A RESEARCH NOTE:
THE SOCIO-SPATIAL CONSEQUENCES OF INMATE RELEASE IN NEW YORK CITY

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, approximately 656,000 individuals leave facilities of incarceration each year.\textsuperscript{1} Disproportionately, they are members of two ethnic groups—African-American and Latino. They are also overwhelmingly male and from low-income backgrounds. The spatial distribution of inmate release is also not equitable (Lynch and Sabol 2001). Metropolitan areas tend to be affected more than ex-urban and rural areas of the United States. In particular, central city neighborhoods and inner suburban ring communities—where much of urban poverty is situated—are playing host to the majority of inmates leaving jails, prisons, and detention centers. This situation is further highlighted when criminal justice data is aggregated geographically and visualized in maps.\textsuperscript{2}

Social science has established the importance that spatial relationships play in the social outcomes of individuals and households. Where people live and the means by which they use the city can be determinative of their personal health and welfare. For example, neighborhood-level attributes such as poverty concentration and quality of housing stock can significantly affect the capacities of individuals to access resources, maintain healthy family relationships, and remain productive at schools and workplaces. The so-called “neighborhood effects” literature—a loose assemblage of social scientific studies on the importance of supra-individual and ecological variables—represents one of the most fertile areas of research.

This Research Note fills an important void in the research on inmate release by examining the role of space in the resettlement of individuals who are exiting jails and prisons and returning to urban neighborhoods. The paper focuses on individuals who are going through resettlement, with the aim of illuminating the potential consequences of spatial movements for individual social outcomes.

The study draws on a sample of ex-offenders\textsuperscript{3} resettling into New York City neighborhoods. The sample is comprised of men and women who have been released from New York state facilities

\textsuperscript{1} In the year 2003, this represents a four-fold increase over the last 20 years (Harrison and Beck 2005). The data for New York alone are striking: New York State Dept of Correctional Services (DOCS) releases 25,000 pp per year to the city, and New York City jails release close to 100,000 (Nelson, Deess and Allen 1999).

\textsuperscript{2} See http://www.spatialinformationdesignlab.org/publications.php?id=38 for reports done by the Spatial Information Design Lab.

\textsuperscript{3} There are many terms that are used to designate individuals who have served time in a facility of incarceration. The ethnographic experience of Venkatesh suggests that individuals have a clear preference for “ex-cons” and “ex-offenders” over the term created by those in advocacy circles: “formerly incarcerated.” The reasons given suggest that “ex-con” and “ex-offender” carry a politicized connotation: they speak more accurately to the subjective perception of individuals as being shunned by society and needing to struggle for re-integration. “Formerly incarcerated” was viewed by many as a politically naïve label motivated by middle-class prerogatives, specifically, by the need to afford dignity. Ultimately, however, people felt that the middle-class label occluded the political (and politicized) aspect of the experience of serving time—which lasts well into re-entry. We take an agnostic posture, deploying both “ex-offender” (to highlight our subjects’ preferences) while using “formerly incarcerated” on occasion in order to capture this necessary difference of perspective.
of incarceration in 2006. All these individuals have allowed research staff to observe closely their movements and personal interactions during the first thirty days of their re-entry into the city.

The objective of this Research Note is both to draw on the empirical study to identify patterns in ex-offender resettlement,⁴ and also to develop ideas and methods of analysis that might be used in a more comprehensive future research initiative. In other words, the observations, interviews and analyses in this paper are meant to be both suggestive and provocative. They are intended to help wider philanthropic and policy-making communities understand the value of basic social science research. Observing responsible research protocols, the paper does not spell out policy recommendations in any great detail, but rather offers suggestions that those in the advocacy and helping arenas might want to consider in developing fundraising and service delivery strategies.

⁴ We use “resettlement” broadly to refer to the complex and dynamic process by which individuals re-enter civil society. This has three dimensions: a perceptual re-orientation to the city; a material readjustment in which the person in question finds work and locates sources of income (or in-kind assistance); a symbolic realignment of one’s personal identity.
LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous research initiatives documenting the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons (Rose and Clear 2002). Researchers have identified communities disproportionately impacted by re-entry; they have studied barriers to resource provision and social inclusion of individuals with criminal records; and, they have worked with advocates to design policies and programs that help reduce recidivism. However, there has been considerably less interest among researchers for a systematic analysis of the initial post-release time period—although it is commonly understood that the early experiences of release and reacquainting can be quite significant for long term resettlement. There has been even less research on the spatial component – the geographic concentration of formerly incarcerated individuals, and the availability of resources in certain areas. Before discussing this spatial component, we will briefly address the literature on the first 30 days after release, which can be a critical moment in the overall attempt to re-integrate into the social mainstream, and is considered to form the crucial time period in which a returning individual embarks either on the path to successful reintegration, or on the other hand, to recidivism (Nelson, Deess and Allen 1999).

During this initial period, individuals re-establish ties with family and friends, they re-form critical parts of their identity by connecting with employers and public institutions, they begin the search for resources and support, and they become reacquainted with their communities and their city. While this process can take years, if not longer, there is scholarly evidence to suggest that the first few experiences can be determinative of future pathways and outcomes (Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999). That is, the initial period can be formative in creating opportunities, building feelings of self-efficacy, reducing the likelihood for recidivism, and creating the conditions for healthy and productive long-term societal reintegration. The first year after release is critical in determining whether an offender will continue involvement in criminal activity and return to prison after having been released from custody.5

In considering the factors that contribute to the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals, some important questions are: how well are prisoners prepared to reenter society? What skills do they have to get jobs? What assets to they have to help them stay away from crime and drugs? What role do their families play in the prevention of recidivism? A Vera Institute of Justice study (Nelson, Deess and Allen 1999) sought to answer these questions by following a sample of 49 people released from jail and prison. The First Month Out focused on the first thirty-days of resettlement into New York City. Reintegration – as opposed to recidivism – turns on such factors as

work, family, drug and alcohol abuse, housing, and access to resources. Although reentry is clearly fraught with obstacles, in a more positive light researchers suggested that the 30 days offer a unique opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals to take positive steps toward the path to employment, abstinence from drugs, good family relations, and a stable, crime-free livelihood (See LaVigne, et. al. 2003; Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999; Petersilia 2003). They proposed that better preparation before release is the only way to really take advantage of this window of opportunity (Nelson Deess and Allen 1999). In the next few paragraphs we will examine the five factors mentioned above.

Housing is a number one concern of returning prisoners and greatly impacts their capacity to transition successfully. It is important to note that housing options for former prisoners are limited as they may be excluded from public housing and do not have access to other federal funds for housing. Some parole conditions may also limit parolee’s ability to distance themselves from others who are involved in illegal activity. Such circumstances may then preclude living with family and friends who may offer shelter, thereby depleting important housing options. New York City residents serving time in upstate New York are far removed from their return destination, for example, and consequently do not have the opportunity to locate and secure housing prior to release. These restrictions, combined with the fact that the inventory of low-income housing continues to shrink, means that parolees are seldom able to access affordable housing options upon release (Legal Action Center 2006). In a study of prisoners returning to the New York City, by Metraux and Culhane (2004), 11% of returning prisoners from 1995 to 1998 entered a homeless shelter within the first two years of release. Furthermore, homelessness can also be correlated with initial incarceration—Mumola (2000) cites the Bureau of Justice Statistics that state that 13% of prisoners scheduled to be released had been homeless in the year before their arrest. Housing is also linked to the other factors – for example, it is often necessary to have a permanent address in order to apply for a job.

The acquisition of steady employment is essential in establishing a livelihood that will keep a former prisoner away from illegal activities that could lead to recidivism (Nelson, Deess, Allen 1999). At the same time, the criminal record that these returning prisoners carry around with them is an impediment to attaining employment. A study in 1999 (Harlow 2003) reported that 40% of prisoners in state and federal prison in 1997 had no high school diploma or GED; this low level of education among the prison population has obvious ramifications for constraining the job options of former prisoners returning to society. The study, it should be noted, did not say with any precision the ways in which timing of employment procurement might lead to successful outcomes—e.g. it may be significant whether individuals find employment right away or do so after they are able to settle into

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6 For a summary of challenges to prisoner reentry see Travis (2005) and Tavis, Solomon, and Waul (2001).
their homes. Two main causal mechanisms may link the experience of imprisonment to the risk of unemployment or low earnings:

1. **Stigma**:

2. **Punctuating effect of incarceration on the life course** (incarceration of young men disrupts entry into stable career jobs with strong earnings growth); **agglomeration effects** (spatial concentration of incarceration can potentially compound the barriers to meaningful employment for released prisoners and their peers).

