for instance with the choice of hook(s) for change (Healy, 2014, p. 875). Both theories do however attribute the importance of “upfront work”, referring to motivation and agency, that is necessary to initiate change and further pave the path for desistance and thus successful reentry for ex-offenders (Bachman et al., 2016, p. 181).

**ANALYSIS**

The analysis section below is comprised of the results and thus a discussion of the results in a theoretical framework. This allows for the results of this study to be discussed in comparison to previous theory and research on the matter (Malterud, 2012, p. 800).

**The Results**

The female ex-offenders interviewed were excited and more than willing to share their experiences and thoughts on successful reentry. Without their consent, it would not have been possible to achieve such insight into the factors of successful reentry. To discuss factors for successful reentry, it was imperative to first discuss what successful reentry meant to each one of them. In opposition to most popular measures of successful reentry, as seen in previous research, the women did not mention recidivism. When the female ex-offenders were asked what success and successful reentry meant to them, they commonly spoke of motherhood, thereby being a good mother, setting and achieving goals, maintaining sobriety, being stable in both personal and work life, being content, and trusting and relying on God. Across the seven women, it was possible to see a trend growing among the common factors and catalysts they found essential for successful reentry: Exodus Ministries, motherhood, religion, fundamental life changes, identity transformation and utilizing resources.

**Exodus Ministries**

All of the women were in agreement that a reentry program, such as Exodus Ministries, was imperative for their embark on reentry and thus maintaining long-term success. The women mentioned that Exodus, provided a supportive network of women with similar life histories, taught them life skills, gave them a sense of security and safety, provided them with a support system, encouraged them to grow spiritually with the Lord; therefore they felt they owed most of their success to Exodus.

Some of the women focused on Exodus as a community and how it had helped them being surrounded by women who were going through the same thing they were. They were always supported by both staff and fellow ex-offenders, who were encouraging them right by their side.

Maggie: *Seeing the other women here going through the exact same thing you are going through. That’s a big one too.*
In addition, Exodus Ministries taught the women life skills that they claimed to still utilize to this day.

Tracey: *I now know how to budget, how to save, to work.*

Furthermore, Exodus Ministries gave the women and their children a sense of security and safety, which they spoke highly of. Something, many of the women had never experienced or had the pleasure of before.

Daisy: *It is very much a security blanket.*

Most of the females had less than average childhoods while some even experienced abuse and had incarcerated parents. Exodus Ministries provided the support system they never had a chance to rely upon.

Claudia: *I don’t have a family, but the people here at Exodus are my family. We are all a support system for each other.*

The special bond that had been nurtured during their one year stay at Exodus seemed to last and grow beyond their time there. Not only were relationships built between ex-offenders and staff members, Exodus encouraged the women to renew their relationship with God and thus grow spiritually. Many of the women confessed to not having a relationship with God prior, but during their time at Exodus they were able to grow spiritually and form a deeper relationship with Him.

Tracey: *I went to Exodus and that helped me with my spiritual path.*

One of the women even expressed her belief that there was a reason they had all ended up at Exodus.

Maggie: *Everybody that comes here is God led to be here.*

All in all, the women believe they would have been lost causes without the opportunity of going to Exodus Ministries. Most of the women in fact said they owed their success to Exodus.

Alex: *I don’t know where I would be without them.*

Maggie: *Coming to Exodus was one of the best decisions I made.*

**Motherhood**

A large majority of the female ex-offenders interviewed were not first-time mothers. Many of them had older children who they had lost custody to due to their past criminal behavior. Motherhood meant that they were given a second chance to prove themselves as mothers. Their most recent child seemed to be a motivating factor in sustaining change and successful reentry. They also felt empowered them to break the cycle of intergenerational transference of adverse outcomes.

The experience of becoming mothers once again was a defining chance for them to straighten out because it meant something different than it previously had. All the women were proud of being given the second chance to prove to themselves and others that they could be great moms.

Daisy: *When I got pregnant with [child’s name] I swore that I would never mess that up again and that I would never make those choices and that I would never go through that pain and that I would never do that to my child.*

Being provided with another shot at motherhood, most of the women said it held a completely different meaning than it had before.

Maggie: *Being a mother now is amazing for the 2-year-old because I am such a different person.*

Lilly: *I’m like wow, how different I am and how different it would have been for her. Like I really do wish I could have done this when I was*
younger because I struggle about my daughter thinking that I did it for someone else but not her.

The concern expressed in the last quote was shared by multiple women because they had multiple children. It was hard for them to find the right words when they tried to explain why this last child helped them change, when their previous children did not in that exact time.

In addition, their children seemed to be a source of motivation for change and maintaining this change.

Tracey: That’s another thing that keeps me going... that’s him. He keeps me on the straight path, which is what I needed.

Not only did their children provide an opportunity for a second chance at motherhood, the women felt they were able to break the cycle of criminal behavior, addiction, abuse and neglect. They found it highly important and rather empowering when they looked down at their beautiful babies.

