22. “Since 1983 Family and Corrections Network has provided ways for those concerned with families of offenders to share information and experiences in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We have done this through publishing, sponsoring conferences, liaison with other agencies, presentations, and consultation. We have published information on children of prisoners, parenting programs for prisoners, prison visiting, incarcerated fathers, hospitality programs and a variety of other topics” (http://www.fcnetwork.org/).

23. Because many areas previously suggested as part of a “research agenda” for incarcerated fathers (Lanier, 1995, 1996) remain unaddressed, they will be included here (see also Hainton, 1996a).

24. For example, while discussing the development of the “Polmont Positive Parenting Scheme,” a program officer at Polmont Young Offenders Institution (VOI) in Scotland noted that “we also took into account the recommendations of the recent Social Inclusion Report, which suggested that all VOI should be presenting ‘Parenting Courses’ before April 2002.” (Tripney, 2000: 5).

25. My thanks to Creasie Finney Hainton and Hamin Tohill for raising these issues during their review of an earlier draft.

26. In short order, other prisoners were involved in running the EFG, specifically, by taking responsibility for attracting speakers and taking charge in support group meetings, and, generally, in just maintaining its vitality.

27. As one author notes: “Legal notions of fatherhood reflect, to a remarkable degree, fathers divorced from nurturing. The model of fatherhood embedded in law is dominantly biological and economic.” (Dowd, 1996: 526).

Imprisonment carries both direct and indirect consequences for convicts (Richards and Jones, 1997). Direct effects refer to what prisoners may lose when they are incarcerated, including nearly everything that is dear to them in the outside world—spouses, children, employment, homes, and personal possessions (Holt and Miller, 1972; Parker and Lanier, 1997; Richards, this volume). They are confined in institutions that are often characterized by violence (Sawyer et al., 1977; Farnan, 1983; Fleisher, 1989; Silberman, 1995), sexual victimization (Lockwood, 1980; Nacci and Kane, 1983; Jones and Schmid, 1989), and severe overcrowding (Paulus, 1988).

The indirect outcomes of incarceration may not be evident to prisoners until they are released from prison (Richards and Jones, 1997). Among these collateral consequences are the physical and psychological effects of imprisonment, including institutional dependency (Walker, 1983; Wormith, 1984; Zamble and Porporino, 1988; Goodstein and Wright, 1989); extended difficulties in relationships with family (Holt and Miller, 1972; Burtstein, 1977; Cebe and Power, 1978; S. Schaffer, 1978; Homer, 1979; Conrad, 1981); various disabilities, disqualifications, and legal restrictions (Burton et al., 1987; Gordon, 1990; Rich-
ards, 1990, 1995a; Richards and Jones, 1997); inadequate financial resources at the time of release (Lehman, 1975; Richards, 1995a); post-prison unemployment (Pownell, 1969; Dale, 1976; Tropin, 1977; Smith, 1984; Dickey, 1989; Grogger, 1989; English and Mande, 1991); and underemployment. Drawing upon these and other analyses, criminologists and other social scientists have declared the prison system to be a failed policy of crime control (Bottoms and Preston, 1980; F. Allen, 1981; Reiman, 1995; Dyer, 1999; Austin and Irwin, 2001).

One measure of this failure is the detrimental effect of stigmatized identity (Warren, 1980; E. Jones et al., 1984). According to Irwin (1970: 135–138), stigma is a complex problem that operates on two levels. First, there is a difference between how an exconvict might perceive his/her stigma (the subjective level) and how it is actually perceived by others. Second, because the person is discreditable rather than discredited (Goffman, 1963), he/she must make decisions about how to manage this stigma in both formal and informal social settings.

EXCONVICT

I am an exconvict. My experience with prison began when I was sentenced on a marijuana conviction to serve a year and a day in the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater, a maximum-security penitentiary. Ordinarily, one of the most difficult steps in research on prisons is gaining unrestricted access to inmates' day-to-day lives within the convict world. This brief time incarcerated provided me a unique opportunity to study prison conditions and my fellow inmates.

In a conversation with a professor prior to my entering prison, it was suggested that I begin keeping a journal. He said that I might at least try to make something positive come from this experience. One week before I entered prison, I began a record that chronicled my daily life for the next year. My early entries were predominantly personal thoughts, impressions, and a chronology of daily events. I used the “diary-interview” method (e.g., Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977) entries to provide a framework to derive new observational strategies and identify potential themes.

From my first day at Stillwater, I recorded extensive notes describing the everyday interactions with other members of the prison community (both long- and short-term inmates), as well as observations of the entire realm of prison life to which I was exposed. When I completed my prison sentence, I entered graduate school and returned to the same prison to conduct extensive interviews with 20 first-time inmates serving time of two years or less. These individuals were asked a series of questions to focus their discussions of prison life, but were allowed to portray their experiences without the constraints of a formal interview schedule. Over 1,000 pages of data were collected from these two sources and were analyzed based on the principles of “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

THE MAKING OF AN INMATE

Doing time in a maximum-security prison is not simply a matter of “being in prison.” It is, rather, a creative process through which inmates must invent or learn a repertoire of adaptation tactics that address the varying problems they confront during particular phases of their prison careers. There is an extensive literature on the informal organization of prison life and the socialization processes through which prisoners come to participate in this informal organization (e.g., Cordilla, 1983).

