Harmony House Internship
A Durkemian View
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HARMONY HOUSE INTERNSHIP: A DURKHEIMIAN VIEW

Many of our communities are affected by crime. The news broadcasts are riddled with stories of horror that are not imagined – not created for our entertainment, and unfortunately, parental discretion should be advised. These stories are so close that we can experience them through nearly all of our senses! With this in mind, I dedicate this study to the victims of the Virginia Tech tragedy and their families. James Costen 2007

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation, GBI (2005) reports 60,288 arrests made in 2005. Based on the arrest rates of previous years, these numbers are climbing significantly – from 2003 to 2004, there was a 4.74 percent increase and from 2004 to 2005, there was a 3.55 percent increase. Figures provided by the Georgia Department of Corrections, GDOC (2007) show the current adult prison population to be 53,579 of which 93.41 percent are male. The GDOC (2007) statistics show that 167,845 adult offenders have been released on probation or parole – 738 within the last 15 days. The figures indicating the business of crime and punishment are worth noting, but this study is not one focused on the efficacy of the criminal justice system. People are committing crimes and are being incarcerated on a daily basis and at high rates. We can feel confident that our criminal justice system will only get more efficient. This study pivots around these facts; 1) offenders are being released from prison, 2) the ex-offender faces difficult challenges upon reentry to society, 3) the community faces difficult challenges upon the ex-offender’s reentry. Three of the major challenges for successful reentry are housing, employment, and substance abuse/mental health (Roman and Travis 2004, Wodahl 2006). It is important to remember that the ex-offender shares these challenges with the communities to which they return. Until recently, thoughts about an ex-offender’s reentry into his/her community by the community have been virtually non-existent (Immerwahr and Johnson 2002). Much of an ex-offender’s time incarcerated is spent thinking about being released and often thinking about doing it the right way “this
time.” Sadly, the current processes of reentry are hit or miss. Therefore, I posit the thesis that the reentering offender has a better chance at successful reentry if embraced by integrated social institutions, and successful reentry results offer benefits for our communities at large.

THE HARMONY HOUSE

From the womb of The Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Prison Ministry, The Turner Hill Community Development Corporation (THCDC) opened the Harmony House July 1, 2006. They saw a need in their community (Cobb County Georgia) and decided to address some of the community’s and the ex-offender’s challenges in the processes of reentry. As a solution, the initiative was taken to offer the reentering ex-offender housing for sixty rent-free days in order to focus on adjusting to life outside of prison (job-readiness development and/or assistance with recovery from active addictions).

The THCDC is structured as such:

- **Primary Program Administrators**
  - THCDC Executive Director,
  - Program Director, and
  - Program Manager,
  - The Turner Chapel Prison Ministry, Turner Chapel AME Church Administrators, and Consultants

- **Staff**
  - Case Manager
    - Provides social services and guidance in order to assist the ex-offender with reentry issues (housing, employment, substance abuse, and mental health).
  - Resident Manager
    - Ensures day-to-day operation in the Harmony House
  - Assistant Resident Manager (Intern)
    - Assists in ensuring day-to-day operation in the Harmony House (weekend coverage).
The THCDC partners synergistically with the United Way and the Cobb Collaborative Planning and Discharge Committee (CCPDC). The CCPDC is a group addressing concerns of the Cobb County community consisting of:

- MUST Ministries,
- The Georgia Department of Labor,
- The Extension,
- The Wash and Wax Connection,
- Travelers’ Aid,
- The Cobb County Detention Center,
- The Cobb County Sheriff’s Department,
- The Cobb County Office of Probations and Parole,
- The Cobb County Police Council on Homelessness, and
- The Cobb Community Collaborative.

It is important to note that the engagement of these local reentry stakeholders is unique in that their priorities are vastly diverse and can be seen as advocating conflicting interest. The advantage in this collaboration is that one stakeholder (with its unique set of priorities) can share information that sheds new and guiding light on the initiative with partnering stakeholders (Brazzell 2007).

Collective and individual studies were made, and the findings were that:

1. Many incarcerated in the Cobb County system were classified homeless and nearing their release dates,
2. The communities to which they would be released had limited housing options for them,
3. Many had addiction issues,
4. Many had damaged relationships (family, employment, general support), and
5. With these pressures, the chances of the ex-offender re-offending are high.

Prospective participants of the Harmony House program are met, interviewed, and assessed before their release (disqualifying criteria are sex-offenders, violent offenders, and severe mental health issues). It has been found that barring the
aforementioned disqualifying criteria, the prospective program participant has been incarcerated for drug/alcohol-related offenses; therefore, the first few hours of reentry are crucial because, although there is no intent to use (“get high”) at release, the untreated addict will use if the opportunity arises. Fully aware of addiction issues at the time of incarceration, few offenders seek the help that they need while serving their time (Wodahl 2006). Considering the criticality of the above-mentioned first few hours of reentry, the Harmony House Case Manager and the Resident Manager are there to take participants to the Harmony House upon release. Currently, the Harmony House serves only men.

