

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IN PRISON

By

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES
May 2009
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

-Albert Einstein

I still remember my first (and only) visit to a prison. In the summer of 2007 I went on a trip with my fellow classmates to the Deep South. The sociology course was intended to provide an insight into social stratification – past and present – in the South and included a visit to Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi. The chance to visit this prison was the moment I had been waiting for throughout the trip. I cannot pinpoint what sparked my interest in the criminal justice system, though I suspect it was the mystery behind what occurs within a prison cell. For a country whose priorities are in trying to disclose the personal matters of celebrities' lives, where people watched Paris Hilton's pornography video online and followed former President Clinton's affair on the evening news, the events that occur in the confines of a prison seemed to be remarkably ignored. Yet now was my moment to uncover the deepest and darkest secrets that characterize our criminal justice system.

As we approached Parchman Penitentiary the bus passed a sign that directed drivers to never stop for hitchhikers: I knew we were getting close. My anticipation was quickly justified as the bus stopped at the large gates which mark the beginning to the prison grounds. I was finally going to experience a real prison. I was going to meet real criminals.

We were, in fact, able to meet current prisoners and learn about their experiences in prison; when the opportunity arose, I was slightly nervous to finally come in contact with two men who were convicted of crimes serious enough to receive over ten years in a Mississippi prison.

What a let down.

After such buildup, after the anticipation of meeting men hardened by their wrongful acts, the only disturbing element to this experience was the prison itself – not the people who were the victims of such an environment. I could not find a reason to justify why these men were sentenced to a life of revolting food, forced labor, no identification – basically, slavery – when I was free to live my life as I had wished. The prisoners whom I encountered did, indeed, commit crimes. Yet I left the prison feeling frustrated and confused. I could not grapple with the fact that the prisoners I had met felt like normal, average people.

This marked the beginning to my interest in prisons.

The journey on which I have embarked to understand the criminal justice system and those who unfortunately take part has been long, continuous, and eye-opening. The previous experience which I just outlined, coupled with my ardent interest in religion, influenced my decision to pursue this topic for my master's thesis. It is fascinating to uncover why humans act as we do, which past experiences shape our current reality, and what we need to create meaning in our lives. This project explores time in prison through the lens of a myriad diversity of voices, and how individuals have come to discover meaning in their experiences through spirituality.

The United States' prison system is anything but flawless. In a recent *Parade* article, Senator Jim Webb stressed the necessity to change our corrections system due

to the current disproportionate representation of poor, minority males, dismal re-entry programs, and ineffective crime deterrent. The United States houses 25% of the world's currently imprisoned population, equaling an incarceration rate five times as large as the worldwide average. As Webb blatantly states, "Either we are home to the most evil people on earth or we are doing something different – and vastly counterproductive. Obviously the answer is the latter."¹

Religion and spirituality can be juxtaposed to evil. Spirituality provides individuals a sense of meaning in their lives and a recipe to live morally. An individual's faith often provides values, standards, and norms that are expected to be embraced. Spirituality often produces a framework which governs how decisions are made and reality is conceived. While some adhere to moral standards which are enforced through rigid religious forces, others follow a more fluid, dynamic set of morals which still govern one's choices. Regardless of its title, everyone has a belief system that they refer to for guidance. Prison is likely the last place one would refer to when considering morals and values. The prison system is meant to punish individuals for breaking the moral standards our society has embraced, so most individuals assume that prisoners find difficulty in upholding a moral framework. In fact, many church volunteers enter prison grounds each year to enlighten prisoners and turn them toward a higher being, but what exactly do they find? Are prisoners hardened by their current lifestyle and unfair situation, or do they accept that perhaps God will provide a positive change to their lives?

¹ Jim Webb, "Why We Must Fix Our Prisons." *Parade*, 29 March 2009.

Regardless of the injustice in our prison system, the reality remains the same: over two million individuals are currently incarcerated.² There have been various studies on prisons and inmates that attempt to uncover what exactly it means to live without freedom or identity, yet it would be impossible to understand such a reality without actually living it. Though the injustice found in our corrections system persists, this paper will instead focus on an exploration of various individuals who have come in contact with the prison system. It will explain why people turn to spirituality for guidance and the role that it serves when people live in dire circumstances. By understanding an individual's history and current reality, we can then comprehend why spirituality becomes such a powerful tool for incarcerated individuals. I argue that an individual's spiritual transformation that results from the prison experience is contingent on his or her sense of security, social influences, and personal identity.

The second chapter of this thesis outlines the essential historical, sociological, and academic topics which pertain to spiritual experience in prison. This chapter contains a thorough review of the prison system, religion, and the interplay between the two subjects in relation to incarceration and recidivism. Chapter 3 provides a glimpse into the lives of four men who wrote about their experiences in prison and the spiritual change that they underwent. This information will serve to frame the research presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 includes the data and methods behind the research conducted through interviews at the Darryl Hunt Project, and Chapter 5 describes and explains the results from the eight interviews with individuals who were previously imprisoned. Lastly, Chapter 6 will provide a discussion of the results.

² __. "Prison Statistics: Summary Findings." Bureau of Justice Statistics. March 31 2009. Internet source viewed April 26 2009 < <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm> >

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spirituality has always influenced modes of punishment, and there has recently been considerable research pertaining to the relationship between spirituality and prisoners. Unfortunately the depth that accompanies such studies is scarce because spirituality is a difficult subject to study empirically – particularly with a vulnerable population. In order to understand the many facets of this topic, this section discusses both punishment and spirituality individually before examining the interplay between the two subjects. Thus, before reviewing research on the relationship between spirituality and incarceration, it is first important to gain a rudimentary knowledge of the prison system and a sociological perspective on punishment and religion. After a preliminary overview of punishment, spirituality, and subsequent studies, Chapter 3 will present four examples of men who published their own account of spiritual transformation within prison walls.

History of punishment and the prison system

Before prisons were implemented to deter crime, individuals were punished by use of public execution or other corporal punishment; these forms of torture originated in the Bible. Such torture was legally used in England and France because “it revealed the truth and showed the workings of power through the body of the condemned.”

According to Michel Foucault, philosopher and author of *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, public forms of punishment were also used to reaffirm the power of the King. Torture practices continued until the eighteenth century, when reformers from the Enlightenment period sought to alter the system of punishment. When reformers

attempted to install change in the system, they were not concerned about the welfare of the convicts but requested a system that would “make power operate more efficiently.” Through the reformation, punishment moved from a system of tormenting the prisoner’s body to an attempt to reform each individual life and to cleanse the soul.³

Punishment in the United States closely resembled England and France; in 1786 the Quakers in Pennsylvania were also successful in abolishing torture tactics such as “death, mutilation and the whip.” Subsequently, convicts were confined to a cell by day and night and were organized by the crime they had committed; this marked the beginning to the penitentiary system. Solitary confinement without labor became a typical means of punishment, and this was meant to create “reformation by reflection” for the prisoner.⁴ While physical punishment was initially justified through the Bible, so too was solitary confinement: “time spent in labor and reflection was to equip the offender with a spiritual coat of armor, capable of deflecting the most virulent of moral diseases.”⁵ While this concept failed to reform prisoners – and resulted in high rates of recidivism – the state legislatures believed the problem stemmed from an overcrowding of prisons, and more money was spent to expand the prison system. Yet withholding labor from prisoners resulted in another sort of occupation: “their sole occupation consisted in mutual corruption” by conversing through prison walls.⁶

³ Michael Edwards. *SparkNote on Discipline and Punish*. 22 Feb. 2009
<<http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/disciplinepunish>>.

⁴ Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis Tocqueville. *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application in France*. Carbondale (Southern Illinois University Press) 1964. p. 39

⁵ Todd R. Clear, Patricia Hardyman, Bruce Stout, Karol Lucken, and Harry R. Dammer. “The Value of Religion in Prison: An Inmate Perspective.” *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 16 (2000): 53-74. p. 54

⁶ Beaumont and Tocqueville, p. 44.

At this time two forms of prisons were established. Both installed solitary confinement without labor, yet one type of prison allowed two prisoners to one cell. Pennsylvania, again, proved itself to be the most radical state, as it adopted a new system at the Cherry Hill Prison in 1825. Prisoners were isolated by day and night, yet labor was introduced into the prison system. While nine states adopted this new system, fifteen others at the time remained loyal to the old method.⁷ The old prison system, by contrast, was described as dirty, overcrowded, and inefficient:

*The crowding of prisoners, confusion of crimes, ages, and sometimes sexes, mixture of indicted and convicted prisoners, of criminals and debtors, guilty persons and witnesses; considerable mortality; frequent escapes; absence of all discipline, no silence which leads the criminals to reflection; no labor which accustoms them to an honest mode of subsistence; conversations which corrupt; idleness that depraves...*⁸

By reviewing the characteristics that embodied the old prisons, one can better understand the aims of the new. The reformed prisons intended to separate prisoners from one another in order to minimize corruption yet also provide labor during the day to keep prisoners out of trouble. It is important to note that at this time, the only prisons which underwent reform were those intended for prisoners with an extended sentence of at least two years of incarceration. Prisons used for a short duration of imprisonment experienced little reform in the early 1800s.

The penitentiary system in the United States was meant solely for felons who would be incarcerated for at least two years; all other inmates who were convicted for misdemeanors were never sentenced to jail. Two distinct forms of penitentiaries existed in the nineteenth century: the Auburn and the Philadelphia system. Both systems isolated prisoners because it was believed that communication between convicts “renders their moral reformation impossible... every time that convicts are put together,

⁷ Beaumont and Tocqueville, p. 48.

⁸ Beaumont and Tocqueville, p. 48.

there exists necessarily a fatal influence of some upon others, because, in the association of the wicked, it is not the less guilty who act upon the more criminal, but the more depraved who influence those who are less so.”⁹ Labor was introduced in prisons in order to teach prisoners “how to live honestly... [and] their detention, expensive for society if they remain idle, becomes less burdensome if they labor.” The Auburn prison, otherwise known as the congregate system, relied on both solitude and labor; the Philadelphia system held to the same principles but with a different approach. The Auburn prison allowed prisoners to work together while they labored, yet the Philadelphia system never allowed prisoners to work as a community.¹⁰ Since the induction of both types of penitentiary systems, the United States has generally adopted the Auburn system and allows prisoners to labor together. European countries, by contrast, have maintained the Philadelphia structure.¹¹

From 1925-1975, the prison population only represented a small portion of the overall American population, and throughout these years the rate of imprisonment remained constant – hovering around 110 inmates per 100,000 citizens. The imprisonment rate refers to individuals who have been sentenced for over one year in a federal or state prison. This rate quickly jumped to 476 inmates per 100,000 residents at the mark of the twenty-first century, and it continues to climb.¹² From 2000 to 2007 the rate of imprisonment jumped from 476 to 506 residents per 100,000.¹³

⁹ Beaumont and Tocqueville, p. 55.

