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Correctional Education Programs: Institutional Predictors Of Availability

Shamilya Marielle Mitchell

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CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: INSTITUTIONAL PREDICTORS OF
AVAILABILITY

By

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Bachelor of Science, Austin Peay State University, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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for the degree of

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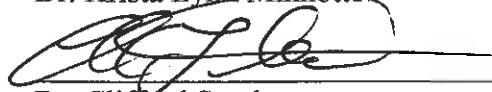
This thesis, submitted by Shamilya M. Mitchell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.



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Title Correctional Education Programs: Institutional Predictors of Availability

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Shamilya M. Mitchell

April 16, 2014

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To Jada, Aneesa, Samiah, Amya and Nehemiah

ABSTRACT

Being a convicted felon can limit a person's life chances. Adding a lack of education and training to that felony conviction can further limit the ability to find stable employment and transition back into society. Correctional education programs can reduce recidivism rates, but there are a wide variety of programs and not every facility offers them. This study examines the institutional characteristics that predict the availability of vocational training and college course programs in correctional institutions. The data for this study come from the 2000 Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities. Data were collected from 84 federal correctional facilities and 1,584 non-federal correctional facilities in the United States. Findings suggest that race has an effect on the availability of certain educational programs. Specifically, facilities with a larger proportion of black inmates are less likely to offer college course programs. It was also found that correctional facilities in the South are less likely to offer college course programs. These findings provide support for the "New Jim Crow" perspective, which suggests that mass incarceration is an important mechanism that reproduces inequality in the U.S.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When studying social inequality in America it is important to examine the relationship between incarceration and educational inequality. If education is an equalizing factor that can improve the life chances of anyone that chooses to attain it, then anything that restricts one's access to educational opportunities is worthy of study. Mass incarceration and the "War on Drugs" is an important part of the U.S. social inequality story because it has had a direct effect on the educational attainment of those that are victims of the justice system's practices of drug sweeps and mandatory minimum sentencing. Existing literature on the topic shows that these practices are discriminatory and result in significant racial inequalities in incarceration rates, voting rights, and access to housing, public benefits, and even federal financial aid (Alexander 2012). Since most drug offenders come from poor, disadvantaged neighborhoods, the only way for them to get a post-secondary education is through scholarships or federal financial aid. By delaying, or worse, denying them access to this benefit the government is all but guaranteeing that they stay in a cycle of poverty and imprisonment.

Most of the existing literature in this area focuses on individual experiences and outcomes, cohort studies of post-release outcomes, or program implementation and evaluation studies (Foley and Cao 2004; Jancic 1998). Other studies focus on General Education Development (GED) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs (MacKenzie

2005; Harlow 2003) because many inmates enter prison without a high school diploma, creating need in this area. Although important, there is little research about post-secondary education programs and even less existing research looks at the institutional factors that predict the availability of correctional education programs, especially vocational training and college course programs. But post-secondary training and education credentials are critical for success in today's labor market. Understanding the institutional factors that predict the availability of vocational training and college course programs may help us to see the magnitude of educational inequality and institutional racism created by mass incarceration, and it may also give us a means for testing the New Jim Crow theory. Alexander (2012) cites unequal systems of education as a part of both the old and new Jim Crow systems. Mass incarceration has replaced the separate but equal philosophy as a way to reinforce educational inequality and ensure unequal levels of educational attainment between whites and minorities, especially black males.

Mass incarceration began in the 1950's but it was more pronounced and widespread with the war on drugs that began in the 1980's after crack cocaine hit inner city streets (Alexander 2012). As a result of mass incarceration, more and more minorities were (and continue to be) funneled into a revolving door legal system that is more punitive than corrective or rehabilitative. Some have even argued that mass incarceration has replaced restrictive policies like the Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws as the "new" racial caste system (Alexander 2012; Petit and Western 2004; Wakefield and Uggen 2010). According to Alexander (2012), "a criminal freed from prison has scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a freed slave or a black person living free in Mississippi at the height of Jim Crow" (p.141). Though all convicted felons may face

discriminatory housing, employment, education, and public benefit practices after they are released, the level of inequality and discrimination experienced is greater for minorities within the larger US prison population. In some states convicted felons are not even allowed to vote (Alexander 2012).

The problem with mass incarceration and its relationship to education is two-fold. The first part of the problem is there is an educational deficit for many of those who become incarcerated. Typically, inmates enter the justice system with markedly less education than individuals in the general population. Specifically, incarcerated individuals are more likely to have an educational level of some high school or less, and less likely to have attended or graduated from college (Harlow 2003). Part of the reason for this is the largest proportion of inmates, regardless of gender and race, are those between the ages of 18 and 24. This is the age where most young people are leaving home and preparing for college or entering the labor market (Mercer 2009).

The second part of the problem is that upon release, these same individuals return to communities with few resources or jobs, leaving them with little to prevent them from reoffending (Mercer, 2009). Without providing inmates with education, training, or teaching them a marketable skill before releasing them, correctional institutions are almost guaranteeing their return. Without the ability to secure a legitimate means of generating an income some people may resort to illegal means of making money and risk re-arrest in order to feed themselves and their families.

There are a variety of correctional education programs available that can equip prisoners with the skills necessary for a career and life success. One report showed that in

2000, over nine in ten state prisons provided educational programs for their inmates and half of state prison inmates reported they had participated in an educational program since their most recent admission to prison (Harlow 2003:4). The report also showed that about a quarter of state inmates had taken basic education or high school level courses, and almost a third received some kind of vocational training (Harlow 2003:5). Despite the fact that educational programs are available at most institutions, not every facility offers programs that can help with successful reentry into the labor market.

