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Successful Reentry

What Differentiates Successful and Unsuccessful Parolees?

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In this research the authors examine the reentry of 51 parolees during the 3 years following their release from prison. The objective is to gain increased understanding of what differentiates successful parolees from those who fail. Success is defined as being discharged from parole by 3 years after release. The study examines the extent to which drug treatment, friendships, work, family bonds, and age are associated with reentry success. Contrary to expectations, it is found that closeness to mother, closeness to father, having a partner, being a parent, and education level are not associated with parole success. Those who succeed on parole are more likely to have taken a substance abuse class while in prison and on release tend to spend more time in enjoyable activities with friends. Among the employed, those that worked at least 40 hours a week are more likely to complete parole successfully. Qualitative data indicate that successful parolees had more support from family and friends and had more self-efficacy, which help them stay away from drugs and peers who use drugs. The findings are consistent with an integrated life course theory.

Keywords: *prisoner reentry; crime desistance; successful parole; recidivism*

During the past 25 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of persons incarcerated in the United States. From 1980 to 2007, the number in prison per 100,000 U.S. residents increased more than 3½ times from 139 to 506

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(Greenfeld & Balog, 1987; West & Sabol, 2008). In 2007, there were 2.3 million in prisons and jails in the United States, about 1 in every 100 adults; 1 in every 37 adults has served time in prison (Bonczar, 2003; Glaze & Bonczar, 2008; Pew Center on the States, 2008; Sabol & Couture, 2008).

About 95% of all inmates will be released to reintegrate into communities (Petersilia, 2005). During 2006 more than 713,000 were released from prison or an average of almost 2,000 per day (Sabol & Couture, 2008). This is more than 4 times the number of U.S. prisoners that were released 25 years ago.

Many released prisoners have difficulty adjusting to life outside of prison and completing their parole successfully (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). In a recent study of U.S. parolees, two thirds were rearrested within 3 years of release and 52% were reincarcerated (Langan & Levin, 2002). In 1980, only 20% of U.S. prison admissions were parole violators; by 2007 this had increased to 33% (Blumstein & Beck, 2005; Steen & Opsal, 2007). As Petersilia (2003) noted, "more of them are being arrested; these arrests are occurring more quickly; and as a group ex-convicts are accounting for a growing share of all serious crimes experienced in the United States" (p. 144).

A better understanding of the reentry process would enable professionals, friends, and family members to help more inmates adjust to life outside of prison and successfully complete their parole. When recidivism rates are high, scarce economic resources that are needed elsewhere are spent on corrections. To illustrate, in the United States it costs about $30,000 per year to incarcerate one person and the total amount spent on corrections has risen by more than 600% since 1982 to $68.7 billion annually (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008; Petersilia, 2003; Stephan, 2004). In the United States in 1987 there were $3 spent on corrections for every $10 spent on higher education. By 2007 this ratio had increased to $6 spent on corrections for every $10 spent on higher education (Pew Center on the States, 2008).

Although there has been extensive research on recidivism, there has been much less study of the process inmates go through when they are released from prison (Petersilia, 2000, 2003; Steen & Opsal, 2007; Visher & Travis, 2003). Recently researchers have begun to study reentry more extensively (Maruna, 2001; Terry, 2003), but more research is needed to understand the process of reentry and what helps parolees succeed (Travis & Visher, 2005; Visher, 2006).

In this article, we examined the reintegration of parolees during the 3 years after their release from prison. We view desistance as a process rather than an event (Laub & Sampson, 2003) and therefore used successful completion of parole as the dependent variable. This is a unique contribution because much research has focused only on discrete events such as rearrest rather than on the process of desistance over time. As we shall see, some parolees may be rearrested but then recover and complete parole successfully. By focusing on parole success, we were able to provide a more complete look at the reentry process than has been done in previous research. Using qualitative and quantitative data guided by life course theory, we examined

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reentry from the perspective of the parolees themselves. Our sample included only parolees who had committed felonies and had spent at least 1 year in prison.

The Process of Reentry

Reentry is a complex process that is not well understood (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Toch, 2005; Petersilia, 2005; Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Most released prisoners are placed on parole, which is designed to help offenders make the transition back into society (Blumstein & Beck, 2005). Parolees must decide where to live, find a way to support themselves, and reconnect with family and friends. Conditions of parole often include finding and maintaining employment, staying drug free, not associating with other felons, not leaving the state, not having possession of firearms, submitting to searches and drug tests, and reporting to one's parole officer regularly.

There is a need for more theorizing and research about how released prisoners are able to make the transition to the community and adjust to life outside of prison (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Shover & Thompson, 1992). We identified four theoretical perspectives that are useful in understanding the reentry process: (a) social learning theory, (b) social control theory, (c) cognitive transformation theory, and (d) life course theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna & Toch, 2005).

We chose these four frameworks because, in our judgment, they are the most useful for understanding the reentry process. Three of these theories have been widely used to explain criminal behavior (Akers & Sellers, 2004). The fourth, cognitive transformation theory, adds an important dimension not emphasized in the other three theories. These four perspectives were used as guides in identifying variables that may influence parole success. We turn now to a discussion of each of these theoretical perspectives and how they help us understand the reentry process.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theorists posit that criminal motivations are learned through associations with significant others. Whether parolees are able to desist from crime depends in part on the criminality of their interpersonal networks (Capaldi, Kim, & Owen, 2008; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Schroeder, Giordano, & Cernkovich, 2008). Through associations with peers and family members, parolees are exposed to and receive reinforcement for particular attitudes and behaviors (Agnew, 2005). If they associate with those who are not involved in criminal activities, they are likely to receive support for avoiding illegal behavior and deviant peers. On the other hand, if parolees associate with individuals who are involved in illegal behavior, they are likely to be influenced by those associations. To illustrate, if they associate with individuals who use drugs, they will be exposed to attitudes favorable toward drug use, will see others using drugs, will be offered drugs, and are

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likely to receive positive reinforcement for drug use and negative sanctions if they refuse to use drugs. In such an environment, it may be difficult for parolees to resist the pressure to use drugs, especially if they have used drugs previously.