¹⁰ Beaumont and Tocqueville, p. 58.

¹¹ Ted Conover. *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. New York (Vintage) 2001. pp. 173-174.

¹² Bert Useem and Anne Morrison Piehl. *Prison State: The Challenge of Mass Incarceration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. pp. 1-10

¹³ West, Heather C. and William J. Sabol. /Prisoners in 2007/. Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2008: 1-26).

The United States now incarcerates more individuals than any other country in the world. Currently over two million people are imprisoned in this country, which signifies a five-hundred percent increase over the last thirty years. Between 2000 and 2006 alone, the federal prison population increased at an annual rate of 5.3% and state prison populations rose 1.7%. While Florida, Kentucky and Arizona experienced the highest jump in number of prisoners, Texas, Florida, California and New York – called the “Big Four” – currently comprise the majority of people in prison, probation and parole.¹⁴ Approximately ten percent of African-American males aged 25-29 were incarcerated in 2007, compared to fewer than two percent of Caucasian males of equal age. In 2006, African-Americans made up 40% of the prison population, though they only constitute 13% of the overall population.¹⁵ That said, African-American males experience a 32% chance of serving time in prison, compared to 6% for Caucasian males. Furthermore, 82% of convicts in state prisons were convicted of non-violent crimes in 2004. Drug offenses have arguably contributed the most to the increased prison population: in 2004, 25% of inmates were drug offenders, compared to 10% in 1983.¹⁶ North Carolina follows this trend, as over 23% of its prisoners are imprisoned for a drug-related crime.¹⁷ Interestingly, those interviewed at the Darryl Hunt Project parallel these statistics, as all are African-American and habitual offenders, and most have not committed a violent crime. Furthermore, several interviewees hold drug convictions.

¹⁴ Todd R. Clear, George F. Cole and Michael D. Reisig. *American Corrections: 8th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009. pp. 13-15.

¹⁵ _____. “Black or African-American Population for the United States by Region, 2002.” Infoplease. Internet source viewed 29 March 2009 < <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0884133.html> >

¹⁶ *The Sentencing Project*. Internet source viewed 20 February 2009 <<http://www.sentencingproject.org/IssueAreaHome.aspx?IssueID=2>>

¹⁷ “North Carolina Department of Correction Statistics.” *North Carolina Department of Correction*. Internet source viewed 31 March 2009 < <http://www.doc.state.nc.us/> >

In 2004 it was estimated that 65% of all prisoners have less than a high school education and only 12% have experienced some college or more. The Comprehensive Crime Act of 1994 banned all federal funding to prisoners for post-secondary education. Furthermore, Pell grants for tuition assistance were eliminated for anyone with a criminal history.¹⁸ This consideration enables one to better understand the educational attainment of most prisoners and the difficulty in pursuing further education during and after incarceration.

Of the millions of incarcerated individuals, nearly 650,000 will return to mainstream American society this year alone. Of those who re-enter society, 7 in 10 are expected to return to prison within three years.¹⁹ The steep number of convicts facing re-entry highlights the substantial issue surrounding incarceration for prisoners – both during *and* after prison.

Our current prison system is a product of early forms of punishment and the formation of the penitentiary. The original torture tactics taken from the Bible were reformed to cleanse prisoners' souls and prepare them to re-enter society. The prison system today incarcerates minority and low-income communities at a disproportionate rate and just a small percentage of prisoners are guilty of violent crimes – yet overcrowded prisons with repulsive conditions still prevail as the leading treatment to cleanse prisoners of their “immoral” acts. Considering the high rate of recidivism, the prison system continues to reaffirm that the current mode of punishment fails to help prisoners change their actions. It also proves that only a certain type of crime and

¹⁸ Michael G. Santos. *About Prison*. Belmont, CA (Thompson Wadsworth) 2004.

¹⁹ “Issues.” *The Sentencing Project*. Internet Source viewed March 14, 2009
<<http://www.sentencingproject.org>>

criminal result in imprisonment, as the prison system does not fairly represent the demographics of American society.

Sociology of crime, punishment and the prison system

There are several different theoretical explanations that attempt to articulate why individuals decide to commit a crime. The theory emphasized in this paper, that spiritual transformation varies according to an individual's current lifestyle, social ties and personal identity stems from a broader theory related to crime called *control theory*. The two major forms of control theory are *containment theory* and *social bond theory*. Containment theory was created by Walter Reckless and proposes that an individual's involvement in crime depends on two levels: the level of social organization and the level of the individual's personality. According to Reckless, a good self-concept – a positive life outlook and concern for family and/or friends – is vital to preventing deviance. Reckless also states that social pressures such as unemployment, family conflict, and racism combined with social pulls contribute to deviance. Social pulls include deviant individuals, criminal subcultures, and negative propaganda.²⁰

Travis Hirschi created social control theory by stating four primary factors that determine whether an individual will conform to societal standards or deviate. The first factor is one's attachment to parents, friends, and school. Second, Hirschi believed that individuals must fear punishment and commit to conformity. Third, involvement in conventional activities – such as sports and school programs – and attachment to positive role models deters one from deviance. The last factor that Hirschi outlined was a belief in strong values. When one upholds strong beliefs about right and wrong, he is

²⁰ Piers Beirne and James W. Messerschmidt. *Criminology*. Los Angeles (Roxbury Publishing Company) 2006. pp. 361-362.

less likely to deviate. While each of these factors is important, they are also interrelated; for example, individuals who find strong attachments to their peers and family are more likely to uphold strong values.²¹

Control theory stems from early functionalists – sociologists who view society as a living organism, each part with an important duty to the functioning of the whole. Of the famous functionalists, Emile Durkheim is the most well known. Durkheim also provides an insightful glimpse into the sociologist’s perspective on punishment. In his book *Punishment and Culture*, Philip Smith discusses the Durkheimian perspective on the meaning behind imprisonment. Smith believes that prisons serve to limit “cultural pollution” – to eliminate “the disgusting and unruly, effecting the decontamination of the spiritually and morally offensive, banishing evil, and enforcing cultural classifications and boundaries by shutting down liminal possibilities.” Durkheim’s writings on the profane – the common or mundane aspects of life – and the sacred – that which is set apart from the everyday – also parallels this idea: punishment represents a spiritual activity because it is beyond human control. The electric chair (using mysterious electric power) and the mystery within prison walls serve as examples of this sacred component to society. Lastly, because of the great meaning which can be found in punishment, a sort of collective representation has been established surrounding castigation.²² Society as a whole understands punishment and its role.

Michel Foucault also views punishment and the prison system in a sociological framework. For Foucault, the prison system – like the rest of society – is governed by power and knowledge. He claims that power and punishment are formed by knowledge which classifies individuals in society. According to Foucault, the prison is integrally

²¹ Beirne and Messerschmidt, pp. 362-364.

²² Philip Smith. *Punishment and Culture*. Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 2008. pp. 169-173.

connected to society by a network of power; the prison normalizes a “carceral city” that exists in society.²³ He believes that the prison system is so integrated in communities that a society would not function without it. In this sense, unlike Durkheim, Foucault would argue that punishment becomes a profane aspect of society because it is normal and expected.

Apart from the many perspectives on the role of punishment itself, some sociologists have attempted to explain prison life and how inmates adjust to the culture that prisons foster. According to Donald Clemmer, prisoners must integrate the norms and values found in prison into their new lives – a concept coined *prisonization*. This new culture requires that prisoners remain fervently loyal to fellow inmates and disloyal to prison employees. According to Clemmer, the longer one experiences prison the more prisonized he becomes. While some sociologists argue that the values and norms found in prison actually come from the prisoners before they are incarcerated, all would agree that prisons foster a particular culture which is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid.²⁴

Erving Goffman’s discussion of *total institutions* parallels the concept of prisonization. Total institutions are places where individuals are cut-off from mainstream society and a new, enclosed life is led; the ideology of the new place is adopted and members are often separated from family and friends, which leaves them in a vulnerable position to be greatly influenced and threatened.²⁵ The ideas behind prisonization and total institutions make reference to the difficulty in enduring the

²³ Michael Edwards. *SparkNote on Discipline and Punish*. 22 Feb. 2009
<<http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/disciplinepunish>>.

²⁴ Melvina T. Sumter. “Prisoners, Prison, and Religion: Religion and Adjustment to Prison.” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* (2002): 127-159.

²⁵ David M. Newman. *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life*. Thousand Oaks (Pine Forge Press) 2004. p. 135

prison experience and transforming one's life. After understanding how challenging it is to adjust to prison, one can better appreciate the difficulty in successfully re-entering society after incarceration.

However valid Durkheim's perspective may appear, it fails to explain the unjust proportion of minority populations found in contemporary prisons. Foucault's explanation of how power categorizes people points to the reality that prisons have attracted certain populations more than others since their inception. Furthermore, while prisonization surely occurs, it must be re-emphasized that distinct communities are overrepresented in prison – and most of these communities experience difficulties beyond the average American public. Thus, one must note that individuals facing a prison sentence often bring with them difficulties from the outside world.

Sociology of religion

When sociologists study religion, they most often begin with the claim that religion is a social construct. Belief systems are often created by the community in which one is engaged and familiar with. Consequently, they realize that one's religious identity is largely shaped by his/her background: where s/he lives; the time period in which s/he lives; and his/her family influences, for example. As one's background shapes his/her religious affiliation, one's religion also determines how s/he chooses to live and those with whom s/he chooses to interact. As Zuckerman succinctly states, "sociologists are fascinated by the affects of religion on people's sex lives, political views, national identities, economic activities, eating habits, career choices, marital relations, and, conversely, how such things affect people's religious identities."²⁶ In other words,

²⁶ Phil Zuckerman. *Invitation to the Sociology of Religion*. New York (Routledge) 2003. p. 25

religion seems to affect one's daily decisions and, most importantly, one's perception of reality.