In the Vera Institute study (Nelson, Deess, Allen 1999), abuse of drugs and alcohol was shown to be a huge factor in recidivism. The stress of reintegration can also lead to the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol. A study in 1999 (Mumola) shows that over 40% of prisoners have drug related offences. The return to communities and social circles where drug and alcohol use occurred can lead to a relapse in abuse.

Another factor in successful reintegration is physical and mental health and the need for adequate care. Hammet, Roberts, and Kennedy (2001) have shown that prisoners have disproportionate health problems, particularly in infectious diseases such as HIV, hepatitis C, and Tuberculosis, which they experience at between 5 and 10 times the rate of the rest of the population. Furthermore, about 16% of prisoners are affected by mental illness (National Commission on Correctional Healthcare 2002). Men and women exiting jail and prison need to find adequate health care and services in order to achieve stability in their lives.

Family is an issue of paramount importance in reentry. Over half of state prisoners are parents of young children (Thoennes 2002). Family can prove to be an enormous financial engagement that people confront upon their release. Many prisoners face exorbitant child support payments; one Massachusetts study (Thoennes 2002) found that a quarter of prisoners owed an average $25,000 in child support upon their release. But family ties can also be a crucial asset. The Vera study (Nelson, Deess, Allen 1999) found that prisoners with stable family situations were more likely to make a successful transition. Family can also make up for deficiencies in other areas, such as by providing housing, making connections for employment, and providing support to stay away from drugs and alcohol. Nelson, Deess and Allen (1999) found family support to be a key factor in preventing drug use, finding a steady job, and staying off the streets.

Finally, access to adequate services is also key to reintegration into society. Lynch and Sabol report that “inmates reentering society now are more likely (1) to have failed at parole previously; (2)

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7 A study focusing on the consequences of a criminal record for employment outcomes reveals ex-offender status as a “negative credential” representing a unique mechanism of stratification, with important implications for racial disparities (Pager 2003).
not to have participated in educational and vocational programs in prison; and (3) to have served longer sentences, which attenuates ties to families” (2001, 3). These three facts make access to services upon release all the more imperative. Given that the vast majority of ex-offenders return to communities that have depleted institutions (as we will see in the next section), an outstanding question is whether individuals are able to draw on resources and services outside their residential community—particularly in those sites where there may be schools, jobs, training, financial assistance, etc., to assist their transition. This last question has not been adequately addressed in the literature.

This last factor of resources brings us back to the question of space and the way that space has an impact on the experience of reentry. It is important to take note of certain demographic and geographic characteristics concerning reentry. It is especially important to note that the populations of men and women reentering society from jail and prison are concentrated in specific geographic locations; formerly incarcerated individuals return disproportionately to urban areas. Lynch and Sabol (2001) note that returning individuals concentrate in several of the larger states, and within those states, concentrate in urban areas, and within those urban areas, in certain neighborhoods. “A number of the areas with high incarceration (and eventually release) rates are located in or near working-class neighborhoods” (Lynch and Sabol 2001, 15). Furthermore, in crucial finding by the Urban Institute, communities receiving the highest concentration of prisoners are also the least equipped to support their reintegration (La Vigne and Kachnowski 2003; La Vigne and Mamalian 2003; La Vigne and Thompson 2003). Communities that receive large concentrations of released prisoners are already struggling with high rates of unemployment and poverty, crime and gang activity, and a dearth of available jobs. There is a disparity between the residences of returning offenders and the location of skill-appropriate jobs that have moved to the suburbs (Brennan and Hill 1999).

Due to these highly concentrated geographic pockets of formerly incarcerated individuals, the relationship between space and reentry must be examined. Space has important consequences for the way in which reentry occurs. The use of urban space is important to understand because in US metropolitan areas, services, jobs, and resources are geographically distributed in non-equitable ways, such that some communities have high-capacity—in the form of employment opportunities, human

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8 Lynch and Sabol (2001) report that prisoners increasingly return to “core counties” which is an area that contains that central city of a metropolitan area. They report that the estimated percentage released into core counties went from 50 in 1986 to 66 in 1996 (Lynch and Sabol 2001, 15).
9 The Justice Mapping Center has embarked on an endeavor to map such concentrations. “Million Dollar Blocks” is a term coined by the Justice Mapping Center to highlight the opportunity costs of mass incarceration concentrated in small neighborhood areas, http://www.justicemapping.org/. For a longer explanations and illustrations of concept see: Architecture and Justice by Cadora and Kurgan http://wwwlarch.columbia.edu/SIDL
services, community-based organizations, resource-rich schools, etc.—while others have suffered decades of neglect and are depleted of institutional resources. Moreover, patterns of segregation and spatial exclusion continue to confine city dwellers use of space—despite great advances made in civil rights laws that have eased freedom of movement.

The Urban Institute established the Reentry Mapping Network (RMN) to apply a data-based and spatial approach to prisoner reentry (La Vigne, Cohen, Brazzle 2006a). They explain, “mapping is one of the most powerful means of capturing important concentrations, patterns, and spatial trends in data, especially as they relate to community well-being. Maps graphically illustrate underlying concentrations and patterns that clarify the ways in which social phenomena, such as prisoner reentry, affect communities” (La Vigne, Cohen, Brazzle 2006a, 1). Their goals are fourfold: 1) to better understand reentry at the local level (2) to engage with key local actors in tackling reentry issues (3) to encourage better interaction and collaboration between state and local authorities, and (4) to promote peer learning on reentry strategies. The UI seeks to fill a gap in the literature using targeted mapping to understand the patterns of spatial distribution of prisoner reentry. They ask: “where are prisoners returning?” “What are the characteristics of areas with high concentrations of releases?” “Are resources available to those in need?” “Are reentry programs succeeding?” (La Vigne, Cohen, Brazzle 2006a).

While the Urban Institute study has used mapping and spatial analysis as a tool to better understand prisoner reentry, few studies added the dimension of time by using time diaries in conjunction with geographic analysis. The use of time diaries and spatial analysis has been mostly limited to the field of transportation analysis. Notably, a 2000 study by Mei-Po Kwan recognized the significance of the temporal dimension and its interaction with the spatial dimension in structuring the daily space-time trajectories of individuals. The analysis provided a way to better understand how people navigate the city through the day given a set of transportation options thereby highlighting the spatial and temporal densities in transportation options. Beyond transportation there have been few studies that use these methods to understand an individual’s relationship with his or her neighborhood, and more specifically, the individual’s interaction with the city and its services through time.

Space plays a key role in answering questions about how the formerly incarcerated navigate the city once they return home and also what urban conditions they might encounter here. On the other hand, little has been done to evaluate and analyze the interaction of space and time during the first 30 days after release from prison or jail. Building on previous literature, our pilot study has introduced a methodology that combines aggregate spatial data with intimate and personal portraits of our subjects over the span of the first 30 days out. The time diaries offer a unique view into the
lives of the people in question, and help to better understand how they use – or don’t use – urban space to facilitate reentry, and what physical challenges they face.
METHODS & DATA

This paper draws on the use of time diaries, an established area of social scientific inquiry (Gersbuny and Sullivan 1998; Ploeg et. al. 2000), to understand inmate re-entry patterns. The protocol developed by the research team is intended to document use of the city by individuals during their first thirty days of resettlement. Each member of the sample was observed closely during this period in order to identify patterns in their use of the metropolitan region. The research staff stayed in close contact with informants in order to document with precision their movements during the first thirty days of release. In the first week, staff met with the informant daily. Once the subject became acclimated to documenting their movements, research staff called them every two days (or so).

The informants were not chosen in a random manner, and so we should be careful when generalizing from the experiences of those in the sample to the wider universe. Instead, the findings here are intended to illuminate the pros and cons of the use of time diaries with spatial analysis — and to suggest some practical benefits of replicating this study on a larger scale (using experimental procedures that would then permit generalization).