The transition from prison to the community is a vulnerable time when individuals may be susceptible to the influences of deviant peers (Agnew, 2005). Marriage and employment may alter networks, so individuals spend less time associating with deviant friends and more time associating with law-abiding persons (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Warr, 1998). As a result, parolees who obtain a job or get a partner may have a decrease in the number of deviant peers and in the amount of time they spend associating with them. With fewer friends to encourage and reward deviant behavior, motivation for committing crime may diminish (Maruna & Toch, 2005; Schroeder et al., 2008; Warr, 2002). Recent research on desistance confirms that a shift away from friendships with people who are involved in crime is one element in the desistance process (Byrne & Trew, 2008).

Self-efficacy was an important concept in Bandura's (1977, 1982) social learning theory and it appears to be useful in understanding reentry and desistance. He defined self-efficacy as individual judgments of how well one can execute courses of action. In the context of criminal desistance, self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to comply with parole agreements and remain crime free. Bandura maintained that self-efficacy was a key ingredient of behavioral change and he discussed how self-efficacy may be influenced by various types of treatment and experiences. According to his theory, individuals low on self-efficacy will put little effort into complying with parole agreements, particularly when faced with obstacles. They will give up and stop trying if they doubt that they can succeed (Bandura, 1977, 1982). Thus, self-efficacy may have a significant influence on attempts by parolees to comply with parole agreements.

Social Control Theory

According to social control theory, the development of bonds helps people change. As parolees associate with individuals involved in conventional activities, they are likely to develop bonds that constrain them when they are tempted to violate their parole. For example, associating with family members and peers who are law abiding may help constrain parolees who are tempted to participate in illegal behavior. As they think about becoming involved again in illegal activities, the prospects of losing associations with a partner or children or losing a job may constrain them.

Consistent with social control theory, several researchers have reported that marriage may help parolees refrain from crime (Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1990). Informal monitoring by a spouse appears to help individuals desist from drug use and other law violations (Kandel & Yamaguchi, 1987; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Vaillant, 1995). However, Laub et al. (1998) found that it was not just marriage but a cohesive marriage that

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had a preventive effect on crime. The social ties that developed within a marriage helped explain why individuals stopped committing criminal acts (Sampson & Laub, 1990).

When parolees obtain a desirable job, they develop a stake in conformity—they have something to lose if their behavior jeopardizes their employment (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1990). In addition, work may provide an opportunity to create new networks that replace old deviant networks.

The type of work may be more important than just being employed (Agnew, 2005; Shover, 1996). For example, low-paying or distasteful work may do little to help parolees adjust, whereas enjoyable, well-paying jobs are likely to aid in the adjustment of parolees.

In summary, according to social control theory, offending trajectories are influenced by informal controls. As individuals develop bonds to conventional individuals and institutions, they develop a stake in conformity that may constrain them when they are tempted to participate in illegal activities.

Cognitive Transformation Theory

A third explanation for criminal desistance is cognitive transformation theory (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996; Terry, 2003). According to the cognitive transformation theory of Giordano et al. (2002), there are four key elements in the desistance process. First, they hypothesized that individuals develop an openness to change. Through their experiences and agency, individuals may begin to conceive of personal change as a possibility. Agency refers to personal choice—whether one seeks change. Some offenders like their life as it is and do not wish to change; others say they would like to change and are willing to put forth effort to change their behavior. Second, individuals are exposed to particular circumstances or "hooks" that help them move toward change. Examples of hooks are obtaining a good job, marrying, or attending a substance abuse class (Giordano et al., 2002). The third element in the desistance process is the development of a conventional replacement self; parolees begin to see themselves in a different light. Finally, there is a reinterpretation of previous illegal behavior. For example, those who were previously enmeshed in the drug culture might begin to view it as something that hurts people and that they want to avoid.

Consistent with Giordano et al. (2002), Terry (2003) described desistance as a conversion process that takes a considerable amount of time. He observed that the process often begins when an event helps individuals reassess their lives. Some were motivated to change when they were unable to function after they became ill. Others decided to change when they realized the damage they had inflicted on their family. The opportunity for drug treatment was another "hook for change"—after a new arrest some had a choice of going back to prison or entering a treatment program. Drug treatment provided new ideas and associations as well as reinforcement of their efforts to leave their old lifestyles and develop new self-concepts. With support from

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treatment, some were able to rebuild self-worth, become assimilated into a different social world, and develop new associations.

Although age is one of the most consistent correlates of desistance, there is debate about how age is associated with desistance (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; Stolzenberg & D'Alessio, 2008; Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Steen & Opsal, 2007). Terry (2003) used his cognitive transformation framework to explain how the motivation for change increases with age. He observed that as parolees aged their view of themselves and their prison culture tended to change. As the prison population was replaced with younger offenders, older offenders felt less comfortable in prison and no longer had their self-concepts bolstered while they were in prison. Health problems became more common as they got older and they had to face their physical limitations. In addition, over time some became more aware of how their behavior hurt their family members.

Maruna (2001) also argued that desistance requires a conscious reformulation of one's identity. After analyzing in-depth interviews of "desisters" and "persisters," he observed that desisters tended to describe redemption narratives in which they viewed their "real selves" as noncriminals and their previous criminal behavior as the result of mistakes, bad choices, and negative influences. They differentiated themselves from their previous mistakes, crafted a moral tale from their experiences, and expressed a desire to use their experiences to help others (Maruna, 2001).

In a similar way, Shover (1996) found that desisters tended to alter their view of their previous activities. They had a growing awareness of time and revised their aspirations to include goals such as contentment, peace, and harmonious interpersonal relationships (Shover, 1996).

Finally, Rumgay (2004) developed a theoretical perspective of desistance that has similarities to the theory of Giordano et al. (2002). She suggested that desistance occurs when an offender develops a personal readiness to change and has an opportunity to reform. Offenders may seek a more prosocial identity if they perceive it is possible to change and if they recognize an opportunity to change (Rumgay, 2004).

