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Self-Determination Theory and the Educational Motivations of the Recently
Incarcerated

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Community College Leadership

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ABSTRACT

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND THE EDUCATIONAL MOTIVATIONS OF THE RECENTLY INCARCERATED

Jason Barr
Old Dominion University, 2016
Director: Dr. Dennis Gregory

This primary research objective of this qualitative study is to determine if self-determination theory is applicable to the population of the recently incarcerated. If it is applicable, self-determination theory may be a new method of examining the educational motivations of prisoners and the recently incarcerated. Twelve subjects from the western region of Virginia were interviewed. Each had been in prison for more than six months within the past five years; each also held a general education diploma or equivalent. Subject responses were coded via the three major tenets of self-determination theory: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Additionally, the researcher coded language that indicated amotivation as well as external and internal motivation. The results should assist researchers in determining the efficacy of applying self-determination theory to the specific population of the recently incarcerated. The research may have opened new research avenues in educational motivation studies.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, as their patience and support were vital to my success.

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This dissertation was the result of the hard work and care of a large group of people. Thanks to Drs. Gregory, Perez, and Williams for their guidance throughout this process. Special thanks also to Dr. Glass for his patience and willingness to help me through the curriculum. Of course, the members of my cohort were some of the best people one could ask for, and they were especially helpful in keeping me motivated. Special thanks to Stacy Waters-Bailey, whose friendship and guidance were especially helpful. Also thanks go to Jim Maccariella, for his companionship, as well as Alisha Tucker and Tiffany Ray for their friendship. My research team, which included, at various points, Christine Damrose-Mahlmann, Hilary Campbell, Corinne McCarthy, and Stacy Waters-Bailey, went well beyond the call of duty and provided me with feedback and assistance that were integral to the research process. The rest of my cohort bears mention, too, for our shared experience was vital to my own learning. Their contribution to my success was just as important as any other: Nancy Adams-Turner, Donna McCauley, Matt McGraw, and Tom Hughes. Kristi Dressler, Rebecca Evans, Richard Yowell, and Tom Sherrard also assisted me with finding interviewees for the projects.

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INTRODUCTION

Research on postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) is abundant, and much of the research focuses on the role education, particularly college-level education, plays in reducing recidivism. Yet, these issues remain incredibly problematic in the United States. According to the International Center for Prison Studies (ICPS), the United States is second in the world only to the Republic of Seychelles in incarceration rates—the United States imprisons 707 people out of every 100,000 citizens. This number also disproportionately reflects underprivileged populations, with African Americans, who comprise just over 13 percent of the total American population, representing, according to the Bureau of Justice, nearly 40 percent of the prison population. A large part of this problem is the continued issue of recidivism, the rate at which a person released from prison ends up being convicted of another crime and returning to prison. Many of these prisoners become, temporarily, ex-prisoners, and it is during this crucial time of reintegration back into society that many of these recently incarcerated people may wish to pursue college education as a pathway to prevent becoming a recidivist. Because of the dearth of information and data for this unique population of the recently incarcerated, it is important to first turn to the field of research of correctional education and seek out any potential relationships.

The data regarding correlations between recidivism and college-level education would be beneficial in interpreting the experiences of the recently incarcerated as well. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education released a report, titled “Partnerships Between Community Colleges and Prisons: Providing Workforce Education and Training to Reduce Recidivism.” The report noted the apparent positive correlation between educational attainment and lowered recidivism rates. As a result, numerous researchers, prompted by state and federal governments, have

attempted to replicate the research or to determine the best method of educational delivery for postsecondary correctional education. Numerous studies have shown that PSCE programs can reduce recidivism rates (Batiuk, 1997; Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2013; Garmon, 2002; Harlow, 2003; Stevens & Ward, 1997; Tanguay, 2014; Vacca & Lattimore, 2004). Much of this research, in particular, has focused on credentialing or degree progress as a rubric for determining potential recidivism. Duguid, Hakey, and Pawson (1996) discovered that prisoners who complete two college courses were less likely to recidivate. Chappell (2004) found that higher levels of educational attainment are negatively correlated with recidivism. It is conceivable, then, that those who have been recently incarcerated would also benefit from college-level education. Such benefits would increase their employability, thus potentially lowering their chances of recidivating.

The data have additionally indicated that prisoners are not only likely to benefit from college-level education programs, but also researchers have found that there are demographic predictors that positively correlate with a prisoner's enrollment in a PSCE program. Lahm (2009) explored the demographic profiles of prisoners who enroll in PSCE programs and found that older prisoners were more likely to join a PSCE program. Additionally, Knepper (1989) found that certain components of a prisoner's demographic background also influenced their eventual decision to enroll in a PSCE program. In much of PSCE research, however, one particular stakeholder remains under-examined: the prisoners themselves. Much of the research surrounding the prisoners tends to focus on quantitative data gathering and interpretation via demographic profiling, test scores, or prison data. Qualitative data gathering remains incredibly scarce in research regarding PSCE programs. This may be a result of several factors, especially limited or strictly regulated access to the prison population for researchers.

Despite the large amount of research touting the success of PSCE programs in reducing recidivism, overall enrollment in such programs remains low (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Although contemporary research has centered on the negative correlations between enrollment in PSCE programs and recidivism, there has been little consideration—beyond demographic profiles—of individual prisoners and their personal educational motivation. In other words, the focus of the research has often been on the end results of PSCE programs—a prisoner’s chances of recidivism—and only rarely have researchers examined how and why prisoners enroll in PSCE programs. As a result, this researcher proposes that the educational motivations of individual prisoners or the recently incarcerated may be vital to understand the complex decision-making processes among individuals that eventually leads to enrolling in college-level coursework.

In much of PSCE research, however, one particular stakeholder remains under-examined: the prisoners themselves. Much of the research surrounding the prisoners tends to focus on quantitative data gathering and interpretation via demographic profiling, test scores, or prison data. Qualitative data gathering remains incredibly scarce in research regarding PSCE programs. This brief survey of the body of research regarding PSCE programs reveals that PSCE programs may play an important role in reducing recidivism rates. However, the data focuses only on those who were currently incarcerated. For those who have been released from prison, they find themselves in between two distinct societies: the prison environment, and the everyday American society. Recently incarcerated individuals, therefore, need to be considered a vital and important subject of study, for their process of reintegration into society depends on many of the same factors that affect the research regarding PSCE.

Conceptual Framework: Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that human beings, besides having innate physiological needs such as food and shelter, also have innate psychological needs such as a need to achieve goals and outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These innate needs are “[r]egardless of social strata or cultural origin” (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 68) and are often achieved—or attempted—through an individual’s intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Further, Deci & Ryan (2000a) theorize that humans have three distinct need categories: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Although this theory may be suited to examining the incarcerated and the recently incarcerated individual’s life choices, the focus of this research was to examine how a prisoner or recently incarcerated individual’s educational motivations begin to appear or reappear. Some prisoners may choose to pursue education while in prison, for example, simply to avoid menial tasks or their immediate environment, motivations which may shift over time to understanding the value of education (Manger, Eikeland, Diseth, Hetland, & Asbjørnsen, 2010). This shift can be interpreted via the lens of self-determination theory as a movement from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivations.

Self-determination theory may apply readily to the recently incarcerated, as a key function of the theory is the continuum between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The push and pull between these two forms of motivation may play a key role in a prisoner’s or a recently incarcerated individual’s desire or lack of desire to pursue college-level educational opportunities. Whereas intrinsic motivation “involves people freely engaging in activities that they find interesting, [and] that provide novelty and optimal challenge” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 235), extrinsic motivation such as rewards systems or punishments may negatively impact an individual’s intrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When one considers the typical prison environment, which is often highly regulated and routinized, it becomes apparent that the

incarcerated or the recently incarcerated individual's educational motivations may be impacted by an environment that "blocks satisfaction of the needs for competence and relatedness [...] and [...] have negative effects on performance and well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 251). It has also been noted that surveillance such as guards and cameras may lessen one's intrinsic motivations (Lepper & Greene, 1975). Indeed, environments that feature "excessive control, non-optimal challenges, and lack of connectedness" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 76) hinder one's self-determination, and thus, also one's educational motivation. In other words, the simple act of being incarcerated may deaden rather than strengthen one's desire to pursue college-level educational.

Topic and Research Problem

The primary question this researcher explored is: Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?

Additionally, the use of self-determination theory allowed the researcher to discern whether or not the theory is applicable to the very unique and marginalized population of the recently incarcerated. Self-determination theory also provides a continuum of extrinsic to intrinsic motivations. This scale of motivations may assist researchers in understanding how this particular population decides to pursue PSCE. The research shed light on some of the issues of low enrollment in PSCE coursework. It also revealed some of the potential reasons why prisoners who have been released do or do not pursue college-level education.

Rationale/Purpose of Study

This researcher is unaware of any research conducted which qualitatively examines the role of educational motivation among the recently incarcerated in the United States. There has

been some research conducted in Norway; in a study conducted by Diseth, Eikeland, Manger, and Hetland (2008), the researchers used the model of expectancy and value along with quantitative data in an attempt to understand obstacles to educational motivation among prisoners. The model of expectancy and value, derived from Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, and Midgley (1983), although originally focused on adolescents, was applied to Norwegian prisoners. The study revealed that Norwegian prisoners were reasonably well motivated in attempting to achieve their educational goals but were hindered by prison regulations, such as lack of access to computers (Diseth, Eikeland, Manger & Hetland, 2008). Much of the research that does exist has been quantitative in nature and has focused primarily on demographic data, funding levels, or recidivism rates. As a result, researchers and practitioners are aware of the results of PSCE programs, in particular, but remain unaware of the underlying motivations that prevent or encourage prisoners from enrolling in a PSCE program or in the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated.

This study proposed using self-determination theory as a framework for understanding how the recently incarcerated arrived at the decision to enroll in a PSCE program, or to enroll in college-level coursework in the years immediately after their release from incarceration. The theory, and the concepts of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, as well as the differences in types of motivations, provided the philosophical underpinning for the research questions and for coding the resulting responses.

Definitions

Much of the research defines recidivism as occurring within either three years to five years of release and this timeframe is often used by the Bureau of Justice in its data gathering (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014).

Recently incarcerated was defined as someone who has been formerly incarcerated in either a jail or prison but has been out of prison for five years or fewer. This guideline is derived from recidivism guidelines created by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Incarcerated was defined as someone who has spent a total of more than six months in either a jail or a prison.

Amotivation was defined as “the state of lacking an intention to act” in achieving one’s goals” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Motivation was defined as the process of being “moved to do something” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 54).

Competence was defined as the process of feeling confident in one’s own abilities to pursue a particular task (Ryan & Deci, 2000a)

Relatedness was a feeling of belonging to one’s own social group and share in its cohesion (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Autonomy was one’s ability to self-regulate one’s own actions in achieving specific goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Intrinsic motivation was defined as the performance of a task because “it is inherently interesting and enjoyable” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 55) and is done in pursuit of one’s own personal fulfillment or goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Extrinsic motivation was defined as performing a task because it will lead to a specific outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000b), often from exterior forces such as other people, social norms, or rules and regulations.

There are numerous types of extrinsic motivations. One can perceive a continuum on which an individual's motivations move from external forces to internalized ideas.

External regulation was defined as the process of one pursuing a goal in order to achieve rewards or avoid punishments. (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Introjection was defined as the process of one pursuing a goal or aim in order to avoid "guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 62).

Identification was defined as the adoption of rules and regulations by an individual as valued by the individual in order to achieve goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Integration was defined as the assimilation of exterior regulations to the self, "into congruence with one's other values and needs" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 62).

Research Questions

1. Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?
2. How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?
3. What impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?
4. Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may provide researchers and practitioners with insights on the underlying educational motivations of prisoners or the recently incarcerated. These insights—when considered via self-determination theory—could allow correctional facilities and the state governments to consider how best to recruit prisoners to join correctional education programs. Even though this research focused on recently released individuals, the background research on PSCE programs is useful in interpreting the overall results. The research can provide benefit to PSCE program administrators, correctional officials, and halfway house directors who are seeking to motivate prisoners and the recently incarcerated to pursue college-level education.

Methodology

This research was a qualitative study of recently incarcerated individuals in Western Virginia. The semi-structured interviews lasted for twelve to fifteen minutes, and focused on the individual's educational experiences and motivations, before, during, and after their incarceration periods. Twelve individuals were interviewed; responses to the questions were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The interviewees were solicited via direct requests and advertisements in print and social media. They received a 15-dollar gift card for their time. The coding was based on the basic facets of self-determination theory: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Statements that fell into these categories (or their related subcategories) were used to craft a narrative of the challenges, obstacles, and ideals that propel a recently incarcerated student toward the goal of college-level education. Additionally, responses that show or indicate obstacles beyond these three categories were also coded and categorized.

Delimitations

As this research was qualitative, the data were not generalizable. Additionally, this research focuses on a very small contingent of recently released prisoners from a limited

geographical area in Virginia. Although the data are not generalizable, the hope is that this research added to the current body of research regarding the incarcerated or the recently incarcerated. Additionally, the use of self-determination theory in regards to the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals may provide new avenues for research regarding the processes in which recently incarcerated individuals “find” their educational motivation.

Prisons and jails within the researcher’s geographic location offered limited correctional education programs and few, if any, college-level coursework opportunities. Many of the programs focused on basic literacy, GED attainment, “soft skills,” and some basic trade education. As a result, interviewing or quantitatively exploring this population’s views on college-level education would have been problematic. Also, according to local officials, the local jail and prison populations have a large population of migrants who are functionally illiterate in their native languages. Other prison regulations, such as the banning of objects such as staples within the prison environment, prevented the researcher from providing an effective survey instrument to the incarcerated.

Finally, a quantitative-style inquiry would have also been incomplete, even if it focused on the very small number of prisoners who were ready to begin—and considering—college-level coursework. Prison and jail regulations in the area are such that a quantitative survey would be limited to one page, front and back, among other security considerations, which would constrict the data set that would be gathered.

Along with these considerations, access to incarcerated individuals is often severely restricted and, thus, a qualitative researcher would have difficulty spending enough time with an incarcerated individual to gain meaningful answers to their questions. By focusing the research

on released, recently incarcerated individuals, however, the researcher had ample time to network and to gather in-depth responses to their questions.