The methodological framework employed by this research initiative has never been utilized in the study of inmate re-entry. Typical understandings of this population derive from evaluation of service delivery programs, which tend to have limited data on ex-offenders, or interview-based studies that do not probe individual experiences with any significant depth. By contrast, this study draws on intensive relationships that the research staff developed with ex-offenders; these relationships enabled staff to gain trust and confidence of the sample participants.

The high levels of trust allow the research to examine aspects of the lives of the urban poor that are typically closed off to scholars—in particular, individuals in our sample were forthcoming about household patterns that might jeopardize the leaseholder’s capacity to receive government assistance and any immersion in illegal/underground economies. Given that illegal work is so central to the lives of the urban poor, the study can shed light on aspects of re-entry that are, to date, unknown.

The sample of individuals is representative of the inmate population in the State of New York. The sample includes 19 people, 11 men and 8 women. The majority of the sample resides in areas of high poverty and minority makeup (See Maps 2 and 3, and Table 1).

This study lacks a control group that would enable us to follow experimental research protocols. A purely experimental design would facilitate the comparison on our sample of ex-offenders with a control sample of individuals chosen randomly from the wider population. Because this is a pilot, and financial and time constraints had to be taken into consideration, this type of control was not instituted. Future research initiatives that seek to mimic or utilize this methodology
would be well served to create a comparison among ex-offenders and those who lack a background of incarceration.

The individuals involved in the study not only recorded their activities at a given point in time, but they also recorded where they were located—to the closest city street intersection. Once the time dairies were completed, the location of the participants’ activities were visualized and coded on a map using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Each individual recorded a location for every hour of the 30-day study. Geo-coding the location of participants’ recorded activities in GIS allowed for further analysis regarding the spatial relationship of activities and the demographics of the communities in which those activities took place.

Beyond understanding the character of the communities in which participants navigate, the use of GIS provided a way to quantify the intensity of an activity at a given location as well as measure how far activities were happening from what they considered to be their home. Density and spatial clustering algorithms were used to determine the locations in which an individual spent the most amount of their time, and again visualized on a map. These clustering maps allowed for the analysis of localities where prisoners spent the majority of their time, and thereby established, or created their specific neighborhoods in the city. Because the data were displayed on maps which have scale, GIS also allowed the researchers to quantify distances between activities thereby providing a way to determine how far an individual may have had to travel for a given activity. The ability to quantify and display activities in time and space allowed the researchers to better understand the geographic constraints associated with those returning from prison. The maps created this way, from this visualization of quantitative analysis, show neighborhood associations as well as markings that established an individual’s path through the 30 days.

Secondary data are utilized in this paper. Statistical summaries as expressed in tabular and graphic form all utilize census data from 2000.

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11 It should be noted here that we did not have a record of the mode in which individuals traveled from one activity to the next. This made it hard to quantify distance in terms of a cost. For example - I may live in Brooklyn and technically a mile from the mid-town as the bird might fly. However, because my subway options might be limited it could take me roughly and hour to get to work. Therefore, while an activity might be close to my home it might have a high cost for getting there. Any future study should include a way to measure transport mode as well as activity location.
Map 1 shows the geographic distribution of the home bases of the participants in our study. Individuals in the sample represent all New York City boroughs except Staten Island.
While New York City is not as segregated as certain other cities, it is important to recognize that individuals in the sample disproportionately reside in distinctively minority, low income areas. Maps 2 and 3 highlight both the poverty and racial segregation of New York City neighborhoods, and marks the home sites for all those who participated in our study; in each map, the darker regions are areas of higher minority and poverty concentration, respectively. Table 1 further describes this distribution by providing the number of participants living in areas of various percentages of minority population and residents below the poverty level.

Table 1. Percent Poverty and Minority Status of Home Sites for all Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Minority</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>% Below Poverty</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>&gt;31</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some notable differences are explored in the following sections, but for now, it is worth stating that the work experiences of participants in the study tend to be rooted in areas of New York that have had historically low levels of employment and services. Although once these neighborhoods might have boasted well-paying jobs, in the last thirty years, the effects of de-industrialization have made these neighborhoods home to mostly menial forms of labor—poor paying, lacking benefits, and with no union representation.

One of the central concepts advanced by Wilson (1987) is that the urban poor are “socially isolated,” i.e., they have a limited relationship to mainstream social institutions. In general, the sample has minimal experience with legitimate work, thereby conforming to the portrait that Wilson draws in his research. If they worked at all, they have tended to move from one poorly-paying job to another, with limited opportunities for mobility and advancement.

However, their poverty status does not restrict their vision or their aspirations. Nearly all the informants spoke of the desire to find meaningful work—everyone recognized steady work as a means of staying out of jail, although not all believed that they would find good jobs upon re-entry.
ANALYSIS

This study points to the importance of individual attachment to place as a key moment in the resettlement process. As Robert Sampson has argued (Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley 2002), attachment to place can mediate the capacity to develop and sustain contact with social institutions, access resources, and otherwise engage in productive behavior. How one integrates into a local environment can affect the capacity to fulfill basic social tasks like parenting, seeking work, and developing intimate relationships—of course, this is not a passive process since individuals also proactively create that environment through deliberate, intentional acts to build networks and relationships. The process of settling into a local environment can, in other words, impact social outcomes like income generation, employment status, social mobility, and the welfare of families.

We begin, therefore, by looking at some general patterns in our sample vis-à-vis the attachments of individuals to the metropolitan landscape.

The resettlement process is spatial and temporal in nature. The synchronic element, which is addressed below first, revolves around the perceptions and expectations that individuals have of regions of the city. These could be areas to which they are directly returning or places where they believe work is available. The critical element is the means by which an individual’s perceptual and practical relationship to space becomes meaningful. The diachronic dimension of resettlement is captured in our focus on the initial thirty days of re-entry.

“Not Belonging”: Space and Resettlement

The resettlement process for formerly incarcerated individuals can be a difficult and sometimes harrowing experience. On the one hand, they face structural hardships (Brennan and Hill 1999). For low-income minorities, the ever-present challenge is to find work that pays a living wage. With considerable periods of time away from the labor market, they may likely have lost the opportunity for re-skilling and continued vocational education; thus, their own human capital profiles can render them unattractive in a technologically changing labor market. Accompanying these exogenous obstacles are endogenous factors that stem from the individual’s personal life history: s/he may have family and parental responsibilities, debt obligations (to banks or simply to relatives who helped sustain them while incarcerated), and mental and physical health-related problems; moreover, the individuals are all struggling to restore various personal relationships that were put on hold.
Another key obstacle arises because the metropolitan landscape may no longer be recognizable to persons leaving jails and prisons. Depending on the length of time served, an individual returning to the city may not see familiar landmarks, businesses, organizations, and so on. They may lose a tactile sense of navigation—which can make them feel less connected to their neighborhood. Families, friends, and relatives who once lived nearby may have moved to other areas of New York (and beyond), thereby severing a key source of support. These developments can come as a surprise and so persons may not have time to prepare for the loss of connections, sources of emotional support, those who might lend them money and find a job, etc.

The combination of these changes can heighten a feeling of isolation among inmates. As one member of the sample said cogently:

*You get off that bus, you wake up and its like you don’t know where you are anymore. You were used to living in this little cell and all you could think about—five years for me—was about coming home. Then, you get home and you don’t know anybody, you don’t really know your ‘hood, so you know, it can be depressing. The not belonging feeling.* (Luca)

The “not belonging” feeling that Luca describes can, of course, produce a number of manifest responses and psychic states that all depend on factors such as support systems, individuals’ capacity for change, and so on. But, structurally, we can say that there is a tension that arises for individuals because the need to re-integrate into the city can be affected by the discomfort and unfamiliarity with the social space to which one is adjusting.
In addition to the health challenges faced by the formerly incarcerated, the inability to feel rooted or to have a stable residential or mailing address may have further consequences for physical and mental health status. One respondent named Ray noted that he had been unable to locate his State ID upon release and that he struggled to obtain diabetes related medication, which was previously prescribed to him by a doctor who has since left a neighborhood clinic. Ray recounted how he turned to non-prescription drugs in order to “self medicate” in an attempt to alleviate such stresses and physical pain. Ray was put on a waiting list for a drug treatment program but was told he would be unable to begin the program for a few weeks to one month’s time. On numerous occasions, Celia, who is in her mid-thirties, would complain of headaches and spoke about how not being formally housed complicated her ability to manage her asthma and depression.