In summary, according to cognitive transformation theorists, social control and learning theories are incomplete because they ignore the role of individual choice in the change process. Most interpersonal networks contain a mix of antisocial and prosocial associations and parolees have some choice in creating their friendship networks (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003; Haynie, 2002). Cognitive transformation theory provides a complement to other theories by focusing on the conscious transformation of one's identity in the process of desistance from crime (Giordano et al., 2002).

Life Course Theory

Laub and Sampson (2003) developed life course theory, which integrates social learning, social control, and cognitive transformation theories. They view desistance as a process that depends on structured routine activities, social controls, and agency.

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Structured activities are important because they help limit criminal opportunities and provide networks of support. They suggest that employment may be important in this process, especially full-time employment, because the structure of going to work will diminish the amount of time available to associate with deviant peers. It may also provide the opportunity to associate with law-abiding peers. Thus, the structured activities are important in providing role models and reinforcement for legal activities, two key elements in social learning theory.

Informal social controls are a part of work because of responsibilities, monitoring, and the development of bonds with law-abiding peers. Through full-time jobs, parolees may develop bonds with other employees and become dependent on the paycheck. Temptations to participate in illegal behavior may be constrained by the potential loss of their job and paycheck.

In a similar way, Laub and Sampson (2003) maintained that the development of bonds with family and friends may help individuals desist from crime. They suggested that the association with deviant peers was more appealing to individuals who were unsuccessful in developing meaningful relationships in family or work. Thus, the lack of satisfying relationships left individuals more susceptible to the influence of deviant peers.

In summary, according to the life course theory of Laub and Sampson (2003), desistance is a complex process that occurs over a period of time. It depends on individual choice as well as support networks that enable offenders to "knife off" or insulate themselves from the deviant environment and develop new scripts for their future. Drug treatment, work, family, and conventional friends appear to be important elements in providing structure that has appropriate controls and learning opportunities for law-abiding behavior. On the other hand, offenders who recidivate tend to lack the connective structures to sustain a crime-free lifestyle over time.

Consistent with the life course theory of Laub and Sampson (2003), we view social learning, social control, and cognitive transformation theories as complementary parts to an integrated explanation of reentry. Associations provide models of and reinforcements for behavior. Through associations, individuals are influenced toward or away from certain behaviors. Bonds to work, family, and friends help constrain behavior. Even the hope of building or rebuilding a relationship with a child or partner may provide motivation to avoid certain situations and behaviors. Choice is an important element in this process as individuals decide whom they associate with, where they will live, and what job they will take. Their particular situations limit the range of their choices and as associations and bonds are developed, future choices may be constrained or reinforced one way or the other.

Research Objectives

Our objectives in this research were to use life course theory to explore the process of reentry from the perspective of the parolees and identify what differentiates those

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who succeed from those who fail. Achieving success while on parole is a process of learning to maintain crime-free behavior over time in the face of obstacles and frustrations (Maruna, 2001). Therefore, our focus was not on a specific transition or event such as a rearrest or reincarceration but on how well parolees were able to perform across a period of 3 years. It is one thing to refrain from drugs and crime for a short period of time, quite another to remain crime free for a period of years.

Using the life course perspective as a guide, we chose to examine how structured activities and associations were associated with reentry success. Specifically, we hypothesized that drug treatment, peer associations, employment, age, marriage or cohabitation, and parenthood would be associated with parole success.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

We sampled new parolees in two major metropolitan areas in an intermountain state in the United States. More than 85% of the state's residents resided within these two urban areas. As noted earlier, parole includes only offenders who had been in prison because they had committed felonies. In this study we did not include jail inmates—those who received sentences for less than a year.

All new parolees were required to attend an orientation meeting within the first month following their release. At the beginning of six of these orientation meetings, we described the purpose of our study, invited the parolees to participate, and passed a sheet for parolees to sign if they were willing to be interviewed. We explained that we would be available at the end of the meeting to interview them and offered $20 for each interview. We were able to interview 51 of the total of 66 new parolees who attended the six meetings (77%).

Because reentry is a process that unfolds over time, we interviewed each parolee shortly after release from prison, and again at 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months after the first interview. We were able to obtain 1-month interviews with 31 parolees (61% of the sample), 3-month interviews with 35 parolees (69% of sample), and 6-month interviews with 40 parolees (78% of sample). Finally, with cooperation from the state department of corrections, we were able to track all 51 respondents for 3 years following their release to determine how many had successfully completed parole, how many remained on parole, and how many had returned to prison.

The first interview schedule included 129 quantitative and qualitative questions that asked about background, criminal history, drug treatment, friends, work, family, recreation, and future plans. The second and third interview schedules included 79 questions from the first interview schedule. The fourth interview schedule included 27 key questions from the earlier interviews.

At the initial interview we explained the purpose of our study and had each parolee sign a consent form. Each interview was recorded for later qualitative analysis. The initial interviews averaged about 45 min, whereas the follow-up interviews lasted

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Parole success (1 = off parole)	0	1	0.55	0.50
Substance abuse class in prison (1 = yes)	0	1	0.71	0.46
Enjoyable activities with friends	0	5	1.59	1.80
Age	22	56	35.06	8.31
Employed (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0	1	0.51	0.51
Hours worked per week (among employed, $N = 26$)	16	70	39.54	12.08
Gender (1 = male)	0	1	0.84	0.37
Married (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0	1	0.16	0.43
Partner (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0	1	0.33	0.48
Number of times in jail or prison	1	50	10.45	10.24
Length of last incarceration (in months)	2	132	26.18	27.96
Ethnicity (0 = other, 1 = White)	0	1	0.75	0.44
Education (1 = 8 or less, 6 = 16 or more)	1	6	3.12	0.82

Note: $N = 51$. Min = minimum; Max = maximum

approximately 30 min. The initial interviews were conducted from September to November 2004 and the follow-up interviews were conducted from November 2004 to July 2005.

All initial interviews took place at the Adult Probation & Parole Offices of the two cities. For follow-up interviews, we called the parolees and arranged to meet them at the day reporting center. The fourth interview was conducted by phone for those who were still in the community and in person for those who were in jail or prison.