Conclusion

This research was designed to give future researchers additional avenues of inquiry into the field of the educational motivations of prisoners and the recently incarcerated. The results of this qualitative study can be used to determine if self-determination theory can further assist future researchers in understanding the underlying educational motivations of prisoners and the recently incarcerated. These findings suggest not only additional avenues of research but may also assist higher education institutions, correctional education programs, and rehabilitation facilities in more effectively recruiting the recently incarcerated to join their programs.

Additionally, the findings in this study provide a new method of approaching the field of education and the recently incarcerated. A review of the contemporary literature reveals that there is previous little research on the very unique population of those who are “in between;” released from prison, but not quite yet fully reintegrated into society. Even so, a survey of the literature reveals a series of patterns and trends that are useful in interpreting the results of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of rehabilitating prisoners in the United States is nearly as old as the prison system itself. The first formal penitentiary in the country, Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, had a “moral instructor” on its staff within the prison’s first decade (Kahan, 2008). Rehabilitation took many forms—mostly counseling and labor—until the 1960s, where these types of rehabilitation began to be perceived as a way of controlling prisoners rather than genuinely rehabilitating them (Irwin, 2005). By the 1970s, rehabilitation was widely considered to be unsuccessful by the public, politicians, and some academics (Gibbons & Rosecrance, 2005). This new attitude, coupled with the growth of violence in prisons, led to the near-abandonment of rehabilitative ideas by the 1980s (Irwin, 2005). However, with the increase in the prison population in the 1990s—and the concomitant increase in state budgets to house the prisoners—academics and correctional experts began to readdress rehabilitation (Cullen & Gendreau, 2001). Among those rehabilitative efforts was correctional education (Gehring & Wright, 2003). In spite of this new emphasis, education in prison has been pushed aside by the “just desserts” philosophy, in which prisons serve only to punish rather than reform (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2010, p. 291). Although research has indicated that recidivism rates drop among prisoners who participate in college-level correctional education (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2013; Vacca, 2004; Garmon, 2002), there has been little research on *why* prisoners enroll in correctional education programs.

This study, in particular, seeks to explore the educational motivation of prisoners using self-determination theory. It is thus important to understand self-determination theory as well as the history of postsecondary correctional education.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) was first postulated in 1985 by Deci and Ryan. Since its inception, the theory has been applied to various domains, including sports, economics, and education. Self-determination theory has a central tenet: that humans, as functioning organisms, have an inherent need, and thus movements toward, psychological growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). To be considered self-determinant, one must “engage in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing, and personal endorsement” (Wehmeyer, 2003, p. 15). These innate needs can be placed into three categories: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Competence is the confidence in one’s own abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). It is also the need to feel effective in one’s own environment, the “sense of effectance” when one attempts to interact with their world (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004, p. 25). Attaining appropriate feelings of competence, through either competition with others or with oneself, can be responsible for increased intrinsic motivations (Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, 2002).

Relatedness is the feeling of belonging to a social group or unit (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), as well as the act of feeling connected to and caring for other people (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Relatedness, too, is responsible for boosts in intrinsic motivations. For example, children who enjoy feelings of relatedness from family and friends often exhibit higher intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2003).

Autonomy is the ability to self-regulate one’s behaviors and actions while achieving goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Autonomy also manifests itself in one’s abilities to “act in accord with [one’s] integrated sense of self” (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Although some scholars have argued that the need for autonomy is not universal and confined to Western culture (Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003), many researchers argue that the desire for autonomy manifests itself as a basic human trait. The innate desire for autonomy, for example, provided “greater enjoyment” in “high

choice situations” (Ryan & Deci, 2006, p. 1576). Additionally, a study of Korean students revealed that they, too, enjoyed learning experiences in which autonomy was emphasized (Hyunghim, Reeve, Ryan, & Ahyoung, 2009).

Just as the three primary domains of SDT are related to one another, so too are they related to motivation. Every person experiences different motivations based on their perceived relationship to the three domains. As a result, individuals may experience motivation ranging on a scale from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. Ryan & Deci (2000b) defines intrinsic motivation as the performance of a job or task because one finds that it is enjoyable or done in pursuit of a goal or set of goals. Extrinsic motivation is the performance of a job or task with the expectation that doing so will lead to some sort of exterior reward, such as monetary gain or simply the acceptance by one’s peers (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Thus, individuals may find themselves more or less motivated to achieve particular goals based on the source of their motivations or the fulfillment of their domains (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). As a person moves from amotivation to intrinsic motivation levels, their interest and experience in a particular activity changes as well. For example, a person who is experiencing introjection may feel compelled by outside forces (such as employers or social pressure) to perform a particular task; thus, their emotions regarding the task will be negative (Koestner & Losier, 2002).

Further, when the need for psychological growth and fulfillment is stymied or unmet, symptoms such as substance abuse or the creation of a substitute ego or personality may occur (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). As a result, self-determination theory has been employed widely by researchers in studies surrounding the educational motivations of all levels of student, from elementary to secondary school as well as college. By examining some of this research conducted on college-level students, and specifically students such as adults and

underrepresented populations, this researcher hopes to better understand the role self-determination theory can play in understanding the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated.

Research on SDT and Student Motivations at the College Level

Self-determination theory has been used by researchers in an attempt to understand the motivations of first-year college students (Köseoğlu, 2013; Winn, Harley, Wilcox, & Pemberton, 2007). Researchers have focused on the varying levels of student perceptions of relatedness, competence, and autonomy as a potential key to understanding a variety of topics ranging from STEM education (Simon, Aulls, Dedic, Hubbard, & Hall, 2015), pedagogy (Russell, 2013), and retention (Pisarik, 2009; Tetrault, 2013), among many other subjects. Research regarding student motivational levels in coursework and on campus is also prevalent.

In the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), researchers have found that STEM coursework which enhances a male student's sense of autonomy can enhance that student's persistence (Simon, Aulls, Dedic, Hubbard, & Hall, 2015). However, persistence levels among females in the STEM fields was more affected by enhancing the female's sense of competence and self-efficacy (Simon, et al., 2015). Brooks and Young (2011) found that college-level learners benefitted from a mixture of extrinsic motivations, such as strict attendance policies, and assignments and policies which facilitated a student's autonomy. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, researchers found that first-year students who received low levels of autonomy support in their coursework were more likely to experience amotivation (Hill, 2013). Researchers also discovered that college learning communities may increase a student's feelings of relatedness, which may increase academic development (Beachboard, Beachboard, Li, & Adkison, 2011). Reeve (2002) found that students were most successful when

their teacher engaged in activities and strategies designed to assist them in developing autonomy. Köseoğlu (2013) found that first-year female college students were more likely to have a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations compared to first-year male college students, who were mostly extrinsically motivated.

Additional research found correlations in competence and autonomy between higher education students in on-campus and online business classes (Butz, Stupnisky, Peterson, & Majerus, 2014). Online students, however, noted significantly lowered levels of relatedness than their on-campus peers (Butz, Stupnisky, Peterson, & Majerus, 2014). Students who questioned the relevance of an assignment or course, who felt were given insufficient feedback, or who experienced communications issues with peers felt undermined in autonomy, competence, and relatedness, respectively (Hartnett, 2015). Autonomous course design, coupled with student feelings of autonomy, were predictors of success in online learning environments as well (Russell, 2013).

Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, and Abel (2013) found that students with reasons for attending college related to autonomy and competence were more likely to experience success in college. The same study, however, found that students who wished to attend college in order to enhance feelings of relatedness were inconclusive. Males who sought to attend college to form peer relationships often struggled; however, all students who sought to form relationships with faculty and staff were more successful (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). Conversely, student feelings of relatedness were found to be positively correlated with students who leave the college. In this research, students were more likely to transfer or leave a college if they were experiencing low levels of intrinsic motivation or amotivation (Tetreault, 2013).

SDT Applied to Specific Overlapping College-Level Populations

This researcher is unaware of any research utilizing SDT in interpreting the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals. However, there has been some research on the educational motivations of adult learners. O’Neill and Thomson (2013) found that low-skilled adult learners benefit from a mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and also require a nurturing and stable learning environment in order to succeed. Ochoa (2012) found, however, that there was no discernable difference in the motivations of first generation students when compared with other students. Additionally, Ochoa (2012) discovered that a student’s level of success in their first semester was a determinant in maintaining feelings of intrinsic motivation. This would result in the low-skilled adult learner being unable to “develop confidence” in their new academic environment (O’Neill & Thomson, 2013, p. 169). McCarthy (2015) applied the framework of SDT and worked with adult learners seeking to learn more about new technologies by teaching lessons which were designed to enhance their competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Woo and Huang (2013) found that adult learners enrolled in online degree programs were extrinsically motivated by short-term and long-term career goals, which may interfere with their intrinsic motivation and sense of autonomy. Research has also found that non-traditionally aged students tended to benefit far more from support from peers than traditionally aged students. The same study also found that feelings of self-efficacy were also highly important to non-traditionally aged students (Johnson, Taasoobshirazi, Clark, Howell, & Breen, 2016). Adult learners enrolled in intensive eight-week foreign language programs experienced better learning outcomes while engaged in coursework designed to enhance their autonomy; this, in turn, led to increased intrinsic motivation which manifested itself in higher grade point averages (O’Reilly, 2014).

Additionally, large percentages of incarcerated individuals come from underrepresented populations (Carson, 2014). In a 2013 United States Department of Justice Report, the total population of non-white prisoners (those identifying as Hispanic, African American, or Other) was over 60 percent (Carson, 2014). Therefore, research that examines the role of SDT in these specific populations may be useful in applying SDT to recently incarcerated individuals. In an exploration of the motivations of African Americans engaged in college-level coursework as well as their career persistence in a pre-health program, Tucker and Winsor (2013) determined that extrinsic motivations greatly outweighed intrinsic motivations among these students. Using SDT, researchers discovered that African American student athletes were more likely, rather than less likely, to have intrinsic motivation and focus on their career goals alongside their athletic goals (Harrison, Martin, & Fuller, 2015). Other cross-cultural research employing SDT includes a Dutch study of minority Moroccan and Turkish students; the researchers found that distant goal-setting provided motivation, but only if those future goals became intrinsic motivation to succeed (Andriessen, Phalet, & Lens, 2006).

Benefits of Postsecondary Correctional Education Programs

PSCE and Recidivism

Of the research areas that are most closely related to understanding the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated, the research about postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) programs may be the most relevant. A variety of research related to prisons and prison systems have been conducted in an effort to determine the effectiveness of postsecondary correctional education. Among the numerous articles and research is a study performed by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This study indicated that prisoners who enroll and attend a college-level course become four times less likely to engage in activity upon

release which would cause them to recidivate (Garmon, 2002). A meta-analysis of postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) efficacy revealed that any prison-based educational experience—be it vocational training, college courses, or literacy training—produced a 30 percent less chance of recidivism (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2013). Additionally, Vacca (2004), argued that prisoners who attend any correctional education program are not only less likely to be recidivists upon release, but also are less likely to be disruptive in the prison environment through violence and recalcitrance, thus saving prisons money on basic correctional procedures.

Tanguay (2014) conducted a one-year study of the New Hampshire corrections system, and found a marginally significant relationship between correctional education and lowered recidivism rates. Tanguay (2014) was unable to find a statistical correlation between the level of correctional education and lack of recidivism. A study conducted in Alabama indicated that numerous prisoners with 90 days left until their release had received little to no educational or vocational interaction, leading to “bleak” employment outlooks (Curtis, Derzis, Shippen, Musgrove, & Brigman, 2013, p. 48). Thomas (2012/2013) adds that prisoners learn lessons well beyond the classroom, including goal setting, improving peer and family relationships, increased social awareness, and increased self-esteem. In general, prisoners who do not receive some sort of educational experience while in prison struggle finding employment upon release and are therefore more likely to recidivate, indicating a direct correlation between PSCE programs, employment, and lessened risk of recidivism (Batiuk, 1997; Harlow, 2003; Vacca & Lattimore, 2004). Lahm (2009) discovered that a prisoner’s age had a negative correlation with prisoner misconduct, and that prisoners enrolled in PSCE programs were less likely to engage in prisoner misconduct (Lahm, 2009).

Stevens and Ward (1997) conducted a three-year longitudinal study in North Carolina and discovered that inmates who complete an associate's or baccalaureate degree were less likely to be recidivists when compared to inmates who did not complete an educational degree. Clark (1991) performed a one-year longitudinal study in New York and concluded that earning college degrees was negatively correlated with recidivism. Duguid, Hawkey, and Pawson (1996) focused not only degree completion, but also the number of credits completed for prisoners enrolled in a PSCE program. The results indicated that prisoners who complete two college courses were 50 percent less likely to become recidivists (Duguid et al., 1996).

PSCE and Educational Motivation

McKinney and Cotronea (2011) used end-of-course evaluations to determine how self-determination theory can be applied to PSCE programs. Incarcerated individuals who enjoyed higher levels of competence, relatedness, and autonomy were more likely to exhibit higher satisfaction with their courses. However, incarcerated individuals who were forced to complete specific programs or coursework were more likely to feel amotivated or ambivalent about the courses (McKinney & Contronea, 2011). Individuals who enjoyed some form of input in the design and execution of the course, however, reported growth in the three SDT domains (McKinney & Contronea, 2011).

As researchers have noted, many students who are enrolled in PSCE programs attend class for specific reasons, thus exposing PSCE researchers to the bias of self-selection. Prisoners who attend PSCE programs are more likely to be motivated to achieving their goals, including finding employment upon release from prison (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Knepper (1989) discovered that race, gender, and prior convictions were all determinants for enrollment in PSCE programs. Knepper (1989) used these data to profile the most prominent PSCE enrollee: older

white males with no prior convictions. Rose and Rose (2014) studied the role of gender of prisoners in the decision to pursue PSCE education. They discovered that gender alone was not a significant predictor of student enrollment. However, other factors, such as visitations from family members, prior income levels, and participation in community and peer groups, influenced PSCE enrollment and continued participation (Rose & Rose, 2014). Prisoners in a GED program also cited as obstacles their own lack of an education as well as an overall lack of timely and relevant course offerings (Dunn, 2014).

Mershon (2014) conducted research on African American males who had been incarcerated. The researcher found that many of the subjects wanted to pursue either skills that they felt would make them marketable (vocational education, for example), or would allow them to achieve a greater depth of understanding about their own actions, such as sociology or psychology. The skills learned in this classes, Mershon (2014) found, included growth in self-worth and soft skills such as patience and following instructions. However, the subjects also expressed fears in pursuing college-level education based on perceptions of a more rigorous academic environment that those they had experience previously. Sanchez (2015) examined the experiences of Spanish-speaking male ex-offenders; those subjects who rated highly in the domains of competence, relatedness, and autonomy were more likely to seek out housing, mental and health care, and educational opportunities, in spite of their language barrier. Sanchez (2015) also noted, however, that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations functioned alongside one another in motivating the subjects to pursue careers or education.

