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## Religious-based programming and reentry success: an examination of spirituality and its effects on post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism

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Religious-based programming and reentry success: an examination of spirituality and its effects  
on post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism

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Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science  
in Sociology  
in the College of Arts & Sciences

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2021

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This study uses data from HopeWorks, a Christian, faith-based vocational program inside the Shelby County Division of Corrections in Memphis, Tennessee, to examine factors affecting reentry success. Specifically, this research examines how spirituality – using measures that assess both *spirituality* (measured at the end of the program) and *change in spirituality* (measured as the difference between pre- and post-program measures of spirituality) – affects released offenders' reengagement with the program, ability to obtain employment, and ability to refrain from reoffending.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to those across the country who have fallen victim to the criminal injustice system, those who are fighting for justice, and all those I have had the pleasure of learning from inside America's prison walls. Above all, it is dedicated to the Mississippi inmates who endure inexplorable living conditions, daily violence, minimal health care, lack of nutrients, deficiency of hygiene products, and disrespect from policies in place, among numerous other injustices that are too lengthy to mention. Most importantly though, this project is dedicated to the individuals who have faced death due to the Mississippi prison system, and to their friends and families. God bless you all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

More than two million people are incarcerated in jails and prisons throughout the United States (Maruschak & Minton 2020). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (at 830 adults per 100,000 adults in the population; Maruschak & Minton 2020) and, according to a Pew Center on the States (2008) report, one in every 100 adults is incarcerated. Furthermore, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported that by the end of 2018, one out of every 40 adults in America was incarcerated or on parole (Maruschak & Minton 2020). The number of U.S. residents who have ever served time in prison has increased by more than 500% over the past 40 years (King, Mauer, & Young 2005). This increase in incarceration disproportionately affected young, Black males (Mauer 2003a; Roberts 2004; Mauer 2003b; King et al. 2005; Alexander 2010). For example, among men aged 20-34, one in 30 is behind bars; among Black men, however, the number is one in nine (Pew 2008).

The increased size of the correctional population also means increased costs. According to Goodwill Industries International (2009), the United States spent over \$65 billion on corrections in 2005, compared to \$9 billion in 1982 and \$44 billion in 1997. In other words, the costs of corrections increased over 722% between 1982 and 2005. Even more astonishing is the fact that this number does not include the costs of arrest, prosecution, sentencing, or the costs to the victim. In 2016, the direct costs of policing, prosecuting, and punishing offenders amounted

to approximately \$300 billion. When indirect costs (e.g., lost wages, adverse health problems for offenders) are included, the costs of operating the criminal justice system are closer to \$1.2 trillion (Hayes 2020).

Because most people are eventually released from prison, increases in the incarcerated population also mean increases in the number of people returning to the community. Reentry, the process of returning to the community after a period of incarceration (BJS 2021), presents a number of challenges, including those related to housing, employment, and lack of education and transportation (Curtis, Durzis, Shippen, Musgrove, & Brigman 2013; Ettinger 2007; Harley 1996). Because of these challenges, a significant number of individuals reoffend. In 2002, based on one of the largest national studies on recidivism, BJS reported that 30% of offenders are rearrested within the first six months of release, and 44% are rearrested within the first year of release (Langan & Levin 2002). In a more recent BJS report, Maruschak and Minton (2020) found that 67.8% of offenders are rearrested within three years of their release from incarceration, and 76.6% of offenders are rearrested within five years of release. Other national studies reported similar recidivism rates (Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1994; Greenfeld 1985; Beck & Shipley 1987). Taken together, these findings highlight how critical the first year of release is in preventing recidivism.

Studies have shown that providing offenders with education and employable skills (e.g., training in food service, maintenance, painting, entrepreneurship) increases their chances of successful reentry (Curtis et al. 2013; Gordon & Weldon 2003; Kelso 2000; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie 2000). Thus, efforts to improve individuals' chances of post-release success have focused primarily on educational and vocational training (Curtis et al. 2013). Improving

individuals' chances for post-release success is also cost-effective. For example, in Colorado, annual housing costs are about \$37,000 *per inmate*, but the annual cost of educational programs *throughout the state* is \$150,000 (Duke 2018). These estimates are similar to those reported in other states. In other words, the benefits of correctional programming outweigh the costs of housing inmates. Correctional programming can both reduce costs and promote successful reentry.

Apart from educational and vocational training, another factor that may be related to successful reentry is religiosity. Research has shown that religiosity (e.g., church attendance, clergy mentorship, spiritual transformations) benefits peoples' lives in several ways. For example, religiosity is associated with higher educational attainment (Johnson, Thompkins, & Webb 2000), longer lifespan (Chatters 2000; Ellison & Levin 1998; George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough 2000), lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse (Chatters 2000; Ellison & Levin 1998), reduced divorce rates (Sherkat & Ellison 1999), lower likelihood of suicides (George et al. 2000; McCullough & Willoughby 2009), reduced depression (George et al. 2000; McCullough & Willoughby 2009), higher levels of satisfaction in married couples (Sherkat & Ellison 1999), and increased levels of hope, self-worth, purpose, and overall sense of well-being (George et al. 2000; Johnson et al. 2002). In other words, these studies suggest that religiosity promotes positive pro-social behaviors. In turn, these positive pro-social behaviors are important because they likely serve as protective factors that prevent harmful or delinquent outcomes. While the previous studies relied on religiosity measures that are Christian-centric, faith-based programs that focus on developing pro-social attitudes, acceptable social behaviors, and

community bonds, rather than Biblical principles, have similar outcomes (Bright & Graham 2007).

The current study focuses on HopeWorks, a faith-based vocational program inside the Shelby County Division of Corrections in Memphis, Tennessee. According to the American Community Survey (2015), of the 53 U.S. metropolitan cities with over one million residents, Memphis has the second highest poverty rate at 18.4%. In recent years, Memphis mayors, politicians, and policy makers have developed programs and resources to help offenders transition from prison to the community (Anon. 2021). The mission of the Memphis Office of Reentry is to provide released offenders with vocational training, hands-on technical training, and entrepreneurship skills that will lead to employment and decrease future criminal behaviors (Anon. 2021). The current study will potentially assist the Memphis community in supporting offenders when they are released from incarceration.

HopeWorks employs a holistic approach that includes counseling, mentorship, spiritual training (e.g., Bible lessons), financial literacy, and post-release services. Furthermore, it claims to promote pro-social behaviors and strengthen community bonds. Although a Christian-based program, HopeWorks is open to individuals with non-Christian beliefs and those who are non-religious. The 13-week program is available to inmates who are typically within 3-4 months of their release date. Program staff interview volunteers to ensure that they are interested in finding employment upon their release from prison. There are not any qualifiers that prevent an incarcerated person from participating. The program distributes a spirituality survey at the beginning and end of the program that serves as the primary data for this research.

While most previous research has accounted only for religious involvement such as church attendance or clergy mentorship, the current study includes two measures of spirituality: one measure based on responses to the second (i.e., post-program) survey and one measure based on the *difference* between responses to the first (i.e., pre-program) and second (i.e., post-program) surveys. The latter is a measure of personal *change* in spirituality. The surveys assess individuals' thoughts, behaviors, and emotional responses. Because the survey is administered at both the beginning and end of the program, it allows me to examine whether thoughts and behaviors change over the course of the program. This change in spirituality measure is unique and will allow me to examine whether a personal spiritual transformation is associated with three outcomes: post-release engagement (with the faith-based program), employment, and recidivism. This is important because change in spirituality is a cognitive transformation, an improvement on many previous studies that measured religiosity using behavioral measures such as church attendance (Cardwell 1980; Hill & Hood 1999), reading the Bible (Hill & Hood 1999), or praying (Hill & Hood 1999; Zwingmann, Klein, & Büssing 2011). A spiritual change will not only be unique but show a change in thought processes.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive body of research focuses on factors that prevent recidivism and promote reentry success. One factor that has been shown to matter is participation in correctional programming (Bedford 1996; Wilson et al. 2000). Correctional programming has existed in various forms since prisons began. Some of the earliest programs were labor-intensive training that focused primarily on upkeep and maintenance to ensure the prison was functioning properly (Stocks 2012). Later programs focused on academic training, skills-based training, and cognitive behavioral therapy to promote successful reentry (Bedford 1996; Gordon & Weldon 2003; McKean & Ransford 2004). Studies evaluating correctional programs have focused primarily on educational and vocational programs. Educational programs assist inmates in earning higher education levels (e.g., a high school diploma or associate degree) and vocational programs teach the skills necessary to obtain and retain employment post-release (McKean & Ransford 2004). These programs are important for offenders because education and employment are associated with reduced recidivism (Curtis et al. 2013; Gordon & Weldon 2003; Wilson et al. 2000).

Another form of correctional programming, religious-based programming, has also been shown to reduce recidivism (Duwe & Johnson 2016; Duwe & King 2013; Hallett et al. 2017; Lee, Pagano, Johnson, & Post 2016; Pagano, Wang, Rowles, Lee, & Johnson 2015). However, some researchers deny this claim (Grasmick, Bursik, & Cochran 1991; Hirschi & Stark 1969;

Laufersweiler-Dwyer & McAnelly 1999), arguing that because most religious-based programming is paired with educational or vocational training, the results may be spurious. In other words, the success of religious-based programming may be due to the educational and vocational aspects of the program rather than to the religious aspect.

Apart from participation in correctional programming, another factor affecting reentry success is cognitive transformations, or enhancing and improving thought processes related to decision-making and problem-solving skills (Hamilton, Martini, Fazio, & Hamarlund 2019; Marano 2003). In other words, altering an offender's thought process is shown to be positively associated with successful reentry. This alteration includes challenging cognitive distortions, improving mental health and emotional regulation, and developing coping strategies. The current study builds on this idea by examining how a *change* in spirituality (i.e., a cognitive transformation) affects released offenders' reengagement with HopeWorks, employment, and recidivism.

Cognitive transformations are measured in several different ways. For the current study, *change* in spirituality is considered a cognitive transformation because alterations in cognitive processes (e.g., thoughts, emotional regulation, situational responses) are being measured. These cognitive processes are Biblical practices that are also considered socially acceptable, positive behaviors. The current study includes both a spirituality measure, assessed at the end of the program and a *change* in spirituality measure, based on the difference between pre- and post-program assessments of spirituality. The spirituality assessment includes items measuring honesty, patience, kindness, ability to communicate about faith-related issues, peace and joy (rather than anxiety and worry), and frequency of prayer. The change in spirituality measure,



based on the difference between offenders' pre- and post-program responses to the aforementioned items, assesses whether and how a cognitive change affects post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism. The study uses two different measures of spirituality because the post-program measure shows how spiritual an individual is and the change measure assesses cognitive change in one's thought processes. Previous research has typically defined religiosity in behavioral terms, such as church attendance (Cardwell 1980; Hill & Hood 1999), how often an individual reads the Bible (Hill & Hood 1999), or the number of times one prays (Hill & Hood 1999; Zwingmann et al. 2011). In addition to the post-program measure and the change measure, the current study includes a behavioral measure more consistent with past studies.

The following discussion begins with an overview of recidivism, including how it is defined and measured. I then describe various predictors of recidivism, including individual characteristics (i.e., education, employment, race, gender, age) and crime characteristics (e.g., criminal history, offense type). Next, I describe some of the barriers that previously incarcerated individuals will likely encounter upon reentering society. Understanding these barriers is important because one strategy that the criminal justice system has employed to combat these challenges is the development of correctional programming. Thus, I also describe the different types of correctional programming available inside U.S. prisons: educational programming, vocational programming, cognitive behavioral therapy, and religious programming. Finally, I discuss the literature on cognitive changes and its implications for reentry success. The literature review concludes with a discussion of the hypotheses for the current study.

## Overview of Recidivism

### Definition and Measurement

Recidivism refers to “the act of reengaging in criminal offending despite having been punished” (Pew, 2011:7). According to Langan and Levin (2002), recidivism refers to individuals who are rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated, including those with or without a new sentence. Although quantifying recidivism *should* be a simple process, many researchers run into barriers. For example, Visher and Travis (2003) noted that challenges are faced when accounting for rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration. Charges being dropped, individuals being arrested but not returning to prison, and technical violations are examples of challenges researchers face when collecting data on recidivism.