The 51 parolees had an age range from 22 to 56, with a median of 34. Eight (16%) of the respondents were women. In response to a question on ethnic status, 38 (75%) said they were White, 8 identified themselves as Latino, 1 was Asian, and 4 were Other. Forty-three (84%) had graduated from high school or received their GED but only 1 (2%) had graduated from college. Three-fourths (37) were parents and the number of children ranged from 1 to 6, with a median of 2. Thirty-six (71%) had been married but only 8 (16%) were currently married.

Drugs were the most common offenses for which our respondents were last incarcerated—13 of the 51 (26%) were incarcerated for a drug offense. Forty-eight (94%) admitted that they currently or previously had a drug problem. The length of their latest incarceration varied from 2 to 132 months, with a mean of 26 months. The number of times they had been in jail or prison varied from 1 to 50 times, with a mean of 10 times. A listing of the major variables along with their ranges, means, and standard deviations is presented in Table 1.

From our experience, the 51 we interviewed appeared to be typical parolees. Our sample of parolees was similar to the U.S. parolee population on a number of demographic characteristics but it had a higher proportion of women, fewer minorities, and was somewhat more educated (see Table 2). We make no claim that our

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Table 2
Comparison of Sample to U.S. Parolee Population

	Sample[a]	U.S. Parolees[b]
Gender		
Male	86.7	93.1
Female	13.3	6.9
Ethnicity		
White or Anglo-American	74.5	34.0
African American	0.0	38.2
Native American	0.0	–
Hispanic or Latino	15.7	20.8
Asian	2.0	–
Other	7.8	7.0
Level of education		
Some high school or less	14.0	41.3
High school or GED	62.0	46.0
Some college or more	24.0	12.7
Age		
Mean age	35.0	34.0

a. Sample $N = 51$.
b. Sources: West & Sabol (2008), Harlow (2003).

sample is representative of the parolee population in United States or elsewhere. Our purpose was to explore the reentry process from the perspective of these parolees. As noted by Travis and Visher (2005), there is a dearth of information from the perspective of individual parolees and such data are needed to understand better the process of prisoner reentry.

Coding

The coding of the quantitative variables is shown in Table 1. For the qualitative analysis, the interviews were transcribed and all team members participated in open coding to identify general themes, followed by axial coding, which is the "process of relating categories to their subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To establish these themes, each team member reviewed a few representative transcriptions. We met to compare the themes that each team member derived from each transcription. We discussed the concepts and subcategories that emerged from each transcription and finalized a large set of themes and concepts. Then we each simultaneously coded an interview so that codes could be refined. After we had achieved consistency in our coding, different individuals on the team coded the transcriptions.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable was parole success, which was defined as being formally discharged from parole at the end of 3 years. For some analyses, we divided the

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unsuccessful respondents into those who were still on parole and those who were in prison. Many who were still on parole had spent additional time in jail or prison during the 3 years and, as a result, had the length of their parole extended. The second unsuccessful group included those who had committed a new crime and were back in prison at the end of the 3-year period.

Independent Variables

As noted earlier, life course theory was used as a guide in selecting the independent variables. We asked about their experiences in prison including whether they had taken a substance abuse class. Given the extent of drug abuse among prisoners, drug treatment could provide needed support to remain drug free.

Life course theory indicates that associations with friends are important, particularly unstructured time. To tap this dimension, the respondents were asked how often they participated in enjoyable activities with friends.

Laub and Sampson (2003) emphasized the importance of employment. We asked if they were employed, and if so, how many hours they worked and the nature of the employment.

To assess bonds and informal social controls, we asked questions about their family relationships including marital or partner status, closeness to mother and father, where they lived, and the nature and extent of contact with family members. If the parolees were parents, we asked about the frequency and nature of contact with their children.

From cognitive transformation theory, we asked questions about self, attitudes toward recovery, plans for the future, challenges, resources, and drug use. In addition, in the qualitative analysis we looked for comments about their choices and reasons they gave for success and failure.

Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First we computed zero-order correlations between parole success and the predictor variables identified from the theories. This provided an initial look at parole success over the 3-year period.

Second, we used binary logistic regression to estimate how the independent variables predicted parole success, net of the control variables. We included age, number of previous convictions, length of last prison sentence, and gender as controls because previous research showed that they may be associated with reentry success (Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, & Seffrin, 2008; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Maruna & Toch, 2005; Travis & Visher, 2005; Uggen, Wakefield, & Western, 2005).

Third, we used qualitative analysis to systematically examine the perceptions of parolees during this process. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of the reentry process from the perspective of the parolees themselves.

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Results

At the end of the 3-year period, 55% (28) of the parolees had successfully completed their parole and were formally discharged. Twenty-five percent (13) remained on parole whereas 20% (10) were back in prison.

To understand the differences among these three groups, we computed the average number of arrests for each group during the 3-year period. These were arrests for new crimes and not just technical violations such as a positive urinalysis. The mean number of arrests for those who successfully completed parole was .28 and ranged from 0 to 2. Only 5 of the 28 successful parolees had been arrested—2 were arrested once each and 3 were arrested twice.

By contrast, those who were still on parole were arrested an average of 1.7 times during the 3-year period. Eleven of the 13 had been arrested and the median number of arrests was three.

All of those who returned to prison had been arrested at least twice. The median number of arrests was three and the maximum number was five.

Quantitative Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to compute zero-order correlations between parole success and the independent variables. Contrary to expectations, we found that closeness to mother, closeness to father, having a partner, being a parent, and education level were not associated with parole success.

Four variables were associated with parole success in the zero-order correlations. First, those who had participated in a substance abuse class while they were in prison were more likely to be off parole 3 years after release. Second, the parolees who participated in an enjoyable recreational activity with friends at least twice a week were more likely to succeed on parole. Third, those who worked 40 or more hours per week had a higher rate of parole success. Finally, those who were older were more likely to succeed.

After this initial examination, we computed two binary logistic regression equations to determine if these four variables predicted parole success net of the control variables. In the first equation we included (a) whether they had taken a substance abuse class in prison and (b) how often they participated in enjoyable activities with friends. The control variables included were age, number of previous incarcerations, length of the latest incarceration, whether they had a partner, and gender.