The United States Department of Education released a report which emphasized the role of the community college in the development and administration of PSCE programs. The report noted the community college's specific roles of open access and affordability ("Partnerships,"

2009). Additionally, the community college's regional focus, in which the institution draws from and services a specific regional area, also facilitates the community college's mission in PSCE programs ("Partnerships," 2009). As community colleges have become more prevalent in political discussions and debates, those institutions are now increasingly being examined as viable options for PSCE programs (Wright, 2001).

Along with prisoner successes, state governments also enjoy, through the implementation of PSCE programs, sometimes significant budgetary savings. Garmon (2002) estimated that, for every 100 students enrolled for two years in a PSCE program, the state government would save 900,000 dollars. In New York, the average yearly cost of incarceration is 54,000 dollars less than a curriculum that would provide someone with a bachelor's degree (Hudson Link, 2011). Fine, et al. (2001) also noted that the cost of a year of incarceration rivals that of the tuition of a private college's tuition, room, and board. The Rand Corporation conducted a meta-analysis of PSCE costs and determined that a state's administration of a PSCE program would "far exceed the break-even point in reducing the risk of reincarceration) (Davis, et al., 2013, p. 59).

In many states, the impact of the most recent recession has provided barriers to employment for released prisoners. Nally, Lockwood, and Ho (2011) conducted a study in Indiana that revealed that released prisoners faced ever-increasing levels of unemployment upon release, with the percentage of unemployed prisoners rising from 48 percent to almost 70 percent in three years. Nally, Lockwood, and Ho (2011) therefore argue that the reduction of recidivism is of paramount importance during a country or region's recession period. In an issue brief for the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Gorgol and Sponsler (2011) offer a three-pronged solution to the issue of ensuring lowered recidivism through gainful employment: first, states should offer increased financial assistance to certain categories of prisoners; second, states

should explore the use of internet and electronic delivery based instruction; third, states should align local workforce development needs with postsecondary correctional education programs. Interestingly, in a survey of one prison PSCE program, Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) found that those prisoners enrolled in academic programs reported doing so, primarily, to boost their self-esteem; prisoners enrolled in vocational training, however, did so in order to make themselves more attractive to potential employers upon release.

Obstacles to Success

Funding

Palmer (2012) noted that some of the primary obstacles to student success in PSCE programs is the lack of available funding for prisoners seeking educational opportunities. There is also a lack of educational materials available in prisons (Palmer, 2012). This lack of funding for PSCE programs started in 1994 with the passage of the Violent Crime Act, which removed Pell Grant funding opportunities for prisoners. Although other programs, including the Incarcerated Youth Offender Program (IYOP), were created to allow some prisoners to receive funding for their education, the financial assistance often came with numerous caveats and could only be described as labyrinthine in nature for many prisoners (Lichtenberger & Onyewu, 2005). Many prisoners cannot provide funds for their own education, as research has indicated that many prisoners come from impoverished backgrounds and have no or little access to financial resources (Messemer, 2003).

At the apex of Pell Grants awards for prisoners, 42 states offered PSCE programs, and, enrolled approximately eight percent of the total prison population (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). The collapse in PSCE enrollment after the removal of Pell Grants for prisoners was immediate: in the years after the abolishment of prisoner access to Pell Grant funding, states offering PSCE

programs dropped by half, to a total of 21, and the percentage of prisoners enrolled in PSCE programs dropped from eight percent to two percent overall (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). In 1994, when the Violent Crimes Act was signed by President Bill Clinton, over 350 PSCE programs ceased operation (Fine, et al., 2001). Since 1994, numerous prison systems have struggled with enrolling prisoners in PSCE programs, or have abandoned their programs entirely. These data indicated that Pell Grants were the primary, if not sole, source of college funding for many prisoners, as there were no laws preventing them from taking courses, only a new law forbidding the use of previously existing federal grant money to pay for those courses (Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor, 2000). Without the Pell Grants, prisoners must rely on an ever-shrinking and very narrow set of smaller federal government grant programs, such as the Incarcerated Individuals Program (IIP), which lost all of its federal support in 2012 (Zoukis, 2014). As prison populations increase, however, and as state governments experience their tax revenues decreasing, PSCE programs are being reexamined as a way to save money through the prevention of recidivism. Thus, the money spent on PSCE programs is outstripped by the money saved on keeping prisoners from returning to prisons for ever-lengthening sentences. Funding for PSCE programs has slowly increased to pre-cutback levels, which means that PSCE programs have essentially “lost” almost two decades of growth in funding (Palmer, 2012). As attendance in PSCE programs increases, and as states insist that more courses be made available, the relative lack of funding and current technology delivery systems keeps PSCE out of reach for those who want to enroll (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011).

Staffing and Administration

A series of interviews with community college administrators was conducted by Ellis, McFadden, and Colaric (2008) in order to understand the factors that influenced the creation and

maintenance of a female PSCE program in North Carolina. Coding and content analysis revealed that the leaders of the program were relatively ignorant of the program's history, as well as North Carolina PSCE programs in general. Ellis, et al (2008) noted the relative lack of PSCE research in general, which resulted in, perhaps, the lack of organizational structure within the program. This also led to an inconsistency in the application of policies and procedures for the program, including the relative lack of training of instructors to function in a PSCE environment. Researchers noted low communication between the college and the prison, which also led to a relative lack of oversight of the program (Ellis, McFadden & Colaric, 2008).

Additionally, many colleges and universities may struggle in finding professors and instructors willing to teach within the prisons, and, more so, within the often strict and sometimes archaic rule structures of the prisons themselves. One problem that many PSCE programs must face is the training and continued support of faculty who teach in PSCE programs. As Spaulding (2011) noted, many of these faculty are adjuncts, and are often alienated from both their "home" campus and also feel a sense of alienation when entering a correctional facility. Palmer (2012) also noted that many prisoners may be experiencing a fully structured educational system for the first time in their adult lives. Prisons could benefit from adopting some of the structure the United States military employs for their deployed students: ongoing and structured mentorships and flexible assignment deadlines may also benefit prisoners as they adapt to their educational settings (Palmer, 2012).

With the relative lack of federal monies coming into prisons via tuition dollars to offset administrative costs associated with PSCE programs, prisons and their partner colleges must work to find funds for the two costliest items in any PSCE budget: staff salaries and educational supplies. Allocating funds for these budget items remains the most daunting challenge, according

to a survey of over 30 PSCE program administrators (Holding, Dace, Schocken, & Ginsburg, 2010). Indeed, the simple act of training a faculty member to teach in a prison environment—before they even enter the classroom—can be financially draining on a PSCE budget. As a result, many higher education institutions provide minimal training, if any, and often rely on adjunct faculty to teach within a correctional facility (Spaulding, 2011). One method is to avoid the costs associated with salaries and supplies entirely: the Northeast Ohio Community Outreach Project (NEOCOP) relies on donations of textbooks and other supplies as well as volunteers who will teach inmates for free (Cleary, 2013). Lockard and Rankins-Robertson (2011) warned, however, that PSCE programs cannot be effective while relying on free materials and volunteerism; they additionally argue that these programs must “remain the domain of state provision, not voluntarism originating from academic campuses” (p. 29). Further, higher education institutions occupy a unique space in American society by not only functioning as educational institutions, but also as community service centers (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011).

Program-Specific Studies

According to Wheeldon (2011), there is little emphasis on study design, data gathering, deliverables, and communicating these findings to the public in PSCE research. Indeed, data-driven research on the subject seems scarce when compared to other research conducted in many other areas of education research. Although data indicates the relative success of programs as well as the prisoners enrolled or graduating from such programs, only a few have discussed the educational *structure* and success of the programs. Indeed, one of the few pieces of research on SDT and PSCE was conducted by McKinney and Cotronea (2011), who found that increasing a prisoner’s sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in a course correlated with more course evaluations that were positive. They thus theorized that programmatic content for PSCE

programs should focus on enhancing the incarcerated individual's motivations through these three domains (McKinney & Cotronea, 2011).

In an effort to understand the potential factors of a prisoner's successful completion or continued pursuit of PSCE, Meyer (2011) gathered data for two academic years from 400 students in five states. Although the group of students were traditionally aged, had their own sources of funding, and had completed a high school education or the equivalent, Meyer noticed several trends which would allow PSCE programs to perhaps better allocate their resources. Meyer (2011) noted that support staff and prison education had a negligible effect on student educational achievement and that student engagement was perhaps the biggest indicator of student success. Other findings from Meyer (2011) include that the availability of educational resources actually produced a negative correlation with student achievement. Additionally, Meyer and Randel (2013) conducted a study of the Correctional Education Association College of the Air program, which is specifically designed to meet the needs of postsecondary degree-seeking prisoners. The study, however, revealed that, after one year of enrollment, prisoner critical thinking metrics were lower and prisoners completed fewer credits than comparable control sites. These findings indicate the need for continued research and instructional design in this area.

Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, and Phillips (2005) focused specifically on Project PROVE, an educational support model for female ex-inmates. The PROVE program is intended to help female ex-inmates received job training and assist with finding job opportunities. The demographic data indicated that housing was essential to employment, and that sales, factory, and clerical work were the top employment fields for female graduates of the program. The successful completion of the program depended on housing needs, family issues, employability,

educational goals, and health issues. As a result, the data indicates that PROVE's primary function is to provide monetary support for female ex-offenders.

A separate study of a program designed for incarcerated fathers was similarly small, examining 110 respondents (Hobler, 2001) in Delaware. The overall goal of the program was to improve parenting skills for incarcerated males with one potential benefit being lowered recidivist rates among the population. The study discovered only that the inmates felt the program was helpful to them.

The purpose of the Hope Bridge Program at Pueblo Community College in Colorado is to address high recidivism rates and the lack of ex-offender employability. It also was designed to more successfully coordinate services (Fuentes, Rael, & Duncan, 2010). After one year in existence, data indicated that of the 108 participants, 95 successfully completed the program, and 47 of those earned certifications from Pueblo Community College. However, only 18 participants found employment via the Hope Bridge Program; 8 individuals recidivated. The researchers used this data to justify the continued existence of the program by comparing housing costs of inmates to the budgetary impact of the Hope initiative (Fuentes, et al, 2010).

In an examination of evidence-based practices (EBP) in correctional education systems, Veit-Hetletved (2014), discovered that 34 (out of 39 respondents) state department of corrections officials used evidence-based practices in their programs. Even though these officials used EBP in order to ensure program success and appropriate funding levels, many of the evaluation methods were different, especially between juvenile and adult populations. Thus, a prison in one state may have radically different protocols and functions than another prison in a bordering state. One possible reason for this large variation is that each prison has varying demographic

profiles and therefore may need differing educational practices in order for the program to succeed.

Borden, Richardson, and Meyer (2012) suggested a series of best practices based on research conducted by Meyer (2011). These best practices included conducting frequent needs assessments for students, working to create a safe and appropriate learning environment, and maintaining open communications between the vast array of stakeholders involved, including communication between the correctional facility and a college or university. Lockard and Rankins-Roberston (2011) argued that internet delivery of course content, especially in the arts, can be beneficial to all stakeholders; unfortunately, regulations for prisoner access to online materials vary widely from state to state. Linton (2011) notes that online access is “the missing essential element” for the success of PSCE programs. Additionally, the growing availability of online electronic resources and open educational resources (OERs), which can essentially function as “free” non-copyrighted or partially copyrighted texts and class materials, thus reducing the costs of the programs. This growing educational phenomenon may create “no cost/low cost” options for PSCE programs and correctional facilities struggling to balance their budgets (Linton, 2011, p. 74). These broad-based suggestions may provide the underlying strategic and structural philosophy for the establishment of new PSCE programs.

New Funding Models

Several states have enacted varying programs in an effort to more fully fund PSCE programs while also maintaining a stance of prisons being “punishment.” Texas, for example, actually has a separate school district, the Windham District, which receives funding as a part of the overall Texas public educational outlay each year. This plan allows the state to pay for one college-level course per semester for an individual inmate. Some of the drawbacks of this plan

includes an exceptionally slow progression through college coursework for the prisoner (Baust, et al, Date unavailable).

Kansas has implemented a funding model in which the state pays one-third of college costs for a qualified prisoner. The other two-thirds is split between a private charity and the prisoner's own finances. The inmate, however, can pursue as many classes as is allowed by the community college and their own funding priorities. Of course, as many prisoners come from impoverished backgrounds, the payment of even one-third of a college tuition cost can be daunting and provide a massive barrier to enrollment (Baust, et al, Date unavailable.)

Other funding models rely on private funds, including a reliance on private charity or the issuance of social impact bonds. Private charities often play a small role in the funding models for a number of PSCE programs: ironically, many charities receive money from a state government in the form of grants and awards, which they then give to local colleges to defray PSCE program costs (Messemer, 2003). Social impact bonds incorporate private funds into the PSCE program philosophy: a government entity agrees to pay a private company a certain amount of money (usually after the awarding of a sealed bid), and the company makes that money only if their program fulfills particular goals. This allows governments to fund PSCE programs without adopting the direct financial and political risks of doing so independently (Baliga, 2013). For example, if a company such as Goldman Sachs can provide evidence of a reduction in recidivism by 10 percent, the company will receive all of the money invested for the project (Ginn, 2013). Going above the 10 percent threshold will create a series of percentage returns above the initial investment up to \$2 million (Ginn, 2013). The social impact bond may create an ipso facto situation: the company produces a bid based on easily achievable parameters,

creating potentially lackluster programs designed solely for corporate profit rather than reduction of recidivism (Macdonald, 2013).

Conclusion

The benefits of postsecondary correctional education appear to be many: possibility for markedly reduced recidivism, increased budgetary savings, and a renewed emphasis on higher education institutions' missions to provide educational opportunities for a diverse population. Unfortunately, in spite of the large amount of research that supports these basic principles, the current state of postsecondary correctional education remains in disarray. Research employing portions of SDT has led some researchers to discover that the motivations, both intrinsic and extrinsic, of a recently incarcerated individual is often severely lacking (Johnson, 2013). Additionally, a recently incarcerated individual will often return to their previous environment, thus further damaging their motivations to pursue career paths (Johnson, 2013).

