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# Consequences of mastication and mortification on former Chicano prisoners

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CONSEQUENCES OF MASTICATION AND MORTIFICATION ON FORMER  
CHICANO PRISONERS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Mexican American Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Robert Marion Koehler

December 2004

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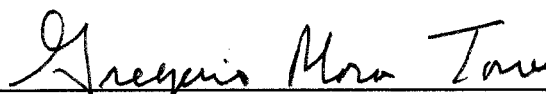
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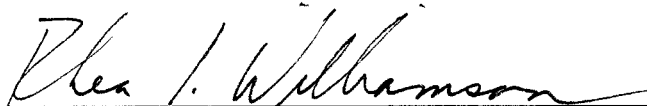
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## ABSTRACT

### CONSEQUENCES OF MASTICATION AND MORTIFICATION ON FORMER CHICANA/O PRISONERS

by Robert M. Koehler

This thesis addressed and examined the topic of the life-long consequences of the dual and closely interrelated processes of mastication and mortification on former Chicana/o prisoners of state prisons. This study defined the process of *mastication* as “the *chewing up* and reconstruction of the psychological being of the individual in the harshness of the prison world.” The process of *mortification* is the gradual *death* of the prisoner's old life, being, identity, and self that must be adjusted to in order for prisoners' with lengthy sentences to continue their lives in the environment of prison. This study found that the processes of mastication and mortification had long-term impacts on former Chicana/o prisoners and intensified the effects of any dysfunctions, psychological or behavioral problems, they had before their imprisonment. It was found that former Chicana/o prisoners were often socially and emotionally *disabled* and faced severe difficulty in adjusting to life outside prison.



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the Chicana/o youth in San Jose I worked with over the last several years and the former Chicana/o prisoners who shared their homes, lived realities, and hearts with me. You and God are my greatest and most enduring inspirations. Viva la Raza! Viva la Gente!

I wish to acknowledge the tremendous interest, friendship, encouragement, and guidance of Dr. Marcos Pizarro throughout this project. Without Dr. Pizarro's constant in put this project would never have been completed. Thank you! I am extremely thankful to Dr. Lou Holscher for aiding me in numerous projects and his always open and honest nature. Thank you! I am ever thankful to have met and been instructed by Dr. Julia Curry-Rodriguez and Dr. Gregorio Mora-Torres who kindly served on my committee. Thank you!

A special acknowledgment goes to my mentor and lifelong friend Dr. Norbert Valdez of Colorado State University. Muchas gracias!

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# THE UNDERWORLD AND OVERWORLD<sup>1</sup> CONSEQUENCES OF THE MASTICATION AND MORTIFICATION PROCESS(ES) ON FORMER CHICANA/O PRISONERS OF STATE PRISONS

I don't remember the person I used to be, or maybe it's just that I can never be the person I once was. It seems I have lost my self and I have become someone else. But I want to be that fun-loving carefree kid that loved his life and family. But it is all gone and so am I. Who am I? I no longer know. I feel so little. There's almost no emotion in my heart for anyone or anything. I married after I killed my number<sup>2</sup> because I thought I could feel what love is again. But I feel nothing! I don't feel any emotion about anything. Sometimes, though, I feel pissed as hell! I don't care about anything. I don't care if I go back to prison or not. It is all the same to me. I may have done some things wrong that put me 'behind the walls,'<sup>3</sup> but I deserved to remain me.

Reflections by a twenty-eight-year-old Chicano who completed an eight-year prison sentence two years previous to being interviewed.

## PREFACE

Typically when a social scientist develops a research project and undertakes that project, they are studying *that which is outside them*. The social scientist is studying processes and situations humans' experience that are unrelated to them and that have not directly impacted their lives on a personal level. This has not been the case during this research project. This researcher is not Chicana/o, but that does not subtract from the fact that I am a former prisoner who underwent the dramatic and drastically life and identity altering process(es) of mastication and mortification. Therefore, in this study the social

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<sup>1</sup>Underworld and Overworld are sociological jargon. Underworld specifically refers to prison society while Overworld refers to the free society outside prison.

<sup>2</sup>Killed my number refers to a prisoner completing their entire sentence in prison and, therefore, not having to serve any time on parole.

<sup>3</sup>"Behind the walls" is prison argot for serving a prison time.

science researcher, Robert Marion Koehler, often uses the normally inappropriate *I* to refer to *himself...me*.

As a former prisoner I can feel the *pains of imprisonment* these former Chicana/o prisoners experienced. I had been in the Colorado prison system where I was beaten; had an attempt made on my life by the Aryan Brotherhood; was placed in solitary confinement for long periods of time; joined the infamous La Nuestra Familia (*Our Family*); and experienced many of the *internal atmospheric stresses* (e.g., the continual stress a prisoner feels as her/his identity is daily assaulted by a system that is designed to destroy her/his *freeworld* identity and psychological well being) they endured.

I readily joined Nuestra Familia during my imprisonment as I did not hold with the White racist beliefs and practices of the Aryan Nation and the majority of White prisoners. I do not regret this association as Nuestra Familia provided me with friendship, aid, and a feeling of humanity. *La Nuestra Familia* is a Chicano prison “gang” that originated in the California prison system in the 1960s. Nuestra Familia was originally identified with Chicano prisoners from rural areas in northern California (*Nortenos*) who supposedly banded together for protection from *La Eme* that is composed of prisoners from Southern California (*Surenos*). La Nuestra Familia and La Eme are now national prison gangs and can be found in the prisons of nearly every state and throughout the federal prison system. La Nuestra Familia in Colorado is not a so-called “prison gang” but a *mutual aid association* and, specifically, a *socialist prisoners’ organization* that closely adheres to the original *self-help* and *Marxist* ideologies of La Nuestra Familia’s founders. La Nuestra Familia outside Colorado and La Eme

throughout the United States are *Capitalist prisoner gangs*. Socialist prisoner organizations seek to rehumanize the individual and resist and reduce the violence Familianos (members of Nuestra Familia) encounter from prison staff; the Aryan Brotherhood and similar White supremacist gangs; other prison gangs such as La Eme, and; from violent prisoners. Rehumanization takes place through the organization's policies of *Welfare* and *Warfare* that are intimately intertwined. Policies of *Welfare* can include: ensuring that prisoners are protected from the dangers that naturally arise in prison and from those dangers instigated by the prison staff (i.e., arranged *gladiator matches* between prisoners of different racial/ethnic backgrounds or gang affiliations, staff beatings), providing Familianos with money on their commissary accounts so that they can purchase food and personal items and do not have to get in debt to nonFamiliano prisoners, providing money to Familianos being paroled or released from prison. Policies of *Warfare* usually entail retaliating against prison guards and prisoners who have assaulted or threatened to assault Familianos. *Warfare* is exceptionally rare for Familianos as the mere threat of violence assures that few prisoners or guards will threaten Familianos.

Though their experiences differ from mine due to their being Chicana/os and the historical and contemporary implications of their ethnicity, I feel that I can recognize and understand the processes they underwent before, during, and after their imprisonment as I underwent similar processes albeit without the same historical and contemporary experiences of oppression. But in my heart I believe that the *prisoner experience* is a *uniting* experience. John Irwin, one of the most respected criminologists in the United

States over the last thirty-five years, believes that “the rest of the ex-convict criminologists (of whom I am one) are able to get at this type of phenomenon—that is, the social worlds of criminals and prisoners—better than almost everyone else. It starts off with our ability to ‘speak the language,’ and then to pull close to our research subjects and enter into their meaning worlds.”<sup>4</sup> By being prisoners in America, we share commonalities that have aided me as a researcher and human in understanding and empathizing with the multitude of tribulations that arise from being a former prisoner, including life-long discrimination in employment, education, access to treatment programs, housing, etc. Our solidarity arises from the dehumanization we have undergone and our bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood.

This study is an act of rehumanization for the individuals, my coresearchers, in this project and me. It is a case study in the *people’s vocation*, the *ontological vocation*, that Paulo Freire advocated in which we seek to rehumanize and liberate not only the oppressed, former prisoners, but to rehumanize and liberate the society that oppresses former prisoners:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power; cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it is my anticipated hope that by reading this study, individuals who have never endured the *prison experience* empathize with current and former prisoners and

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<sup>4</sup>Terry, Charles m. 2003. *The Fellas: Overcoming Prison and Addiction*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomas Learning, viii.

<sup>5</sup>Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

humanize them in their hearts and actions. Through this process of humanization they may feel the urge to participate in actions that bring about fundamental change in the U.S. prison system. By making themselves conscious of the traumatic effects of prison on former prisoners they may take it upon themselves to add their voices to the growing number of dissenters with the growing U.S. prison complex. Until the prison is reformulated along humane lines the voices in this study will continue to grow.

## INTRODUCTION

### DEFINITIONS OF PRISONER PORTRAYALS

In previous research,<sup>6</sup> this researcher has noted the importance of the mastication and mortification process(es) in Chicana/o prison personality formation. This study briefly summarizes those findings and the background details of my previous research to describe to the reader my current research interests related to the mastication and mortification process(es) in Chicana/o prison, and post prison, personality formation and reformulation.

There are three general categories, types, or identities, of prisoners that exist in the sociological literature and in actual prison culture: *fish*, *inmates*, and *convicts*. There may be exceptions to these *general categories* but I utilize these *types* to differentiate between the identities assumed by prisoners and which they chose to function under in prison.

*Fish* are recently incarcerated prisoners who are just beginning their initial adjustment to prison life. *Inmates* are prisoners who have been incarcerated for lengthy terms, but have failed to adequately adjust to the stresses and strains of prison life and experience continual episodes of psychological despair typified by isolating themselves from other prisoners, engaging in self-mutilation, and physically and psychologically preying upon newly admitted prisoners to name but a few of the symptoms of their failure to adjust to prison life. The psychological stress of prison environment evidences itself through their participation in antisocial and often self-injurious activities such as violent behavior, suicide attempts, and verbal assaults on prison staff and other prisoners.



*Convicts* are prisoners who have “adequately” adjusted to prison life and have proven, generally over several years that they abide by the prison subculture's code of conduct. Convicts have become *acculturated* to the hardships and cultural and environmental realities of prison. They have become *prisonized* and accept their roles as *characters* within the prison underworld. This study terms all prisoners *characters* within the prison as they are living in a world of distorted realities and psychological anxiety. They are no longer the individuals they were in the free world but have become *role players* in the stage of the prison in which they must reformulate their identities according to prison stereotypes that are often real flesh-and-bone actualities. The prison is the stage upon which stereotypes become realities and engaging in and corresponding to stereotypes is *an act of survival* but also an act that aids in the destruction and denigration of the individual’s personality and psychological *self*.

Convicts are at the top of the social hierarchy of prison character actors. They are the *stars of the stage*. Their status as convicts is fundamental to their respect and ability to physically, and more importantly psychologically, survive the destructive intentions of prison (i.e., psychological debilitation, physical and psychological retribution by the State). "The more one is feared and seen as a regular (convict), the more respect he is given by others, including the guards. In an atmosphere of deprivation and hostility, the ability to maintain respect allows a feeling of superiority and a sense of well being."<sup>7</sup>

Convicts do not isolate themselves from other prisoners, they do not engage in self-

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<sup>6</sup>Most notably, March-April 2000, "The Organizational Structure and Function of La Nuestra Familia. In *Deviant Behavior*, V. 21 n. 2, 155-179.

<sup>7</sup>Terry, 72.

mutilation, and they rarely physically and psychologically prey upon newly admitted prisoners. Fish have yet to undergo the process(es) of mortification and mastication while inmates and convicts have undergone both mastication and mortification. The significant difference between inmates and convicts is that inmates never fully overcome the processes of mastication and mortification while convicts have transcended these processes. Convicts learn to manage the stressors of prison life while inmates appear to be in a continual cycle of crises and denial brought about by such stressors. For example, convicts learn techniques, such as developing hobbies and physical exercise, to fill the endless hours of *dead time* (hours with nothing to do), while inmates fail to learn such techniques and spend endless hours fretting over, what appears to them, to be their hopeless and depressing situation in prison. Convicts, are *prisonized*, acculturated to prison life and generally associate only with other convicts. Charles M. Terry found that during his imprisonment “I was associated with people who, highly prisonized themselves, would be categorized at the top of the prisoner social hierarchy...these associations helped me do relatively easy time and to be seen with respect by others and myself.”<sup>8</sup> While convicts *come to terms*, adjust to their lack of freedom and control over their lives in the prison, inmates will often display overly macho attitudes that are steeped in denial of their lack of control over their situation and claims that they have empowered themselves and assumed control over their prison life. The subsequent statement by a thirty-seven-year-old Chicano prisoner who was initially incarcerated in the Colorado prison system at the age of eighteen with a four-year sentence is a prime example of an

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<sup>8</sup> Terry, 5.

inmate in denial of his inability to control his prison realities. This prisoner had been reincarcerated at the age of twenty-two for six and one-half years and again, at the age of thirty-one, with a sentence of twenty-five years. His first conviction was for a nonviolent offense, while his second and third convictions were for increasingly violent offenses:

Fuck everybody! The only person you are responsible to is yourself! When I first came into prison I didn't know shit about nothing. I was naive and didn't know how things worked. But prison taught me everything I needed to know. I grew up and gained knowledge. Now I got everything I need and nobody stands in my way. I am the biggest and the baddest motherfucker in this place. I was a stupid punk kid when I came in, but no more. I know how everything works, and everything works for me.

"But what is mastication and mortification and how can these processes be described?"

## CHAPTER ONE: DEFINITIONS AND SELF-REFLECTIONS ON MASTICATION AND MORITIFICATION

The literature on the psychological processes prisoners undergo, the sociological concepts of mastication and mortification, is exceptionally limited. Therefore, based on my prison experience and prison and prisoner research, in filling the void left by the literature, I formulated the constructs of mastication and mortification used in this study. I relied upon my experiences as a prisoner who underwent the processes of mastication and mortification in order to define these terms. Furthermore, this study relies on the work of sociologists and psychologists who allude to these processes but do not usually refer to them directly. This study defines *mastication* as the *chewing up* and reconstruction of the psychological being of the individual in the harshness of the prison world.<sup>9</sup> Mastication is the psychological processes by which the individual loses contact with her/his past identity and the human relationships that her/his identity was constructed upon. This reconstruction can be either into an *inmate*, a *convict*, or into an *emotionally disturbed individual*. Hans Toch's *Mosaic of Despair: Human Breakdowns in Prison*<sup>10</sup> is perhaps the most insightful work into the subject of mastication, though he does not use the term per se and does not posit any constructs similar to mastication and mortification.

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<sup>9</sup> Karmel, M. 1969, June. Total Institutions and Self-Mortification. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol.10, 134-142.

Bohr, R. June 1970. On Total Institutions and Self-Mortification. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 11, 152.

<sup>10</sup>Toch, Hans. 1992. *Mosaic of Despair: Human Breakdowns in Prison*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Initially, I experienced mastication upon my entry to the prison where I was given a number, 80109, which became more important as an identifier than my given name. The exchange of my clothing for green Colorado State prison garb, prison regimentation (being told when to eat, sleep, shower, etc.), being identified as an *offender* or *criminal*, etc. are but a few of the methods by which prisoners lose their free world identity. As my name changed into a number, my psychological being, who I am/was, began to change in what was less than psychologically healthy ways as I gradually became an individual who no longer feared the use of violence to protect myself or its use against my person. As my clothing, an identifier of who I am/was, underwent alteration and my ability to use time as I chose was taken from me, I began to feel less and less like the *free world Robert*. As my identity and existence were *criminalized* and *othered* by the state, I truly began to feel like a different person. There are numerous other methods by which prisoners' psychological being (including isolation and deprivation of access to material goods, loved ones, etc.) is *chewed up* and altered, but it is most significant to think of the individual's psychological being as if in a state of experiencing *continual trauma*.

This study defines *mortification*,<sup>11</sup> which is deeply intertwined with mastication as they occur simultaneously or in *partnership*, as the denial of the prisoner's overworld life and their prior overworld *being* as prisoners will have little, if any, contact with the individuals they associated with in the free world and life ways related to their former

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<sup>11</sup>For literature on mortification I suggest:  
Goffman, Erving. 1961. On the Characteristics of Total Institutions: The Inmate World in the Prison. In *The Prison: Institutional Organizations and Change*, Donald R. Cressey, ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 69-104.

free world existence during their incarceration. Mortification is the gradual *death*<sup>12</sup> of the prisoner's old life, being, identity, and self. Mortification<sup>13</sup> must be adjusted to so that prisoners' with lengthy sentences can continue their lives in the environment of prison.

Notably, sociologist Erving Goffman has been one of the social scientists who explored mortification. Goffman formulated this term, in part, as "solution to a problem which has always plagued social science writing and research: how to avoid the analytic flaws and failures which arise from our unthinking acceptance of the constraints of conventional thinking."<sup>14</sup> According to Goffman, social scientists accept the existing language and perspectives toward that being studied and, therefore, the assumptions behind those words and ideas. According to Becker:

No reader of Goffman's essay on total institutions can be unaware of the considerable disparity between the social realities he is talking about and the way he talks about it.

He describes and analyzes social practices which are quite common, whose existence and character are known to most adults, if not through their personal experience then through the experience of others they know and through secondhand descriptions in the press, films, drama, and fiction. He describes and analyzes organized social practices of incarceration and degradation which repel and even disgust many readers,

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<sup>12</sup>The Catholic Encyclopedia says this about mortification: The term originated with St. Paul, who traces an instructive analogy between Christ dying to a mortal and rising to an immortal life, and His followers who renounce their past life of sin and rise through grace to a new life of holiness. "If you live after the flesh", says the apostle, "you shall die, but if through the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live" (Rom., viii, 13; cf. also Col., iii, 5, and Gal., v, 24)  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm>.

<sup>13</sup>George Herbert's poem "Mortification" ends with the lines:

Man, ere he is aware,  
Hath put together a somemnitie,  
And drest his herse, while he has breath  
As yet to spare.  
Yet Lord, instruct us so to die  
That all these dyings may be life in death.

The Poetical Works of George Herbert. 1857. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 124-126.

<sup>14</sup>Becker, H. 1999, November. The Politics of Presentation: Goffman and Total Institutions: The Problem Conventional Categories. Paper given at the Conference on Erving Goffman and the Concept of "Total Institutions," Grenoble, 1.

and which arouse feelings of shame in us for living in a society in which such things have happened and continue to happen. His detailed and comprehensive descriptions make it impossible to ignore the continued existence of these organized, socially accepted activities, and have on occasion instigated attempts at their reform. The disparity I mentioned exists, first, in the language he uses to make these descriptions. For, despite the repellent nature of many of the activities he describes, he never uses judgmental language. He does not explicitly denounce the practices his descriptions make us want to denounce, nor does he use adjectives and adverbs which betray a negative assessment of them.<sup>15</sup>

Goffman utilizes this kind of neutral language to describe matters about which readers would probably have strong, negative feelings. For example, Goffman uses “looping” to indicate “how an inmate's attempt to fight mortification lead to more mortification.”<sup>16</sup>

Becker argues that:

The avoidance of built-in judgment is not evidence of a moral confusion on Goffman's part. He was not a moral dope....Far from it. Any careful reader feels, beneath the cool, unemotional language of Goffman's essays in this volume, the beating heart of a passionate civil libertarian. By adopting this method, which entailed both antiseptic "scientific" language and a non-judgmental comparison of cases, Goffman found a solution to the problem of the assumptions built in to conventional thinking.<sup>17</sup>

According to Goffman, when an individual is imprisoned they bring with them the concept of themselves based on social arrangements from their *home world*. This *home world* is a social arrangement that is taken for granted until the individual is imprisoned.<sup>18</sup> Social patterns established in their home world create a *free world self*. In prison, this free world self is methodically removed from the prisoner through degrading practices. The prisoner is subjected to a series of degradations and humiliations, such as: strip searches; being assigned a prison identification number; being issued standard prison

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup>Goffman, E. 1961. *Asylums*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 12 and 14.

clothing; having personal photos removed from their possession, and; being isolated from friends and family, that result in the mortification of the self.<sup>19</sup>

Goffman formulated several *stages* in the mortification process which he charged was a process of *disculturation*, “an ‘untraining’ which renders him temporarily incapable of managing certain features of daily life on the outside, if and when he gets back to it.”<sup>20</sup> Disculturation is an unsettling process in which the identity of being in prison, a prisoner, coexists with the identity of getting out or being free. This process creates and “sustains a particular kind of tension between the home world and the institutional world and use this persistent tension as strategic leverage in the management of men.”<sup>21</sup> Terry found that he benefited by being a prisonized convict within the confines of the prison but that “once I was released all this would be gone instantly. Instead, I would feel fear, anxiety, and alienation.”<sup>22</sup>

The initial stage in the mortification process is that of role *dispossession*. In the free world, there are no obstructions to, or interruptions of an individual’s roles and roles can tie into each other. But in the prison, individuals can be separated from the free world for years and their *role scheduling* disrupted<sup>23</sup> Therefore, role dispossession takes place especially during the initial stage of imprisonment when prisoners are customarily denied visiting privileges thereby causing an abrupt fracture with previous free world roles and the admission process when prisoners’ personal identity items (i.e., clothing, family

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>20</sup>Goffman, Erving. 1961. *On the Characteristics of Total Institutions: The Inmate World in the Prison.* In *The Prison: Institutional Organizations and Change*, Donald R. Cressey, ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 23.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Terry, 5.



photos, etc.), *property dispossession*, are taken from them and they are subjected to strip searches; showering in front of guards and other prisoners; forced haircuts; clothing themselves in institutional uniforms that identify their *prisoner* status, and their *possession* by the prison, and give them a *uniform* appearance with other prisoners.<sup>24</sup>

Property dispossession is also *personal dispossession* as individual's confiscated personal items held sentimental value and identified them as who they were in the free world.<sup>25</sup>

Some free world roles can be returned to but many roles are lost to the prisoner "by virtue of the barrier that separates him from the outside world."<sup>26</sup>

*Personal defacement* and *personal disfigurement* are important to the mortification process. *Personal defacement* is the alteration of the individual's physical appearance, through haircuts and clothing changes, and the forced removal of items used to maintain her or his physical appearance.<sup>27</sup> *Personal disfigurement* entails "direct and permanent mutilations of the body or loss of limbs."<sup>28</sup> Personal disfigurement of the body primarily relates to *self-mortification* in which the prisoner physically injures and/or scars their body. Such injuring and/or scarring of the body can include that incurred from failed or demonstrative (*call for help*) suicide attempts, cutting of one's body to draw attention or originating from other psychological problems, tattooing, etc. Self-disfigurement also includes any permanent injuries or scars incurred from physical beatings by guards or other prisoners. Significantly, self-mortification, such as tattooing and intentional

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<sup>23</sup>Goffman, 23 .