Tracey: I broke the cycle. He didn’t know me in my addiction at all so he doesn’t have to.

Religion

The women experienced religion as a major catalyst for change and ability to sustain change in their lives. Not only did their personal relationships with God get reestablished, but the women surrendered to Him, thus trusting and following His purpose for them. Most of the women referred to God as their flashlight in the dark: they trusted Him and faithfully believed that He would not steer them wrong.

Chloe: You don’t know what’s ahead but you trust in Him, that He’s going to lead you in the right direction and He’ll help you grow into the women that He wants you to be.

Daisy: That is the key to everything, that was surrendering, surrendering to God and following His will for me.

Maggie: If God didn’t want me here and didn’t want me successful, then it wouldn’t be happening.

Lily: Like sometimes I wake up and I don’t feel alone and I don’t feel like I need somebody either, because God is with me every bit of the way and through every struggle I have had.

Fundamental Life Changes

The female ex-offenders spoke of fundamental life changes that positively impacted them upon their pursuit of successful reentry. It began with the prison or jail experience and thus eventually resulted in job, home, sobriety, change of location, and education as factors for successful reentry as well.

Two of the women especially regarded prison and jail as turning points in their life.

Chloe: I mean, jail is not so bad. What it does for you is that it sobers you up. Basically, it’s you and a bible. For me I took it seriously this [last] time.

Maggie: I had a lot of revelations while in prison. I sure did this last time. When I was in prison I sat there and I said, I am going to rethink everything.

Sobriety, for the women who had been addicts most of their lives, was a top priority to pave the way for success. They believed that as long as they stayed on the path of recovery, then they would be able to do anything.
Daisy: For me, it is sobriety. This is the first time I have ever been sober in my life.
Tracey: I never would have been able to do this had I not been sober.
Alex: Life is hard and it’s beautiful sober.

In addition to maintaining sobriety, a few of the women spoke of location change and how that had helped them achieve successful reentry. Due to the location changes, the women felt they could start completely over.

Chloe: He [God] took me from Denton to Dallas. I had never been to Dallas before and I didn’t know anybody here. The Lord wanted me to start over, and that’s what I needed. I needed a fresh start.
Lily: I have no family here, which is another reason as to why I am successful. I left everything behind.

In opposition, one of the women did not see her location change as beneficial. She felt that because she did not know anybody in the area, she was unable to ask for help or rely on anyone for help.

Tracey: I was in a whole other state so I think that made it worse. I didn’t know anybody so I didn’t have anybody or any kind of help.

Education was another factor for successful reentry which helped the women set goals for themselves. Many of the female ex-offenders pointed to education as an important aspect of success. Some of the women were already enrolled while others were just getting started.

Chloe: My next thing in life is going to school. I definitely want to help people. That is my next goal and I really want to achieve that.

Furthermore, it was surprising to see that a handful of women wanted to go to school for a degree in counseling. This seemed to be a popular choice in their return to the academic world.

Fundamental human needs such as earning a living for oneself and having a roof over their heads did not seem to stand in the forefront of factors for success like the abovementioned fundamental life changes. As aforementioned, the women describe success above and beyond just ceasing criminal activity. It became apparent that the women viewed having a job and a place to stay as mandatory for every human being and not just particular to their life story. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the work and housing were hard to obtain due to their status as ex-offender.

Daisy: I did try other housing options as the next step from here, but they all closed their doors on me and now I’m in my own two bedroom house right up the street.
Claudia: I’ve had a job the whole time... not the same job though.
Daisy: I haven’t ever since March of last year been without a job.

Identity Transformation

All the women in the study viewed themselves as having had a change or shift in identity in order to stay on the path for successful reentry. This change was also the very reason they could slow down and take things one step at a time. The identity change experienced by some of the women was a radical shift.
Forgiveness and being ready for change were part of this process as well. Some of the women seemed to have experienced their identity change as a radical shift.

Chloe: For you are a new creation in Christ, for the old is gone [referring to a bible verse here] and that is exactly what He did for me.
Daisy: Renewing of the mind. Total transformation. Metamorphosis is my favorite.

Many of the women also emphasized insight into their past and how it was best to move on from their ‘old self’ to a better version of themselves. This came from acceptance and forgiveness for many.

Tracey: My past doesn’t define who I am today.

Chloe: I definitely feel like me, but like a much better version… It’s just a way better version of who I was.

Chloe: I am not ashamed. Shame and guilt are not of God. He took that from me when He took my sin.

Maggie: I really think the secret to success is to accept the punishment as it is and to forgive yourself to move on.

With this forgiveness, it further encouraged the women to feel ready for change and renewal.

Chloe: It was completely different from before. I was so ready for change... more than ready.

Following, the women were able to feel the transformation occurring and other people in their lives became witnesses to this change.