Researchers not only define recidivism in a variety of ways, but also measure it based on different time frames following release from prison. In other words, studies employ different follow-up periods (i.e., different amounts of time in which offenders are at risk of recidivating). Most studies measure recidivism by following offenders for three years after being released from prison (Langan & Levin 2002; Maruschak & Minton 2020; Pew 2011; Visher & Travis 2003). According to Pew Center on the States (2011), following offenders for three years after release is most typical for studies of recidivism. However, other studies may follow offenders for only six months (e.g., Langan & Levin 2002) or for as long as five or more years (e.g., Kelso 2000; Langan & Levin 2002; Maruschak & Minton 2020; Nally et al. 2013). It is important to be mindful of the various ways in which recidivism is measured when attempting to compare estimates of recidivism.

## **Prevalence**

*Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, a BJS report by Langan and Levin (2002), was quite possibly one of the largest recidivism studies ever completed. It tracked 272,111 previously incarcerated individuals for three years following release across 15 different states (from all regions of the United States). Langan and Levin (2002) reported that within the first three years of release, 67.8% of offenders were rearrested, 47% were convicted of committing a new crime, and 25% were returned to prison for committing a new crime. If technical violations are included, 52% (rather than 25%) of offenders were returned to prison (Langan & Levin 2002).

When measuring recidivism by rearrest only, Langan and Levin (2002) reported interesting results before the three-year mark. Within the first six months of release, 30% of offenders were rearrested. Within the first year of release, 44% of offenders are rearrested. Within the first five years of release, 76.7% of offenders were rearrested. Numerous national studies following offenders released from prison have reported similar recidivism statistics (Beck & Shipley 1987; Greenfeld 1985; Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1994).

### ***Predictors of Recidivism***

Research on recidivism focuses primarily on two types of risk factors: dynamic risk factors and static risk factors (Andrew & Bonta 1994). Dynamic risk factors, also referred to as criminogenic needs, are predictors of recidivism that are subject to change. They are malleable factors, specific to an individual, that can be identified and transformed through treatment aimed at reducing recidivism. For example, an individual's behaviors, social achievements, and thought processes can be changed and therefore can be targeted to reduce recidivism. Static risk factors are predictors that cannot be changed, such as an individual's race, age, and gender. In other

words, static risk factors are fixed and, therefore, more difficult to target as a means of reducing recidivism (Andrews & Bonta 1994).

Empirical research has attempted to better understand what dynamic and static risk factors are better predictors of recidivism. Gendreau et al. (1996) analyzed 131 studies to determine what characteristics of offenders were associated with recidivism. They found nine static, or unchangeable, statistically significant factors: intelligence, race, age, gender, criminal history, socioeconomic status, juvenile antisocial behavior, family rearing practices, and parent/family criminal histories. Among these, the two largest correlations were race (0.17) and criminal history (0.17). They also identified several dynamic, or malleable, statistically significant factors: social achievement, interpersonal conflict, personal distress, substance abuse, criminogenic needs, antisocial personality<sup>1</sup>, and companions. The two largest correlations were with antisocial personality (0.18) and companions (0.21). Gendreau et al.'s (1996) findings suggest that dynamic risk factors are better predictors of recidivism than static risk factors. This finding is noteworthy because dynamic risk factors can be changed and are therefore targets for treatment to decrease the likelihood of released offenders reengaging in criminal behaviors. One dynamic risk factor, education, has been shown over long periods to have a direct, positive impact on reduced recidivism and increased employment opportunities (Curtis et al. 2013; Duke 2018; Gendreau et al. 1996; Nally et al. 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Research in psychiatry has claimed that antisocial personality disorder is unchangeable, or static (Adshead & Jacob 2012). However, researchers note that the behaviors associated with antisocial personality disorder (e.g., drug and alcohol use, social isolation) can be dynamic, or changeable.

## ***Education***

The assumption that offenders are unintelligent has been postulated for decades (Goddard 1920) and numerous studies have demonstrated an association between intelligence and criminal behaviors (Hirschi & Hindelang 1977). Regarding recidivism, intelligence (Gendreau et al. 1996) and level of education (Curtis et al. 2013) are statistically significant predictors of recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 68% of incarcerated persons are racial minorities who have not graduated high school or obtained a GED (Harlow 2003). This finding is consistent with Duke's (2018) meta-analysis, which finds that the incarcerated population is highly uneducated compared to those who have never been incarcerated and Black males are the largest group to not have obtained a high school diploma. Furthermore, Gehring and Wright (2003) find that among those incarcerated, the literacy level (i.e., the grade level at which one is able to read) is 5.2 for Black Americans and 8.9 for White Americans.

## ***Race***

Studies generally find that minority group members are more likely than their counterparts to reoffend after release from prison (Alexander 2010; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). Consistent with that finding, Langan and Levin (2002) reported that Black Americans recidivate at 73%, compared to 63% for White Americans. Duke's (2018) meta-analysis reached similar conclusions. He found that, overall, Black and Hispanic men have significantly higher probabilities of reoffending than White offenders. Contrary to these findings, Nally et al. (2012) found that race had no significant effect on recidivism and concluded that a longitudinal study is needed to better understand these results.

## ***Gender***

Studies consistently find that males are more likely than females to reoffend once released from prison (Alexander 2010; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). For example, Langan and Levin (2002) reported that 68% of males recidivate in the first three years of release, compared to 57% of women. Furthermore, Duke (2018) found that men were 1.5 times more likely than women to recidivate. Contrary to these findings, Nally et al. (2012) found that gender had no significant effect on recidivism. Once again, they concluded that a longitudinal study is needed to better understand why gender was insignificant.

## ***Age***

Numerous studies find that younger individuals are the group most likely to reoffend once released from prison (Alexander 2010; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). For example, Langan and Levin (2002) found that more than 80% of those under the age of 18 were rearrested compared to 43% of individuals over 45. Nally et al. (2012) also reported that older individuals were less likely to reoffend.

## ***Criminal History***

Criminal history refers to an individual's record of offending. According to Langan and Levin (2002), prior arrest records affect released offenders' recidivism rates. Specifically, the likelihood of recidivism increased with each additional previous arrest for a released offender. Three years following release, offenders with only one prior arrest had a 41% recidivism rate, and offenders with 15 or more prior arrests had an 82% recidivism rate. Within the first year of release, offenders with 15 or more prior arrests had a 61% recidivism rate.

Offenders with more extensive criminal records may be more likely to recidivate because they have trouble finding employment (Rossman & Roman 2003). Consistent with that idea, a large body of research shows that employers are often unwilling to hire those with a previous criminal history (Pager, Western, & Bonikowski 2009).

### ***Type of Offense***

Regarding the type of offense, Langan and Levin (2002) reported that offenders motivated by monetary, or material gain recidivate at higher rates. In other words, released offenders who were originally convicted of property crimes were most likely (73.8%) to recidivate, followed by those originally convicted of drug offenses (66.7%). The lowest recidivism rate (61.7%) was for those originally convicted of violent crimes.

Peled-Laskov, Shoham, and Cojocaru (2019) reached similar conclusions. Specifically, the authors found that offenders charged with violent offenses were less likely to recidivate than those convicted of property or drug crimes. Peled-Laskov et al. (2019) attributed this to the fact that violent offenders typically serve their entire sentence, making them more eligible for rehabilitation programs and eliminating the possibility of violating parole.

### **Barriers to Reentry**

Given that 95% of offenders will eventually be released back into the community (Pew, 2008), it is essential to address the needs and challenges they will likely face. Previously incarcerated individuals may have low levels of education, limited employment skills, drug or alcohol dependency, negative self-perceptions, and/or a disability (Ettinger, 2007; Harley, 1996; James & Glaze, 2006). Released offenders may also have high levels of unemployment due to

their criminal records (i.e., having to disclose felony convictions on applications) and inadequate interpersonal skills (Rossman & Roman 2003, Vacca 2004, Visher, Baer, & Naser 2006).

Travis (2002) explained that offenders experience various “invisible punishments” that increase recidivism. For example, various state and federal laws restrict convicted felons in ways that make a successful transition into society harder to achieve. For example, there are restrictions on offenders’ voting rights and limited opportunities related to housing, employment, parenting, and welfare assistance (Love & Kuzma 1997; Petersilia 2003).

Curtis et al. (2013) studied 155 male inmates in two medium-security facilities in Alabama who were at least 90 days from being released. The inmates completed surveys that asked about their demographic characteristics, educational attainment, and employment history. They were also interviewed about their perceptions of the job market and reentry process. Curtis et al. (2013) identified several barriers to reentry. Specifically, there were eight themes identified: having a prison record; having low levels of education; having little previous work experience; absence of employment support/opportunities; reduced familial and community support; the need for specific work skills including a license, trade, or the like; no available transportation; and inability to access education. The authors concluded that the criminal justice system set itself up for high recidivism rates due to its lack of vocational and educational training. They concluded that nine out of ten participants could not identify a pathway to a successful transition.

Released offenders may also lack transportation, childcare, housing, and a positive social network (Ettinger, 2007; Shivy, Wu, Moon, Mann, Holland, & Eacho 2007). Barriers to housing,



in particular, often leave releasees homeless, which significantly interferes with the reentry process (Travis, Solomon, & Waul 2001). Another barrier to reentry success is offenders having to pay legal fees (Shivy et al., 2007). Financial instability can encourage individuals to seek other, potentially illegal methods to generate income (Nally et al. 2014).

Literacy skills are also important to reentry success. Studies measure literacy on a scale of levels one to four. One of the largest prison literacy research projects finds that 31% of inmates can only read at level one. This means that they can read short tasks but are unable to read straightforward literacy tasks. At the next level, 37% of inmates can read and make low-level inferences. 22% of inmates can read at the level three, indicating they can comprehend dense text. Finally, at the last level, level four, only 6% of inmates can read and synthesize the information (Haigler 1994). All of this indicates that literacy levels inside of prisons are low, thus a barrier to reentry.

Given the number of challenges that offenders face when reentering society, some individuals, groups, and organizations have attempted to build pathways to improve transition into the community. The Ohio Plan, an organization formed to develop a holistic reentry approach, introduced a new reentry philosophy in 2005. They formed Reentry Action Teams to brainstorm different approaches for reentry and analyze what worked best. Their philosophy was based on the idea that a cohesive group of support systems was best for reentry success. More specifically, they recognized that courts, police, and institutions within the community each play a role in offenders' positive transitions into the community. They also argued that offenders' families and faith communities are key to long-lasting change (Wilkinson, Rhine, & Henderson-Hurley 2005:160). Correctional programming alone cannot be expected to ensure offenders

obtain employment and refrain from reoffending. Instead, outside factors such as families, government services, positive faith communities, and post-release services must be available to increase the chances of employment and reduce the likelihood of recidivism. The numerous barriers to reentry need to be holistically approached to achieve success.

## **Correctional Programming**

### **History of Correctional Programming in the U.S.**

Correctional programming has been part of the American criminal justice system for over 200 years (Burton 2008). The first American prison was built in 1791 in Philadelphia. Just seven years later, in 1798, the first correctional program, which centered on religious and vocational training, was implemented (Burton 2008; Coley & Barton 2006). The instructors were ministers and seminary students and the only text available was the Bible (Gehring & Wright 2003). Inmates' lack of literacy skills resulted in their inability to read the Bible. Assumptions made by religious volunteers and those in charge of corrections claimed that if inmates could improve their literacy skills, they would be able to read the Bible, thus becoming better contributors to society. Instructors believed that the attitudes, behaviors, and ideas of offenders could be corrected through solitude and time for reflection and repentance (Gehring & Wright 2003).

In 1930, Congress passed legislation creating the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which was responsible for overseeing correctional programming for inmates (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2005). All prisons' correctional programming, including state prisons, operated under the same mandates given by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In the 1940s, there was no formal correctional programming inside prisons, but clergy and volunteers were allowed inside. During that time, prisons were changing significantly. Prisons were originally housing mature convicts with past

and numerous criminal records. As time progressed and laws changed, the prisons began to fill with many young, adult males with current, less “mature” convictions. As prison populations changed to younger, uneducated males, correctional programming shifted its focus to the skills-based training that the younger detained population did not possess.