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 24 , 25, and 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>27</sup>Goffman., 27-28.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 28.

scarring is often part of the process of *prisoner identity formation*. A prisoner may decide to be tattooed or scarred in order to *put on the makeup* of the prison character she or he is to play on the prison stage.

Terry describes how Max's, a man in his late twenties, personality was altered by mastication and mortification and how Max had *put on the makeup* of a prison character:

By merely reading his letters, I noticed he was changing. I saw him only once after he paroled. He was like a different person. His self-concept, language, demeanor, and overall perspective had undergone a severe alteration. Not only was his body covered with tattoos, but his ideas, plans, and hopes for the future were extremely different than the ones he seemed to have when we first met. The last I heard about him, he was still "out" (not locked up) and battling with his drug habit. His name had also changed. Nowadays, instead of being called Max, he goes by the name Mad Dog, a nickname he picked up in prison.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, prisoners are continually subject to commands that often include verbal or gestural profanations and regulations that continually assault the prisoner's remaining free world identity.<sup>30</sup> Commands may often intentionally demean the prisoner and/or place them in physical postures that are demeaning. This includes continual *pat-downs* of the prisoner's body and strip searches. Institutional regulations assault the prisoner's identity by demanding conformity to a daily pattern of monotonous regimentation and homogenization. The prisoner is told when to sleep, eat, engage in recreation/physical exercise, and visit the prison library, and so on. The cumulative effects of these commands and regulations are to dull the prisoners' senses and make them either lifeless or internally angry thereby increasing their frustration and potential to physically lash out

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<sup>29</sup>Terry, 63.

<sup>30</sup>Goffman, 29.

at guards and other prisoners in *psychological desperation* at their loss of power in controlling their lives and the diminution of their self identity into *prison character actor*. The prisoner is forced to engage in behavior whose symbolic implications are incompatible with her/his understanding of self. “A more diffuse example of this kind of mortification occurs when the individual is required to undertake a daily round of life that he considers alien to him—to undertake a *disidentifying* role. Thus, in prison, denial of heterosexual activity can induce the fear of losing one’s masculinity.”<sup>31</sup>

Whereas Goffman specifies that there exists another form of mortification in total institutions, *contaminative exposure*, I have found this to be part and parcel of the general mastication/mortification process. According to Goffman:

...beginning with admission, a kind of *contaminative exposure* occurs. On the outside, the individual can hold objects of self-feeling—such as his body, his immediate actions, his thoughts, and some of his possessions—clear of contact with alien and contaminating things. But in total institutions these territories of the self are violated: the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned.<sup>32</sup>

Contaminative exposure involves “a violation of one’s informational preserve regarding self.”<sup>33</sup> The prisoner must provide personal information (i.e. past behavior, social status, family life, etc.) to prison staff throughout his/her imprisonment; they have no informational, physical, or spatial privacy; their personal mail is read by guards, and; they can only visit with friends and family members in front of guards and other prisoners.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 30-38.

Goffman found that three general issues related to *self-determination* are raised during mortification: That “total institutions disrupt or defile precisely those actions that in civil society seem to have the special role of attesting to the actor and to those in his presence that he has some command over his world—that he is a person with ‘adult’ self-determination, autonomy, and freedom of action;” “A margin of self-selected expressive behavior is one symbol of self-determination...one letter” and loss of bodily comforts reflect a loss of self-determination.<sup>35</sup>

Mortification, in my experience, meant that I had to *live for prison* and not the free world. The free world had to remain outside of my logical thinking processes in order for me to accept the reduced status of my humanity by my existence in prison (i.e., lack of freedom and control of my movements, reduction in decision-making ability [when to eat, sleep, etc.], loss of contact with loved ones). The few times I thought of the outside world was in daydreams that converted the free world into images that were not realistic. For example, I daydreamed of being able to easily and effectively adjust to the free world upon my release from prison. I fancifully thought that my past would not be an obstacle in the future and I dreamed of easily obtaining a good job, a home, a loving wife, respect, and the disappearance of the problems of the past (such as my *othering*, or *stigmatization*, by the criminal justice system as a *criminal deviant*). Such thoughts, looking back now, were foolish and quite naïve, as now, more than ten years since being released from prison, I face constant blatant discrimination in employment, education, and relationships. But such daydreams served a purpose. They kept my hope alive and

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 45.

allowed me to *do my time*. Significantly, this *hope* separates convicts from inmates. Convicts, even if they are serving a life term with no possibility for parole, maintain hope for life outside prison. Convicts know within themselves that the *character* they are forced to portray on the *prison stage* is not who they are but what they have been forced to accept. Convicts know that they have a separate identity from their role as convict but the processes of prison culture have removed them from that identity. Upon release from prison, their challenging goal is to *reattune* themselves to their *real identity*. Inmates do not live in hope. Inmates are obsessed with their plight in the here-and-now and believe in only their prison role as *inmate*.

As Hans Toch noted:

The dominant concerns of most prison inmates--personal security, reducing the rigors of imprisonment, and "doing time"--require a clear definition of the boundaries between the prison world and the outside community. The "doing your own time" precept of the inmate code implies that self-reliance should be maintained in relation both to custodians and to members of the free community. The structure and location of most prisons limit the inmates' view and facilitates demarcation.<sup>36</sup>

In reflection, the Robert I was did die and has never, and will never, return, though I wish I could be him/me again. My old personality has been mortified, it has died, and a new personality was created in the underworld of prison. A new personality that was much better suited for the harsh realities of prison and not the free world. This is one of the dire consequences of mastication and mortification.

In stating this it is apparent that mastication is a process of tearing the individual's personality apart and reducing it so that a new personality can be formulated. The old

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<sup>36</sup>Toch, 180-181.

person will be mortified, become dead, as the new personality arises. Significantly, the new personality may well be more unsavory to society, and to the individual, than the old personality. The individual may never like, nor fully accept, the person they have become while society may be subjected to a much more dangerous individual than the one that entered prison. A mild nonviolent offender can be transformed into a volatile and violent criminal. Many former prisoners cannot *accustom* themselves to their new personality and find themselves in a quandary. The personality that afforded them *relief from stress* and the ability to survive in prison is no longer suited to relieving their stress and aiding in their acceptance and survival in free world society. They find themselves at odds with a free world society that they view as participant in sending them to prison and participating in their personality change as society has created the prison system as it exists today.

But herein resides the source of the *former prisoners' quandary*. After undergoing mastication and mortification in the underworld of prison, they cannot return to their prior free world personalities. They find themselves rooted in two worlds: the free world of mainstream society and the underworld of prison. They are, in other words, *creations (born) of two worlds*. But they cannot reconcile these two worlds, or *two personalities*, nor can they deny the existence of one world, or personality, and live in one world with one personality. They will live in both worlds attempting to find methods by which to return to their pre-prison personality or attempting to reconcile the two worlds that are at *war* within their psychological being. It is as if they are in an *identity purgatory* waiting for one identity or the other to set them free. But neither is possible as the reality and

potency of the prison personality remains dominant in their psyche. They edge closer to *personal hell* every day. The prison personality is dominant as mastication and mortification are such hegemonic processes that the pre-prison free world personality is virtually eradicated except for the *dysfunctions*, individual character flaws or problems that are *untreated*, that were often factors in the individual's commission of crime. These dysfunctions often included drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts, extreme introversion or extroversion, etc. Individuals' dysfunctions may appear to be obscured during the individuals' prison life but they have in reality been amplified (increased in potency) and such dysfunctions are undeniably amplified upon the prisoner's release into the free world. These amplified dysfunctions are unmanageable for former prisoners without effective personal and/or professional treatment (such as drug/alcohol counseling, psychotherapy, etc.). The stressors of free world society (such as adjusting to the lack of regimentation, one's identity as a *criminal deviant*, finding employment, etc.) and former prisoners' inability to design and utilize adequate coping mechanisms to counteract such stressors lead to the dysfunctions' amplification which often result in the former prisoner becoming a recidivist (committing another felony and being reincarcerated in prison) or leading a life that they find personally unfulfilling.

The mortification and mastication process(es) that Chicana/o prisoners undergo has yet to be a subject of scholarly study nor has mastication and mortification in general. Furthermore, Chicana/o prisoners are rarely, if ever, the subject of academic research. Few prison research projects have focused on minority prisoners. The public, and many college students', perceptions of Chicana/o prisoners are driven by popular films such as

*American Me* and *Blood In, Blood Out*. Such films stereotype Chicana/o prisoners as effortlessly adaptable to prison life and the use of violence against others. The lack of scholarship focused on Chicana/o prisoners may be due to the actuality that scholars consider Chicana/o prisoners and former prisoners a deviant population, and, therefore, not worthy of being the subject of scholarly studies. Such scholars, often White males, maintain and exploit stereotypes, misperceptions, and biases of Chicana/os that prevent them from accepting or presenting realistic depictions of Chicana/o prisoners. In the contemporary era, society has taken an unsympathetic view toward criminal offenders and shown a lack of concern for rehabilitation of prisoners. This view pervades not only general society, but the academic world as well.

Another reason for the lack of research on Chicana/o prisoners may be due to the scarcity of Chicana/o professors in academia. Though Chicana/os are the largest nonWhite population in the United States, they fill a disproportionately small number of the professorships at U.S. universities. Finally, access to prisons to conduct research is exceptionally difficult to obtain. Federal and state prison policies severely restrict access to researchers as prison administrations appear to desire that the prison remain a *total institution*, in the words of Goffman, in which the daily realities of prison and free society are kept completely separate and unsavory aspects of prison society remain hidden from free world individuals.<sup>37</sup>

Scholars, sociologists and criminologists, who publish at length on the prison and prison culture offer, what seem to former prisoners, unrealistic portrayals of prison life. I

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<sup>37</sup>Goffman. 1961, 72.



have often found that the majority of information on prison and prison life given by university professors is stereotypical. Charles Terry found during his graduate school experiences:

I was presented with information about criminology, law, and society. The basic curriculum focused on classes about theory, statistics, research methods, legal reasoning, and so on. As a teaching assistant, I worked with professors who taught corrections, juvenile delinquency, the law and inequality, deviance, and criminal justice and court procedures....

Being exposed to this information was an experience in itself. It often felt strange to be sitting in a classroom listening to a professor talk about issues related to prison and notice that little, if anything, was mentioned about the real lives of prisoners. Similarly, the mostly quantitative research presented in academic journals and conferences had little to do with the actual experiences any 'criminals' I had known. Consequently, I was left with the impression that the creators of this information knew little about the social worlds of the people they were studying.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, research studies focused on Chicana/o prisoners are significant academic research in that such research leads to new incarceration theories and models that include nonWhites and that may aid in understanding the unique difficulties, such as feelings of alienation from society and interethnic strife (White hegemony) that Chicana/o prisoners and former prisoners experience throughout their lives. In understanding these difficulties prison researchers can advocate specific structural changes in the prison system and its administrative policies (such as policy changes from retributive to rehabilitative processes), and post prison policies such as parole that will function to improve Chicana/o prisoners' ability to cope with prison life and post prison life.

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<sup>38</sup>Terry, 8.

Understanding the mortification and mastication process(es) that Chicana/o prisoners undergo is important to understanding why and how Chicana/o prisoners become the individuals they are within the prison and after their release. This study brings about such an understanding and thoroughly examines Chicana/o prisoner personality transformations produced by prisoners enduring the mastication and mortification process(es) and the effects of such transformations on the individual's *quality of life* both while incarcerated in the prison and after their release into overworld society. *Quality of life* is defined using a myriad of factors such as the individual's contentedness and comfort with their personality (character traits); their self-perceived role in society, their perception of their ability to lead lives which are comparable to those led by individuals who have never been incarcerated among other factors (i.e. employment, economic stability, family relationships and patterns); if they have been affected by their pre-prison dysfunctions and to what extent, how they have responded to stressors (have they sought treatment), and; the coping mechanisms they have developed to counteract stress.

While the explicit objective of the study is to delve into the consequences of the mastication and mortification process(es) on the individual (both in the underworld of prison and the overworld of free society), and to a lesser extent to American society, several related questions are interwoven with the study's primary purpose. These questions include:

- \_ Does failure, defined as maladjustment to prison life, to make the transformation from the personality of a free individual to that of an incarcerated prisoner have negative consequences on the individual (psychological and physical self-abuse for example)?

- \_ Are the mortification and mastication processes any different for Chicana/o prisoners than White prisoners? If so, how and why?
- \_ Does the mastication and mortification process(es) factor into the psychological and/or physical deterioration that many Chicana/o prisoners and former prisoners face? If so, how and why?
- \_ Or, Does the mastication and mortification process(es) factor into the coping mechanisms, such as maintaining exercise schedules and participating in educational programs that many Chicana/o prisoners develop during their initial entry into the prison?
- \_ How, and in what ways, do the mortification and mastication process(es) alter the personalities of Chicana/o prisoners during their prison incarceration, and most importantly, after their release from prison? Do they become more prone to violence? Do they feel or become isolated from others?
- \_ Do they behave differently toward their families and friends than before the initial stages of their incarceration? Are they aware of such changes? If so, what do they feel/think about such changes in their personality?

These are but a few of the questions that will be asked, examined, and answered in route to gaining an understanding of the effects of the mastication and mortification process on Chicana/o prisoners and former prisoners.

Central to this study was the hypothesis that Chicana/o former prisoners' experiences with the mastication and mortification process(es) (i.e. the changes in their personality) have been negative and that any faulty habits (such as drug and/or alcohol problems,

coping problems, or psychological problems) have been amplified by their incarceration and the aforementioned process(es). In other words, in many situations the problems, which played at least a partial role in individuals' incarceration, were not *treated* or addressed while they were in prison but were amplified. Therefore, the prisoner was returned to society with enlarged problems (*dysfunctions*) with which they lacked the skills and resources to adequately respond. This, thereby, increased the likelihood that they would become recidivist (those who return to prison) or would become individuals who lacked specific goals and ways to meet those goals. Therefore, they either return to prison or become people suffering from numerous dysfunctions such as alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, etc. In this regard, prison has served not as a *rehabilitative tool* but as a *degenerative* and *debilitative tool* of the State that functions in creating individuals that reside on the social edges of society.

Debilitation follows this general process:

1. Individual enters prison with dysfunctions (such as psychological problems, alcoholism, drug usage, anger control problems, etc.) that may have contributed to her/his incarceration. The individual has not developed coping methods (that counteract stress) by which to treat the dysfunction.<sup>39</sup>
2. Mastication and Mortification (personality change) occur as a reaction to prison stressors. Old dysfunctions are amplified and new dysfunctions are developed. The individual does not develop coping methods by which to treat the old and the new

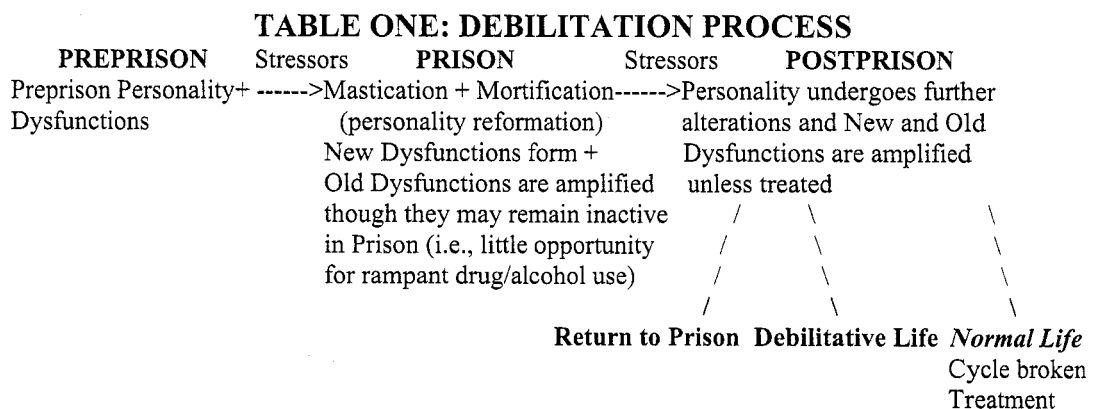
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<sup>39</sup>John Howard Society of Alberta. "Effects of Long Term Incarceration. <<http://www.john>

dysfunctions.<sup>40</sup>

3. The individual is released from prison and in the free world their old and new dysfunctions generally increase unless they develop methods, including seeking drug/alcohol treatment and psychological counseling, to treat the dysfunctions.
4. As a result of their not developing methods, or seeking aid, to treat their dysfunctions the individual either commits new crimes and returns to prison or lives a life in the free world in which the dysfunctions limit their options and, in other words, debilitate them from successfully functioning in overworld society.<sup>41</sup>

A diagram of this process follows:



Throughout the study, this debilitative process will be discussed, as this construct is effective in portraying the experiences of numerous former prisoners and aids the reader in comprehending and envisioning the processes that affect prisoners and former prisoners.

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howard.ab.ca/PUB/C35.htm>, 8-10.

<sup>40</sup> John Howard Society of Alberta. 7.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *PRISONIZATION IN THE LITERATURE*

The majority of research on adaptation to prison was conducted between the 1950s and the 1970s when the *Rehabilitative* correctional model was the predominant prison theory. During this period, the majority of prisoners were perceived of as wrongdoers who could be *rehabilitated, cured* of their antisocial ways, and eventually released to society with moderate concern for recidivism. Sociologists worked in close association with prison administrations, and often with great freedom from the constraints of prison administrators, in studying prisoners and the prisons in an attempt to improve the rehabilitative process. In the 1980s, the *Retributive* correctional model replaced the Rehabilitative as prison guards and administrators were hired in greater numbers from the ranks of police departments. The street mentality of law enforcement, based in retribution, displaced the belief in rehabilitation as the old guard of rehabilitative administrators and guards were replaced. The retributive model perceived prisoners as impossible to rehabilitate and that the prison's main purpose was not to rehabilitate, but to punish the prisoners...for prisoners to receive *retribution* for their crimes against society. With the end of the rehabilitation model, there was no longer a great need for sociologists to work in alliance with prison administrators to improve the successful rehabilitation of prisoners. Furthermore, prisons became increasingly *closed total institutions* that denied access to the public and academic researchers. Therefore, the majority of literature on

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

prisonization, a popular and important area of study for *rehabilitationist* sociologists, comes from the period of the 1950 to the 1970s.

Early sociologists were concerned with the harsh deprivations of prison, as well as how prisoners dealt with those deprivations as a group of similarly situated people. The first detailed analysis of the changes prisoners undergo during confinement was Donald Clemmer's pioneering work on the concept of *prisonization*.<sup>42</sup> Clemmer proposed the existence of an inmate society whose collective values and behavior were antithetical to those of the staff, the institution, and society as a whole. The rules of conduct that unified prisoners were defined as the *convict code* (often incorrectly referred to as the *inmate code*),<sup>43</sup> the adoption of which allowed prisoners to unite against their captors. Adherence to the code and allegiance to the inmate society was cemented through a process called *prisonization*, Clemmer defined prisonization as "taking on, in greater or lesser degree, of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary."<sup>44</sup>

Prisonization, in other words, was described as the process through which prisoners adopt the attitudes and values of the prison culture. The most important aspects of prisonization were those that made prisoners' characteristic of the criminal ideology in prison, that is, those profound influences that bred criminality. Clemmer held that nearly all prisoners underwent prisonization to a greater or lesser degree and, therefore, considered this to be a *collective* attempt at adjusting to confinement. According to

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<sup>42</sup>Clemmer, Donald. 1958. *The Prison Community*. New York: Rinehart.