*I have depression and asthma—I forgot my pump again and it hurts going up the stairs or just walking around for too long. During the day, I have to keep moving because you can’t loiter. I have not been taking my depression medication because it knocks me out and so I am not taking my medication like I am supposed to because I don’t want that [feeling] when I am outdoors. It’s hard to keep moving with nowhere to really go…especially when you are in pain.*

She would also express concern regarding her personal safety. Celia would often sleep beneath an underpass area, which she found to be a safer space than the city shelters where one risked being “robbed or beaten.” Although she was familiar with a few men that often stayed in the underpass area, they were not always with her and many persons unknown to her would come and go on a regular basis.
In our sample, one can identify two separate and distinct responses to the “not belonging” feeling. On the one hand, there are individuals for whom the lack of familiarity with their community acts as a springboard. They are liberated from friends who may have exerted pressures to be involved in crime, they may feel free from gangs, and they may welcome new activities and opportunities. This does not necessarily produce “success” in terms of a smooth integration into the city. However, the liberation from the local neighborhood can send individuals into other parts of New York, thereby increasing potential work opportunities and life experiences. As John said, “You got all these niggers you don’t have to deal with no more, so you can get out and start looking around. Go places maybe you never seen before.” John describes the 30 days of looking for work as an opportunity to become acquainted with heretofore new areas of the city. His movements across the New York metro region are represented in Map 4. The levels of poverty and minority makeup in the neighborhoods where John works are displayed in Table 2 (Both Map 4 and Table 2 appear on the following page).
Table 2. Poverty and Minority Percentages in Neighborhoods where John Works *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>high poverty</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>low poverty</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>high minority</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>low minority</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high poverty</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>low poverty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>high minority</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>low minority</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Job site is a location where legal or illegal work was performed or where respondent went for interview appointment, training, school, employment
** high poverty > 20% people in poverty, high minority > 50% people of color
Another group, however, draws inward. They report that, while incarcerated, their family and friends have undergone important changes over the life course. By contrast, their own growth has been stunted, which lowers their self-esteem. For this group, the patterns of utilization of space are markedly circumscribed. We identify this restricted perceptual and mobility framework as *attenuated localism*.

For example, consider Michael (Map 6). In the first thirty days of this person’s resettlement, we can see a starkly different use of New York. The area of northern Manhattan is the primary area of activity; indeed, there are few moves outside the community. Neil, whose movements are represented in Map 5 shows an even more restrictive profile (Map 5 and 6 appear on the following page).

It should be noted that an attenuated localism can either be a productive or a limiting state depending on the individual in question. For example, someone who works full time out of the home may show spatial use as limited as a socially isolated person with few connections to mainstream institutions. However, for the poor who are re-entering society, the likelihood is that they are not settling immediately into such a stable work/home life. The majority of persons in our sample report few social connections that they can utilize to find resources, jobs, and social support. Therefore, the chances are greater that, if they are remaining close to their home base, the attenuated localism they are experiencing is a limiting state. It is probably reducing their capacity to forge a productive lifestyle because they are effectively removed from opportunities occurring in other parts of the city. We explore the consequences of these relative attachments to, and use of, space below in further detail.
MAP 5: Neil stays home and has no job

MAP 6: Michael has no job, limited movement
It is important to recognize that the urban poor do not always have one stable house or apartment that acts as their home base, from which they begin to develop and fashion a relationship to their community and city. It is well documented that any particular low income resident will likely live among networks of households, the majority of whom are also low income (Aschenbrenner 1975; Stack 1974; Venkatesh, 2006). Individuals are unable to pay rent on a regular basis and contribute to a household based around a nuclear family. Instead, they are embedded in various networks of exchange such that they are active contributors to several households—e.g., they may conduct day care in one home, they could pay partial rent in another, and they might eat and sleep in yet another domicile. The result is that any given household is the sum of various persons who have different roles and responsibilities. Any given household has individuals who perform different labor. Stack identifies this loose assemblage as “domestic kin networks” (Stack 1974).

For our purposes, it is important to recognize that these circumstances translate into multiple sites of domesticity. An individual who is asked “Where do you live?” may find the question difficult to answer because they may spread their lives over several domiciles. They may also have attachments to several neighborhoods. In other words, an ex-offender in our sample may have several different places that might be potentially be regarded as “home.” And while they may have significant personal attachments to one or another place, it well may be the case that none of their living sites afford the stability and comfort that the term “home” connotes. Members of our sample repeatedly told us that they keep personal property in multiple locations, their own children will live in several different places in addition to potentially changing schools in the middle of the academic year, and they have different intimate partners spread out over several apartments in the city. These circumstances may all be tenuous and so require significant expenditures of emotional labor—as well as other costs (e.g., transportation, money, food, time).

As former inmates undergo re-entry, individuals report psychological anxiety because they are never quite sure how their lives will spread across the city.

*Everyday I’m thinking, okay, my auntie is going to kick me out of my home’ or my baby won’t let me stay with her… I got one kid out in Brooklyn, so I’m trying to be out there, and then I got one here [in E. Harlem] and I’m doing all I can just to see them. But, that means I’m always moving, and I don’t have no time for nothing else. Last week, I got a job out in Jamaica, but I couldn’t take it because my old lady said I had to be closer in case she needed someone to watch the baby. I mean, what can I do? If I had a car, I’d move all around, but I can’t afford that.*

These are the thoughts of Tony, a 33 year-old father of two children.
Before they were incarcerated, an individual may have lived in one or two places, but these spaces may no longer exist or the arrangements may have changed during their tenure in jail. Thus, upon re-entry, they often struggle to understand where they will live, how they will co-habit with intimates and children, and the nature of their obligations and rights over private space.

We cannot under-emphasize the importance of this challenge from the point of view of the individual re-entering the city. The informants in our sample placed great emphasis on the uncertainty that they experienced when it came to returning “home.” Many had no idea whether they would be welcomed in any of the apartments in which they used to live. They were unable to secure commitments from friends and relatives while in prison regarding their ability to stay in the household—so, upon re-entry, they did not know how long they might be able to stay in a particular household. A few expressed a preference for settlement houses that might act as intermediaries between incarceration and civil society—in jail, they were unable to make calls, contact relatives, and understand the options that might be available to them.

This indeterminate state can exert unique pressures on low income people—constraints that are not faced by those in the middle class, for whom the existence of a single stable home is affordable, and so feasible. To cite a common case, a young adult may share responsibility for taking care of an infirmed parent/guardian who lives in another location. Or, as in the case of Tony (see above quote), their children may be spread out over multiple apartments in the city. These circumstances will pull them across two or three ‘home bases’, which create inordinate demands on their personal and emotional resources.

Shawn in Map 7 moves between several locations, including his mother's apartment in East Harlem, his Aunt's place in East New York/Brownsville, and other family and friends around the city. He wanted to find one home, but he was unable to obtain a commitment from any one of his relatives—their promises that he could join the household were broken once they determined that he might not find work so easily and begin contributing to the household income. This uncertainty also made it difficult to hold onto employment because he was unsure about his commute and never completely assured that he would have a place to live.
MAP 7: Shawn's Multiple Home Bases
Despite the fact that individuals may have to re-form their lives around multiple locations, a common refrain in our sample is the clear preference for a single site around which one can organize daily life. As Katrina, a young mother of two said:

*I haven’t seen my children; I can’t rely on my husband. I just want to know that I can stay somewhere. I mean, I got all these things I have to do. I have to get my ID; I have to look for work. Now, I got one kid out in Brooklyn, I got another one here [in Manhattan] with me. It’s hard and I feel like I can’t get started doing nothing productive for myself and my family because I just keep going back and forth. (Why can’t you keep your children in one place?) Because I can’t afford to be paying rent, and my family don’t trust that I can take care of them.*

Others echoed Katrina’s urgent feelings of obligation to establish a secure residential site for themselves and for their families. They also expressed that their family takes precedence over other needs.

Many of the people re-entering civil society expressed the need to stabilize their housing situation in the first few weeks. They would have preferred to look for work at a later point; however, the pressure to find employment and income made this a luxury, and so unfeasible. And, the consequence of a lack of income means that individuals often go into debt with family, friends (or gang members and loan sharks), which can return them to the positions of vulnerability that they are trying to avoid.