In recent years there have been numerous debates about the need for correctional education and training programs to reduce or prevent recidivism for those that have been incarcerated (Mercer 2009). According to James (2004), over 10,000 people are released from prison every week and over 650,000 are released every year. A traditional model of adult correctional education assumes that the educational needs of prisoners will be addressed during incarceration so that people leaving prison will move immediately into the civilian workforce (Linton 2012). Although it may be difficult to document the magnitude of program outcomes, studies indicate that those that participate in correctional education programs have lower rates of recidivism and earn higher wages than those not receiving educational services while incarcerated (Mercer 2009).

Though there is compelling evidence of the benefits of prison instruction, state investments in correctional education programs have not kept pace with growing prison populations. Combined with a growing trend to eliminate or reduce educational programs due to costs, correctional educational program slots often fall short of population needs (MacKenzie 2005). While correctional education programs can and do move individuals closer to employment readiness, many individuals exiting incarceration still have unmet

educational needs. They either are unable to access education at all, or have greater needs in this area than can be met prior to release (Linton 2012). Being a convicted felon already places limits on a person's life chances. Adding a lack of education and training to the picture can further limit the ability to find stable employment and transition back into society. With the U.S. prison system at 137 percent capacity and staggering post release unemployment rates (Linton 2012), it is necessary to evaluate the institutional characteristics that shape the prevalence of educational programming in U.S. prisons and jails in order to reduce inequalities in education and access to employment following incarceration.

Research Question

There are many correctional education program options available, from apprenticeship programs to correspondence courses. These programs can teach inmates marketable skills and help prepare them for a variety of jobs that are available in their communities. Vocational programs and college courses are two kinds of educational programming that are especially important, yet some facilities do not offer educational programs. Given the importance of education for successful reentry, what are the factors that shape whether or not a facility will offer education programs? Specifically, how are factors such as racial composition, facility size, security level, gender distribution, and facility location related to the type of educational programs that are offered by a correctional facility? The need for, and importance of, correctional education programs has been established by previous scholars (Ward 2009; Vacca 2004; Mercer 2009), however, an examination of the institutional factors related to the availability of these programs is understudied. The goal of this thesis is to examine certain institutional

characteristics of prison facilities and determine whether or not they impact the availability of two different types of correctional education programs – vocational training programs and college education courses.

Chapter Two will briefly introduce a theoretical perspective pertinent to this topic and will review previous literature regarding the need for correctional education programs and their availability. To examine the relationship between racial composition, facility size, security level, gender distribution, facility location (region) and the availability of education programs, a quantitative analysis will be employed as described in Chapter Three. The results from the statistical analyses will be presented in Chapter Four. Lastly, the results will be discussed and related back to previous literature in Chapter Five. Chapter Five will also outline limitations of this thesis and provide implications for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspective

The work of Michelle Alexander (2012) identifies the US justice/penal system as a mechanism for creating and perpetuating social inequality. She argues that mass incarceration has replaced restrictive policies like the Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws as the “new” racial caste system. According to Alexander (2012), racism is highly adaptable and as society changes and evolves so do the rules and reasons used by those with political power to reinforce status relations and a racial hierarchy. According to her “New Jim Crow” theory, mass incarceration of black males is the latest way to oppress, marginalize, and exclude black males from society, serving as a vehicle for the continued practice of institutional racism and discrimination. Being black or “colored” is no longer a “legal” reason to exclude people from housing, jobs, government programs, and benefits. Instead, Alexander argues that the label of felon, convict, or ex-offender has replaced race in our laws, policies, and procedures, allowing them to exclude people that carry these labels.

The overrepresentation of minorities in the US justice system, especially in the prison population, has been a problem for decades. Approximately 12-13 percent of the American population is African-American, but they make up 40 percent of the almost 2.1

million male inmates in jail or prison (Western 2006:535). This racial inequality in incarceration is tied to educational inequality. According to Western, Kleykamp, and Rosenfeld (2006), the risk of imprisonment is lower for those with higher levels of education, with “nearly all growth in the risk of imprisonment [from 1983-2001] confined to non-college men” (p. 2291). Western (2006) found that regardless of race, high school dropouts were five times more likely to go to prison than high school graduates. Nevertheless, he also found that the combination of racial and educational inequality had a stronger effect on young black male dropouts who were 10 times more likely to be incarcerated than those that had completed high school. While “one in six black male dropouts per year went to prison in the late 1990’s ...less than 1 percent of college-educated black men were admitted to prison in the 1990’s” (p. 2293). Overall, the relative risk of imprisonment for a young, black, male, high school dropout was 250 times greater than that of a college educated white man (Western 2006:2294). The consequence is that more black males are in prison than are enrolled in colleges and universities. In 1980, there were 143,000 black men in prison and 463,700 enrolled in college. By 2000, there were 791,600 black men in prison and 603,032 enrolled in college (Western 2006:2294-5).

These race, education, and incarceration inequalities intersect to create extensive formal and informal barriers to workforce participation for some of the most socially vulnerable populations (Owens 2009). Instead of being a rare occurrence, these inequalities make incarceration “a defining characteristic of the life course of young black men” (Owens 2009). According to Alexander’s (2012) “New Jim Crow” perspective, mass incarceration is a deliberate and direct way to continue to discriminate

against, marginalize, and oppress those that are members of a racial minority, namely black males. Part of what makes mass incarceration so consequential is that it disrupts the education and employment trajectories of young black males by removing them from school and the labor market for extended periods of time and also preventing them from accessing federal financial aid. The longer these time periods last, the harder it is for them to return to school or work upon release. Once they have been incarcerated their likelihood of attending college or obtaining stable employment that pays a living wage is significantly reduced (Alexander 2012; Western and Beckett 1999).