Clemmer (1940/1958) argued that men who are sent to prison experience a socialization process through which their established values, beliefs, and attitudes are stripped away and replaced by the cultural values of the prison, a process he referred to as the “prisonization ordeal.” In other words, as inmates come to adopt behavior patterns that are consistent with prison culture, they also become increasingly further removed from conventional behavioral patterns. Within this conceptualization, Clemmer hypothesized that the longer a convict is incarcerated, the more prisonized he would become and therefore the more difficult it would be to alter his behavior in a socially acceptable direction.

The deprivation model, an alternative explanation, is most closely associated with the work of Sykes (1958) and Messinger (Sykes and Messinger, 1960), who argued that the inmate social structure is a functional response to inherent deprivations of imprisonment: the loss of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual contact, autonomy, and security. Although prisoners react to these deprivations individually, Sykes and Messinger observed that they also do so collectively, through the cultural theme of inmate solidarity and the normative prescriptions of the convict code. The various social roles that constitute the inmate social system are essentially a classification system of how individual prisoners respond to prison deprivations, including the extent to which they conform to or violate the inmate code (Irwin, 1970: 82–85; J. Ross and Richards, 2002: 72–74; Richards, this volume).

Other prison researchers have contended that the deprivation model gives insufficient consideration to what convicts bring to the prison environment. This “importation response” emphasized how the experiences and values of prisoners prior to their incarceration affect their adaptations in prison, and ultimately inmate social structure and culture. In an early statement of this model, Irwin and Cressey (1962) identified three ideal-type subcultures within the inmate social structure: the thief, convict, and legitimate subcultures.

Members of the thief subculture identify with a larger criminal subculture that extends well beyond the boundaries of the prison world (King and Chambliss, 1986; Shover, 1996). These men value, at least in principle, the idea that criminals should not cooperate with police or prison authorities and that they should be reliable and “solid” in the eyes of other thieves. Their interests lie in resolving group conflicts and promoting behavioral norms that contribute to making life easier for them on the street and while serving time. Thieves expect to enter and exit prisons many times over the course of their adult lives, as they
are usually sentenced to relatively short sentences (less than 10 years), serve their time, and then return to the streets. The life they live assumes that they must maintain a respectable status in the thieves' world. In effect, they live with one foot in the street and another in prison.

In contrast, members of the convict culture are serving longer sentences (10 years to life), many for violent offenses. They are oriented primarily to the prison itself and seek to acquire status within the prison. These are the men who have served extensive prison time behind bars and do not expect to "make parole" or have their sentences reduced by "good time." They may be fanatical and have little respect for prison policy or procedures. Many of them spend months or years in detention cell blocks (the hole). They have no choice but to make a "home" in prison. Some of these are "state-raised" convicts (Irwin, 1970: 26–29; Abbott, 1981: 3–22; J. Ross and Richards, 2002: 70–72; Richards, this volume), convicts who are children spent time in orphanages and juvenile detention institutions.

A large percentage of the prison population, according to Irwin and Cressey (1962), reject the values of both the thief and convict subcultures, attempt to isolate themselves from these groups, generally follow prison rules, and seek to do their time with as little trouble as possible; these are the men classified as members of the "legitimate subculture." Irwin (1980) has since observed that prisons are no longer comprised of the three dominant subcultures that he and Cressey identified originally. Rather, as a generalized extension of the importation model, inmate social systems are increasingly constituted by specific groups or gangs of prisoners, each with its own identity and purpose (Davidson, 1974; Richards, this volume).

My research on prisoners' experiential orientations does not speak directly to the deprivation versus importation debate, but it is informed by, and contributes to, the same research tradition. Like all of the studies cited, my project examined inmate adaptations to the conditions and deprivations of prison life. Lending broad support to the importation model, this analysis documented the importance of what new prisoners bring with them to the prison; in the case of the individuals studied, an outsider's stereotyped imagery of prison life, and a tentative plan of action grounded in this imagery. More generally, the men studied could be classified as members of what Irwin and Cressey called the "conventional" or "legitimate" subculture in prison, although their inexperience with penal confinement would relegate them to the margins of even this segment of the prison world. However, in contrast to the usual importation model analysis of how outside norms or values are translated into prison adaptations, I examined how new prisoners, as outsiders, defined the problems of imprisonment and then acted on these definitions.