There are many sociologists who have chosen to study society by analyzing religion: Durkheim provides a valuable insight into the purpose behind religion in society which can be applied to research on prisoners and their subsequent reintegration experiences. Durkheim believed that religion provides social stability by fostering a set of norms and values. This moral cohesion reduces the likelihood that an individual will deviate from the established norms of a society. Durkheim chose to identify religion by separating the sacred from the profane: anything deemed sacred would characterize a religion in society. These sacred components, according to Durkheim, contribute to the "moral power" of a society and "bind individuals to the group." He also claimed that religion embodies society itself: "religion is the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself."²⁷

Durkheim's belief that religion forms social cohesion justifies the importance behind religious adherence among society's delinquents. According to Durkheim's principle, if an individual conforms to the religion that characterizes the society which he is part of, then this may afford an easier mode of re-entry in society. In other words, it is important that prisoners conform to the same moral standards as the rest of society during re-entry. It is important to note that this does not mean that all prisoners must conform to the *same* religion; as long as each person conforms to the moral standards upheld by his subculture in society, then he will conform as needed. When this does not happen, then Durkheim would suggest that recidivism likely occurs.

²⁷ George Ritzer and Douglas J. Goodman. *Sociological Theory*. Boston (McGraw-Hill) 1983. p. 93.

One might recall that a Durkheimian perspective on punishment also characterizes prison as a path to social cohesion because it defines norms and values by signifying what *not* to do. The prison system serves as a form of social control by deciding who qualifies to live inside prison grounds while religion enhances social control by promoting the correct way to live in society. Therefore, if the prison system houses individuals who have broken the moral code, then religion should provide the key to freedom. This perspective offers another reason to understand how incarcerated individuals approach religion and how it plays a role in their lives.

Religious programs in prison

Religious intervention has always been vital to the prison experience and such programs are becoming increasingly common. John Wesley, a Methodist, initially installed religious programs in prisons; he believed that we can be pardoned by God for our sins through faith. Indeed, religious services have become an integral part of prison: at minimum, each prison has at least one prison chaplain. While such programs typically offer prayer services and religious study, they are increasing their scope to aid in pre-release and re-entry programs for both prisoners and family members. Fortunately, these services often come without a price, as volunteers comprise the staff.²⁸ Another reason why religious programs are important in prison is because they are often viewed as the only component to prison life that remains invested in the present – not the past – lives of prisoners.

As religious programs gain popularity, some scholars have begun to ask what exactly the prototypical participant in faith based programs might look like. Camp et al.

²⁸ Laurie C. Bright and Mary G. Graham. "Faith-Based Programs Give Facilities a Helping Hand." *Corrections Today* (2007): 137-139.

(2006) explored the primary characteristics of individuals who participate in such programs and found several common trends. They examined the type of participants who were involved in the Life Connections Program (LCP) – an 18 month, residential program which provides religious guidance and training programs to prisoners. In general, LCP participants tended to be slightly younger, have less religious background prior to entering prison, and have more spiritual encounters on a daily basis than the control prison population. Individuals who participated in religious activity prior to incarceration were less likely to participate in LCP, and those who began to attend religious services in prison were more likely. Furthermore, those who felt that they had higher levels of knowledge about their faith were less likely to participate in LCP. Those with higher levels of motivation, by contrast, participated in the LCP at a higher rate.²⁹

In addition, Pierce (2006) outlines the five stages of incarceration which ultimately lead to participation in religious programs in prison. Pierce's interpretation of the process that occurs in prison allows one to comprehend the mental state of most prisoners once they begin to participate in religious programs. Once prisoners accept their situation – or become prisonized, according to Clemmer – they are fully integrated in the prison climate and can now participate in what the new community has to offer. Individuals who experience a sort of religious transformation have likely experienced the five stages of incarceration, whether or not they conform to the programs that are offered. In other words, Pierce's five stages are useful to consider for all prisoners, regardless of religious affiliation. The five stages of incarceration are outlined below:

²⁹ Scott D. Camp, Jody Klein-Saffran, Karl Kwon, Dawn W. Daggett, and Victoria Joseph. "An Exploration into Participation in a Faith Based Program." *Criminology and Public Policy* 5 (2006): 529-550.

1. Denial: for the first one to three years, individuals blame others, dream of the free world, and dwell on personal dilemmas.
2. Anger: at this time prisoners better understand their current situation and tend to become angry with others – particularly God.
3. Bargaining: individuals vow to change if they receive a particular favor.
4. Depression: individuals view their situation realistically and the prisonization process is accelerated.
5. Acceptance: confinement is accepted and participation in programs begins.³⁰

While most religious offerings in prison are Christian-based, some pertain to other religious affiliations. *Wellbriety for Prisons*, for example, is a network of the non-profit organization White Bison; it provides programs to Native American prisoners – many of which pertain to Native American spirituality. This organization offers support to individuals who are currently involved in treatment programs or were recently released from prison.³¹ While there are several programs nationwide that provide religious support to individuals of a non-Christian faith, most programs are dominated by a Christian influence.

Religion and its usefulness in prison

As discussed before, Christian organizations have increasingly provided religious programs for offenders since the mark of the twenty-first century. Clear et al. (2000) interviewed various prisoners in order to uncover the meaning of religion for incarcerated individuals. They outline the main reasons why prisoners become religious while incarcerated and how it gives them meaning in their lives. Clear et al. note that

³⁰ Dennis Pierce. *Prison Ministry: Hope Behind the Wall*. New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006. pp.18-19.

³¹ _____. *White Bison*. Internet source viewed 5 May 2009 < <http://www.whitebison.org/>>

most prisoners are either Christian or Muslim, so their research deals with the two religions exclusively.

Clear et al. outline how prisoners use religion for intrinsic and extrinsic reasons; there are several ways in which prisoners use religion for intrinsic benefit. To begin, those who were interviewed reveal that religion provides a sense of meaning to their sentence: it provides an explanation for why they are incarcerated and a solution to the problem. Prisoners who adhere to religion tend to use fundamentalist tactics; that is, they read religious scripture literally. This allows religion to be viewed concretely with direct answers. Prisoners also use religion to deal with their sense of guilt. Clear et al. claim that prisoners can use religion to confront guilt in two ways: “the first is a kind of exculpatory acceptance of the workings of evil in the world. The second is atonement and forgiveness.”³² Prisoners assert that they committed unlawful acts because they rejected some religious truth or meaning. Religion in this situation provides a defense mechanism to ward off these evil urges. This method also allows the prisoner to blame his/her conviction on a force outside him/herself: if the devil motivated him/her to commit a crime, then when the devil is removed, s/he is no longer capable of committing the crime. Thus, religion allows an individual to feel guilt yet withdraw from personally identifying with his/her wrongful action. Lastly, religion offers a new beginning and a sense of inner peace. One inmate in the study noted that “My faith has made me excited about when I go home.”³³

Prisoners also adhere to religion for extrinsic purposes. Religion provides prisoners a sense of safety because they can escape to the chapel to avoid confrontations with other inmates. Religious leaders occasionally defend religious inmates when they

³² Clear, et al., p. 59.

³³ Clear et al., p. 60.

are under attack from another prisoner. Religious activities often provide dessert and soda, which leads to a second motivation for prisoners to participate. In an environment where a prisoner must work two hours to afford one bag of chips, receiving free cake is a significant incentive to participate in religious gatherings. Third, inmates experience contact with the outside world – particularly women – through religious programs. For individuals who rarely converse with anyone outside of prison, this is an important factor to consider. Lastly, religious programs provide prisoners an opportunity to converse with those who live elsewhere on the prison grounds. It widens their social network and provides social support which is hard to find in prison.

Clear et al.'s study provides essential information when considering why prisoners choose to become spiritual during incarceration. Their analysis allows one to understand how spirituality is used to benefit individuals in such difficult circumstances, and their reasoning parallels previous studies which show that religious participation tends to prevent criminal behavior. Research has suggested that religious involvement helps to reduce and prevent even adolescents from delinquent behavior. It has been shown that in unstable communities, religious participation has a positive effect on individuals.³⁴

Religion and adjustment to prison

There appear to be many benefits for those who choose to partake in religious gatherings in prison; yet studies do not collectively support the notion that religious participation helps to ease the transition to prison life. While there are varying conclusions which relate religion to prison adjustment, research generally indicates that

³⁴ Johnson, pp. 329-354.

the relationship between religion and adjustment to prison depends on the person and institution: “Differences in the way the prison environment deprives the inmates of what he seeks will therefore color the type of religious response occurring in that prison.” For example, Sumter (2002) found that minorities are more likely than Caucasians to report high religiosity, and older prisoners are more likely to be religious than younger prisoners. She found that Caucasians generally have a more difficult time adjusting to prison, though she failed to find any correlation between particular groups to religion *and* adjustment – except for young, minority males. This subgroup reportedly found religion to be useful in adjusting to prison.³⁵ While Sumter’s study reveals common characteristics for prison populations, her findings may vary depending on the security level of the institution under study.

Relationship between religion and recidivism

While many prisoners adhere to religious practice during incarceration for the reasons mentioned by Clear et al., studies suggest that recidivism is not affected by one’s religious tendencies after one year of release. In a study conducted through Prison Fellowship (PF), a non-profit organization created by Charles Colson, recidivism rates for ex-convicts who participated in PF were compared to those who did not participate. The research showed that there was more variability in recidivism among PF participants for the first three years, yet ex-convicts showed no difference in recidivism after eight years of release.³⁶

³⁵ Melvina T. Sumter. “Prisoners, Prison, and Religion: Religion and Adjustment to Prison.” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* (2002): 127-159.

³⁶ Byron R. Johnson. “Religious Programs and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs: A Long-Term Follow-Up Study.” *Justice Quarterly* 21 (2004): 329-354.