Empirical Literature

The greatest way to limit the life chances of low-income and working-class men is to restrict their access to the labor market. Research shows that those on the prison trajectory do worse in the job market than the rest of the population before incarceration and their employment prospects are only damaged further as a result of being incarcerated (Western 2006). This is partially because those that have been incarcerated experience large gaps in their employment record. Men that have been incarcerated have significantly lower wages, employment rates, and annual earnings than those who have never been incarcerated (Western 2006). For all races, the employment situation deteriorates after incarceration because a person may spend on average at least six months to a year or more out of work following incarceration. But according to Western (2006), this “wage gap” is the largest for blacks and Hispanics. Combined with a lack of education and skills, this makes it nearly impossible for released offenders to meet the demands of the skilled labor market.

Importance of Education

Long periods of unemployment after being released from prison not only create a wage gap, they also increase the risk of re-offense over time (Owens 2009). Nevertheless, participation in correctional education programs can improve the employment prospects of former prisoners, thereby reducing their likelihood of reoffending. Correctional education and vocational training programs that provide a college degree increase employability and decrease recidivism among released offenders (Vacca 2004). Educational attainment during incarceration creates opportunity for participants by reassuring potential employers of the individual's skills, abilities and personal qualities as a college graduate; it is also seen as a way to account for time lost to incarceration (Lockwood et al. 2012; Owens 2009). Since uneducated offenders are more likely to be unemployed and unemployed offenders are more likely to recidivate, addressing the educational needs of inmates while they are incarcerated is crucial.

There is an abundance of support for correctional education programs in the literature which shows that education does more than just improve the job prospects of released offenders. According to MacKenzie (2005), as a person's level of education increases, so do their cognitive and problem solving abilities, social skills and self-esteem. This may be especially beneficial for inmates who may be lacking in these areas. Gendron and Cavan (1990) also find that participation in educational programs positively influences the psychological well-being of inmates, reduces rule infractions, and enrolled inmates serve as role models to other inmates. These positive influences also facilitate a culture of respect that allows prisoners to develop personal motivations for enrichment (Muth 2004). Educational programs also provide a change from the routines of daily

prison life (Vacca 2004) and may also help in the management and reduction of emotional concerns regarding familial relationships, image maintenance, violence, and inmate relationships by implementing positive influences that strengthen one's identity (Craig 1981; Smith 1988). Since most inmates have multiple problems and are at varying levels of cognition and educational attainment, the more opportunities that a person has to learn formally, the less likely they are to feed their criminogenic needs.

Many studies have demonstrated that educational programming reduces recidivism (Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman 2000; Jancic 1998). For example, Foley and Cao (2004) found that educational programs coupled with employment assistance led to a higher rate of post-release employment and a lower rate of recidivism. Stevens and Ward (1997) found that inmates who earned associate and baccalaureate degrees while in prison tended to recidivate at lower rates than a control group consisting of inmates that did not advance their education. Visian, Burke, and Vivian (2001) found that for every inmate that completes at least one college course, the individual was 22 percent less likely to recidivate within a 5 year time period. In addition, Chappell's (2004) analysis of post-secondary correctional education and recidivism showed that the recidivism rate did not increase during the first five years post release. Like academic programs, many vocational programs boast the same positive effects, including lower rates of recidivism, fewer parole violations, better employment upon release, as well as fewer disciplinary problems while incarcerated (Gerber and Fritsch 1995). Similarly, inmates also report a high degree of satisfaction with both vocational and academic programs (Moeller, Day and Rivera 2009).

Despite an abundance of research showing numerous positive effects of correctional education programs they remain vulnerable to political and economic influences. A major argument against the funding of educational programs is the excessive cost. This is a misconception given that even a minimal amount of educational programming decreases recidivism, resulting in a cost savings. In fact, one estimate suggests that the annual cost to educate an inmate is \$2,500, compared to \$25,000 to house an inmate (Hrabowski and Robbi 2002). Taylor (1992) argues that even if an ex-convict does recidivate, for each year that they are not in prison prior to re-incarceration, the government continues to save money by not housing them for that time period. Despite the potential savings for tax payers, there is a growing trend to eliminate or reduce educational programs for inmates due to cost (Hrabowski and Robbi 2002).

Funding is particularly important in shaping whether education programs are offered at a correctional facility or not. The process of deciding if and what education programs are offered in a correctional setting is highly politicized and it varies from state to state. At the federal level, the 1965 Higher Education Act provided Pell Grant funding for those that were low income to subsidize the cost of post-secondary education through federal financial aid. Inmates were allowed to use Pell Grant funding, which was welcomed by prison administrators because it reduced the cost of educating and rehabilitating prisoners for the institution. This practice ended in 1994 when the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was implemented, which prevented inmates from continuing to receive Pell Grant funds (Mercer 2009). The passage of this act left states and prison systems with the responsibility of educating inmates and funding higher education programs. This caused a dramatic decrease in the number of correctional

institutions that offered post-secondary education programs to inmates (Coley and Barton 2006). At the state level, senators, governors and legislatures have to get public support for funding certain programs. It is also hard to garner public support for correctional education programs because the public wants to see tangible results to ensure that their tax dollars are being spent in the most cost-effective way, but educating inmates does not provide that assurance (Mercer 2009). As a result, program availability varies by state political environment, the educational needs of the population, and whether or not a facility is a state or federal correctional institution (Coley and Barton 2006).