<sup>43</sup>In my opinion an inmate code does not exist as inmates do not possess group cohesion as found with convicts. Furthermore, when sociologists and criminologists use the term inmate code they fail to differentiate between inmates and convicts. Academicians view convicts and inmates as one and the same, thereby, homogenizing the prison population.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 229.

Clemmer, the longer an inmates' prison stay, the more removed from conventional society they became and the stronger the influence of the antisocial prison society (and, by implication, the more difficult to reach and reform such an inmate). The decline in the role of convicts and the convict code, and the rise of young inmates in prison, has resulted in increasing the debilitating effects of prisonization. Prisoners are no longer "able to maintain positive self-evaluations because of the ethics they fulfilled as mandated by the convict code, now they often withdraw from most prison public activities and disassociate themselves from the convict identity. In their quest for safety and, perhaps, some semblance of sanity, they are left with little or no supportive countervalues whatsoever."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, contemporary prisons are filled with prisoners who will be primarily transformed into inmates who are more prone to violence, within and outside prison, than convicts were.

Central to this understanding of early prison-adjustment literature is the substantial body of research that explored prisonization in detail. The prisoner subculture was believed to act as a socializing mechanism for shaping common values, attitudes, and behavior--a *collective* response to the confinement experience.<sup>46</sup> The only variability among prisoners discussed in the literature was the adoption of a few broad categories of social or argot rules within the prisoner community.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Terry, 66.

<sup>46</sup> Korn, R. and Lloyd W. McCorkle. 1959. *Criminology and Penology*. New York: Holt.  
Ohlin, L. E. 1956 *Sociology and the Field of Corrections*. New York, Russell Sage Foundation.  
Ohlin, Lloyd E. 1973. *Prisoners in America*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.  
Ohlin, Lloyd E, Michael H. Tonry and David P. Farrington. 1991. *Human Development and Criminal Behavior: New Ways of Advancing Knowledge*. New York : Springer-Verlag.

<sup>47</sup> Wellford, Charles F. and William E. Amos. 1967. *Delinquency Prevention: Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.  
Garabedian, Peter G and Don C. Gibbons. 1970. *Becoming Delinquent: Young Offenders and the*



The preoccupation of criminological research with the uniformity of prisoner behavior continued throughout the 1970s. The numerous empirical tests on the concept of prisonization laid the foundation for developing literature on adjustment to prison. This scholarly research is noteworthy for two reasons. First, it had an enormous impact on the study of prisoner behavior and the sociology of corrections. Second, evidence of the inmate code played a role in the analysis and presentation of study findings.

Three major explanatory models emerged from the prisonization literature to explain inmate adjustment: the deprivation, the importation, and the integrative models. Each model sought to explain the origin of prisoner social structure and examined the relationships between prisonization and a variety of factors. These studies generally produced mixed results as to the existence, extent, and nature of prisonization. The deprivation model of prisoner adaptation focused on the socio-structural-functional features and patterns of interaction unique to the prison itself. These indigenous prison aspects were thought to produce severe problems that required adaptive prisoner responses. Gresham Sykes, in the classic work, *The Society of Captives*,<sup>48</sup> delineated the problems of confinement faced by prisoners. These *pains of imprisonment* (or deprivations of liberty, goods and services, security, autonomy, and heterosexual relationships) were said to promote inmate solidarity--a collective uniting of prisoners against their oppressive environment. Thus, the inmate social system functioned as an attempt by prisoners to mitigate the deprivations of imprisonment and cope with

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Correctional Process. Chicago, Aldine Pub. Co.

<sup>48</sup> Sykes, Gresham M. 1965 [1958]. *The Society of Captives: A Study of Maximum Security Prison*. New York : Atheneum.

incarceration. Other deprivationists followed similar lines of inquiry when analyzing such adaptive behavior as the adoption of the inmate code and argot rules.

The deprivation model emphasizes intra-institutional pressures and problems generated by the actual experience of imprisonment.<sup>49</sup> Prisonization is seen as the consequence of incarceration and stigmatizing (i.e., the effects of legal processing and induction into the prison) coupled with the alienative effects of coercive power exercised by prison officials in their maintaining social control of the prison.<sup>50</sup>

Studies based on the deprivation model have examined the relationships between prisonization and a variety of factors, including: (a) the length of time in prison and the time remaining to be served;<sup>51</sup> (b) interpersonal involvements and the social role assumed by the inmate;<sup>52</sup> (c) the type of institution and organizational structure;<sup>53</sup> and (d) the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. and Sykes, Gresham M. 1967. *Crime and Society*. New York: Random House.  
Sykes, Gresham M. and Sheldon L. Messinger. 1960. *The Inmate Social System*. In *Theoretical Studies in Social Organization of the Prison*. Richard A. Cloward, Donald R. Cressey, George H. Grosser Richard McCleery, Lloyd E. Ohlin, Gresham M. Sykes, and Sheldon L. Messinger (eds.), New York: Social Science Research Council, 5-19.  
Cote, Suzanne. 2002. *Criminological Theories Bridging the Past to the Future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

<sup>50</sup> Gillespie, Wayne. 2003. *Prisonization: Individual and Institutional Factors Affecting Inmate Conduct*. New York : LFB Scholarly Pub.

<sup>51</sup> Akers, Ronald L. 1998. *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Wheeler, Gerald R. 1978. *Counterdeterrence: A Report on Juvenile Sentencing and Effects of Prisonization*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Amos, William E. and Charles F. Wellford. 1967. *Delinquency Prevention: Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

<sup>52</sup> Sykes, Gresham M. and Sheldon L. Messinger. 1960. *The Inmate Social System*. In *Theoretical Studies in Social Organization of the Prison*. Richard A. Cloward, Donald R. Cressey, George H. Grosser Richard McCleery, Lloyd E. Ohlin, Gresham M. Sykes, and Sheldon L. Messinger (eds.), New York: Social Science Research Council, 5-19.

Garabedian, Peter G and Don C. Gibbons. 1970. *Becoming Delinquent: Young Offenders and the Correctional Process*. Chicago, Aldine Pub. Co.

Garabedian, Peter G. *Social Role and Processes of Socialization in the Prison Community*, 11 *Social Problems* 140 (1963).

<sup>53</sup> Akers, Ronald L. and Gary F. Jensen. 2003. *Social Learning Theory and the Explanation of Crime: A Guide for the New Century*. New Brunswick, N.J : Transaction.

degree of alienation or powerlessness experienced by the inmate.<sup>54</sup>

Stanton Wheeler provided one of the most prominent empirical tests on the validity of the concept of prisonization.<sup>55</sup> His data, while supportive of prisonization, moved away from Clemmer' focus on the induction process into the inmate society. Instead, Wheeler analyzed the changes prisoners undergo over time and the relationship of this temporal factor to conformity to staff. He found that prisoners who were recently admitted to the prison and prisoners who were nearing release were more frequently oriented to the staff and the conventional values than middle-phase prisoners and termed this a U-shaped temporal distribution of high conformity versus antistaff attitudes. This temporal pattern finding is still tested and referred to in current adjustment literature.

Second, the importation model of prisoner adaptation held that the prisoner subculture was merely a mirror image of the societal and personal characteristics prisoners possessed in the community and brought with them to prison. Clarence Schrag's work on

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Akers, Ronald L. 1997. *Criminological Theories: Introduction and Evaluation*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Pub.

Akers, Ronald L. 1998. *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*. Boston : Northeastern University Press.

Rossi, Richard, A. Berk, and Kenneth J. Lenihan. 1980. *Money, Work, and Crime: Experimental Evidence*. New York : Academic Press.

Street, David., Robert D. Vinter, and Charles Perrow. 1966. *Organization for Treatment: A Comparative Study of Institutions for Delinquents*. New York, Free Press.

<sup>54</sup> Cullen, Francis T. and Velmer S. Burton, Jr. 1994. *Contemporary Criminological Theory*. New York: New York University Press

Tittle, Charles R. 1972. *Society of Subordinates: Inmate Organization in a Narcotic Hospital*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Cote, Suzanne. 2002. *Criminological Theories Bridging the Past to the Future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

<sup>55</sup> Wheeler, Stanton. 1961. Socialization in Correctional Communities, 26 *American Sociological Review* 697.

prisoner roles and leadership,<sup>56</sup> Daniel Glaser' work on post-release adjustment,<sup>57</sup> and Donald Cressey and John Irwin's study on subcultures laid the foundation for this new model to emerge.<sup>58</sup> The new model emphasized prisoners' preprison experiences and characteristics as determinants of prisoner adjustment. The core proposition of this model was that prisoners' *personal* systems of ideals, values, and attitudes, rather than common or collective central value systems, were imported into the prison from the outside world and, in turn, influence prison behavior. Cressey and Irwin, for example, held that the inmate code was part of a more general criminal code, which exists outside and was imported into the prison. They observed that different subcultures brought certain value and behavior patterns with them and that the prisoner culture represented a blending of these subcultures within the official system of control.

The deprivation model's closed-system emphasis on prison-specific influences is challenged by the importation model. Importation theory highlights the effects that preprison socialization and experience can have on adaptation to prison life. Within the importation model, the degree and duration of involvement with criminal value systems prior to imprisonment, and the various attitudinal and behavioral patterns that the inmate

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<sup>56</sup> Schrag, Clarence C. 1972. *Crime and Justice: American Style*. Rockville, Md., National Institute of Mental Health, Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency.

<sup>57</sup> Glaser, Daniel. 1964. *The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System*. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill. Glaser, Daniel and Vincent O'Leary. 1966. *Personal Characteristics and Parole Outcome*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, Welfare Administration, Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development.

Glaser, Daniel. 1995. *Preparing Convicts for Law-Abiding Lives: The Pioneering Penology of Richard A. McGee*. Albany: State University of New York.

<sup>58</sup> Cressey, Donald R. and John Irwin. 1961. *The Prison: Studies in Institutional Organization and Change*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

brings with him/her to prison are regarded as the most crucial determinant of adaptation.<sup>59</sup>

Preprison factors that have been related to prisonization include: (a) general factors such as age, race, educational attainment, and preoffense socioeconomic and employment status;<sup>60</sup> (b) variables reflecting the individual's history of criminal involvement, such as the number of prior convictions and the number and length of prior prison terms;<sup>61</sup> (c) identification with criminal values and attitudes toward the legal system;<sup>62</sup> (d) the self-concept of the individual;<sup>63</sup> and (e) identification with broad social, political, racial, and religious ideologies.<sup>64</sup>

Given the amount of research on the first two prisonization models, the results have been disappointing. The theoretical linkages made between prisonization and various intrainstitutional or preprison predisposing factors have not been borne out. Only weak and inconsistent relationships have been found.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the hypothesized

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<sup>59</sup> Irwin, John. 1970. *The Felon*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

Cressey, Donald R. and John Irwin. 1961. *The Prison: Studies in Institutional Organization and Change*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

<sup>60</sup> Alpert, Geoffrey P. 1980. *Legal Rights of Prisoners*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

<sup>61</sup> Amos, William E. and Charles F. Wellford. 1967. *Delinquency Prevention: Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

<sup>62</sup> Zingraff, M. T. 1975. Prisonization as an Inhibitor of Effective Re-Socialization. In *Criminology*, 13, 366-381.

Zamble, E., & F.J. Porporino. 1988. *Coping, Behaviour and Adaptation in Prison Inmates*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

<sup>63</sup> Flanagan, T. J. 1980. The pains of long-term imprisonment. In *British Journal of Criminology*, 20, 148-156.

Tittle, Charles R. 1972. *Society of Subordinates: Inmate Organization in a Narcotic Hospital*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

<sup>64</sup> Irwin, John. 1980. *Prisons in Turmoil*. Boston: Brown & Little.

Jacobs, James B. 1977. *Stateville: The Penitentiary in Mass Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>65</sup> Bowker, Lee H. 1977. *Prison Subcultures*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Hawkins, Gordon. 1976. *The Prison: Policy and Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zingraff, M. T. 1975. Prisonization as an Inhibitor of Effective Re-Socialization. In *Criminology*, 13, 366-381.

associations with sentence phase have not been clarified, with discrepant patterns emerging across studies.<sup>66</sup>

The meaningfulness of the prisonization construct in these models is made even more questionable by other findings. Although prisonization has been consistently related theoretically with decreased likelihood of post release success, several studies have found an opposite relationship. Inmates who subscribe to the inmate code and adjust poorly to the formal prison structure have been found to be less likely recidivists in comparison to their less prisonized peers.<sup>67</sup> Other studies have shown that rebellious prisoners who reject formal prison rules and regulations are less handicapped during the initial period of transition to the community<sup>68</sup> and are actually more similar to persons outside prison on various personality dimensions.<sup>69</sup>

There is also considerable evidence that racial and cultural differences exert a more powerful influence on behavior than the prescriptions of the prison culture. Indeed, the very existence of a stable prison subculture and dominant convict identity has been

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<sup>66</sup> Atchley, R. & M. McCabe. 1968, Oct. Socialization in Correctional Communities: A Replication. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 33, 774-785.

Bukstel, L. H., & P.R. Kilmann. 1980. Psychological Effects of Imprisonment on Confined Individuals. *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 469-493.

Wheeler, Stanton. 1961. Socialization in Correctional Communities, 26 *American Sociological Review* 697.

<sup>67</sup> Jaman, D. R., R.M. Dickover & L.A. Bennett. 1972. Parole Outcome as a Function of Time Served. *British Journal of Criminology*, 12, 5-34.

Kassebaum, C., Ward, A. & D. Wilner. 1971. *Prison Treatment and Parole Survival: An Empirical Assessment*. New York: Wiley.

Bartollas, Clemens, Stuart J. Miller & Simon Dinitz. 1976. *Juvenile Victimization: The Institutional Paradox*. New York: Sage Publications.

<sup>68</sup> Quay, H.C. 1977. The Three Faces of Evaluation: What can be Expected to Work. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 4, 341-354.

<sup>69</sup> Sechrest, L., S.O. White & G.D. Brown. (eds.) 1979b. *The Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences.

disputed, a tentative order based on values of violence and self-protection being seen as having replaced the traditional prison social world.<sup>70</sup>

The integrative model emerged when researchers found support for factors connected to both models and suggested that a more complete, consolidated explanation of prisoner adjustment was indicated. Rose Giallombardo conducted perhaps the most significant, exploratory study of women in prison in her seminal work, *The Society of Women*.<sup>71</sup> In a classic sociological study, she examined the women' prison as a system of roles and functions and made vital comparisons with the existing literature on male prisons. Giallombardo found evidence that male and female prisoner social systems differ markedly in terms of how the *pains of imprisonment* are experienced and the nature of the responses of males and females to these deprivations. To support this she examined gender roles within women' prisons and concluded that the *system* of attitudes, values, roles, and statuses attached to men and women in the free world is imported into the prison and, therefore, reflects the larger cultural differences between the genders. The informal structure of the female prison was found to be an attempt to resist the destructive efforts of imprisonment by creating a substitute social world of interpersonal relationships with other women, whereby the prisoners preserve an identity relevant to life outside the prison.

Thus, Giallombardo concluded that the prisoner culture couldn't be explained solely as an intrinsic response to prison hardships, even though deprivations may precipitate the development of that culture and provide the structure in which various modes of

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<sup>70</sup> Irwin, John. 1980. *Prisons in Turmoil*. Boston: Brown & Little.

adaptation can occur. In other words, the differences in the informal social structure in male and female prisons in response to the problems of incarceration (such as the kinship network of social relationships found among women but not men and the considerably less salient *inmate code* among women), can best be explained in terms of the differential cultural definitions ascribed to male and female roles in American society. Similar early conclusions regarding the nature of the differential response of men and women to prison, and the relevance of both situational (deprivational) and background (imported) variables to prison adjustment, were reached by Ward & Kassebaum<sup>72</sup> and Candace Kruttschnitt.<sup>73</sup> These conclusions advocated the necessity of a more integrative approach to the study of adaptation to prison.

Charles Thomas sought to synthesize the findings of earlier models and proposed that prisoners' adaptation was influenced by preprison variables imported into the institution, as *well as* their response to the conditions of prison itself. In a 1977 study, Thomas related preprison learning experiences, extra-prison relationships, and post prison expectations.<sup>74</sup> His findings in this and other studies led to the certainty that a more inclusive model of prisoner adjustment was required. Briefly, "each inmate has a past, a present, and a future. His adaptation to the prison can be nothing other than the interactive product of all these influences."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Giallombardo, Rose. 1966. *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison*. New York: Wiley.

<sup>72</sup> Ward, David A. & Gene G. Kassebaum. 1965. *Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.

<sup>73</sup> Kruttschnitt, Candace. 1981. Prison Codes, Inmate Solidarity, and Women. In *Comparing Female and Male Offenders*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 112-126.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, Charles Wellington. 1977. *Prisoner Organization and Inmate Subculture*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



However, prisonization has not served to clarify why and how prisoners adapt in particular ways during confinement. There are several reasons for the lack of significant progress in understanding adaptation to imprisonment from the perspective of prisonization. Methodologically, the studies can be criticized for using different indices of prisonization, of unknown reliability and uncertain meaning (e.g., nonconformity with staff expectations, commitment to inmate solidarity, and adherence to prescriptions of the inmate culture.<sup>76</sup> There has also been a paucity of longitudinal analyses, most studies having relied on simple correlational or cross-sectional designs.<sup>77</sup> This limits what can correctly be concluded about changes over time.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, researchers have not defined what adaptation to prison life means or entails. If a prisoner is said to have adapted to prison life does that mean they "do their own time" in a solitary manner or by associating with prison gangs? Furthermore, it is improbable that prison culture adaptation, to any degree, can be identified without lengthy studies of a prisoner's behavioral habits and in-depth psychological evaluations. Simply physically existing in and surviving prison does not mean that prisoners have wholly or even partially adapted to life in prison.

However, the problems are more than just methodological. Although possibly of some heuristic value as a description of how imprisonment affects individuals, prisonization is clearly too general and too crude a construct. It has directed criminological research to

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<sup>76</sup> Poole, Eric D. & Robert M. Regoli. 1980. Role Stress, Custody Orientation, and Disciplinary Actions. In *Criminology*, Vol. 18, 215-26.

<sup>77</sup> Alpert, Geoffrey P. 1980. *Legal Rights of Prisoners*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

<sup>78</sup> Farrington, David, Lloyd Ohlin & James Wilson. 1986. *Understanding and Controlling Crime*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

the explanation of uniformity in behavior, rather than individual variation. Prison environments will affect individuals in myriad ways, and it is quite possible that individuals who become similarly *prisonized* will nonetheless vary on other dimensions determining important differences in adaptive functioning.

In order to understand varying reactions to imprisonment, a much finer analysis is needed than is afforded by the notion of prisonization. Using either deprivation or importation variables, integrative studies that have looked at more specific aspects of behavior in prisons have been more successful in explaining observed variations in the behavior of inmates.<sup>79</sup> Rather than thinking of prisonization as a primary mode of adaptation to be predicted, it might be more useful if it were seen as an attitudinal factor that combines with other variables to affect adaptation. Prisonization is a series of precise and specific practices that occur over time in the prison environment. Factors such as prior incarcerations, ethnicity, drug and alcohol usage, and sexual orientation contribute to one's degree of adaptation, prisonization, to the prison environment.

Studies that have sought to quantify the range of emotional or personality changes brought about by imprisonment are relatively more recent, even if they are not as numerous as those in the prisonization literature. However, once again, particular methodological and conceptual weaknesses have led to a set of inconsistent findings that are difficult to interpret.

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<sup>79</sup>Toch, Hans. 1975. *Men in Crisis: Human Breakdowns in Prison*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.  
Toch, Hans. 1977. *Living in Prison: The Ecology of Survival*. New York: Free Press.  
Toch, Hans. 1992. *Living in Prison: The Psychology of Survival*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Clinically and psychiatrically oriented case studies have long suggested that imprisonment can be devastating, at least for some prisoners. For example, variants of a functional *prisonization* have been described which include defects in cognitive functioning (e.g., loss of memory and a general clouding of comprehension and ability to think), emotional problems (e.g., apathy and rigidity), problems in relating to others (e.g., infantile regression and increased introversion), and the appearance of various psychotic characteristics (e.g., obsessions, loss of reality contact). On the other hand, as one turns to studies that have applied more rigorous methodology, it becomes evident that there are no consistent findings of quantifiable psychological deterioration (though this study maintains that psychological deterioration is a significant effect of the prison and post prison experience).