Research suggests that prisoners who consider themselves religious do not consistently differ from non-religious prisoners in recidivism after an extended amount of time. Sumter (1999) found that the difference in recidivism rests in an individual's participation in religious programs and his/her belief in the supernatural. She analyzed official FBI criminal history reports in combination with pre-existing data from another study to demonstrate that religious participation and belief in a higher being contribute to lower recidivism rates. Sumter found that belief in a higher being – which was usually characterized through a “born-again” Christian faith – was the most important factor in preventing recidivism. She adds that this born-again faith allowed individuals to begin a personal relationship with God which contributed to self-awareness, personal power, and atonement for past convictions.³⁷

While the study conducted on Prison Fellowship participants failed to find any connection between long-term recidivism and religion, Sumter's findings showed that religious participation and beliefs about the divine contributed to lower recidivism rates. This paradox could be a methodological artifact tied to prisons which were included in the study and the type of person chosen to participate. Sumter's findings also linked both participation *and* beliefs with recidivism, suggesting that both variables are necessary for effective re-entry in society. It may be that prisoners who only participated in religious gatherings were involved for reasons unrelated to God, such as the extrinsic attributions cited earlier, and beliefs about the divine proved that those who participated in religious activities were genuinely interested in the subject – a marker of intrinsic motivation.

³⁷ Melvina T. Sumter. *Religiousness and Post-Community Adjustment Graduate Research Fellowship – Final Report*. US Department of Justice (1999): 1-175.

Re-entry

There appears to be minimal literature pertaining to ex-convicts and their struggle to return to mainstream society. Re-entry, or the process of leaving prison and returning to society, poses countless obstacles to ex-prisoners. Visher and Travis (2003) identified four major determining factors in how prisoners will react to re-entry: individual characteristics prior to prison, family, community, and state policies. They point to a separate body of research which found that slightly more than half of inmates were employed full-time prior to their prison sentence; the extent to which prisoners are integrated in society before conviction strongly determines how they will integrate in society after. Re-defining family roles is also a critical component to re-establishing one's identity, as is becoming a responsible citizen and building a peer network. Family ties further determine one's re-entry in society based on the nature of the family dynamics and the material and non-material support it may offer. While there is little research to elaborate on this claim, it has been shown that individuals who maintain close ties with their families are more likely to successfully reintegrate in society. The community to which one returns also determines the success of his re-entry: housing, job availability, health care, and substance abuse treatment centers all contribute to the process of reintegration. Lastly, the extent to which prisoners participate in educational and treatment programs while in prison drastically affects their re-entry in society. However, such programs have decreased in availability over the last couple decades, creating further obstacles for prisoners to re-integrate after prison release.³⁸

³⁸ Christy A. Visher and Jeremy Travis. "Transitions from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 89-113.

In their analysis, Visher and Travis reveal how personal identity, family, and community point to the most important aspects of an individual's life. While re-entering society, individuals must do more than return to their original life: they are required to adjust to the outside world while also beginning a new life without their criminal behavior. Personal identity and social bonds prove to be essential for successful re-entry.

Conclusion

Empirical results are mixed with respect to the impact of religion on adjustment to prison and recidivism. Yet many academics would agree that spirituality proves itself to be a very personal endeavor and subjective to the individual person. Spirituality has always played a role in the penitentiary, and religious programs continue to gain prominence in corrections facilities. Sociologists show that deviance stems from many factors relating to self-concept, social ties, and values; spiritual adherence can be similarly viewed as contingent on the many facets of an individual's life that make up his/her perceived reality. In order to further illustrate those interconnections, the next chapter will provide four personal accounts of individuals who have published their own story of spiritual transformation under imprisonment.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IN PRISON

The following individuals have experienced some sort of spiritual change as a result of their incarceration. Malcolm X, Petre Tutea, Charles Colson and Michael Santos each tell their own account of how the prison experience changed their belief system and life meaning; while each individual endured prison, each story differs from the varying dynamics that characterize each biography. All four accounts point to the importance of social ties for each man to endure prison, and while Malcolm X and Michael Santos received their education during incarceration, spirituality was clearly influenced by each individual's educational background. Borrowing from Clear et al.'s study (2000) on why prisoners adhere to religion, each testimony can also be related extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for spiritual change.

Malcolm X

Malcolm X remains one of the most well known African-Americans in United States' history. His childhood was difficult and he resorted to crime at an early age; as a result, Malcolm X experienced seven years in prison. It was his time in prison that transformed Malcolm X into the respected man that is celebrated today. He experienced a sort of self-education by reading and copying the dictionary and writing letters to Elijah Muhammad. Religious transformation also took place, as Malcolm X states that "in prison – I found Allah and the religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life."³⁹

³⁹ Alex Haley and Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York (Ballantine Books) 1964. p. 174.

The story told in Malcolm X's autobiography describes the events that led to his spiritual transformation. It becomes apparent through his words that three major factors influenced his religious change, which subsequently altered his life forever: a fellow inmate, family members, and education. Before his religious change, Malcolm X held a distinct opposition to God and the Bible, yet his friend Bimbi began to transform his perception of religion. At the same time, Malcolm X's brother wrote him letters informing Malcolm of "the natural religion for the black man." His brother believed that the Muslim faith would help to get Malcolm out of prison, and Malcolm X listened. Malcolm X's religious views were strengthened through his acquisition of reading and writing. He formed closer ties to his faith when he wrote letters to Elijah Muhammad about Islam and Elijah Muhammad wrote back. In one response he wrote that the black prisoner "symbolized white society's crime of keeping black men oppressed and deprived and ignorant, and unable to get decent jobs, turning them into criminals."⁴⁰ Through this excerpt of Muhammad's letter, one can ascertain that Malcolm X's faith and educational advancement contributed to his future success in becoming a human rights advocate.

The spiritual change that Malcolm X experienced can be distinguished by the contributions his family made to instill this religious fervor as well as his continued education in prison. He was fortunate that his family kept in touch with him and encouraged him to change his actions through religious prophesy. By persuading him that the Muslim faith would help to reduce his sentence, Malcolm X's family offered an extrinsic reason to become more spiritual. Yet the extrinsic motivation which sparked

⁴⁰ Haley and Malcolm X, p. 195.

his spiritual journey clearly resulted in intrinsic benefit as well. His spiritual enlightenment allowed Malcolm X to view the world with a new sense of meaning.

Malcolm X's transformation is also distinctive because the education which shaped his spiritual change was adopted during imprisonment. This aspect of his change does not offer an extrinsic or intrinsic motivation to become more spiritual but provides an understanding of the medium in which Malcolm X transformed his belief system.

Petre Tutea

A political prisoner in Romania, Petre Tutea provides a thorough account of his rediscovery of the Christian faith in his book *Between Sacrifice and Suicide*. Before imprisonment, Tutea was highly involved in politics and well versed in philosophical literature. He argued against the current government in the 1930s-40s when he published articles supporting a national revolution to restore Romanian traditional values. In his early adulthood Tutea supported Marxism, yet with time he transferred to the Legionary Movement because it embraced the Christian Church. Beginning in 1948, Tutea was imprisoned for his political activities; in 1960 he was transferred to a prison focused on destroying the prisoners' Christian faith through "re-education." This re-education technique attempted to convert prisoners to communist collaborators and erase all religious faith because "communism rejected all religions as illusion."⁴¹

It was his experience in prison – particularly with re-education – that sparked a change in religious faith for Petre Tutea. While he was always a religious man, Tutea increased and altered his faith during imprisonment. He examined his religious belief system through several different lenses while incarcerated: previous education and

⁴¹ Pompescu, Alexandru. *Petre Tutea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide*. Burlington, VT (Ashgate Publishing Company) 2004. p. 64.

physical torture. Tutea combined his knowledge of Plato and Kant with his religious beliefs when he was sent to prison, as he realized that philosophy was not enough to make sense in the world:

In the end, through the experience of unjust imprisonment, terror, and suffering, Tutea knew that philosophy was not enough. And it was at this point of need that certain fellow prisoners of conscience opened up to him the spiritual power of the invocation of the Name of Jesus.⁴²

Petre Tutea realized that there was an internal dimension to survival in prison that could only be endured through his faith, no matter how helpful philosophy was in his life before incarceration. He also used the physical torture he endured as an impetus for religious change because this torture paralleled that of Christ on the cross. As his religion intensified through spiritual conversation and physical agony, Tutea began to pray with fellow political prisoners and acted as a priest in prison. Along with his own personal transformation, Tutea also influenced fellow inmates to maintain religious identity as a shield to the harsh prison lifestyle.

Petre Tutea intensified his religious convictions in prison as a result of the harsh circumstances and his previous immersion in philosophy. It would be difficult to ignore the effect that his background in philosophical literature had on his spirituality, or how imprisonment forced him to consider the deeper meaning in life. Yet a less obvious factor seemed to play a crucial role in Tutea's transformation: his ties to the prison community. Tutea's spiritual growth was motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. The torture he endured provided an intrinsic benefit to become more spiritual, thus offering a new sort of life meaning, while he extrinsically benefited by becoming more integrated with the prison community.

⁴² Pompescu., p. 59.

It is important to remember that Tutea was not a typical prisoner in an ordinary prison; he was surrounded by similarly educated men who possessed comparable values and careers to himself. Thus, Petre Tutea was immersed in a supportive atmosphere of peers who undoubtedly encouraged Tutea to strengthen his beliefs. While Tutea's spiritual transformation is noteworthy, it is important to remember how it differs from most prisoners who possess criminal convictions.

Charles Colson

Charles Colson represents one of the most well known accounts of spiritual transformation in prison. As special counsel to President Nixon and a participant in the Watergate scandal, Colson was sentenced to prison in 1974 and developed a newfound commitment to spread the Christian faith to prisoners across the country. Colson was religious before he entered prison, as he brought only two books with him to prison – and both were editions of the Bible. Yet while Colson was always religiously affiliated, his faith carried a new meaning when he entered prison. His wife Patty committed to visiting Colson on a regular basis, and most reunions were spent discussing their faith and the Bible. With time, the Colsons decided to pray together during each meeting. A well educated man, Charles Colson succinctly articulated his religious transformation when he stated that the Holy Spirit came when he called for God's help in prison. His religious commitment was exemplified in his ability to forgive John Dean – the man who accused Colson – when he was also sent to the same prison.⁴³ Despite his difficult adjustment to prison, Colson reflects on his time away in a positive light: "I sensed that

⁴³ Charles W. Colson. *Born Again*. Old Tappan, NJ (Chosen Books) 1976. pp. 260-263.

in some way the Lord had a plan for my life which he would gradually reveal to me.”⁴⁴ Eventually Colson realized that God placed him in prison in order to learn to love each prisoner as his brother.⁴⁵ As a result of his religious transformation, Charles Colson founded Prison Fellowship – a ministry structured for prisoners – in 1976. This prison ministry is now the largest in the world.