This research adds two sociological themes to the research on prison culture and inmate adaptations. The first is that prisoners' changing orientations to prison life are better characterized as active efforts to interpret the prison rather than as the passive response to prison culture, as was suggested by Clemmer's concept of imprisonment and subsequent research on prison socialization. The second is that individuals' orientations, at least for new prisoners, reflect the interplay and continuous influence of both the outside world and the prison world throughout their sentences. This simultaneous influence is inadequately recognized not only by the prisonization pattern of a linear, progressive socialization into prison culture, but also by the U-shaped adaptive pattern (through which prisoners are seen to be imprisoned and then depersonalized) suggested by Wheeler's (1961) and Garabedian's (1963) research. It is also insufficiently addressed by the "deprivation versus importation" framework for examining prison culture.

My own research suggests that both of these themes are important in the prison experiences of new prisoners during their pre-prison orientations, in which they attempt to envision and prepare for prison life, and again in their post-prison orientations, when they compare the prison with the free world and endeavor to assess the impact that this experience may have on their future lives. There is, to be sure, a period in the middle of their sentences when their response to the prison routine suggests a more passive form of prison adaptation such as that represented by the term "prisonization." Nevertheless, this takes place only after the inmates have already altered their emotional response to the prison as a result of their own experiences and interpretations. In addition, it is countered by their ambivalent but continuing identification with the outside world.

Prisoners' behavior is not determined solely by rules and values; they recall real events and then interpret these abstractly. Thus, their evolving experiential realities and the changing problems and concerns of everyday prison life provide the basis for the inmates' changing adaptations to the different phases of the prison experience. This involves something more than a passive alternation between conventional and criminal values. Instead, they work to resolve their difficulties with life both inside prison and outside, after they return to the free world. Finding out how prisoners face these challenges can tell us a lot about what might be done to help them.

**FROM THE INSIDE LOOKING OUT**

Inmates' preparations for their future on the outside begin while they are still in prison. Throughout their incarceration, convicts fantasize about what they will do when they finally get out of prison. Toward the ends of their sentences, they begin to speculate more frequently and to discuss their outside plans with others.

In order to plan for his future, an inmate has to construct an image of the outside world. Irwin (1970) noted that this takes place at two different levels. First, there is that which operates within the general prison community, where their dreams about their future tend toward generalized possibilities, often grandiose and impractical. As their return to the free world becomes more imminent, however, their plans tend to become more specific and realistic. This is more likely to take place on a personal level, in discussion with their close associates or friends.
Beyond their immediate need for a job and a place to stay, inmates are also concerned with other dimensions of their lives outside. Most of the expectations that these prisoners have for the outside world center around escaping the deprivations associated with incarceration. The following interview with a prisoner anticipating release identifies some of these issues. Denial of heterosexual relationships is discussed in the following excerpt:

The talk of sexual escapades can always be overheard, second only to talk about past criminal behavior. There is much talk of what they [fellow prisoners] are going to do sexually when they get out.

Loss of autonomy is expressed by the following inmate:

I've wondered what my day would be like once I gained my freedom. . . . What will it be like to not be constantly surroundings by hundreds of males, to not have to listen to the bells ring at 6:00 every morning?

I think there is more danger in the idea that we all expect so much more from our new lives. In looking back, my life wasn't filled with total joy and excitement. Yet we seem to think that is what awaits us once we obtain our freedom. I am afraid that many of us may be in for quite a letdown. We have set our expectations much too high. Hell, anything will be better than what we have now, but anything will wear off quickly. It won't take much to put a real damper on things, such as a failure to get a job, or find that woman or women you have dreamed about during incarceration.

Irwin (1970: 88–93) stated that inmates learn three concepts that serve as guides for their planning about the future. The first is "making it," which entails becoming financially viable and coping with the parole system. Making it, in spite of a lack of education, vocational skills, and the stigma of being an ex-con, is thought to require a considerable amount of effort and a little luck. The second is "keeping out of the old bag," which refers to the former life, with its high probability of arrest and conviction. The third is "doing all right," which goes beyond merely staying out of prison and includes the fulfillment of specific desires and goals.

As prisoners think about returning to the "free world," they attempt to make plans. Throughout their prison careers, convicts dream about "doing all right"; for example, having sex with women, buying a car, and finding a good job. But, as they near the completion of their sentences, certain fears and doubts begin to enter their thoughts. The following interview focuses on an inmate's uncertain future:

I think often about what it will be like when I get out, but can't really imagine it. I know it will be another beginning for me. This starting all over again is just like getting out of high school or the military or whatever. It is kind of scary. Starting out with nothing, not knowing if you're making the right decisions. The parole board asks what your plans are when you get out. I don't know how anyone can know for sure. I think I know what I would like to do but I don't know if I will be able to do it.

Surrounded by many examples of parole failures, this man has good reason to worry about his ability to make it on the outside.