The results of the first logistic regression are shown in Table 3. Net of the control variables, parole success was associated positively with participation in a substance abuse class while in prison. Compared with those who had not taken a class, those parolees who took a substance abuse class while they were in prison were almost 6 times more likely to succeed at parole.

Perhaps somewhat surprising was the finding that those who participated more frequently in enjoyable activities with friends were *more* likely to have completed

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Table 3
Binary Logistic Regression of Parole Success by Predictor Variables

	B	*SE*	*p*	Exp(*B*)
Age	0.13	0.05	.02	1.13
Number of times incarcerated	0.00	0.03	.99	1.00
Length of last sentence in months	0.00	0.01	.87	1.00
Has a partner	–0.07	0.76	.93	0.94
Gender	–2.20	1.17	.06	0.11
Took substance abuse class	1.75	0.84	.04	5.76
Frequency of enjoyable time with friends	0.52	0.25	.04	1.68
Constant	–4.31	2.02	.03	0.01

Note: $N = 51$.

Table 4
Binary Logistic Regression of Parole Success by Age and Hours Worked

	B	*SE*	*p*	Exp(*B*)
Age	0.07	0.06	.27	1.07
Hours worked per week (among employed)	0.13	0.06	.04	1.14
Constant	–7.95	3.53	.03	0.00

Note: $n = 26$.

parole successfully. A look at the tabulations indicated that those who participated in enjoyable activities zero times or one time per week were considerably less likely to succeed on parole. This finding existed net of controls for age, gender, length of prison sentence, and number of previous incarcerations.

Gender was marginally significant ($p = .059$)—males were less likely than females to successfully complete parole. As expected, as age increased, the chance of succeeding at parole increased. Each year in age increased the chances of parole success by about 13%. The number of previous incarcerations, the length of the latest incarceration, and having a partner were not associated with parole success.

Whether a parolee was employed at the first, second, or third interview was not related to later parole success. However, based on the life course theory of Laub and Sampson (2003), we expected that the structure of full-time work would make parole success more likely. In the second logistic regression equation, we examined whether the number of hours worked was associated with parole success. As shown in Table 4, among those who were employed, the number of hours worked was associated positively with parole success. Each hour worked increased the chance of parole success by 14%. Among those who worked 40 or more hours per week, 63% were discharged from parole at the end of 3 years, compared to only 10% among those who worked less than 40 hr per week. Because of the small sample size (only

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26 were employed), we included only age as a control in the second regression equation. It is interesting that among this employed subsample, age was not associated with parole success net of hours worked.

Qualitative Analysis

One of the objectives of this research was to understand the process of reentry from the perspectives of the parolees themselves. We examined the narratives of the successful and unsuccessful parolees to see how they differed at the first and second interviews.

First, it is instructive to see how the two groups did not differ. First, there was no difference in their belief that they were not going back to prison. All but one of the parolees were adamant in saying they had learned their lesson and this time they would not return to prison. The one respondent who was uncertain did in fact later return to prison. When we asked them how they would be able to make it outside of prison, they gave a variety of reasons—they now had family support, they had gone through drug treatment and now were clean, they had a job waiting, or they had learned from their previous mistakes.

Second, the two groups were not significantly different in the proportion that said their family was a helpful resource. However, this percentage was somewhat lower among those who later returned to prison (70%) compared to those who did not (85%). We turn now to a discussion of differences in the qualitative interviews.

Drugs. One of the major risk factors for parolees is drug use. A large majority of prisoners have had a problem with alcohol and other drugs (Petersilia, 2005). Our sample was no different—94% of the parolees (48 of 51) said they had a problem with alcohol or drugs in the past. Eighty-two percent said involvement with drugs contributed to their incarceration. Many of those who failed parole did so because of problems related to drug abuse and most began using again while associating with friends who used drugs.

During the first interview, we asked several questions about drug use and those turned out to predict later parole success. First, we asked them what they felt were the biggest challenges they faced since release. Among those who said staying clean was a challenge, only 31% were off parole 3 years later. By contrast, among those who did not mention drugs as a challenge, 63% were off parole 3 years later. In a related question, we asked: "Are you ever tempted to try alcohol or drugs?" Sixty-four percent of those who answered yes were in jail or prison by the end of the 1st year, compared with only 27% of those who answered no. We asked those who returned to prison what happened that brought them back. Almost all talked about associating with the wrong people and drugs.

The cognitive transformation theory focuses on the openness for change and the redefinition of self. Those who failed at parole were less open to change from the

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start and more likely to continue to define themselves as addicts. This is illustrated by the following quote from a parolee who continued to define himself as an addict, did not change, and ended up back in prison: "Yeah you are always going to be tempted. There's not one day when you aren't tempted. Once you are an addict, you are always an addict. If it is around me, it is going to be really hard." On the other hand, the following quote illustrates a parolee who attempted to create a positive replacement self:

> I don't believe in this "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic," "once a drug addict, always a drug addict," "once a convict, always a convict." You know, that's what they're pretty much saying, you know, and I don't believe that. I believe you're who you are and if you want to change, you can! It's all a choice. The sooner you can stop saying that "I'm a convict or a drug addict," then you can go ahead with that logic.

Friends. According to social learning theory, associations are an important influence on criminal desistance. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that peers have a strong influence on the onset and persistence of criminal behavior (Elliott & Menard, 1996; Rebellon, Straus, & Medeiros, 2008). It is often assumed that peers pull individuals toward crime and much less attention is given to law-abiding peer influences. As reported above, one of our surprising findings was that those who spent more time participating in enjoyable activities with friends were *more* likely to succeed on parole.