This raises the point that programs seeking to support individuals during the first few weeks might productively focus on housing-related needs. It is not sufficient to determine that an individual has a place to stay. Their lives may be more complicated. Case workers who are providing services might want to inquire about the precise relationship that an individual has to domestic sites around the city—is the place stable? Does the individual sleep there? Do they have the right to claim membership in the household? Understanding the contours of an individual’s spatial commitments might shed productive light on the capacity of individuals to make further changes in their lives—such as enrolling in training programs, looking actively for work, taking up a job full-time, etc.

**Punctuated Equilibrium: Time and Re-settlement**

Resettlement can also be looked at as a processual activity. The first thirty days are particularly intensive for ex-offenders because of the tremendous shift in the structure of their daily life, the high emotional peaks they experience upon returning to civil society, and the tremendous expectations they have (including the pressures that others place on them) for a productive integration into the social mainstream.
The feeling of not belonging—rooted in the unfamiliarity of the individual with the places they once inhabited—can also be viewed from a temporal perspective. Gaining awareness with the urban ecology does not occur in a smooth, linear process for those undergoing re-entry—a comparable point of reference might be those in the armed forces who return to their homes after a period of duty abroad.

We can borrow Stephen Gould’s notion of punctuated equilibrium to capture the erratic and unpredictable nature of resettlement. Writing in the context of evolutionary biology, Gould surmised that most species show developmental tendencies not as a gradual process, but instead as a period of sharp shifts that interrupt seemingly dormant states. In the context of re-entry, individuals adapt to their social/physical ecology through a complex series of adjustments. There are moments of reflection, heightened activity, advancement and retarded progress. We are not intending to offer a fully developed theory of this process in this paper. To do so, we would have to spend much more time with the subjects under study—a process that should be done in an extended version of this methodology.

Nevertheless, it is possible to isolate some key parts of this punctuated structure of re-entry and resettlement. The individual’s return to the city and to a home can be jarring and, if there is a truism, it is that ex-offenders constantly point to the serendipitous nature of the re-entry process. As Jaime, a 24 year old who spent a little over a year in Rikers because of drug arrests, explained:

> You think you know what it’s going to be like and then, like, BAM! It just hits you. You got your kids, you got your mother crying all the time ‘cause she thought she’d never see you again. And, then, you got people who think you went out and killed somebody. Shit, I just sold a few bags, I wasn’t gone for more than a year, but people think I shot the president or something. And, you just have to deal with it, because you never know what’s coming. You got to take it all one day at a time.

Of course, the re-entry process is particular to each individual and below we identify some of the general patterns in the acclimation process that hold across our sample. However, it is important to note that individuals in the sample constantly point to the inability to withstand surprise exigencies that arise—a fee for a work uniform, the need to purchase materials for training, day care for children, and so on.

In observing their process of acclimation, it is apparent that there are particular social statuses that promote stability more readily than others. Two in particular deserve mention from the point of view of reentry. First, as respondents locate full-time work (or something approximating permanent employment), their social movement around the city is altered. In Map 8, the individual
procured a full-time job at the 22nd day out of jail and his use of the city dramatically shifted to a more regular, stable pattern of spatial movement.

**MAP 8: Spatial Movements Before and After Job Acquisition, Day 22**
Similarly, as individuals develop the capacity to live in a household with their children and intimate partners, they experience a transformation in psychological makeup. Both of these changes in social status (i.e., in work and family life) will manifest in sharply shifting patterns of geographic mobility. In most cases, as individuals find work and maintain a household, their movement about the city is stabilized. Not only does it grow less erratic, but it is also governed by purposive activities that help spur the development of productive relationships with the social mainstream—e.g., seeking job training and counseling, visiting church, and so on leads them into regular contact with persons in civil society. Given that opportunities for illegal work can be spread all around the city (see below), when their movement becomes regular, it is likely that they are not seeking out underground economies across the metropolitan region.

It is best to understand regularity of movement and social stability as an interactive process. As Tony suggests,

You know when things get better, because its like all of a sudden, you wake up and you know what you're going to do each day, where you're going to go, who you're going to see. You don't have these people asking you to do shit you don't want to—you know, things that get you in trouble. You just keep to yourself and you get back into the 'same shit, different day' mode.

On the one hand, as people's movements in physical space grow predictable, they create a rhythm to their lives and grow more attentive to supporting their households in a productive manner; on the other hand, as people make ends meet successfully, they grow more predictable in terms of their ecological mobility. Whatever the direction of causality—and it is likely in both, we can see the changes to an individual's movement as a result of finding jobs, taking care of children, and so on.

In this sense, resettlement is best understood developmentally as a nonlinear process. The adjustment to civil society is not a smooth trajectory of steadily increasing improvements, nor is it a steady regression leading eventually to recidivism. Instead, it proceeds in fits and starts. One of the key attributes of re-entry is the capacity to face obstacles such as the need to find money for transportation or purchase of a State ID, the need to locate emergency day care for children, and so on. These situations are usually material or financial in nature and they can arise suddenly, often without warning in the first thirty days. One of the respondents described the following set of circumstances:

When I got out my auntie let me live with her, and she said I could stay there for nothing until I got a job. I found some work, and was feeling real good. But, one day, my girl told me she had to go to work and I had to take care of my kid—Missy. I couldn’t go to work, and I couldn’t find nobody to take care of Missy. So,
just like that, my boss said I couldn’t be trusted no more. If I had ten bucks, I could have paid the lady next to me to take care of Missy. But, I didn’t have nothing but bus fare.

These incidents occurred frequently for those in our sample and in nearly all cases, individuals struggled to locate cash, day care assistance, a car owner, etc. who could provide immediate assistance.

Stated slightly differently, individuals re-entering society can find themselves on a precipice. Many speak of circumstances as turning points in which progress can easily be impeded if they are unable to find money or support. The inability to find day care may lead to conflicts with an employer, for example; or, the failure to find money for transportation may lead an individual to temporarily pursue illegal economic opportunities. This does not necessarily cause irreparable harm—e.g., an immediate return to jail/prison. But, it can lead to moments of crisis that must be addressed. It is possible to see these crisis moments manifesting in shifts in daily rhythms. These rhythms may be spatial in nature, such that the patterns of movement about the city are altered as key points of adjustment arise. Thus, once again, spatial movements can reveal vulnerability in the social status of individuals.

The process of resettlement is punctuated because social stability is a function of the development of ties to social institutions. This is not a taken-for-granted process for those undergoing re-entry. The respondents in the sample stated that they felt uprooted as a result of their incarceration. As they return to communities, a core part of their struggle to become citizens is making contact with organizations such as schools, social service agencies and churches.

The capacity to create these relationships can significantly change their mode of integration into the city. In particular, these institutional relationships help stabilize their transition. As one respondent said:

My pastor is the one who’s helping me. I was embarrassed to call him because he would yell at me, but I knew it was worth the pain. (How does he help you?) Let’s say I need to see my kid and my momma don’t want me to see her, my pastor will make a call. Or he might let me work at the church for a few bucks to help me get a little change. Its small stuff, but it helps.

Many of the respondents will utilize the services of the clergy to act as intermediaries when their relationships with family or employers begin to sour; interestingly, most did not attend church regularly over the course of their lives, and only came to organized religion while incarcerated. Principals, social workers, and even bodega store owners can play a similar role for individuals. The
important point is that individuals are looking for people who have a public status in the community, i.e., those who will act as references or provide them assistance as needed.

Moreover, the process is unpredictable because one functional relationship with the mainstream will help create other. As Tony stated, “I was just wandering, couldn't get my foot into anything. But once I got a place to stay, I found a job, then I got some money and then it was like everything was okay—I didn't have to deal no drugs no more.”

Individual transitions from a correctional institution to the community may be influenced by personal and situational characteristics including the person's social environment of peers and family. Jennifer, who “used to prostitute” and heavily uses crack cocaine, once met with us while in the hospital after she had been attacked by a friend's dog that had kicked Jennifer after she refused to give her friend any money for drugs. Jennifer, who has “stayed clean” since her release, talks about struggling to relate to some of her family and friends upon return but also shares her hopes of joining up with her partner, moving out of state to live with her sister-in-law, and ultimately reuniting with her children.