The rise of the labor movement was pertinent to the acceleration of correctional programming. Prison industries were labor-based programs for inmates that produced profits. The purpose of these programs was to assist the prison industry and other physical plant maintenance by providing inmates with the skills necessary to perform these duties (Stocks 2012:36). The programs were directed at equipping inmates with the skills needed for labor-based work and paid them little to no money. Because the labor movement in the 1970s pushed for labor to be done by incarcerated persons, correctional programming moved from literacy training to skills-based training. Literacy and academic training provided individuals the opportunity to pursue an education post-release and potentially secure employment. An unintended consequence of incarcerated individuals receiving skills-based training was that it exploited the working ability of the incarcerated. In other words, it allowed institutions to take advantage of the labor that inmates could provide. After legislative acts were passed to halt prison industries, due to the injustices taking place (e.g., labor abuse, lack of pay) and strong resistance from labor unions outside of prisons, guards were left with idle inmates, and educational and religious training were the only thing left to keep inmates busy (Stocks 2012).

### **Significance of Correctional Programming**

Correctional programming provides enhanced decision-making and problem-solving skills, both of which are valuable inside and outside prison. Correctional programming also

provides opportunities for meaningful behavioral change (McKean & Ransford 2004). These behavioral changes benefit the inmates themselves, as well as their friends, families, and communities. Pelletier and Evans (2019) highlighted the prosocial attitudes, networks, skills, and bonds to social institutions that inmates build while participating in correctional programs. Inmates reported that their positive self-identities stem from educational programs providing them with the proper navigation to be contributing members of society. In other words, when an individual felt a sense that they are a contributing citizen, their self-worth was enhanced. Furthermore, the social bonds formed while participating in correctional programs “facilitated improved relationships with their families, motivation to pursue education, and preparedness for employment opportunities” (62).

Although there were no universally agreed upon goals of correctional programming, Gordon and Weldon (2003) presented the five most commonly accepted goals: (1) to provide inmates with basic academic and vocational skills; (2) to provide inmates with an opportunity to change their behavior, attitudes, and values; (3) to reduce recidivism; (4) to provide passive control of inmates’ behavior; and (5) to support the operational needs of correctional institutions (these are operations that keep the prisons running efficiently, such as food service, cleaning, and groundwork).

One factor affecting the efficacy of these correctional programs is service delivery, or how information is disseminated to inmates. Correctional programs are most effective when they address the risks, needs, and responsivity of incarcerated persons (Dowden, Antonowicz, & Andrews 2003; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Holsinger 2006). Regarding risks, this means that programs are most effective when they target high-risk offenders (Lowenkamp et al. 2006). In

other words, when offender risk factors (e.g., needs for drug rehabilitation services, interpersonal skills, or education) are addressed, their successful reentry is more attainable. Regarding needs, this means that correctional programming should target the offender's greatest challenges. In addition to addressing risks and needs, programming should ensure adequate responsiveness to these risks and needs. Responsivity ensures that the services and interventions are specific to the individuals' unique risks and needs. For example, a well-trained staff should disseminate the information, match students' learning styles, and provide services after release. When correctional programming targets specific offenders' needs, it reduces their chances of recidivism (Dowden et al. 2003). Thus, educational and vocational programming need to focus on the skills necessary to ensure employment and reduce recidivism. In the following section, I describe several types of correctional programs that address risks, needs, and responsiveness.

### **Types of Correctional Programming**

According to Bedford (1996), there are four types of correctional programming. The first is for individuals sentenced or awaiting trial and receiving educational activities supervised by the judiciary. The second type refers to activities taking place inside prisons that focus on the needs and interests of those incarcerated. The third type, correctional education, includes academic studies, literacy and basic education, vocational education and training, physical activities, and creative cultural activities. In the 1960s (Hayes 2004), these programs began focusing on cognitive transformations, which added the fourth type, communication, thinking, interpersonal, and functional life skills. The fourth type refers to resources and opportunities available to assist incarcerated persons in developing skills to be contributing members of society (e.g., skills to maintain and/or form relationships with families and communities). In the

next section, I describe educational, vocational, cognitive-behavioral, and religious-based programming, each defined by one of Bedford's (1996) four definitions.

Various forms of correctional programming have been shown to reduce recidivism. Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 33 independent studies examining educational and vocational programs. They found that evaluating an individual's degree of motivation to make positive life changes was one of the most important variables in reducing recidivism. Furthermore, correctional programming in the form of academic education, vocational training, and cognitive behavior therapies were most effective (Wilson et al. 2000).

### *Educational programs.*

Correctional education provides offenders with the skills and knowledge to be contributing members of society and is associated with reduced recidivism (Wilson et al. 2000). For example, Dugas (1990) evaluated a program that implemented literacy tutoring. Inmates who participated in the program and went on to earn a GED while incarcerated recidivated at exceptionally low rates. Of the 557 participants, less than 4% (19 inmates) reoffended, compared to the national recidivism rate of 65% at the time.

Nally, Lockwood, Knutson, and Ho (2012) conducted a study of Indiana inmates released between 2002 and 2009. Specifically, they compared 1,077 inmates enrolled in educational programs to a comparison group of 1,078 inmates. The comparison group only included individuals released in 2005. The focus of their study was the program's effect on recidivism and post-release employment. The recidivism (measured as rearrest) rate for those enrolled in correctional education programs was 29.7%. For those not enrolled in any program, the

recidivism rate was 67.8%. In other words, those not enrolled in correctional education programs were 3.7 times more likely to reoffend. They also found that the level of education affected recidivism, such that individuals with lower education levels were more likely to recidivate.

Educational programming also matters because level of education is one of the most important predictors of obtaining employment in the United States (Levin et al. 2007). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman 2004), 15% of young adults (an estimated 3.8 million youth aged 16 to 24 years old) were not in school or employed in 2001. As of 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that only 13% of young adults aged 16 to 24 were not in school or employed. Among the incarcerated, these figures were not as virtuous. For example, Nally et al. (2014) reported that 55% of the participants in their prison study did not have a high school diploma or GED.

Duke (2018) argued that there is a positive association between correctional education enrollment and post-release outcomes. His meta-analysis of five studies sought to understand which groups would benefit from correctional education. The findings showed that men entered prison with less education than women and that Black males were the largest group with less than a high school diploma. Regarding recidivism, he found that men were 1.2-1.5 times more likely to recidivate than women. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic men had significantly higher probabilities of reoffending than White men. Duke (2018) concluded that because men enter prison with less education, correctional programming should be directed at them. Furthermore, he argued that programming should be directed at marginalized populations because racial minorities are more likely to recidivate.

Another reason that educational programming matters is because research has shown that education level is associated with an individual's health. For example, better health status and lower rates of mortality are reported among high school graduates (and even more so among individuals with a college degree; Cutler & Lleras-Muney 2006; Levin et al. 2007). Maruschak and Beck (2001) found that one-third of state inmates reported having a physical or mental health condition. Even more problematic, these conditions likely exacerbated their struggles to find employment.

### *Vocational programs.*

Vocational programs, which focus on job training and skill-building for the workforce, are associated with reduced recidivism and a more straightforward reentry process (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie 2000). These programs are important for offenders because studies consistently found that high rates of unemployment were associated with higher rates of recidivism (Ettinger 2007; Harley 1996; Harrison & Schehr 2004; Shivy et al. 2007; Vernick & Reardon 2001). The stigma of incarceration was a barrier to reentry success that made it difficult for released offenders to find employment (Harrison & Schehr 2004).

Vocational education is important because it offers skills-based training to teach skills incarcerated individuals typically do not possess. In Indiana, Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson (2014) analyzed the specific types of employment that released offenders obtained and found that most (91.4%) released offenders obtained temporary help services (e.g., office assistant, customer service representative). Other jobs included waste management, food services, manufacturing, construction, or retail trade. Nally et al. (2014) concluded that skills-based, employment-oriented training would undoubtedly outweigh incarceration costs. Also, vocational



training focused on the specific qualifications and skills needed for employment would reduce recidivism by increasing the number of incarcerated persons obtaining employment.

Some correctional programs combine educational and vocational methods. According to Curtis et al. (2013), the three main barriers to employment are low levels of education, possessing a criminal record, and lack of work experience. Combination programs may be particularly useful because they address two of these barriers (i.e., low levels of education and lack of work experience) and could go a long way toward reducing recidivism.

Anderson and Schumacker (1988) examined the recidivism rates of those who obtained employment and received vocational or academic training while incarcerated. Their study divided 760 ex-offenders into four subgroups: vocational training, academic training, vocational and academic training, and no training. Those receiving no training had the highest recidivism rate. Those receiving vocational training and vocational and academic training had lower recidivism rates and higher employment rates than their counterparts (i.e., those having academic training and no training). This study showed that vocational training was pertinent to obtaining employment post-release. Later, Gordon and Weldon (2003) conducted a similar study that examined data of released offenders from 1999-2000 in West Virginia. They compared the recidivism rates of imprisoned offenders who received vocational training, vocational and GED training, or no training. Among the 169 inmates who received vocational training, only 8.75% recidivated within three years. Among the 24 inmates who had both vocational and GED training, only 6.71% recidivated. Finally, among those who received no training at all, 26% recidivated. They argued that their low recidivism rates were due to the effectiveness of the offender tracking system they implemented. Their suggestion for policy interventions was that

the design and procedures of the program, along with service coordination, needed to be derived from empirical research that proved effectiveness. Finally, they argued that monitoring and evaluating programs would continue to produce more effective transitions from incarceration to society.

Kelso (2000) compared the effects of two education programs on recidivism in Washington. This study also examined a program that combined educational and vocational training. The data included program participants from 1987-1989 who had been released for five full years. One program offered high school diplomas, vocational programs, and community college degrees. The other offered vocational training certificates and associate's degrees. Graduates from the two programs were less likely than their counterparts to recidivate. One limitation of this study, common to many studies of correctional programs, was that those in the educational program self-selected to participate and therefore may have been more motivated to succeed. The study showed that vocational training alone reduced recidivism; however, when both vocational and educational training were received, recidivism was decreased even more.

Steurer, Smith, and Tracy (2001) compared job retention and recidivism among educational and vocational program participants and non-program participants in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. Participants were (1) between the ages of 18 and 35, (2) mostly White and Hispanic individuals, (3) unlikely to have ever held a job for a full year, (4) highly likely to have a family member in prison, and (5) more likely to be serving a sentence for violent crimes. In other words, this group would be assumed to be high-risk for recidivating and less likely to retain employment. Results showed that participants were more likely to obtain a job and less likely to reoffend. Specifically, the results presented recidivism rates across the three states for program

participants at 43.3% and non-participants at 56.7%. Their findings for employment were not statistically significant; however, the researchers did find that after three years of being released, program participants had an average wage-earning of \$10,628.78 compared to \$9,557.92 for non-participants. The authors attributed the lower recidivism rates and higher wage earnings to the individuals' participation in vocational and educational programs.

Hull, Forrester, Brown, Jobe, and McCullen (2000) analyzed 3,000 men and women released between 1979 and 1994 in Virginia. Their study focused on the recidivism rates and employment status of offenders enrolled in correctional educational programs (i.e., academic, vocational, and transitional programs). The authors obtained the data in 2000, thus individuals had at least six years to obtain employment or recidivate. Recidivism rates were 49.04% for those with no educational programs while incarcerated, 37.9% for those who enrolled in but did not complete one of the programs, and 20.17% for those who completed the program. Regarding employment, the rates were 54.6% for those with no educational programs while incarcerated, 61.4% for those who enrolled in but did not complete one of the programs, and 77.9% for those who completed the program. These findings demonstrate why correctional programming is essential to reentry success (e.g., providing employment assistance, reducing recidivism). Simply participating in these programs, regardless of whether one graduates, is associated with reduced recidivism and increased employment. The benefits are even more pronounced for those who complete the program.

### ***Cognitive behavior therapy programs.***

The development and transformation of people's values, morals, beliefs, and rituals affect the way they approach the world (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck 2006). Changing these

aspects of one's identity requires changing one's thought processes. One way to produce this change is through cognitive behavioral therapy, otherwise known as CBT (Butler et al. 2006). CBT was created to address the thoughts of individuals that were deemed deficient. Ross and Fabiano (1985) defined four cognitive deficits of inmates: cognitive impulsivity, lack of concrete reasoning skills, lack of social perspectives, and lack of problem-solving skills. Cognitive impulsivity occurs when an individual is faced with a temptation or problem and reacts immediately, without analyzing the situation or understanding the consequences. Concrete reasoning skills are deficient when one's thinking is shallow and narrow (e.g., being unable to see the larger picture and seeing the world in absolute terms). A lack of social perspectives is being unaware of the social situation, or as some would say, the inability to "read a room." A deficiency in problem-solving skills occurs when an individual cannot generate alternative solutions to problems, cannot identify a step-by-step plan to solve a problem, and cannot properly conceptualize cause-and-effect of their actions. When correctional programs addressed these specific cognitive areas using CBT, there was reduced recidivism among released offenders (Ross & Fabiano 1985). Pearson, Lipton, Cleland, and Yee (2002) also found that cognitive-behavioral therapies successfully deterred individuals from engaging in crime upon release.

