Effects of Local-Level Culture on Prison Reentry

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Nature of the Problem

• About half of all state and federal prisoners are black men
   – 730,000 inmates are released annually (West, 2010)
   – 93% of prison inmates will be released (Petersilia, 2003)

• Recidivism is a confusing measure: 60% recidivism has no clear meaning
Social Control Theory

• Concentrates on societal norms and values, and how they influence an ex-offender’s decision to re-offend (Sampson & Laub, 1993)

• In neighborhoods where social capital is high, there is little crime and little need for formal policing (Coleman, 1988; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Putnam, 1995).
Recidivism: mainstream perceptions

- Unemployment
- Inadequate housing
- Poor healthcare
- Lack of education
- Need for M/H or substance abuse treatment
Mainstream Society’s Perception of Theoretical Causal Process

- Education → ↑ Social Capital
- ↑ Social Capital → ↑ Employment
- Employment → ↑ Work Experience

↑ Frequent exposure to positive role models → ↓ Recidivism

↓ Recidivism → ↑ Work Experience

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What is a cross-cultural approach to recidivism?

• Cross-cultural interpretation of recidivism defines it by intra-community values, norms, and expectations.
• Mainstream perceptions are ethnocentric.
• Collective mainstream culture was not affected by civil rights deprivation. Therefore, ....
  – education leads to a non-criminal lifestyle
  – everyone has equal access to education
  – everyone has equal access to employment and complementary privileges of mainstream society.
Black community culture

• Black culture suffers effects of centuries of civil rights deprivation

• Black cultural expectations adjusted to life w/o civil rights
  – w/o access to education and its social and economic mobility
  – w/o freedom of vertical mobility
Black community culture

• Assumption: imprisonment in black communities has a cultural meaning different from mainstream community

• Black culture interprets imprisonment & recidivism within cultural conditions affected by civil rights deprivation:
  – Intra-community economic opportunities are limited
  – Intra-community education is relatively low
    • National data on reading: 3rd grade level
  – Highly restricted social mobility

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How do we help ourselves?

• Cannot rely on mainstream community
• We need culturally competent approaches
  – Adjust expectations to cultural norms and expectations
• Culturally competent reentry programs
• Culturally competent personnel
• *Black communities’ responsibility to reduce imprisonment and recidivism rates*