Without federal oversight, many state correctional facilities employ widely differing educational opportunities (if any), and those opportunities may shift from county line to county line or from state border to state border. Additionally, the primary obstacle that each program in the United States is funding for PSCE programs. With the lack of Pell Grant funding, states have been forced to seek an array of differing funding options, from a reliance on charity to an embrace of private industry and capitalistic ideal through social impact bonds.

PSCE face challenges also through political lassitude, as well as a relative lack of research in the area. Many colleges and universities do not have robust PSCE programs, and those higher education institutions that do offer such programs often rely on a small group of adjuncts who otherwise have no connection to the institution and often, little to no training on meeting the needs of the PSCE population.

Ultimately, however as prison populations continue to grow to near-exponential numbers, and states wrestle with methods to reduce their budgetary obligations toward their correctional systems, PSCE programs remain well within the ongoing discussion. As a result, PSCE programs, in spite of the lack of research in the discipline, continue to be located in the foreground of correctional education. One potential avenue of research that has been thus far under-examined is the educational motivations of prisoners or the recently incarcerated. This research, which focused on the recently incarcerated, should assist prisons and halfway houses with the means to assist prisoners and the recently incarcerated in finding suitable educational motivation and thus reduce recidivism.

This research was designed to explore the population of the recently incarcerated. Although there is scant research on the topic, related studies have assisted with the overarching design of this study. Self-determination theory, when coupled with some of the findings found in a survey of the contemporary research, provided the philosophical underpinning for this study.

METHODOLOGY

This researcher found a lack of qualitatively-based studies on postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) programs. This is most likely a result of researchers' limited access to prison populations. However, the data gathered from such research could be vital to understanding the role the incarcerated and the recently incarcerated play in their own educational decision-making and motivations.

Although quantitative data indicated that college-level education programs are positively correlated with recidivism, the overall enrollment in such programs in prisons remains low (Palmer, 2012; Wright, 2001; Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor, 2000). Limited finances for both prisons and prisoners stemming from the loss of availability for Pell Grants in 1994 is certainly a factor (Messemer, 2003). There is, however, such a low number of enrollees in these prisons that it is worth investigating the underlying educational motivations of the recently incarcerated and what obstacles and benefits they perceive come with pursuing a college-level education.

The research questions were:

1. Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?
2. How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?
3. What impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?
4. Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?

Research Design

This qualitative study attempted to discern the usefulness of self-determination theory in understanding the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated. By performing a qualitative analysis of a sample of recently incarcerated individuals, and exploring their educational backgrounds, their educational motivations in prison, and their current educational motivations, this researcher hoped to be able to determine how those who have been incarcerated “discover” their educational motivations. Additionally, by using the lens of self-determination theory, it became possible to understand how the domains of autonomy, relatedness, and competence factor into the decision to pursue—or not pursue—a college-level education.

Although it was possible to use a quantitative analysis to determine the efficacy of self-determination theory, there is a lack of qualitative research in the areas of self-determination theory and post-secondary correctional education. As Rossman and Rallis (2011), argued, qualitative research is a fundamental data gathering method that does not seek to achieve a quantifiable universal truth; rather, qualitative research provides varying and multiple, personalized perspectives about the world. As a result, qualitative research was not only unique in this particular field of research, but also gave the recently incarcerated an opportunity to share their own thoughts and opinions in a freer manner. Subjects were encouraged to expound on their reflections and thoughts through copious follow-up questions during the interviews. Many of the interviews lasted 15 minutes to a half an hour. In at least two cases, the subjects answered follow-up questions via email or phone. The results provided some additional perspective and depth to the small body of qualitative research that already exists. Future researchers in this area may also find qualitative analysis to be useful in assisting their own research, whether it be quantitative or qualitative in nature, by providing an extra dimension to the research.

Participants

The sample participants were considered “recently incarcerated” if they were in a prison or jail for longer than six months, and had been incarcerated within the last five years. The five-year time frame aligned with common research parameters used by the United States Bureau of Justice (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014). There were 12 respondents recruited from the geographic region of Western Virginia. This sample was chosen as the result of convenience sampling, as this was also where this researcher lived and worked. This area was also where this researcher had already established some contacts regarding corrections and college-level education. In this region of Western Virginia, there are three jails and two prisons. Although data on the jail population fluctuates daily, Virginia’s jail and prison system is frequently overcrowded (“Peculiar,” 2010). As a result, along with the presence of a halfway house and a diversion center, there is a relatively significant portion of the Western Virginia population which fit this researcher’s definition of “recently incarcerated.” Even so, this research depended on subjects who self-identified and self-selected to participate, or on the referral of those who knew potential interview subjects.

Instrumentation

This study involved a semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview was designed to allow the recently incarcerated to reflect on their educational motivations before, during, and after their incarceration periods. The survey questions were designed by the researcher and were not based on a previously created instrument.

Before the interview began, an interview protocol which informed the interviewee of the purpose, average length, and confidentiality of the study was provided to the interviewee alongside an informed consent statement. After the interviewee signed the informed consent

form and has agreed to be audio recorded, the interviewer asked these basic demographic data questions:

- What is your current age?
- How do you identify yourself racially?
- How many times have you been incarcerated?
- What total length of time for all incidents have you been incarcerated?
- How much time has passed since your most recent incarceration?

The respondents' answers to these questions allowed the researcher to better categorize the responses to the main interview questions. The responses also assisted the researcher in framing the responses using current quantitative research that has been conducted on these demographic factors as well (Knepper, 1989; Lahm, 2009; Rose & Rose, 2014).

Data Collection Procedures

Those who qualified for the interview process were solicited via direct requests, flyers, or local advertisements. The semi-structured interview was designed to ascertain how self-determination theory may function in regards to the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated. Interviews lasted 12 to 15 minutes, depending on the need for immediate follow-up questions or prompts. The questions and the follow-up questions were designed to elicit frank and open reflections from the interviewee that focused on their perceived educational motivation before, during, and after imprisonment. An interview protocol was developed. The five core questions, for the interview subjects who have expressed an interest in pursuing college-level education were:

- How would you describe your educational experience before your incarceration?
- Did you consider or think about pursuing college-level education while incarcerated?

- What do you feel are the major obstacles to your success in college-level coursework?
- What are your primary goals in seeking a college-level education?
- Did your incarceration impact your motivation to seek an education?

These questions were asked in order, save for an instance where a subject began speaking about a subject related to a particular question. In this instances, in order to keep the subject speaking about that particular topic, a question was moved. The researcher asked follow-up questions as needed. Each of the interviews required multiple follow-up questions as the researcher attempted to seek clarity in the responses provided.

The interviews were conducted primarily by phone or in person and were recorded for transcription purposes. Those who volunteered their time for the interview received a 15-dollar gift card to a local retail outlet. Three of the interviewees were asked follow-up questions for further clarification via e-mail. Follow-up questions were often asked during the interview in order to further clarify points and perspectives and also to redirect subjects. All of the interviews extended beyond the original five questions; many of the interviews contained 10 to 12 questions.

There were 12 interviewees. The interviewees each spent more than six months in a prison or jail facility and had been out of prison for five years or less. Of the 12 subjects, two were female and 10 were male. Four were African-American and 8 identified as white or Caucasian. The average age of the subject was 38 years old; the youngest was 25. The oldest subject was 56. The average length of incarceration was 10 years; the average time elapsed since their most recent release date was 10 months. Seven of the subjects had been released two months or less before the interview occurred.

The subjects were incarcerated, on average, a total of 4.75 times before the interview occurred. Many of the subjects were incarcerated for a variety of drug violations, including simple possession up to distribution.

Each of the subjects expressed some interest in pursuing higher education, either via trade school, community college, or university studies. Some had completed coursework or earned certifications before or during incarceration, others had registered for college, and others had pondered enrolling in college.

All of the interviewee responses were audio recorded. The responses were transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft Word software.

Confidentiality

All interviewees met individually with the researcher in an office, in a mutually-agreed upon meeting place, or via phone at times that were amenable to each. Because of the potential sensitivity of the topic, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. Names in the transcripts were replaced with pseudonyms or otherwise deleted where necessary.

This study was submitted to the institutional review board at Old Dominion University and all participants voluntarily signed an informed consent form.

Data Analysis

The researcher read the transcripts of the interview multiple times and searched for word patterns, topics, and ideas that may be categorized within self-determination theory's three primary motivational factors: relatedness, autonomy, and competence. The researcher used the MAXQDA software platform to assist in the coding process. The process of coding focused on different key words, ideas, and phrases that fit loosely into these categories, with potential subcategories where appropriate, such as amotivation, prior educational attitudes, or surveillance.

This content analysis first allowed the researcher to determine if self-determination theory could be applied to recently incarcerated students. Secondly, this process allowed the researcher to understand what themes and ideas affected the educational motivations of this unique population. The three categories of relatedness, autonomy, and competence featured subsets based on the schema of self-determination theory. For example, relatedness featured a set of different social schema such as a broadened sense of one's relationship with family members or society. These themes and statements were culled from each interview and placed into the appropriate categories. The researcher also examined the text to determine if there are other factors in the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated that exist outside of self-determination theory. After the responses and phrases were categorized, the researcher interpreted the results and determined that relatedness, competence, and autonomy, were theoretically viable in examining the role of SDT on the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated.

To further validate the results, a research team of three others who have completed advanced coursework in qualitative research examined the shared transcripts and examined the list of themes and the initial research coding results. The research team consisted of two doctoral students in community college leadership or higher education; each had completed advanced coursework in qualitative research. One of the team members held a doctorate in community college leadership; their dissertation was qualitative in design as well. The research team performed two distinct tasks. The first task was to examine the research questions in the context of the interview questions and to assist in understanding the relationship, if any, between the research questions and the interview questions. A small matrix was created to show the relationship between the interview and research questions. All but one of the research questions were tied to multiple interview questions.

Table 1

Questions Matrix

	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4
Interview Question 1			X	
Interview Question 2		X		X
Interview Question 3	X			
Interview Question 4	X			
Interview Question 5	X	X		X

The second task was to examine the transcripts and to review the researcher's coding for errors and to provide feedback. This process strengthened the internal validity and reliability of the research results. During the verification process, the research team examined the MAXQDA results, which featured quotations highlighted by the researcher. The research team was also provided with the self-determination theory definitions listed in Chapter One. They then examined the quotes and made corrections or provided suggestions for particular quotations that needed to be placed in different categories. Some of the quotations provided were also examined to see if they fit into any other possible education motivation theoretical framework. Much of the feedback resulted in corrections to the motivations process within the self-determination theory framework. Additionally, the research team suggested areas such as prior educational experiences and amotivation receive their own categorization outside of the self-determination framework theoretical structure.

In an effort to increase the overall trustworthiness of the final data set, two additional research team members were contacted. Each held a doctorate, one in research and assessment and the other in linguistics. One had written a dissertation on achievement goal orientation and

had familiarity with educational motivation theories. Both obtained their doctorates in 2007. Additionally, both have spent considerable time in higher education and private research companies as researchers. A codebook with the self-determination theory definitions listed in Chapter One and a subset of four transcripts were provided to each; neither had seen this researcher's comments or markings. In many instances, the findings of the individual researchers correlated across broadened categories. Each of them disagreed, primarily, on the levels of motivation (introjection, identification and integration) and the nuances involved. Follow-up discussions occurred in each case and many of the instances regarding the potential differences were resolved. After discussing their findings, one team member's level of agreement was around 88%; the other around 70%, for an initial overall inter-rater reliability of 79%.

Potential Biases

This researcher, in his role as a community college professor, has had some interactions previously with self-identified formerly incarcerated students. The researcher had maintained an interest in the history of the prison system and the rehabilitation of the prisoner in the United States. However, the researcher had not directly participated in any field, such as teaching courses in prisons or working specifically with rehabilitation processes, prior to this research.

Limitations

Qualitative data relies on the researcher's interpretation of comments and statements made by the subjects. As a result, the results may be open to differing interpretations by other scholars and practitioners. Those who agreed to be interviewed self-selected or volunteered and may have attempted to please the researcher or provide "better" answers to the questions. As this research is designed to allow the recently incarcerated to reflect on their experiences, there is a possibility that they may have misremembered certain events or otherwise embellished them.

Additionally, as Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) noted, those who are willing to participate in the research are also the most likely to pursue educational opportunities, which may skew the results.

Seven of the subjects were interviewed in the same facility where they regularly met their parole officers or their substance abuse counselors. The room, which was provided to the researcher, was the same room where the head of the residence facility worked. This may have caused the interviewees to attach a sense of authority to the interviewer and to be more reticent in sharing their true beliefs and ideas at times.

The geographic region, which is dominated primarily by jails and lower-security prisons, limited the generalizability, as many of the respondents were low-level offenders and those who have already recidivated repeatedly prior to the interviews. This population also all hold general equivalency diplomas and thus may be more inclined to pursue college-level education than those who do not hold a GED. Finally, as this is a qualitative study, there is no true generalizability; even so, the purpose of this research is to create potential new avenues and perspectives for study on a unique population.

Conclusion

This research was based on semi-structured interviews with the recently incarcerated. Twelve interviewees were solicited from the geographic location of Western Virginia and were given a small gift card for their times. The transcribed interviews were coded based on the major tenets of self-determination theory: competence, relatedness, and autonomy while also examining aspects of motivation. Coding the responses allowed the researcher to understand that self-determination theory can help guide further research into the various research fields of correctional education. Internal validity was strengthened through triangulation with a research team of two individuals with prior advanced qualitative coursework and experience.

This study revealed a number of ideas and patterns that supported the idea of self-determination theory as applied to the unique population of the recently incarcerated. Aspects of self-determination theory, such as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation as well as relatedness, autonomy, and competence, frequently appeared in the statements of those interviewed. The findings also revealed trends of amotivation and the potential impact of an individual's prior education on educational motivation.

RESULTS

In order to determine if self-determination theory could be applied to the recently incarcerated population, the researcher interviewed 12 people who have been incarcerated in the recent past. In order to qualify for the interview, the subject needed to have a high school diploma or equivalent and have served at least six months in jail. They also need to have been released from jail or prison within the past five years. Subjects did not need to express an interest in pursuing a college education before, during, or after their incarceration.

