Prisoner Reentry and Reintegration Workshop Panel:

Issues and Themes in Research on Reentry

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Title:
Unpacking the Black/White Dichotomy: Examining Narratives of Reentry Among African American, West Indian, and Hispanic Mothers

Abstract:
Existing research on prisoner reentry has extensively demonstrated the various burdens individuals encounter post-incarceration. Yet, criminological literature is often constructed along a black/white dichotomy that blurs racial-ethnic variations in reentry narratives. African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women are typically considered together as “minorities,” with little attention to how social and cultural differences might impact the reentry process. This study draws on semi-structured interviews to unpack the experiences of groups viewed collectively as “minorities.” In doing so, it examines racial-ethnic variation in narratives of reentry among African American, West Indian, and Hispanic formerly incarcerated mothers. Although there are shared obstacles across all three racial-ethnic groups, the women discussed reentry experiences that consisted of ethnic clashes, a “foreigner” experience, and cultural distinctions in familial acceptance and assistance. The findings demonstrate issues with the homogenization of minority groups and also suggest the importance of examining racial and ethnic variation in narratives of reentry.