There have been numerous attempts to use traditional objective psychological measures to assess the effects of imprisonment. The MMPI has perhaps been used most extensively to determine how imprisonment may affect personality functioning. No clear conclusions can be derived from the literature.<sup>80</sup>

For my purposes, the work on the construct of self-esteem provides a good example of the inconsistencies that were found in other areas as well. Self-esteem has been a popular personality dimension to examine. Comparisons of findings are made more difficult by differences in measures, subject sampling, and the periods examined, and it is clear that no consensus of findings has emerged.<sup>81</sup> For example, self-esteem has been found to

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<sup>80</sup> Hare, R. D. 1996. Psychopathy: A Clinical Construct Whose Time has Come. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 23, 25-54.

<sup>81</sup> Bukstel, L. H., & P.R. Kilmann. 1980. Psychological Effects of Imprisonment on Confined Individuals. In *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 469-493.

increase after some period of imprisonment,<sup>82</sup> decrease,<sup>83</sup> or remain unchanged.<sup>84</sup> Similar contradictory findings have been obtained with measures of other dimensions of psychological functioning.

In summary, the available evidence indicates that gross psychological deterioration is not an inevitable consequence of imprisonment. However, the research may be criticized for using measures that are insensitive to subtle effects of imprisonment.<sup>85</sup> In addition, the samples of prisoners that have been studied often have been nonrepresentative (e.g., they were selected after systematic attribution by parole release), and the effects of other potentially significant factors (e.g., age, prior prison experience) typically have not been adequately controlled for or taken into account. Finally, there is again the reliance on cross-sectional designs. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the psychological evidence to date is inconsistent with the view that imprisonment is generally or uniformly damaging. I maintain, however, that prisonization is damaging through my personal experiences and those of countless former prisoners I have talked to in the last ten years. Terry noted that "I knew I would be confronted with the effects of prisonization when I got released. I realized that though I had learned to do quite well while I was locked up, I would basically be a social cripple on the outside."<sup>86</sup> Terry maintained that the more

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<sup>82</sup> Gendreau, P., C. Goggin & M. Law. 1997. Predicting Prison Misconducts. In *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 24, 414-431.

<sup>83</sup> Fichtler, H., R. Zimmerman & R.T. Moore. Feb. 1973. Comparison of Self Esteem of Prison and Non-Prison Groups. In *Perceptual & Motor Skills*, Vol.36, no. 1, 39-44.

Atchley, R. & M. McCabe. 1968, Oct. Socialization in Correctional Communities: A Replication. In *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 33, 774-785.

<sup>84</sup> Cohen, S., Taylor, L. 1972. *Psychological Survival*. Hammondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Terry, 5.

prisonized an individual became, the less likely their ability to be successful upon release.<sup>87</sup>

From this study's perspective, this is not at all surprising. Conceptually, it makes little sense to search for the psychological effects of imprisonment without acknowledging that these effects may vary considerably across individuals (genders, ethnic groups, etc.). How individuals cope with problems is at least as important as the frequency or severity of problems they experience. Unfortunately, as with the sociological literature on imprisonment, previous psychological studies have concentrated on finding generalized and uniform effects. The reasons for variations among prisoners and former prisoners in social functioning and emotional or mental health have been typically ignored. Sociologists have generally focused on prisoners and former prisoners as a homogeneous population who react in uniform and prescribed ways to imprisonment and, therefore, utilize similar coping strategies. Researchers' predisposition to this form of thinking and analysis has led them to overlook factors that directly relate to the psychological problems of imprisonment and post imprisonment and the diverse set of coping strategies implemented by prisoners and former prisoners. These psychological problems vary due to the prisoner populations' heterogeneous characteristics. Such characteristics include ethnicity, sexual orientation, familial support, spousal support, drug and alcohol usage, religious beliefs, gang affiliation, age, gender identification, etc. A white male in his middle forties would most likely experience many different psychological and emotional difficulties during imprisonment and post imprisonment than a nineteen-year-old Chicano

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

male, hence, they would also most likely utilize different coping strategies to overcome such difficulties. The variances between these two individuals would be so dramatic that it would seem impossible to place them into the same general category of prisoner and then former prisoner and study them without acknowledging the overwhelming array of their differences.

The driving force behind the mastication and mortification process(es), and this study's hypothetical debilitating process, can be defined as stress and the failure to find appropriate methods to relieve stress. This view coincides with the use of the concept in engineering to describe the engineers' maltreatment of physical objects to produce *strain* in them and ultimately cause them to break. In contemporary sociological theories (such as those summarized by McGrath,<sup>88</sup> the stimulus-centered definition corresponds to the first stage of a hypothesized stress process or stress transaction. The *constraint* or *influence* is the demand, load, input, stressor, press, stress situation, or environmental force that is the occasion, precondition, or requisite to stress.

Gresham Sykes' 1958 classic *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*<sup>89</sup> remains relevant to modern prison studies. His work on prison life is invaluable. Sykes focuses on prison culture and that this culture is a unique society in which:

...custody is many individuals bound together for long intervals. Such aggregates enduring through time must inevitably give rise to a social system-not simply the social order decreed by the custodians, but also the social order which grows up more informally as men interact in meeting the problems posed by their particular environment. In attempting, then, to understand the meaning of imprisonment, we must see prison life as something more than a matter of walls and bars, of cells and

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<sup>88</sup> McGrath, J.E. 1970. "Major methodological issues." In J.E. McGrath (Ed.), *Social and Psychological Factors in Stress*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

<sup>89</sup> Sykes, G.M. 1958. *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

locks. We must see the prison as a society within a society.<sup>90</sup>

Sykes's prisons' "deprivations" qualify as stressors; they describe features of the prison environment (such as separation from loved ones) that *deprive*--that is, adversely affect--prisoners. The phrase "adversely affect" assumes that the deprivation involves commodities that have been present and were valued. Depriving a person of commodities that have not been an asset to him/her is not a demand or stressor.

Demands are divided into those that tax us by demanding more than we can deliver (stimulus overload) or by insufficiently challenging our interests and capacities (underload). Prison demands combine underload and overload. The press of other inmates can be an overload, and enforced inactivity an underload according to Toch.<sup>91</sup> Prison demand occurs as onslaughts (such as a menacing cellmate with a knife) or as cumulative wear and tear (noisy tier mates). Janis<sup>92</sup> points out that low-grade chronic demands can translate into acute demands because "the relentless accumulation of stresses day after day lowers the person's stress tolerance to the point where he begins to react to every minor stress as though it were a serious threat."<sup>93</sup> Prisons are also classed with dramatic demands under the generic heading "life stresses."<sup>94</sup>

A second stage is defined as the "*reception* (recognition, cognitive appraisal, perception, and acceptance)"<sup>95</sup> of a stressor, or its "*subjective demand* (or *strain*, or

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>91</sup> Toch, Hans. 1977. *Living in Prison: The Ecology of Survival*. New York: Free Press, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Janis, I.L. 1969. *Stress and Frustration*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>94</sup> McGrath., 10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 15.

*personal definition*).<sup>96</sup> Sykes deprivation of autonomy, for example, means that prisoners at some level (conscious or unconscious) see prison staff as intrusively controlling their fate or circumscribing their decisions. Given specialized past experiences--such as a transfer into a low-custody prison from a high-custody prison--deprivation of autonomy could become a nondemand; alternate experiences--such as over permissive upbringing--could increase the salience of autonomy restrictions.

The reception process not only refers to whether or not stressors are perceived, but also describes the *meanings* assigned to the stressors (their *definition*) by the perceiver. The situation must be perceived as *noxious*. Noxiousness converts a neutral or ambiguous scenario (prisoner population density) into a stressful situation (a crowded prison). The inmate's definition of the situation also refers to the quality of the demand (undesirable connotations of crowdedness) that is salient and irritating to them. Crowding is thus experienced--given density--when people are "forced to participate, even passively, in an unwanted experience,"<sup>97</sup> when their surroundings exercise "control over both their social and physical environments by dictating where and with whom they interact,"<sup>98</sup> and when control is seen as arbitrary. Such meanings define the nature of stress. Crowding then translates into deprivation of autonomy (arbitrary assignments), privacy (unwanted social contacts), and freedom (circumscribed movement); it also makes one feel unsafe and restricts one's activities and program options.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>97</sup> Cohen, S. 1980 Cognitive Processes as Determinants of Environmental Stressors. In I.G. Sarason & C.D. Spielberger (Eds.), *Stress and Anxiety*, Vol. 7. Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere, 174.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 175.



The third stage of stress is one McGrath calls “responses.” It covers very diverse grounds, as does Sykes’s phrase “pains of imprisonment.” One connotation of response is that of feelings (discomfort, fear, anxiety, rage, sense of impotence) that most of us think of when we think of stress. Sykes’s deprivations presume *pains* such as loneliness, shame, and rage. More complex feelings are the experienced injuries to self-esteem that Sykes postulates. Responses also include physiological reactions (high blood pressure, ulcers) and indicators of psychosocial malfunction (alcoholism) utilized by stress researchers.

Responses are defined to include behavioral reactions. These must be read to comprise reactions such as those used by prisoners (retreating, exploding, attempting suicide) to deal with stress. Two problems follow: One is that stress includes a fourth stage, the consequences of response (the prisoners’ individual efforts to salvage their self-esteem) and as the consequences of response (the sum of prisoner efforts that salvage collective self-esteem). A more serious difficulty is that *response* becomes an overloaded concept, comprising the impacts of perceived demand (such as resentment at being harassed), the reaction to impact, and the purposes of the reaction (salvaging wounded self-esteem, demonstrating manhood, reacting to sensed impotence, suppressing depression, anxiety, or rage).

R. Theodore Davidson’s *Chicano Prisoners: The Key to San Quentin*<sup>99</sup> is the only lengthy examination of Chicano prison culture so it must be included in any discussion of Chicano prisoners. The book is a reference point that can be utilized in comparing the

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<sup>99</sup> Davidson, R. Theodore. 1974. *Chicano Prisoners: The Key to San Quentin*. New York: Holt,

contemporary situation of Chicano prisoners with those of Davidson's San Quentin of 1968 and the stresses that are unique to Chicano prisoners. Davidson makes the important observation that the prison world is:

...a full, real world, with joys and sorrows, laughter and pain. Through the stark reality that they face, prisoners have their own view of their world behind walls. It may differ from the views held by outsiders and staff. However, it is important to realize that the prisoner perception of the prison world is what governs their actions. In this respect, their view of the world is quite real. Granted, their view may be subject to ethnocentric limitations and distortions, but to no greater degree than the view of the prisoner world held by outsiders and staff.<sup>100</sup>

James B. Jacobs' works are insightful examinations of prisoner relations and stress. According to Jacobs, within the threatening environment of prison there is "...a conflict-ridden setting where the major battles are fought by intermediate level inmate groups rather than by staff and inmates or by inmates as unaligned individuals" who must daily face the difficulties of individual psychological and physical survival.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Jacobs provides numerous examples of the ways in which prisoners form both friendly and antagonistic relationships and how such relationships transform the prisoner's personality and he speaks at length about the "convict code of conduct."<sup>102</sup> Juanita Diaz-Cotto, in a fashion similar to Jacobs, relates that prisons are "conflict-ridden settings" in which ethnic differences play an important role in conflict.<sup>103</sup>

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Rinehart and Winston Inc.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid. 5.

<sup>101</sup>Jacobs, James B. 1975, Winter. Stratification and Conflict Among Prison Inmates. *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 66 4, 478.

<sup>102</sup>Jacobs, James B. 1977. Statesville. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacobs, James B. 1983. *New Perspectives on Prison and Imprisonment*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>103</sup>Diaz-Cotto, Juanita. 1996. *Gender, Ethnicity and the State: Latina and Latino Prison Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

John Irwin (a former prisoner) and James Austin are preeminent in the field of contemporary prison and prisonization studies. Irwin and Austin consider prisons “human warehouses” in which:

Convicted primarily of property and drug crimes, hundreds of thousands of prisoners are being crowded into human (or inhuman) warehouses where they are increasingly deprived, restricted, isolated, and consequently embittered and alienated from conventional worlds, and where less and less is being done to prepare them for their eventual release. As a result, most of them are rendered incapable of returning to even a meager conventional life after prison. Because most *will* be released within two years, we should be deeply concerned about what happens to them during their incarceration.<sup>104</sup>

Hans Toch is the preeminent researcher on the psychological effects of prison on prisoners. His works are unique in that they provide numerous examples of case studies of male prisoners in various stages of the mortification and mastication process(es) and of mental debilitation. Toch details their criminal offenses, prison records, psychological profiles, successful and unsuccessful attempts at self-mutilation, and relates portions of interviews with prisoners. Hans Toch’s work is fundamental to my research, as he is one of but a few researchers studying what this study described as mastication and mortification and the transformation of prisoner personalities.<sup>105</sup>

Leonard Orland’s *Prisons: Houses of Darkness*<sup>106</sup> provides important details concerning the psychological pain of prison life that he experienced and witnessed other prisoners enduring. His work grants first hand data on the debilitating effects of prison

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<sup>104</sup> Irwin, John and James Austin. 1994. *It’s About Time: America’s Imprisonment Binge*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 65.

<sup>105</sup> Toch, Hans. 1977. *Living in Prison: the Ecology of Survival*. New York: Free Press.

Toch, Hans. 1992. *Mosaic of Despair: Human Breakdowns in Prison*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<sup>106</sup> Orland, Leonard. 1978. *Prisons: Houses of Darkness*. New York: The Free Press.

life, as does Louis Peregro's "A Prisoners Testimony" in which he relates his inability to adapt to prison life:

Prison came as a brutal shock. The appalling physical conditions and to an even greater extent the prevailing outlook made me feel I had stepped back into an age of barbarity. The grim universe within the prison walls not only seemed out of touch with the world but to be embedded in a punitive mentality bordering on bestiality. I felt utterly isolated from the prison officers and my fellow inmates. I also felt cut off from myself, and this was not the least of the dangers I was up against. I soon learned what life in the jungle is all about. If you want to survive you can't afford to trust another living soul.<sup>107</sup>

Felix Stringfellow, a Ph.D. and former prisoner, has written a compelling account, "Society's rejection of the incarcerated," of the problems that former prisoners encounter in the overworld.<sup>108</sup> He supplies first-hand accounts of the psychological trauma experienced by former prisoners who have difficulties adjusting to the overworld and who are rejected by free society. Orland and Stringfellow combined provide inside prison and outside prison perceptions of character alterations as the individual is confronted with vastly disparate environments.

Michel Foucault understands and relates the prison as no other scholar. To Foucault, prisons have the specific function to:

...apply the law and teach respect for it; but all its functioning operates in the form of abuse of power. The arbitrary power of administration: 'The feeling of injustice that a prisoner has is one of the causes that may make his character untamable. When he sees himself exposed in this way to suffering, which the law has neither ordered nor envisaged, he becomes habitually angry against everything around him; he sees every agent of authority as an executioner; he no longer thinks that he was guilty: he accuses justice itself.'<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Peregro, Louis. 1998, June. A Prisoner's Testimony. In UNESCO Courier, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Stringfellow, Felix. 1991. Society's rejection of the incarcerated. Journal on Prisons by Prisoners, Vol. 2, no. 12, 22-28.

<sup>109</sup> Foucault, Michel. 1984. Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison. New York: Pantheon Books, 227-228.

It is clear that in the early twenty-first century the U.S. correctional system operates under the *retributive* correctional model. The prison's purpose is not to *rehabilitate* citizens but to exact the maximum amount of *retribution* for their crimes against society. As the prisons' emphasis has turned from rehabilitation to retribution the prison has become a *closed total institution* in which the effects of prisonization, and mastication and mortification, on the individual are increased due to prisoners having fewer rehabilitative options (i.e., educational programming, drug/alcohol treatment programs such as AA and NA, and anger management programs) and more *dead* time. According to Clemmer, the longer an individual remains in prison the more they will become removed from the values of mainstream society and attuned to criminal lifeways.<sup>110</sup> But in contemporary times the positive effects of prisonization during incarceration, such as the convict code, have declined in significance as prisoners become younger and the prison emphasizes retributive policies that reduce attempts at citizen rehabilitation. Terry noted that prisoners are no longer "able to maintain positive self-evaluations because of the ethics they fulfilled as mandated by the convict code, now they often withdraw from most prison public activities and disassociate themselves from the convict identity. In their quest for safety and, perhaps, some semblance of sanity, they are left with little or no supportive countervalues whatsoever."<sup>111</sup> The *pains of imprisonment* identified by Sykes are no longer perceived by prisoners as "a collective uniting of prisoners against

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<sup>110</sup> Clemmer, 229.

<sup>111</sup> Terry, 66.

their oppressive environment”<sup>112</sup> but as *individual* experiences that prisoners must face in solitude and on individual terms.

Wheeler’s importation model of prisoner adaptation is correct in that prisoners bring societal and personal characteristics, dysfunctions, to the prison.<sup>113</sup> Prisoners’ pre-prison experiences are brought with them to the prison as also shown by Glaser,<sup>114</sup> Glaser and Leary,<sup>115</sup> and Cressy and Irwin,<sup>116</sup> but these pre-prison factors (age, race, educational attainment, employment, socioeconomic history; prior criminal involvement; criminal values and attitudes; self-concept of the individual, and; identification with broad social, political, racial, and religious ideologies) are undeniably altered by the prison experience. Giallombardo found that both situational (deprivational) and background (imported) variables were intertwined in prison adjustment.<sup>117</sup> Hence, what prisoners bring with them from the freeworld and prison culture combine in prison adjustment. Thomas identified that pre-prison and prison experiences combine with post prison expectations in forming prison adjustment.<sup>118</sup>

But prior literature fails to clearly delineate how the pre-prison, prison, and post prison experience are interrelated nor the *former prisoners’ quandary* of being rooted in two worlds: the free world of mainstream society and the underworld of prison. After undergoing mastication and mortification in the underworld of prison, they cannot readily return to their prior free world personalities. They are *creations (born) of two worlds*.

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<sup>112</sup> Sykes. *The Society of Captives*.

<sup>113</sup> “Socialization in Correctional Communities,” 697.

<sup>114</sup> *The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System*.

<sup>115</sup> *Personal Characteristics and Parole Outcome*.

<sup>116</sup> *The Prison*.

<sup>117</sup> *Society of Women*.

But they cannot reconcile these two worlds, or *two personalities*, nor can they live in one world with one personality while denying the other. They live in both worlds attempting to find ways to return to their pre-prison personality or attempting to reconcile the two worlds that are at *war* within their psychological being. It is as if they are in an *identity purgatory* waiting for one identity or the other to set them free or annihilate them. But freedom is not possible as the reality and potency of the prison personality remains dominant in their psyche. They edge closer to *personal hell* every day. The prison personality is dominant as mastication and mortification are such hegemonic processes that the pre-prison free world personality is virtually eradicated except for the *dysfunctions* (individual character flaws or problems that are *untreated*) that were often factors in the individual's commission of crime. These dysfunctions often included drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts, extreme introversion or extroversion, etc. Individuals' dysfunctions may appear to be eliminated during the individuals' prison life but they have in reality been amplified (increased in potency) and such dysfunctions are undeniably increased upon the prisoner's release into the free world. These amplified dysfunctions are unmanageable for former prisoners without effective personal and/or professional treatment. The stressors of free world society, and former prisoners' inability to design and utilize adequate coping mechanisms to counteract such stressors, lead to the dysfunctions' amplification that often result in the former prisoner becoming a recidivist or leading a life that they find empty of personal enjoyment.

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<sup>118</sup>Prisoner Organization and Inmate Subculture.

Next, in the *Description of the Study: Methodology*, I identify and explain the four stages of the debilitation process during the pre prison, prison, and post prison experience; the selection interviewees; the interview process as *psychiatric first aid*, and; *working through* as a method for former prisoners to confront their dysfunctions.



## CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

### Methodology

As previously stated, central to this study is that Chicana/o former prisoners' experiences with the mastication and mortification process(es) (i.e., the changes in their personality) have been negative and that any bad habits (such as drug and/or alcohol problems, coping problems, or psychological problems) have been amplified by their incarceration and the aforementioned process(es). In other words, in many situations the problems, which played at least a partial role in individuals' incarceration, were not *treated* or addressed while they were in prison but were amplified. Therefore, the prisoner was returned to society with increased problems (dysfunctions) with which they lacked the skills and resources to adequately respond. This, thereby, increased the likelihood that they would become recidivist (those who return to prison) or would become individuals who lacked specific life goals and methods to meet those goals. So, they either return to prison or continue suffering from numerous dysfunctions such as alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, etc. In this regard, prison has served not as a rehabilitative tool but as a debilitating tool of the State that functions in creating individuals that reside on the social edges of society. The reader should keep in mind the hypothetical *Debilitation Process*: Debilitation follows this process:

1. Individual enters prison with dysfunctions (such as psychological problems, alcoholism, drug usage, anger control problems, etc.) that may have contributed to her/his incarceration. The individual has not developed coping methods (that counteract stress) by which to treat the dysfunction.