Demographics

Twelve people from the Western geographic location of Virginia were interviewed for this research. The subjects were solicited via social media, direct networking, and advertisements. Research ceased when saturation was reached. Each of the interviewees spent more than six months in jail or prison and had been out of prison for less than six months at the time of the interview. Two of the subjects were female and 10 were male. Four of the subjects identified themselves as African-American and 8 subjects identified themselves as white or Caucasian. The average of the subject was 38 years old; the range of the ages was 25-56 years old. The average length of incarceration was 10 years. The average time since their most recent release was 10 months; seven subjects had been released from jail or prison within the previous two months. All of the subjects served at least one of their prison terms in a federal penitentiary; some of the subjects had served multiple sentences, with some in state or local prisons or jails as well.

On average, the subjects had been incarcerated 4.75 times before the interview. Many of the subjects had been arrested and incarcerated multiple times for various drug violations, including simple possession up to distribution. The charges and the length of the sentences were

verified through contemporary media research and courts records searches. Table 2 describes the participants.

Table 2

Description of Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of Incarcerations	Total Years Incarcerated	Time Elapsed Since Most Recent Release
Sara	31	Female	Caucasian	1	4 years, 9 months	4 years
Kenny	27	Male	Caucasian	1	7 years	7 month
Michael	46	Male	Caucasian	3	10 years	10 months
Christine	37	Female	Caucasian	2	9 years, 4 months	3 years
Stephen	56	Male	Caucasian	1	15 years	5 years
Bill	37	Male	African American	18	17 years	2 months
Jim	28	Male	Caucasian	3	5 years, 6 months	3 weeks
Bob	25	Male	African-American	6	7 years	1 month
John	53	Male	Caucasian	6	18 years	1 month
Kristoph	55	Male	African American	3	12 years	1 month
Gordon	32	Male	Caucasian	10	10 years	1 month
Preston	34	Male	African American	3	7 years	2 months

Methodology

MAXQDA was used by the researcher to assist with sorting and interpreting comments made by the subjects. Comments that focused on motivations were then separated and examined. The comments were sorted into the domains of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Other aspects of self-determination theory were considered, including extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Additionally, questions about prior educational backgrounds and the subjects' educational experience were also examined in order to find results for the research questions. More unusual comments, such as those about religion or family support, were more closely examined and additional research was conducted in order to understand how these factors impacted educational motivation as well. Self-determination theory, however, provided the best available framework through which to interpret the results. For confidentiality purposes, the names of the subjects have been changed.

Research Questions

The guiding questions for this research included:

1. Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?
2. How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?
3. What impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?
4. Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?

Findings

Research Question 1

The primary research question was: *Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?*

The coded responses indicated that self-determination theory is indeed useful in deciphering the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated. The domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy form the underpinning for not only basic psychological need fulfillment, but also for an individual's movement along the spectrum of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

External regulation. External regulation is the state of compliance or reactance to a set of rules (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The external regulation is not internalized in any way. Interestingly, few subjects indicated any external regulation. Many of the comments had to do with seeking some form of self-support by playing along with the rules of a capitalist economy. The search for “wealth and material possessions, social recognition and fame, and image or attractiveness” are considered extrinsic goals (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 151). Statements that focused on wealth or the pursuit of external benefits appeared in 7 of the 12 interviews. Sara described “a good paying job” with “insurance,” the “things that matter” as the primary motivation for her education. Kenneth added that he was seeking a “career path” and sought to avoid the social stigma of “a dead-end job.” Bill admitted that “you got to have finances to survive,” while John hoped to get a “high-paying job.” For contrast, consider Jim's comment that he “used to be all about the money,” but now wants “a good job.” In this particular statement, which is echoed by several of the subjects, Jim has split the concepts of pursuing money with

what constitutes a “good” job. Presumably, a “good” job is one that provides not only money, but also some form of personal fulfillment that extends beyond the low-order needs of “high-paying” work. Michael essentially summarized his fears and the fears of many of the respondents when he said that he realized “I was getting older and I didn't want to retire one day and try to live off of the \$500 a month.” Compare this to statements from others such as John and Bill, who pursue education because they are things they “like” doing.

Introjection. Two of the subjects exhibited tendencies toward introjection, as they spoke almost exclusively about pursuing an education in order to avoid a particular punishment or to earn a boost to their ego (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Many of the subjects were still on parole or probation and thus were attempting to find ways to stay out of situations that could lead to re-incarceration.

When asked about pursuing a college career, Bob mentioned that his primary goal was simply seeking out something that would “occupy [his] time.” John, too, mentioned that he felt a benefit of enrolling in college would be to “keep [his] time occupied.” Gordon noted that college would “keep [him] busy” and that he would use it to “help my sobriety.”

Sara noted that her primary reason for enrolling in college was to change her career so as to avoid a low-wage job. “I want to be a CNA,” she said, “and not a cook.” She added that she wanted “to do better than [...] being a felon.” These comments reveal that Sara drew a clear line in social status that is attached to a particular career as well as her status as a recently incarcerated person. As a result, her goal in pursuing a CNA was partially in response to perceived sociocultural benefits and stigmas.

Identification. Each of the subjects displayed some identification. The knowledge that they needed to adopt a new set of rules and regulations in order to achieve their goals (Ryan &

Deci, 2000b) appeared in numerous statements. For many of the subjects, education was viewed as a part of a process which somehow plays a role in staying out of incarceration. However, when pressed to explain how college-level education would assist them in not recidivating, the subjects were unable to clearly explain why or how. In other words, they have been told that college education will help them, but they have not been told *how* it will help them. In a survey conducted on traditionally-aged students, researchers found that students with uncertain career aspirations often had low autonomy and self-efficacy (Guay, Senécal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003). For the population of the recently incarcerated, who seek to attain high degrees of autonomy, the mixture of high levels of autonomy with intrinsic motivation could be damaging, as it would “result in a high level of intrinsic motivation toward certain activities within a domain but will not promote an understanding of why it is personally important and meaningful to perform even the uninteresting activities that are central to a domain” (Koestner & Losier, 2002, p. 115).

Kristoph, for example, felt that “education [...] is the way out of bad situations.” Jim is pursuing a college education because a relative “told” him that an education would help him stay out of prison. Jim added that a fellow inmate who was in college gave him advice “make college work” was to “actually do the college and not get sidetracked by all the side work.” These sentiments seemed to appear most often when the subjects reflected on their prior incarcerations. In this case, the subjects were clearly in the process of adopting the rules of society—no doubt shared with them by families, friends, or counselors—and slowly internalizing them.

Additionally, some of the stated concerns among many of the subjects focused on issues of returning back to the same environment they came from. Bill, for example, stated that “[family and friends] automatically assume that you are back home and you’re going to go back to the same crap that you were in at first.” Jim noted that he was worried that he would have to

“go back” to a place where he led a “criminalistic lifestyle before,” adding that he was hoping to attend college because his old lifestyle was “just a lot of bullshit to deal with.” Others were reluctant to “burden” their family any further. Interestingly, the two subjects who worried about burdening their family—either financially or psychologically—were both the oldest males in the group: John, 53, and Stephen, 56. This may indicate a generational perspective, or simply a perspective borne from their specific crimes or prison sentences. Both of these sentiments are borne out in the literature, which indicates that a return back to one’s pre-incarceration environment may expose the recently incarcerated to “significant others” “that are engaging in criminal behaviors” (Phillips & Spencer, 2013, p. 127). In other words, those interviewed may find it simple to apply to a college in order to change their chance of recidivating, but may become uninterested in the basic details, such as budgeting time, studying, or taking developmental coursework in order to become successful.

Integration. A clear indicator that a subject had moved to internalizing their motivation was their usage of “the street” or “the street” in their discussion. By using this term to describe their prior environment—which they attributed, at least partially, as a reason for their incarcerations—they indicated that they had recognized that they were moving from one set of societal rules and standards to another. Here, motivation has been internalized, and the subjects indicated that their lives and motivations now had fully separated from their lives prior to their incarceration. They also seemed to recognize the split in pre-incarceration and post-incarceration lifestyles and desires. This shift in societal rules necessitated not only a movement in one’s actions and motivations, but in the understanding that the cultural norms were shifting around them. As Bob noted, one of his motivations is that he “would like to know there’s way more out there I can do instead of being on the streets.” Preston noted that, upon his release, he “could

have gone back to the streets,” but instead joined a rehabilitation program and enrolled in college.

Others viewed their incarcerations in a different light. Jim noted that as he visualized himself earning his college degree, that “I still made it and [...] I’m trying to be better than what I can be.” A part of Jim’s improvement is getting married and to have a family in a house he owns. Bob said that his third incarceration, which was much lengthier than the prior two incarcerations, gave him the “time to sit down and just realize all the things I was doing and all the things I weren’t doing [...] and it just gave me a whole different outlook on life.”

Relatedness. All of the respondents noted family and friends as playing an integral role in their desire to pursue a college-level education. Each of the subjects mentioned siblings, children, parents, or friends. Jim said that he “want[ed] to be able to support a family on my own without having to ask for a handout.” He later added he wanted to be able to provide for his future family and “be able to provide them without having to be incarcerated.” Kenny echoed those thoughts, wanting to provide for his future family “like [he] was provided for” when he was a child. Bill cited his mother as an inspiration, even though she was deceased: “Losing my mother while I was in the system made it clear that look, you got to buckle down and do something because you got to make her proud in some kind of way. That’s part of the motivation for me.” Other subjects mentioned future relationships as well. Jim said that he “got a girl right now I want to marry, I want a house with little rugrats running around all in the back yard, and I want to be able to provide for them without having to be incarcerated.”

Even though the subjects each noted that they received support, some of them, however, mentioned not wishing to “burden” their families with their college aspirations or their financial need. Research has indicated, however, that this attitude may be self-defeating. Appropriate

autonomy-supportive social support can indeed increase one's progress toward goals (Aspinwall, 2004).

Some, however, not only mentioned those particular groups, but also expanded their notions of relatedness to another level of social structure. Preston, for example, mentioned "activism" as a goal, noting that he "want[ed] to be the mediator between the criminal justice system and the societal system as far as helping" return incarcerated individuals back to society. Preston also added that he hoped to "change some votes or turn some keys to open some doors in areas where [reform] has been dormant." Preston's comments align with research conducted by Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, and Abel (2013), who theorized that

students of color, perhaps most especially those who have internalized more collectivist cultural orientations, may derive their most powerful motivation for succeeding in college based on a desire to give back to their home communities as a way to fill their relatedness needs. (p. 137)

Preston's comments indicated his desire to assist those who find themselves in the same predicaments he experienced. As a result, his motivation is derived from a broader sense of society and social justice to a greater degree than his motivations regarding more personalized ideals, such as income or family.

Interestingly, some respondents seemed aware of the potential social stigma of being a felon. Jim, when speaking of his college peers, said "It might be different when they look at me [...] they can see me as a kid that's actually doing something with his life, or they're going to say he's not worth my time," adding "that's a problem [...] if I'm honestly trying to change." Sara noted that she desired to "do better than what I've been. Being a felon." These statements are not

unusual; many recently released people feel that society will view them based on their past actions rather than their present attitudes (Buck, 2014).

Additionally, some of the subjects stated that the idea of going back to their original, pre-incarceration environment was daunting. Bob said that one of the challenges he would face would be “for people to take me seriously when I go back home” in regards to his desire to pursue a career. Kenny noted that the entire process of being incarcerated and then released was proving difficult to overcome, as it felt like “it was really just like a bad dream and you wake up six, seven years later” with the societal demand of “picking up where I left off.” Preston noted that he, too, “want[ed] to stay in this area, but because of the way this program is set up, but they make you go back to where you’re from.” Indeed, for many of the subjects, the idea of going “back” was worrisome. Sara stated several times that she did not want to “go back to that life” that led to her incarceration.

Competence. For some of the subjects, the competence was base-level concerns about their existing knowledge base. For others, the primary concern was their inability to balance pursuing a degree they enjoyed with their desire to pursue a particular career. Others noted that their motivation was key to their continued success. Kenny, who was enrolled in college and hoping to pursue a degree in computer science, was sentenced to seven years in prison. Upon his release, he realized that technology had passed him by, saying “I’ve [...] noticed a lot of big changes” adding that when he was first released from prison

[It] was a big learning curve, just technology in general. My sister gave me her old phone. It was an iPhone 5, and so I played with it the whole ride home. It was like seven hours and I’m still learning stuff today with it. So, even going through [college] education now, I’m learning how to use the computers again.

Others noted that mathematics was their weakest area of study. Gordon noted that, even while in school prior to his incarcerations, he has “probably forgot[ten] how to do algebra [and] fractions. Preston added that he “always struggled with algebra.”

Christine had a similar experience, noting that, upon re-enrolling in college, she had been away from educational environments for 15 years. She noted that she felt “worried” and asked herself “[A]m I still going to be able to do this, and do I still have the learning capacity that I had 15 years ago?” Jim echoed those feelings, but, as he had not yet enrolled in college, wondered if, after 16 years away from educational environments, he would still fit in. Noting that the “typical” college students aren’t the “type of people I’ve been around,” he wondered if the college campus itself would become an obstacle to his success.

For some, however, competence was displayed by a simple work ethic. Bill said that he felt confident in his success because “life happens, so you have to roll with the punches,” adding that he viewed education as a tool, a method of preparing himself “for the things that come your way.” Preston, who was worried about his mathematics classes, added that being “tenacious” was his best chance for success.

Preston was also the only subject interviewed who discussed his religious faith as a part of his views toward motivation. When reflecting on the number of classes he pursued while incarcerated, he said that “God sent for me to be in that class, then everything felt just like it is.” He later added, when discussing his current desires to pursue a bachelor’s degree, that he will do so, “God willing,” and that enrolling in college is not a matter of “thinking” about doing so; “I’m going to take them,” he said. In this particular instance, the role of religion plays a factor in Preston’s feelings of competence. As Baard (2002) argued, competence can be established through “growing in one’s own relationship with God” (p. 271). Preston’s assuredness over his

enrollment in college and his eventual success in doing so stems, in part, from the strength he has derived from his religion.

Others worried that they may not be able to find a degree path that would be both personally fulfilling while also ensuring that they could find a career. Several respondents mentioned that their career goals did not seem to match up with the degree programs in which they thought they would excel. Bob's past charges prevented him from pursuing a nursing degree, so he was uncertain of which degree to pursue. He added that he worried any degree "wouldn't be something I would enjoy doing, because I would have to think about [pursuing] something" that would lead to a degree that would increase his employability. Gordon, who desired a history degree based on his personal interests, noted that he "don't really know nothing," adding that "[w]hen I did work, I was a general laborer. I can pick up bricks or whatever." Still, Gordon said later of his college aspirations, "I know I can do it," before adding later, "I think I can do it."