Prevalence of Program Types

When studying correctional education, it is important to assess a range of educational programs included in correctional settings. Most previous research focuses on only one form of educational program offered by an institution instead of a variety of programs (e.g., Foley and Cao 2004; Gerber and Fritsch 1995; MacKenzie 2005; Vacca 2004). However, when looking at only one form of educational programming there is a danger of inappropriately generalizing results to all education programs or having policies and programmatic decisions based on faulty interpretations of research data (Hrabowski and Robbi 2002). Therefore, in order to understand the factors that shape the availability of correctional education programs, it is important to look across different types of programming options.

Since correctional educational programs are a means to create employment opportunities and reduce recidivism, serious attention must be given to understand which programs best address the needs of prisoners. A 1995 survey conducted by the Bureau of

Justice Statistics of all state and federal adult correctional facilities showed that 94 percent had work programs and 84 percent had at least some form of educational program (Wilson et al. 1999). This survey also showed that over 75 percent of facilities offered basic adult education and GED programs and one-third provided access to college course work (Wilson et al. 1999). However, while two-thirds of the inmates at these facilities took part in work programs, less than 25 percent were enrolled in an educational program (Wilson et al. 1999). Other research shows that vocational training programs are fairly common, with 56% of state prisons, 94% of federal prisons, 44% of private prisons, and 7% of local jails offering such programs (Harlow 2003). More recently, Foley and Cao (2004) reported that 40 of the 41 states in their sample offered ABE and GED instruction, with an average availability rate within each state's correctional institutions of 91 and 92 percent respectively. Of these programs, the most prevalent were those that focused on the development of basic academic skills and the obtainment of a high school diploma or its equivalency (Foley and Cao 2004). Less frequently available were post-secondary education programs (60%) (Foley and Cao 2004). While informative, this study was only based on a sample of U.S. states, providing an incomplete picture of the true availability of correctional educational programs across the U.S. This thesis includes data from all 50 states and provides a more complete picture of the availability of correctional education programs in the U.S.

Programs that teach inmates competitive skills and provide them with job training are important and a necessity in today's economy and changing labor market. Vocational training programs can provide hands on training in a particular field like auto repair or welding and prepare inmates for jobs in specific fields upon release. According to Harlow

(2003), vocational training programs are popular among inmates because they allow them to learn particular job skills. If an inmate has an interest in a particular field, then a vocational training program may suit them because they usually take less time to complete and provide inmates with skills that help them find a job more easily upon release (Owens 2009). In addition, correctional facilities often enter into educational partnerships with different companies where a trainer from the company comes into the facility and teaches inmates a particular skill or set of skills. The companies then offer apprenticeship opportunities and agree to hire, or at least accept applications from, participants that successfully complete the training once they are released (Owens 2009).

Though vocational programs are popular and important, college course programs can also help prepare inmates for a career while improving their social skills and decision making skills. College education may be even more important in order to access higher paying jobs in a competitive labor market. Research shows that inmates that receive a college education are more likely to find employment (Coley and Barton 2006) and four times less likely to recidivate due to marked improvements in social and decision making skills (Vacca 2004), which, in turn, means lower crime rates and costs associated with building and staffing prisons. It is important to examine these programs and the factors that shape access to them separately since they can lead to different outcomes for participants.

Despite a great deal of literature on the necessity of correctional education programs and their benefits, as the statistics above show, not all facilities offer vocational programming and even fewer offer opportunities for college education. In addition, missing from the literature is a discussion of the institutional factors that may affect the

availability of these programs. Alexander (2012) argues that mass incarceration operates at the institutional level as a form of racialized social control; thus, understanding the characteristics of institutions that might be related to the availability of correctional education programs is important. How are factors such as racial composition, facility size, gender distribution, security level, and location of facility related to the type of educational programs offered by a correctional facility? If Alexander (2012) is right, and the prison industrial complex operates at the institutional level to marginalize young, black men, then we should find that prisons with higher proportions of minorities, especially young black males, are less likely to have educational resources available to them, especially college course programs. Understanding the effects of these institutional variables may lead to a greater understanding of the social and economic inequalities created by mass incarceration and a revolving door legal system that has become more punitive than rehabilitative for those labeled convicted felons.

Hypotheses

The literature on the effects of mass incarceration shows that the combination of racial and educational inequality has a stronger effect on young black males who are at greater risk of imprisonment (Western 2006). The literature also shows that twice as many black males under age 40 have prison records as have college degrees (Wakefield and Uggen 2010). In light of these findings, I offer the following hypothesis:

H1: Facilities with a larger proportion of Blacks will be less likely to offer college course programs.

Literature on the availability of correctional education also shows that loss of the ability to use Pell Grant funding for higher education programs for inmates has led to a dramatic decrease in college education program availability (Mercer 2009). The literature also shows that vocational education programs are often offered free of charge to inmates and have high rates of participation (Mercer 2009). Given the importance of examining different types of educational programming, I also offer the following hypothesis:

H2: Institutional factors such as racial composition, gender composition and facility size will be more important in shaping the odds of a correctional facility offering college course programs than vocational training programs.