2. Mastication and Mortification (personality change) occur as a reaction to prison stressors. Old dysfunctions are amplified and new dysfunctions are developed. The individual still does not develop coping methods by which to treat the old and the new dysfunctions.
3. The individual is released from prison and in the free world their old and new dysfunctions generally increase unless they develop methods, including seeking drug/alcohol treatment and psychological counseling, to treat the dysfunctions.
4. As a result of not developing methods, or seeking aid, to treat dysfunctions the individual either commits new crimes and returns to prison or lives a free world life in which the dysfunctions limit their options and, in other words, debilitate them from successfully functioning in overworld society.

The methods utilized in the study include recounting my participant-observation experiences and reviewing the related literature on the mastication and mortification process(es) and stress as experienced by prisoners and former prisoners. The primary method utilized in the study were interviews with six former state (Colorado, California, Massachusetts, Arizona, Oklahoma) prisoners and their spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, or partners. These six former prisoners were selected from among more than ninety-five former Chicana/o prisoners interviewed from June 2000 to August 2004 in Massachusetts, California, and Colorado. Their interviews were chosen as typifying those interviewed through their having, in general, common themes (i.e., poverty in childhood, little access to education, drug/alcohol addiction, etc.) in their lives

All six former prisoners were either previously known to me through prior research projects or I was introduced to them by former prisoner acquaintances. I sought Chicana/o prisoners between the ages of thirty and forty-years-old who had served a minimum of five to ten years in prison and had been out of prison for one to two years. The majority of former prisoners had long-term drug and/or alcohol addictions and/or had socially isolated themselves from friends, families, and coworkers. The six interviewees were selected, as their difficulties in adjustment to post prison life were representative of the larger sample. They were also selected for this study as they exemplified a willingness to talk candidly about their lives before, during, and after prison. Through interviews, the participants effectively described the constructed debilitation process and how mastication and mortification, alongside dysfunctions, are the dominant factors within this process.

In approaching this study it was necessary to keep in mind the potential psychological effects on former prisoners of the retelling and reexamination of their pre-prison, prison and post-prison experiences. When finding that an individual did not want to discuss specific events of their personal history I did not "push the subject." At the same time I realized that allowing individuals to tell "their story" was cathartic to them. Rarely, if ever, had these former prisoners been questioned concerning their lives. In many ways, the lack of interest in their lives represented their *invisibility* in American society. In retelling their stories I anticipated that former prisoners would examine their failed attempts at resolving the difficulties in their lives and make renewed attempts at seeking

drug, alcohol, and psychological counseling. During the study I found that several individuals sought and obtained counseling and improved their lives substantially.

Given the chosen definition of stress and mastication/mortification and some meaningful ways of studying phenomena thus defined (through interviews), the link between *understanding* and *eliminating problems* can be direct. Persons who have recently undergone stress, or are undergoing stress, can benefit from interviews in which they are asked to recount their experiences. Freud, who showed that our ability to cope with adversity could be improved by rehashing our past coping failures, first uncovered this phenomenon. To put the matter more psychoanalytically, verbally reliving our pains can be regenerative. The reason for this paradox has to do with the power of undigested traumatic experiences (lived pain) to magnify perceptions of threat and to charge them with inherited panic. When we rehearse a sequence of events that produced a traumatic juncture in our lives, we can place our pain into perspective, and we can keep leftover distress and self-doubt from haunting us. With an intervening cooling-off period, we can assimilate facts that previously were too painful to digest or to face. Not surprisingly, *psychiatric first aid* that is administered to stressed persons resembles sensitive stress research interviews. As Janis points out, “Many psychotherapists who treat traumatized persons see their job as that of helping each person to do the amount of working through the trauma that is needed for him to regain his basic sense of self-confidence.”<sup>119</sup> “Working through” is what a good interview should offer an interviewee. Interviewees must be cared for with great sensitivity especially when they have undergone the stress of

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<sup>119</sup>Janis, 72.

imprisonment and the at least equally stressful release into free world society. The re-realization of a sense of self-confidence was a primary goal of interviews in this study.

*Working through* implies that interviewees will have to consciously encounter the stressors in their life, the way they counteract (or do not counteract) stressors, the effect stressors have upon their dysfunctions, the reality that they have dysfunctions, that they have or have not utilized treatment methods or coping strategies for their stressors and dysfunctions, and the effect of their dysfunctions upon their lives (such as the dire effects of alcoholism or depression). In most cases the interviews led to the interviewees identifying and recognizing their current problems, and the roots of their problems, and realizing that they must seek appropriate treatment for their problems. Once interviewees identified their problems they may felt less inclined to give themselves over to hopelessness and ineffective treatment methods (such as avoidance of the dysfunction, self-treating by drinking and drug usage, etc.). Again, a primary goal of this study was to not only analyze the mastication and mortification effects on former prisoners' personalities but to assist in their actively seeking treatment for their dysfunctions.

Research can provide stressed persons with some momentary social support. Cohen points out that when we are in trouble we need “people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value and love us.”<sup>120</sup> During this study I found that former prisoners felt empowered by my interest in their experiences. Several of the former prisoners expressed a change in their self-attitudes by my interest in their lived realities. This was a new *experience* for them as they had been previously viewed by

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<sup>120</sup>Cohen, 37.

society as merely *deviants, criminals, drug addicts, social problems, or numbers* (as in prison). A research interview that includes a salient component of caring and that communicates honest concern for a traumatized interviewee can thus be therapeutic. It can be an encounter that has *stress-buffering value*.

A more obvious link between stress and mastication/mortification research and practice lies in the use of experiential data--such as data about life in prison and upon a prisoners release into the free world--to help prisoners and former prisoners who must face predictable stress experiences and do not know what to expect or how to react. Such experiential data has yet to be integrated into adjustment programs to prison and post prison lives. Janis reviewed a large number of related experimental studies, from which he concluded, "If a normal person is given accurate prior warning of impending pain and discomfort, together with sufficient reassurances so that fear does not mount to a very high level, he will be less likely to develop acute emotional disturbances than a person who is not warned."<sup>121</sup> *Prior warning* was not given to former prisoners before their incarceration or before their release into the free world. Hence, former prisoners upon their incarceration and their release from prison felt acute emotional disturbances.

Data about unavoidable prison and post prison deprivations, either fairly widely shared deprivations or those specific to prisoner and post prisoner groups, could shape modules of an orientation program for inexperienced new prisoners and newly released prisoners. The former prisoners in this study would have substantially benefited from such a program. A new prisoner program could resemble a three-step sequence of the

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<sup>121</sup> Janis, 102.

sort described by Janis. The first step in such a sequence would be “to give (the prisoner) realistic information.”<sup>122</sup> The term “realistic” charts a middle course between reassurance and alarm. It does not paralyze by magnifying further danger (announcing, “What crowding means is that you’ll sit in your cell going stir crazy”), but it forewarns of probable or to-be-expected threats (for example, “Some guys will threaten you and they’ll make advances to you”).

Janis notes, “One must reduce feelings of invulnerability, but one must counteract feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and demoralization.”<sup>123</sup> One does both by exploring the person’s view of options and of resources for coping. The last step of inoculation is “to encourage the person to work out his own way of reassuring himself and his own plans for protecting himself.”<sup>124</sup> Individuals must become confident that they can effectively overcome their difficulties or they may give themselves over to despair and their dysfunctions may come to control over their lives. Hence, interviews conducted during this study can be perceived as *interventions* in post prisoners' lives that boosted their self confidence and provided the need in them to seek counseling in addition to the drug, alcohol, and psychological counselors I referred them to.

Significantly, this study is based in Chicana/o Studies methodology and interaction with the community in an ethical manner is fundamental. Therefore, I considered the individuals interviewed during the course of this research to be *coresearchers*. I may be the *research facilitator*, the individual who initiated the research, but I have attempted to

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

ensure that my *coresearchers* were active participants in the research process so as to overcome the differences (racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) between us. The process of transcending these differences is discussed in the *Limitations of the Study*.



## CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS

Six former prisoners were interviewed whom I met during the course of fieldwork on separate Chicana/o Studies projects and several of the prisoners I was introduced to via mutual acquaintances. All six Chicana/os (four male and two female) were between the ages of thirty to forty-years-old. Individuals were selected from this age bracket so as to focus on fairly young former prisoners who had initially entered prison in their twenties and exited prison at a young enough age to have a reasonably high likelihood of marrying and raising families. Individuals selected served a minimum of five to ten years in California, Massachusetts, Colorado, and Arizona state prisons and had been out of prison for 1 to 2 years. This ensured that each individual had served a length of time necessary to fully undergo the mastication and mortification process(es) and had been out of prison long enough to experience significant adjustment difficulties and to have made numerous attempts at resolving the difficulties they encountered in readjusting to free world society.

Four individuals were married and were married to their spouses before their incarcerations. The two other individuals had partners whom they met after their release from prison. Individuals who were in relationships were chosen so that there would be another individual, observer, to give further details on the former prisoners' readjustment to free world society. This was significant in that interviews with former prisoners partners provided data to make comparisons/contrasts with. Former prisoners views on their behavior could be *checked* with those of their spouse/partner.

The individuals selected to be interviewed seemed to be typical of the larger sample set in that they were experiencing significant difficulties in adjusting to life outside of prison and were struggling with finding ways to mediate their adjustment problems. This is not to say that other former prisoners were not more or less successful in their adjustment to free society. Several former prisoners had adjusted without significant difficulties but this was due to their dramatically higher levels of education (i.e. college degrees), class, lack of drug and alcohol abuse histories, and strong family support systems that the majority of former prisoners were lacking. Furthermore, the interviewed individuals had been out of prison for one to two years so this study did not analyze the effects of long-term imprisonment on individuals released for less than one year or for more than two years. Individuals out prison for more than two years may have adjusted to the free world in different ways than the selected sample of individuals free for one to two years. Such individuals may have been more successful and found strategies that aided them in adjustment to free life. Individuals out of prison less than one year would more likely be facing prospects of more difficult adjustment to free life and a greater recidivism rate than interviewees.

The location for interviews was in interviewee's homes. Their homes were chosen as interview locations as individuals felt more at ease and as if they were talking among friends and not to a researcher in their homes. This was important in gaining the trust of the individuals and allowing them to feel free to expose their emotions and frustrations about their time in prison and their readjustment to free world society.

### **Selected Interview Questions**

The interview questions were open-ended and there were a limited number of questions asked of each interviewee. New questions were derived from the interviewee's responses to initial questions during the interview. This allowed the researcher to respond to the individuality of each interviewee and for respondents to inform the researcher of the uniqueness of their specific life history. Initial interview questions were designed to gather information that gave details of the former prisoners' perception of their character traits before their incarceration, during their incarceration, and since the time of their release into free world society. Questions also pertained to the stresses the former prisoners encountered while in prison and during their readjustment to free world society. Initial questions, followed a common pattern, and followed by questions corresponding to each respondent's specific answers. Furthermore, respondents were allowed a period for *free thought* in which they related anything they desired concerning their prison and post prison experiences.

Furthermore, each former prisoner wrote a brief synopsis of: the events that led up to their arrest and incarceration; significant events (and emotions) during their incarceration; significant events (and emotions) during their readjustment to society; reactions to stress, and strategies used to alleviate stress.

The data from interviews aided in answering questions relative to the central thesis of this study: that Chicana/o former prisoners' experiences with the mastication and mortification process(es) (i.e., the changes in their personality) had been negative and that any dysfunctions (such as drug and/or alcohol problems, coping problems, or

psychological problems) had been amplified by their incarceration and the aforementioned process(es). Through in-depth examination of Chicana/o former prisoners' personal experiences with stressors within prison and in the free world, their perceptions of alterations in their personalities, and identification of their coping strategies (or failure to implement effective coping strategies) the hypothesized *Debilitative Process* will be illustrated.

Initial questions included:

A. Pertaining to character traits and stresses before prison incarceration:

1. How would you describe your character or personality before you were incarcerated?
2. Had you ever felt depressed, isolated, or angry before your incarceration?
3. Had you engaged in violence toward others (or yourself) before your incarceration?
4. What would cause you to feel stress before your incarceration?
5. What types of actions would you engage in to relieve yourself of stress?

B. Pertaining to character traits and stress during prison incarceration:

1. Did your personality change during your prison incarceration?
2. Did you feel depressed, isolated, or angry during your incarceration?
3. Did you engage in violence toward others (or yourself) during your incarceration?
4. What caused you to feel stress during your incarceration?
5. What types of actions would you engage in to relieve yourself of stress?

C. Pertaining to character traits and stress after release from prison:

1. Did your personality change during your readjustment to society?

2. Did you feel depressed, isolated, or angry during your readjustment?
3. Did you engage in violence toward others (or yourself) during your readjustment?
4. What caused you to feel stress during your readjustment?
5. What types of actions would you engage in to relieve yourself of stress

### **Limitations of the Study**

This pilot study has numerous limitations. The study utilizes a small sample size of six. This limitation is partially overcome by comparing the gathered data with that of the numerous prisoners interviewed by Charles M. Terry in *The Fellas: Overcoming Prison and Addiction*<sup>125</sup> and Hans Toch's in *Mosaic of Despair: Human Breakdowns in Prison*. Terry, a former prisoner and professor at St. Louis University, included detailed interviews with former prisoners and their travails with adjusting to the free world and overcoming their addictions. Toch provided the complete transcripts of interviews he conducted and these were compared with the transcripts of the interviews conducted throughout this study, though this study did not utilize the same questions as Toch (whose questions varied widely between individuals interviewed), in order to note any significant similarities or dissimilitude.

This study did not allow for the observation of prisoners as they entered the prison and during their incarceration. Such a study would require significant resources, access to a prison and the freedom to conduct independent research, and a significant period of time (several years). In lieu of such observations, this study interviewed former prisoners who

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<sup>125</sup> 2003. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomas Learning.

had completed their prison sentences [hence the mastication/mortification process(es)] and had spent less than two years readjusting to free world society. Interviewees less than two years released from prison were chosen so that their prison experiences would be fresh in their memories. By implementing this method, the study obtained data on both the prison and post prison life of former Chicana/o prisoners.

An additional limitation is that the six individuals interviewed were each in long-term relationships. This might have influenced the effects of readjustment stress, i.e., each former prisoner may have adjusted to their post incarceration status superior to that of individuals who were not in long-term relationships. But this also allowed for further insights into the former prisoners' adjustment to life outside prison through the inclusion of individuals close to them.

The most significant and problematic portion of the interview and analysis process was that of *seeing the real data*, the importance of the data, and how the researcher as an outsider, especially a nonChicana/o, could relay *accurate* interpretations of that data. The researcher actively sought to avoid presenting research that was fully based in his biases and perceptions as a White male. Numerous sources on methods by which to overcome this dilemma were reviewed.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*<sup>126</sup> and Marcos Pizarro's "'Chicano Power!': Epistemology and methodology for social justice and empowerment in Chicano communities"<sup>127</sup> bring up many issues that were resolved in the course of the study. In these two works there were many and varied

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<sup>126</sup> 1999. London: Zed Books.

concerns that the researcher encounters before, during, and after the research process. It is clear that the research process does not have a definite end until the researcher chooses to move away from the project or be forever consumed by that project. Of the two works, Pizarro's article rang the most resoundingly as it intertwined with the interests of this study.

Pizarro clearly delineated the purpose of his research/article when he stated that "The ultimate goal of this project is to reveal the necessity for social justice to become the measure by which we evaluate the strength of research."<sup>128</sup> Smith asserted that "Intervening takes action research to mean literally the process of being proactive and of becoming involved as an interested worker for change."<sup>129</sup> Pizarro, in pursuing this goal, challenged "the epistemological framework that underlies contemporary research in academe" and suggested "the need to consider the possibilities of Chicano epistemology and methodology as integral to the transformation of the academy and, hopefully, to the empowerment of Chicano communities."<sup>130</sup> Smith concurred with this view when she wrote:

Some methodologies regard the values and beliefs, practices and customs of communities as 'barriers' to research or as exotic customs with which researchers need to be familiar in order to carry out their work without causing offence. Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are 'factors' to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> 1998. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 57-80.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, 147.

<sup>130</sup> Pizarro, 57.

<sup>131</sup> Smith, 15.

Research must not solely serve the needs of the researcher, but carry with it a profound concern for social justice for the people of the community the researcher has participated in the research with (her/his coresearchers). Furthermore, the researcher and her/his research project must be fully cognizant that Chicana/os possess vital transformative epistemological and methodological perspectives. Chicana/os have unique perspectives and methods of interpreting the world related specifically to their history and experience. By understanding the specific views of Chicana/os related to an issue that directly affects them, solutions can be more efficiently and effectively formulated. An example of this is that research must serve to assist the community in its endeavors toward social justice and the assertion, by Octavio Romano, that “the bulk of Chicano existence has been oriented to a symbiotic residence within ecosystems.”<sup>132</sup> Applying a Chicana/o perspective to social problems encountered by Chicana/os can lead to creative solutions that best benefit the community.

One of the clearly expressed purposes of this research on the effects of the mastication and mortification processes on current and former Chicana/o prisoners is a concern for social justice. This concern focuses on valid and successful methods by which to improve the psychological well being of the individuals. Significantly, these methods cannot be *placed upon* these individuals by the researcher in the traditional positivist Western image, but must originate through interaction between the researcher and interviewees (who are significantly more than participants or providers of information). Practical methods can only derive from an understanding of the unique epistemologies

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<sup>132</sup> Romano, Octavio. 1973. Social Science, Objectivity, and the Chicanos” in *Voices: Readings from El*



and methodologies employed by current and former Chicana/o prisoners in their self-treatment, and community treatment, of the personal (and community) difficulties that arise from the often debilitating, and always character-altering, process of mastication and mortification. For example, former Chicana/o prisoners may rely upon the supernatural (defined as any unseen *powers* arising through formally established and recognized religions and philosophical traditions such as the Catholic Church and the interaction of curandera/os). Researchers operating in the traditional mode of the academy may believe that they can design successful treatment programs for these individuals, but this study is cognizant that the mastication and mortification process creates unique responses and alterations in current and former Chicana/o prisoners that the researcher can never adequately comprehend or experience and can only be made aware of through the sharing of the experiences, information, personal stories, etc. This study shares with Gitlin, as quoted in Pizarro, the concern that “voices need to become the primary concern in research such that the research endeavor is entered into with the goal of collectively developing analyses that are beneficial to all members of the project”<sup>133</sup> and that research must seek to “alter the alienating relationship between the researcher and the researched.”<sup>134</sup>

Pizarro argued that the students in his study must be allowed to both tell their stories and “to engage in the analysis.”<sup>135</sup> The researcher must not solely tell the story of others

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Grito, A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought, 1967-1973. Quinto Sol, 40.

<sup>133</sup> Pizarro, 58.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 59.

for them, “but to engage them in the analysis as part of an empowering process.”<sup>136</sup>

“Empowerment should be aided by the research process itself”<sup>137</sup> as participants in the research have “critical insights to share” and are creators of knowledge. Smith argues that story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the “diversities of truth within which the storyteller rather than the researcher retains control.”<sup>138</sup>

Complex participant analysis is possible and integral to transformative empowering research that has as one of its goals the attainment of social justice for the participants and their community(ies). Individuals who had experienced mastication and mortification told their stories and engaged in the analysis.

Participants were allowed space in which to detail their unique (and perhaps culturally specific) short-term and long-term attempts at treating, self-treatment, and the difficulties arising from mastication and mortification and their treatment methods. Furthermore, family and community assistance given to these individuals was not overlooked but allowed space within the research. Pizarro argued that participants must feel open to “tell it like it is” as “It is only by listening intently to people of color...that we can begin to see that dominant ‘realities’ too are constructions and that they often exist at the expense of the reality of others.”<sup>139</sup> All research fails to be objective, but when research has as its goals the attainment of social justice for a people and community it carries with it an ethical imperative substantially superior to that of traditional positivist “objective” researchers who conceal the agendas and often-selfish purposes of their research.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, 145.

<sup>139</sup> Pizarro, 62.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>140</sup> is a work that sought social justice. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* detailed the role of education as a political force---for either liberation or domination. Freire argued that the process of liberatory education, reflecting the specific intersections of an educator, a student, and a community, must be a process of unveiling, questioning the central issues of life: work, culture and the construction of knowledge. Freire contrasted his pedagogy to "banking" practices, rote memorization of the teacher's facts, which he insisted only reproduce injustice by acculturating the student to passivity. A critical education, in contrast, assists the student in methods to unravel his/her world and the words that hide or expose its realities. For example, through my education since release from prison I have come to fully understand the effects of prison on the individual and myself. I now have the capability to dissect and analyze the ways in which mastication and mortification alter individual's personalities and can relate that analysis to others and myself.