As was the case with Petre Tutea, Charles Colson was a well educated man before he entered prison. However, unlike Tutea and Malcolm X, he did not specifically use his knowledge to expand his religious convictions. Instead, Charles Colson gained motivation to strengthen his religious adherence through his wife and his fellow inmates who were also Christian. Like Tutea, Colson benefited intrinsically and extrinsically from his spiritual advancement. His spirituality allowed Colson to provide new meaning in his life, yet it also brought him closer to his fellow prisoners. Colson’s cordiality with John Dean also serves as an extrinsic benefit to becoming spiritual by increasing his social network.

Michael Santos

Compared to the previously reviewed individuals, Michael Santos’s history most closely resembles that of Malcolm X. His involvement in drugs resulted in imprisonment, and prior to entering prison Santos only received a high school education. Yet as he endured prison, Santos completed a bachelors and masters degree. Like Petre Tutea, Santos also used his exploration of philosophy to grow strength and will to develop his character. Santos is still imprisoned but he maintains a website where he has published extensive literature on prisons and prison reform. On this website Santos

⁴⁴ Colson, p. 263.

⁴⁵ Colson, p. 284.

refers to his religious faith when he says that since entering prison, “I have felt strengthened because I accepted that I was living God’s plan.”⁴⁶ For a man who has now been incarcerated for over 21 years, Michael Santos provides an example of the most obvious benefit of religion in prison: it provides meaning to those who need it. Clearly, Santos’ spiritual change has provided immense intrinsic benefits, though his proclamation of a belief in God may also serve an extrinsic benefit by attracting more people to his website.

Conclusion

Malcolm X, Petre Tutea, Charles Colson and Michael Santos reveal the complexity in spiritual transformation – especially when it occurs in prison. Malcolm X, Colson, and Santos each experienced profound changes in their careers as a result of their spiritual development in prison – pointing to the immense impact it had on their lives. All four men intrinsically benefited from their spiritual change while Malcolm X, Petre Tutea and Charles Colson also experienced extrinsic benefits: Malcolm X believed his spirituality would reduce his prison sentence while Tutea and Colson became more socially integrated with the prison community. The next chapter will build from the stories of these four men: Chapter 4 will explain the methodology behind the interviews that took place to study spiritual transformation in other prisoners.

⁴⁶ Michael Santos. “2009 Values and Goals.” *MichaelSantos.net*. Internet source viewed 15 March 2009 <http://www.michaelsantos.net/Values-and-Goals_2009.html>

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND METHODS

In order to determine spiritual transformation among previously imprisoned individuals during and after incarceration, I conducted eight interviews with participants from the Darryl Hunt Project. The questions that I examined were, “Does incarceration produce spiritual transformation and what are the determining factors that contribute to this change?” This question presumes that incarceration is the conditional cause of spiritual transformation, and my research intended to uncover the reason and scope of change that typically takes place during imprisonment.

I hypothesized that spiritual transformation is based on the following factors: education, personal identity and an individual’s ties to his family, friends and community. These factors were used to explain an individual’s spiritual transformation based on past research linking these issues with an individual’s word view.

Previous research suggests that the less educated are more likely to participate in religious activities. For the purposes of this research, education was presumed to help define the realm of transformation that may (or may not) take place because knowledge shapes the world in which we each live. Educational attainment operates as a time-varying covariate such that an individual might participate in educational programs during imprisonment and education levels will change. Contrary to previous research, it was predicted that higher levels of education would result in a more intensified spiritual transformation. This change was predicted to take place in an intrinsic manner.

Personal identity was also considered to determine how an individual views himself and interprets the meaning behind his incarceration. In formulating the

hypothesis, this factor draws from the symbolic interactionist perspective in sociology which examines our subjective realities based on personal and daily interactions with others.⁴⁷ How one perceives himself – innocent or guilty, a life of meaning or devoid of worth – will determine how his subjective experience in and after prison unfolds. This hypothesis also derives from containment theory which argues that a positive self-concept serves as a buffer against deviance. Following the logic that wrongful acts might be prevented by a strong sense of self-worth, it was also hypothesized that positive self-worth would facilitate spiritual transformation in prison.

Lastly, the strength of one's bond to family, friends and community shapes the perception of one's role, obligation and connection with society. As part of his study on suicide, Durkheim declared *integration*, or the "strength of attachment that we have to society," a primary component to our culture.⁴⁸ If one is to overcome the obstacles that arise in prison and expand his/her spiritual framework, he/she will need a strong sense of integration in society. Control theory elaborated on this argument as it proposed that commitment – or sense of self vested in conformity – inhibits one from deviant behavior. This thesis parallels control theory by proposing that an individual's shift toward religion would be directly proportional to strong social ties.

All eight participants in the study represent a convenience sample which was taken from the Darryl Hunt Project (DHP). DHP is a non-profit organization that provides skills and support to ex-convicts as they re-enter society. In the re-entry program, "associates" are given job referrals, transportation assistance, counseling, and GED classes.⁴⁹ DHP was founded by Darryl Hunt, a Winston-Salem native who was

⁴⁷ Newman, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Ritzer and Goodman. p. 88.

⁴⁹ The project also aids currently incarcerated individuals who believe they are innocent of their conviction.

wrongfully accused of rape and murder and spent over 18 years in prison before he was proven innocent. Although Darryl Hunt experienced religious transformation in prison, his organization is not religiously affiliated: religion plays no role in the programs which are offered through the DHP.

I conducted semi-structured interviews which lasted for 10-35 minutes. The interview began by asking a set of five close-ended questions that pertain to religious identity and participation (see Appendix A). The set of questions were asked in relation to life before prison, and then asked again in regard to post-release. After the close-ended questions were given, I asked participants five open-ended questions relating to their experience in prison (see Appendix A). The length of each interview depended solely on the amount of information the participant shared during these open-ended questions.

The close-ended questions were analyzed quantitatively by comparing the change each subject underwent from pre-prison to post-release in society. The purpose in asking these questions was to establish whether or not religious change took place; the open-ended questions then elaborated on why that change occurred. Apart from the first question, which asked about the participant's religious identity, the responses to the other four questions were assigned a numerical value. A score of "1" indicated the highest religiosity while the largest number, 16, equated a low level of religiosity. (The same numerical assignments were given to the questions regarding post-release). Appendix A provides the coding scheme for these values. The four questions which were assigned numerical values related to the importance of one's religion to his/her life, formal religious participation, informal religious participation, and the frequency in

⁵⁰ _____. *Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice*. Internet source viewed 15 March 2009
<www.darrylhuntproject.org>

which religion influenced one's decisions. To measure religious change, the mean number pre-prison was compared to the mean post-release.

For the open-ended questions patterns were identified through cross-case analysis, or examining several cases, within a case-oriented analysis.⁵¹ Case-oriented analyses were performed in order to fully understand each individual through the information that s/he provided. Voice recordings were used in order to carefully review information provided by the subjects. Each interview was transcribed into a Word document in order to be analyzed. After transcription, all interviews were read carefully in order to identify recurring themes in each participant's response set. These themes were gathered and later compared to all other participants.

Individuals were asked to participate in the study by the administration at the Darryl Hunt Project and a Subway gift card was provided as an incentive.⁵² The program provides weekly classes that help individuals with re-entry in society, and individuals from a morning mentoring class formed the convenience sample. The administration at the DHP intentionally asked individuals who seemed to have relevant stories to participate. In other words, some interviewees were specifically chosen because of their background. For these reasons, chosen participants represent a convenience sample. They were each pulled out of the class or arrived immediately after class to complete the interview. Thus, all interviews took place during or after the mentoring class and at the DHP office.

All of the individuals who were interviewed were African-American, and two were female. While four had been to prison, two people had only experienced jail and the remaining two did not provide complete information on their sentence. All

⁵¹ Earl Babbie. *The Basics of Social Research*. Belmont, CA (Thompson Wadsworth) 2005. pp. 416-417.

⁵² While a reward was provided to participate in the interview, it is doubtful that such a small gift would provide significant change in the subjects' responses.

participants were convicted of more than one crime, and over half ($n = 5$) were convicted of over three crimes. While everyone who experienced prison was involved in religious programs, the two individuals who went to jail were not provided such options during incarceration. Three of the participants have been involved with DHP since its inception over four years ago; the other four have joined the organization in the last one to two years.⁵³

It is important to note that all interviewees have made a conscious effort to successfully reintegrate in society. This recognition allows one to realize that the information I gathered from participants – however useful – is not indicative of the general prison population experiencing re-entry. The information I gathered may not even fairly represent the entire population at DHP because the mentoring program from which the subjects were chosen is *voluntary*. Thus, the most motivated individuals from the organization would be the ones attending the optional mentoring session. My findings, therefore, contribute to a working knowledge of a very narrow subset of the prison population.

⁵³ The data for one participant is missing.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that interviewees (drawn from DHP) who experienced spiritual change would have such change due to education, personal identity, and social ties. In fact, all participants in the study did experience some sort of spiritual change. Of the seven people who experienced spiritual change, only one individual actually became less spiritual.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitatively, all participants experienced some degree of spiritual change during incarceration. One person became less spiritual, and seven reportedly became stronger in their spirituality. On a scale of 4 to 16, with 1 being the most spiritual, the mean score in spirituality pre-prison was 10.3. By contrast, the mean score among post-release responses was 7.0, indicating that participants generally became more spiritual after incarceration.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative research allowed for a detailed account of the *reasons* behind spiritual change. Education did appear to alter the type of spiritual change that individuals experienced, though it was not a primary reason for change. Furthermore, two individuals referred to education when they spoke of the type of change that they underwent, suggesting that there is a correlation between education and intrinsic reasons for spiritual change. This subject will be further discussed later in this section.

Personal identity also proved to be an important factor in determining why participants became more spiritual – particularly in explaining the scope of spiritual change. Each of the participants who became more spiritual viewed themselves in a positive light when asked how they are perceived by others. This indicates that a positive self-concept did correlate with spiritual change.

Lastly, social ties represented the most common factor in spiritual change. The results resonated with control theory: strong social ties contribute to less deviant behavior. Every interview involved a discussion about an influential family member or friend who helped the participant to turn toward God. This suggests that the sense of integration in their communities influenced all but one of these individuals to change.