Cognitive transformations may be essential to post-release success (Pearson et al. 2002; Ross & Fabiano 1985). When cognitive interventions were put in place, recidivism was reduced due to increased positive self-perceptions (Pearson et al. 2002; Sampson et al. 2004; Shippen et al. 2017). Because these cognitive transformations involved building a positive self-identity and bonds to friends, families, and community services, it may be easier for released offenders to

envision paths to employment and desistance from criminal behaviors (Marano 2003; Hamilton et al. 2019; Shippen et al. 2017).

Regarding employment, inmates' thought processes can be challenging to understand and even more challenging to change. Cognitive information processing (CIP) theory assumes that decision-making and career planning are associated with thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The theory posits that for individuals to effectively choose a career path, they must identify, challenge, and alter negative cognitions hindering the process, or pathway, to a career after obtaining employment (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz 2004). Railey and Peterson (2000) examined incarcerated persons and their negative cognitions. The authors suggested that inmates have lower levels of commitment to careers due to their internalized thoughts of self and ability.

Cognitive theory is based on the assumption that individuals' behavior and affect arise from their cognitions (Freeman, Pretzer, Fleming, & Simon 1990), which are verbal or visual events, actual or not, that enter a person's stream of consciousness based on their experiences (Freeman et al. 1990). Shippen, Meyer, Derzis, & Gage (2017) used cognitive theory to analyze the career thoughts (i.e., self-perceptions regarding employability and capability) of adult male offenders reentering society and found that inmates with less education have more confused decision-making skills, more external conflict due to their internalized thoughts, and lower scores on their cognitive abilities scale.

Bandura (1977) theorized that "cognitive events are induced and altered most readily by experience of mastery arising from effective performance" (191); in other words, self-efficacy is improved by having a successful experience. Consistent with this idea, Pelletier and Evans

(2019) argued that interviewees experienced mastery in their educational programs, which increased their self-confidence. They stated that, “with participants citing development of self-confidence and positive self-image through educational activities—[this] indicates a self-perception of mastery that allows them to establish prosocial connections upon reentry into the community” (65). The ability to master something and develop self-confidence and a positive self-image encouraged participants to obtain employment and refrain from engaging in criminal behavior.

The labels that prisoners adopt, both inside and outside of prison, predict their ability to obtain and retain a job. “Pathways to Success,” is a 60-hour vocational course implemented by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, identifies “a career pathway, a target occupation, and skills that support the individual in successfully moving toward their target goal” (Hamilton Martini, Fazio, & Hamarlund 2019:56). The program also teaches soft skills such as “personal initiative, communication, dependability, scheduling and time management, getting along with supervisors and co-workers, resolving conflict, giving and receiving feedback, stress on the job, and diversity in the workplace” (55). Soft-skills training builds characteristics that prisoners can be proud of, thus promoting the ability to find and retain work. Program staff works with individual inmates to build a portfolio that they can take with them upon release. According to Hamilton et al. (2019), 61.6% of participants completed the program, which was higher than the national average. One reason for the high completion rate may be because the program changed participants’ thoughts toward employment. For example, one inmate stated the following:

At first I just chose the highest paying job that sounded good. Then as the class went on, I found jobs that I can see myself working and making a career out of. The more

information that I was given in this class, the more it started to open my eyes and mind to wanting to know more about a job that I am now focusing on.

### ***Religious programs.***

Many institutions offer religious (i.e., faith-based) programs (Hallett & McCoy 2015; Mowen, Stansfield, and Boman 2017; Stansfield & Mowen 2018; Stansfield et al. 2017). Numerous studies have examined the relationship between religion and crime (Duwe & King 2013; Mowen et al. 2017; Stansfield & Mowen 2018). Most of these studies have focused on Christian-based religious programming. The focus on Christian-based programs may be because those were among the earliest correctional programs. According to Todd and Tipton (2011), research that seeks to understand the experiences of (or give voice to) non-Christians has been limited. Furthermore, those studies that have been conducted on non-Christian-based programs have focused almost exclusively on those of the Muslim faith (Todd & Tipton 2011). Unless otherwise stated, the studies described here are Christian-centric.

Some of the first criminologists to study this religion-crime relationship were Hirschi and Stark (1969). They hypothesized that the “hellfire” associated with religiosity could be a crime deterrent. Their hypothesis was based on the idea that offenders would refrain from crime due to fear of eternal damnation for sinners. Hirschi and Stark (1969) assumed that religious potential offenders would weigh their rewards and punishments. If an individual’s perspective on rewards and punishments was based on religious beliefs, they were expected to support prosocial values, beliefs, and rituals.

Nevertheless, the relationship between religion and crime is complicated. As Burkett and White (1974) noted, a paradox exists regarding the construction of Christian morals. Although one might assume that those possessing Christian morals would not engage in crime or delinquency to avoid punishment, Hirschi and Stark (1969) found that Christian adolescents were no less likely to engage in delinquency than other adolescents. Burkett and White (1974) proposed two reasons for Hirschi and Stark's (1969) finding. First, Christian understanding of Biblical morality is not implemented in the ways the Bible intended. Second, if Christians live up to the proper biblical morality, secular forces may have the same impact to counteract the effect of Christian morals. Burkett and White (1974) noted that churches do not condone criminal behavior, but neither does any other "respectable" institution. Over the years, they explain that the broader community has viewed "victimless" crimes (e.g., marijuana use or underage drinking) as less serious; some church leaders have agreed. Overall, however, most self-proclaimed Christians had not accepted that victimless crimes are less serious (Burkett & White 1974). Although Burkett and White's (1974) study mirrored Hirschi and Stark's (1969), they added a measure of self-reported marijuana and alcohol usage. They found that religious participation was associated with building morals (i.e., disagreeing with doing something wrong to get ahead or taking advantage of people). However, the positive association was stronger when belief in the supernatural was present, as opposed to simply religious participation. These findings suggest that *belief* in a higher power does more to discourage criminal behavior than religious *participation*.

Adamczyk, Freilich, and Kim (2017) found a negative relationship between religious involvement and criminal behavior. They suggested that religious involvement promoted



networks of social support and prosocial connections that, in turn, reduced recidivism among offenders, as have others (Giordano et al. 2008; O'Connor et al. 2006; Schroeder & Frana 2009; Stansfield et al. 2017). According to Stansfield et al. (2017:525), "religion can form the basis for an institutional support network through which recently released prisoners can build and repair relationships, find jobs, and establish social support." Upon being released, assuming offenders were offered the opportunity to build the skill set, their outside relationships and ability to find employment can be increased. The skill set was built from cognitive changes due to religious involvement that led to prosocial relationships and self-confidence (Bandura 1977; Marano 2003; Shippen et al. 2017).

Byron Johnson (2004) sought to analyze if there was a relationship between religious programming and recidivism. His study was based on Prison Fellowship (PF), a nonprofit religious ministry, that followed recidivism rates for one to eight years. His findings presented that over the eight years, there was no significant difference between the groups, those in PF and those not. He did find, however, that those enrolled in Bible studies were highly less likely to recidivate (measured by rearrest and reincarceration). Furthermore, those enrolled in Bible studies that had high participation rates had even lower recidivism rates. This indicates that those engaging in religious behaviors are less likely to reoffend than those who are not.

Duncan, Stansfield, Hall, and O'Connor (2018) conducted a study of 300 prisoners who had humanist, spiritual, and religious (HSR) ways of findings meaning during their incarceration. Of those in the study, 95% voluntarily engaged in different events held by community volunteers and the prison chaplains. Their attendance averaged three to four hours of engagement per month. The authors findings presented that involvement in HSR had a significant impact on

recidivism over a 1-year follow-up period. Those attending more than four hours per month had a 22% recidivism rate. They attribute the success to the pro-social support and modeling of each person's diverse journey of transitioning back to society. They argue that developing positive characteristics and pro-social bonds are derived from higher levels of HSR involvement. Put differently, those who engage in the humanist, spiritual, and religious events have more positive transitions into society and reduced recidivism.

Character development (i.e., positive self-worth) is one of the main focuses of religious programming (Mowen et al. 2017). A religious program that includes a spiritual dimension encourages a positive identity transformation. Hallett et al. (2017) examined a Christian seminary program in Louisiana to analyze the beliefs, self-perceptions, and values of incarcerated individuals. Their findings showed that spiritual and religious components of programs assisted in developing coping mechanisms (which were then used to combat negative circumstances and emotions). In turn, these cognitive strategies enabled individuals to desist from crime and attain employment (Marano 2003; Shippen et al. 2017).

According to Giordano et al. (2008), self-esteem, hope for the future, and empathy are all components of faith-based programming. Each component serves as a precursor to refraining from future criminal behavior. Further, they assist individuals in obtaining employment. Giordano et al. (2008) and Mowen et al. (2017) claimed that individuals who identify as spiritual are more likely to be supported by positive social networks and faith communities. These communities and their positive influences likely affected released offenders' reengagement with programs, ability to secure employment, and recidivism. Consistent with that idea, Pelletier and Evans (2019) showed that social bonds formed in programs promoted positive familial

relationships, motivation to increase education, and the ability to seek employment opportunities.

Finally, Bright and Graham (2007) studied five different faith-based correctional programs. One of these, an interfaith-based program in Marion, Ohio called Horizon, had volunteers from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith communities. Horizon provided services to assist in developing prosocial behaviors and basic life skills and recovering from addiction. As of June 2006, Horizon served 260 inmates; 179 participants graduated, 86 of whom were released to the community. As of 2007, only 14% of the released had recidivated and returned to prison. The second program, FCBI (faith- and character-based institution) in Lawtey, Florida, focused on self-improvement, including the development of life-skills, mentorship, and personal integrity. This program did not tolerate fighting or stealing and the men policed themselves. As of May 2007, Lawtey had a significantly lower disciplinary rate per 1,000 compared to all institutions in Florida. After six months of release, none of the 189 men from the institution had been reincarcerated, compared to four (2.1%) of those in the comparison group. The researchers argued that the overall low recidivism was due to the environment and atmosphere of the facility.

The other three programs did not specify which religion they based their programs on, but all of them noted that individuals of all religious beliefs, or no beliefs at all, were welcome to participate in the programs. All the programs focused on building community bonds and developing a plan for successful reentry. Findings showed significantly lower recidivism rates for participants in the Horizon program (14%) and the FCBI institution (0%), compared to those who did not participate. The other three programs did not collect recidivism data. Despite the

lack of recidivism data, one program reported that more than 1,400 inmates had graduated, and “84% of [them] said the program had been very useful to them” (2007:2). All five programs reported that community bonds were increased. Bright and Graham’s (2007) study was important because the five programs implemented practices based on pro-social attitudes and socially acceptable morals rather than specific religious beliefs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The negative association between religion and crime may be explained by Hirschi’s (1969) social bond theory. Hirschi (1969) argued that individuals who have strong attachments to conventional society were more likely to be deterred from crime than those with shallow or weak social bonds. Consistent with this idea, studies found that recidivism was less likely when a person had strong social support (Duwe 2011; Wilson, Cortoni & McWhinnie 2009). Religious communities were one source of support, and individuals who developed their social networks in these communities reported greater well-being (Lim & Putnam 2010).

Several criminological theories are relevant to the relationship between religion and crime. If an individual’s character is rooted in positive self-perceptions and beliefs, the idea is that religious involvement promotes prosocial behaviors and positive community bonds; therefore, serving as a deterrent from crime. Hirschi’s social bond theory maintains that attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief explain how an individual assimilates within a community (Hirschi 1969). Regarding religion, if the community that an offender is returning to is rooted in religiosity, it can be assumed that prosocial behaviors, rituals, and values will be formed. This also supports the argument that reengagement with religious programs will promote positive social bonds that lead to reentry success.