Pizarro stated, "The significance of families fighting together against oppression and injustice is central to the epistemology of working-class Chicanos."<sup>141</sup> This is a factor that played a significant role in the research on the effects of the mastication and mortification process on current and former Chicana/o prisoners as this process affected not only the individual, but also the families. The families must, and do, work together to overcome the difficulties encountered by the individual. The mastication and mortification process, as experienced by current and former Chicana/o prisoners, is at least partially driven by oppression and injustice. This oppression and injustice, as

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<sup>140</sup>1970. New York: Continuum.

detailed in the research, significantly amplified the difficulties wrought by mastication and mortification upon the individual and their families. It is only through uniting with the family in facing the altered character of the individual that these difficulties can best be overcome. Love, family, and social justice are indeed the foundation of the Chicana/o epistemology as Pizarro argues.<sup>142</sup> Former Chicana/o prisoners, as this study indicated, centered their lives on their families and the love found within that family. Their goals as a family unit were to improve their material conditions, but also their social standing within society including their access to quality education, quality medical care, and fair treatment by the criminal justice system. Their concerns revolved around a striving for social justice.

Furthermore, Pizarro believed “that there is a uniquely Chicano epistemology grounded in the pursuit of new knowledge that moves toward group empowerment.”<sup>143</sup> This is significant in that new knowledge is not the sole *property* of the researcher and created by the researcher. New knowledge is pursued and created by Chicana/os who are not “researchers” per se. This study accepted participants in the research as fellow researchers, or coresearchers, and acknowledged that they are pursuers and creators of knowledge. However, they created not only knowledge, but also unique knowledge formed by their experiences.

Research on mastication and mortification answered specific questions. Pizarro stated that:

Researchers must begin by asking: Who are the parties involved in/affected by the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 65.

context we will be exploring? In particular we should ask who is experiencing 'difficulties' or 'problems,' who is being exploited/victimized/oppresed, who is seeking change out of sheer necessity, whose knowledge is being ignored and drowned out by hegemonic ideology and epistemology? It is those who are most negatively involved/affected who have the most light to shed on the investigation."<sup>144</sup>

They shed the most light on these areas as they have directly experienced the effects of that being studied. They have become the authorities on that which has affected them as they have felt the full trauma of the forces exerted upon them and have, consciously and unconsciously, developed responses and solutions to the forces exerted upon them and the effects of those forces. Smith, in her work, makes a similar statement when she asked, "Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?"<sup>145</sup> In this study, the individuals who had the answers to this question were former Chicana/o prisoners who were exploited, victimized, oppresed, ignored, and drowned out. By accepting these individuals as co researchers, acknowledging their authority on the subject matter,<sup>146</sup> and hearing their stories, this study wholly accepted the notion that "attempts at social change may be greatest when we consider how we can 'co-create' new knowledge and challenge racist epistemologies in solidarity with the Chicanos with whom we are working."<sup>147</sup> This study strove to keep in mind the empowerment and transformation of the individuals

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>145</sup> Smith, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Pizarro, 67.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 67.

studied and their families. As participants, they may be “far less interested in the documentation of their experiences than in their transformation.”<sup>148</sup>

Smith’s work seemed less practical as her book focused on indigenous researchers conducting research within their indigenous communities. However, Smith, as previously pointed out, echoed Pizarro in numerous ways. She argued that Western researchers, bound in positivism and objectivity, “can assume all that there is to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with us.”<sup>149</sup> Smith, like Pizarro, believed that Western research has been oppressive and denies the reality of nonWestern epistemologies and stories. Both Pizarro and Smith argued for the importance of allowing people’s stories to be told. Smith stated, “These counter-stories are powerful forms of resistance which are repeated and shared across diverse indigenous communities.”<sup>150</sup> The emphasis by both authors on people’s stories resounds in the research on the effects of mastication and mortification on current and former Chicana/o prisoners. Former prisoners’ told their stories in-depth, and as a model of this technique, this study utilized Hans Toch’s *Mosaic of Despair: Human Breakdowns in Prison* as a primary resource throughout the research. Toch masterfully interviewed individuals and placed within his book lengthy passages from their interviews and stories. It is unique to read an interview in which the interviewer cleverly brought the interviewee to realize the extent of their importance to the research, the uniqueness of their individual experiences, their authority of the subject matter, and their ability to treat, empower, and transform

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>149</sup> Smith, 1.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 2.

himself or herself. For example, Toch led one prisoner to this conclusion concerning his ability to counteract, treat, the stresses he would encounter upon his release from prison:

See, I don't view it as a crisis: I view it simply as a *problem*. So I try to deal with it within what I feel would be an intelligent manner. For instance, once I leave prison I know it will be pretty difficult for me to get a job, so I try to condition myself while here....I realize also that my wife is the major support of my family now. It will be harder once I'm released--now if I go into the streets and I can't find a job, I become a drain or a strain on my wife and my children....Either I will do something to relieve the strain, or I will remove myself from that family. But in any event it will cause a destructive attitude, and that is something I'm trying to condition myself for. So I'm taking educational courses that I feel are necessary, that might get me around that particular problem and help in finding a job.<sup>151</sup>

As Smith noted, "The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices--all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope."<sup>152</sup>

Conducting field research is complex. The researcher will never cover every area of the research that her/his critiques would desire them to. However, researchers must form some type of mutual relationship with their coresearchers. They must believe that the researcher cares for them and their stories. They must believe that the researcher desires their input in the project and that the project will transform/empower them. The project can never harm them in anyway. It seems that the researcher must fully acknowledge the humanity of the coresearchers and of her/himself. Acknowledging this humanity involves the realization that we are all kindred spirits and share the same human qualities. In spite of the differences and borders humans place between ethnic groups, genders, those of different sexual orientations, etc., we are all humans sharing a human

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<sup>151</sup>Toch, 375.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 4.

experience. By utilizing this technique, the researcher can locate the commonalities and common causes that can unite the researcher and co researchers and allow them to create unique and important new knowledge that carries with it the power to transform people and communities.

Significantly, my being an ex-prisoner was fundamental to this study and my ability to make connections with interviewees. I was able to gain the trust and understanding of former prisoners and they were better able to express themselves and their prison experiences to me as I shared many of those experiences. They felt at ease relating their lived prison and post-prison experiences to me that they would not have as comfortably or fully related to a researcher that had never been imprisoned or experienced their realities. Through our bonds of imprisonment we connected so that a fuller understanding of prison experience and personality change could be made.

Another source researched in order to resolve the prior mentioned dilemma of *seeing* the *real* data, the importance of the data, and how the researcher as an outsider, especially a nonChicana/o, can relay *accurate* interpretations of that data is *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*<sup>153</sup> by John H. Stanfield II and Rutledge M. Dennis. What was found lacking in *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods* was more compelling than what was included. This fact was especially apparent in the section by Rutledge Dennis, who stated that “Epistemological concerns are at the heart of any discussion of participant observation. Such concerns include concepts such as materialism and idealism,

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<sup>153</sup>1993. London: Sage Publications.



objectivity and subjectivity, and natural and cultural sciences.”<sup>154</sup> Dennis is correct in that epistemological concerns are fundamental in any research in race and ethnicity especially those that include interviews. Dennis continued to state that:

The ‘primitive’ positivism and naturalism of Bacon and Hobbes and the other English empiricists was challenged by Kant, who introduced the idea (which became the core of German idealism) that the key to understanding and interpreting sense data or sense-experiences is the existence of the mind, which arranges and organizes and makes sense of the data; moreover, the principles of governing the arrangement and organization of data are inborn and related to human consciousness.<sup>155</sup>

Kant is correct to a point. A portion of the factors governing the arrangement and organization of data may be inborn and definitely related to human consciousness, but a significant portion of these factors derive from our highly diversified lived human experiences. Dennis asserted that *verstehen* (understanding) was important in the acquisition of social knowledge. By *verstehen*, Dennis implied that “the researcher would analyze the social world and the particular events of that world by an ability to relive or reenact symbolically the experiences of others.”<sup>156</sup> This can be problematic to say the least. The best the researcher can do is to achieve a level of empathy with their coresearchers.

Dennis proceeded to the work of Karl Popper who contended that the understanding of others was “based on our common humanity. It is a fundamental form of intuitive identification with other men, in which we are helped to expressive motions, such as gestures and speech. And it is, ultimately, an understanding of the products of the human

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<sup>154</sup> “Participant observations” in *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, 53-74.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

mind.”<sup>157</sup> What of women? What of the products of culture? What of going beyond gestures and speech? What do expressive motions have to do with the inner consciousness of men? Are the harsh realities of life always expressed in gestures and speech? Popper seems to be lacking any significant input in aiding in my dilemma except that he believes in some form of common humanity.

Significantly, I have relied heavily upon concepts I have formulated, of *psychological culture* and *experience* throughout this study and in all studies I have undertaken. The limitations previously mentioned in this study are generated by differences in metaphysical/epistemological conceptions of *psychological culture* and *experience* between the research facilitator and the *coresearchers*. *Psychological culture* refers to a wide array and amalgamation of *traits of perception and perspective* developed by the individual over the course of their lifetime. The individual may be consciously or unconsciously aware of such traits though psychological culture traits tend to be more unconscious than conscious unless the individual engages in substantial self-reflection and examination of the socio-cultural and historical processes that contributed to their individual psychological culture. Psychological culture traits are developed from a *multitude* of synthesized interrelated individual experiences that had an enduring effect.

*Experience* refers to *everything* that an individual has experienced in his/her lifetime and possibly in other realities and in the historical past. An *experience event* can be developed from a single significant or traumatic experience, such as imprisonment, in the individual's life or from a series of experiences, such as long-term drug addiction and its

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

physical and social consequences that coalesce into an experience event. Experience is a totality of the physical, psychological, spiritual, etc. Experience transcends the contemporary in that experience events, such as oppression, can be rooted in the historical past of the individual's identity (i.e., such as in one's racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation background or family/ancestral history). These *historical experience events* can extend into the contemporary. These events include any aspect of the history of oppression that Chicana/os have experienced in the United States via White hegemony or even deeper into Chicana/o history such as in Mexico, Spanish rule, the "conquest" of the indigenous people of the Southwest, and beyond, perhaps even into primordial epochs. Furthermore, such historical experience events can entail the oppression endured by one's *experienced, known*, family, and those ancestors one does not know but can *feel in their blood*. Historical experience events can become *personal experience events* when the individual is subjected to contemporary oppression or when they can feel the burden of historical oppression restrict their access to the rights freely given to others and/or the bonds between them and their ancestors. For example, a Chicana/o may be called a "wetback" by a policeman or experience employment discrimination due to his/her being Chicana/o. Such an incident can recall the historical racism the individual's family and *people* experienced for hundreds of years. Therefore, the Chicana/o may have *historical experience events* cast into their contemporary psychological culture (not to mention social, economical, and political existence) that have become not only *historical* but *personal experience events*. Such an *experience event* can have an exceptionally

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potent affect on the individual's *psychological culture* and might possibly result in either *personal empowerment* or *personal denigration* and/or *degradation* if the individual cannot withstand the oppression of the dominant culture and begins to *oppress themselves*, thereby, taking on and performing the functions of the oppressor with his/her psychological being. Such *psychological oppression*, and *psychological repression*, of oneself is inimical to former Chicana/o prisoners' *freeworld potentialities* and such thinking inimitably leads to their returning to the dysfunctions that may have contributed to their incarceration and that were not treated during that incarceration.

The psychological culture of former Chicana/o prisoners is filled with their twoness: their pre-prison free world identity and their prison identity formed via mastication and mortification. They experience continued *psychological oppression* and *repression* through the struggle between their two identities, *two selves*, and their inability to resolve their *identity conflict*. "Which identity do they rely upon to interpret the free world and their place in that world?" They have no tools to mediate or cope with the world "So where do they turn when their *experiences* are primarily negative and destructive to the individual?" This is their conundrum.

Significantly, there are at least two additional major limitations involved in this study that must be transcended: the revelation of personal histories from the *coresearchers* to the research facilitator and the problematic ability of the *research facilitator* to appropriately represent the coresearchers' personal histories. The limitations can be expressed as problems of *revelation* and *re-presentation*. The first limitation is the

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understandable reticence of coresearchers to share perceptions and perspectives, *revelations* of personal history, that are fundamental in understanding the individual's oral histories, stories, and narratives with the White male research facilitator. The coresearchers may not wish to share with the research facilitator personal experiences they would normally feel comfortable sharing with others. The second limitation is that of the research facilitator's *re-presentation* of coresearchers' personal histories. The research facilitator, due to his psychological culture and experience, may be prone to unknowingly re-present the coresearcher's oral histories in an inappropriate manner.

These limitations may seem insurmountable, but they are not. Through diligent application of the appropriate methodology, the problems of *revelation* and *re-presentation* were overcome. Revelation, the reticence of coresearchers to share personal experiences with the male research facilitator, was a barrier that was removed by placing an emphasis on the *empowerment of coresearcher's* aspect of the research and the expressed purpose of the coresearcher as an *active participant* in the research. Coresearchers were actively engaged in sharing and analyzing their post prison problems and in finding solutions (i.e., therapy, drug and alcohol counseling, etc.). This active engagement created empowerment in the coresearchers as the majority self-validated their lived perceptions and perspectives (the reality and validity of their *psychological culture*) through continual dedication to forming the optimum re-presentation of their written and oral histories. Therefore, addressing the second problem of *revelation* to some extent resolves the problem of *re-presentation* as the coresearchers were involved in all aspects of the re-presentation.

The second problem of *re-presentation*, the research facilitator's unknowingly re-presenting the coresearcher's oral histories in an inappropriate manner, was partially resolved in addressing the problem of revelation. The empowerment aspect of the project, the active engagement of the coresearchers did not wholly eliminate the problem but significantly reduced the potential for *false re-presentation* of the coresearchers' narratives. Coresearchers wrote and rewrote their personal narratives throughout the study (i.e., through letters, written stories). Members had the *veto power* to remove any segments of their personal narratives and interviewed oral history that they were not comfortable in relating beyond the confines of the interview. Through diligent application of these methodologies the problems of *revelation* and *re-presentation* were overcome.

The above limitations of the research concern on the small sample size and the problems of revelation and re-presentation were overcome by the use of former Chicana/o prisoners who are representative of the larger sample and by the inclusion of individual narratives that add depth and humanity to the interviews. Their experiences of oppression and injustice are viewed through their "eyes" and expose their unique way of perceiving their lived realities. In the interview narratives the problem of individual dysfunctions and the results of the mastication and mortification processes on the individual become clearer. The failure of the prison system to address individuals' dysfunctions and, in fact, to amplify their dysfunctions is obvious in former prisoners' interviews.

## **Interview Process**

The findings from the interviews were divided into five sections of which the first four are summations of interviews with the six respondents and their significant others. The spouses/partners were interviewed and add significant insights into the personality changes they perceived in former prisoners especially those who had been with their spouse/partner previous to their incarceration. The first four sections are each composed of interview summations from one Chicano and one Chicana divided by either dysfunctions the former prisoners' may have had and/or the existence of similar mastication and mortification experiences. The respondents and spouse/partner interviews were conducted on the same days. All six of the former prisoners were interviewed at least three times and some as many as five. This did not include phone calls and letters received from the coresearchers over the last four years. The final section is an analysis of the significant points brought up in interviews.

Interviews were conducted in the homes of interviewees whom the researcher was first introduced to by former prisoners. Initial visits were made with the interviewees to allow them to "get to know" the researcher and establish a minimal level of trust and openness. During the second visit, interviews were conducted. Interviewees were asked the previously mentioned questions and questions related to specific aspects of their preprison, prison, and post prison experiences. Data were included that was specifically related to detailing the points made in the hypothetical debilitating process. Details of the interviews that interviewees requested be held in confidence were omitted as were details related to specific criminal acts or that deemed not significantly related to the debilitating

process (and mastication and mortification, stressors, and dysfunctions). In specific instances, such as in the interviews with Jorge and Anna, the study included their insights upon a particular situation (the possibility of future spousal abuse) that both interviewees discussed and were aware of (In this case I recommended Jorge and Anna to a psychotherapist who often counsels former prisoners and their families for a reduced fee.). Interviews were conducted with spouses/partners usually within hearing-distance so that participants in each interviewee's home would feel that intensely personal facts were not being divulged. Such an interview may limit the insights provided by former prisoners' spouses/partners, but as my contact with the former prisoners was limited I sought to make them feel as much at ease with me as possible. This was vitally important, as the vast majority of former prisoners are overwhelmingly suspicious of others, even those they have known for years. Furthermore, the study sought to create a "client-centered climate" as Hans Toch implemented in *Mosaic of Despair*:

We communicated our interest in the inmate's perspective not only through our open-ended questions but also through the care we took to explore any theme initiated by a respondent, no matter how tentatively he or she introduced it. This enabled our subjects to expand on sensitive areas which they usually deemed is unsafe or less than respectable to broach. Though we cannot claim that all our subjects were fully open with us, we discovered that at least some of them felt able to explore areas which they had previously regarded as private, unshareable, or damaging.<sup>158</sup>

Finally, the names given to interviewees were not their actual names. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of the interviewees.

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<sup>158</sup> Toch, 24.



## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERVIEW SUMMATIONS

### **Jorge: *I Am Making It***

Jorge was a thirty-two year-old Chicano who was sentenced to the Colorado state prison system in 1991, at the age of twenty, for fourteen years for First-Degree Burglary. Jorge served ten years of his sentence and was released on parole for two years. He completed his term of parole in January 2003 and he and his wife Anna relocated to California in March 2003.

I grew up in North Denver in a very strict and proud family. My mother worked cleaning rich people's houses and my dad worked in a salvage yard.....I have two brothers and two sisters. No one in our family finished their education [Jorge dropped out of school in the eighth grade]<sup>159</sup> ....I didn't like school because we only had White teachers and they did not like me or my friends. When I was fifteen I began working in the salvage yard with my dad. That was okay....I met Anna when I was seventeen and not long afterward we moved in together into her parent's basement. Back then I was a good guy. I drank and began smoking some dope but I never did anything hard and I never got in trouble with the cops....I was laid back and never got angry about anything. I just let things go and let people be and I never got in any fights. I don't think I ever got depressed or stressed out about anything....I was having a good time until Anna got pregnant and then I got worried 'cause we didn't have the money for a baby and we were living in her parent's basement and we weren't even married. I was worried and I didn't know what we were going to do 'cause we had to have the baby. I mean, we went to Mass all the time since I was little and you can't kill a baby. So that's when things went bad....

A friend of mine said that we should break into this warehouse where there was a lot of stereo equipment and stuff like that....He said would be "real easy." Fucker! We got caught before we had grabbed anything. That was the first time I ever did anything and I got caught. They locked us up and told us how we were a menace to people and dangerous and stuff. They gave me a \$50,000 bond so I had to stay in jail....The Public Defender didn't do anything for me so I got a fourteen year sentence and I never even got the chance to steal anything!

When I got to prison I got scared. I heard all the stories about getting killed or stabbed or something else and then I saw it was all real. Guys were hassling me and I had to fight all the time. I started pumping iron and getting tats [tattoos] and getting big....I hung with the Chicanos from North Denver and we banded together for protection. I

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<sup>159</sup> Text in brackets are my comments.

changed a lot man. I would get angry real easy and just start fighting with people if I thought they were disrespectin' me. I seriously fucked up a couple of guards 'cause they keep callin' me a "wetback" and telling me they were fucking my wife when she came to visit [Jorge married Anna in 1995 while in prison].

They put me in the *hole* [Administrative Segregation] for months....Then they tried to put me in the yard with guys that had beefs with me and have us fight. I remember how for ten years I never slept with the lights off 'cause the lights in the cells don't turn off. Even now I have to sleep with the lights on. I would exercise all the time so I wouldn't think about all the shit I was going through and, yeah, I got depressed 'cause they keep fucking with you. They never let you know when you are eligible to get out on parole....I use to count my days and months done every day an' think about how much time I had left every day.

I could always feel the tension so I would work out all the time and read a lot and play cards. I tried to stay busy all the time so I wouldn't think. But I always did think and then I would get frustrated and pissed and start fights or something. Maybe just break things. I became a bad motherfucker which I had to be to keep from getting fucked with by the guards and the other cons. I used to think about killin' myself but every week Anna would come visit me with Jose [their son]....

I used to always dream about getting out, buying a house, and Anna and Jose and I having a good life. I would have a good job and Anna would have nice clothes and we could do things together and go places. But it is all shit man! When I was on parole they kept fucking with me and kept going after Anna and trying to make her a guard. Trying to make her snitch on me but she didn't 'cause I hadn't done shit! Man, they never stop fucking with you. They had us [excons] so bad that they want us all dead or back behind the walls. I dream at night of killing them all. All those fucking bastards. And man, it ain't just the Whites it's all the Chicanos who work in the prisons. They are just as bad....