In the next chapter I will discuss the dataset and sample, including a description of the data collection process, the measurement of each variable, and the analytic strategy used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Data and Procedures

A secondary data set, the 2000 Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities ($N = 1,668$), will be used to examine the institutional factors that affect the availability of two types of correctional education programs. The study was fielded for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) by the Bureau of the Census. The census included all state, federal, and private correctional facilities intended for adults (but sometimes also holding juveniles), including prisons, penitentiaries, and a wide range of correctional institutions such as, vocational training facilities, prison hospitals, and drug and alcohol treatment facilities for prisoners. Facilities were included in the census if they: “(1) were staffed with federal, state, local, or private employees, (2) housed primarily state or federal prisoners, (3) were physically, functionally, and administratively separate from other facilities, and (4) were in operation on June 30, 2000. Specifically excluded from the census were: (1) private facilities not primarily for state or federal inmates, (2) military facilities, (3) Immigration and Naturalization Service facilities, (4) Bureau of Indian Affairs facilities, (5) facilities operated by or for local governments, including those housing state prisoners, (6) facilities operated by the United States Marshals Service, (7) hospital wings and wards reserved for state prisoners, and (8) facilities that hold only juveniles” (BJS 2004:2).

Questionnaires were mailed to each facility during the last week of June, 2000. Reminder notes and telephone and email follow-ups were made during the fall of 2000, resulting in a final response rate of 100 percent. Data were collected from a total of 84 federal correctional facilities and 1,584 non-federal correctional facilities. The questionnaires collected data on facility characteristics, including where the facility was located, who operates the facility, physical security, and capacity. Inmate information was also collected, including the number of inmates held on June 30, 2000, the gender and race/ethnicity of inmates, inmates by facility security level, and inmate health information (BJS 2004). In cases where there was missing data the Census Bureau made estimates based on existing data.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Vocational training programs were one the first types of educational programs offered in prisons because they were viewed as having the ability to eliminate inmate idleness, provide inmates with marketable skills, ensure post release employment, and lower correctional costs through cooperative arrangements with private industry (Ward 2009). As the U.S. economy shifts from an unskilled labor market to a more skilled and specialized market, a college degree is increasingly important for those that want to obtain stable employment that pays a living wage (Western 2002). Because these two types of educational programs are particularly important, for the purposes of this study, there will be two separate dependent variables. One measures if a facility offers

Vocational Training programs and the other measures whether a facility offers *College Course* programs. These are dummy variables coded as 1 = yes and 0 = no.

Independent Variables

The main independent variable in this analysis is racial composition. Given the race-based nature of mass incarceration in the U.S. (Alexander 2012; Western, Kleykamp and Rosenfeld 2006) the proportion of Black and Hispanic inmates in each facility is included. In order to calculate the proportion of Black and Hispanic inmates housed in a facility, each race population was divided by the total inmate population for the facility.

Several other variables are also included. The size of a facility may shape the availability of educational programs. Statistics show that facilities with higher inmate populations often receive more federal funding and thus may be able to provide more options for education and training for inmates (Mercer 2009). Thus, *Facility Size* is included as an interval ratio variable that refers to the total inmate population of a facility.

Despite a lack of literature on the impact of inmate security level and the availability of correctional education programs, it is reasonable to assume that security level may play an important role in shaping access to educational programs. For example, minimum and medium security level inmates are not usually incarcerated for extremely violent offenses; they are most likely drug offenders serving 10 years or less in prison so they may be more likely to be given the opportunity to participate in educational programs to reduce their likelihood of returning to prison or repeat offense compared to violent offenders who will not be returning to society. The level of supervision and confinement of the inmates was measured on three levels: minimum, medium, and

maximum security. To calculate the total proportion of inmates held under each category of supervision, the number of minimum security males and females was added together and then divided by the total inmate population. The same method was used to calculate the proportion of medium and maximum security level inmates for each facility. Only the proportion of *Medium Security* and *Minimum Security* inmates are included in the models because inmates within these classifications are more likely to be allowed to participate in education programs.

According to Harlow (2003) women in State prisons are more likely than men to have received a high school diploma or attended an institution of higher learning. Since women are more likely to have completed high school, correctional facilities may be more likely to offer education programs beyond the GED and ABE level when the inmate population has more women than men. In addition, female inmates have a lower rate of violent offenses and serve shorter sentences than men (James 2004), and are 30 percent more likely than male inmates to participate in vocational training and college course programs (Harlow 2003). Due to these gender differences, a measure of a facility's *Gender* composition is included in the model and refers to the proportion of females within a facility population. This proportion was calculated by dividing the total number of female adults by the total inmate population.

There is limited information about the location/region of a correctional facility and the effect that it has on the types of educational programs it offers. Existing literature suggests that this is due to the fact that correctional data is aggregated so it masks significant state and regional variation (Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Mercer 2009).

Region is a categorical variable that refers to the geographic location of the facility. Each

facility was classified as falling into one of four regions, the *Midwest*, *Northeast*, *West* and *South*. These are coded as dummy variables where if a facility was in a certain region it was coded as 1 = yes. The *Midwest* serves as the comparison category in the models.