To explore how friendships may influence desistance, we examined the narratives of the parolees over time. Ninety percent of those who were reincarcerated mentioned the difficulty of staying away from old friends compared with only 21% (6 of 28) of those who later completed parole successfully ($p < .01$). In the initial interview, a number who later went back to prison indicated that they had little or no association with friends. Several commented on being lonely and said it was difficult to make new friends. By the second interview (at 1 month postrelease), the unsuccessful parolees commented on the difficulty in staying away from old friends. To illustrate, when asked about his biggest challenges since release, Mr. C, who later became an unsuccessful parolee, said,

> Probably, just um, kind of loneliness because I wrote off all my old friends cause they were trouble. So I find that when I do get home from work I no longer have friends. I even had to get rid of my girlfriend cause she was going down the wrong path and I can't be around her. The chance of me changing her ways were a lot slimmer than the chances of her making me screw up. If I were together with her—I just can't! She calls me and we talk and I've seen her twice since I've been back but I'm just disgusted with her behavior that I just can't be around her. So I do get lonely, you know, and I'm trying to think of a way—I don't even know where you meet people anymore you know cause I've been in this lifestyle. You suddenly get this lifestyle that everybody you know does drugs and stuff.

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Another example is from the second interview of Mr. L, who told us the following:

> It's really hard though, because I don't know—it's not the drugs that I have a problem with, I really don't miss that. It's the life with all the girls, you know. Controlling all the—you know. It's probably more of that that I miss. You know, it's hard because I meet girls and stuff and they all use. And I'm like uh, no I can't be hanging out with this. No!

When we interviewed another parolee who had returned to prison, he gave the following explanation for his failure:

> Yeah, cause I got bored and I want to be around friends and I'll do what the rest of my friends do. I thought I could do it. I thought I could do parole, it would be easy. Yeah, cause I tried. I guess I just didn't try hard enough. I gave up. I got bored. I just gave up.

Another recidivist said the reason for his failure was his friends: "They're the reason, the product of why I'm here today. I followed in their footsteps." One stated that he felt uncomfortable being away from his prison friends so he started hanging out with them and started drinking and using meth again.

Although the successful parolees also mentioned the need to stay away from the wrong types of friends, they were more resolute in their attempts to do so, as illustrated by the following comment: "I just passed them right by. . . . If you hang out with a barber you're gonna get a haircut."

Another noticeable difference was that the successful parolees were more likely to mention friends as a resource that helped them. As noted earlier, more of them spent enjoyable times with friends than the recidivists. A number of parolees indicated that they were able to make new friends and made a conscious effort to stay away from old friends. The unsuccessful parolees had fewer friends and exhibited more loneliness, which may have led them to be less selective in choosing friends; they gave in when old friends called.

Work. A requirement of parole is to find employment, yet many parolees have few marketable skills and have a history of underemployment and unemployment (Petersilia, 2005; Uggen et al., 2005). Because finding employment is a critical step in the transition from prison to the community, we expected that those who found work would be less likely to recidivate. This was not the case since employment did not differentiate the successful and unsuccessful parolees, as noted earlier. What was important was finding an adequate job.

In response to the question about their biggest challenges since release, more than half mentioned the difficulty in finding a good job. Many lamented their lack of job skills. One parolee said he had never had a job before except selling illegal drugs. Others mentioned that their record made it difficult to find work as illustrated by the

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following response: "My charges, like I have violence on my record, so that's pretty difficult. Not too many people want to hire me."

Not having a good-quality job puts added stress on the parolees, particularly if they have a family to support, as illustrated by the following quote from a parolee who was arrested for shoplifting:

> Because, I mean, if you want a job, you can get a job, if it's flippin' burgers. You know, so you can get a job. But to get a good job that pays is harder. You know, I can go get a cook job at Denny's or something or Cracker Barrel or something like that and get nine, ten bucks an hour but it's nothing to support my family on, you know, so minimum, bare minimum payments and rent and stuff but nothin' to really support a family with.

Later in the interview he explained that financial pressure was the reason he chose to shoplift:

> I started feeling like I had to make up everything for those last 2 years and stuff and for Christmas and stuff and I—I wasn't, you know, I'd just barely got, you know, like a 10-dollar-an-hour job and stuff and trying to make up our bills and everything and so I—I shoplifted to try to—to get some extra money.

Another parolee needed money so he used a stolen credit card. He was convicted of credit card fraud and sent back to prison. When we asked him about it he said, "I had the opportunity to use a stolen card. I had a baby on the way. I thought I could make some money selling what I bought on the card. The temptation was too much. I'd done it before and didn't think I'd get caught."

The successful parolees were more likely to mention that their work was a resource that helped them succeed. In addition, as noted above, they worked more hours than those who were later sent back to prison.

Family. One of the surprises was the lack of an association between several family characteristics and parole success. Almost everyone said that their family was a resource. When we probed, however, the family situations of those who went back to prison appeared to be more strained and less supportive. One parolee said, "I love my parents but I just can't live with them. I just really can't. It is driving me nuts!" He lived with his parents for a while after release and then got his own place. Subsequently, he committed a new crime and was reincarcerated. In our interview with him after he returned to prison, he said the friends he associated with after he moved out of his parents' house influenced him toward illegal behavior. Another parolee who returned to prison said his family was helpful but when we probed he talked mostly of how they were more of a stress than help: "I guess my family has been helping me a lot even though they've been stressing me out." A third recidivist said her mother was a help but that her mother's medications were a temptation: "It's

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kind of hard to be at my mom's because she's on a lot of pain medication—morphine, lortabs, oxycontins, xanex, you know. And so, you know, and she just leaves 'em out, so whenever I felt bad or anything, I would take 'em."

The narratives of those who successfully completed parole confirmed that from their perspective, their families helped them succeed on parole. One claimed, "If it wasn't for my parents I don't know what I would do." Another said, "I have support from all my children right now and my sisters. They let me stay at their house and I helped finish their basement while I was on home visits. And my son gave me a truck and they're really supportive." Finally, a successful parolee commented on what family support meant to him: "If I had to go out and find housing for myself it would be very difficult. If I didn't have family support I'd be screwed. I really would. I would be hating it. I see why it's hard for people once they're a parolee, unless they have somebody out there in their corner. It's difficult, yeah."