We moved to California 'cause even after I did my parole the cops would come by asking me questions and checkin' me out. What the fuck for? I was working and not doing anything. I would get real mad and start breaking things until Anna cooled me down. So we left Colorado to get away from all the bad memories. But I don't work out or read anymore. After work [Jorge is employed doing odd construction jobs] I come home and watch tv and sleep if I am stressed out. Shit, I don't even drink or do dope anymore. I am making it. I think everything is going to be okay....I think I just gotta relax a bit more and then things will get better.

## **Anna**

Before Jorge went to prison he was a real nice gentle guy. He never yelled at me and never got angry. He was real respectful to his parents and mine....He treated me like I was really special and tried to show me he loved me. I never thought he was depressed or under pressure before he went to prison. But he changed in prison. He became real easy to anger and got angry at me for nothing. He seemed to gradually

lose trust in me and now he won't talk to his parents or mine because he thinks they didn't care about him while he was in prison. He thinks they didn't visit him enough. But he was in prison hundreds of miles away and a lot of times he got moved from prison to prison and they [the Colorado Department of Corrections] wouldn't tell us where he was or they would say he wasn't in the system! Our parents couldn't drive that far every Sunday....

Now Jorge just goes to work and sleeps. He gets angry when I talk to him about anything. I thought that when he got out of prison the old Jorge, who was real gentle, would come back but he hasn't. Moving to California hasn't helped....He wants to stay away from everyone and he doesn't trust anyone, even me. He has gotten in several fights since he has been in California. I tell him that he'll go back to prison if he doesn't stop but I don't think he cares....He has never hit me, but he could at any time so I watch my words around him. I hope things get better soon. I am tired.

In the case of Jorge it appears that he may have entered prison with specific dysfunctions such as alcoholism and/or drug addiction. This may have prevented him from feelings moments of stress and/or depression. Jorge stated that he drank and smoked dope. When confronted with stress, Anna's pregnancy, Jorge became stressed and chose an easy way to make money (burglary) that resulted in his incarceration. During his incarceration, Jorge "got scared" and his personality began to alter. His fear of "getting killed or stabbed" resulted in his getting numerous tattoos and spending hours each day weightlifting. Jorge began to anger easily and fight with not only other prisoners, but also guards. For these offenses he was placed in Administrative Segregation. Jorge felt continual tension and anxiety over his release date, anger, delusions of killing guards, and delusional daydreams concerning his life upon release from prison. These were new dysfunctions that Jorge had not encountered before and his method of coping with these dysfunctions was to exercise, play cards, read, and daydream.

Jorge's propensity toward violence appears to be extreme and he has no means of controlling his violent reactions. It appears that Jorge's displays of violence usually occurred when he was in a state of depression and feeling low self-esteem. This is similar to a prisoner named Sam whom Hans Toch interviewed:

You sit there, and you have to put yourself in a mental position where you have to think of the supposedly wrongs that have been done to you and the wrongs you have done to other people, to yourself and to your family and to your loved ones. And you've got to keep running this through your mind until you get in a paranoid state of mind that "I'm no good to myself and to anybody." Somewhere along that line your mind blanks out, and you have no recollection of what it does to you then. And from that state on, you can carry out almost any act that you want, whether it is self-destruction or destruction of another individual. You have no control over your emotions whatsoever. You just function like a machine.<sup>160</sup>

Upon his release Jorge had not developed any methods by which to cope or treat his old and new dysfunctions. He still suffers from "bad memories" and dreams of "killing" guards. His coping methods are to watch television and sleep. These are not effective coping techniques as Anna feels that Jorge is often angry and has been in "several fights since we have been in California." Jorge is no longer trustful of people even his family and Anna. It appears that unless Jorge develops strategies to treat his dysfunctions, or seeks professional treatment, he may be reincarcerated. As Anna states "he'll go back to prison if he doesn't stop." In August 2004 I learned that Jorge was awaiting sentencing to the California Department of Corrections.

**Theresa: *I Can Put My Life Back Together***

Theresa is a thirty-seven year-old who in 1988, at the age of twenty-one, was

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<sup>160</sup> Toch, 14.

sentenced to twenty years in the Massachusetts state prison system on three related drug charges. Theresa was paroled in 1999 and completed her parole in 2000. She is single and lives with her boyfriend James.

My family moved from Sonora to San Antonio when I was about five years old. Later, when I was ten, we moved to Chicago and to Boston when I was twelve. My parents had friends wherever we moved so we always had people we could rely on to help us out. I didn't go to school much. When we moved to Boston it was weird because everyone was from Central America and no one was Mexican but a few families. I hung around Puerto Ricans then and we drank some but I didn't do any drugs until I got a little older.

I started dating a lot of Puerto Rican guys when I was like thirteen. Guys that were in their twenties and thirties. A lot older than me....bunch of fucking perverts when I think of it now. Who would date a thirteen year old. I got pregnant at fourteen by a Puerto Rican guy that was like thirty-five. My dad went crazy and beat the hell out me and went lookin' for the guy. My dad changed after that in the way he treat me. He was real abusive after that. He hit me a lot. I had an abortion....

I started working selling drugs for Puerto Ricans not too long after that like when I was fifteen. I sold rocks (crack), eight-balls (heroin), and sometimes acid or angel dust. I made some money and sometimes I took some eight-balls for payment. But that shit really got to me and I started doing a lot of shooting (heroin) in no time. Then, when I didn't have no money and no one to sell (drugs) for I would have sex with guys in the neighborhood for drugs or money. My father found out what I was doin' and when I was sixteen he threw me out.

I moved in with a boyfriend and stayed with him till I got locked up. He did burglaries and sometimes I helped. But mostly I sold drugs for him and we sometimes got high. He wasn't a bad guy and he never hit me like my father. But I always missed my mother. It don't seem that it's right to not see your only child! I got arrested for dealin' and then got probation. But then I got picked up twice more for dealin' and that was it. Twenty years and I did eleven before I got out. What a trip. I was so sick in there 'cause I had been getting high forever and then I couldn't no more. Then I though someone was goin' to hurt me all the time because I heard about prison and the women getting on you and such. I didn't want to die in there. I was hoping my mother would come see me but she never did. I found out that my father wouldn't let her come (to visit). So I never had no visitors in eleven years. I hung around with the Puerto Rican girls and we had our own little gang. Nobody ever messed with us. I got my Latin Kings (an eastern U.S. Latina/o gang) tats in the joint. I had a girlfriend for awhile but I am not lesbo or anything [not a lesbian]. We just got along really well and were like sisters....

But I was always scared unless my girl was with me. You can't never trust no one in there (prison). So I always played tough and I still am. I am a lot tougher now than when I went in (to prison)....I think you gotta be mean and nasty a lot or people will

abuse you especially if you are woman....

When I got out it was shit! After sitting around for years you are supposed to get busy and work and stuff. It took me three months to get a job as a waitress and now I have to wait on people who are stupid and want everything their way. Plus, I miss all my friends from prison. I see some of them that got out right before me and after me. We get together sometimes and do stuff.... But I still go and do some pot and other stuff (heroin). Not like I used too. I don't make much money so it's hard to get things and make a life. I tried goin' to programs (twelve-step drug addiction programs) but I never seem to stay in them for long. I sometimes miss work but I can put my life back together. I just don't seem to want to do anything. I am tired always and it's hard to work a lot. It just seems weird to be here (free) after being away (in prison) for so long. I am tired and I have gone through a lot of jobs 'cause I get tired of them sometimes. I wished I had more energy....

### **James**

Theresa is always saying she's tired or worn out. I think maybe she gets tired of being a waitress and she has problems as she gets mad at people easily. I think that prison made her that way. Angry, bitter, easily angry, and tired....

She smokes a joint with me every once in a while but a few times she hasn't come home and I had to go looking for her. I wouldn't find her but I knew she was at a shooting gallery getting high (heroin). I can see the needle marks and that is why she is tired. I went with her to a few programs (drug addiction) but she never stayed in them long. If she is not careful she'll get picked up (arrested) again for using.

Theresa appeared to have began drinking and dating older men at a young age and was pregnant at fourteen. She began selling drugs at the age of fifteen. She entered prison with a drug addiction (heroin) and a lack of proper age-group social relations. She additionally suffered in prison by not having family members to visit her. During her incarceration, Theresa became involved in sexual relationships with other women and joined the Latin Kings. She joined the Latin Kings and engaged in relationships with other women due to her fear of being assaulted in prison. "I was always scared unless my girl was with me." Theresa learned to be "tough" and "mean and nasty" in prison.

After her release from prison, Theresa used heroin and other drugs and associated with former female prisoners. She attempted attending twelve-step programs for her drug addiction but did not attend them for long as she seemed to lack energy and identified more with her prison identity than any free world identity ("I miss all my friends from prison"). It seemed that the only real friends Theresa has had in her life were in prison. According to James, Theresa was heavily involved in drug use and became angry and violent easily. James believed that "prison made her that way. Angry, bitter, easily angry, and tired." Theresa was picked up for drug possession with intent to sell (heroin and methamphetamines) and is now serving a ten-year sentence in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections.

**Magali: *What Is Missing In Me?***

Magali was a thirty-two year-old sentenced to ten years in the Arizona state prison system in 1996, at the age of twenty-four, for one count of Second-Degree Burglary and one count of Criminal Trespassing. Magali was released on parole in 2002 after serving six years of her sentence. She completed parole in 2003. She has been with Marie since 2002.

When I was growing up in Phoenix I never thought I would ever be in prison. Who plans for that? Nobody, right? I never got in trouble at school and I graduated high school though I hardly ever went. Not too difficult to graduate. I got a job after high school and kept living with my parents who have lived there since before I was born. But I made little at work and I wanted to move away from my family. They are too traditional for me and I wanted to be free...like a butterfly I guess. When I was twenty I started drinking a lot. I couldn't afford much due to my job but I liked to drink some and go to parties. I was always a good girl though.... When I was twenty-two I started using meth occasionally which is where my troubles started. I started using when I got bored with my life and my family were bugging me

about moving out and getting married. The marriage part was problem because I am a lesbian. Ha! At twenty-four I got arrested, first arrest ever for me. I had done a burglary with my girlfriend so we could pay our rent and pay for groceries and such. It was always so hard to make a living when I didn't earn much at work. We got caught of course! It was weird being arrested and sent to prison. For a first offense! I never saw my girlfriend since and my family abandoned me. I had to go it alone! I remember having to take off all my clothes while male guards were there and being given prison clothes to wear. I had to give them all my personal items plus the ring my girlfriend had given me. I felt like they were taking everything away from me including my dignity. But they kept taking that away (her dignity) for six years. I don't understand how all they put you through is supposed to help you become a better person or not return to prison. I think it is designed to make you want to return. In prison I learned how to be a better at being a criminal. It is an art. Yes, I have done a few burglaries since I was released but I work in a grocery store too. But, again, I earn very little.

It is so weird to be free. Sometimes I don't know what to do. Before I went to prison I liked to go to the movies and be at the mall. Now I only like to stay home and watch movies there. I like the comfort offered by walls...like in prison. I don't like going out as I think that people know what I have done and where I have been though I know that is crazy. I don't feel safe in public. It is like people see within me and see what is missing in me...like feelings of having my life together. And yes, I am back to doing meth.

## **Marie**

Magali and I get along well. We don't go out much but we enjoy each other's company. But we do burglaries together. Can you believe that? We are a female crime wave! But there are no jobs out there for us. I am an excon too so what do we do? Get jobs as corporate executives? We have each other and that fills the void. I knew Magali before she went to prison when we lived in the same neighborhood and we even dated before. Now look where we are? Two people who only live for and understand each other in a strange new world. How else can I describe this life?

Magali grew up poor and could only find low-paying employment after high school.

She started using methamphetamines at the age of twenty-two which is when her "troubles started." She began committing burglaries to support her drug habit and that led to her imprisonment. Magali was not offered any drug treatment programs in prison



but it appears that she stopped using drugs on her own in prison but was back to using methamphetamines in the free world.

Magali was severely affected by the mastication and mortification process during her imprisonment. She no longer felt safe in public as she was, in fact, never safe in prison. She has returned to committing burglaries with Marie as they felt there were no opportunities for them to lead normal lives. Magali disappeared in April 2004 and Marie has not seen or heard from her since. Police reports have been filed related to her disappearance but she remains missing.

### **Gustavo: *La Vida Loca***

Gustavo was a thirty-one year-old who was sentenced to the Colorado state prison system in 1995, at the age of twenty-three, for ten years on five counts of Attempted Second-Degree Burglary. Gustavo was released on parole in 2000 and completed parole in February 2002. He moved to California in June 2002 where he met his girlfriend Gabriela.

Before I went to prison I was mellow....I was a cool dude. I drank and smoke and did some stuff [heroin] and I was having a good time. I had a lot of friends and a lot of women. I was really like the main man at every party. If I got feeling down I would draw [Gustavo is an artist] lowriders, or women, or whatever, maybe smoke a joint. But I was too busy having a good time to feel low. I can't say that anything got me down. Maybe losing a girl I wanted or something like that, but there's always more women. I was just taking it easy. I did some burglaries because burglaries require skill and I am a skilled dude....Yeah, I got caught, but it was worth it. In the joint I joined a gang and became a better tat artist. I made a lot of money doing tats and drawing cards for dudes to send to their women. I was respected! But in five years I got in a lot of arguments and beat down a few dudes....You gotta do what you gotta. When you're penned in a little cage with some dude you fucking hate for hours and hours every day and you can't see any women and the guards screw with you every minute you get pissed off and then you fuck up anyone who gets in your way.

That's what it [prison] is all about. It's supposed to drive you crazy so you'll feel like you have nothing to lose if you kill someone or fuck'em up. That's what they [the prison system] want....

When I got fed up I would draw and sleep. Maybe I would go to the yard and hook up with my homies and bullshit. But I learned to control my feelings in prison and I learned how to be better at what I do [burglaries]....I mastered my skills and I made one or two good connections that I hook up with now. All that time alone and locked up made me think about how to do things better and get organized. I made my plans for the future and I am living them.

I got a couple a lowriders and I do all the work on them. I don't need to tell you where all the parts came from [stolen]....I may be a bit more edgier now and don't trust many people but that is what prison teaches you...be careful. I don't hang with too many people or go to their parties, but I have a few women and I party with them. I don't get angry or depressed...I just get even if someone messes with me. I'll mess someone up if they get in my way, which I never did before I did time. But I am happy and when I feel bad I pick up Gabriela or another and go have fun....I work on my cars, draw, do some tats, hang out, whatever. I only get feeling bad if I don't have any one around and nothing to do. Then I gotta be around someone and have some attention paid to me. Maybe that's something that changed in me. In prison no one paid attention to me except for a few dudes I knew. Now, a lot of people, especially the women, want to be around me....I guess living la vida loca attracts the women? Or maybe my cars! Who cares!

### **Gabriela**

I've been with Gustavo for around a half a year....He's cool! He is not one to mess with. He's got a bad reputation on the street and a bad ride....He gets pissed with me sometimes but that's usual. I want to be with him forever and we are good together. He drinks every day, which is okay, but he does too much other things [heroin] and he kind of gets pissed every day over nothing. I don't know why some things set him off like going to a place to eat makes him pissed. It's no big thing but he will make a scene. I caught him cheating on me and then he says he needs more than one woman sometimes as he was in prison so long....But I am going to change that. I am going to make him less moody and more happier.

Both Jorge and Gustavo appeared to have been *chippers*, individuals who "generally worked at regular jobs and got high only occasionally—like on weekends after being paid—and seldom participated in any type of illegal activity other than the simple use of

the drug"<sup>161</sup> until they encountered events of stress. Gustavo was not able to confront deal with and resolve his lack of education, employment, and available money, so he increased his heroin use and had to resort to crime. Gustavo went from a *chipper* to a *regular* drug user who relied on illicit activities to fund his increasing drug use.<sup>162</sup>

Gustavo drank and did heroin before he entered prison and fancied himself a professional criminal. Gustavo believed he coped with his problems by drawing or "smoking a joint." It is most likely that his drug and alcohol use was a technique employed to handle stress. In prison Gustavo joined a gang for protection and was involved in numerous fights with other prisoners. Gustavo felt continual tension in prison and concentrated his time on the gang and earning money by doing tattoos and cards. Most of his time was spent making criminal contacts and learning from others how to perfect his trade (burglary). Upon his release Gustavo became a burglar once again and also stole auto parts for his lowriders. He trusts few people and has been involved in numerous fights not to mention his womanizing. He is heavily involved in using heroin and drinks every day. Furthermore, he becomes angry easily, as his girlfriend Gabriela noted.

It appears that Gustavo may return to prison as he did not learn methods by which to treat his dysfunctions in prison and outside of prison, nor seek professional treatment, and his heroin usage has increased from his minor pre prison heroin usage. It appears that both his old dysfunctions, such as heroin usage, and his new dysfunctions, such as anger and willingness to fight have increased. Furthermore, his personality appears to have

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<sup>161</sup> Terry, 62.

been thoroughly prisonized as he spent his time in prison learning how to become a better burglar. Gustavo appears to have given himself completely over to his prison personality and holds the belief that he is "...unregenerable, that one's future must be shaped inescapable by the propensities that have shaped one's worthless past."<sup>163</sup> This feeling is similar to a recidivist prisoner who had returned to his pre prison drug use and crime lifestyle interviewed by Hans Toch:

I thought about how if I went back on the streets I'd do the same thing again. I could tell people, tell you, that I'm going to stop, I'm not going to do this, I'm going to do that. But when you go out there, and you know you can get it--I didn't think much of me or my life, because I knew what I'd do.<sup>164</sup>

Gustavo was arrested in November 2003 for first-degree burglary. He is serving an indeterminate sentence of ten to twenty-five years in the California Department of Corrections.

### **Nathan: *Settling In***

Nathan was a thirty-four year-old who was sentenced to the Colorado prison system in 1994, at the age of twenty-five, for eleven years for ten counts of Grand Theft Auto. Nathan was released on parole in 2001 and completed his term of parole in June 2002. He moved to California in July 2002 with his girlfriend Marcia whom he has been with since 1992.

I grew up poor and I felt depressed about that growing up....I never had anything and neither did my family. I turned to crime because I was unhappy with not having money and not being able to find a decent job that paid more than minimum wage....I felt there was no hope being Chicano and poor and not having an education [Nathan

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

dropped out of school in the tenth grade]. I was an unhappy person and I was mad that life was the way it was. You know, some people have more than enough and some have nothing. Fuck, I wanted mine. When I got feeling this way I drank. I drank a lot. I felt that life wasn't the way it was supposed to be you know....I wanted something for me, but I couldn't rob or kill or use a weapon. I don't like to fight or anything like that. I used to feel like dying and I tried to cut my wrists, but even the thought of cutting myself was too much for me. I wanted to die, but I couldn't do it myself. I felt alone in the world.

When I got locked up I think I felt even more alone. It was tough. Everyone wanted to act tougher than everyone else. I just wanted to be left alone....I never got in a fight, but felt depressed all the time and angry all the time and alone. When I felt this way, every day, I just stayed in my cell, slept, watched tv, played Solitaire, and read. But I never really felt better. I got more into myself and I thought a lot about how the White prisoners got treated better than us [Chicana/os]. The guards didn't hassle them and they got better cells and treatment like jobs....I would think of ways to destroy the prison and kill all the guards so that no one would ever be able to be in that prison again. I thought of the walls be bombed open and the cons running out the hole and away from the prison. I thought of how we had to speak English all the time and there was nothing in Spanish to read though I can hardly read Spanish. I thought of all the waste of time and my life and getting older without doing nothing. Just laying around waiting to get out and then not having anything to get out to....I guess I became less open to people and more of a lone wolf. I guess I can't trust anyone and I don't want to....I got out and I had all this pressure to get a job, don't do a crime, don't drink, don't do drugs, don't hang around the people I know and was forced to be around for years, don't be out at night, don't do this, don't do that...there was nothing I could do. So I did nothing but work and keep to myself and be with Marcia when I could. I still don't fight with people or get angry with them. I try not to talk to anyone and keep to myself. I have the same old dreams about destroying the prison every night and some nights I wake up worried that I might go back or that I am being sent back. I am becoming more and more of a lone wolf all the time even since I got and finished parole. Everything seems unusual to me....It all seems like another planet to me and I am just visiting. When I get depressed or anything I sleep and watch tv and talk to Marcia but I don't talk to any of my family or friends from before I went to prison. Those people are from another life and I really don't know them anymore....I don't really want to be around anyone and sometimes I don't want Marcia around. I guess I'm settling in to this life but I don't know what I should do next or in the future. I don't really think there is much I can do or any real future for me. Just keep working and see what happens.

### **Marcia**

Nathan has always been a quiet guy who never really got angry with people or acted out....After he wound up in prison he slowly became even quieter and now it seems like he never talks. Some days I think he hardly says a word. When I ask him what

he wants to do, like on the weekends, he always says “whatever you want.” He doesn’t care. He doesn’t care about much but I think he’s brooding over something inside....Something has to be going on inside! He is gentle, but I think too gentle. He doesn’t want to leave the house for anything but work and beer....I don’t know what else to tell you. Nathan is not the kind of person you would see on *COPS* [the television program]. He’s just not energetic enough to cause trouble and maybe prison took too much from him. Maybe prison took all the heart out of him that wasn’t killed by everything else like how he grew up. I don’t know.