Assuming a criminal identity may also lead individuals to formulate ideas about themselves that could lead to further criminal involvement. Labeling theory argues that stereotyping individuals or forcing an identity on them may cause them to adopt that identity, even if they otherwise would not have (Becker 2018). Strengthening social bonds encourages individuals to refrain from adopting a criminal identity when one is projected onto them (Braithwaite 1989). According to Agnew (2001), faith-based services have prosocial effects and are an agent for positive identity transformation. Hallett, Hays, Johnson, Jang, and Duwe (2017) interviewed graduates of the seminary program at Louisiana State Penitentiary and found that spiritual learning and religious involvement helped reshape the significance of their purpose and belonging in society. Braithwaite (1989) put more focus on the societal role of criminogenic labeling. The religious and spiritual learning that promotes enhanced self-worth decreases the formal, stigmatizing labels that society places on offenders.

According to Laufersweiler-Dwyer and McAnelly (1999), spiritual guidance helped identify functional paths to success in society. They argued that offenders' ability to foresee a path to success would lead to a "sense of belonging." As previously mentioned, a sense of belonging and social bonds promoted successful reentry. Spiritual guidance also increased one's perception of self (Hallett et al. 2017; Mowen et al. 2017). Laufersweiler-Dwyer and McAnelly's (1999) study of Florida incarcerates showed that participants' belief that they "belonged in society" increased as a result of interactions with mentors who provided spiritual guidance.

The Ohio Plan, a program formed to find alternative avenues for reentry, suggested that community-based reentry programs could assist offenders in transitioning from incarceration to

being contributing members of society. Wilkinson, Rhine, and Henderson-Hurley (2005) argued that programs are necessary to connect offenders with services that address specific criminogenic needs and, in turn, prevent future offending. This study analyzed offenders through sentencing, admission to prison, and following discharge to find ways to better the transitional process. Their argument was that following release, reentry programs would serve as a tool to incorporate their families and communities. While they accepted there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for reentry, they found that targeting individuals’ personal needs will reduce offending and increase job retention. For example, they implemented The Ohio Plan in Cleveland and Cincinnati; findings showed that service-delivery and community-based private organizations were bridging gaps in the reentry process. The authors argued that for successful reentry plans, successful collaborations of stakeholders must be established. These stakeholders included, but were not limited to, family agencies, mental health agencies, departments of correction, employment agencies, and charity and faith-based organizations. These stakeholders aligned with Hirschi’s (1969) theoretical argument that having positive social bonds prevented future offending. Each of these services played a vital role in integrating incarcerated individuals into society. They must work together to effectively address the needs of offenders while transitioning (Wilkinson et al. 2005). This supports the theoretical argument that positive social bonds and self-perceptions promote successful reentry (Becker 2018; Braithwaite 1989; Hirschi 1969).

A social bond found to promote successful reentry is the presence of mentors. Mentors, specifically while incarcerated, were associated with reduced recidivism due to building bonds (Duwe & Clark 2011). While visits from family members were beneficial, Duwe and Clark (2011) found that visits from clergy and mentors were more highly correlated with reduced

recidivism. Further, upon release, offenders relied on friends and family members for financial assistance, housing, and employment opportunities (Berg & Huebner 2011). Critical levels of accountability and aid were supported through faith-informed mentors who stayed connected with released offenders. Otherwise, this is missing during the transition back into society (Dominey & Lowson 2017; Duwe & King 2013; Wright 2013; Tomczak & Thompson 2017). If incarcerated persons are given the opportunity to form strong bonds with mentors, the possibility of engaging in deviance could be decreased. Moreover, the mentoring relationship can enhance the ability to reintegrate into society and bring about a smoother transition.

According to several scholars, spiritual and religious programming can enable incarcerated persons to have the capacity to reduce offending based on a positive identity transformation (Hallett et al. 2017; Lee et al. 2016; Pagano et al. 2015). Further, social support and mentoring that continues post-release can also assist in reducing recidivism (Duwe & Johnson 2016; Duwe & King 2013). Strong social support (Hirschi 1969) and positive self-perception (Becker 2018) promote successful reentry paths. The studies that have been conducted about these relationships focused primarily on individual program participation and religious behavior. A shortcoming of the research is that there is no consideration for other possible opportunities for support and resources. The current study will seek to understand how a Christian-centric, faith-based program that provides spiritual guidance, job training, and post-release care affects recidivism and job retention.

### **The Current Study**

While numerous studies have examined correctional programming and its relationship to recidivism and job retention (Steurer et al. 2001; Wilkinson et al. 2005), the role of religious

programming in reducing recidivism and increasing job retention has not been clearly identified. Furthermore, few studies have examined the factors that predict post-release engagement (in part because most programs do not offer services that extend from the correctional facility to the community). The few studies that evaluated post-release services found that when offenders utilize them, recidivism was reduced, and employment was increased (Saylor & Gaes 1997). Religious programming is important to consider because religious involvement was associated with various pro-social behaviors, including higher educational attainment (Johnson et al. 2000), lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse (Chatters 2000; Ellison & Levin 1998), lower likelihood of suicides (George et al. 2000; McCullough & Willoughby 2009), and increased levels of hope, self-worth, purpose, and overall well-being (George et al. 2000; Johnson et al. 2002).

While most studies define religiosity as religious involvement, research has shown that a cognitive transformation is imperative to developing prosocial attitudes (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Agnew 2001), a sense of purpose and belonging (Braithwaite 1989), decision-making and problem-solving skills (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Hallett et al. 2017), bonds to families and communities (Agnew 2001; Lee et al. 2016), and self-efficacy (Pagano et al. 2015). The current study uses data from HopeWorks, a holistic program that includes counseling, mentorship, spiritual transformations, financial literacy, and post-release services. Because HopeWorks distributes a spirituality survey at the beginning and end of the program, I plan to use two measures of religiosity (i.e., spirituality): one measure based on responses to the second (i.e., post-program) survey and one measure based on the *difference* in responses to the first (i.e., pre-program) and second (i.e., post-program) surveys. The latter is a measure of personal *change* in



spirituality. By including a measure of change in spirituality, I hope to determine whether a cognitive transformation in the form of personal spiritual change affects whether offenders reengage with the program, obtain employment, or reoffend once released from prison. The former (i.e., post-program) measure will describe how spiritual an individual is, rather than any cognitive *change* in spirituality. To compare these spirituality measures to more traditional measures of religiosity, I will also include a measure of religious behaviors. This measure will describe how frequently participants attend church, pray, and read the Bible. For the current study, recidivism is defined as an offender being rearrested for a new offense following release from prison. The time since release ranged from six months to five years. This number was generated from the date I obtained the data. The first class had graduated five years prior, and the most recent class had only been released six months. More specifically, the current study will test the following hypotheses:

### **Post-release Engagement Hypotheses**

*Participants who report greater spirituality (H1.1) and those who report an increase in spirituality (H1.2) will be more likely to reengage with HopeWorks after their release from prison.* Previous studies have found that religious involvement promotes communal support (Duwe 2011; Hirschi 1969; Lim & Putnam 2010; Stark & Bainbridge 1996). The religious involvement of HopeWorks' program should promote increased spirituality. As a result, more spiritual offenders may have more bonds to society (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Agnew 2001; Pelletier & Evans 2019) and therefore may be more likely to reengage with HopeWorks following release. Finally, those who are spiritual, in general, would be inclined to reengage.

*Participants who are older (H2.1), female (H2.2), more educated (H2.3), White (H2.4), and convicted of violent crimes (H2.5) will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.* Participants reengaging with programs after release from prison have not previously been examined, so this hypothesis is exploratory. However, research overwhelmingly finds that offenders who are older (Langan & Levin 2002; Nally et al. 2013), female (Alexander 2010; Langan & Levin 2002), more educated (Langan & Levin 2002; Nally et al. 2013), White (Alexander 2010; Langan & Levin 2002; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; Nally et al. 2013; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Roberts 2004), and convicted of violent crimes (Alexander 2010; Nally et al. 2013; Vacca 2004) are less likely to reoffend and more likely to obtain employment; therefore, I assume these groups will be more likely to reengage, as well.

### **Employment Hypotheses**

*Participants who report an increase in spirituality will be more likely to obtain employment after their release from prison (H3).* Spirituality, enhanced by religious involvement, promotes prosocial behaviors and cognitive transformations (Giordano et al. 2008; Hirschi & Stark 1969; O'Connor et al. 2006; Pelletier & Evans 2019; Schroeder & Frana 2009; Stansfield et al. 2017). Religious involvement promotes positive cognitive transformations, or a change in one's thought processes. This includes decision-making skills, enhanced emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills, which increases their ability to see a pathway of success (Curtis et al. 2013; Hallett et al. 2017; Sampson et al. 2004; Vacca 2004) and, in turn, their ability to obtain employment following release.

*Participants who are older (H4.1), female (H4.2), more educated (H4.3), White (H4.4), and convicted of non-violent offenses (H4.5) will be more likely than other participants to obtain*

*employment.* Research shows that older, more educated, White women are more likely to obtain employment after release from prison (Alexander 2010; Duwe 2013; Hull et al. 2000; Langan & Levin 2002; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). Furthermore, although released offenders with violent charges recidivate at lower rates, they are shown to face more barriers to obtaining employment (Langan & Levin 2002; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019).

### **Recidivism Hypotheses**

*Participants who report an increase in spirituality will be less likely to recidivate after their release from prison (H5).* Religious involvement deters individuals from reoffending (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Giordano et al. 2008; Hallett & McCoy 2015; O'Connor et al. 2006; Maruna, Wilson, & Curran 2006). As stated before, religious involvement promotes positive cognitive transformations that increase self-efficacy, community and family bonds, and communication skills (Bedford 1996; Enocksoon 1980; Marano 2003). All these findings suggest that high levels of spirituality will result in reduced recidivism.

*Participants who are older (H6.1), female (H6.2), more educated (H6.3), White (H6.4), and convicted of violent offenses (H6.5) will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.* Studies show that older (Langan & Levin 2002; Nally et al. 2013), more educated (Langan & Levin 2002; Nally et al. 2013), White (Alexander 2010; Langan & Levin 2002; King et al. 2005; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; Nally et al. 2013; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Roberts 2004) women (Alexander 2010; Langan & Levin 2002) are less likely to reoffend. This group is also more likely to obtain employment, which is directly, positively associated with reduced recidivism (Harley 1996; Levin et al. 2007; Rossman & Roman 2003). Finally, those with non-

violent offenses reoffend at higher rates than those with violent offenses (Langan & Levin 2002; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Steurer et al. 2001; Vacca 2004).

Table 2.1 Summary of Literature

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<i>Post-release Engagement</i>	Most research claims that building bonds with communities is pertinent for a successful reentry process. Religious community bonds lead to increased well-being. Though there aren't many studies analyzing post-release engagement, it can be assumed that reengaging with a faith-based, vocational program will promote successful reentry.
<i>Employment</i>	Most offenders are unemployed when they enter prison and, upon release, their chances of obtaining employment are decreased. Post-release engagement is a positive agent for building community bonds, which leads to reduced recidivism. Individuals are less likely to recidivate when they are employed.
<i>Recidivism</i>	Approximately 30% of offenders are rearrested within the first six months of release, 44% within the first year of release, and two-thirds are rearrested within three years of release.
<i>Spirituality Change</i>	Cognitive transformations lead to prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and purpose. Positive identity transformations also lead to increased self-efficacy. The spirituality scale measures honesty, patience, and emotional regulation, among other cognitive processes.

Table 1 (continued)

<i>Education</i>	Educational attainment is associated with obtaining employment and reduced recidivism. Post-release engagement has not been measured regarding education.
<i>Race, Age, &amp; Gender</i>	White, older, females are less likely to recidivate and more likely to obtain employment post-release. Demographics have not been studied on post-release engagement.
<i>Type of Offense</i>	Violent offenders are less likely to obtain employment and are less likely to recidivate than are non-violent offenders. Post-release engagement has not been measured regarding violent and non-violent offenses.
<i>Time Since Release</i>	The transition back into society is an “over time” process. The sooner that resources and opportunities are presented to released offenders, the more successful the reentry process will be (due to rates of recidivism from time of release).

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### **Data**

HopeWorks, a faith-based personal and career development program, was established in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1990. At that time, government and social service agencies assisting released offenders were not abundant and existing ones did not have adequate resources. Church leaders and volunteers hoped to develop a program that would equip individuals with the skills to become self-sufficient, self-directed, and goal oriented. In 1990, Wayne Reed, the director of Memphis Area Cooperative Services, a social service organization, developed Life Skills Lab. Eight years later, the organization received 501(c)(3) status to be declared a non-profit. The organization, renamed HopeWorks, consisted of a variety of programs, including counseling and job search assistance, to assist the community. The program providing employment assistance was named Personal and Career Development (PCD) to more clearly identify the services offered. Since 1990, the nonprofit has assisted more than 1,000 graduates in obtaining employment in Memphis. As the services needed by participants and by the city changed, HopeWorks expanded its programming to meet those needs. Specifically, HopeWorks was updated to include counseling, financial management, English as a second language, and education (in the form of HiSet, which is equivalent to a high school diploma).