My family members—even my mother—gets high [crack cocaine] and that's why it's a money issue. That's why I had to prostitute myself. See I don't mind giving, but they try to take everything from me and that's not right...and I cried a lot, so I'd rather sleep in the hallways and stuff even though it's dangerous. My husband just came home [from prison] last week. He trying to help me too—he's a good man, but it's hard too. I'm going to Virginia and I talked to his sister. I'm going. I'm leaving—

My kids is in the system and I don't know where they're at. I know that when I get to Virginia, I am going to do better because no one around is going to do drugs—my sister-in-law does not do drugs. I'll be able to get a job, a house or an apartment. She (sister-in-law) said that if I do things around the house she'll pay me and I can save for my own.

Jennifer's plans to use her small remuneration fee from the study for bus fare, which will allow her to travel out of the state to live with her sister-in-law, reflect her perseverance and dedication to maximizing the chances of successful reintegration. Recent studies indicate that some returning ex-offenders stay with family members or some other support system that accepts the individual into their homes; however this is not an option for others (Lynch and Sabol 2001). Family conflict, a lack of family, and hesitation on the part of the family members to welcome back a relative with a criminal record are some of the reasons that make this less possible. Although this living arrangement may facilitate the provision of emotional and/or financial support, reunification may produce additional financial, emotional or other stresses on individual or family members. Moreover, unstable or risk-intense environments may put vulnerable returning individuals or their
family members at risk. On the other hand, for families that have children in foster care or are otherwise separated largely because they do not have safe, affordable housing, there may be opportunities to access Family Unification Program (FUP) housing vouchers, which enable families to purchase or lease to reunify parents whose children are in foster care because the parents lack safe, decent, and affordable housing.

Ultimately when family members are incarcerated, potentially miles from home, maintaining contact can be challenging while many dynamics of family functioning undergo significant changes. Families may struggle in the absence of the individual who is incarcerated while the returning parent who may wish to take their child out of foster care must demonstrate that they can now adequately provide and care for their children (Braman 2002). A few respondents like Connie and Jennifer spoke about looking forward to being reunited with their children on several occasions. As Connie expressed concerns around limited adequate housing options, a lack of steady employment, and past negative encounters with city agencies, one hopes that she would receive the necessary support and encouragement in order to allow for a successful reunification despite such challenges.

I would like to get my own apartment and find my kids—I have eight kids and I do not know where they are and I love them. I used to do drugs and it fucked my life up and then my kids were taken. First, I kept track of where they were at but then DCS [Department of Children’s Services] spread them all around the city and then while inside [the correctional facility] they were moved around some more and I lost them again. I went to Far Rockaway a couple of days ago and I got a number for rooms—SRO (Single Room Occupancy) so I have to see about that, but it is only temporary.

Over the course of many meetings, Robert said similarly:

I was getting ready to hustle. One time I got very frustrated because everything was not really going according to what I had hoped it to even though I had expected the hurdles. When others, like friends you used to hang out with, see you trying to do good, they won’t allow you to…it almost comes in my way until I say screw it and do what I have to do. But you know what? I thought about my kids.

Robert, who was first arrested as a teenager and now in his forties, would smile widely whenever he spoke of his children and he often mentioned how it was his kids who kept him “straight.”
Space and Work in Re-Entry

In this section, we focus specifically on the work-related experiences. Work patterns help reveal the ways in which the spatial data can be used to reveal social patterns in the re-entry process. We do not focus on macro-level patterns of incarceration and inequality, although our analysis has been influenced greatly by Bruce Western and his colleagues who have written on this subject (c.f., Western and Pettit, 2005).

Locating employment is a core challenge for those leaving facilities of incarceration. A full-time job can often mean the difference between a stable, productive life and a return to jail or prison. As noted, the individuals in our sample have experience in both industrial and service sectors of the economy; however, few have held jobs for any significant length of time. Most have shuttled between menial and part-time work, supplementing their income with illegal work. The illegal work most commonly includes drug sales, sex work, gypsy cab and livery, car repair, paid work for stores and construction sites under-the-table, burglary and grand larceny, and personal theft.

It is possible to draw on the spatial data to reveal key moments in the transition of ex-offenders to civil society. Conventional wisdom would hold that legal work is represented primarily—if not exclusively— in non-poor areas, while underground illegal jobs undergird the economy of the poorer parts of the city. Tables 3 and 4 below challenge that notion.

### TABLE 3. Percentage Minority at Home Site, Legal Job Sites, and Legal Job Search Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Minority</th>
<th>Low Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOME SITES</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL JOB SITES</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL JOB SEARCH SITES</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4. Percentage Poverty at Home Site, Legal Job Sites, and Legal Job Search Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Poverty</th>
<th>Low Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOME SITES</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL JOB SITES</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL JOB SEARCH SITES *</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* site where respondent went for interview appointment, training, school, employment
** high poverty > 30% people in poverty; high minority > 50% people of color
Maps 9, 10, and 11 also challenge the notion that legal work is primarily located in non-poor areas. We can see that opportunities for underground employment—whether licit work on construction sites for cash or illicit jobs like sex work—are spread throughout the city. In low-income areas, the primary work available is drug sales and sex work. But in the wealthier enclaves, there are also many underground opportunities, though the work varies.

MAP 9: Legal Job Sites for All Participants
MAP 10: Illegal Job Sites for All Participants

MAP 11: Legal Job Search Sites for All Participants
For example, one of the striking findings from our sample is that informants actively seek illegal work in Midtown Manhattan, the heart of the corporate business sector. Here, the respondents in our sample report the opportunity for numerous forms of illegal and unreported income: corporate offices hire cleaners, security guards and employ low income people for manpower. Drug sales are a constant source of employment, as is sex work; catering and construction firms will employ seasonal labor under-the-table. None of this work pays more than menial wages, the jobs last for only a short period, and they do not allow the respondents to build social and human capital that is necessary to locate more stable employment.

Table 5 reveals that, in general, the legal and illegal work sites are distributed in a similar fashion across New York City. That is, individuals in the sample work in neighborhoods of similar racial/ethnic and poverty composition, whether the nature of their work is legal or not.

TABLE 5: Percent Poverty and Minority by Site Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Type</th>
<th>Percent Below Poverty</th>
<th>Percent Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Site</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Job Site</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Job Search Site*</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC Average</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Site where respondent went for interview appointment, training/school, employment

Given that legal and illegal sites are distributed in similar ways across the city, it is probably not surprising that respondents travel about the same distance for the legitimate and underground work (Only one respondent manages a home-based business.) A basic question remains, which is: the process by which individuals gain familiarity with urban neighborhoods and how that alters their willingness to leave their home base to search for work opportunities. Our anecdotal research has expressed in the quotes below, suggests that people will seek out new opportunities as they become familiar with the city. That is, a feeling of belonging will enable to traverse the metro landscape more easily. However it is equally likely that sheer desperation can promote geographically distributed searches for employment. A fuller version of this study is necessary to solve this riddle.
Moreover, at least in the first week after their release from jail/prison, it seems that some of our respondents tend to look more closely for work near their home. As noted above, they tend to gain comfort by first seeking out familiar people and organizations that are geographically proximate. Once they feel settled locally, they then cut a wider path across the city in their search for work.

We can see this pattern by examining the movements over time of Chris in Map 12. The map suggests that Chris stays close to home the first couple of weeks and then moves further away from home in the later weeks.

**MAP 12: Chris Ventures Further from Home over 30 Days**

This pattern can be seen because the map displays temporal movement in three dimensions. Each line represents one day - each day is pulled up by a height increment. Each color represents a different week with blue being the last week. The unique time/space dimension of our data set allows us to visualize participants changing patterns.

This map is simply meant to be illuminative, and a more rigorous, systematically drawn sample could highlight shifting patterns with greater precision. A future study may allow for analysis using the latest techniques in three dimensional clustering. This type of analysis can provide an enhanced understanding of how activities begin to cluster or disperse over time—usually accompanied
by innovative visualization techniques. For example we could visualize whether a participant’s move to illegal work was significantly clustered in time—but not space and represent this as a cluster field in a representation similar to the one above.

Table 6 also shows that the respondents in our sample will move about the city and travel away from their homes to find work.