Another prisoner offers an extreme example of a fellow convict's difficulties in reentering the free world:

One of the inmates out here is a guy well into his 70s, by the name of Pete. From what I've been told, he shouldn't be here [in prison]. After he was paroled, one day they found him sitting on the front steps crying. Evidently he just couldn't make it on the outside. All of his family and friends were dead and things had changed too much. He was just lost out there. So, they are allowing him to do his parole here in minimum security. It's a rather sad case, though, that once a person's time is up he can no longer function out there in society.

This quotation emphasizes the changes that take place in the outside world while an inmate is incarcerated, and the difficulty he may have after serving many years in prison returning to the community, where he no longer has family or friends.

Another prisoner expresses his concern with the dependency that is induced by the prison system and wonders whether he will be able to make important decisions on his own:

I just seem to go through the motions every day. It doesn't take much thought to wake up, go to sho, go to work, and go to your cell when the bell rings again. I wonder what effect this has on us when we get out, when we no longer have these bells to tell us what and when to do? Is it a shame to let a person who has been totally dependent on an institution for a period of time just go out on his own, ill prepared to make any decisions for himself.

This prisoner expresses a more generalized concern about what impact the prison experience will have on his ability to make it on the outside:

I'm in a kind of strange mood. I think I'm just a little scared. I've been doing a lot of thinking about my future on the outside and I guess I have some doubts about my ability to make something of my future. I really wonder what impact this prison stay will have.

Another inmate is more concerned about how others might perceive him after his release from prison:

I had an interesting visit with my friend Joan the other night. She told me that she and two friends were talking about me and the joint. During the conversation with Joan it came out that her friends didn't think much of criminals, but that somehow that didn't apply to me because I was their friend, and I wasn't really a criminal. But it really made me realize that when I get out of here I am going to have to fight the stigma of being an ex-con. It could be tough to find work and such, and people seem to act a little weird around ex-cons. I never really thought about this before.
The end of a prison sentence includes a prisoner's efforts to reconstruct a picture of his reintegration in the world outside the prison walls. This look into the future is emotional and includes increasing apprehension about returning to the "free world."

PROBLEMS OF REENTRY

Incarceration creates a number of obstacles that must be overcome when a prisoner is attempting to adapt to life again in the free world (Austin and Irwin, 2001: 139–159). Individuals released from prison must cope with strained personal relationships, poor education, and few job skills, plus the stigma of a felony conviction, which may bar them from many occupations and make it difficult to obtain employment of any kind. In addition to this, they must find housing as well as deal with a myriad of other reentry problems for example, moving from a highly routinized, controlled environment into the complex, fast-moving world of the streets. Given all of these issues, it should not come as a surprise that many individuals who are released from prison are not successful and are reincarcerated, many for technical violations (Austin and Irwin, 2001: 143–146).

The focus of the remainder of this chapter will be on how excons view the reentry process and develop strategies for coping with stigma. Before doing this, I need to reveal some of my own experiences when I left Stillwater penitentiary.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH REENTRY

I am not the typical excon, whatever that means. In comparison to the other ex-prisoner academic authors in this book, I have done the least amount of time in prison. Some might argue that I most closely fit Irwin's description of the "square john" in my orientation toward the prison experience. I believe that what is important for readers to understand is that there is no typical exconvict. Although we have something in common in that we have all been rejected by society and sent away to prison, we have not experienced incarceration in the same way. As a result, we shouldn't expect all exconvicts to experience reentry in a similar fashion. I remember my last day in prison:

I have been waiting so long for this day to come around. I didn't do anything at all today but sit around and watch television. A fitting way to end my prison experience. I have really been watching the clock. Just 10 more hours to go.

I just crossed off the last day on my prison calendar. I just want to scream, I'm so damn happy. I had hoped that I would be more settled on the outside—with a job that is. But at the present time I really don't care. At least I have a place to live [with my family]. I know that I am going to make it. I have no real plans for today, except that I would like to party with my friends.

Reflected in this final entry in my prison journal are some telling and conflicting images. For many prisoners, including myself, the prison experience is viewed as time wasted, and getting out, then, is an opportunity to make up for lost time. So, one of the first things that I wanted to do was to reestablish and celebrate with old friends and family. On the other hand, getting out of prison is filled with uncertainty and risk: no job, no real plans.

Many individuals leave prison on parole and are required to write a release plan that includes specifying a place to live, family arrangements, and employment. In contrast, because I had served my entire sentence (with deductions for jail time and "good time"), I was released immediately to the street without the encumbrance of parole supervision and any other obligations to the community corrections legal machinery. As a result, I was not required to formulate a release plan, and no one would be checking on me to see that I had a job or a place to live. So, although I had a place to sleep and hang my hat, I had no way of making a living and the prospects for doing so did not seem so bright. But, I was resolved to "make it."

I was lucky for a number of reasons. First, I was busted in Minnesota, a liberal state with relatively lenient penalties for marijuana convictions. If I had been sentenced by a federal court, or in a different state, for example, in the South, I might have been required to do more time. Second, I was able to do my sentence without serious physical injury or catching a new case. Third, I had the support of family and friends.