HopeWorks' PCD Program takes a holistic approach; home-cooked meals are prepared, counseling is provided, and weekly mentors are available if inmates desire. Once released from prison, HopeWorks continues to offer all of its services to program graduates. In other words, counseling services, HiSet courses, job finding assistance, hygiene products, and interview clothing are available when graduates reengage with HopeWorks. Those who reengage with the program (by returning to the HopeWorks facility) have an intake meeting with a staff member, are drug tested at the Memphis testing facility, and return for a meeting with the internship and job coordinator(s). The expectation is that the individual will obtain and maintain a job with a livable wage. It is also expected that they will take advantage of the counseling services, food, and essential sanitary items offered.

HopeWorks originally serviced only individuals in the Memphis community. In 2016, the Tennessee Department of Corrections granted HopeWorks permission to expand the 13-week PCD program to the Shelby County Division of Corrections. The current study uses data from that project. Specifically, only data gathered from those who graduated and were released from prison is used. Data from those who failed to complete the program was not available. One of the unique aspects of the HopeWorks data is the spirituality survey, which is distributed at the beginning and end of the program. The spirituality survey is included in Appendix A and contains 15 questions assessing individuals' thoughts and attitudes towards spirituality and is based on Biblical principles (e.g., "Peace, joy, and contentment describe my life more than worry and anxiety," "I make an effort to show love to people who are different from me," "I control my temper well," and "I treat my family with patience and kindness.")). The survey also includes

three measures of religious behavior that assess how frequently participants attended church, prayed, and read the Bible.

## **Participants**

Within the Shelby County Division of Corrections, HopeWorks' PCD program is voluntary. Inmates sign up to be considered for the course and then go through a brief interview with the HopeWorks instructor and counselor for the class. The interviews, which ask about the desire to find a career path and intentions to attend class daily, are designed to build a relationship with potential students and make them aware of the processes of the PCD program. HopeWorks staff review and admit inmates based on the criteria previously outlined. HopeWorks seeks to admit inmates approaching their release date within 3-4 months after graduating from the program. A maximum of 35 individuals is allowed in each 13-week class. Because participation is voluntary, inmates are free to withdraw from the program at any time.

The cases included in this study are from CoactionNet, the tracking database at HopeWorks. HopeWorks staff surveyed participants at the beginning and end of the PCD course. CoactionNet also provides data that includes whether the released offender reengaged with HopeWorks, their employment status, and if they reoffended. For the current study, the data are from all participants who completed the program between February 2016 and April 2020. The final sample includes 253 male and female graduates aged 18 to 70.



## *Measures*

### *Dependent Variables*

This study includes three dependent variables: post-release engagement (with HopeWorks), employment, and recidivism.

*Post-release engagement.* The first variable, *post-release engagement*, measures whether or not an individual engaged with HopeWorks after being released from prison. Possible outcomes included did not engage (coded “0”), engaged (coded “1”), engaged but never passed a drug test (coded “2”), and did not engage but obtained job on their own (coded “3”). This variable was recoded so that “did not engage” and “did not engage but obtained a job on their own” are coded “0” and “engaged” and “engaged but cannot pass a drug test” are coded “1.”

*Employment.* The second variable, *employment*, measures whether the participant obtained employment post-release. This includes full-time and part-time employment. Those who obtained a job were coded as “1” and those who did not obtain a job were coded as “0.”

*Recidivism.* The final dependent variable, *recidivism*, measures whether or not an individual was rearrested. This included arrests for both new crimes and parole violations. Participants who were not rearrested since their release were coded as “0” and those who were rearrested were coded as “1.”

### *Independent Variables*

This study includes nine independent variables: two measures of spirituality, religious behavior, education, gender, race, age, offense type, and time since release from prison. Apart

from one of the spirituality measures, all these variables are based on responses to the post-program survey.

*Spirituality.* At the beginning and end of the program, participants answered 12 questions about their spirituality. Responses to each question were coded “1” for never, “2” for occasionally, “3” for often, and “4” for daily. To create the first measure of spirituality, based on the post-program survey, I summed responses to these items so that higher scores represent greater spirituality. This spirituality measure ranges from 12 to 48. To create the second measure of spirituality, I used both the pre- and post-program surveys. Specifically, I subtracted the pre-program score from the post-program score. The change in spirituality measure is a continuous variable that ranges from -15 to 25. Positive scores on the change in spirituality measure indicate growth in spirituality and thus a cognitive, personal identity transformation.

*Religious behavior.* In addition to the spirituality measures, I summed responses to the following questions to create a measure of religious behavior: how many times (in weeks) one attended church (responses ranged from 0-4), how often (in days) one prayed (responses ranged from 0-7), and how often (in days) an individual read the Bible (responses ranged from 0-7). The summative measure ranges from 0-18, with higher scores representing more frequent religious behaviors.

*Education.* Education is a dichotomous variable coded “1” if the respondent graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or passed the high school equivalency exam (i.e., HiSet) and “0” if the respondent did not graduate from high school or pass a high school equivalency exam.

*Gender.* Gender is a dichotomous variable coded “1” for female and “0” for male.

*Race.* Race was recorded as “White,” “Black,” “Hispanic,” “Asian,” or “Other.” Because the majority of participants are Black or White, I recoded this variable as “1” for Black and “0” for Non-Black (i.e., White, Hispanic, Asian, and Other).

*Age.* Age (in years) is a continuous variable. Respondents in the current study ranged in age from 18 to 70 years.

*Offense type.* The data includes information about all criminal charges for which an offender was convicted. For this study, I coded each case based on the most serious conviction offense. Offense type is a dichotomous variable coded “1” for violent offenses and “0” for non-violent offenses.

*Time since release.* To measure the amount of time participants have had to reengage with HopeWorks, obtain employment, and/or reoffend, I created a time since release from prison variable. This variable measured the number of days that have passed since the individual was released from prison. Specifically, I subtracted the date that the data were downloaded from the participant’s release date. This variable was recoded to months and ranged from six to 59 months.

### ***Analyses***

I used STATA 13 to conduct the analyses. To better understand the data and its distribution, I first conducted descriptive analyses of the entire sample. Next, I estimated bivariate correlations to examine the relationships between the variables and check for

multicollinearity. Finally, several models were estimated using logistic regression; this strategy is appropriate because all dependent variables are dichotomous.

I estimated four models for each of the three dependent variables: post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism. For post-release engagement, Model 1 included post-program spirituality and all other independent variables. Model 2 included the change in spirituality variable (i.e., no change and increase in spirituality, with a decrease in spirituality as the reference group) and all other independent variables. Model 3 included religious behavior and all other independent variables. Model 4 included the change in spirituality variable, religious behavior, and all other independent variables.

For employment, Model 1 included the change in spirituality variable and all other independent variables. Model 2 included the same variables as Model 1, with the addition of post-release engagement. Model 3 included post-release engagement, religious behavior, and all other independent variables. Model 4 included post-release engagement, the change in spirituality variable, religious behavior, and all other independent variables.

For recidivism, Model 1 included the change in spirituality variable and all other independent variables. Model 2 included the same variables as Model 1, with the addition of both post-release engagement and employment. Model 3 included post-release engagement, employment, religious behavior, and all other independent variables. Model 4 included post-release engagement, employment, the two spirituality variables, religious behavior, and all other independent variables.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in three parts. First, I describe the study variables and sample of 257 offenders (see Table 2). I also present a more detailed description of the spirituality scores from the pre- and post-program surveys in Table 3. Religious behaviors (i.e., church attendance, prayer, and reading the Bible) are presented, along with a summative score (see Table 4). Second, I present a bivariate correlation matrix and describe the relationships between the three dependent variables (i.e., post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism) and the eight independent variables (see Table 5). I will also check for multicollinearity by looking for outliers and assessing variance inflation factors (VIF) scores. In the final part of this section, I discuss results from the logistic regression models predicting post-release engagement with HopeWorks (see Table 6), employment (see Table 7), and recidivism (see Table 8).

#### **Descriptive Analyses**

In Table 2 I present descriptive statistics for the 257 previously incarcerated persons included in the sample. Following their release from prison, most participants reengaged with HopeWorks (65%), obtained employment (67%), and were not rearrested (85%). Regarding their characteristics, most participants were male (71%) and Black (78%). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 69 years and the mean age was 37 (Mdn = 36). More than half of the sample (55%)

obtained a high school diploma or GED. Most participants had been convicted of a violent offense (66%). To account for the fact that participants were released from prison at different times, and therefore had different amounts of time to reengage, find employment, or commit a new offense, I also calculated the amount of time since release (in months). The number of months since release ranged from 6 to 59 with an average release time of 29.65 months (i.e., 2 years and 5.65 months).

Regarding spirituality, the results presented in Table 2 show that post-program spirituality scores ranged from 12 to 48 and the mean score was 36.46 (Mdn = 37). Those who had a change in spirituality ranged from -15 to 25. The mean score was an increase of 2.31 points (Mdn = 2). Regarding religious behavior, scores ranged from 0 to 18 and the average score was 9.36 (Mdn = 9).

Table 4.1 Description of Study Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Post-release Engagement	232	0.65	1	0.48	0	1
Employment	213	0.67	1	0.47	0	1
Recidivism	253	0.15	1	0.36	0	1
Female	257	0.29	0	0.46	0	1
Black	256	0.78	1	0.42	0	1
Age (in years)	256	37	36	9.89	20	69
High School Graduate	251	0.55	1	0.50	0	1

Table 2 (continued)

Violent Offense	235	0.66	1	0.48	0	1
Time Since Release	249	30	29	13.18	6	59
Post-program Spirituality	247	36.46	37	6.32	12	48
Change in Spirituality	247	2.31	2	5.32	-15	25
Religious Behavior	157	9.36	9	4.90	0	18

In Table 3 I describe the various spirituality measures used in this study (for a list of the specific items included in these measures, see Appendix A). Pre-program spirituality is based on responses to the pre-program survey, completed on the first day of class; it describes participants' spirituality level at the beginning of the program. Scores range from 19 to 48 with a mean score of 34 (Mdn = 34). Post-program spirituality is based on responses to the post-program survey, completed on the last day of class; it describes participants' spirituality level at the end of the program. Scores range from 20 to 48 with a mean score of 36 (Mdn = 37). To determine whether levels of spirituality changed over the course of the program, I also created a change in spirituality measure by subtracting the pre-program survey score from the post-program survey score. Change in spirituality scores ranged from -15 to 25, with a mean score of 2.3 (Mdn = 2), indicating an increase in spirituality.

Table 4.2 Description of Spirituality Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Pre-program Spirituality	255	34.3	34	6.26	19	48
Post-program Spirituality	247	36.5	37	6.32	20	48
Change in Spirituality	247	2.3	2	5.32	-15	25

### Religious Behavior

In Table 4 I describe participants' religious behaviors. Only 157 of the 247 participants answered these questions on the post-survey at the end of the program. These three items, which are separate from the spirituality score, asked three questions: how many weeks (per month) an individual attended church, how many days (per week) an individual prayed, and how many days (per week) an individual read the Bible. On average, participants attended church 1.81 weeks per month, prayed 5.06 days per week, and read the Bible 2.50 days per week. I summed these items to create a measure of religious behavior. Scores for the summative measure ranged from 0-18, with an average score of 9.36 (Mdn = 9).

Table 4.3 Religious Behaviors

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Church Attendance (weeks)	157	1.81	2	1.40	0	4
Prayer (days)	157	5.06	6	2.33	0	7
Read the Bible (days)	157	2.50	2	2.57	0	7
Summative Religious Behavior	157	9.36	9	4.90	0	18



### *Bivariate Analyses*

I present the results of the bivariate correlations between the study variables in Table 5. I estimated these correlations to examine the relationships between the variables and to check for collinearity and multicollinearity. No correlations were greater than 0.8, indicating no problems with multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell 2013).