An additional factor was observed during the interviews that explains why some people become spiritual in prison: the concept of survival and security. While personal identity and social ties greatly influenced participants' spiritual shift, one individual merely had no other option but to turn to spirituality if she wanted to alter her lifestyle. She represents someone who becomes spiritual because there are no other available alternatives.

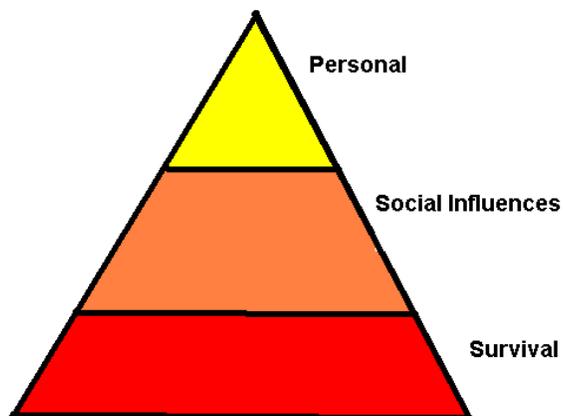
The general themes that arose from the open-ended questions resulted in an overall framework that explains the reasons for spiritual change during incarceration. This framework reflects Maslow's "hierarchy of needs," depicted in Appendix B. Maslow's need hierarchy is based on the premise that humans act according to needs. The basic and most essential needs must be met before humans can experience personal growth and rise to the top of the pyramid, where self-actualization is located. Self-

actualization refers to the achievement of one's potential.⁵⁴ Similarly, the interviews revealed three common reasons to change spiritually: survival, social influences, and personal reasons. These reasons represent needs of individuals and are placed in a hierarchical order based on the reason that spiritual change took place. Furthermore, Clear et al.'s study allows one to distinguish the three categories between intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to becoming more spiritual: personal reasons for change are almost exclusively intrinsic, social influences offer extrinsic benefit, and survival methods include both types of benefits.

Of those interviewed, one person experienced spiritual change as a means of survival, four were influenced by social forces, and three were a result of personal transformations. One of the individuals began her religious change as a means of survival, but with time it became a social, extrinsic endeavor. Her story serves as a reminder that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as people can experience different motivations to become religious at varying points in their imprisonment. It is also important to remember that the three categories do not always function in a linear fashion. That is, an individual may begin his/her religious journey due to survival and this change could later become social or personal.

⁵⁴ Michael S. Gazzaniga and Todd F. Heatherton. *Psychological Science: Second Edition*. New York (W.W. Norton and Company) 2003. pp. 344-345.

Reasons for Religious Change During Incarceration



Survival. The category linked to survival is located at the bottom of the triangle because it indicates that an individual has no other choice but to change. In this case, individuals feel as though they have no support or security in their lives: they may feel desperate and that spirituality is their only recourse. Because of the need for security and assistance, they turn toward spirituality. “Kathy,” who embodied this category, stated that it took her over twenty years to realize she needed to make a change in her life, and that finally she felt like God told her that He would save her life one last time. She realized that this was the last chance she had to break her dependence on drugs, and it was God who helped her to make this shift. This illustrates the intrinsic dimension underlying spiritual change: God offers hope and motivation to change when nothing else is available. While not specifically cited by the interviewees, one may seek spiritual change for survival reasons yet expect extrinsic benefit. At times religious programs provide the only social service available, motivating individuals to become more spiritual for basic social needs.

Social Influences. This category lends itself to a much broader scope than survival. Individuals who become more spiritual for social reasons may attribute their change to family, friends, or fellow inmates. The common thread among these individuals is that they become spiritual because of the social benefit of doing so. According to those interviewed, prison becomes an incredibly lonely place; when religious activities are offered, they can draw a large crowd because such gatherings offer social interaction and a support network for individuals. Furthermore, family members or friends are highly influential in persuading individuals to participate in religious activity because they are often the backbone of an individual's life. Especially while enduring such a difficult environment, prisoners need important people in their lives to give them guidance and direction. This social assistance, or extrinsic motivation, seems to be the primary motivating factor to become spiritual during incarceration. While social motivation may be subconscious for some people, others freely admit that this is the reason for an increase in spirituality. "Mark" bluntly admitted that he only participated in church activities for a distraction: "I had to do something with my time so I attended church and stuff, when I was in there. I just didn't want to sit around and do nothing."⁵⁵

Personal. Attributing an individual's spiritual change to personal reasons is a difficult task because the motivation to change becomes an intangible element that is derived from within. The best way to describe this type of change is that these individuals experience spiritual transformation for personal gain and satisfaction unrelated to social benefit or necessity: the benefit is intrinsic. Personal reasons for change allow an individual to look deep within oneself and provide an opportunity to

⁵⁵ Associate "Mark" of DHP, 10 March 2009.

afford more meaning to one's life. For example, "Joe" realized during incarceration that he needed to change his past habits because he was unhappy. He came to the following epiphany while reading the Bible:

I just started reading my Bible. And you know, I started to get in tune with myself, and I realized that I wasn't happy. I realized that it was a deeper thing within myself... And when you start to depend on yourself and be honest, be faithful to yourself, and recognize who you are, I mean being straight up, God is like that too.⁵⁶

"Joe" looked within himself to discover what he wanted from his spiritual commitment and this journey became incredibly personal. He needed to find a way to re-discover his happiness and love himself as he is, and he found this through God. This self-discovery varies greatly from survival and social influences because, as "Joe" notes, it involves only the interaction between self and a higher being and it does not come from physical desperation. It is purely intrinsic.

Of the three males who experienced spiritual change due to personal reasons, two mentioned that their education helped to form their beliefs. These were the only two of the eight people interviewed that attributed education to their formative belief system. "Joe", for example, stated that his increased literacy helped him to view religion in a different light: "By reading the Bible and reading my dictionary I felt like I was mis-educated and misguided."⁵⁷ The fact that two of the three men used education to change spiritually suggests that education may be correlated to this category. While anyone could experience spiritual change at a personal level, these individuals can, at the very least, better articulate the type of change they underwent. This finding means that the more educated may attribute spiritual change to intrinsic motivations because they are able to better explain the transformation they undergo.

⁵⁶ Associate "Joe" of DHP, 24 March 2009.

⁵⁷ Associate "Joe" of DHP, 24 March 2009.

Cross-Case Analysis of Personal Testimonies

While all of the accounts for spiritual change embody some characteristics of survival, social influences, and personal attributes, each fits best with one type to explain the primary *need* that was fulfilled in becoming more spiritual *during* incarceration. Spiritual transformation began in prison for these individuals, but it continues to influence their lives during re-entry as well. Three of these stories – each representing one of the three categories of change – will now be further elaborated. In the first account, attributing spiritual change to survival, “Kathy” was more spiritual than the group average before prison and remained more spiritual than the average after release. The second story, focused on social factors for change, comes from “Tina.” She was considerably less spiritual than the average before prison, and is now more spiritual than the group outcome. Lastly, “John’s” account of personal change started at a point where he was less spiritual than the average and his post-release spirituality equaled the mean.

Kathy. Kathy has always considered herself a religious person. She was a Baptist born-again both before and after her imprisonment, and while she went to church weekly before prison, she now attends formal religious gatherings multiple times each week. She prays and reads the Bible twice a day and she often thinks about God when she makes decisions, while before this was a rare occurrence. It is clear that before imprisonment, Kathy merely went through the motions when it came to religion; now, however, she depends on God to fight through her struggles with drugs and street crime. Kathy has been imprisoned for numerous convictions including drug possession

and prostitution. She just recently joined DHP and the transition has been difficult, evidenced by her insecurity and forced effort in discussing life during incarceration.

When asked which experiences made her think about God or religion while incarcerated, Kathy painfully reminds herself that it was the loneliness: “The experience of me being alone, the loneliness... when my friends didn’t write me or I really had no visitors. I had no choice but to turn to God and pray.” As she explains herself, Kathy appears to be a fragile child – anything but a prior convict. When she was in prison, Kathy often participated in education, vocational, and religious programs; she even earned her GED while incarcerated. She claims that these programs helped to “keep [her] mind focused on things.” Kathy has been to prison multiple times, yet the last time she went it was different:

But this time it was different. I didn’t want to come back out like that, I wanted to change, from going to church and everything, straighten up and see what God did for me. He gave me this life where I have one more chance to do this right, and I feel like this was my last chance to do things right, ‘cuz a lot of my friends died out there and stuff and I gotta make it this time.⁵⁸

Kathy explains how she found out that many of her friends died when she was in prison through newspaper obituaries which she received in the mail. She proves what an incredibly painful experience this was as she painfully relives the moment she realized she would not be able to attend her friends’ funerals, followed by several tears. Finding out that her friends were dying made Kathy attempt to turn her life around. She decided that she wanted people to remember her for more than someone who used drugs. She wanted a real life.

The turning point for Kathy occurred in prison when she realized that she was only given one more chance to create a new life for herself: but what exactly enabled her

⁵⁸ Associate “Kathy” of DHP, 24 March 2009.

to make this change? Kathy claims it was the simple realization that people cared about her. She was able to become more spiritual because of a program in prison, and she realized people cared for her when she was sent a weekly reminder to attend a Bible study. By her gratitude for this reminder from a mere stranger one might ascertain that she was never truly comforted by family or friends before this experience. Her relationships with fellow inmates were subsequently strengthened by these Bible studies, enabling Kathy to find more religious meaning in her life. The realization that she was appreciated was all that Kathy needed in order to change. She says that women are often lonely when they first get to prison, but that they begin to join study groups that discuss Biblical scripture and “they start getting involved too... they don’t want to sit over there by themselves and you’re over there laughing, and then they want to get in a part of it too, it’s good for them.”⁵⁹

Kathy’s story provides an effective example of how some people turn to God because they see no other option to improve their life. While she clearly used social support to enhance her religious experience, it was the initial realization that she had to make a change that sparked Kathy’s motivation to become more spiritual. For this reason, Kathy represents someone who turned to God for mere survival and intrinsic benefit. She elaborates on this claim when she mentions how she finally realized that people cared about her: she was finally given a sense of security. At the end of her story, however, Kathy also mentions that many women in prison become involved in Bible studies to join social groups. Here is an example of the next category: social influences.

Tina. Kathy and Tina could not better represent opposite personalities. If Kathy were to be a shy, fragile kitten then Tina would be the courageous, outspoken lioness.