The objective of the Harmony House program is to walk with the participant through the processes of 1) reporting to his probation/parole officer; 2) developing a network of support for recovery from addictions; 3) acquiring employment; 4) embarking on strategic financial savings awareness and planning; and 5) securing long-term housing. Upon exiting the Harmony House, the Case Manager continues to walk with the participant for a period of time to ensure stabilization.

THE INTERNSHIP

I excitedly accepted the potential, but there were many moments of apprehension and/or tension choosing this internship even though I have considered taking a position in this industry. The meeting with the program administration went well, and I accepted.

The objective of the intern (Resident Assistant) at the Harmony House is to make sure that the day-to-day operations are maintained throughout the weekends (the time off for the Resident Manager). The essential duties are to 1) live on the property while on duty; 2) orient the participants to the regulations and culture of the house; 3) coordinate
in-house tasks assigned to the participants; 4) maintain order in the house; 5) administer breathalyzers and/or urinalysis; 6) maintain detailed and accurate notes on each participant; 7) inspect all living quarters, equipment, and property on a regular basis; 8) provide an example of upright living; and 9) submit reports at regular and called staff meetings. Although there were times where common sense stood taller than the law, these objectives were met with regularity. According to Howard (1994), when requirements eliminate making judgment calls, it is difficult to be fair. In some cases, bureaucracy can be bluntly stifling.

I am inserting detailed accounts of interaction with Harmony House participants – a group that can be paralleled with “the submerged tenth,” a term penned by W.E.B. DuBois (1899) and characterized as a group of violent, irresponsible, alcoholics, thieves, and justifiably alienated. What is different in this scenario is that the participants of the Harmony House program have made a cry for help from within the walls of incarceration. Elijah Anderson (1999) uncovers much of what has happened surrounding drugs, violence, and street crime in urban America since DuBois’ ethnography. Inspired, I intend to use this ethnographical method in describing my internship experience paralleled with sociological theory to support my thesis.

Mixed, but far from blended, are my feelings as I took on this internship assignment. I feared that the hours would be long and grueling – consuming total weekends for twelve to fifteen weeks. I thought (and tried to use as an excuse to decline) that I would have little if any time for my studies. I could not deny my inner drive to do this work for I often ponder the most appropriate vehicle for social change in our communities. To be more specific, social change that addresses one of many rip currents
exacerbating America’s culture of poverty – the ex-offender caught up in ubiquitous recidivistic behavior. It is in this vein where I find the Harmony House to be a group aspiring to champion this challenging ill.

In order to respect the administration of the Harmony House, the employees, and the participants, I will not use their names. Instead, I have developed a system for identifying them in these sections of journal insertions:

- The Program Director – “PD”
- The Program Manager – “PM”
- The Case Managers – “Case1” and “Case2”
- The Resident Managers – “ResMan1” and “ResMan2”
- The Residents – “Res(x)” where x could be any number assigned to the resident in order as I met them.

My First Weekend
I met PD at eight o’clock on a Saturday morning. He and I spoke briefly about what I should expect. He introduced me to one of the residents (Res1) before he left. Res2 was out on a daily pass and was expected to return late morning. Res1 and I talked about generalities until he left for work.

Not yet feeling warm and fuzzy about my impact on this world or anyone in it, I was starting to warm up to what this experience could mean for me – experience in this field, my studies, and these precious credit hours.

Res2 checked in and I suspiciously administered my first breathalyzer (the system used to detect alcohol on the breath). His results were negative.

This day ended uneventfully. I had not started staying the night, so I left for home.

On the following day, I was greeted by two unfamiliar faces. Immediately, I felt glad for what I perceived to be growth and expansion in the Harmony House program. I signed in and immediately isolated to do some reading. I was approached by one of the two unfamiliar faces – Case1, the case manager. While we talked, I scolded myself quietly for being so judgmental and shortsighted. Without spending time to feel the pulse, culture, and spirit of the house upon my arrival, I wrongfully “ascended” to a place that I thought to be more important.

Case1 gave me updates of the house (particularly, the admittance of the new resident/client). Any new resident in the house was time for caution because they may not be equipped at this point to address all of the challenges of reentering the community. This time was dangerous for staff, but more importantly, this time was dangerous for the new resident. They are often released with all of the right intentions but often derailed within hours. I learned a valuable lesson on this day. I began to wonder if the community is a safe place for the reentering offender.
There are three residents in the house now. Case1 lets me know where Res1 is (at a meeting) and takes Res2 with him to church. Res3 and I talk until his ride to church arrives. I sensed his instability and ambivalence about leaving, so I encouraged him to “just come back clean.” I have considered this to be my message and possibly all I know as advice for these guys at this point. The dynamics are getting interesting in the house – Res1 appears to be stable and confident, Res2 appears to be unstable but unaware of it, and Res3 appears to be unstable and totally aware of it.

