

From Prison to Home: Women's Pathways In and Out of Crime

Ph.D Dissertation

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Abstract

A great deal of research has been amassed on recidivism and desistance. However, most studies have been conducted on male offenders or have included only small samples of women and fewer have considered whether the reentry experience differs between black and white women. Thus, my goal in this dissertation is to bring women and race to the forefront by investigating the reentry and desistance process among Black and white females released from prison. Drawing from primary in-depth and survey interviews and an examination of official records, the current research examines the reentry experiences of a matched sample of women ex-offenders in the process of desistance with incarcerated female recidivists. Specifically, this study provides a nuanced analysis of the pathways women take into crime, the challenges they face post-release, the strategies females use to successfully or unsuccessfully reintegrate into the community, the reasons for recidivating, the motivators and methods used to desist from crime, as well as to capture the meanings of their experiences. This study highlights the importance of an intra-gender, theoretical understanding of reentry for women offenders and has direct implications for correctional policies and practices. Drawing from my study findings, I conclude by providing recommendations to help women reintegrate into society as responsible and productive citizens and to improve their reentry outcome by reducing the risk of recidivism.