I served less than one year in prison and was able to maintain fairly close contact with my family and friends, and will be forever grateful for their support. For example, I received a steady flow of mail and visits, even from people that I never expected to hear from. I doubt this would have been possible if I had served a longer sentence, or if I was doing federal time and shuttled constantly from prison to prison across the United States (Mobley, Murphy, Richards, this volume). Research (Richards, 1995a; Richards and Jones, 1997; Austin and Irwin, 2001: 151–153; J. Ross and Richards, 2002: 155–171; Terry, this volume) suggests that the two most important factors in successful reentry into the free world are the strong social support system of family and friends and meaningful employment. Upon my release, I went home to live with my family.

EMPLOYMENT?

The employment situation was a completely different story. Before I went to prison, I had completed a bachelor's degree in sociology from Mankato State University (MSU), but I was reasonably certain that no one in the fields of criminal justice or human services would be inclined to hire a recently released prisoner. So, I limited my employment search to the usual exconvict kinds of jobs, and applied for entry-level positions at foundries, restaurants, and with mowing
companies. Many exconvicts are forced to hide their criminal status when applying for work; ironically, I found that my college degree was preventing me from being hired for manual labor positions.

For two months I responded to newspaper ads and leads provided by the local unemployment office, as well as those given to me by family and friends. Nothing happened. I kept getting more and more frustrated, having never experienced this kind of rejection before. I had always had a job, whether delivering newspapers as a kid, holding down a variety of part-time positions as a teenager, working my way through college, or serving in the military. This was the first time that I could not secure employment.

Ready to give up, I received a phone call from a former professor who told me about a university-sponsored paid summer internship in a criminal justice planning department that was headed by a friend of his. They were willing to hire me as a research assistant if I would enroll in graduate school, thereby making me eligible for federal subsidies. I had never really given much thought to graduate school until this opportunity forced me to consider this option. I applied to the master’s program in sociology at MSU as a part-time student, but with no real intention of attending the university.

At the end of the summer, I was again faced with the prospect of being unemployed. Again, my former professor came to my aid. He offered me a two-year graduate assistantship appointment at MSU. With no other job prospects, I decided to enter graduate school as a full-time student. I was relieved that my next two years were essentially covered. Although I was still not committed to attending graduate school, the prospect did provide a certain amount of certainty in my very uncertain life.

It is important to note that none of these opportunities were created through my own efforts. On my own, I was unable to acquire a job. I always felt that my excon status prevented me from getting on with my life. These gifts were provided by my professor at MSU. They could have been given to other people rather than me. My “spoiled identity” did not prevent me from receiving these positions. Once my foot was in the door, I was able to demonstrate that I could do the work that was required.

**GRADUATE SCHOOL**

My first year of graduate school was a surreal experience. I breezed through the course work, completed the comprehensive exams, and collected the data for my thesis within the first year. My status as an excon was known by the entire faculty (I had been an undergraduate in the same department before my incarceration) and other graduate students.

I was also asked to speak in a variety of criminology and sociology courses, so it appeared as if everyone at MSU knew who I was and about my history. It also seemed as if my past was viewed in positive terms; my prison experience was presented as a life experience that all could learn and benefit from. My “bad boy” reputation even helped me get dates with women. This was the kind of year that an excon could only dream of with all of these opportunities falling into place and my criminal status actually working for me.

Toward the end of the first year, I felt that I had accomplished all that I could at MSU, and that it was time to move on. I was encouraged to apply for Ph.D. programs. I figured that I was still unemployed, and that going to graduate school would further distance me from my time spent in prison. Fortunately, I was admitted to Iowa State University (ISU) and awarded a teaching assistantship. I moved to Ames to continue my graduate education. Five years later I received my Ph.D. in sociology and was back on the job market.

Graduate school was a wonderful experience. It is so unrelated to the real world. The intellectual atmosphere is accepting and supportive of a wide range of people, beliefs, and values. I had a great cohort of graduate students, many of whom I continue to stay in close contact with. In addition, the faculty at Iowa State was supportive and continued to reassure me that I was on track and that my criminal conviction would not be an issue in the future. After all, for someone who studies deviance and social control, my prison experience would likely be treated as a positive factor. Both my professors and I were soon to learn differently.

After my fourth year of Ph.D. studies, and upon being officially designated as “All but Dissertation” (ABD), I decided to test the academic job market. Although the sociology employment market had been fairly tight, there were quite a few advertised positions for assistant professors with concentrations in criminology and deviance. I applied for 25 positions, many of which appeared as if they had been written for me. Unfortunately, I did not make the short list for any of these openings.

I couldn’t understand what was going on. My grade-point average was nearly a 4.0. I had prepared and taught four different courses on my own, as well as having served as a teaching assistant in four other classes. I also had presented a number of conference papers and had a book-length manuscript under review with the University of Chicago Press. My professors consoled me by saying that my ABD status was not helping my job prospects.