My First Sleepover: The Following Weekend
Sleeping anywhere for the first time is difficult for me. The next day started really early (4:30AM)! There were sirens, roars of muscle engines (believed to be the engines of Marietta’s finest), voices yelling, and this alarm system that, for no apparent reason, sounded off. Surrendering, I pick up my reading where I left off. It has been some time since I have lived in an area like this. This time of day is not unfamiliar to me; however, it is difficult to navigate under the duress of little sleep.

Until I found out that the door alarm sounded off arbitrarily, I stayed suspicious of the residents. I am getting the feeling that this internship has started (Journal).

DURKHEIMIAN VIEW

The Durkheimian view is the approach that I have been assigned. Although Emile Durkheim could not have considered today’s set of societal issues regarding deviance, crime, punishment, and/or the processes of recovery from such, he laid solid groundwork for these disciplines on which to build. I have been humbled in this study as I faced the depth and breadth of his work and foresight; however, I will attempt to assess my internship experience through the lens of this great sociologist.

Deflem (2004) gleaned from Durkheim’s Rules of Sociological Methods, sociological study is empirical – viewing society as an entity of its own kind (sui generis) and not merged with psychology, biology, or any other discipline; therefore, it is important to qualify and define social facts. The definition of “social fact” rests on this tripod:

1) it is any way of acting, thinking, feeling or being;
2) it is capable of exerting an external constraint over the individual (sanctions have been assigned by society that gives it coercive power over the individual; however, this coercion is not perceived in the case of successful socialization. Subsequently, social facts become internalized); and

3) it is general and exists independent of its individual manifestations (where individual manifestations are deemed more socio-psychological).

Deflem (2004) continues to point out that Durkheim makes the distinction between what is inherently individual (eating, sleeping, and other biological/psychological acts) and what is inherently social (acting out roles, i.e., as a citizen or as a traveler, etc.). Material social facts include technology, housing arrangements, population distribution, etc., and nonmaterial social facts include norms, value systems, roles, language systems, currency systems, and systems of professional practices.

Durkheim: Observing Social Facts

As a participant observer at the Harmony House, I had the opportunity to see the processes of reentry for the ex-offender, the processes of assisting them, and an opportunity to experience successes and frustrations that accompany these processes for both the facilitator and the ex-offender. It is often difficult to do this stoically. I also have the opportunity to make an etic and emic representation of what I observed. Sociological study that veers away from a scientific ethos becomes another discipline – namely philosophy. The dangers of this are the inclination to prescribe instead of describe and/or studying ideas of ethical/moral rules instead of studying ethical/moral
rules. A couple of other objectives in observing social facts are that observation must be done without preconceptions, and the investigation needs to be clearly defined, and defined by their external characteristics (Durkheim 1938).

**Durkheim: Deviance**

Deviance is defined as behavior that violates the rules set by a society or behavior that is not conforming to societal expectations. Therefore, deviance is relative – constrained by the society that sets the rules. What is wrong in one society may not be wrong in another. A troubling possibility is that concepts of deviance often vary within a society. On this point, Durkheim asserts that “moralities prevailing in the different spheres do not always keep pace in their development, and on examination, reveal different degrees of coherence and consistency” (Ginsberg 1951:211).

According to Durkheim, deviance is normal in and even crucial to healthy societies. The positive functions of deviance affirm cultural values and norms, clarify boundaries, promote solidarity, and encourage social change. Durkheim believes that deviant behavior gives non-deviants the sense of solidarity in support of the rule that has been violated and further affirmation in the processes of punishing the deviant. This punishment is not intended to prevent crime. Punishment of deviance is necessary to assert the importance of the rule that has been violated.

Durkheim believed that society transitioned from mechanical solidarity – the simpler society held together by the fact that members of that society are more homogenous (possessing a collective consciousness) into organic solidarity characterized as the larger and more complex society requiring specialized roles of its members and dependencies on each other in that society. It is interesting to note that he considered a
distinction between repressive law of the smaller societies that had the system of shared
social understandings of morality (the above-mentioned collective consciousness) and
restitutive law of the larger societies where morality is outpaced by division of labor.
The Harmony House re-creates solidarity of the smaller societies in an attempt to help the
participants recapture a sense of social belonging and responsibility to others. This is
done by creating a sense of homogeneity within the house. The resident, recently
released from a total institution, has little, if any, skill in maintaining sanctioned roles as
demonstrated by their previous systems of behavior that forced their incarceration.
Consequently, the Harmony House provides the platform for the resident to development
from the inside out. Obviously, the Harmony House does not dismiss the resident from
his responsibilities to society at large (reporting for probation, parole, or employment,
etc.), but they do recognize the inclination of the ex-offender to repel so facilitating these
processes is crucial. Ideally, these men will transition from this solidary structure better
equipped for the more organic structure that awaits their independent living.