⁵⁹ Associate “Kathy” of DHP, 24 March 2009.

Tina's enthusiasm radiates when she is offered an opportunity to declare her love for God and she is more than willing to share her darkest stories from before and during imprisonment. In fact, Tina speaks as though she is having a direct conversation with God himself. Like Kathy, Tina was also a habitual felon and in active addiction for crack cocaine for over twenty years. The last time she was sent to prison, she believes God spoke to her: "I believe he was actually speaking with me saying, 'ok Tina, I'm gonna save your life one more time.'" While Tina began participating in religious programs her third of six times going to prison, she admits that she first went merely to escape the dorms. Now, however, Tina's religion is the most important thing in her life. She believes that "without God this day, I don't even know if I'd still be alive."⁶⁰

When she discusses her experiences with drug addiction and how she finally broke this habit, Tina often refers to her family. She now constantly speaks to her daughters about God and how only He can save them. Tina's uncle is a pastor and his wife used to be a heroine addict. She has since become clean, and now Tina says that her entire family worships at her uncle's church together. Tina even participates in the church choir now: "I'm real active in my church and when I'm singing in the choral and look down at her and my mom and dad, they just have this big old glow on their faces."⁶¹

Tina admits that one of the main experiences in prison that made her turn to God was when she was having intimate relationships with women. Even though this was normal in prison, one day someone told her that she would go to hell for abomination. This moment made Tina reconsider her actions and turn closer to God. Yet there were two additional turning points in Tina's life that forever left a mark. The

⁶⁰ Associate "Tina" of DHP, 10 March 2009.

⁶¹ Associate "Tina" of DHP, 10 March 2009.

first came when she was in a drug rehabilitation center the last time she went to prison. There had been considerable tension with her and her family because they refused to visit Tina, though they regularly visited her brother who was imprisoned for murder. This reality hurt Tina because she also wanted her family to visit her. One day, however, Tina's family decided to visit her and Tina presented her "life history" to her parents (her daughters refused to come). During this life history, inmates are required to expose everything that has happened to them in their life. Tina revealed to her parents during her presentation that she was sexually abused by her babysitters when she was young. Her parents had been completely unaware that this had happened, and the realization that they did not understand the root of Tina's problems allowed the family to reconcile during this visit. This discussion clearly impacted Tina, as it was the only subject that made her emotional. Tina's voice lowered and became uneven as she relived this moment:

They finally learned about the disease of addiction and it helped the family a lot. You know it helped them understand me more, so that was the most painful time for me in prison. There was a lot of crying and a lot of hurt and a lot of pain.⁶²

Another major turning point in her life came when Tina realized that her daughters were aware of her addiction to cocaine. One day, Tina had locked her daughters in their room so that she would not get paranoid when she was high. Tina's daughters were angry and called their grandparents, begging them to come over and let them outside. They told Tina's parents that they were locked inside because their mother was getting high with her friends. When Tina's parents arrived at her house to save their grandchildren, she realized for the first time that her children knew about her drug addiction. This awakening made Tina decide to give her daughters to her parents while

⁶² Associate "Tina" of DHP, 10 March 2009.

she sorted through her problems. To realize that her daughters understood her drug addiction forced Tina to awaken to her own problems. She finally realized that her problems not only affected herself.

Apart from her family, Tina's fiancée has also greatly influenced Tina to turn to God. He was also addicted to drugs but now works as a minister. She decided that if her fiancée could end his drug addiction, then she could as well. This relationship has forced both individuals to hold responsibility for their actions and while it is difficult, both Tina and her fiancée are staying clean: "We've had our battles though, we both got back out there one time even together, but now there ain't no turning back for either one of us."

The many relationships that persuaded Tina to turn to God demonstrate the power that social networks can exert on individuals in difficult times. Tina learned about God through fellow inmates, family, and a new romantic relationship – all of which held her accountable to maintain this new commitment to God. While she desperately needed guidance to help her deal with her situation, Tina's central motivation to change was found through her ties with family and friends, thus providing an extrinsic benefit for spiritual conversion.

John. Of all the interviewees, John seemed to experience the most personal sort of spiritual transformation. He was sent to jail for minor offenses and the experience altered his life. A quiet and reflective man, John seemed to carefully gather his thoughts before he spoke. He notes that he was agnostic before incarceration, yet afterward he turned toward Islam. John attributes his loss of freedom to such religious change:

*It gives a person a lot of time, it gives a person an opportunity to really re-think their lives in a number of ways: number one, how did I get in the position I did in the first place, and number two, where will I be going once I come out.*⁶³

Though John did not discover Islam while imprisoned, it was during his incarceration when he realized he needed a spiritual component to his life. Once he was released, John visited several religious sites and finally turned to a mosque. Ironically, this mosque refers to the Bible more than the Quran, and its teachings enabled John to better understand Biblical scripture that he learned as a child. To better understand the Bible was a great gift to John, as he simply said “it’s wonderful,” because through Islam “I’ve come closer to the Lord and found a better understanding of the Bible.” While he could never genuinely relate to his Christian faith as an adolescent, the Muslim faith allowed John to understand the workings of the Christian church as well as provide meaning to his new life.

When asked if he met any influential individuals in jail, John said no. For him, his time in jail was very personal and his growth involved only himself. Even his conversion to Islam has been a lonely journey, as his family is strictly Christian. It has been difficult for John that his family struggles to accept his Muslim faith and he hopes that they can eventually realize that it has helped him to form meaning in his life. The difficulty John found in confronting his family about this change was highlighted by his mother’s illness. She passed away just a few years ago, and before her passing John told her about his religious conversion: “It kind of came as a shock to her but I tried to explain to her that I mean this for the first time in my life. I felt something. I’m believing in something, so I guess she has my blessing.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Associate “John” of DHP, 17 March 2009.

⁶⁴ Associate “John” of DHP, 17 March 2009.

John's story is unique in several ways. First, he initiated the decision to become more spiritual. He was never influenced by friends or family, and his past difficulties were not the reason for a conversion. As John attributes "alone time" to his reconsideration of spirituality, he points to the personal aspect of his change. For John, this did not involve anyone but himself. His spiritual change provided the intrinsic benefit of meaning in his life: he learned to better understand the religion of his past and he could pave meaning for his future. Regardless of his family's reluctance to accept his transformation, John has become fully committed to this newfound belief system, and it has positively impacted his life. This serves as evidence that John's spiritual change is attributable to intrinsic motivation, as his change has strained personal relationships yet strengthened his personal beliefs.

Summary. Kathy, Tina, and John each provide an example of the three reasons for spiritual transformation in prison. As one can see, these three factors are often integrated in each history, as each story proves to be incredibly complex. The largest distinction can be found in the initial pull – the *need* that is met - by religious change. For Kathy, she had no other option but to turn to God for survival. Tina decided to make a change because of social influences in prison and familial ties in the outside world – fulfilling the need of integration and community. John, by contrast, lacked any support in the outside world; he turned within himself to discover what he needed in his life, and found it regardless of what others thought. Chapter 6 will next elaborate on a discussion of these findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Both quantitative and qualitative interpretation helped to analyze the interviews: quantitative data established that all eight participants changed spiritually after incarceration while qualitative analysis explained how and why this change took place. Survival, social influences, and personal identity determined the reason for spiritual transformation and social influences proved to be the most common attribution for change. The four individuals who became more spiritual for social reasons experienced extrinsic benefit while the two men who cited personal reasons for change were motivated by intrinsic benefit. Lastly, the one woman who changed for survival purposes was influenced by intrinsic motivations, though one could presumably turn toward spirituality out of desperation for extrinsic reasons.

Education was a difficult variable to sufficiently analyze with the data, though a correlation with personal religious change and education was evident. While educational attainment did not determine whether or not spirituality changed during imprisonment, it allowed individuals to attain immense intrinsic benefits for such change. A similar theme can be found in the story of Petre Tutea, Malcolm X, and Charles Colson. None of these three men necessarily initiated religious change because of their education, but their knowledge certainly shaped their transformation and allowed them to take their spirituality to a deeper, personal level. Malcolm X was the only one of the three individuals to attain literacy in prison, yet all three men used education to formulate and apply their religious beliefs toward personal enrichment. This finding may initially seem to contradict previous research that supports the notion

that higher educational attainment results in less religiosity. The key distinction here is that education allowed these men to grow at an intrinsic level as opposed to a social, extrinsic, one. While there are social elements to the transformations that Malcolm X, Tutea and Colson experienced, each of these men used their spirituality for a deeper purpose. Malcolm X became a civil rights activist while Petre Tutea applied Jesus' suffering to his own life and Colson found a new career in helping prisoners. For these men, education helped them to translate their conversion toward something personally meaningful.

By applying the triangular hierarchy of survival, social influences, and personal motivation to reasons for spiritual change in prison, it helps to better conceptualize why people confronting difficult circumstances undergo spiritual transformation. For someone like Kathy, there appeared to be no other choice but to become more connected with God in order to change her unhealthy lifestyle. When she was lonely in prison and sought security and comfort, her only resolution was to rely on God.

Social influences also provide a plausible reason to become spiritual in prison. Malcolm X perfectly demonstrates this idea, as he seemed to become spiritual due to social factors. First, his family wrote letters to Malcolm X about their newfound Islamic faith and told him that he would be released from prison if he also converted. Converting also allowed Malcolm X to become tightly integrated in his community both within prison and among the African-American community. He formed close friendships with fellow inmates who were also religious, and Malcolm X attached meaning to the discrimination he experienced as an African-American through his faith. This allowed Malcolm X to increase solidarity with fellow African-Americans during and after he was released from prison.

Lastly, personal reasons to become more religious often offer the most powerful intrinsic benefit of spiritual change. For individuals who take the initiative to search for greater meaning in their lives, spirituality often translates into a deeper understanding of self identity. Petre Tutea used his social ties to develop his religious change, yet the decision was also very personal. He was able to parallel his pain in prison to that of Jesus on the cross, and this brought him closer to God. Tutea related his prison experience to his religious beliefs so that he could better understand Jesus and himself.