**TABLE 6: Distance Traveled from Home by Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Type</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Job Site</td>
<td>3.06 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Job Site</td>
<td>4.02 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Job Search Site*</td>
<td>3.09 miles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* site where respondent went for interview appointment, training/school, employment

This does not mean that they feel entirely comfortable visiting areas outside of their own communities—some neighborhoods are perceived as dangerous because of gangs, while others are seen as unwelcoming because of perceptions that police will harass minorities. Our respondents represent all the boroughs, except for Staten Island and they appear to be un-restricted in terms of reaching out across the metropolitan region for work.
While the distance traveled to work does not differ by the legal or illegitimate nature of the activity, individuals tend to vary in terms of their interest in one or another type of employment. Several typical patterns may be found. One modal trajectory is for an individual to seek legitimate work actively in the first two weeks. Those who find work often use two sources of information: a friend/relative who has a job—and who can act as a referral—or another type of personal contact, like a clergy member, storeowner, or probation officer. A common refrain among those in our study was that community-based organizations were unhelpful for locating job training and vocational programs. It is difficult to know exactly why people felt pessimistic about working with CBOs, but one factor depressing individual motivation may be the perception that CBOs are performing a quasi-law enforcement function—i.e., surveillance. One respondent makes this clear in the following quote:

Yeah, I went to work with Fortune, but they get too much in your business. Just like every place else. I mean you just left this place where your whole life is being watched, and then you get out and people want to ask you all kinds of questions. That's mostly why I don't go into these places. I know they want to help, but they need to get out of your business.

If they do not find work, individuals will contemplate underground economic opportunities. In almost all cases, this turn to illegal income generation is expected to be temporary. From our study, it is apparent that the decision to participate in the underground economy entails shifts in one’s spatial pattern. Specifically, the search for illicit income forces respondents to move about the city—typically, one’s own neighborhood does not provide sufficient opportunity. These movements effectively destabilize an individual’s life because they are now expending considerable energy seeking illegal work—which is always a tenuous process and never guaranteed. This is time that could be spent on other, more productive pursuits. Tony, one of our respondents, spoke about this as a pernicious cycle:

Someone says to you, “Hey I got a friend out East who has something we could do. Make a little money, just like that.” But, you got to get out there, and then maybe you wait for a while. And, maybe nothing happens, or you have to meet that guy somewhere else… it’s all a headache, and you just say, “fuck it, I’ve had enough.” But, the problem is you need the money. So, that’s what I mean when I say that you can’t get out of it. You don’t want to get into trouble, but there’s nothing else you can do. And, you spend all your time moving all around trying to make a buck. And, it’s dangerous, because when you don’t know people in other places, you walking into somebody else’s backyard. You could get killed.
There are some people in our sample who gravitate immediately to the field of legitimate work and show no willingness to pursue criminal activities. Typically, these persons actively try to put some distance between themselves and others (friends or relatives) who they believe might encourage them to work illegally. The distance is two-dimensional. On the one hand, there is the need to separate oneself from those who have access to illegal work. But, occasionally geographic isolation is required: that is, some people literally go to great distances by leaving behind their neighborhood for a new area of the city where they are unknown to local inhabitants. But, people who switch their home base in such a radical fashion report that they are losing ties to familiar persons and organizations. These are individuals who might provide a reference, who might conduct day care for their children, or who might lend them money or food if times get tough. In this manner, while the use of spatial movements can be a means by which people can overcome social obstacles, there are sacrifices that must also be made.

The challenges facing an individual who may not have any money upon release or a means by which to immediately access a loan may result in petty theft for survival, which may incur harsh sentencing if one is apprehended while on parole. Steve recounts how he has given up his “days of being a serious criminal for good.” In a pinch, he shoplifts from neighborhood stores near where he stays, which sell “less high end merchandise.”

I shoplift and then sell the stuff on the street. Basically I go to smaller stores that would not let me get locked up. Little stores, nothing big, just enough to get me through the day or the week. I know it’s not worth the hassle and I don’t like doing it but I get to eat. Basically people are always going to look at you as if he is going to go back to the same thing—you know—that’s all he knows. But in your mind, you’re thinking other things but to them you are always going to be that bad person. I was always a good guy…

As he points out, he steers clear of the more expensive retail establishments where “they are always breathing down your neck” or outfitted with “serious security.”

A third modal trajectory is rooted in the individual preferences for illegitimate work. There are several members of our sample who believe that the majority of legal jobs available to them are poor paying and menial in nature. They immediately seek out underground economies and they rarely look for (or accept) legitimate employment. Only a small minority of our sample report absolutely no interest in legitimate work. Those who are looking solely at the underground economy may have the most erratic spatial patterns; they are often moving quickly about the city, living in multiple places temporarily and never establishing a fixed presence in any one home.

One interesting difference among those who work in legal and illegal jobs concerns their use of the city. As seen in Table 7, people in legitimate employment tend to have fewer job sites over
their first 30 days. By contrast, as stated, those working in underground economies will move rapidly about the city, taking up many kinds of work—usually these jobs are short-lived and provide only a burst of immediate income (e.g., sale of stolen goods, drug purchase and re-sale). These contrasts are represented in Maps 13 and 14 on the following 2 pages. Map 13 captures the movements of David, who has a steady, legal job; Map 14 shows the use of the city by Shawn, who works in the underground economy.

**TABLE 7. Average Number of Worksites**

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informal Job Sites</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Steady Jobs</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As one can see from the blue density marks, David, who has a steady legal job, displays a spatial distribution that is primarily concentrated between two main points: work (white x) and home (orange dot).
Shawn, by contrast, shows a much greater use of the city, as represented by the greater number of nodes of high activity concentration.
As noted, the distances traveled for work add various immediate pressures for our respondents, including the need to find transportation and day care. Secondary needs also arise due to the geographic nature of work commitments. As we described, the low income poor can have their lives spread across many households, not all of which will be near to one another. Managing family, personal, and work responsibilities may draw them to different neighborhoods. On the following page, in Map 15, one sees a respondent in our sample whose children and family responsibilities draw him in one direction, while work takes him in another direction. Also, he has several home bases, one in Manhattan, the other in Brooklyn. The need to manage several domiciles while trying to establish connections with employers and family is no small task for the ex-offender in the first thirty days.
MAP 15: Michael's Movements for Work, Drug Use/Exchange, and Family
DISCUSSION: Implications for Policy and Practice

This Research Note has analyzed the experiences of a sample of young men and women who have returned to civil society after a period of incarceration. In writing this essay, we have sought to draw on social scientific concepts to illuminate aspects of the process by which ex-offenders integrate into the urban environment. At this point, we conclude the discussion by outlining some of the implications of the analysis for policy and practice.

At the most general level, this essay has examined the role that home plays in the lives of individuals. The concept of home needs to be understood carefully in re-entry. To begin, the already tenuous material position of low income individuals is exacerbated in the resettlement process. Tensions are amplified and the general pressures to survive become even more acute because individuals do not have an immediately recognizable social and spatial landscape. Individuals are often re-entering an unrecognizable city, one that they may have left years—if not decades-- ago. Given the rapid pace of urban change in civil society, it is not surprising that ex-offenders experience shock and discomfort when they do not see familiar people, places, and organizations in their neighborhoods. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the distress for the formerly incarcerated returning to their old haunts can be even greater than if they had arrived in a new city: that is, they are expecting to see a memorable visual and symbolic landscape, and instead they find that life has passed before their eyes. Many in our sample express the sentiment that they must rush to make up for lost time.

It is through the attachment to place (to “home”) that we can begin to understand the importance of space in the resettlement process. In the first thirty days, those re-entering civil society make critical decisions regarding work, family life, education and training, and so on. These decisions can either lead to new opportunities or, they can increase personal vulnerability and discomfort. We have argued in this Note that the ability to acclimate to the city in order to gain information and resources is deeply influenced by one’s perception—in this case, one’s capacity to recognize familiar surroundings. The capacity to regain one’s footing in space, such as in the household or the neighborhood, could be the critically important factor that makes the difference between a hastily-made decision and a thoughtful one.

Research

Beginning with implications for research, we note that the methods and analysis employed in this study are a marked departure from conventional analysis in the field of re-entry. As detailed in the literature review, past research has studied the first thirty days of individual re-entry and the spatial layout of services as two separate issues: some studies attempt to focus on personal experiences without taking the city into context; others focus on the placement of services in the city, without looking at how individuals actually use the metropolitan landscape in their daily lives. We
seek to combine both perspectives by focusing on the micro movements of individuals through the city—where they go and what they do when they get there. This vantage point has allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the ex-offender’s perception of the city begins to take shape after they leave a facility of incarceration, and how this emergent perceptual field begins to affect his/her social integration pathway.