Chloe: Through prayer and just reading the Word [the bible], is how He has transformed me.

Maggie: But I can see now that it is reforming my habits and my mind, and how I approach life.

Daisy: Most people who know who I used to be... they tell me, you don’t even sound like the same person.

Lily: Yes, like my lifestyle is completely different. Like some of the people I talk to are like, wow I can’t ever imagine you doing all these things, and I’m like yeah, I did all that.

Although these changes and shifts helped them on the path for successful reentry, it was still up to the women to maintain on the same path. Only one of the women clearly pointed this out.

Lily: Of course, it was going to be up to me whether I remained successful.

In line with their perceived identity change, the women felt they could take things slow in being certain to maintain the change. This meant taking things day by day, one step at a time.

Daisy: I know how I did it... I put one foot in front of the other.

Lily: All you gotta do is take one step forward and that’s it, and not get caught up in what the future looks like.

Instead of focusing on the unknown and speculating about what the future might bring, the women were able to focus on the present. By taking things step by step, they felt successful in their everyday, which thus translated to the rest of their lives.

Chloe: What has helped me is living day by day, not living in the past and not trying to live in the future.

Utilizing Resources

In many of their life stories, the women were not used to having adequate resources available to them in their past. Therefore, it took time for them to learn to ask for help and receive resources that were readily available. Upon reentry, many of the women recognized that resources carry much potential in aiding successful reentry.
Claudia: *It takes work, dedication, and calling every number on that resource list.*

Maggie: *Being able to accept help... I’m going to need help with this, it’s not going to be easy.*

In addition, some of the women found a special resource especially impacting: that of another human being willing to give them a second chance. Most of the women felt it was hard outside of Exodus Ministries to open up and ask for help; when they did experience an individual who was open to helping them, by hiring them for example, it was apparent to see they were very grateful and appreciative.

Lily: *All it takes is one person, someone, one company to, whether it will be Sonic like I work at, or some marketing business company to take a chance on you, cause they will, one person will.*

Claudia: *There are good people out there that own places that are willing to give a second chance and you gotta just find it and when they do give you that chance, make sure you set it up for the next person because there is more people coming behind you and walking in your shoes, and if you set it up they are more likely to help the next person in that same situation.*

**Discussion**

The discussion below will take departure from the results aforementioned. They will be discussed in a theoretical framework in relation to previous research findings as well. As introduced in the theory section of the thesis, the theory of “making good” by Maruna (2001) and the theory of cognitive transformation by Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) will be utilized. Overall, the results of the study found that the seven women pointed to Exodus Ministries, motherhood, religion, fundamental life changes, identity transformation and utilizing resources as factors for successful reentry.

The results indicated that Exodus Ministries was a huge influence upon the women’s journeys to successful reentry. Their lives were touched positively in multiple ways by Exodus. The program provided the women with a community full of fellow female ex-offenders who had been through similar experiences. The women emphasized the benefit of being surrounded by other women who could encourage and support them based on similar life stories. This is similarly seen in previous research (Covington, 2003; Haney, 2003; Maruna, 2001). In addition, many of the women did not have families that positively influenced them. Therefore, they drew attention to Exodus as their support system and family. Even though literature points to the conventional family as a viable support system, the women at Exodus commonly referred to their peers as sisters and referred to Exodus as their family. The women felt support and encouragement from their Exodus family, which was a positive factor in their process of reentry. This ultimately supports previous research in the role that family can have (Bahr et al., 2010; Farrall, 2002; James, 2015; McIvor et al., 2004; Pollock, 1998; Petersilia, 2005b; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003; Uggen et al., 2004).

Exodus also allowed the women to feel empowered by being a part of something larger than themselves. This is very similar to what Maruna (2001) states in his theory on benefits from being involved in a supportive network or community. They did not feel alone while making their way in the free world. They could look to their left and right and see other women going through similar struggles. Exodus, as commonly also seen in prison, helped the women with their life skills (Pollock, 1998). This gave the chance for women to learn independence in the
free world. The women conveyed that they still to this day relied upon skills they learned at Exodus. Furthermore, most of the women thanked Exodus for renewing their relationship with God. Maruna (2001) points out that many ex-offenders in the United States eventually rely upon religion for change. This is also supportive of previous research and theory (Giordano et al., 2002; Lofland, 1969). The results support this notion as well. The women ultimately professed much of their success to the Lord, because they chose to finally trust, follow and surrender to Him. This is in accordance to what Maruna (2001) believes religion can do for ex-offenders. In addition, as seen in Giordano et al. (2002) this can in fact encode a blueprint of how to upkeep and maintain change for successful reentry. As expressed in literature, organizations such as Exodus are excellent at encouraging the women to seek the Lord and live a Godly life to find purpose and thus success (Lofland, 1969; Maruna, 2001).