I still had another year of funding left at ISU, so I remained and continued to work on my dissertation. I finished collecting my data and began the writing process slowly but surely. October through February was the time when most of the open faculty positions for the following year are advertised. I began to apply for every position that I might fit, as well as some that I didn’t. I applied to 45 schools for assistant professor positions. Finally, things were starting to look up. When I attended the Midwest Sociological Society annual meeting in March, a number of criminologists from different universities told me their departments had been discussing me as a possible hire and had me on their short list (three to five persons to interview). They were sure that I was going to be offered campus visits and I would be in a position to choose between job offers.

I was surprised when nothing happened. Then, I was shocked when two other students in my Ph.D. cohort were offered positions and I couldn’t even get one campus interview. It was generally thought that I had the stronger vita — more teaching experience, conference papers, and articles under review. I
wondered what was going on here. We started doing some comparisons among the three of us. We all had experience in the criminal justice system. One of the persons in my cohort was African American, so it is possible that affirmative action was playing a role, but this individual also had a refereed publication that I did not have at the time. One person was a former prison guard, another had previously been a police officer and probation officer, and I was an exconvict. None of us had degrees in hand, but we were all scheduled to defend our dissertations. This was the first time that I actually began to wonder about my excon status and whether it was affecting my ability to get a job in my chosen profession. I also discovered that two of my references had mentioned my excon status in their letters on my behalf. They believed that this was a positive attribute and played it up. It appears that was not the best strategy.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

I had learned something important about the academic hiring process. Being an excon is perceived negatively by many people, even in a relatively liberal discipline such as sociology. I decided that I needed to manage this status differently. I was no longer the crown prince looking for a job. Rather, I was more like a pariah, someone to be shunned.

I was finally offered a tenure-track position at Pittsburg State University (PSU) in southeastern Kansas. Needless to say, I was not their first choice. In fact, PSU called ISU trying to hire one of my graduate student cohort who had already accepted a job. Once they found out that he had been hired by another university, they asked the department chairperson if there was anyone else available. I was recommended, so PSU invited me down to Kansas for a campus interview. Let’s face it, they were desperate. After a brief interview I was offered the job. I put off accepting it for as long as I could, hoping that a better-known university would finally call. They never did and I moved to Kansas.

Upon arriving at PSU, I immediately went back on the job market, but with a different strategy. The faculty at PSU were very supportive of me during my one year there. I just couldn’t conceive of myself spending my life in Pittsburg, Kansas teaching eight courses a year. Meanwhile, one of my PSU colleagues confided in me that he had a friend who was on the faculty of a larger university that had previously shown some interest in hiring me as an assistant professor. It turns out that I had been their number one candidate until it was learned that I was an exconvict. Once that happened, my stock dropped drastically. So, I decided to ask my academic references to rewrite their letters of support, and delete the information that identified me as an excon. I had learned the risk of raising this issue in their letters of recommendation. If they were asked about it in person or on the phone, then they could talk about my exconvict status in a positive way.

This new strategy worked. I had a Ph.D. degree in hand, was sitting on a tenure line at PSU, and was getting offers to interview from a variety of universities. Something interesting took place during one of those interviews. Faculty in the know had a hard time raising the question about my status. And of course, I never knew who was in the know. So, faculty who were unaware of my excon status would raise a question about how I got interested in doing prison research, and I did not know if that was a "trick" to see if I would divulge my excon status. Therefore, I was always confused and unsure as to what to say. Ultimately, I ended up telling them the truth about my criminal background, and generally surprised some of the faculty. I also learned later on that my status was an issue that was discussed before I was offered the positions, and that in all cases, the departments felt obligated to inform the administration.

I was offered tenure-track employment at Marquette University. This was a joint appointment in their sociology and criminology programs. What I was not aware of was the faculty warfare that was going on between these two disciplines, that eventually I would be caught in the middle, and that my exconvict status would become an issue. Having decided to guard my excon status, I only revealed my personal history as necessary for research endeavors and within the academy, but I would not share it in the classroom or within the general public. I wanted to be in control of who knew. What I discovered, though, is that I had been publicly "outed" before my arrival on campus.

When I arrived at Marquette University that summer, and I met returning students as well as alumni, I was often greeted with a phrase that went something like this: "Oh, you’re the one. I think that it is great that we have someone like you in the program." I was stunned by this and had no idea of how to respond, other than to say "thank you."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Later, as my career at Marquette developed and I was preparing to go up for tenure, I was informed that some senior faculty members, who were very critical of me, were spreading the word that I was inappropriately using my excon status to curry favor among the students and glorify my prison experience. This, of course, was not true. Since graduate school, I had always been reluctant to discuss my personal history. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues were not nearly as concerned about protecting my privacy. So, these less than positive faculty observations were included in my tenure file, and I will never know what role they may have played in my tenure denial (which was later overturned after I hired an attorney).

CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY AUTHORS

IN THIS VOLUME

Part of relearning how to act on the outside involves learning how to cope with a spoiled identity. The stigmatized individual must determine what information about himself he will convey. According to Goffin (1963), information con-
trol is particularly significant for persons who are able to "pass." This need to control information about personal history will affect the types of relationships he develops, as well as his concept of self in these relationships (Adler and Adler, 1989).

Goffman implied that stigma is the primary factor in determining the nature of all social relationships. He suggested that the motivating force for all behavior is to reduce tensions and/or to withdraw attention from the stigma, thus establishing the most favorable identity possible. This can be accomplished by employing one of the following three coping strategies. First, the exconvict can hide or mask the stigma by applying for and receiving a pardon. This would certainly minimize the degree to which the stigma would intrude upon and disrupt interaction. Second, he/she could develop mastery in areas that might ordinarily be considered closed to someone with this character blemish, such as going to graduate school and earning a Ph.D. And third, one could call attention to his tainted past and use the stigma for secondary gains. The remaining section of this chapter will focus on these latter two coping strategies for managing a spoiled identity, which have been used by many of the exconvict authors contributing to this book.

Convicted felons leave prison knowing that life ahead of them will not be easy. According to one of the exconvict professors appearing in this volume:

I am a man with limits caused by my identity and there is no way that I can overcome them. I will attempt to get a job in academia. I will use the "cover" of academia to make a living, knowing full well that if my name comes up surrounding a controversial issue—I will be the issue. Only through time and good work do I stand a chance to become active in policy matters.

Another author explained:

Humiliation and degradation have no limits in the criminal justice system, and when I thought about and planned for the day of release, I did not perceive it as a day of gaining liberty in the free world. Freedom is a tenuous thing, especially for those labeled as felons, no matter how much time passes. Credibility is permanently lost in the eyes of those who are in positions of judgment. I saw the upcoming day of release from prison as the beginning of a struggle to live in the outside, and I know better than anyone that I had no idea how to live in the ordinary world.

So, planning for the future goes beyond finding a job and a place to live; it also involves the expectation that there will be people who will judge you on what you have done in the past, not on who you are or what you are doing in the present.

Awareness of a spoiled identity is common to all exconvicts. How one chooses to manage this identity varies from person to person, and from situation to situation. One question to face is under what conditions one should reveal one's deviant status. One convict criminology associate, not appearing in

this collection, wrote about the discrimination she suffered in a sociology master's program:

I am faced with the decision of whether to reveal the status when applying for Ph.D. programs. Disclosing information here has elicited a reaction: I would classify as close to shunning. Disclosure reveals more about the recipients of the information than it does about me. . . . My presence here has been tolerated, just as the presence of blacks here is barely tolerated. The question that I have struggled with. . . . is when and to whom to reveal my prior status. Even a good friend or employer can hurt me in their well-meaning desire to help me.

I am applying to Ph.D. programs between semesters. I don't plan to openly divulge my status. There is no need or purpose. Some individuals will know and some will not. I'll be damned if it isn't hard to figure out who should and who shouldn't. But when there is a chance of someone else being affected negatively by it, I tell.

Captured in these quotations are sentiments of uncertainty over when and what to reveal about oneself. On the one hand, exconvicts are aware of the potentially negative reactions if they reveal the deviant status, but they are also cognizant of the moral element involved in not revealing under certain circumstances, like when a friend goes on a limb to support them. At the heart of managing a spoiled identity is trust, something that inmates have not had a great deal of experience with while incarcerated.

This convict criminology author demonstrates that appearances can be deceiving:

I have learned that it is not so much what people say to your face as what they whisper behind your back. The problem was the "goody-two-shoes" few who had lived sheltered lives and found my convict background difficult to accept.

For still another member of our group, the decision of when or what to reveal was made for him, as is shown in the following excerpt:

I refuse to accept that I am stigmatized by the official misdeeds of a government. I am the wronged party and I want everyone to know what the criminal justice system does and why. Of course, my federal probation officer said that I had to inform any employer of my status and prior conviction so secrecy was never an issue.

In this case, having the government decide for you under what conditions you must reveal your deviant status removes one burden in the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, how one goes about revealing is still left up to the exconvict.

Another author in this book adds:

I have used no strategies. When I enrolled at the University [as a Ph.D. student], I informed every instructor that I had, that I am an excon. I am now teaching four classes at the University and my students, when
informed of my background, am amazed that I am an excon. I firmly believe that all but the most right wing professor believe in my innocence. In other words, the criminal justice system is paying every day for this mistake and I will not go away.

Regardless of the strategy chosen, most former prisoners realize that they are going to need some help in making it on the outside. Generally, the assistance is unsolicited and comes from unexpected places. This author reveals how he was helped by academics:

I do not suffer from the illusion that I have pulled myself up by my own bootstraps. I am one of a very privileged few who happened to encounter the most humane and generous people in a [academic] community. Jobs were offered so that I might make a living, and people were generous with themselves and their time.