We are working with men who, for the most part, have lived majority of their
lives without regard for authority, structure or rules and recently released from an
institution that controlled their comings and their goings. As Fein (1999) asserts
regarding the challenges of one in the helping field, “good intentions [are] not enough;
insights into what lay behind client actions [are] also essential.” He follows that point
with this argument. Successful intervention pivots on these insights (8, 9).

Resistance of Res2 and Res3

Res3 had been expelled during the week. I didn’t have much of a chance
to get to know him. He knew that he was on shaky ground (wanting to drink
and do drugs), but did not develop the strength to abstain.

The focus was now Res2. He is not at the house when I checked in, so PM
and I have time to discuss his inability or unwillingness to participate in the
program as prescribed. There was also some question as to whether he actually
completed his community service for the week. The administration waited to hear from Case1 (who is seizing a moment for a movie). In the meantime, staff made the decision to take Res2 for a drug screen as soon as he checks in. His recent drug screen tested positive for some prescription medicine.

PM and I discussed procedures. I recommended that ResMan1 and I develop a better method for him to let me know what happened in the house through the week so that I could come in on Fridays better informed. PM drafts a daily log.

Later, Res2 arrived and signed in. I administered the breathalyzer (that he passes), and we take off to get this urinalysis done. His urine tested like it did two days ago. The administrator explained the results to us. The concern was that the initial test appeared cleaner than this one. He recommended that we give him about a week before testing him again. That next one should undoubtedly be clearer than this.

We got back to the house, and Res2 retires to his quarters. As I walk with him, he appears a little shaken and denies taking any medication. I suggest that he drinks more water and exercise in order to flush his system. He agrees.

The next day, I cannot deny my concern for Res2. It seems that he doesn’t have a sense of urgency about his situation. Here is a man recently released from incarceration, homeless, and hanging on to this program by a thread – his arrogance is astonishing. I take the opportunity to express my concern for him and offer these gifts: 1) I reminded him of his condition (homeless, recently released from incarceration, and that he has an opportunity to get himself situated with employment, save some money, and find somewhere affordable to live), 2) I suggested that he stops using whatever is showing up on his urinalysis or to drink more water to flush it out of his system (he has yet to admit to using and appears baffled at the positive results of his urinalysis – both of them), and 3) I humbly offered my time (should there be a need) to talk.

Res2 accepted my gifts and left for his quarters. For some reason, I was not very optimistic about Res2 “getting” the message and sadly believed that he may be heading for more of the same pain that has rendered him this demise. This comes as no surprise and is probably the rule in situations like this – not the exception.

The following Friday, I found that Res2 didn’t make it through the week. I believe he wanted to make sure that he was the first one to tell me, and he did by cell phone while I was on my way to the house. He did not elaborate, and I did not ask “what happened.” Obviously, I was not surprised, and for some weird reason, I believe that he was not surprised either. Could there have been a scheduled reservation for derailment that he was not willing to share or avoid?

Resistance of Res4
Res4 was waiting at the door upon my Friday afternoon arrival (residents were often on the porch waiting for me on Friday because they did not have keys to the house). Before completing my ascension of the stairs, Res4 is requesting to be excused from tonight’s program schedule. This had become quite a routine! I denied his request and braced myself for his pompous pouting. In a ridiculous way, Res4 would go through this routine childishly, arrogantly, and condescendingly.
PD told me that Res4 was fired from his job because of this same behavior. His boss told him that it was time to get back to work from a break, and Res4 “told” his boss that he thought that he would spend a few more minutes in bible study.

PD called and told me that he has concern about Res4 and his whereabouts. I have concerns too! I did know that Res4 left for work early this morning, but did not know when he would return. I was not comfortable about not knowing Res4’s schedule and intent. He checked in later on and passed the breathalyzer.

Res4 took off to a meeting and returned quite a bit after curfew. His story was that he waited around for a ride. We have another one of these futile got-to-get-through-to-you discussions that end up with me “TELLING” him that he needed an attitude adjustment – his current attitude was taking him to trouble. His reply was that, “…everything is about me. I am first and foremost and I am trying to save my life!” I immediately recognized that as being some deranged and dangerous twist of messages that he had heard from 12-step meetings. Those statements are more like, “put sobriety first,” and “stay clean to live….” Nevertheless, these messages are prefaced with a plea for the alcoholic/addict to get honest with him/herself. He apologized to me later.

Res4 took off about 7:30AM to do his community service. Case1 called back shortly afterwards to tell me that they were finished with Res4, and that he should be coming back to the house. At 9:35AM, Res4 called to ask if he could go downtown Marietta to pay his phone bill (he is exactly one block away from the house). I denied his request and in an attempt to cut the whining, I suggested that he ask Case1 to take his money and make his payment for him. The phone conversation ends.