Exodus was again another major key factor in promoting successful reentry, since the women lived there with their children. As evident in the results, it would have been devastating if the women had to give up reunification with their children; this was one of the things they were looking forward to upon release (Covington, 2003; O’Brien, 2001; Schulke, 1993) Fortunately, the mission of Exodus is to reunite children with their mothers. Therefore, the women uphold the role of being a full-time mother while they live there. Research typically shows that treatment programs and community services do not allow women to bring their children with them. Since Exodus allows children to live there with their mothers, the children are not seen as deterrents for successful reentry, but rather a motivation which reminds the women why they are out of prison and are getting to start anew (Collins, 1997; Pollock, 1998; Urbina, 2008; Wellisch et al., 1994).

Motherhood was ultimately another factor for successful reentry that the women gave much attention to. However, it is important to note that it took multiple tries, meaning multiple children, for the women to identify motherhood as a hook for change and thus successful reentry. It is possible to question here if it really was their child that created a hook for change, or if it was all the underlying factors which finally made it seem the right time to change. This can be questioned since they were not able to change when they became mothers the first time. Even though this can be discussed, it is important to reiterate that the female ex-offenders themselves pointed to their children as motivating factors. When the women were given a second chance at motherhood they did not want to mess it up. Giordano et al. (2002) ultimately found motherhood and thus children as an important hook for change in accordance to much previous research (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Covington, 2003; O’Brien, 2001; Pollock, 1998; Richie, 2001; Schulke, 1993; Urbina, 2008). The results therefore support previous research, as the women latched onto their children as a specific hook for change.

The theory of cognitive transformation claims that women tend to focus on the negative aspects of motherhood, hereby referring to intergenerational transference of adverse outcomes (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 1041). In opposition to this theory, the women felt empowered by motherhood to break the negative cycle of criminal behavior, addiction and abuse. The women focused on the good they could do, instead of getting hung up on all the negative aspects their past has had on their children. It is very interesting to see that the women experienced this in a positive light contrary to how theory describes it. Furthermore, generativity, according to Maruna (2001), can also be introduced here. It is evident that the women wish to
positively affect their community and nevertheless their children, which also coincides with previous research on the matter (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Maruna, 2001; Richie, 2001). Evident through parenting, generativity can become a motivating factor, and this is supported by the results. The children were motivating factors for the women since they described successful reentry as being able to be great mothers for their children. This is further supported by Maruna (2001) and other research, in that motivation depends on the individual’s definition of success and what in fact matters most to them in life (Amodeo et al., 1992; Covington, 2003; Earls et al., 1993; Clark, 2009; Schlager, 2013).

Furthermore, as proposed by Maruna (2001), many female ex-offenders in the United States rely upon religion. Likewise, Giordano et al. (2002) find religion to be a hook for change. The results cohere with both theories, thus supporting them. As claimed by Giordano et al. (2002), religion becomes a “whole-hearted and up-front commitment” in which the women find particularly helpful (p. 1036). Surrendering, trusting and following the Lord are all important aspects that the women felt help them stay successful, thus giving them the stability and predictability which they needed (Richie, 2001, p. 386). In addition, it is possible to say that religion for these women also provides a blueprint on how to live their life (Giordano et al., 2002). Many of the female ex-offenders claim that they trust and follow God and therefore believe that He will keep them on the straight path. They trust that He will lead them in the right direction to sustain successful reentry in every aspect.

As depicted in the results, fundamental life changes were also described by the women as factors for successful reentry. The results portrayed the experience of prison or jail as the starting point. In opposition, Giordano et al. (2002) do not find prison or jail time to result directly in desistance or successful reentry, and Maruna (2001) fails to mention anything on the matter. Some of the women in this study, on the other hand, feel appreciative towards their time in prison and jail. Other previous research does in fact support this notion: some women may need that moment of clarity (Link & Williams, 2015; Pollock, 1998; Urbina, 2008). Many of the women interviewed desisted and began their path to successful reentry after their experience of prison or jail. As the theory of cognitive transformation states, the women focused on their personal actions rather than that of prison or jail staff. The women pointed to their own ability in prison and jail to think clearly and refresh their mindset. They began the desistance process by defining a new replacement self. These results are supported by previous research and theory (Bahr et al., 2010; Giordano et al., 2002; Haney, 2003).