One of the interesting aspects of convict criminology is the informal support provided by group members. This individual was an adjunct instructor before going to prison, and while in prison he received visits from one of the ex-convict professors who had mentored him:

In prison, I spent most of my time thinking about how I was going to make a living on the outside. I had it set in my mind that I could no longer write with any authority and certainly not be able to teach again. The only reason I am finishing my doctorate now is because of the support I received from one of the convict criminologists. He convinced me that I could both write and teach again.

Professors in this book have mentored numerous prisoners, literally from prison into graduate school and through graduation. A number of the recent Ph.D. authors in this book are the “academic children” of the more established professors. Convict criminology continues to grow as ex-convict graduate students join the group.

The following letter to Steve Richards shows another aspect of mentoring or assistance that has been offered to help former prisoners with problems that they are having in the free world:

I am writing to you in the hopes that you may be able to help me with a problem. I am aware from attending ASC [American Society of Criminology] conferences that you are a convicted felon and might be able to offer some valuable advice. I am currently completing my dissertation and have applied for a few faculty positions. I have recently been hired very briefly for two positions. That is until I advised the deans that I served time in various federal institutions. One of the deans stated that he admired my candor, but could no longer offer me the faculty position. The other lost his ability to converse intelligently and sent a letter stating that I was originally offered the position in error. . . . Perhaps it would be better if I did not disclose my [prison] record.

The answer is that although ex-convicts are not obligated to reveal their felony record when applying for academic positions, they should do so before signing an employment contract. Failure to do so will only create future problems with colleagues. The difficulty is that no matter who is informed (dean, department chair, search committee), ex-convicts cannot control the flow of information, including who may remain uninformed or misinformed. Despite the best intentions for full disclosure, the information may not be shared with everyone in the workplace.

Once the ex-convict is established in the profession, he takes on a new identity as professor. This metamorphosis requires many years of hard work. This convict criminology colleague shares his insight:

Now, 14 years out of prison and a recently tenured professor, I find it more tedious to have to explain my excon status to people who keep their own history hidden. I was a convict, then a graduate student, and now a professor. I dare say that the Dr. title cuts the stigma.

The convict, like every other Ph.D., has devoted many years to completing graduate degrees, overcoming many disadvantages. This may contribute to the ex-convict becoming an exceptional university colleague. At the very least, they know well the value of higher education as a medium for personal transformation.

Ex-convict professors may be especially talented at teaching across several related disciplines. They have firsthand knowledge of inequality, disadvantaged groups, deviant worlds, and how the criminal justice system operates. This experience with police, courts, jails, and prisons provides them with the ability to teach many different courses. One convict professor writes:

I continue to employ my excon status in the classroom and my academic research. Over the years, I have taught courses in sociology, criminology, criminal justice, corrections, community corrections, and law enforcement. I dare say, my students learn more than what is read in the standard textbooks or journals.

A number of the convict professors whose writing appears in this book are popular instructors who teach lively courses. Their real-life adventures provide colorful insight and spirited commentary, which challenge students to question their own deep assumptions and stereotypes about criminals and convicts.

For example, few students know that felons are subject to a long list of employment restrictions (Richards, 1995a; 62–72, 1998: 127–130; Richards and Jones, 1997). Many occupations and professions are closed to ex-convicts, and felons are routinely barred from both corporate and government positions. Universities remain one of the few places that remain open to hiring ex-convicts. A convict professor employed at a state university writes:

I still enjoy the surprise of students when they learn that their professor is an excon. I tell my students, as a felon, I cannot vote, teach school, or get an occupational license. I cannot even be bonded to work a cash register.
CONCLUSION:

THE MORAL OF THIS STORY

In our desire to manage the personal image presented to others we attempt to control how our exconvict status is represented. Still, we are not always able to maintain control over what others learn about us. So, each exconvict must decide whom, and with whom, to share his or her personal history. And, if he does not, someone else might do it for him. In addition, laws may force us to reveal our status whether we want to or not. And obviously, there are consequences that follow whatever decision is made.

In many ways, this is the hardest essay that I have ever been asked to write. It could be said that I am one of the more reluctant members in the convict criminology group. I am still extremely wary of owing myself, of pronouncing to the world that I am an excon and I am not ashamed of it. For example, my children and neighbors still do not know this little secret that my wife and I keep. Nevertheless, I know that my experience as a penitentiary prisoner has educated me in criminology and provided insights that inform my research in ways that a textbook education could not. Still, I am also aware of the risks that all the exconvict professors in this book are taking by "coming out" and honestly discussing their personal background.

My thanks to Gilbert Geis and Richard Petty for assistance throughout the preparation of this chapter, and to Stephen C. Richards and Jeffrey Reis for their enlightening comments. A earlier version of this paper was presented at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences meeting, New Orleans, March 2000.

Convict Criminology:
The Two-Legged Data Dilemma

ALAN MOBLEY