Nathan appears to have had problems with depression from his youth. He felt depression about growing up poor and not being able to find adequate employment. He states that he “was an unhappy person and I was mad that life was the way it was.” When he felt this way, he drank “a lot.” He felt suicidal and stated that “I wanted to die, but I couldn’t do it myself.”

When he was incarcerated his psychological dysfunctions increased. He became isolated and felt “even more alone” and coped by remaining in his cell sleeping, watching television, playing Solitaire, etc. He would daydreams of ways to kill guards and how he was wasting his life. After his release he had dreams about returning to prison and about destroying the prison. He envisions himself as a “lone wolf” and when he becomes depressed he sleeps or watches television or talks to his girlfriend Marcia. Nathan doesn’t feel that he has any future. Marcia thinks that Nathan is apathetic and doesn’t want to leave the house to do anything. She feels that Nathan is gentle and passive but that “prison took all the heart out of him that wasn’t killed by everything else like how he grew up.”

Nathan seems to have been adversely affected by the fear he experienced in his prison. This fear is one of the factors in the isolation he experienced in prison. Nathan’s fear of prisoners assaulting him led him to spend the majority of his prison time in his

cell isolated from all social contact with others. Nathan transported this fear and need for isolation from the underworld of prison to the free world. The coping mechanism he implemented to avoid violence, which may have been effective and quite necessary in prison, hinders his social life in the free world. Nathan's plight, paranoia focused on violence, is similar to one of Hans Toch's interviewees who were "so paranoid I couldn't even look a person in the eye. If I looked a person in the eye, I had a fear that that person might think I was staring at them and they would become aggressive toward me. And maybe a fight would break out, and then we'd go into the [straight] jackets."<sup>165</sup>

Nathan has not sought professional treatment for his old dysfunction, depression and isolation, and these dysfunctions have amplified themselves to a point that may be considered debilitating. His nightmares, delusions, and feelings of not being in this world are new dysfunctions built upon his depression and isolation. Nathan will most likely never return to prison, but he is noticeably debilitated by his dysfunctions.

### **Reuben: *Beer Is Life***

Reuben was a thirty-five year-old who was sentenced to the Colorado prison system in 1993, at the age of twenty-five, for twelve years for Second-Degree Felony Assault. Reuben was released on parole in 2001, after serving eight years of his sentence, and completed his term of parole in January 2002. He moved to California in March 2002 with his wife Marta whom he has been with since 1990.

What can I tell you about me before prison? I loved to be outside under the sun working in the heat. I was a hard worker at every job I had no matter how much the

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 144.

pay. I liked to be around people and joke with them. I liked to party, you know, dance and sing. Have a good time....I was a happy man and Marta and I enjoyed going out and drinking. Did I feel depressed ever or angry? No, I just never got depressed and anger is a waste of time. No good! maybe I felt stress at work to work hard but then I would just work harder and everything would be good. And no, I am not a fighter, I am a lover [laughs]....When I feel sad I listen to music, Mariachi, Banda, and then I drink and I am happy.

In prison, no music, no beer, and no pretty faces to dance with [laughs]! So I tried to stay away from people and do my own time....I never get in fight with anyone and I never get angry. That no good in prison. I did feel different. Everyone was unhappy and no one I could talk to. I was lonely and used to walk around the yard when I could. I would walk in circles round the prison yard for hours until I had to go back to the cell and be counted. One me, one me, one me [laughs]. Prison was bad for me....I never got in any trouble but the guards always after me to do things and call me a "lazy Mexican." Sometimes I hear men in other cells having sex with other men and being forced to do that. So I thought about that a lot and then I went to the yard and began working on the weights every day and doing pushups in my cell....No one would get to me without a good fight. I had a lot of tats put on my arms and then everything changed. I had muscles and tats and people didn't mess with me as much and they respected me....Some of the old timers started letting me hang with them. That was good.

When I got out Marta and I got back together... I feel different now that I'm out. Like I don't know what happened in the eight years I was gone. Was I asleep? But here I am. I get upset with everything I gotta do, like all the bills, but what can I do? I come home from work, clean the house a bit, and drink a few beers while I wait for Marta to get home. I feel down sometimes and then I listen to Mariachi and drink more beer....Beer is life my friend. That's about all I can say.

## **Marta**

Reuben used to drink beer, but not like he does now....He goes to work, comes home, and drinks. By the time I get home he is sleeping and doesn't wake up until it is time to go to sleep. He is not as outgoing as he used to be and we do not do much together anymore. He spends lots of time asleep on the couch. I wish he would get rid of his tattoos. The gangster look doesn't suit him or me and the police always notice his tattoos when we do go some where. That's all I wish to say.

Reuben is a passive and happy individual. Before he went to prison he drank quite a bit and was an outgoing person. In prison he managed to avoid fights, but he became worried that he would be raped. So Reuben became tattooed and lifted weights every



day. He hung around convicts who had done a lot of time and became thoroughly prisonized. Terry interviewed a former prisoner, Hippie, like Reuben who fully assumed “*convict consciousness*” and “accepted the fact that they were convicts” while in prison.<sup>166</sup> While in prison Hippie’s “changing self-concept affected his thoughts and actions....he started eating meat, lifting weights and looking and talking like all the other convicts....his perceptual shift made his life much easier. ‘I stopped doing hard time after that. My life was in prison. It was not out there. You do hard time when you’re living on the outside in your head.’”<sup>167</sup> In order to mentally and possibly physically survive in prison, after completing the prison mastication and mortification process, Reuben assumed the transformative character role of convict, which severely hindered his ability to survive in the free world.

When released from prison Reuben returned to his old dysfunction of drinking, that his wife Marta claimed had been amplified since Reuben’s release. Marta felt that Reuben had a “gangster” look that she did not like but that he was proud of. Reuben felt financial pressures and his release was through alcohol. Reuben’s old dysfunction of alcohol increased since his release from prison and he carries himself with the air of a gangster though he is not involved in the gangster life. Reuben has not sought treatment for his drinking and seems to feel that his prison identity is foundational to his new gangster persona. It is unclear if Reuben will return to prison or remain free. What is clear is that he is in denial of his dysfunctions.

### **Comprehensive Analysis**

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<sup>166</sup>Terry, 74.

In analyzing the interviews it was first necessary to reiterate one of the central arguments of this study. This study hypothesized that Chicana/o former prisoners' mastication and mortification experiences (i.e. the changes in their personality) had been negative and that any bad habits (such as drug and/or alcohol problems, coping problems, or psychological problems) had been amplified by their incarceration and the aforementioned process(es). In other words, in many situations the problems, which played at least a partial role in individuals' incarceration, were not *treated* or addressed while they were in prison but were enlarged. Therefore, the prisoner was returned to society with increased problems (dysfunctions) with which they lacked the skills and resources to adequately respond. This, thereby, increased the likelihood that they would become recidivist (those who return to prison), as three of the six former prisoners in this did, or would become individuals who lacked specific goals and ways to meet those goals like the remaining three former prisoners (including the missing Magali). Therefore, they either return to prison or become people suffering from numerous dysfunctions such as alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, etc. In this regard, prison has served not as a rehabilitative tool but as a debilitating tool of the State, which functions in creating individuals that reside on the social edges of society.

The process of debilitation looks like this:

1. Individual enters prison with dysfunctions (such as psychological problems, alcoholism, drug usage, anger control problems, etc.) that may or may not have contributed to her/his incarceration. The individual has not developed coping methods

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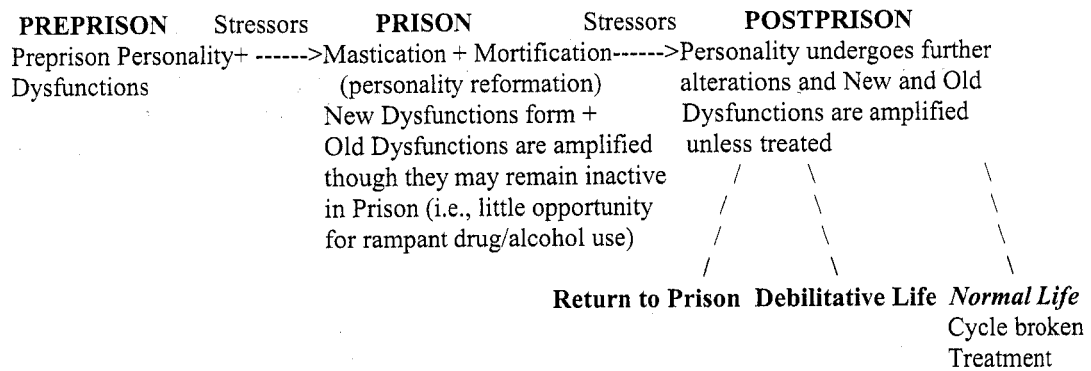
<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

(that counteract stress) by which to treat the dysfunction.

2. Mastication and Mortification (personality change) occur as a reaction to prison stressors. Old dysfunctions are amplified and new dysfunctions are developed. The individual still does not develop coping methods by which to treat the old and the new dysfunctions.
3. The individual is released from prison and in the free world their old and new dysfunctions generally increase unless they develop methods, including seeking drug/alcohol treatment and psychological counseling, to treat the dysfunctions.
4. As a result of their not developing methods, or seeking aid, to treat their dysfunctions the individual either commits new crimes and returns to prison or lives a free world life in which dysfunctions limit their options and, in other words, debilitate them from successfully functioning in overworld society.

Central to this study is that Chicana/o former prisoners' experiences with the mastication and mortification process(es) (i.e. the changes in their personality) have been negative and that drug and/or alcohol problems, coping problems, or psychological problems have been amplified by their incarceration and the mastication and mortification process(es). The problems at least partially responsible for the individuals' incarceration were not *treated* or addressed while they were in prison but were enhanced. The prisoner returned to society with increased problems (dysfunctions) that they lacked the skills and resources to adequately respond to. This increased their likelihood of becoming recidivists or becoming individuals who lacked goals in life and plans to achieve those goals.

**TABLE ONE: DEBILITATION PROCESS**



**CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

There is little substantial literature on the mastication and mortification process(es). The same lack of literature can be identified in the area of the debilitating processes that prisoners undergo in prison and upon their release to society. This study began the process of filling the void left by the absence of such literature. The *debilitative process* I formulated is rudimentary, but realistic, as it appeared to describe the process that the six coresearchers underwent. I was drawn back to R. Theodore Davidson's insight on prisons:

...a full, real world, with joys and sorrows, laughter and pain. Through the stark reality that they face, prisoners have their own view of their world behind walls. It may differ from the views held by outsiders and staff. However, it is important to realize that the prisoner perception of the prison world is what governs their actions. In this respect, their view of the world is quite real.<sup>168</sup>

I utilized Davidson's insights and extended them to the Chicana/o former prisoners' world. The former prisoners world was unique to them and their perceptions of the free world, though often filled with illusions, was real to them. Their world was especially difficult to understand and perhaps that is why researchers must study their perceptions. Furthermore, Chicana/o former prisoners in many ways remain *residents*, psychologically, of the underworld of prison. Chicana/o former prisoners are *trapped* by their twoness. Their imprisonment was part of the trend of increased imprisonment that is "nothing less than a wide-scale prescription for separating families and tearing apart inner city neighborhoods that are most affected by these policies, and *generating prisonization*."<sup>169</sup> These men and women can never fully separate their free world existence from their lived experiences in the prison underworld. They live with one

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<sup>168</sup> Davidson, 5.

psychological/emotional foot in prison and one psychological/emotional foot in free society. In many ways, they have come to possess a *twoness*, a quite terrible twoness. Their psychological being undergoes an incessant, almost always subconscious, trauma that they are unable to mediate. This twoness is increased by their lived realities as Chicana/os in a society that views them as the *other* and has denied them equal access to the full benefits of American society.

In some ways, it appears that a societal debilitating process was affecting these Chicana/os before they experienced the prison and post prison debilitating process. Prior to their incarceration the six young men and women were, in general, poor, uneducated (dropouts), unskilled, had problems obtaining employment that paid a living wage, and were overwhelmed by despair due to their circumstances. These Chicana/os envisioned few opportunities for themselves in free world society and turned to criminal actions to achieve that which they felt they had no opportunity of obtaining, such as material possessions and/or financial security. In the words of Nathan "I felt there was no hope being Chicana/o and poor and not having an education." Nathan "wanted to die" but "couldn't do it" himself. Such despair is endemic among those who have been debilitated and feel they cannot function in free society. This feeling is increased by their material realities of poverty and limited options that arising out of their being Chicana/os in an unjust society. Prison, to these six Chicana/os, was a continuation of the debilitating processes that free world society had started. To be young, poor, uneducated,

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<sup>169</sup> Terry, 15.

unskilled, and Chicana/o meant hopelessness to these men and women (and to some it still does).

The desperation that arises out of these men and women is furthered due to their twoness of existence in the underworld and free world and their existence as Chicana/os in underworld and free world societies structured by White hegemony. Chicana/o former prisoners possess a *doubled twoness*. The first twoness is that which this study described as having one psychological/emotional foot in prison and one psychological/emotional foot in free society. The second twoness is one formulated before their entry into prison, in the free world, in which they are designated as *Americans* but stigmatized as *others* by the dominant White society. These women and men experienced, both in the prison and in the free world, their second twoness. It is no wonder then that these women and men encounter difficulties in constructing lives in free world society. It is understandable that without any *safety net* or assistance from society that three of these six former prisoners were reimprisoned and no one knows what has become of Magali. The other two are struggling financially, emotionally, and with their dysfunctions. Without assistance they too may disappear or return to the prison that for some of them is a less stressful and more accommodating environment than free world society. I myself, after being out of prison for more than ten years, struggle on a daily basis to find a *place* in the free world. If I am having such a difficult time after being out of prison for more than ten years; having earned an education; physically appearing as a fully White person (though I am half American Indian); having no drug or alcohol addictions, and; having no severe

psychological problems, then I can only imagine the *psychological hell* these Chicana/os feel on a daily basis.

They have no one to turn to. Society has decided that they are *criminals, deviants, drug addicts*, and so forth. But in reading their narratives, "How many opportunities did these citizens have in their lives since childhood?" They grew up poor in a racist society that termed them less than equal to Whites. "What privileges did this these Chicana/os have?" "Who has asked them their stories or cared about their lives?" The failure is not theirs! Society has failed them! When America neglects the needs of its citizens then it has failed as a society and country. When equal opportunities are not provided to each and every American then *America* has failed.

These former Chicana/o prisoners have been further dehumanized by their prison experience. Terry explains that:

Perhaps the greatest barrier people like the fellas have to face, and one that can be mitigated with strong social support (as can be found in family relationships or 12-step programs) is their deeply held belief that they are inferior human beings. Overcoming a sense of being an outright alien while interacting in everyday, mainstream activities is something many of them have struggled with for years. ...the effects of such negative self-concepts can be so crippling that doing ordinary things like buying groceries in a store or asking somebody for a job can be overwhelming.<sup>170</sup>

The fact that these former prisoners are Chicana/o cannot be overlooked. They have lived on a daily basis with the potent effects of American racism in their pre prison, prison, and post prison lives. They have never had equal opportunity in employment, education, access to psychological counseling, and drug and alcohol counseling. Racism has left its lasting effect on their self identity as many of these former prisoners feel that



they have no self-worth. They have internalized the impact of racism within their psychological culture and perceive their life options via a world that signifies them as the dangerous *other*.

### **Implications**

“How can society aid former prisoners in their transition to free society?” One innovative solution to aiding Chicana/o former prisoners, and all former prisoners, with the difficulties they encounter in adjusting to free world society is the formation of *shelters*, in lieu of a more suitable name, where they can obtain counseling by both professionals and former prisoners. Each state could form such shelters as *havens* for former prisoners who would rather seek treatment for their dysfunctions and remain in free society than revert to criminal actions and return to prison. These shelters would be staffed by professional psychologists, drug and alcohol counselors, employment counselors, and by former prisoners (Chicana/o, White Asian American, Black) who through their personal experiences, and state specified training, could serve as peer counselors to former prisoners. “Newly released prisoners can benefit tremendously by interacting with people who have successfully made the transition from living in prison to the outside world.”<sup>171</sup> Former prisoners experiencing adjustment difficulties could come to these shelters for assistance and not feel as if they had to “go it alone.” The shelters could be financed through the Department of Corrections budget of each state. Currently, approximately 600,000 people are released from state and federal prisons each year of

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

which two-thirds will be returned to prison within three years.<sup>172</sup> If such shelters were instituted states could significantly reduce their recidivism rates and dramatically lower the amount each state spends on housing prisoners. Furthermore, the amount of suffering inflicted upon former prisoners, whom the State implies *have served their debt to society*, could be appreciably reduced and a vast number of human lives improved.

Alternatives to imprisonment and reimprisonment would save society money and be more humane than the current process of warehousing prisoners who exit prison either as more violent offenders or as dehumanized, listless, dysfunctional shells of humanity. Incarcerated prisoners should receive thorough drug and alcohol treatment and psychological counseling. Educational opportunities, which are virtually nonexistent in prisons, should be offered from the most remedial to college degree programs. Individuals should be prepared to exit the prison with at least the skills necessary for employment.

Chicana/o former prisoners are seeking a place and a space in American society. Place, space, and race seem to be inextricably intertwined in America. Chicana/os, due to their race/ethnicity, are often barred from specific physical and social space in American society and this barrier prevents them from locating their place in that society. Due to the limited options and harsh social and physical realities these former Chicana/o prisoners experienced, and their families and communities have historically experienced, they often see no future for them in America. Before they entered the prison they were losing hope in their lives, after exiting prison that hope diminished more.

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<sup>172</sup>Terry, 15.

## AFTERWORD

When I was released from the Colorado Department of Corrections in 1994, I was given \$100, out-of-date "disco style" clothing complete with Black Rhino shoes, and a box that contained my handful of personal items. I was dropped off on the side of the road on East Colfax along "crack hotel row." I paroled to the Samaritan House Shelter in lower downtown Denver. The showers blasted out water so hard that you could only stand under the edges of the spouts or risk having your skin torn off. The sleeping arrangements were bunk-bed style in an open dormitory. Theft was commonplace. I remember that I slept with my clothes on as your clothing would be stolen from your locker. It was common occurrence for lockers to have the locks torn off and the few items individual's owned stolen. It was worse than prison because in prison it was rare for prisoners to steal. Respect and fear prevented theft. But at least I could get outside of concrete walls and walk in the open air. But without the walls surrounding me, holding me up, I felt that I would fall. The strangeness of it all was sometimes overwhelming.

My first day out of prison reported to the Denver Police Department and had a warrant check completed. Imagine! Within hours of your release from prison the police check if you should still be in prison or jail. There is no common sense to the American criminal justice system. While waiting to have my warrant check completed the young Black man in front of me was rearrested on outstanding warrants. That was a short parole! After being cleared I reported to my parole officer. From that day on, until I completed my parole four months later, I had to report to a day reporting center every weekday, visit my parole officer at least one day per week, and surrender the majority of my wages from

working at the Denver Tabor Center Hotel to the Victim Restitution Fund (primarily for court fees).

I remember the difficulties I had in accomplishing what would have been the simplest actions for a normal citizen. I could not obtain a replacement Social Security card (the Denver Police had lost my wallet and personal items after my arrest) until I obtained a new Colorado State ID. I used the only identification I had, my Colorado Department of Correction's ID with a photo of me in an orange prison jumpsuit, in order to obtain a Colorado State ID and then a Social Security card. A few weeks later my wallet was stolen from me while I was sleeping at the Samaritan House Shelter. I returned to the downtown Denver branch of the Colorado Motor Vehicle Department to obtain a replacement ID but they refused to give me one. I was without any identification. I felt like a man without a country. When I left the Department of Motor Vehicles I slammed the glass door so hard that I shattered the door and the glass panel next to it. I was so numb that when closing the door I did not realize what force I had used. My anger was so deep that I was not aware of its potency. A week later I returned and received a new Colorado State ID.

I wonder how different my transition to freedom would have been if I had been given employment and housing upon my release. What could have been done to aid these former Chicana/o prisoners with their *doubled twoness* of existence in the underworld and free world and their existence as Chicana/os in underworld and free world societies? I wonder how different these six Chicana/os lives would have been if they had been given low income housing, employment, drug and alcohol counseling, psychological

counseling, and the benefit of having someone with their shared experiences to talk with. Is this asking too much? But this is America and former prisoners are routinely denigrated for their past transgressions no matter how much time has passed in between. This denigration increases when former prisoners are also Chicana/o. They experience not only a *doubled twoness* but also a *double denigration* at the hands of a society that they may never feel or find their space or place in.

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