Sobriety for many of the women who had been addicts, was number one for maintaining change and thus successful reentry. In addition, the women identified maintaining a job and having a home as imperative for not only them, but human beings in general to be able to live in society. Surprisingly, neither theory draws importance to these factors. A few of the women placed heavy weight on sobriety as the first step to change and to continuously keep on the path of successful reentry. It is quite surprising that neither theory touches upon sobriety as an important prerequisite for change, but other previous studies and research do recognize this (Bahr et al., 2010; Farrall, 2002; James, 2015; McIvor et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2005b; Pollock, 1998; Uggen et al., 2004). Maruna (2001) blatantly mentions that criminal behavior is often related to drug use and therefore the
study of desistance needs to look at desistance from illegal behavior in both aspects. This is puzzling as Maruna (2001) does not develop this further in the theory of “making good”. Most of the women who were previous addicts recognized that without sobriety, then there would be no foundation to build desistance and thus successful reentry onto. Additionally, as commonly reiterated in research, the challenge of finding housing and a job upon release from prison is often overwhelming (Covington, 2003; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013; Haney, 2003; Hattery & Smith, 2010; O’Brien, 2001; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Petersilia, 2005b; Pollock, 1998; Rose & Clear, 2003; Schlager, 2013; Travis & Waul, 2003). It is likewise puzzling that neither theory mentions these two factors as important stepping stones to achieving and sustaining change. Luckily, while the women were a part of the Exodus program, housing was taken care of. When they apply and are accepted, there is an apartment for the female ex-offender and her children. It is interesting then that the women do not put more emphasis on housing and occupation since they are not a part of the Exodus program anymore. It was evident though that they found housing and work to be imperative for all individuals in society, and not just for them as ex-offenders.

As pinpointed by Maruna (2001), supported by the women interviewed, and evident in previous research, pursuing education can also be helpful for successful reentry (Bahr et al., 2010; Covington, 2003; Farrall, 2002; James, 2015; McIvor et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2005b; Pollock, 1998; Uggen et al., 2004). The results also indicate the notion of “professional ex” as coined by Maruna (2001). A handful of the women wished to finish a degree in counseling so they could help others with similar struggles. This is a common career pathway and interest among ex-offenders as also noted in previous research (Lofland, 1969; Pollock, 1998). Furthermore, generativity is also evident here as the women wish to positively affect and give back to their community. This indicates that the results support theory and previous research (Maruna, 2001; Richie, 2001).

Identity transformation, which promoted successful reentry, was experienced in similar ways between the seven different women. It can be hypothesized that their identity change was experienced similarly as they were similarly influenced by Exodus Ministries during their involvement in the program. The results support previous research in that identity transformation is an important factor for change and thus sustaining change (Leibrich, 1993; Shover, 1983). Parallel to the theory of “making good”, the women emphasized the importance of being able to accept and forgive themselves (Maruna, 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Schlager, 2013). A benefit of forgiveness, according to Maruna (2001), is that ex-offenders can move on from their past, redefine their ‘old’ self and thus start anew. Thus, exhibiting the first step for change (Maruna, 2001). In support of this, the women found that they could accept their past through self-forgiveness and then move on. This meant that they could redefine their identity instead of rejecting the ‘old’ one. However, the results also depict one of the women gravitating more towards a replacement self as coined by Giordano et al. (2002). She feels like a new creation through God: she is able to start anew and live the life she wants to lead. She created a new self and thus differentiated from her old marginalized self.

Likewise, Giordano et al. (2002) define the first and most central cognitive transformation as that of openness to change. Some of the women supported this notion, also seen in previous research, by stating they suddenly experienced a readiness for change (Bahr et al., 2010). Thus, this allowed the women to choose
certain hooks which they found most appealing to them. Here, agency becomes a key variable in the relationship between the ex-offender and their environment (Giordano et al., 2002; Mischkowitz, 1994). It is surprising that the results only identify one woman who pointed to her own will and agency as an important feature in maintaining and sustaining success. However, it can be pinpointed that individual agency is also evident in the women who follow the will of God (Maruna, 2001). The women have surrendered to Him and thus follow His will and purpose. They base their choices on hooks for change on what they think God’s will may be for them. They all believe that God will help them become a better woman through the path that He has presented them.

Maruna (2001), in his theory of “making good”, also explores a connection between the past and the present: the good present is “an inevitable outcome” from the bad past (Maruna, 2001, p. 87). The results support this notion. Most of the women felt God brought them through their bad past to bring them to the present good. One of the women mentions that God has taken her shame and guilt. By following God and relying upon him, the negative feelings of guilt and shame have been washed away, and therefore identity transformation can occur. Her identity is restored and therefore she is not overwhelmed by guilt and shame due to her past. Interestingly, this female ex-offender identifies with both theories in that she had reformed her past identity, yet again replaced it with a new replacement self. It can be hypothesized that some parts of her identity have been reformed, yet other portions of her identity have been newly defined, thus presenting a replacement self.

Another factor identified by the women to promote successful reentry is their ability to utilize resources. This supports previous research (Covington, 2003; Haney, 2003; Richie, 2001). As aforementioned, Giordano et al. (2002) find agency and will to change important for the transformation process to begin, but if resources are not readily available then the process stops dead in its tracks. The women, as seen in the results, agree with this notion. As indicated in previous research, emotional resources are just as important as material resources (Richie, 2001). The results also indicate this, as many of the women refer to the support of their Exodus family and a few even pinpoint the special role one individual can have. In accordance to Maruna (2001), this is regarded as an outside force. Two of the female ex-offenders presented in the results drew special attention to the notion of an outside force. The women claim how much of a vital role such an outside force could play, such as second chance hire. Not only can the outside force restore the ex-offender’s belief in society, but also for themselves. The ex-offenders gain personal value, according to Maruna (2001), which helps them move on and begin the path towards successful reentry.