There were five individuals who were arrested after being released from prison who were still able to complete their 3-year parole on time. We went back and looked at their situations to see what we could learn. Three of the five were arrested on drug charges and one for not reporting to his parole officer. These five individuals had three common characteristics. First, all had support from family members—parents, children, or a partner. The interviews suggest that family support was critical in helping them complete parole even though they had a setback. Second, all of them received some type of drug treatment. The drug treatment appeared to help them overcome their drug problems even though they had been rearrested. Finally, all had a parole officer who maintained regular contact with them. Although these are only five cases, they illustrate that desistance is a process with ups and downs and that even after being rearrested, parolees can complete parole successfully.

Discussion

Drug Treatment

Particularly interesting was the finding that those who had taken a substance abuse class were less likely to return to prison than those who had not. This finding is consistent with a growing body of research which shows that substance abuse treatment is effective (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, & MacKenzie, 2002). It is also consistent with the proposition from cognitive transformation and life course theories that desistance requires an openness to change as well as a reformulation of one's conception of self. A substance abuse class may be a vehicle or hook for change that helps prisoners to modify their self-conceptions, learn techniques of change, and increase self-efficacy.

Drug use was a key factor in whether parolees were able to complete parole successfully. It did not matter whether the person had been convicted of a drug crime

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or another type of offense. When individuals used drugs they associated with others who used drugs and became involved in a variety of crimes, such as possession of an illegal substance, possession with intent to distribute, possession of drug paraphernalia, selling of drugs, writing bad checks, and various types of theft and fraud. On the other hand, successful parolees were better at staying away from others who used drugs and avoiding drug use.

In Bandura's theory (1977, 1982), self-efficacy is a key mechanism for change. The qualitative responses illustrated how self-efficacy differentiated the successful from unsuccessful parolees. Those who succeeded were more resolute and had stronger beliefs that they could stay away from negative peers and the temptation to use drugs. On the other hand, those who failed did not have confidence in their attempts to succeed. They talked of the difficulty in staying away from friends and that if they are around them, they will do what their friends do.

In his theory, Bandura (1982) identified four different ways that self-efficacy may be modified: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Examining how different types of interventions may affect self-efficacy may be a useful approach for parole officers, correctional workers, treatment providers, and policy makers.

It is possible that those who took the substance abuse classes were already less dependent on drugs or more committed to change than those who did not take the class. That is, a certain type of prisoner might have selected the substance abuse class. The differences later observed in parole success might have been due to selection rather than the class itself. However, Laub et al. (1998) and Laub and Sampson (2003) reported that classic background variables did not explain desistance, which suggests that the influence of taking a substance abuse class might not be due to selection. Future research should explore more fully who takes substance abuse classes in prison and what their impact may be on the desistance process.

The classes may have taught skills that increased self-efficacy and enabled parolees to take advantage of opportunities for change. If this is the case, then attempts to encourage and maintain attendance at substance abuse classes may be an important factor for increasing the number of parolees who succeed. Of course, the quality of a drug program is important. Research shows that programs are more effective if they use multiple treatment components, are intensive, last longer, have follow-up, and use cognitive–behavioral methods (Gendreau, 1996; Kurlychek & Kempinen, 2006; Mackenzie, 2000; Rhine, Mawhorr, & Parks, 2006; Seiter & Kadela, 2003).

Friends

As expected, friends were a significant predictor of parole success. However, the direction of the association was the opposite of what some might have predicted—those who more frequently participated in enjoyable activities with friends were more likely to succeed at parole. Much of the theorizing and research in the literature

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has focused on how friends are associated with illegal behavior. Laub and Sampson (2003), for example, noted that deviant peers are an important influence in the sustaining of offending over the life course. An examination of the qualitative data helped understand this finding. Those who failed parole had fewer friends and expressed more loneliness, which made them more vulnerable to opportunities to associate with friends who were using drugs. This is similar to the observation of Laub and Sampson (2003) that those who were unsuccessful in developing meaningful relationships found deviant peers to be particularly appealing.

Those who successfully completed parole often listed their friends as a resource, whereas many of those who failed said their friends were the reason they were back in prison. Several unsuccessful parolees mentioned that romantic partners and family members encouraged them to use drugs or placed them in compromising situations where they were tempted to use. This is similar to the finding of Capaldi et al. (2008) that romantic partners' antisocial behavior was associated with men's likelihood of arrest.

Employment

The number of hours worked per week was associated with greater likelihood of success, which is consistent with life course theory. Being involved in work at least 40 hours not only enables one to earn more money but it leaves less time for boredom and association with undesirable friends. Work provides the opportunity to develop associations with others who are law abiding and can help support attempts to reframe one's identity.

Laub and Sampson (2003) indicated that full-time work may be particularly important in desisting from crime because it leads to a change in routine activities. Parolees are in a period of transition and full-time work may help provide structure and restrict criminal opportunities. On the other hand, if parolees do not have full-time work, they will tend to have more time to hang out with deviant peers and act on criminal tendencies.

Family

A number of the variables from social control theory were not predictive of parole success. Having a partner, being married, being a parent, being close to parents, and having frequent contact with family members were not associated with later parole success. However, in the qualitative responses a number of successful parolees said that family was an important resource as they adjusted to life outside of prison. Although those who failed said family members were a resource, in the qualitative narratives they tended to focus on problems, stresses, and temptations in their family relationships. They would say their family was a resource and then talk of how stressed their family made them. Again, the evidence suggests that a lack of close family relationships was a factor that led to parole failure.

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Agency and Identity

Agency and identity are key concepts in life course and cognitive transformation theories and help explain differences between the successful and unsuccessful parolees. At the initial interviews, many of the successful parolees commented on how they had changed. They had an openness to change, expressed hope, and discussed how they would conform to parole requirements. They had already fashioned a replacement self.

On the other hand, the unsuccessful parolees were more fatalistic in their responses. They made more comments about how difficult it was to stay away from drugs, that they were often tempted, and that they struggled to stay away from old friends. They mentioned giving in to friends who kept calling and asking them to hang out with them. They did not have confidence in their ability to stay away from drugs and fulfill their parole requirements—in short, they were low on self-efficacy.