We propose several adjustments vis-à-vis research design to make any future effort both systematic and informative. First, an ideal sample should be at least fifty individuals. Our study was a pilot, driven by the need to be illuminative and to test ideas regarding methodology. Our sample was not chosen in any way that would permit systematic generalization to the larger population—for this reason, we also suggest that general policy prescriptions based on our findings must be made cautiously. A future study—that is, one that expands the sample in accordance with rigorous sampling procedures that enable a representative pool of informants to be followed over time—would yield more definitive results.

We also believe that a future study should compare different types of ex-offenders—e.g., those jailed for drug-related crimes, those incarcerated for immigration-related offenses, and so on. The findings of our study are limited because of the difficulty accessing individuals with highly varied criminal backgrounds.

We would also like to expand the substantive focus of the study. In our analysis, we looked at the ways in which spatio-temporal dynamics affected the sphere of work. Our scope above was relegated to an analysis of how those in our sample used space in relation to employment—legal and illegal. However, with sufficient resources, one could look also at family patterns, utilization of social services, and public health outcomes for individuals and families with the same depth. The use of GIS to map spatial movements could be applied widely to these life spheres.

Even in the limited arena of work and employment searches, our small sample presented notable constraints. We would prefer to have more complete answers to the following questions, which would necessitate a greater sample size: Do people with illegal or informal work tend to stay in their own neighborhood? Do people tend to stay closer to home in the first days and weeks, venturing further away as time goes on? What are the reasons for this, and does a “sense of belonging” play a role (as posited earlier)? Are there significant differences between the spatial use of the city for off-the-books workers and formal workers, or is steady employment vs. sporadic employment a more salient delineation?

Our study confronted a classic question in research that utilizes the “neighborhood” as a unit of analysis: namely, what is the appropriate definition of neighborhood. Social sciences scholars have long sought to provide a systematic definition for this term (Newman and Small 2001). As past research has shown, varying definitions can produce highly contrastive analytic findings. In our study,
it was possible to define the neighborhood via objective criteria—e.g., census block, police district, public housing developments—or via subjective criteria. This tension is important because attentiveness to the ex-offender’s perception is critical in understanding how neighborhood (and home) matters in daily life.

In general, we sought to understand neighborhood as emerging from the individual’s patterns of perception and movement. However, by utilizing this subjective foundation, any meaningful comparison across individuals in the sample becomes difficult. At times, use of a census block was appropriate in our study, but we felt that failed to capture adequately the individual’s perception of space.

Many sociologists believe that neighborhoods are best conceived as communal or social networks that bring individuals together in meaningful ways in shared space (Wellman 1988; Chaskin 1997; Sampson 1999; Small and Newman 2001). For example families distributed across the floors of a large high-rise public housing development might come together via relations of resource exchange, thereby creating a network of solidarity and support. This network-oriented approach has been under-utilized but it may hold promise for any future studies on re-entry as it integrates both subjective and objective qualities. Our own delineation of neighborhood utilized one insight of a network based approach: namely, that the daily movement for individuals reveals the social ties in which they are embedded; and the constituent element of these ties could involve many people situated across social space (e.g. friends, gang members, relatives, community based organizations, employers, and so on).

As discussed in the policy section, our study complicates the notion of social isolation by showing that formerly incarcerated persons do travel outside their own neighborhood to seek jobs. This revelation begs further research; it is important to determine if this phenomenon is unique to New York, or if it would produce similar results in other cities. This line of inquiry could be expanded to address how people travel outside their own neighborhoods to satisfy varying needs and functions. In order to address this question, this study should be replicated in other metropolitan areas, where patterns of residential segregation, systems of public transport, and so on may differ.

The report also develops the notion of “precipice” — namely, how pivotal events can manifest in changes in an individual’s spatial patterns. We showed that acquisition of a job can significantly change how a person moves about the city, but with sufficient resources, we could develop this further. For example, are there other milestones or crises to which we should pay attention? There may be other salient events that significantly change the spatial patterns of formerly incarcerated persons. And, if the time period were increased to sixty days, perhaps the importance of the “job” would also change.
Finally, some would argue that there are technological advances that might hold significant promise. One in particular is worth mentioning. GPS, as voluntarily worn by the individual in the form of a watch or a pager – perhaps as a replacement to the time diaries – could allow for more accurate data collection. This would eliminate the margin of error involved in self-reporting. GPS would allow researchers to know exactly how a respondent moved from one location to another, although there are some constraints such as the inability to track individuals underground or inside of buildings. GPS might allow us to more accurately estimate the true cost of transportation for respondents. However, there are considerable ethical issues that necessitate careful use of any such monitoring, particularly with a population that has a history of contact with the criminal justice system, and one could certainly argue that ethical considerations trump any argument in favor of social scientific methodological rigor. We remain agnostic and do not advocate for the use of GPS in this manor, nor do would we prohibit it outright. In a fuller study this would be one aspect of the research design that would need to be discussed in great length.

Practice

Those working in spheres of policy and practice might find several lessons from this research study. First, perceptions matter and should be taken seriously in efforts to provide services to ex-offenders and to advocate on their behalf. We highlighted the feeling of “not belonging” in order to direct attention to the ways in which cognition can sharply constrain the individual’s capacity to move about the city. If the ex-offender does not feel at ease in their spatial movements, then their ability to access and utilize services, to find work, to remain in touch with their families, etc., will be deleteriously affected. As a result of this discomfort, s/he may gravitate toward criminal activities and the underground economy, where they feel more familiar; simultaneously, s/he may withdraw from mainstream institutions. No amount of employment assistance will bring about productive results until the individual feels that they have some meaningful connection to their home, neighborhood and city. One could argue that integration into the city could improve the sense of belonging—rather than vice versa, and the answer probably lies somewhere in between. The important point is that social service directors should be attentive to cognitive factors along with conventional indicators of hardship and need.

The perception of belonging is just one of many cognitive structures that apply to the re-entry case. It also highlights the processual nature of resettlement, which from a policy standpoint, needs to be taken more fully into consideration. For example, ex-offenders in our sample repeatedly pointed out that they were not immediately ready for employment immediately upon release. Many said that in their first few weeks, they were busy trying to establish the safety and security of their home—i.e., their personal life. We could pay more attention to the dynamic nature of settlement,
such as the process by which people create “home” again, the manner by which people feel comfortable nurturing children, and so on.

This dynamic regarding the appropriate timing of services and supports for individuals re-integrating into civil society has gone unnoticed in the literature. Jobs, of course, are the basic social good that permit successful re-entry, but we need a better understanding of the moment at which an individual would be receptive to job assistance and placement. Once again, we find ourselves in a chicken-and-egg situation: does stability at home increase the likelihood that an individual will successfully integrate into the job market, or does steady work engender personal/familial stability? We have found it important to pay attention to the sentiments of those in our sample: namely, that they would feel more receptive to job placement, training, and assistance, if it occurred “later” in the resettlement process—“later” being a relative term that varies according to the individual in question. Many individuals felt that the expectations were very high as soon as they left facilities of incarceration and that the most useful contribution of social service agencies was to reduce the feelings of pressure.

We are in agreement with a similar study directed by the Vera Institute in which the researchers recommend heightened preparation and services before release. However, the exact services that individuals need are multi-faceted. For example, if in the first few weeks of re-entry, individuals must adjust to an unfamiliar urban environment, it might be productive to give them a concrete understanding of their neighborhoods before they are released. They would benefit from knowing such minor details as stores that have opened and closed, new residential buildings that have been built, and so on. A social worker or case worker might provide this kind of tutorial, while simultaneously helping the inmate to draw a physical map of the placement of their own households. In this way, the individual can understand how their own lives will be spatially organized and they can anticipate some of the transportation, monetary, emotional challenges that will follow.

The use of the city is a cost or expenditure, like money or personal energy, although it is not normally perceived as such. Our study points to the need to take spatial mobility seriously in the re-entry process. When inmates have to navigate the city, they are expending personal resources, which like money, is limited. For example, those who travel in one direction to take care of children may have to move in another direction for employment. This can create inefficiencies and costs that must be met. Typically these kinds of costs do not show up on the needs assessments of social workers—who may mistakenly perceive the individual as being lazy or unable to plan effectively. Instead, the individual in question may actually be confronting structural obstacles that are impinging their capacity to create stable lives.
WORKS CITED