Finally, Maruna (2001, 2010) speaks of redemption rituals. None of the women interviewed spoke of such a notion. This is puzzling since all the women that successfully complete the one year program at Exodus Ministries have a graduation ceremony in their name. It can be argued that this graduation ceremony is a direct example of a redemption ritual. It seems such an event is a great way to announce the ex-offender’s reentry into society as a citizen. Within criminological literature, there is a pressing argument for risk which follows the notion of redemption rituals (Maruna, 2010, p. 18). A rational fear is that ex-offenders will eventually reoffend, since recidivism rates are continuously so high. However, this seems a rather unjust argument as to why redemption rituals
are not introduced for reentry. Take for instance everyday rituals such as graduation ceremonies and marriages. Recidivism rates can be paralleled to divorce rates for marriage and the number of graduates who are not able to find a job after graduation. If risk was introduced to these everyday rituals, then they would become meaningless (Maruna, 2010, p. 18). Graduation ceremonies from universities and rituals of marriage will indefinitely occur, regardless of the risk of divorce and inability to find a job. Therefore, the argument for the risk of ex-offenders to reoffend is invalid when put into perspective with common rituals that occur daily in society. Even though the women fail to mention anything about their graduations from Exodus Ministries, it can still be hypothesized that the event allowed the women to celebrate their success and feel welcomed into society again. Redemption rituals allow not only ex-offenders, but their communities “to legally move on from the past”: ultimately forgiveness is key here (Maruna, 2001, p. 165). Maruna (2001) proposes that without redemption rituals “ex-offenders will always be ex-offenders, hence outsiders, or the Other” thus holding them back from their potential for successful reentry (p. 165).

**Limitations**

As evident in all research, the thesis presents certain limitations which may have affected the results of the study. To begin, research and literature regarding reentry does not distinguish between ex-offenders and ex-prisoners. Ex-offenders are individuals who serve non-custodial sentences, while ex-prisoners serve custodial sentences (Aresti et al., 2010; Maruna, 2001). Due to the lack of differentiation between the two, the term ex-offender is commonly used throughout literature surrounding the topic of reentry. It was therefore concluded that the term ex-offender was sufficient in describing all individuals released from any sort of institutionalization. During the interview process, all the informants were asked if they were okay being referred to as ex-offenders throughout the thesis. Upon their consent, the term ex-offender was established for use to maintain consistency throughout the entirety of the thesis.

Furthermore, the notion of successful reentry was likewise difficult to establish. In defining successful reentry, terms like desistance, termination and cessation are abundant. The difficulty here is that such words elicit permanent change. Permanent change, and therefore successful reentry, can be challenging to prove since ex-offenders typically follow a zigzag path as mentioned in the introduction. Maruna (2001) proposes that to research permanent change properly, it can only be done retrospectively upon the death of the individual. Otherwise, it is always uncertain if the change is legitimate and long-term. The thesis was not able to study successful reentry retrospectively as all the women were alive and well. However, it can be argued that such a pessimistic view upon reentry research encourages the ever-present focus on failure rather than success. There is no reason to doubt these individuals until proven otherwise.

The sample in the thesis is not representative of the typical female offender population: six of the seven women were Caucasian, and typically individuals of color constitute the majority as aforementioned. However, according to Schlager (2013), the sample is representative of the female prisoners and ex-offenders who are mothers. The sample coincides with research indicating that most mothers in prison are Caucasian (Schlager, 2013, p. 112). In addition, the sample was directly
influenced by Susan Stephens, the executive director of Exodus Ministries. Ms. Stephens granted contact to the women she felt had reintegrated successfully. In other words, the sample chosen was solely dependent upon her judgement of successful reentry. However, it is critical to reiterate here that reformation, according to Maruna (2001) is not something that can necessarily be proven in black and white. Rather, reformation is “a construct that is negotiated through interaction between an individual and significant others” (Maruna, 2001, p. 158). Ms. Stephens evaluates the women’s reformation based on her relationship to them and how she has witnessed them throughout time. Although this may have introduced some bias, there is no other way of determining successful reentry as of right now. This will unfortunately not change “until ex-offenders are formally and symbolically recognized as success stories” (Maruna, 2001, p. 158).

Furthermore, as aforementioned, the sample only represents women who have taken part in the Exodus Ministries reentry program. It is noted in literature that oversampling from one organization may cause similarities in the language used by the interview participants (Maruna, 2001, p. 103). It is important to point out that such similarities may have occurred because the women were similarly influenced by Exodus. This is evident in the results as many of the women pointed to the same factors for successful reentry. However, it was still found that the women were able to convey their personal experiences through their own words. All the women had graduated or left Exodus some time prior to the interviews. Therefore, the issue of oversampling was not seen as troublesome as they had all moved on further into the real world.