Moments later, PD called to ask for Res4’s whereabouts. I told him the chain of events, and he told me that Res4 was not with Case1. At this point, Res4 is considered absent without leave (AWOL – terms for separation). While talking with PD, Res4 arrived (10:00AM – 25 minutes from the time that he told me that he was one block away from the house). PD told me to make an assessment of the situation and decide on the best course of action to take.

The script was already written. I had gotten so familiar with Res4’s responses and arguments that I could practically mouth his part while he spoke it. In an attempt to get Res4’s attention, I made him aware that this conversation was an attempt to get as much information about his decision to allow him to stay in the Harmony House program. Egoistically, his response was, “you just have to do what you’ve got to do.”

I asked him to go pack his belongings. Sentimentalism had no place here although I gave it a shot when I saw Res4 sitting in the park across the street with all of his belongings, but it has been my experience that these are the tough decisions that help the addict more than it hurts them.

Resistance of Res5

I initially thought that Res5 was just being more aggressive with his processes of reentry because of his place of origin (Brooklyn, New York), but eventually this aggression took another face. One that appeared as though he had picked up everything that he needed to transition out of the Harmony House in record time or never really thought that he was in need – just playing the part.
His constant expression of terminal uniqueness was astonishing. When he would complain about not being able to “take care of his business,” I would remind him that if he was incarcerated, he would not be able to take care of his business and that taking care of his business before incarceration was obviously not priority! Nevertheless, Res5 asserted with regularity that I should assist him in planning and/or carrying out his perpetrating initiatives (a characteristic of one still incarcerated or one in need of incarceration). I refused to cosign this nonsense and often just wished that he would sit down somewhere.

I am reporting to staff that Res5 has quite a few distractions that have required special attention – we have been accommodating; however, there seems to be a pattern developing and there is a possibility that Res5 is manipulating the system.

Upon my arrival this weekend, Case2 tells me that Res5 wants to celebrate his mother’s birthday with her and the rest of his family. The story was told that many of his family would be traveling from other cities for this event. Like all of Res5’s requests, admirable intent, but he was not eligible for a weekend pass. This was not the first time Res5 requested a weekend while ineligible – staff allowed him time before, but now staff refused to budge. I braced myself for this encounter.

This plot thickened upon Res5’s arrival. He knew about staff’s position on his request, but he had made an appeal and was waiting to hear back from the administration (by now, Res5 had established a “direct line” with administration – his situations were too involved for Case2, ResMan1, and me.

He has more than the birthday party to request. He wanted to return a rental car (the one that staff, on a previous request, allowed his mother to rent so that he could travel back and forth to work). He also wanted to purchase a car all before his scheduled 7PM meeting. Unwilling to accept the challenge, I allowed him to go, but not before making it clear to him that he is skating on thin ice and must be back before his scheduled meeting. He left.

I am not only amazed that he left with as much on the line. I am flabbergasted that he pulled it all off. I began to think that Res5 may not need the Harmony House’s assistance.

I had been given the duty to announce that Res5 will not be allowed the weekend pass and that he is expected to do community service in the morning. He angrily suggested that he needed to leave – I agree with him on this one.

While conflicting internally about leaving, Res5 requested that I allow him to go do his laundry (minutes before his scheduled meeting). Now, I suggested that he considers leaving these “strangling obligations” to the Harmony House. Obviously, he outgrew this program. He packed and left.

**Durkheim: Suicide**

Suicide is such a strong term, but in a 1992 study in Norway, 45.5 percent of 2051 drug addicts admitted into treatment reported experiencing life-threatening overdoses and 32.7 percent attempted suicide. Although one act is seen as intentional and the other
accidental, these two life-threatening behaviors cannot always be separated (Rossow and Lauritzen 1999).

According to Durkheim, the suicide rate is a social fact and something external to individuals. He argues that it is a product of a society’s social structure. *Social integration* (where relations bind an individual or a group to others’ moral demands) and *social regulation* (where norms or moral demands are placed on the individual as they become members of a group) are two key factors in understanding suicide (Bearman 1991). Two of his theses apply with some specificity – anomic suicide and fatalistic suicide.

His findings on anomic suicide (with regards to economic stressors) have been tested, supported and creatively applicable here. His assertions have been that “religion promotes shared values, intense interaction, and strong social bonds” and protects from suicide (Breault 1986:629). Durkheim states that individuals from situations where, “futures are pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline” (1951:276) commit suicide in order to escape this control or put more accurately, an attempt to demonstrate having some control over their own lives.

*Durkheim: Religion*

Durkheim, as Coser (1988) explains, focused on primitive religion and its four functions thereof.