Analytic Strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the institutional predictors of the availability of correctional educational programs. Hypotheses were formulated to address direct relationships between facility characteristics (racial composition, facility size, security level, gender composition, and region) and the availability of college course and vocational training programs. In order to analyze these hypotheses a quantitative analytic strategy will be employed in which univariate and multivariate analyses will be conducted. First, descriptive statistics will be presented to provide a summary of the sample characteristics. Second, logistic regression analyses will be used to examine the factors that affect the availability of correctional education programs. Since the dependent variables are dichotomous and coded as dummy variables, binary logistic regression analysis is most appropriate to use. Two separate models will be tested. Model 1 will test the relationships between racial composition, facility size, security level, gender composition, region, and the availability of vocational training programs. To test Hypothesis 1, which predicts that facilities with a larger proportion of Blacks will be less likely to offer college course programs, model 2 will test the relationships between racial composition, facility size, security level, gender composition, region, and the availability of college course programs. To test Hypothesis 2, which predicts that institutional factors will be more important in shaping the odds of a correctional facility offering college

course programs than vocational training programs, the results of models 1 and 2 will be compared.

In Chapter Four the descriptive statistics and results from the logistic regression analyses will be presented. In Chapter Five the results will be discussed and related back to the existing literature. Chapter Five will also outline limitations of this thesis and provide implications for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1. For the education programs offered, 54 percent of facilities had vocational training programs available and 29 percent had college course programs available. On average, correctional facilities had a total inmate population of 783 inmates ($SD = 917.245$). On average, 43 percent of inmates in a facility were Black, 40 percent were White, and 10 percent were Hispanic. For security level, on average, 55 percent of inmates were held at the minimum custody level, 26 percent were held at the medium custody level, and 12 percent were held at the maximum custody level. Female inmates were 11 percent of the population on average in these facilities. For region, 19 percent of facilities were located in the Midwest, 16 percent were located in the Northeast, 19 percent were located in the West, and 46 percent were located in the South.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics (N = 1668)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Range</i>
Vocational Training Program	.54	.498	0-1
College Course Program	.29	.452	0-1
Facility Size	782.53	917.25	5-7223
Percent Black	.4297	.23201	0-1
Percent White	.3994	.21103	0-1
Percent Hispanic	.0952	.14077	0-1
Total Max	.1152	.24274	0-1
Total Med	.2611	.34581	0-1
Total Min	.5510	.42585	0-1
Total Females	.1129	.29384	0-1
Midwest ¹	.1888	.39151	0-1
Northeast ²	.1601	.36678	0-1
West ³	.19065	.39293	0-1
South ⁴	.4604	.49858	0-1

¹This region includes the states of : ND, SD, ID, MN, IA NE, KS, MO, WI, IL, MI, OH, IN; ²This region includes the states of : ME, MA, RI, CT, NJ, NY, PA, NH, VT; ³This region includes the states of : WA, OR, CA, MT, ID, WY, NV, UT, CO, AZ, NM, AK, HI; ⁴This region includes the states of : OK, TX, AR, LA, MS, TN, KY, AL, FL, GA, SC, NC, VA, WV, DE, MD, DC.

Logistic Regression Results

Logistic Regression results are presented in Table 2. Two models are presented, in Model 1 the dependent variable is Vocational Training; in Model 2 the dependent variable is College Course programs. Each model includes the same independent

variables. Model 1 predicts the odds of a correctional facility offering Vocational Training Programs controlling for Facility Size, Racial Composition, Security Level, Gender Composition and Region. The analysis indicates that the model is significant and explains 42 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. The first significant independent variable in Model 1 is Facility Size, as the inmate population of a facility increases the likelihood that vocational training programs are offered increases ($OR = 1.002, p < .001$). For Security Level, both Minimum and Medium are significant, with the higher the proportion of medium and minimum security inmates, the greater the likelihood of a facility offering vocational education programs ($OR = 5.619$ med; 2.309 min, $p < .001$). Gender Composition is also significant, the higher the proportion of female inmates, the more likely a facility is to offer vocational training programs ($OR = 2.04, p < .001$). Region is also significant. In relation to facilities located in the Midwest, facilities in the Northeast ($OR = 1.832, p < .01$) and the West ($OR = 1.618, p < .05$), are more likely to offer vocational training programs.

Model 2 predicted the odds of a correctional facility offering College Course Programs by Facility Size, Racial Composition, Security Level, Gender Composition and Region. The analysis indicates that the model is significant and explains 10 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. In Model 2 the first significant independent variable is Facility Size, as the inmate population of a facility increases, the likelihood that college course programs are offered increases ($OR = 1.000, p < .001$). Racial Composition is also significant, the higher the proportion of black inmates, the less likely a facility is to offer college course programs ($OR = .472, p < .05$). For Security Level both Minimum and Medium are significant, meaning the higher the proportion of medium and minimum

security inmates, the greater the likelihood of a facility offering college course programs ($OR=3.039$ med, $p<.001$; $OR=1.535$ min, $p<.05$). Gender Composition is also significant, the higher the proportion of female inmates the more likely a facility is to offer college course programs ($OR=1.525$, $p<.05$). Region is also significant in this model, in relation to facilities in the Midwest, facilities located in the South are less likely to offer college course programs ($OR=.632$, $p<.01$).

TABLE 2. Binary Logistic Regression Results Predicting Availability of Correctional Education Programs (N = 1668)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Vocational Training Programs			College Course Programs		
	β	Std. Error	Exp(β)	β	Std. Error	Exp (β)
Facility Size	.002	.000	1.002***	.000	.000	1.000***
Percent Black	.200	.311	1.222	-.751	.307	.472*
Percent Hispanic	.445	.473	1.560	-.364	.455	.695
Total Med	1.726	.255	5.619***	1.112	.228	3.039***
Total Min	.837	.211	2.309***	.429	.104	1.535*
Total Females	.957	.195	2.604***	.422	.186	1.525*
Northeast ¹	.605	.218	1.832**	-.322	.195	.725
West ¹	.481	.222	1.618*	-.255	.201	.775
South ¹	.016	.169	1.016	-.459	.151	.632**
Constant	-2.560	.286	.077***	-1.230	0.250	.292***
R ²	.421			.096		

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; ¹The Midwest was used as the comparison category.