As with all methods, there are criticisms and pitfalls. It is claimed that research utilizing qualitative interviews is not as scientific as quantitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 169). Interviews only “reflect common sense” and are “too person dependent” because they are biased, subjective, explorative and not generalizable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 169-171). These claimed disadvantages can be overturned by the benefits of the method. Qualitative research can empower people (Crow & Semmens, 2008, p. 51). Moreover, the interview process can be “rewarding for both parties involved” through “the unfolding of stories and new insights” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 15). Participants may also experience the interview process as “rare and enriching” to their own lives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009 p. 32). These positive benefits were also evident during the interview process with the female ex-offenders. When each interview was completed, the women were asked to describe their experience. The women who participated in face-to-face interviews conveyed that they felt empowered and privileged to share their personal stories. Some even recognized that putting words to their experiences, which they never had done before, reminded them of how far they had come. Overall, according to the women, the interview had been a positive experience and they seemed confident in their contribution.

Regarding the chosen theories, the theory of cognitive transformation resulted from research conducted on adolescent males and females (Giordano et al., 2002, p. 990; Healy, 2013, p. 564). The sample of the thesis however is only comprised of adult women. The theory was chosen regardless, since previous research has also applied the theory on adult samples (Bachman et al, 2016; Bahr et al., 2010; Berg & Cobbina, 2016; Healy, 2014). Therefore, the theory was still seen as applicable. This was further supported by the fact that previous research has used
both theories, “making good” by Maruna (2001) and cognitive transformation by Giordano et al. (2002), together since the two are in fact compatible (Healy, 2014, pp. 875, 886). In addition, emotions are not explored in either theory. This is a limitation, especially regarding the theory of cognitive transformation, as cognitive and emotional processes go hand in hand. Another limitation within the theory of cognitive transformation is that agency and openness to change are not described in detail. The specific mechanisms needed for openness to change are not specified and the relevant features of agency are not adequately discussed (Healy, 2013, p. 562-563).

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the results may have been skewed by the fact that most of the women did not report on romantic relations. Previous research and theory tends to mention the marital relationship as a hook for change or turning point (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2003). It is important to point out as well that this is commonly seen more so for males than females. However, regarding the results, it was difficult to conclude if the marital relationship was of any importance to the women since the majority did not mention anything on the matter. While they took part in the program at Exodus Ministries in the past, they were not allowed to have any romantic relationships. Since the interviews took place at Exodus, this can also be a viable reason as to why the women did not mention any romantic relationships. It was decided that the marital relationship as a hook for change is beyond the scope of this thesis since most of the women fail to mention any romantic relationships. One woman stated that it was just herself and her son and another woman mentioned men in a negative manner: “A lot of women you see in prison are behind a man” (Maggie). Since all the women interviewed either ignored the influence of a male or spoke negatively upon them, it can be hypothesized that the women did not find them helpful in their path for successful reentry. Therefore, the marital relationship does not hold any importance within this study and was disregarded in both theories.

Finally, the stance taken in this thesis is arguable. A counter argument to the thesis is that change is not possible. Furthermore, it can be argued that the qualitative research in this thesis is not able to identify if the women are just fabricating positive stories. It is possible to question whether the women made genuine changes. Although this may very well be the case, this pessimistic view and doubt only adds to the negative cycle of reentry and recidivism. If this perspective had been taken into account, it would have negated all of the findings. How much is just a social construction? What about the women’s core self, identity and the different roles they play? It would have been possible to take the thesis a step further and ask such questions. Unfortunately, the thesis had to be limited to a certain point. Additionally, it was a purposive decision to write this thesis in a positive light. All human beings are criminals. The only difference lies between those who evade exposure: some are caught in the criminal act, while others are not. All human beings are sinners, but God forgives for all sins. The thesis is built upon the belief of second chances and the ability for individuals to change. The female ex-offenders featured in this thesis have all paid their debt to society. They committed a crime, for which they got caught, and they dealt with the consequences. The women should now be able to move on from their punishment and start their lives anew. Why not take their word for it and believe these women until they show otherwise? As evident in the American justice system, all individuals are innocent until proven guilty. These women have
renewed ‘innocence’ so to say, after they have paid their debt to society. Ex-offenders will never be able to move forward if they are continually doubted and are not considered trustworthy. As aforementioned, a society that does not believe in genuine change produces ex-offenders that do not believe in change for themselves (Maruna, 2001, pp. 80, 166). Current recidivism rates point to the fact that reentry is eluding for most. So, why not take a new approach? Is it possible to change the reentry process and make it better for all by attentively listening to ex-offenders, believing what they say and thus supporting them?