Age

Similar to other research, we found that age was associated with parole success. However, it is not clear what processes explain desistance as one gets older. Cognitive transformation theory helps explain why age is associated with greater parole success. A comment by a successful parolee illustrates this process:

> No, it's taken a long time for me to get to that point, though. Before, I didn't care because jail was really no big deal for me. Now it's different. What makes it different is just—I guess, as I matured just realizing the impact that my behavior has had on my family and my children. Just tired of being without my family 'cause I separate myself from them, you know, 'cause they're all in Texas and I know that they'll know that I'm using, so I just stay right away from them, you know. And I'm tired of spending life—like the last four Christmases and Thanksgivings in a row, I've been locked up in jail or prison and that's no way to live, you know.

This quote illustrates how individuals may grow tired of going in and out of jail and decide to change. Laub and Sampson (2003) suggested that there may be "natural sanctions" to criminal behavior that become more apparent as one gets older. As losses accumulate over time, offenders may begin to see the consequences of their behavior on themselves and others. As a result, parolees may seek to change their identity and look for support and opportunities to change, which is consistent with the theories of Terry (2003), Rumgay (2004), and Laub and Sampson (2003).

Although age is one important element in the desistance process, Laub and Sampson (2003) maintain that desistance is more than aging. They suggest that desistance requires a "knifing off" of the immediate environment and building a new script for the future. This may occur at any age. Among the parolees who were employed, age was not related to successful parole after the number of hours of work

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was taken into account. This suggests that the structure of full-time work may help parolees achieve desistance regardless of age.

Summary and Conclusions

In this research we examined the reentry of 51 parolees during 3 years following their release from prison. Our objective was to gain increased understanding of what differentiates successful from the unsuccessful parolees. Success was defined as being discharged from parole at the end of 3 years. We examined the extent to which drug treatment, friendships, work, family bonds, and age were associated with reentry success. Those who succeeded on parole were more likely to have taken a substance abuse class while in prison and spent more time in enjoyable activities with friends. Among the employed, those who worked at least 40 hours a week were more likely to have completed parole successfully.

The qualitative interviews helped explain the findings. For example, they helped understand the differences between the friends of successful and unsuccessful parolees. In addition, they demonstrated that family ties were important even though in the initial quantitative tabulations there were only small differences on the family variables. Most important, the qualitative interviews helped see things from the perspective of the parolee.

The findings provided some support for the integrated life course theory. The evidence suggests that taking a substance abuse class in prison may help parolees succeed in their attempt to stay off drugs after release and change their identity. This finding needs replication to rule out the possibility of this being a selection effect—that those who already are more likely to succeed are the ones who take the class. The growing body of research showing that drug treatment is effective suggests that this finding may not be explained by selection (Dutra et al., 2008; MacKenzie, 2000; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Sherman et al., 2002). A substance abuse class may provide skills, motivation, and support useful in learning to remain substance free.

Social learning theory was supported in that associations with friends were essential in achieving success. Friendship networks were stronger among successful parolees, and qualitative interviews indicated that the unsuccessful parolees drifted back into the influence of friends who used drugs because they were less connected and more alone.

Social control theory was not supported by the quantitative data except that working more than 40 hours per week was associated with parole success. This was a key finding however because work may be important in establishing routines that reduce opportunities and time for associations with deviant peers. Full-time work may also help parolees establish a conventional identity. In addition, the qualitative interviews demonstrated that support from family was essential for the successful parolees.

Although the findings are tentative because the sample was small and from one state, there are several strengths of the data. First, the findings were based on data

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collected over a period of 3 years. Having multiple interviews enabled us to examine the process of reentry and see how parolees changed over time during the critical 1st year after release. In addition, we were able to see how variables measured at the time of release and shortly thereafter were able to predict later parole success.

Second, the dependent variable was based on the cumulative experience over a 3-year period rather than on a single event such as an arrest, conviction, or reincarceration. Some of our respondents were arrested numerous times and were in and out of jail or prison several times. Even some of the successful parolees were arrested and spent brief periods in jail or prison. These were temporary setbacks and they were still able to complete their parole successfully by the end of the 3-year parole period. This suggests that it is important not to rely solely on rearrest or reincarceration as indicators of recidivism because they do not reflect the cumulative process of reentry over time.

Third, we used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data enabled us to predict parole success prospectively using variables measured at release while controlling for other relevant variables such as age and previous record. The qualitative data were useful in understanding the reentry process from the perspective of the parolees themselves and in explaining the nature of the findings regarding drug treatment, friendships, and family associations.

A key finding was that information available at the time of release was predictive of later parole success. When they were released, there were marked differences between those who later became successful and unsuccessful parolees in their views of themselves as well as in their descriptions of friends and family. This type of information should be useful to parole officers, correctional workers, treatment providers, and policy makers in providing information about risk factors and possible warning signs in those who are on parole.

Based on these findings, there are several implications for policy and treatment. First, the data illustrate how reentry is not an event but a process (Maruna & Toch, 2005). Many have setbacks during the process and may violate parole stipulations. With appropriate support and treatment, many parolees are capable of succeeding even though they may have relapses.

Second, the findings highlight the value of providing classes and other types of treatment while offenders are in prison. It is important not only to provide substance abuse classes but to encourage offenders to attend and to use efforts to keep them enrolled until completion. Given the pervasiveness of drug use and its role in causing parole failures, drug treatment should be given high priority both in prison and after release. Anyone with a history of substance use should be able to benefit from treatment. This is important given evidence that drug treatment is effective, particularly treatment with performance-based activities that could help maintain and increase self-efficacy. Of course, the quality of the treatment program will make a difference, as noted earlier (McKenzie, 2000; Rhine et al., 2006).

Third, the qualitative interviews clearly showed differences between the successful and unsuccessful parolees in self-efficacy and social supports. This suggests that a

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key element for success would be providing support and aftercare (Kurlychek & Kempinen, 2006). The unsuccessful parolees had less social support, fewer law-abiding friends, and lower self-efficacy. Aftercare may be important to help parolees maintain self-efficacy and to continue their efforts to comply with parole agreements.

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