1. *Self discipline* is imbued by religious rituals,

2. *Cohesiveness* by the ceremonies that cause people to congregate (this edifies the group’s commonality and social solidarity),
3. *Vitalization* by religious observances that maintains the perpetuity of social heritage, and

4. *Euphoria* by restoring the sense of well-being, restoring confidence in the state of morality in society, restoring faith, counteracting frustration, counteracting uncertainty, and restoring confidence in the state of morality.

*The Sons of Allen*

There is a knock on the front door and a member of the Turner Chapel AME Church introduced himself as such along with the fact that he is representing the Sons of Allen (SOA), a group of men committed to mentor the residents of the Harmony House. Their engagement is scheduled for 7PM – 9PM on Fridays. I introduced myself and invited him in. Mem1, Case1, Res2, and I sat at the kitchen table to talk.

Our conversation was enlightening and thought provoking. The Case1 is sociology major, Mem1 is a mechanical engineer, Res2 is a computer science major, and Res1 is not degreed. Nevertheless, we all had plenty to bring to the table in conversation, and I believe everyone felt just as positive as I did about it!

*The Church*

We have discussed Durkheim’s theory on religion, but we have not discussed the church in the community. Similar to the characteristics of the moral reform movement church (most known for the civil rights movement), the reentry conversation links disorder and crime to social disorganization; hence the attempts at reaching out to embrace the offender upon release instead of meandering through the causes. There is this fact supported – time spent incarcerated has not reformed the offender. When the church appropriately embraces the ex-offender (developing and nurturing a relationship of trust and mutual accountability) reshaping of the ex-offender’s worldview begins (McRoberts 2002). There are a few churches with big ministries but little
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budgets. Many of these churches are in the communities from which the ex-offender will return; therefore, integration of social institutions and the dispersing of responsibilities to assist in these initiatives is imperative (Wilkinson 2005).

Durkheim: Sociology of Knowledge

Much has been done in this discipline since Durkheim asserted that basic categories that shape perceptions and experience are birth from social structure, particularly in simple societies. Coser (1988) goes on to assert that Durkheim’s conclusion was that cognition has social origins. Akbar (1994) argues that Western society is challenged with basic human problems (love-making, parenting and peaceful interaction with others) more so than less developed societies. It seems that Mannheim (1952) had a similar thought that shaped this comment, “….Europe and Asia have tackled the possible tasks of human acquisition of knowledge from radically different directions. Europe was going from matter to the soul, Asia from the soul to matter.” It is upon this groundwork that Mannheim sought new concepts on the nature of truth and fact – new epistemologies birthed from social experiences.

Traditionally, thinkers share personal thought. This is not necessarily helpful to those seeking to interpret or comprehend their own personal lives. The processes of thinking and methods of thought are practically unrecognized leaving an important bit of information inaccessible – intellectual control and self criticism. As societies grow, it becomes necessary to increase the correct “thinking through” of situations in order to maintain an atmosphere of keeping our social processes in check. Mannheim’s concept of the sociology of knowledge is an attempt to describe and analyze the processes of thought and the processes of changing misunderstood thought because of the obscurity
of its social origins. He states that there are no original ideas/sentiments motivating any individual – they are formed by life’s experiences.

Changing one’s worldview is a daunting challenge. The men of the Harmony House have experiences that vary along a continuum of epistemologies. For the most part, these are men who at some point in their lives sensed “meaninglessness, hopelessness, and most importantly, lovelessness” (West 2001:23) enough to metaphorically “throw in the towel.” Assisting the ex-offender in the processes of recovering these life-sustaining principles is the challenge of which our social institutions face. Integration of and collaboration between these institutions is a vital piece in this process – a task too monumental for any one institution to tackle alone.

It could be safe to make this parallel: sociology looking at societal ills with the intent to assess and recommend methods for recovery on one hand, and psychology looking at the individual’s ills with the intent to assess and recommend methods for recovery. If so, this could explain how society can overlook the metaphorical “pink elephant in the corner.” Systems of denial have to be dismantled in order for the individual to accept and participate in these processes that will, in fact, save even his or her own life.

Role Playing with the Board of Pardons and Parole

My plans were to study as much as I could at the house and get to the library later for online research. I decided to take Case1 up on his invitation to Turner Chapel for a workshop. Although I missed the opportunity to talk one on one with the representative of the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole, the workshop turned out to be quite a useful tool.

This workshop focused on the minds of the incarcerated offender. I found these questions interesting. What is the knowledge base of the offender? How does what the offender know shape his/her decisions? How is that knowledge base reshaped? Much of these questions surfaced as I watched this mock interview.
The mentor asked the offender, “What are your employment plans upon release? The offender responds, “I am going to find a job paying $45 or $50 thousand per year.”

The offender’s educational and professional profile supports this ideal for she is educated with several years of experience in her field, but this lofty objective is flawed. The offender is incarcerated for manslaughter and conditions for parole include secured employment within a certain period of time. The mentor had the daunting task of informing the resentful offender/mentee: Fact 1: It usually takes one month per every ten thousand dollars preferred for salary, Fact 2: According to her parole conditions, she didn’t have the time to spend looking for that particular salary, Fact 3: Taking a lesser paying job could be an option until she finds that ideal job, and the unfortunate Fact 4: Her employment prospects may be permanently limited do to her history that includes manslaughter.