Clear et al.'s discussion of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation provides a comprehensive explanation for the benefits prisoners receive when they turn to religion. Their research closely parallels the survival, social, and personal reasons that prisoners initially make a shift toward spirituality and helps to explain why these three reasons differ from one another. There are instances, however, when the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic benefits blur. Tina, for example, initially became spiritual due to social influences, yet her shift has undoubtedly helped her in an intrinsic manner as well. It has provided more meaning in her life and the ability for a new beginning. John, on the other hand, became more spiritual for personal reasons. He initially sought a more meaningful life that his Islamic faith provided, though his conversion has been accompanied by a new social network. He has formed close friendships with several members of his mosque, so he has also experienced extrinsic benefits through his personal transformation. Clear et al.'s study provides an invaluable insight into the many rewards that result from spiritual conversion during imprisonment, yet it is important to note that spirituality is a complex factor and its many facets can often evolve.

While each human being is too complex to simply attribute spiritual change to one general factor, the pyramid derived from the interviews conducted at the Darryl Hunt Project provides a general framework to understand why spirituality often becomes important to prisoners. Some people may become more spiritual to fulfill one need and continue their spiritual journey for a separate reason, as spirituality is never a static component in any person's life. Others may gravitate toward spirituality in prison, adopt the new lifestyle, and later forget why their spirituality was initially adopted. In this case, retrospection can produce flaws in pointing to the exact reason for change. The point of this schema is to simplify a complex concept in order to understand the use of spirituality in prison.

In analyzing conversations, one must remember that data is gathered only as far as the interviewee allows him/herself to share information. There was a considerable discrepancy in the interviews that took place: some people spoke for less than ten minutes while others chose to share their history for over a half hour. To acknowledge this gap is to be mindful that how individual histories were interpreted largely depends on the depth of interview conversations. For example, Tina's story was much more powerful than several others because she explained her background without reservation and at greater length – nearly forty minutes. She offered to divulge everything of her past, where other interviewees withheld any details about their history.

This research provides a starting point for understanding why prisoners initially become more spiritual in prison, though there were several shortcomings in this study. In order to better understand this phenomenon, a more detailed study would have to be conducted. Sentence length, severity of conviction, recidivism, and type of facility must be further analyzed to uncover the specific affects of an individual's spiritual change.

Interviewees at DHP were all recidivists and sentences varied from one to twenty years. Convictions included drug possession, property crimes, and assault. While this offers a broad range of length and type of conviction, one might explore longer sentences and more severe crimes for a better understanding of spiritual change in prison.

It would also be important to study individuals who do not become more spiritual and discover how they cope with the prison experience. “Mark” was the only interviewee to become less spiritual after prison and his interview often included references to his family or fellow inmates he befriended. “Mark” claims he often participated in religious gatherings during incarceration. Ironically, he is less spiritual now that he has been released because he believes he needs to invest in self-discovery before he returns to the church.⁶⁵ While social influences motivated “Mark” to participate in religious programs in prison, these extrinsic motivations failed to extend to his post-release experience. Unfortunately, he was reluctant to elaborate on his experiences; a more thorough analysis of individuals like “Mark” would greatly benefit the study of spiritual change among prisoners.

Lastly, interviewing currently incarcerated individuals might provide more thorough and accurate information regarding spiritual change. Those interviewed at the Darryl Hunt Project were released between one month and three years ago; their explanation of the prison experience may differ if they had been interviewed during incarceration.

By examining spiritual transformation in prisoners it becomes clear that there are many factors that motivate individuals to become more spiritual. Whether it is pre-prison experiences or the prison experience itself, research suggests that most prisoners

⁶⁵ Associate “Mark” of DHP, 10 March 2009.

need assistance before they can begin a new life – and spirituality often plays a role. Reading spiritual text, attending religious gatherings, and spending time to self-reflect are just a few of the many ways in which prisoners become spiritual when they need help. Intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to spirituality help prisoners, both during and after incarceration, to mark a new beginning in their lives. In sum, spirituality often allows individuals to find meaning for their past and hope for the future. Whether it is religiously affiliated or purely secular, prisons need to provide support and rehabilitation services in order to help convicts begin a new life after incarceration.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The invention of the penitentiary arrived in the United States from England and France and has since become a major aspect of American society. There has been substantial research on prisons and prison populations, though what exactly occurs within prison walls remains a mystery to those in the outside world. Religious volunteers increasingly provide services to prisoners each year – a clear indicator that religion remains both an important and underfunded aspect of the corrections system in the United States.

The effect of spirituality within incarcerated populations remains controversial. While religion undoubtedly aids individuals in their prison experience, empirical studies prove inconclusive regarding its ability to help prisoners cope with their time and prevent recidivism. Scholars are more apt to establish that social and personal ties are clear indicators of preventing deviant behavior, which may not necessarily depend on spiritual influences.

Through interviews conducted with the Darryl Hunt Project, research concluded that incarcerated individuals often choose to become more spiritual in prison to satisfy three primary needs: survival, social ties, and personal meaning. The triangle that ties these three elements to the spiritual experience represents the initial reason for spiritual change and an explanation of how this change may evolve. Clear et al.'s research enables one to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits associated with reasons for spiritual change. Survival reasons for change are associated with intrinsic and extrinsic benefit, where social ties provide extrinsic benefit and personal reasons allow for intrinsic gain. Everyone who experiences spiritual change in prison likely

reflects each of these three elements, and this hierarchy may apply to other circumstances regarding spirituality as well.

The current prison system in the United States has evolved from a long history of physical torture, solitary confinement and disproportionate representation of minorities and particular crimes. Of the millions of people who currently reside in prison, the millions who were incarcerated before, and the millions who will likely proceed, each of these individuals can relate to the feeling of solitude, fear, and deprivation. This loss of freedom is something that those in the outside world will never truly understand. Our best option is to regard the prison population with the highest respect, as we have much to learn from people who experience such a life changing and unpleasant place. And yet while most of us will never experience the physical form of incarceration, we all have the potential to live within our own prison – even in the free world. As “Joe” stated in his interview:

Regardless of what's going on behind those walls, or regardless of being outside, you can still be locked up within your heart. A lot of people don't believe it. You could be locked up on the inside because one thing about it is you have to understand that some people could be unhappy within themselves, so then you're still locked up... Because everything could still be going right, you could be doing the same thing you're doing five years from now, because you don't know how to elevate yourself. You're stuck.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Associate “Joe” of DHP, 24 March 2009

APPENDIX A:**INTERVIEW ITEMS****Pre-Prison/Post-Release Questions**

1. What was your religious or spiritual identity before you entered prison?

Baptist = 1
Christian-other = 2
Islam = 3
None = 4

2. How important was religion/spirituality in your life before you entered prison?

Extremely Important = 1
Very Important = 2
Moderately Important = 3
Only Somewhat Important = 4
Not At All Important = 5

3. How often did you attend formal religious gatherings, such as Sunday service, Bible study, church dinners, etc?

Weekly = 1
Two or three times a month = 2
Once a month = 3
Never = 4

4. How often did you participate in informal religious or spiritual activities such as meditation, prayer, reading religious text, etc?

More than once a day = 1
Two or three times a week = 2
Once a month = 3
Never = 4

5. How often did religion/spirituality influence the decisions you made?

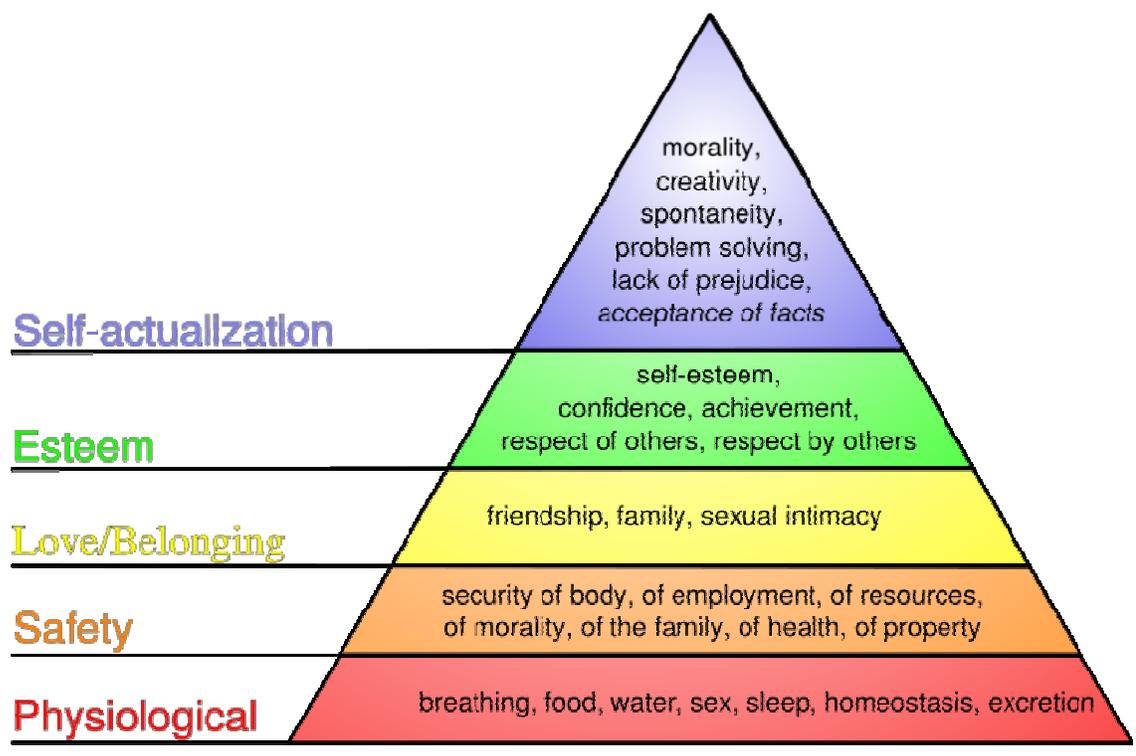
A lot = 1
Fair amount = 2
Only a little = 3

Open ended discussion questions

- What types of experiences made you think about God/religion while you were in prison?
- When you were in prison, were you involved in any programs? (Education, rehabilitation, vocational, religious, etc)
- Tell me about the relationships you had in prison – in regards to fellow inmates and family and friends who might have kept in touch.
- What was the single most influential person or thing that helped you to endure your time in prison (or to change religious beliefs, if change took place)? Explain.
- How do you think others perceived you before prison? How do others perceive you now?

APPENDIX B:

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY



Source: < http://talkingtails.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/800px-maslows_hierarchy_of_needssvg.png>

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