Autonomy. As Stephen noted, "In the incarceration system, you're really limited [... I] didn't have a whole lot of options and choices." However, the stated desire for autonomy that many of the subjects shared may reveal that the subjects feel that they currently have little to no autonomy. For those who are currently engaged in low-wage work, their autonomy is lessened by the demands of the labor and the conditions of their employment. As Preston reflected on his current employment, he stated "I don't want to be here forever. This is not me." Other subjects were on parole or probation, and many basic life choices, such as travel, were under intense restriction or scrutiny. Few subjects, if any, spoke at length about their current autonomy; for them, earning autonomy was an abstract goal for the future. Jim stated, for example, that he looked to a time when he could

have my own. I've always done my own stuff, I always bought my own stuff, I've always taken care of myself. This time, I want to own my own business, something that cannot be taken away from me because of what I work for. I want to own my own house that the cops can't take because I got it legally.

For Jim and the other subjects, the lack of autonomy in the past has heightened the desire to achieve autonomy in the near future.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: *How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?* Of the 12 subjects interviewed, all but two mentioned careers or professions that were desirable primarily because they imagined the career would grant them near-total autonomy. Jim, who was hoping to pursue his heating, ventilation, and cooling (HVAC) license, stated "I want to have my own business;" Bob was pursuing his long-haul commercial driver's license (CDL). Kristoph, who was in the process of seeking out trade education in plumbing, specifically rejected a different career because he realized that

Sheet metal, you can't really do that work on your own. But plumbing, you can obtain a knowledge and work for yourself. [...] Sheet metal is mostly a manufacturing job where will you probably work for a company.

Kristoph later added that when he imagined his ideal career, it involved "working for yourself" because "you can do your own thing." Christine, who was pursuing an accounting degree, stated that the career was attractive to her because it was different from her current employment of working second shift at a factory. Christine said she hoped to start her own accounting business and "make my own hours."

Research Question 3

The design of the third research question was intended to determine *what impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?*

All of the respondents were asked to assess their prior educational experiences and to reflect on their success or lack of success in their educational backgrounds from elementary school through their first incarceration. Sara stated that she quit school and “did what I had to do to get by” in her homeschooling. Michael said that his education was “pretty non-existent.” Jim, who was expelled from middle school, ended up in an alternative program, moved out of the country, and then got a GED, stating that his educational motivation was “not” great “at all.” Bob’s experience, for example,

was good in the beginning. I think up until I really got exposed to the streets. It was at an early age. I think about 14. And that was when I really started selling drugs when I was 14. So, I ... I still was in school. I still continued to go to school, but I just wasn't serious about it from that point on. So, I say about maybe when I was 16, 15, or so, I did stop going to school. I dropped out. I wasn't dumb at all. I've always been a smart kid, but I was just so caught up in the streets, you know. I dropped out, when I was 15, but I later, I say when I was 18, I went back and got my diploma. I actually got my high school diploma when I was 18. Education ... it was good, you know, I had my rough patch. I still managed to complete school. I enrolled in college a few times, I say maybe about 2 times, but got locked up each time I enrolled, like, right before I was due to start, so I never got that experience as far as my education.

Like Bob, each of the subjects felt they were intelligent and did well in school until a certain point. Even for those who got their diploma while enrolled in high school, the subject could point

to a time when their interest in education slipped away, either as a result of drug use, family issues, or criminal behavior. As Gordon recalled, “I was motivated in school until I found drugs. I mean, I made good grades all the way until, I’d say until 13.” Kenneth had the same type of experience, and stated that “I was raised by my parents and they always preached education. But my mom definitely preached on getting a skill 'cause you always need skills. I was pretty good with school up until about my senior year. That's when I started smoking a lot of weed and stuff. And I just... It didn't really affect me but I started partying more and stuff like that.” John stated that he did well “all the way to 11th grade and then things was rough at home, so in 11th grade, I found a job, and I just ended up quitting school and taking a job. It was a full-time job.” Jim remembered that he was

taken out of middle school for fighting, so my mom was forced to home school me. Come high school, I missed the first two years because no school wanted to take me, because of all my discipline in middle school. By the time I got to a high school class, it was an alternative program. I did one year there, but I went from 9th grade to 11th grade in one year, because they let you move at your own pace. Then I went to South Korea in my 11th grade year, but I didn't graduate, but I got my GED instead when I turned 18.

Of the subjects interviewed, only two recalled a traditional high school experience: Stephen and Kristoph, who both went through secondary education without interruption and obtained their diplomas on time.

Each of these subjects, however, pursued or attempted to pursue educational opportunities while incarcerated. Additionally, each of these subjects are attending or wishing to attend college. Thus, in this particular group, there appeared to be no direct correlation between

past educational experiences and educational motivation—those who did and those who did not have positive or in-depth educational experiences both wanted to pursue college-level education. Subjects who experienced frequent or interrupted educational experiences throughout their early educational experiences were just as inclined to pursue college-level education as those whose educational paths were uninterrupted or suffered only minor interruptions.

However, the remainder of the respondents, even when their education was interrupted for long periods of time by their incarceration, viewed themselves and their prior education in a positive light. John “always liked school,” Gordon “was motivated in school,” and Kristoph and Preston described themselves as “average” and “good” students, respectively. Bill added that he was “a smart guy” who was now “more interested in learning than I was then.”

Research Question 4

The final research question was: *Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?* Many of the subjects pursued some form of education in prison, ranging from general education diploma (GED) programs to trade programs to college-level correspondence courses.

Subjects often focused on the state of being imprisoned in response to the questions. In other words, prison was viewed as a motivator because it was a lifestyle they had decided they no longer wished to experience. However, even for those who pursued education within the prison system, the very process of doing so was often difficult. As Michael said, “[t]hey don’t make it easy,” adding that, in general, “it’s hard to feel positive about things” in prison. Stephen added that, even though he did pursue education, it was difficult, adding that “prison is not a real pleasant place to be, and it’s not a real encouraging place to be.”

Christine wished to pursue multiple educational opportunities in prison, but found the requirements difficult:

it's discouraging because I was there for nine years, and I was only able to do educational stuff my last two years there. Because they wait until you're getting ready to get out before they allow you into those programs. So you sit almost idle for the first half of your sentence or the first three fourths of your sentence. And there are some things that you can get into as far as recreational stuff, but nothing that really you can bring home with you. I think that part was discouraging because I could have done a whole lot more. I had a lot of time. [...] I could have accomplished a whole lot more while I was there. And I probably could have almost finished what I needed to, to get home, and then I wouldn't have been working so hard now trying to maintain my home, and maintain my family, and maintain a job, and maintain school. I think that's the most discouraging part. I look back on it. I was like, "Wow, I wasted all those years because they just won't allow you into the stuff."

The intensive externally regulated environment of the prison system tended to become an amotivating experience, or otherwise sparked fears in the subjects of becoming amotivated. Of the 12 subjects, four specifically mentioned that the process of pursuing a college or trade education within the prison system was often an onerous task that discouraged them and others from pursuing opportunities.

Conclusion

Self-determination theory is useful in determining the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated. Coding and categorizing a variety of self-determination theory ideas and

phrases provides a clearer picture of how the recently incarcerated are arriving at their decision to pursue college-level coursework. The subjects interviewed were each in the process of moving from extrinsic to intrinsic motivations. Although the boundaries between introjection, identification, and integration are often unclear, the majority of the subjects appeared to be in the identification stage. Additionally, some of the subjects were still relying, in part, on external regulation in order to attain motivation. This external regulation manifested itself through capitalistic statements based on earning higher wages or gaining other benefits.

The three primary domains of self-determination theory: autonomy, relatedness, and competence, could also be applied to the data. The subjects each displayed a desire for increased autonomy in their educational aspirations. Each of the subjects also mentioned family or friends as a motivator or de-motivator for their college education. Additionally, feelings of competence or a lack of competence also appeared frequently in the data.

The wide array of experiences and motivations among a group of 12 individuals is possibly a facet of self-determination theory itself. As Mithaug (2003) noted, one basic aspect of self-determination theory is that “some [...] are more self-determined than others” (p. 128). In fact, it is possible to have a healthy mix of intrinsic motivations (for short-term goals) and identification (for long-term aspirations) (Koestner & Losier, 2002). Thus, a natural consequence or benefit of applying self-determination theory to any population, but especially a population in a particularly difficult and unique situation, is the large range of responses. In other words, if each of the subjects were placed on a scale of motivations, competence, relatedness, or autonomy, no two would share the same location on that scale.

The statements revealed a set of trends and ideas that are supported by self-determination theory. As a result, the data points toward new avenues of research. The data also indicated that

the recently incarcerated are, in particular, struggle with fully internalizing educational motivation. The findings also provided information that would assist higher education institutions with a set of programs or interventions designed with the recently incarcerated individual in mind.

INTERPRETATION

Although self-determination theory is one of the leading theories applied to educational motivation, there has been little research on non-normative populations. Much of the research featuring self-determination theory as a theoretical framework has focused instead on populations such as traditionally-aged college students or secondary education students.

Although there are numerous studies regarding the creation of postsecondary college education (PSCE) programs, as well as the effects of said programs on lowered recidivism rates, there has been little to no research on the educational motivations of people who are reentering society. These recently incarcerated people—defined here using the Federal Bureau of Prisons guidelines of those incarcerated for more than six months within the past five years—may wish to seek college-level education upon release. As a result, studying the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated would benefit not only corrections educational programs, but also higher education institutions as well.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand if self-determination theory could be applied to the population of the recently incarcerated. Twelve people who had been recently incarcerated were interviewed about their educational histories, aspirations, and motivations. The guiding questions for this research included:

1. Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?
2. How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?

3. What impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?
4. Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?

Subjects were solicited through third-party referrals, rehabilitation facilities within the researcher's geographic area, social media, and print advertisements. Interviews, which contained follow-up questions, lasted, on average, from 15 to 20 minutes long. Interviewees were given a \$15 gift card for completing the interview.

After coding their interviews, it became clear that self-determination theory could be applied to the population of the recently incarcerated. Almost all of the subjects frequently provided statements that were coded on the domains of self-determination theory (relatedness, competence, and autonomy) and on motivational levels, from amotivation to extrinsic to intrinsic motivations.

In addition, all of the subjects expressed a desire to pursue career paths that granted them almost total autonomy in their everyday interactions. The subjects often spoke of owning their own business, building their own home, or working as a journeyman in order to express their autonomy. Each of the subjects also spoke at length about different family members or peer groups that were influencing their decisions to pursue college-level education. The domain of relatedness, however, also had negative correlations: some of the subjects wished not to "burden" their families with their decisions, and one subject worried that he would be unable to belong either to his current peer group or his prospective peer group of traditionally-aged college students. All of the subjects also discussed their feelings of competence, and each had expressed confidence in their current or future college-level studies. Several of the subjects, however, worried about their proficiency in mathematics and technology.

The prison environment, as well as the conditions of their release, seemed to be a driver for the subjects' stated desires for autonomy. As the prison environment and its constrictive nature, along with the parole and rehabilitation facility policies, were often dictating the actions of the subjects on a regular basis, the subjects wished to increase their autonomy as a direct result. The desire for autonomy in future or perceived career paths were therefore not only viewed as a method for avoiding recidivism, but also for being able to reclaim one's autonomous nature.

There appeared to be little relationship between the subjects' prior educational experiences and their current desires to pursue college. Each of the subjects had felt they had done well in their prior educational experiences, from elementary to secondary school. Many of the subjects could also point to a particular time when their educational motivation lapsed, either as a result of criminal activity, family issues, or drug and substance abuse. However, in spite of their non-traditional paths to a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED), each of the subjects were confident about their abilities to pursue and attain college-level coursework. Many of the subjects were able to attain multiple vocational certifications while incarcerated.

Several of the subjects noted that their incarceration environment deadened or slowed their desires to pursue further education. The intensive external regulation of the prison environment lead to many respondents coping with amotivation. At least two of the subjects mentioned a specific prison regulation—that an incarcerated individual had to wait until the final two years of their sentence before being allowed to engage in educational opportunities—as particularly amotivational. Thus, it can be said that it is not only the prison environment, but also the rules and regulations concerning enrollment in college-level coursework, causes amotivation within prisoners.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question was: *Do the SDT domains of relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a bearing on the educational motivations of recently incarcerated individuals to pursue college-level coursework?*

As subjects appeared to be in the process of slowly internalizing their motivations, they were generally able to speak more clearly about their goals, both professional and educational. Those subjects who were still adopting an extrinsic viewpoint, or had simply moved to introjection were often unable to clearly state their goals or how they hoped to achieve their goals. For example, external motivations such as money and health insurance were primary drivers for many of the subjects; however, how they hoped to achieve those goals seemed to be vague. The movement from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation can be seen in the variety of responses to the questions. Different subjects were at different stages of the process of from merely accepting entirely extrinsic motivations to internalizing and integrating societal “values and needs” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 62). Once these values and needs are integrated, then an individual will pursue goals or idea while feeling “free from pressures, such as rewards or contingencies” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 29).

Motivation. Many of the subjects indicated that the baseline motivation of capitalism and the perceived benefits of a “good paying” or “high-paying” job. These are not what Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008) term “first order goals,” which fulfill the basis for an individual to pursue competence, relatedness, or autonomy (p. 150). Instead, these goals indicate purely external motivations, a compliance with the capitalistic need to pursue not only wealth, but enough of it to evoke emotions of security and stability. Indeed, some of the values of capitalistic pursuits are

in stark contrast to achieving competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Vansteenkiste, Ryan, & Deci, 2008). Some researchers have stated that self-determination theory cannot be fulfilled through materialistic pursuits or rewards (Kasser, 2002). Thus, it can be said that several of the subjects may be seeking out base rewards (or perceived rewards) in exchange for a loss of the fundamental components of intrinsic motivation. Those subjects who mentioned money and benefits as a primary reason for pursuing a particular career may still be in some of the earliest stages of financial understanding (Stone, 2014), and thus have additional work to do in progressing toward the fulfillment of their basic psychological needs. Those who are seeking financial stability are not unusual, however. As Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) noted, prisoners enrolled in PSCE vocational programs were more likely to view increased employment prospects as a primary motivator. However, the same study found that those students who pursue academic education are motivated by boosts to one's self-esteem (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Thus, a crude barometer can be applied to these results: as the recently incarcerated move from extrinsic motivators such as finances, their interests may also shift from vocational employment to more academic pursuits. Such a shift can be found in several of the subjects' responses: Preston, Christine, Kenneth, Sara, Bob, and Gordon have all decided to pursue academic education, even though they have vocational credentials. Although some stated that reasoning for pursuing academic education (for instance, to become a Certified Public Accountant or Licensed Nurse Practitioner) was the potential for increased pay and benefits, many of the above subjects were seeking to move away from social stigmas and to forge an autonomous identity. Therefore, the style of education pursued may also be a predictor of a recently incarcerated person's intrinsic motivation levels.

