



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Muriel Adams

Will defend her prospectus

**Building Sustainable Communities in the Era of Restorative
Justice, Mass Incarceration and High Recidivism**

Abstract

Over 700,000 people every year are released from prisons and jails in the United States and return to their home communities unprepared for how to survive in society. Within one year more than 50% of the individuals released had returned. In poor communities with high incarceration and recidivism rates, community social cohesion has been worn thin because incarceration and reentry are traumatic and devastating experiences. They affect not only the person incarcerated, but their family, community and society. The communities that are most negatively impacted by the United States criminal justice system are marginalized communities of color (African American, Latino and American Indian). High unemployment, homelessness, health problems and poor education are major barriers blocking their successful reintegration into society. Additionally, the formerly incarcerated often lose their voting rights and are stripped of jury duty responsibility. This combination adversely affects their community's reputation, decision-making power, government representation and funding at the local, state and federal levels. In order for these fragile communities to become sustainable places residents want to live, they need to be inclusive, safe, cohesive and equitable. Sustainable communities provide affordable housing, quality education, social organizations and networks, clean environments and shared spaces, healthy food stores, health care and other local services that members of the community need. Communities affected by the intended and unintended consequences of high incarceration and recidivism are not sustainable communities. We know very little about how to change or prepare poor communities of color impacted negatively by prison cycling into resilient, sustainable communities able to withstand wicked environmental problems. Restorative justice practices, peacemaking circles in particular, an indigenous based practice, has been shown to build relationships and repair harm. This research looks at community-based reentry programs that utilize restorative justice

peacemaking circles to help returning citizens assimilate back into their communities. Sustainability and Restorative Justice emphasize that we are all connected (share a common future), that social equity (intergenerational and intragenerational equity), and collective wisdom are essential for creating a truly sustainable world. I am proposing a two-part participatory action dissertation to examine the extent to which restorative peacemaking circles and use of restorative practices can assist with adult reintegration, community building, social cohesion and social equity. In phase one, I will synthesize and build on existing literature and practice to create an assessment tool focused on community reintegration, social cohesion and sustainable community building. This tool will be tuned in partnership with community organizations working on reentry. In phase two, I will work with these community partners to facilitate restorative justice peace circles with people reentering their communities after the release from prison, their families and community members (neighbors, religious leaders, business owners, etc.). The assessment tool will be utilized to evaluate the implications of this method for community reintegration and sustainable community building. Health, wellbeing, sense of belonging, social interaction and networking, safety, neighborhood stability, and multigenerational equity will be a few of the factors considered.

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

9:00 AM

Wrigley, Rm 481

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Nalini Chhetri, Co-chair

Dr. Sonja Klinsky, Co-chair

Dr. Christopher Boone, Member

Kay Pranis, Member