Several correlations were significant. As expected, post-release engagement and employment were positively correlated. If released graduates reengage with HopeWorks, the services offered are likely to assist them in obtaining employment. Gender and both post-release engagement and employment were negatively correlated, indicating that women were less likely to reengage with HopeWorks or obtain employment. As expected, time since release and recidivism were positively correlated. In other words, the longer the time since release, the more likely an individual was to recidivate. Race and education were negatively correlated, indicating that Black individuals were less likely to have obtained a high school diploma. Post-program spirituality was negatively correlated with recidivism and time since release, indicating that those with higher post-program spirituality scores were less likely to recidivate and spend more time out of prison. Also, post-program spirituality was positively correlated with change in spirituality, showing that those who experienced an increased change had higher post-program scores, as would be expected. Religious behavior was positively correlated with both gender and change in spirituality. In other words, women and those who changed in spirituality reported engaging in more religious behaviors. Religious behavior was negatively correlated with no change in spirituality.

Table 4.4 Bivariate Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Post-release Engagement	1.0000											
2. Employment	0.62**	1.0000										
3. Recidivism	0.03	-0.10	1.0000									
4. Age	0.10	-0.06	0.03	1.0000								
5. Female	-0.13*	-0.23**	0.07	-0.03	1.0000							
6. Black	0.03	0.01	-0.04	0.003	-0.09	1.0000						
7. Time Since Release	-0.007	0.003	0.44**	0.07	-0.03	0.04	1.0000					
8. High School Diploma	0.009	0.07	-0.09	0.15*	0.004	-0.13*	0.04	1.0000				
9. Violent Offense	0.07	0.10	0.12	-0.23**	-0.09	-0.02	0.08	0.03	1.0000			
10. Post-program Spirituality	-0.0073	0.16*	-0.17**	-0.05	0.06	-0.06	-0.18**	0.04	0.04	1.0000		
11. Change in Spirituality	0.05	0.10	0.03	-0.04	0.03	-0.07	0.12	0.02	-0.04	0.43**	1.0000	
12. Religious Behavior	-0.03	-0.001	0.08	0.07	0.32**	-0.15	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	0.16	0.39**	1.0000

See Tables 2 and 3 for a description of the variables and how they were measured.  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

## *Regression Analyses*

### *Post-release Engagement*

I present the results of four logistic regression models predicting post-release engagement with HopeWorks in Table 6. Model 1 included respondent characteristics (i.e., age, gender, race, education, offense type, and time since release) and post-program spirituality. Model 2 included respondent characteristics and the change in spirituality variable. Model 3 included respondent characteristics and a measure of religious behaviors (for a list of the specific items included in these measures, see Appendix A). The purpose of this model was to determine whether (and how) a more traditional measure of religiosity might affect post-release engagement. Model 4 included respondent characteristics, the change in spirituality variable, and religious behaviors. Across all four models, none of these variables significantly predicted post-release engagement with HopeWorks.

Table 4.5 Logistic Coefficients and Odds Ratios for Models Predicting Post-release Engagement with Hope Works

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Age	0.02	1.02	0.02	1.02	0.03	1.03	0.03 <sup>+</sup>	1.03
Female	-0.46	0.63	-0.47	0.63	-0.20	0.82	-0.19	0.83
Black	-0.15	0.86	-0.12	0.89	0.13	1.14	0.15	1.16
Time Since Release	-0.004	1.00	-0.005	1.00	0.004	1.00	0.0008	1.00
High School Graduate	0.02	1.02	-0.00007	1.00	-0.24	0.79	-0.29	0.75
Violent Offense	0.47	1.60	0.49	1.63	0.18	1.20	0.21	1.23
Post-program Spirituality	-0.003	1.00	--	--	--	--	--	--
Change in Spirituality	--	--	0.02	1.02	--	--	0.03	1.03
Religious Behaviors	--	--	--	--	-0.002	1.00	-0.01	0.99
Constant	0.15	1.16	-0.09	0.91	-0.69	0.50	-0.66	0.51
N	196		196		138		138	
Pseudo R-squared	0.0222		0.0244		0.0175		0.0204	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## ***Employment***

Table 7 presents the results of four logistic regression models predicting employment. Model 1 included respondent characteristics and change in spirituality. Model 2 included respondent characteristics, changes in spirituality, and post-release engagement. Model 3 included respondent characteristics, religious behaviors, and post-release engagement. Model 4 included respondent characteristics, change in spirituality, religious behavior, and post-release engagement. In Model 1, only gender was significant, such that women were 54% less likely than males to obtain employment following release from prison. In Model 2, both education and post-release engagement were significant. Specifically, the odds of employment were 3.02 times greater for high school graduates and 25.81 times greater for those who engaged with HopeWorks post-release. In Models 3 and 4, only post-release engagement was significant, such that the odds of employment were 27.36 times and 29.12 times greater, respectively, for those who engaged with HopeWorks post-release.

Table 4.6 Logistic Coefficients and Odds Ratios for Models Predicting Employment

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Age	-0.01	0.98	-0.04	0.96	-0.04	0.96	-0.04	0.96
Female	-0.78	0.46*	-0.85	0.43	-0.61	0.55	-0.51	0.60
Black	-0.04	0.96	-0.32	0.73	-0.80	0.45	-0.071	0.495
Time Since Release	0.0005	1.00	0.01	1.01	0.02	1.02	0.009	1.01
High School Graduate	0.55	1.73	1.11	3.02*	1.03	2.80	1.07	2.93
Violent Offense	0.29	1.33	0.20	1.21	0.36	1.44	0.56	1.53
Post-release Engagement	--	--	3.26	25.81***	3.31	27.36***	3.37	29.12***
Change in Spirituality	0.06	1.06	0.04	1.05	--	--	0.08	1.08
Religious Behavior	--	--	--	--	-0.01	0.99	-0.05	0.95
Constant	1.04	2.82	-0.34	0.71	-0.08	0.93	0.07	1.08
N	180		172		128		128	
Pseudo R-squared	0.0579		0.3480		0.3354		0.3505	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## ***Recidivism***

Table 8 presents the results of four logistic regression models predicting recidivism (i.e., whether or not an individual reoffended). Model 1 included respondent characteristics and changes in spirituality. Model 2 included respondent characteristics, changes in spirituality, post-release engagement, and employment. Model 3 included respondent characteristics, religious behaviors, post-release engagement, and employment. Model 4 included respondent characteristics, changes in spirituality, religious behavior, post-release engagement, and employment. In Model 1, type of offense, level of education, and time since release were significant. The odds of recidivism were 3.05 times greater for violent than non-violent offenders. Those with a high school diploma were 61% less likely to recidivate. For each additional month since release, the odds of recidivating increased by 14%.

In Model 2, race, time since release, type of offense, post-release engagement, and employment were significant. Specifically, Black individuals were 82% less likely than their counterparts to reoffend. For each additional month since release, offenders' odds of recidivating were 17% more likely. The odds of recidivism were 3.98 times greater for violent offenders and 4.23 times greater for those who reengaged with HopeWorks. Those who obtained employment were 80% less likely to reoffend and those who increased on the spirituality scale were 67% less likely to recidivate.

In Model 3, race, time since release, type of offense, post-release engagement, and employment were all significant. Black offenders were 78% less likely to recidivate. For each additional month since release, offenders' odds of recidivating were 14% more likely. The odds of recidivism were 3.82 times greater for violent offenders and 4.55 times greater for those who

reengaged with HopeWorks. Those who obtained employment were 82% less likely to recidivate.

In Model 4, race, time since release, post-release engagement, and employment. Black offenders were 82% less likely than their counterparts to reoffend, and for each additional month since release, offenders were 14% more likely to reoffend. The odds of recidivism were 4.47 times greater for those who reengaged with HopeWorks. Those who obtained employment were 80% less likely to reoffend.



Table 4.7 Logistic Coefficients and Odds Ratios for Models Predicting Recidivism

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Age	0.005	1.00	-0.01	0.99	-0.009	0.99	-0.02	0.99
Female	0.44	1.55	0.20	1.22	0.23	1.26	0.21	1.23
Black	-0.87	0.42	-1.72	0.18**	-1.52	0.22*	-1.72	0.18**
Time Since Release	0.13	1.14***	0.15	1.17***	0.13	1.14***	0.13	1.14***
High School Graduate	-0.93	0.39*	-0.44	0.65	-0.40	0.67	-0.47	0.62
Violent Offense	1.12	3.05*	1.38	3.98*	1.34	3.82*	1.19	3.29
Post-release Engagement	--	--	1.44	4.23*	1.52	4.55*	1.50	4.47*
Employment	--	--	-1.61	0.20*	-1.72	0.18*	-1.62	0.20*
Change in Spirituality	-0.05	0.30	-0.07	0.93	--	--	-0.07	0.93
Religious Behavior	--	--	--	--	-0.005	0.99	0.02	1.02
Constant	-6.45	0.006***	-6.26	0.002***	-5.44	0.004**	-5.34	0.005*
N	212		172		128		128	
Pseudo R-squared	0.2974		0.3434		0.2467		0.2625	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the Department of Justice (2021) more than 650,000 people are released from prison each year, and these individuals are likely to experience challenges related to housing, employment, and lack of education and transportation (Curtis, Durzis, Shippen, Musgrove, & Brigman 2013; Ettinger 2007; Harley 1996). To better understand the factors associated with reentry success, this study examined how spirituality (assessed after participants completed a faith-based vocational program) and change in spirituality (based on the difference between pre- and post-program assessments of spirituality) affected released offenders' reengagement with the program, employment, and reoffending.

Although research on the relationship between religion and crime is not unique, previous studies have focused on factors such as church attendance (Cardwell 1980; Hill & Hood 1999), clergy mentorship (Duwe & Clark 2011), or prayer (Hill & Hood 1999; Zwingmann et al. 2011). In contrast, this study used two spirituality measures based on self-report surveys administered before and after participating in HopeWorks, a Christian faith-based vocational program. The first spirituality measure was based on responses to a post-program survey and the second was based on the difference between participants' pre- and post-program survey responses. The latter makes this study unique because it measures a personal *change* in spirituality (i.e., whether and how individuals' thoughts and behaviors changed over the course

of the program). Change in spirituality is important because it represents a cognitive transformation, or a change in one's thought processes. In addition to the spirituality measures, I included a more traditional measure of religious behavior based on participants' frequency of church attendance, prayer, and reading the Bible.

In the following sections, I describe the statistically significant findings regarding post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism. I also describe which hypotheses were or were not supported and provide possible explanations for any unexpected findings. Next, I discuss the limitations of the study and suggest directions for future research. Finally, I propose several policy recommendations to assist incarcerated persons in transitioning back into society.

### **Overview of Results**

The effects of the various predictors differed across all three outcomes: post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism. Although none of the independent variables significantly predicted post-release engagement, post-release engagement significantly predicted both employment and recidivism. Consistent with other studies (e.g., Ettinger, 2007; Harley, 1996; James & Glaze, 2006), age, gender, and education frequently affected employment. Also consistent with previous research (Alexander 2010; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; King et al. 2005; Langan & Levin 2002; Pager et al. 2009; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Roberts 2004), race, type of offense, and time since release significantly affected recidivism. Contrary to expectations, the spirituality measures were rarely significant and religious behavior never was significant. Below, Table 9 gives a clear picture of which hypotheses were and were not supported.

Table 5.1 Hypotheses Support

Hypothesis	Supported (+)/Unsupported (-)	
H1.1	Participants who report greater spirituality will be more likely to reengage with HopeWorks after their release from prison.	-
H1.2	Participants who report an increase in spirituality will be more likely to reengage with HopeWorks after their release from prison.	-
H2.1	Participants who are older will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.	-
H2.2	Participants who are female will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.	-
H2.3	Participants who are more educated will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.	-
H2.4	Participants who are White will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.	-
H2.5	Participants who are convicted of violent crimes will be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks.	-
H3	Participants who report an increase in spirituality will be more likely to obtain employment after their release from prison.	-
H4.1	Participants who are older will be more likely than other participants to obtain employment.	-
H4.2	Participants who are female will be more likely than other participants to obtain employment.	-
H4.3	Participants who are more educated will be more likely than other participants to obtain employment.	+
H4.4	Participants who are White will be more likely than other participants to obtain employment.	-
H4.5	Participants who are convicted of non-violent offenses will be more likely than other participants to obtain employment.	-
H5	Participants who report an increase in spirituality will be less likely to recidivate after their release from prison.	-
H6.1	Participants who are older will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.	-
H6.2	Participants who are female will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.	-
H6.3	Participants who are more educated will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.	-
H6.4	Participants who are White will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.	-
H6.5	Participants who are convicted of violent offenses will be less likely than other participants to recidivate.	-

## **Post-release Engagement**

Regarding post-release engagement, I expected that both those who reported greater spirituality (H1.1) and those who reported an increase in spirituality (H1.2) would be more likely to reengage with HopeWorks. As a result of increased spirituality, bonds to society were expected to be augmented (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Agnew 2001; Pelletier & Evans 2019), thereby encouraging released offenders to reengage with HopeWorks following release. Contrary to expectations, neither measure of spirituality was significant and therefore these hypotheses were not supported.