According to Fall (2014), motivation toward work that is based solely on compensation needs to fulfill three distinct conditions: a high level of effort results in desired performance; reaching that level of performance results in a reward; and the value of the reward itself. Among others, Preston stated his desire to not only work hard, but to achieve rewards as a result. Because Preston saw this process at work as a forklift operator, he appeared to derive motivation from the pursuit of further rewards:

With all these tools under my belt, I can say it has helped incline me in my endeavors, because now at work, I came in and started on like the 10.50 base pay rate, now I'm making 11.50, and in 60 days I've moved up the scale. Being that I had those tools and I was tenacious in my goals and telling people look, I don't want to be here forever, this is not me. I have knowledge of certain things. That's where I'm at. I got a raise Friday. Yeah, they gave me a raise, and it goes into effect on Monday. It comes with a little more responsibility but I'm always looking to propel myself forward.

Yet, if the on-the-job rewards that the subjects experienced or perceived do not continue, then it is highly possible that their "dissatisfaction then acts retroactively on future perceptions" of the job and the rewards (Fall, 2014, p. 202). In other words, the satisfaction that Preston felt at the time of the interview may no longer exist (and may change significantly to overall dissatisfaction) if the future rewards do not match his expectations. This situation may temporarily influence a subject's motivation, but may ultimately negate it as well. As a result, it may be beneficial to de-emphasize wages and benefits as the primary drivers for career choice.

Relatedness. A large amount of research employing self-determination theory has often been applied to normative populations, such as high school students or traditionally-aged college

students. This study shows, however, that the basic domains of self-determination theory—relatedness, autonomy, and competence—are indeed applicable to the decidedly non-traditional population of the recently incarcerated. Many statements about how society viewed the subjects seemed to stem from concerns about how they will be perceived by society, as well as the cultural pull or peer pressure. The subjects may feel pressure to return to their “old” lifestyle. For example, Jim noted the seismic shift in cultures from incarceration to college, and worried that his status as someone who was recently incarcerated would prevent him from being successful by providing peer pressure from two different segments of society:

But the problem with that is I'm going to see somebody around the way and they're going to look at me in a whole different area because they're like you're no longer who you are and you're just another college boy. And when I go to college it's different because the teachers will probably look into my background, the students are going to find out who I am and all that shit. That's just another punk that thinks he's going to do something with his life.

Jim's level of relatedness is both a strength and a weakness. Although he feels some support, both psychological and financial, from his uncle, his relationship with his environment leaves him “definitely” in between two distinct cultures while being a member of neither. Jim's concerns regarding his two microsystems, his current peers as well as his potential new peer group of traditional college students, indicated that there are possible deficiencies in his perceived acceptance. Acceptance “includes having access [...] in which significant others demonstrate consideration, understanding, and empathy for one's feelings, values, interest, and opinions” (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003, pp. 66-67).

However, the subjects who expressed these concerns have started to understand the societal processes in place and label them appropriately. Their sense of relatedness—for them, the idea that there are different groups of people with differing ideas and goals—is intact.

Competence. Each of the respondents felt differing degrees of competence and anticipated some struggles in attaining their future educational goals. Many of the subjects had pursued (or attempted to pursue) some form of education while incarcerated; as Manger, Eikeland, and Asbjørnsen (2013) noted, those who started education in prison were most likely already exhibiting some form of competence or feelings of confidence in their competence. The subjects, however, universally felt that they were competent in most areas of their knowledge, or their ability to successfully pursue an education. Within the domain of competence, subjects such as mathematics and technology were most frequently mentioned.

Autonomy. Often, subjects focused on their perceived autonomy in relationship to their career goals. There was a palpable desire among many of the subjects to pursue complete or near-complete autonomy in their professional lives. As McKinney and Cotronea (2011) reported, students enrolled in correctional education tend to be more successful in programs that foster feelings of individual autonomy. Therefore, the desire for autonomy in this research may be an extension of the innate desire to enhance autonomy while incarcerated.

This may be a direct result of having very few allowed autonomous actions within the “inherently coercive environment” of the prison system (Konrad, Völlm, & Weisstub, 2013, p. vi). Additionally, although there is scant research on the prison environment and feelings of autonomy, research regarding parental involvement in children has indicated that parents who are more controlling create children who have an external locus of causality (Grolnick & Apostoleris, 2002). Thus, it can be said that the prison system, which considers prisoners as

wards and highly regulates their every action, can severely reduce autonomous feelings. As Deci and Ryan (1985) noted, in order for an individual to become self-determining, there is an intrinsic need for people to feel in control of a situation; the lack of this sentiment can ultimately manifest themselves negatively: through poorer health, for example, or “impaired learning” (p. 37). Many of the desires of the subjects were on some sort of earning of future autonomy, primarily through running their own business. However, those who expressed some reluctance or uncertainty about their career path seemed to suffer from low self-efficacy or autonomy (Guay, Senécal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003). As a result, it is possible that the subjects who desire heightened autonomy in their career paths may be unsure of how to do so, and thus may be considering college as some sort of intangible method of doing so. Again, the trend among the subjects interviewed pointed toward the subjects knowing the *why* of going to college, but not the *how* of doing so.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: *How are an individual's educational motivations affected by the correctional environment?*

It can be argued that the subjects' desire to pursue careers that feature extensive autonomy are a direct reaction to spending large amounts of time in an environment in which they had no control; after all, the average time incarcerated for the subjects was 10 years. According to Stohr and Walsh (2015),

Autonomy for the inmate is also severely restricted in the rule-bound prison world. When, how, where, and with whom they live, eat, work, and play are all determined by the rules of the institution. Inmates can make few choices

regarding their lives while imprisoned, and all of those choices are shaped by their imprisonment. (116)

The renewed desire for autonomy sparked an interest in pursuing careers which hence promoted maximum autonomy. This desire for autonomy has manifested itself in prior research as well. As McKinney and Cotronea (2011) found, prisoners enrolled in PSCE coursework that promoted autonomy not only rated those courses more favorably, but also exhibited increased feelings of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. However, research has also shown that low-skilled adult learners are more likely to pursue credentialing such as general education diplomas because they place value in the credential, but not the work required in order to earn the credential (O'Connor & Thomson, 2013). Although all of the subjects in this study acquired their GED prior to the interview, it is worth noting that many of the subjects were unable to discern the work required to earn a particular degree, and thus, attain their goal of greater autonomy. It should also be noted that the acquisition of a GED does not necessarily indicate any particular desire on the part of the subject; many correctional programs and judicial interventions require the completion of high school equivalency (O'Connor & Thomson, 2013).

The desire for autonomy was strong in nearly all of the subjects, and each were pursuing distinctive educational paths that they not only in which they felt strongest, but which they also felt would grant immense autonomy. Therefore, the desire for running one's own business was paramount.

As the average length of incarceration for the subjects is 10 years, many of the subjects spent a decade of their lives stripped of the ability to engage in autonomous actions. Numerous prisoners, when asked why they enroll in PSCE, mention "the desire to own and operate a business upon release" (Winterfield, Coggeshall, Burke-Storer, Correa, & Tidd, 2009, p. 5).

There has been scant research on the subject of prisoners and autonomy, quite possibly because of the inherent conflict between the two ideas. However, research has indicated that pre-release interventions that emphasize autonomy are beneficial to recently released prisoners (Bowman, Lowrey, & Purser, 1997). Where inmates can make some progress in the domains of relatedness (forming or joining social, cultural, or religious circles) or competence (either through self-study or prison-organized coursework or employment), any sense of autonomy is nearly impossible to obtain. When one considers the lack of autonomy granted in many prison environments (including substance abuse rehabilitation facilities or parole requirements), the desire to pursue a career that is almost entirely autonomous is unsurprising.

Here, too, would expectancy-value theory (EVT) be useful in deciphering the motivations of the recently incarcerated. Expectancy-value theory is a framework which suggests that educational motivations are a result of one's beliefs toward the value the individual will receive at the conclusion of a particular task (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Given a plethora of options, the individual will choose the task that is perceived as containing the most value to them (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). An example would be the motivation among the subjects to earn more money; they feel that the work they are investing should be, or will be, met with the value of higher income and increased economic stability. In the population of recently incarcerated individuals, the choices are many, and many of the subjects expressed a particular distaste of one of the choices: returning to prison. The value, therefore, of the actions that led to incarceration dropped significantly as a result of the incarceration period, coupled with the growing self-determination and self-efficacy of the individual. Other choices obtained greater values, and the work required to attain those values, although sometimes indistinct in the minds of some of the subjects, was viewed in a more favorable light. Jim, for example, who was "all about the money, the clothes,

the jewelry” obtained from the drug trade when he was younger, most likely attached high value to social acceptance among peers and exhibitions of wealth. The work required to achieve that value was simple: to successfully deal drugs and “watch my back because I might get shot at.” The criminal actions and the danger from those actions were offset, in Jim’s youth, by the value he attached to social acceptance and wealth. Jim’s prison sentence, however, decreased the value he associated with the drug trade and eventually, he attached greater value to autonomy and the desire to live without criminal associations. The choice for Jim—to pursue an HVAC license—was eased not only by the value, but also the time required to achieve that credential. Jim’s uncle told him that “HVAC systems is a really good job, and I didn’t want to have to go to a four-year, seven-year college for that.” Jim’s statements provide a clear example of the potential role expectancy-value theory may play in interpreting the motivations of the recently incarcerated as well.

There is also overlap between EVT and SDT; for example, Eccles (1994) argued that feelings of competence are an indicator of value: those who feel competent in a particular field also attach value to that field. In a study of adolescents, researchers found that the completion of work-based learning programs led to greater feelings of autonomy and work hope (Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat, & Seltzer, 2010). It can be posited, then, that the subjects, even though only one actively attained employment in a field in which they earned a credential while incarcerated, benefited from PSCE programs. The attainment of certificates in subjects such as small engine repair or firefighting may not directly enhance an individual’s desires to pursue that field, but it may increase their self-determination.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: *What impact does an individual's past educational experiences have on their current educational motivation?*

Rose and Rose (2014) found that prior educational experience was a factor in determining which prisoners sought out education during their incarceration. There appeared to be no relationship between an individual's educational values or attitudes prior to incarceration and their educational values or attitudes after their most recent incarceration. However, Rose and Rose (2014) also revealed that peer groups and family relationships also influenced the educational motivations of PSCE students. Seven of the interviewees were a part of the same large peer group at a rehabilitation facility. Additionally, three others were enrolled in college and participated in programs designed to ease their path through college through career counseling and the acceptance of prior college credits. Each of the subjects spoke strongly of family relationships and support. It is possible, then, that belonging to a peer group or strong family unit negates prior educational experiences. Additionally, Knepper (1989) found that older white males with only one incarceration period were most likely to pursue PSCE. This too, was not the finding in this sample, which contained a mixture of gender, race, and ages.

Three of the subjects had negative or neutral educational experiences prior to their incarceration. In spite of the differing backgrounds and attitudes expressed toward their pre-incarceration education, each of the subjects expressed an interest in attending college-level coursework or were currently enrolled in college. Of those interviewed, seven of the subjects were enrolled in or expressed an interest in pursuing a traditional two-year or four-year college degree. The remaining five subjects were pursuing or in the process of pursuing a variety of vocational trades or certifications, including plumbing, welding, or electrical work. One of the subjects had earned certifications both inside and outside of the prison environment and was

pondering a certification in management, but was uncertain if they wanted to progress into that career. Additionally, each of them pursued some form of education in prison, ranging from general education diploma attainment to trade education to college-level coursework.

It can be argued, then, that this sample indicated that prior educational experience had no impact on one's educational motivations. If one agrees with McKinney and Cotroneo's (2011) belief that it is possible that educational programs are only successful if the subjects are genuinely invested and motivated in their own education, then prior educational experience becomes a moot point. Therefore, programs designed to boost one's feelings of self-determination would enhance their intrinsic motivation, leading, perhaps, to interest in college-level coursework. This means that the path that many correctional facilities take—forcing students to pursue a GED or otherwise offering limited vocational options—are attracting only those who have the motivation and the ability to be successful. Many of these subjects had unconventional paths to obtaining their high school diploma or general education diploma. Their education was often interrupted by incarceration, family issues, or drug and substance abuse. Even so, the expressed desire to improve oneself through college-level education was universal in this data.

Research Question 4

The final research question was: *Does the constrictive nature of the prison environment lead to amotivation?*

Those interviewed discussed the amotivational aspects of the penal system. Even those who engaged in regular coursework struggled with depression or amotivation. One major amotivator were the rules and regulations surrounding college-level coursework. As the courses

are only made available to those with longer sentences, several respondents noted that they had to “wait” for years in order to be considered for college-level coursework or trade education.

The motivation to take the coursework, however, seemed not to come from the prison itself in the form of peers, guards, or counselors, but rather from the individual. At some point in time, almost all of the subjects interviewed expressed the understanding that they no longer wanted to be incarcerated. As Christine stated,

I think for the most part it was I knew that I needed to come out. I was already gonna have odds against me, being a convicted felon and being out of the work force for so long because my last sentence was the nine-year sentence. I did the four months when I was 18. But this last time, I got hit really hard. But I knew that I needed to take the opportunities that were given to me while I was there. Because even though I had a high school diploma and stuff like that, the odds were already against me.

Therefore, even though the prison environment was an amotivator, the individual found the motivation by looking to the period that would occur *after* incarceration, and attempting to find ways to avoid reincarceration upon release. Christine stated that she simply “lost touch with” who she was before incarceration; her PSCE was an attempt to change her own behaviors and outlook.

Each of the subjects could be placed on the scale of moving from external regulation to integration. As humans are rather fluid and impermanent in their motivations, this should not be surprising. However, many of the research subjects seemed to struggle with moving toward integration. Additionally, as McKinney and Contronea (2011) posited, “[p]erhaps programming [...] will be unsuccessful unless the offenders themselves are ready to invest in learning the

material” (pp. 175-176). In other words, it is possible that the design or enactment of a specific educational program is entirely secondary to the motivational levels of those who seek to pursue college-level education. As each of the subjects were at varying levels of motivation, it is entirely possible that only some of them will find success in achieving, even partially, their educational goals.