CONCLUSION

The thesis contributes new knowledge to existing research by having utilized the female ex-offender perspective to highlight personal stories of successful reentry. Conducting research to highlight success rather than failure through the first-hand accounts of ex-offenders, can hopefully transform the discourse surrounding ex-offender reentry in a more positive light (Maruna, 2001).

The results cohere with previous research and theory in that successful reentry is deeply dependent upon the services available to ex-offenders during reentry; the quality of these services and level of support is highly critical here as well (Haney, 2003). The women interviewed in the thesis drew much attention upon Exodus Ministries as a major factor for their successful reentry. Most importantly, Exodus Ministries prepared the women for the real world, provided them with a support system, allowed for reunification with their children and encouraged them to renew their relationship with the Lord. Ultimately, the women declared that they could not have successfully reintegrated without the help of Exodus Ministries.

It was surprising to see in previous literature that most treatment programs and reentry services do not allow children in their housing (Collins, 1997; Pollock, 1998, p. 83; Urbina, 2008, p. 190; Wellisch et al., 1994). Exodus Ministries defies these common restrictions and promotes motherhood as a hook for change by allowing the children to live with their mothers. All the women in the sample expressed how much of a motivation their children were for them to remain on the straight path, reach their goals and nevertheless to break the cycle of adverse outcomes. Surprisingly, in opposition to the theory of cognitive transformation, the women did not regard the latter as a negative aspect of motherhood. Rather, they felt empowered: being able to break the cycle of intergenerational transference of adverse outcomes promoted their sense of being a good mother.

The importance of religion to the women coincided with both theories chosen and much previous research (Giordano et al, 2002; Lofland, 1969; Maruna, 2001). Most of the women owed their renewed relationship with the Lord to Exodus Ministries. They were continually encouraged and supported by Exodus staff to follow and rely upon God. Many of the women found religion as a comfort. They were finally able to believe in themselves and their capabilities. Most importantly, they believed that God would not steer them wrong. They trusted Him so faithfully that He would help them become the woman they were always meant to be. The aspect of religion, however, may prove difficult when generalizing the results of the thesis. American culture relies heavily upon religion, whereas some European cultures, as seen in Denmark and Sweden, are not religious on such a
grand scale. It can be hypothesized that the role religion plays, that of comradery and companionship, may still be generalizable to other cultures.

Some of the results established in the thesis were surprising in comparison to previous research and theory. Sobriety was viewed by many of the women as being a key factor for successful reentry. They believed sobriety was the foundation for successful reentry. Many stated that if they had not been sober, they would not have been able to become productive members of society. It is surprising that neither theory spoke the importance of sobriety. In addition, the women saw work and housing as imperative not only for them but for all individuals in society in general. It was likewise puzzling that neither theory touched upon this when most previous research continually stressed the importance of housing and work. Education was also identified as an important factor for successful reentry by the female ex-offenders which coincided with previous research (Covington, 2003; Schlager, 2013). The remarkable thing here is that so many of the women want to earn their degree in counseling to help others with similar life stories.

Identity transformation was also identified as an important part of the process of desistance and successful reentry for the female ex-offenders. Some of the women, in accordance to the theory of cognitive transformation, felt like new human beings as they had found a replacement self, while the other women, in accordance to the theory of “making good”, accepted and forgave themselves for their past actions, which helped them redefine their old self. Interestingly, only one of the women spoke clearly of agency. She drew importance to her own will in her ability to sustain the change achieved and therefore maintain successful reentry. Furthermore, resources, especially that of an outside force, were especially helpful to the women interviewed. An outside force can be powerful in gaining the women’s trust toward their community again. Second chance hire was also experienced positively by the women interviewed. Resources were furthermore needed to actualize the will the change.

It has been proposed that,

Instead of isolating, neglecting, and marginalizing these women, community agencies and conventional society should work together, share resources, and exchange information to create a “road map” for released offenders so that they have realistic established goals, motivation, and hope (Urbina, 2008, p. 199).

It is important to remember that once released, ex-offenders are citizens of society alike everyone else. Future research on ex-offender reentry should be consumed with improving the process not only for the ex-offender, but also for the families affected and the community at large (Maruna, 2001, p. 17). The notion of redemption rituals may help ease this process. Although the women did not personally refer to such a notion, redemption rituals, according to Maruna (2001, 2010), may prove useful in kick starting the process of successful reentry. Through redemption rituals, successful reentry can hopefully become attainable to even more ex-offenders. Furthermore, future research should listen to ex-offenders and their first-hand experiences. Highlighting the ex-offender perspective may allow for a much-needed focus on success rather than failure. They have the insight needed to pinpoint factors for successful reentry, which
may prove useful for policy, practice, reentry programs and institutionalization to genuinely help ex-offenders with the inevitable transition of reentry.
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Statement from the Ethical Council:

The Ethical Council has no comments on this project, and would only like to wish the student good luck.

On behalf of the Ethics Council at the Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University
Claes Andersson