Even though Racial Composition was not a significant variable in Model 1, it was in Model 2. Model 2 provides partial support for H1 by showing that the higher the proportion of black inmates, the lower the probability of college course programs being offered. Surprisingly, the proportion of Hispanic inmates is not significant in either model. These analyses also provide support for H2. Institutional factors, such as gender composition and facility size, were important in shaping the availability of both college course programs and vocational training programs. Specifically, the higher the proportion of female inmates, the greater the likelihood that vocational training and college course programs were available. Facility Size is also significant in both models, meaning the larger the inmate population, the more likely a facility is to offer both vocational training and college course programs. Nevertheless, Racial Composition, namely the proportion of black inmates, is only significant in Model 2, which predicts the availability of college course programs.

The next chapter provides an in depth discussion of the results of the analyses. Limitations and suggestions for further research will also be described. In summarizing the finding of this thesis, they will be related back to the New Jim Crow theory, and the previous research in this area. Finally, a conclusion will be provided that will briefly summarize the study along with the overall impact of the findings on the larger body of research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This thesis explored the institutional factors that influence the availability of correctional education programs, namely vocational training and college course programs. Since there is very little research that examines the institutional factors that may influence the availability of correctional education programs, conducting a study that does examine those factors is a contribution to the literature. The application of the New Jim Crow perspective to the educational inequalities created and perpetuated by the Prison Industrial Complex also provides a unique contribution to the literature. Although the reality is education will not end racism or discrimination, studying the mechanisms in place that preserve certain forms of discrimination is essential to understanding social inequalities in life chances.

Vocational training and college course programs are the focus of this thesis because they have the greatest impact on the ability to obtain and maintain stable employment following incarceration. The more education or training a person has, the more likely they are to be able to find and keep a job after release from prison. Past research focuses more on inmate characteristics than the characteristics of correctional institutions. If Alexander (2012) is correct and the New Jim Crow operates at the institutional level through mechanisms such as mass incarceration to interrupt the life course trajectory of young minority men, then we should observe the effects of

institutional characteristics on the availability of programs designed to improve life chances, such as correctional education programs. The application of the New Jim Crow theory to the explanation of the existence of the educational inequality that mass incarceration creates is essential to understanding a number of patterns including recidivism rates, post-release employment rates, and the discrimination that inmates face upon release. Including race in this discussion is especially important when we compare the incarceration rates of black males to their employment and college enrollment rates. Data from the 2000 BJS Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities were used to answer the question how are institutional factors such as racial composition, facility size, security level, gender distribution, and facility location related to the type of educational programs that are offered by a correctional facility?

Discussion of Results

Findings indicate that though they are beneficial, correctional education programs are far from universal. Only 54 percent of correctional facilities offer vocational training programs, while only 29 percent offer college course programs. The findings also indicated a significant positive association between facility size and the availability of vocational training and college course programs, such that larger facilities are more likely to offer vocational training and college course programs. These findings support the existing literature which has established that larger facilities receive more federal funding (Mercer 2009). Passage of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act denied inmates the right to use Pell Grant Funds to access college course education while incarcerated. This essentially defunded higher education programs in correctional facilities (Mercer 2009; Coley and Barton 2006). The fact that correctional facilities have

such low rates of availability for vocational training and college course programs provides support for Alexander's (2012) theory and further evidence of the institutional factors operating within the New Jim Crow system to keep young black men specifically in a continuous cycle of poverty and incarceration.

The results showed that the larger the proportion of female inmates in a correctional facility, the greater the probability that vocational training and college course programs will be offered. This finding is supported by existing literature because it shows that female inmates are more likely to have a high school diploma and some post-secondary education before incarceration. This substantial gender difference could also be attributed to the affect that motherhood has on decision making. Women that have children may be more likely to seek opportunities for rehabilitation so they can secure employment to care for their children upon release. Previous scholars have shown how incarceration disrupts the educational trajectory of young black males in particular. Since minority males, especially black males, are viewed as aggressive, they are more likely to have interactions with law enforcement and be incarcerated at an earlier age than females which can lead to more interruptions in their education and greater educational deficits (Alexander 2012; Western 2006). The earlier these males begin this "prison trajectory" the less likely they are to be viewed as able to be rehabilitated.

The findings indicate that relative to facilities in the Midwest, facilities located in the Northeast and the West are more likely to offer vocational training programs, but are not more likely to offer college education programs. The West has the highest population of inmates even though only 19 percent of the nation's prisons are located there. Sixteen percent of the nation's prisons are located in the Northeast. It is possible that for the West

this finding may be related to facility size. The Western region of the nation has the highest rate of incarceration, thus, funding for these facilities may allow them to only offer programs that can be taught to a large number of people at one time in order to maximize participation and make thorough use of resources. The case may be the same in the Northeast because their incarceration rates are second to those of the West. Although the South was surprisingly no less likely to offer vocational programs relative to the Midwest, correctional facilities in the South are significantly less likely to offer college course programs to inmates. This is a particularly important finding given the racial history of the South and the fact that 46 percent of correctional facilities are located in this region.