I also predicted that participants who are older (H2.1), female (H2.3), more educated (H2.4), White, (H2.5) and convicted of violent crimes (H2.6) would be more likely than other participants to reengage with HopeWorks. These hypotheses were also unsupported (i.e., none of the participant characteristics significantly predicted post-release engagement).

## **Employment**

I predicted that participants who reported an increase in spirituality (as opposed to a decrease or no change in spirituality) would be more likely to obtain employment after their release from prison (H3). Specifically, I expected that those who increased in spirituality would have greater pro-social attitudes and be more motivated to seek out employment. Studies have shown that religious involvement promotes positive cognitive transformations, or changes in one's thought processes, including improved decision-making skills, enhanced emotional regulation, and greater problem-solving skills, which increase their ability to envision a pathway to success (Curtis et al. 2013; Hallett et al. 2017; Sampson et al. 2004; Vacca 2004). Although those with no change in spirituality were already high on the scale, I expected these positive

changes in thought to improve their ability to obtain employment following release. Contrary to expectations, spirituality was not significant and therefore my hypothesis was not supported.

I also predicted that participants who were older (H4.1), female (H4.2), more educated (H4.3), White (H4.4), and convicted of non-violent offenses (H4.5) would be more likely than other participants to obtain employment. Older White women who are more educated are more likely to obtain employment after release from prison (Alexander 2010; Duwe 2013; Hull et al. 2000; Langan & Levin 2002; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). Furthermore, violent offenders face more barriers to obtaining employment (Langan & Levin 2002; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019). Contrary to expectations, the odds of employment were 24% lower for women than for men. Education was also significant, and in the expected direction, such that individuals with a high school diploma were more likely to obtain employment. No other findings were statistically significant and therefore only Hypothesis 4.3 was supported.

### **Recidivism**

I predicted that participants who reported an increase in spirituality would be less likely to recidivate after their release from prison (H5). This hypothesis was based on numerous studies showing that religious involvement deters individuals from reoffending (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Giordano et al. 2008; Hallett & McCoy 2015; O'Connor et al. 2006; Maruna, Wilson, & Curran 2006). Results from the current study confirmed this hypothesis as those with increased spirituality were less likely than those with decreased spirituality to recidivate; however, using the continuous variable for *change* in spirituality, no findings were significant, and Hypothesis 5 was unsupported.

I also predicted that participants who are older (H6.1), female (H6.2), more educated (H6.3), White (H6.4), and convicted of violent offenses (H6.5) will be less likely than other participants to recidivate. Studies show that older, more educated, White women are less likely to reoffend (Alexander 2010; Mauer 2003a; Mauer 2003b; Mauer 2011; King et al. 2005; Roberts 2004). Studies also find that those convicted of violent offenses reoffend at lower rates than those convicted of non-violent offenses (Langan & Levin 2002; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Steurer et al. 2001; Vacca 2004). When religious behavior is not included in the model, Black, non-violent offenders with increased spirituality are less likely to reoffend. Hypotheses 6.1-6.5 were not supported.

The results also showed that time since release (in months) was statistically significant across all 4 models; the odds of recidivism increased the longer the time since release. Also noteworthy, post-release engagement and employment were statistically significant. As expected, those who obtained employment were less likely to reoffend. Surprisingly, those who reengaged with HopeWorks were more likely to reoffend.

### **Implications for Policy**

The findings presented here potentially have several implications for criminal justice policy and program improvement. First, results showed that the odds of recidivism were up to 3.98 times greater for violent offenders than for non-violent offenders. This finding contradicts previous studies, which showed that violent offenders recidivate at lower rates (Langan & Levin 2002; Peled-Laskov et al. 2019; Steurer et al. 2001; Vacca 2004). One reason for this difference may be that PCD, the program under consideration here, targets high-risk, violent offenders (i.e., those *most* at risk of recidivating). Correctional programs should seek to offer services

specifically to violent offenders. Violent offenders are often excluded from opportunities inside (program enrollment) and outside (employment opportunities) of prison (Pager et al. 2009) due to their criminal record; however, if policies allotted them the opportunity for transformational programs, outcomes may be different. If violent offenders were given the opportunity to develop prosocial behavior and increase life skills, their employment chances may increase and their chances of reoffending may decrease (Bouffard & Bergeron 2006).

Second, spirituality as a cognitive transformation, rather than religious involvement, was shown to significantly reduce recidivism when standing alone, outside of a model. Policies should implement spiritual guidance (Hallett et al. 2017; Laufersweiler-Dwyer & McAnelly 1999; Mowen et al. 2017), counseling, and programs that seek to serve individuals of any belief system, not just Christian. These would all meet the goal of improving correctional programming.

Third, results showed that the odds of employment were 3.02 times greater for high school graduates and 29.12 times greater for those who re-engaged with HopeWorks than for their counterparts. These findings highlight the importance of post-release services for offenders, especially those focused on providing educational opportunities. These findings also highlight the importance of education, both inside and outside of prison, for increasing employment among released offenders.

Those who reengaged with HopeWorks were also shown to have higher recidivism rates. Although this finding was unexpected, it provides important information that may serve to improve the program and develop more effective policies. These individuals may have been



more likely to reoffend because they were interacting with other offenders or were returning only for the services offered (e.g., counseling, food, hygiene supplies, etc.) instead of seeking to make meaningful changes. Possibly, the motivations of reengagement may have not been for the purposes of obtaining employment, which in turn, result in lower employment rates and lead to higher arrest rates among these graduates. First, the program should seek to identify, possibly with qualitative research such as interviews, what services offered the offenders reengaging are returning for. Second, the program should collect and analyze data of the type of crimes being committed, and why, by their graduates who they serve post-release. Lastly, the program should pinpoint what services are assisting those obtaining employment and what services are null, or void. Therefore, those services could be revised to address the specific needs of the graduates to reduce recidivism.

Finally, results showed that the longer the time since release, the more likely the offender is to recidivate. This finding supports the need for evaluations of longer-term service delivery. Put differently, more longitudinal research is needed to identify how long-term service delivery might decrease recidivism. Also, if post-release services specifically targeted the risks and needs derived from empirical research, the revolving door of prison could be diminished. If policies allotted resources needed for long-term research and care, offenders transitioning back into society may be smoother, employment may increase, and recidivism could decrease (Dowden et al. 2003; Lowenkamp et al. 2006).

### ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

This study was unique in that it examined the role of cognitive transformations – measured as a change in spirituality – on post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism.

Nevertheless, there were several limitations to this research that are important for future studies to address. First, this research relied on a sample of only 257 offenders, and given problems with missing data, most models included fewer than 175 respondents. Future research would benefit from including a larger sample of released offenders. A larger sample would allow researchers to examine differences between subgroups of offenders (e.g., differences by gender, race, level of spirituality).

Second, the measure of spirituality should be improved. A limitation of this study was that the survey items included in the spirituality scale were very different from one another (see Appendix A). While some items (e.g., “I talk about faith related issues” and “I practice a regular quiet time during which I read or think about spiritual things”) were more faith-based, others (e.g., “I control my temper well” and “I try to be honest at all times”) were not. It would have been more appropriate to conduct a factor analysis before combining these items into a single scale. Unfortunately, the items were summed before I obtained the data from HopeWorks.

Third, this study relied on data from HopeWorks, a Christian-centric program. While the survey includes non-religious questions, there are a few based in Christianity (see Appendix A); therefore, the survey should include questions that relate to those of other religious beliefs or no beliefs at all. If the survey is seeking to quantify spirituality, the questions should be more culturally sensitive. Continuing, although HopeWorks allows individuals of any belief to enroll, the focus on Christianity may discourage those who have different religious beliefs, or no religious beliefs, from participating. Little to no research has been done on other religious communities (Todd & Tipton 2011). To determine whether the findings presented here differ from others, future studies should conduct analyses on non-Christian, faith-based programs.

Fourth, the current study was only able to obtain data from those who graduated from the program. Anecdotally, very few participants dropped out of the program. However, future research should attempt to gather data on those who completed the program, as well as those who drop out, are released from prison before completing the program, or leave the program for any other reason. Including a more diverse sample would allow researchers to examine why individuals do not complete programs and may enhance the ability of correctional programming to retain students.

Fifth, this study did not contain any qualitative data regarding offenders' thoughts towards employment. Future research should include additional measures to analyze offenders' self-awareness of internal and external influences on pathways to success. Studies that have measured offenders' internal thoughts of external barriers towards employment have found various predictors of employment following release from prison (Curtis et al. 2013; Hamilton et al. 2019). For example, increasing offenders' ability to have positive thoughts towards a pathway of success increases employment opportunities. Being able to foresee a future with positive opportunities may increase employment and decrease recidivism. Also, identifying barriers and ways to combat them has been shown to alleviate the pressure of the job search (Hamilton et al. 2019). Future research should give more weight to offenders' career thinking as it may assist in the development of better vocational programming.

Sixth, future research should include variables measuring the role of familial and communal relationships, as these relationships are essential to the reentry process (Bright & Graham 2007; Cutris et al. 2013; Hamilton et al. 2019; Hirschi 1969; Lim & Putnam 2010; Marano 2003; Shippen et al. 2017; Wilkinson et al. 2005). A study analyzing both correctional

programming and outside influences (e.g., bonds to society) might help policymakers develop better recommendations to assist offenders in the reentry process, leading to reduced recidivism and possibly greater job retention.

Finally, long-term follow-up of recidivism and job retention is especially important for finding ways to address them. Although this study analyzed some individuals who had been released 59 months (4.9 years), obtaining data that was greater than five years would surely broaden the recidivism and employment literature. If the research was able to identify specific barriers along one's timeline since release, ways to overcome them could be implemented. Furthermore, services directed at long-term problems (e.g., transitional housing, addiction services) could be developed.

### *Conclusion*

Although this study had few significant findings, and the program can be deemed as unsuccessful in meeting its goals, it brought a unique approach to the analysis of faith-based correctional programming. The results showed that most participants increased in spirituality (62%), reengaged with HopeWorks post-release (65%), and obtained employment (67%). Furthermore, only 15% of released offenders recidivated. While the findings regarding post-release engagement, employment, and recidivism cannot be attributed to spirituality, research should seek to understand how programs like HopeWorks achieve general high success rates.

Post-release services should be readily available to individuals released from incarceration. The setting and atmosphere inside prison looks nothing like the outside world and services that make the transition smoother would be beneficial to both the individual and society.

Services that include job training and employment assistance would be especially important to employment attainment and retention. Having an income would lead to opportunities that would allow various facets of ones' life being better. Specifically, the ability to avoid engaging in further criminal behavior. Finally, spiritual learning and religious involvement help reshape the significance of offenders' purpose and belonging in society (Hallett et al. 2017). HopeWorks' Personal and Career Development program does each of these, which may provide a smoother transition back into society.

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APPENDIX A  
SPIRITUALITY SURVEY

## Spirituality Assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many weeks out of the past four weeks did you attend church?

Circle one: 0 1 2 3 4

2. How many days out of the last seven days did you pray?

Circle one: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. How many days out of the last seven days did you read a Bible?

Circle one: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

For each of the following statements, check the answer that best describes you:

	Never--1	Occasionally-- 2	Often-- 3	Daily-- 4
1. I talk about faith related issues.				
2. I practice a regular quiet time during which I read or think about spiritual things.				
3. Peace, joy, and contentment describe my life more than worry and anxiety.				
4. I understand the Bible when I read it.				
5. I have Christian friends I can rely on.				
6. I make an effort to show love to people who are different from me.				
7. I make an effort to serve those who are less fortunate than me.				
8. I control my temper well.				
9. I try to be honest at all times.				
10. I make an effort to be patient with others.				
11. I am gentle and kind in my interactions with others.				
12. I treat my family with patience and kindness.				

*Adapted from Amy L. Sherman, Center on Faith in Communities, and Lifeway Christian bookstore's on-line spirituality assessment.*