**Durkheim: The Community**

In Durkheim’s (1951) work, he expressed concern for the transition from mechanical solidarity into organic solidarity. He went on to posit that the state of anomie (normlessness) is maintained, and possibly, exacerbated by this transition, and as an end result, despair or even suicide, hence the title of his book, *Suicide, A Study in Sociology*. Unlike the state of nature theorists, he thought of humans as social beings. As organic solidarity developed, so did individuality, therefore it would be safe to deduce that society makes us individuals rather that depicting that individuals make societies. This paradox gets perplexing, but as we get more specialized in our society, we become more solidary as a society (Roberts 1997). I want to clearly state that I found nothing that would assert that Durkheim thought mechanical solidarity could make some comeback. In a society as industrial as ours is today, this concept may be unrealistic.

Looking at our challenges from the inside out would appear to require taking this look from the top down, but what we have between the slides in this particular study is the ill-equipped offender anxious to reenter the community that is ill-equipped to receive him. The top-down approach is too broad, and possibly
those too far at the top are unable to share the emotions (namely fear, anger, and pain) involved with this delicate issue of deteriorating communities; therefore, it could be that these initiatives are best if birthed at the bottom.

Naim Akbar (1985) penned and appropriately name a book/concept, *The Community of Self*, where he induces development of community begins at the level of “self.” “The family is the nuclear social unit in a [society]. All of the relationships in the society are based on the quality of life [of] the families and the lessons learned in those families. If families are closely knit, then relationships throughout the society are closer. If respect for others is learned in relationships with family members, then respect [will be] extended throughout the society” (62).

The previously-mentioned conditions that Durkheim suggests perpetuate anomie and fatalism have taken its toll on many – there are statistics that capture much of this; however, there is a population that has been captured (the incarcerated offender) who has been restitutory by law and just needs the opportunity to try something different upon release.

*Safe Community?*

Before reporting to the Harmony House, I stopped at a community store for a soft drink and a bag of potato chips. A young man waved me over as I pulled into the parking lot. I thought I recognized him as a former participant of the Harmony House. He and I approached each other, but as he neared, I quickly realized that this man was a stranger and wanted to let me know that he had drugs if I was interested. This was truly awkward for me even though I am not intimidated by this encounter, but I see this as potentially dangerous for the ex-offender too young in reentering for this type threat.

Res8 is probably the humblest participant that I have seen in the Harmony House. I watched him fearfully wait over a weekend in a hotel room until admitted into the program, quietly comply to the rules of the program once admitted, acquire employment within the allotted time, re-establish a relationship with his children against the odds (his wife continues to use crack and threatens him with abandonment charges), position himself to transition out
of the program by saving money and securing an affordable place to live. This model participant faced the barrel of a gun on his way home from work one night one block away from the house. By this time, the community knows what this house provides, and for the most part, has respected it. Res8 survived his lifestyle prior to and during incarceration. He has decided to try a different route. It would be tragic for the community to swoop down on him like a bird of prey that has eyed vulnerability.

The Cobb County Community

This community and others like it must be applauded! It has become glaringly obvious that these issues are not disappearing. They can be ignored for a little while, but something invariably happens to bring them back to the forefront. Taking on the three major challenges for the reentering offender (housing, employment, and substance abuse/mental health) are Cobb County’s Must Ministry and the Cobb County Police Council on Homelessness (housing), the Department of Labor, the Wash & Wax Connection (employment), and The Extension (substance abuse/mental health). The Marietta Police Department and the Cobb County Sheriff’s Department will continue to do what they do to maintain public safety and house the offender. This is the type of synergism that can stimulate awareness, reestablish confidence in our communities, and reestablish confidence in our society.

The Employer

Currently, there is some aversion toward hiring the ex-offender. Below are some generalizations about employers’ hiring behavior:

1. Virtually all employers seek basic “work-readiness” in prospective employees, while many seek additional “hard” and “soft” skills, even in low wage markets,
2. Since most skills are not directly observable at the time of hiring, employers generally seek applicants with certain credentials that signal employability and skill and tend to avoid those with certain stigmas;
3. Employers vary in the amounts of resources they can apply to hiring and compensation decisions, as well as in their information and expertise on these matters,
4. Recruiting and screening choices (as well as compensation, promotion, and retention decision) are often made informally and can reflect employer prejudices, perceptions, and experiences,

5. Employer access to a reliable and steady pool of applicants is also affected by their physical proximity to various neighborhoods and groups, their employee networks, as well as the tightness of the labor market locally and/or nationally.