Together these findings provide support for Alexander's (2012) theory that mass incarceration operates as the New Jim Crow. As industrial jobs are outsourced to foreign countries and technology becomes a larger part of the U.S. economy and labor market, the need for a college education becomes stronger. Those who are undereducated are not prepared for the labor market, making them more likely to be incarcerated (Wakefield and Uggen 2010). Incarceration further reduces the employment prospects for those with few job skills and low levels of educational attainment by creating gaps in employment histories and restricting/preventing them from accessing higher education programs that would increase their employability. This leads to unsuccessful transitions back into society upon release and increases the rates of recidivism. Those with felony convictions are in essence pushed out of the labor market, have less work experience, and less education and job skills.

Finding that the racial composition of a facility is not a significant predictor of the availability of vocational training programs may not support the New Jim Crow Theory, but other findings indicate a negative association between racial composition and the availability of college course programs. Specifically, the larger the proportion of black inmates in a correctional facility the less likely the facility is to offer college course programs. This finding is central to the theoretical perspective guiding this thesis, the New Jim Crow Theory. According to Wakefield and Uggeman (2010), mass incarceration causes inequality by removing potential workers, eroding the already shaky job skills of the incarcerated, and stigmatizing the formerly incarcerated. Western, Kleykamp and Rosenfeld (2006) found that over time the only racial inequality that increased with incarceration was educational inequality. This same study also found that only college educated black men were spared the increased risk of incarceration experienced by young black men. Considering the protection from the risk of incarceration that a college education provides, if the purpose of mass incarceration is the oppression, discrimination and marginalization of young black men, then limiting college course programs in institutions where they are the majority of the population is necessary to perpetuate the inequality. In terms of the New Jim Crow perspective, Alexander (2012) found that racism is highly adaptable. As one system of racial control collapses there is a period of confusion and then transition, in which those that are most committed to maintaining a racial hierarchy search for a new means of achieving their goals; educational inequality is part of the means and mass incarceration is that system of control. The findings of this thesis support the idea that racism, in this case institutional racism, is highly adaptable. They show that correctional institutions with high

proportions of black males are less likely to offer college course programs. Knowing that a black male is more likely to go to prison than to college (Western, Kling and Weiman 2001), and that inequalities within the prison system reflect those that exist within society, one can see the mechanisms in place to keep young black males uneducated and out of the labor market.

Implications

The main goal of this thesis was to examine the institutional predictors of the availability of vocational training and college course programs. This is something that has not been done in prior research. The key finding was that racial composition does affect the availability of college course programs. In order to ensure that inmates reenter society successfully and reduce the likelihood that they recidivate, political action needs to take place. The US Department of Justice should recognize the value in educating young black males and weigh it against the costs of mass incarceration. The cost of the continued funneling of young black males in and out of a revolving door legal system is greater than providing them with the educational resources necessary to help them establish lasting attachments to the labor market. Giving incarcerated black males the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts equalizes the possibilities for success and minimizes educational inequality.

The main findings of this thesis do not suggest that education is the key to solving the problem of racism. Considerable political and social change needs to take place racism can begin to be fixed in this country. In the context of correctional education, employment, and inequality, college education has the power to interrupt the cycle of

inequality and make the playing field a little more level. This will not necessarily remedy the societal discrimination that newly released offenders face, but it gives them something more than they had when they went in and research shows (Owens 2009; Petit and Western 2004) that it reduces the likelihood that they will reoffend.

Limitations

A few limitations to this thesis should be observed. To begin with this study makes the assumption that all correctional facilities operate under a set of core policies and procedures that are similar, if not the same, in order for them to be compared to each other. The data set used is from 2000 and there may be more significant factors that affect the institutional availability of correctional education programs presently, that were not accounted for when this data was collected. Because this was a cross sectional study, we cannot determine causality, only that the variables are associated with each other. Longitudinal research, then, is needed to more firmly establish the direction of causality. Subjective indicators of the availability of vocational training and college course programs also introduced the risk of misinterpretation of items and may misrepresent the overall level to which a factor actually predicts availability and the levels of educational inequality. Lastly, because this study was conducted in the United States using a large sample, studying other parts of the world may offer further insight into varying levels of educational inequality.

Suggestions for Future Research

Because there is such little research focusing on the institutional predictors of the availability of college course programs, more research should be conducted. More research on the decision making processes involved in developing correctional education curriculum needs to be done; this can offer insight into why certain institutions offer college course programs and some don't. This can also help to determine how to get college course programs to be offered more widely across institutions. More research that includes disaggregated regional data needs to be done so that the variance in the availability of correctional education programs by region can be explained. Lastly, more studies on successful programs that have seen high rates of participation, completion and low rates of recidivism of longer periods of time need to be done because such programs can serve as examples.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the relationships between vocational training and college course programs and facility size, racial composition, gender composition, security level and region. Because there is little research on the institutional characteristics that predict the availability of vocational training and college course programs specifically the results of this study give us some understanding of these important variables. The results of this thesis also help support the New Jim Crow Theory. The main finding of this thesis is facilities with large proportions of black, male inmates, and those that are located in the South, are less likely to offer college education programs. This finding is essential to understand because current social trends are indicating more black males are being released from prison without the job skills or education necessary to secure a job that pays a living wage or to prevent re-offense. It also helps us to understand Alexander's

(2012) assertion that mass incarceration serves as one of the main mechanisms for the continued oppression of, marginalization, and discrimination against black males. All in all, the findings of this thesis have highlighted the importance of exploring the institutional level variables that may predict the availability of vocational training and college course programs, including the role that race and region play.

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