The evidence showed that they were able to discuss motivations for college-level coursework, but seemed to be unable to explain exactly how it would prevent them from being incarcerated. In other words, the subject’s friends, family, or prison staff were able to communicate the need for education as important in avoiding recidivism, but have not successfully communicated the underlying reasons for doing so. Several subjects also noted anxiety in balancing the need for economic stability with the desire to find a career which would keep them entertained or intellectually engaged.

Each of the subjects noted that friends and family were considered vital for their long-term success in pursuing their education. Some of the subjects, however, were concerned that their desires for pursuing additional education would be a “burden” to family members. Other subjects, however, had embraced not only familial relatedness, but had started to ponder societal issues as a whole, and how they would be able to impact the issues that interested them the most.

Many of the subjects expressed emotions regarding their competence as well. Although some noted their struggles with mathematics or technology, each believed that they had the potential to overcome any obstacles that could prevent them from pursuing their college coursework. The feelings of competence were essentially based on the idea that they had the stamina and intellect to be able to pursue college-level coursework. Another consideration in the

domain of competence is examining the role religion plays in an individual's feelings of competence. There appears to be very little research on religion and self-determination.

Implications for Practice

Although many of the subjects earned an abundance of certifications—ranging from firefighting to management to welding to plumbing—during their incarceration, few of them were actually pursuing employment in those areas. Like many traditional college students, the recently incarcerated appeared to struggle to reach a happy balance between desired income and lifestyle versus pursuing a field where they would find some enjoyment or stimulation. Thus, higher education institutions should consider special training for counselors and academic advisers who interact with the recently incarcerated. Such an adviser would be able to administer personality tests that would assist the recently incarcerated individual in determining which path to pursue. Research has shown that the Meyers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) were strong predictors of the types of majors a student would eventually pursue (Pulver & Kelly, 2008). Undecided students, or students who simply are unaware of their potential career paths, may feel lower decision-making efficacy in regards to their careers, as well as experiencing negative thoughts toward career options (Bullock-Yowell, McConnell, & Schedin, 2014). Wigfield and Eccles (1992) posited that, given a range of choices, people will automatically pursue the choice through which they can most likely attain value while maintaining their self-determination. However, the perception of academic choices may be more limited in the recently incarcerated than in the traditionally-aged college student. People can only pursue choices that they are aware exist. Thus, it would be useful for career counselors to educate the recently incarcerated on possible career paths of which they may not be aware. As many of the subjects indicated uncertainty about their career paths, or only held somewhat vague

notions of their career options (beyond options they are already employed in), it would benefit higher education institutions to specifically administer personality tests alongside intensive advising, which would assist the recently incarcerated with finding appropriate credentialing programs.

This research has indicated that many of the subjects enrolled in classes while incarcerated that had little to no bearing on their own career desires and aspirations. Of the 12 subjects interviewed, only three were using or planning to use the knowledge they learned in PSCE programs. Sara, for example, “passed the state test” for firefighting, but never pursued the career; she is instead enrolled in college to study accounting. Preston, however, earned numerous certifications, including small engine repair and firefighting, because he “wanted to have more tools under my belt, because you never know what life’s going to throw at you.” Preston’s certification as a forklift driver—also earned while incarcerated—allowed him to gain employment in driving a forklift upon release. Even so, Preston expressed a desire to pursue other careers after attending college.

Research has shown that students benefit from autonomy-supportive counseling and teaching (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). Academic advisers could encourage students to pursue extracurricular or other on-campus activities designed to promote autonomy and competence as well (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). Other potential methods would include early-semester apprenticeships or intensive career counseling. Additionally, educators should adopt autonomy-supporting teaching methods, which include listening more, encouraging conversation, and allocating time for independent work (Reeve, 2002). This “student-driven experience” enhances student autonomy (Brooks & Young, 2011, p. 56). Although such methods are not particularly less effective for other populations, the recently incarcerated appear to thrive

on boosts to one's autonomy. Kristoph fondly recalled a plumbing teacher who was "a real motivator, who had a "good attitude toward learning." The teacher also told Kristoph that he "had a good attitude toward pursuing that type of field and I should stick with it and pursue it more." Kristoph also recalled that his teacher "cheered for you just learning." Kristoph's plumbing instructor, then, directly influenced Kristoph's feelings of autonomy simply by encouraging his students while also having conversations with them.

Finances also provided obstacles for many of the subjects, both while incarcerated and during their most recent release period. Thus, those who wish to attend college have to navigate the sometimes onerous financial aid process, which becomes even more difficult for those who have been incarcerated. For example, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) bases its calculations on the prior two years' worth of an individual's tax returns. However, those who have been incarcerated face a new set of questions, as some have received no income during their incarceration, nor filed taxes. Additionally, some of the subjects held jobs within the prison system, and thus can report a small income, but may be lacking the appropriate paperwork to file taxes. By allowing Pell Grants to once more be made available to those who are incarcerated, at least some of the uncertainty would be answered. At the very least, a prisoner who enrolls in a college-level course would be able to make connections with college personnel such as academic advisers or professors who could assist them in understanding the paperwork involved in the often convoluted process of seeking funds for higher education. Students have been shown to feel or exhibit a greater sense of autonomy when paired with autonomy-supportive academic advisers (Sheldon, Garton, Orr, & Smith, 2015); best practices in future training for academic advisers, then, should incorporate autonomy-supportive tactics.

Several of the respondents, both on and off the record, noted that they were beholden to a state policy. The policy required the individual, after completing their counseling at a substance abuse facility, to return to their original region prior to their incarceration. In other words, an individual who was arrested in the Tidewater region would, upon completing their incarceration in a different and then their counseling in the Shenandoah Valley, would be forced to return to the Tidewater region. The subjects worried that reintroducing them to the environment in which they were arrested was likely to increase their chances of recidivating, or to expose them to organization from their former friends. However, while at the substance abuse counseling facility, many of the subjects pursued jobs, networked, formed relationships with other formerly incarcerated individuals, and pondered taking college coursework. Yet, at the end of their 90-day stint, they would be removed from what they perceived as the more beneficial environment. It may be useful for government entities to relax this policy so that those who wish to stay in a particular area in order to improve themselves may do so. By relaxing this policy, the benefits of the “new” environment in which they find themselves may increase their chances at a successful rehabilitation.

While the federal government has launched a pilot study called the “Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot Program,” it remains relatively small, with only 12,000 people enrolled (“Launches,” 2015). A widened reintroduction of Pell Grants for the incarcerated would allow those who have been incarcerated to accelerate their educational path while also relieving some of the uncertainty regarding their financial situation. In lieu of any increase in the enrollment of the Pilot Program, however, higher education institutions and state and local governments should consider increasing financial counseling and assistance as an overall part of rehabilitation services.

Not surprisingly, the recently incarcerated were in different stages of internalizing external motivators. Many of the interviewees appeared to know that they should pursue college-level education, but seemed to be unable to decipher *why* they should do so. When pressed to explain why they wished to pursue college, many of the interviewees fell back on vague generalizations coupled with a profound desire to avoid future incarceration. Administrators at higher education institutions, therefore, should consider creating a special motivation-based orientation class. Additionally, incarceration facilities should consider further counseling (either psychological or career-based) that assists the inmate/student with internalizing their motivation.

In the domain of relatedness, subjects should receive some form of peer or family counseling that focuses on the desire to pursue college-level education. Such a discussion may help subjects to avoid immediately assuming that pursuing their education would be a burden to family members. The counseling may also focus on the basics of pursuing a college-level education, from choosing a college to applying for financial aid to simply being a good student and forming appropriate educational habits. Higher education institution administrators should consider creating and promoting an orientation class for their college that is specifically designed for the recently incarcerated. Doing so would allow those who enroll in such a class to seek out additional peer support. A peer support network would also ameliorate concerns that some of the respondents shared regarding the stark relief between their own prior experiences and the presumed experiences of the traditionally aged college student.

For a few respondents, there was tangible concerns about the stigma surrounding being a felon. This creates several concerns, including the possibility that the higher education institution may not admit someone with a criminal background to their programs. In an effort to these concern, New York University has reconfigured its Common Application to prevent

automatically rejecting those applicants with a criminal background for violent offenses. Instead, New York University admissions counselors now make decisions to admit prospective students before being made aware of any criminal background; only then do they consider the applicant's criminal history (Martinez, 2006). The widespread adoption of such a system would help alleviate some of the concerns of the recently incarcerated. The stigma—perceived or real—of being a convicted felon would become a secondary question for higher education institutions.

Finally, several of the respondents noted perceived weaknesses in mathematics or technology skill levels, or both. Feelings of competence is a “crucial aspect” in an adult learner's development of self-determination, and thus, overall retention and success in the pursuit of their goals (O'Connor & Thomson, 2013, p. 167). Weaknesses in math and technology, for example, stems primarily from the length of time spent in the penitentiary. While one is incarcerated, their math skills may weaken and the technology used for communication and computing—to which the incarcerated individual will have little or no access—will advance and become more complex. Many four-year colleges and universities have eschewed base-level developmental courses in mathematics, thus, academic advisers or those who are counseling the recently incarcerated should consider encouraging the individual to pursue community-based tutoring programs or community colleges in order to pursue developmental-level education. Those who need developmental education assistance may also be in a mindset of pursuing education at an accelerated pace. Academic advisers should take into consideration this mindset when working with some of the recently incarcerated and assist them in understanding that their long-term goals are dependent on successful completion of building basic competence in these fundamental areas.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should be more expansive, with interview subjects coming from a variety of locations. Many of these subjects were enrolled or expressed a desire to enroll in college-level education, and as such, the results may be skewed. Adding additional subjects who have been recently incarcerated but have no desire to pursue college-level education may dramatically change the results of this study. Recent research has indicated, for example, that a large majority (79%) of incarcerated individuals in Alabama had not attained a GED (Curtis, et al., 2013). For those who have not attained a GED or received vocational training, the path toward college-level studies is more difficult. It is possible, then, that there are three distinct sub-populations within the prison environment: those who have received their GED and who wish to pursue college-level education, those who were forced to receive their GED, and those who have not pursued, or have not been able to pursue a GED. The educational motivations of each of these groups may be exceptionally different.

Several of the interviewees, before the start of the interview, were interested to know if the researcher had any criminal background. Such statements led the researcher to believe that additional subjects may be found or encouraged to participate simply by using a contact that has been within the penal system. Seeking out counselors or mentors may provide a more useful and positive point of entry for this often transient population.

Those who study self-determination theory may also benefit from this research, as it appears to open new avenues of inquiry. For example, an examination of the role addiction plays in one's perceived autonomy was a subject that arose in at least two of these interviews. Several respondents also stated that the prison environment itself was amotivating, which may indicate that amotivation is a learned behavior, or that it is directly influenced by one's environment. Additionally, religion, which has been relatively overlooked in self-determination theory

research, was cited by at least one subject as the primary source of their perceived competence. In other words, they felt able to achieve particular goals and objectives because a perceived higher power would assist them or otherwise reduce obstacles to their success. Thus, the role of religion in one's sense of competence may also provide new insights into self-determination theory as well. These new ideas and insights, when researched, may provide even more depth and nuance to the field.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine if self-determination theory, so often applied to normative populations, could also encompass more at-risk, non-normative populations. The results indicate that self-determination not only applies to the recently incarcerated population, but also provides new insights into the thought processes of a recently incarcerated person. Indeed, these new insights can lead to a new field or method of research for this population, and the results can also provide new tactics and techniques for approaching educational motivation among the incarcerated and the recently incarcerated.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Self-determination theory and the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated.

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. This project will be conducted via phone or in particular offices of interviewees.

RESEARCHER

Jason Barr is an Old Dominion University doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

There has been little to no research performed on the educational motivations of the recently incarcerated. This project seeks to determine if self-determination theory would be useful in understanding the processes in which someone who has recently been incarcerated decides to pursue college-level education.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

There is no exclusionary criteria for this document.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of loss of anonymity. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by removing identifiers. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is a shared copy of the final research. Others may benefit by examining any conference delivery or published reports which discuss the issue, which has thus far been relatively unexplored.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet they recognize that your participation may pose some inconveniences.

The researchers will provide a \$15-dollar gift card (through mail or e-mail) to a retail store for your time upon completion of the interview.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researchers will take reasonable to keep private information, such transcripts or provided documentation, confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Dennis Gregory at dgregory@odu.edu or phone 757-683-3702 or Dr. Petros Katsioloudis, the current IRB chair at 757-683-6309 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-4305 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Jason Barr, (540) 421-6041

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Petros Katsioloudis, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-4305, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
Parent / Legally Authorized Representative's Printed Name & Signature (If applicable)	Date
Witness' Printed Name & Signature (if Applicable)	Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date
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APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Jason Barr. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. During this interview I will ask you about your experiences with faculty governance. The purpose is to get your perceptions of your experiences working under a faculty governance system. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

Audio Recorder Instructions

If it is okay with you, I will be audio-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all comments without any reference to individuals.

Consent Form Instructions

(Verify the Consent Form is signed.)

Before we get started, you have read and signed to the consent form. Do you have any questions regarding the project?

Initial Demographic Questions

- What is your current age?
- How do you identify yourself racially?
- How many times have you been incarcerated?
- What total length of time for all incidents have you been incarcerated?
- How much time has passed since your most recent incarceration?

Interview Questions

- How would you describe your educational experience before your incarceration?
- Did you consider or think about pursuing college-level education while incarcerated?
- What do you feel are the major obstacles to your success in college-level coursework?
- What are your primary goals in seeking a college-level education?
- Did your incarceration impact your motivation to seek an education?

VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Community College Leadership, **Old Dominion University**, Dec. 2016

M.A., English, **James Madison University**, May 2008

M.A.T., Education, **James Madison University**, December 2005

B.A. in English, **James Madison University**, May 2001

Minor: Technical and Scientific Communication

Concentration: Creative Writing

A.A.S. in Liberal Studies, **Blue Ridge Community College**, December 1999

PUBLICATIONS

“The Plus 50 Population in Higher Education: Triumphs and Challenges.” *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 64:1, 51-55.

“Risk Management and Crisis Planning on College Campuses,” with Tiffany Ray. *Campus Safety and Student Development*, Fall 2014.

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