The basic work-readiness that virtually all employers seek involves personal qualities such as honesty and reliability, an inclination to arrive at work on time every day, a positive attitude toward work

(Holzer, Raphael and Stoll 2002:1)

The data provided specifically about an employer’s unwillingness to hire the ex-offender are pivoting around these issues:

1. Their very low levels of education;
2. Their problems with substance abuse and other mental health issues;
3. The fact that a majority are Black American or Latino men;
4. The concentration of their areas of residence in poor, inner-city neighborhoods that are relatively removed from centers of job growth and where employment networks are often weak; and
5. Their own lack of motivation, and attitudes of distrust and alienation from traditional work.

(Holzer et al. 2002:3)

Many of the suggested solutions have already been discussed in this paper; however, Holzer et al. (2002) offers the following:

1. Case management services, including referrals to substance abuse treatments and other supports;
2. Some education or training activities, particularly in “soft skills” and in skills directly related to specific employer needs;
3. Prerelase supports and training, including assistance with collection of necessary documentation, such as social security cards;
4. Transitional work experience;
5. Job placement assistance; and
6. Post employment supports, including transportation services and job coaching activities.

(8,9)

CONCLUSION

Taking another look at some statistics, we may deduce higher success rates of reentry if agents of the community integrate their efforts to assist the ex-offender with their challenges.
Reiterating these statistics:

- Seventy to eighty percent of all inmates are incarcerated for drug-related offenses,
- Twenty-three thousand arrests were made in 2006. Seventeen percent was for possession of cocaine (the most frequent arrest). The list of other drug-related arrests includes marijuana, alcohol, heroin, and methamphetamine (meth),
- Fifty percent of all homicides and sixty-two percent of all assaults involve drugs and/or alcohol,
- Substance abuse treatment can reduce criminal activity by up to sixty percent,
- Cobb County ranked second (1,616 arrests) behind Atlanta (1,712 arrests).

Health is rarely mentioned:

- Forty-six percent arrested tested positive for Hepatitis C,
- Five percent tested positive for tuberculosis,
- Three percent tested positive for syphilis, and
- Two percent tested positive for HIV.

(GDOC 2007)

What is happening in Marietta is an example of solutions brought forth from a groundswell of concern by those most affected. The crime rates are what they are, and the arrest rates are what they are. Thankfully, those deem violent are given appropriate sentences – time out of society. For some of these violent criminals, we could justify putting them away for life. The offender applicable to this particular study is the non-violent offender who, for the most part, is challenged with addictions or minor mental health issues. If left untreated, non-violent drug-involved offenders transition into being violent drug-involved offenders and concerns of health for the community increases. These ex-offenders will continue to reenter with the same, and possibly heightened, issues; however, those reentering who have successfully addressed their core issues have more to offer their communities. Many of the facilities like the Harmony House and substance abuse-focused halfway houses throughout the country are staffed by recovering addicts and ex-offenders who know the troubles and how to help those tampering with these troubles navigate from them.
The good news is that there are several communities across the country recognizing the criticality of moving toward assisting those seeking help. In the case of the Urban Institute (2007), The Reentry Roundtable hosts accomplished professionals of all disciplines collaborating on just this issue. They have taken as an objective, assessing and changing the nation’s thinking on ex-offender reentry.

As these successes of reentry accumulate, employers will find that their labor pool is not only larger but staffed with those clean from alcohol and drugs, highly motivated, seeking education, living in areas that are safer (not creating threats of re-offending), and trustworthy.

My internship experience gave me the opportunity to work in an area of which I am interested. There were instances during this internship where my input helped shape administrative and operating processes. Being a young organization many decisions had to be made on the run – weapons were built while on the battlefield. Organizations in this helping field need flexibility and bureaucracies of funding resources can be somewhat constrictive. Until there are institutions without the need for external funding, this is one drawback that institutions lacking adequate funding from within will have to face. Nevertheless, the mission is admirable and the drawbacks are minor compared to the benefits.

This experience also allowed me to see the processes of change in society. The Harmony House neighborhood is one with a presence of drug and other deviant activities. The young men on the street selling their drugs recognize the Harmony House and what it stands for. There is mutual respect between them, the Turner Chapel AME Church, and the Harmony House. The participants of the Harmony House definitely have to
respect the dangers that lurk literally outside their doors. In a sense, this imbues strength in the ex-offenders’ ability to walk their walk despite of the threats in the community. The successful reentering ex-offender is available as an example (by sight) for those seeking recovery from a condition that invariably becomes immitigable (active addiction) and a beacon for those following them from their respective correctional institutions. The presence of the Harmony House is part of an evolotional process of change for this Marietta community.

Experience at the Harmony House is not one for the squeamish, for working with the ex-offender can be intimidating. However, someone has to roll up their sleeves for this tough work in the trenches. I highly recommend the appropriate sociology or criminal justice major to consider the Harmony House assignment for internship.
REFERENCES


