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Eastern Kentucky University

Through the Eyes of the Incarcerated: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Prisoner Reentry  
Through Memoirs

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of The

Requirements of HON 420

Fall 2023

By

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Faculty Mentor

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## Through the Eyes of the Incarcerated: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Prisoner Reentry

Abigail Estep

Dr. Betsy Matthews

### **Abstract**

One in 100 adults in the United States are currently in jail or prison, equaling over 2.2 million individuals. Around 600,000 of those individuals are released from state and federal prisons every year. Unfortunately, these returning citizens are met with a system that has set them up to fail. Most of these individuals are determined to never go back, but the immobilizing challenges that they meet make it difficult, if not impossible, to be successfully reintegrated into society. The recidivism rate in the United States is the highest it has ever been at 44% nationally. We need to find and fix what we are doing wrong for the sake of returning citizens and our communities.

This qualitative content analysis was conducted to give voice to people with experience in the criminal justice system. The overarching question that guided this research was “what are the most prominent challenges that returning individuals face when they are released from prison?” The findings revealed that problems with reentry stemmed from a lifetime of challenges. These challenges were organized and coded into four categories: traumatic lives, prison and jail experiences, procedural justice, and the reentry process. The paper closes with a discussion about policy implications based on the issues returning citizens face.

Keywords: jail, prison, prisoner reentry, returning citizens, policy implications, procedural justice

## **Introduction**

One in 100 adults in the United States are currently in jail or prison, equaling over 2.2 million individuals (National Research Council 2014). Around 600,000 of those individuals are released from state and federal prisons every year. Unfortunately, these returning citizens are met with a system that has set them up to fail. Most of these individuals are determined to never go back, but the immobilizing challenges that they face make it difficult, if not impossible, to successfully reintegrate into society. This paper includes a review of the literature on prisoner reentry and reports the findings of a content analysis of prison memoirs designed to give voice to individuals with experience in prison and the challenges associated with reentry.

## **Literature Review**

Nancy Wolff and colleagues wrote an article with the purpose of examining whether and how the amount of time incarcerated affects reentry readiness. The goal of this paper is to assess the perceived and tangible reentry readiness of a representative sample of male inmates scheduled to be released within 24-months or less from a single state correctional system, and to explore whether time incarcerated affects reentry readiness.

This study measured time in two ways: time served on the current conviction and time served since turning 18. This was an only male study and the instrument used was a six-part survey. The parts of the survey included reentry readiness, personal well-being, prison time, prison programs, employment experience, and background information. There were self-reported feelings about the ability to reenter the community successfully and reentry readiness indices.

The data itself suggested that the effect of time served on reentry readiness is more pronounced with the accumulation of time incarcerated and in facilities with older inmates.

“From the descriptive analysis, it was clear that reentry vulnerability increased between inmate

groups with three to ten and more than ten years served time since turning 18, compared to the group with less than three years served time since turning 18. Vulnerability, however, was greatest for those serving more than ten years in prison over their lifetime. Inmates who had served ten or more years on multiple convictions or a single conviction were older, had weaker social ties and job prospects, lacked personal identification, had limited financial resources, and were less than positive about their ability to succeed in the community.” In discussion of this, it was pointed out that time in prison depreciates human, social, and financial capital and that cumulative time is a better measure of the effects of prison on the depreciation of human, social, and financial capital, which increases reentry vulnerability.

In the conclusion of the article, it mentions that there is growing pressure to “do corrections” more efficiently in ways that ultimately reduce recidivism. One of the main points and findings was that there is not much guidance or strategy to focus and allocate funds because of the lack of comprehensive assessment of the reentry needs and risks of the soon-to-be-released inmates.

Klies (2010) used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the privatization of parole services. Her findings provided a comprehensive understanding of four different issues. This article specifically investigated how it is determined what types of programs parolees are required to participate in, the relationship between the New York State Division of Parole and private organizations contracted to provide services and programming to paroles, the impact of programming logistics on the day-today-lives of parolees, and the impact of privatization on others with a vested interest (including family and taxpayers).

Kleis (2010) argued that the practice of privatization has created “adverse effects (logistically and emotionally) on the daily lives of parolees and serves to inhibit the reintegration

process, resulting in negative consequences for parolees, their families, and the public” (Kleis, 2010).

Her survey consisted of questions about individuals’ reintegration into the community and the obstacles they faced. There was a lot of reported frustration with parole-mandated programs that they were required to participate in. The mandated programs take up considerable time during the work week, which often interferes with the parolees’ ability to gain employment and remain employed. Many also reported that they felt they were unfairly and unnecessarily required to attend programs that were inconsistent with their criminal histories. For example, if they were convicted of something related to substance or drug use, they might be mandated to take an anger management course. Finally, there were also some respondents that discussed being required to attend programming with other known felons, which is a violation of the general conditions of parole.

Another issue addressed in the article was that many times, parolees have a fear of parole. Many times, individuals felt like their parole officer was able to violate them with little to no reason at all. On top of that, then it would be the parole officer’s word against the parolees’ word, and the discretion and control their parole officer maintained over the individuals’ daily lives was so great that the individuals themselves felt they had no control or say over their own decisions. Many respondents in this study reported having feelings of hopelessness, fear, and frustration, and even having the intense fear that they would be targeted and viewed as uncooperative if they spoke out against their mandates and conditions.

To discuss and analyze the issues further, parole officers and private entities are important aspects of successful reentry. High volume of caseloads is a tremendous issue with parole workers. On average, the current caseloads for parole workers are often 70 cases, which is



double the suggested maximum of 35. As a result of this, parolees' reported limited contact with their parole officer and expressed feelings that their parole officer treated them as a case rather than an individual. There is significant evidence to suggest that the relationship between a parolee and their parole officer will dictate, to at least some extent, how successfully the parolee is able to reintegrate into society. This relationship has been given a tremendous amount of weight and to have individuals report that they feel more like a case than a individual is devastating to that relationship and to the lives of parolees. Part of this issue is also that parole officers have begun to defer decision-making to the private entities that they contract with, using the private entities as a means through which to ease the burden of their caseload.

“One of the central concerns raised by critics of correctional privatization is that firms motivated by financial gains might make decisions that enhance profits at the expense of the rights and well-being of inmates” (Kleis, 2010). So, at the end of the day these private organizations profit financially from parolees' involvement in programs. With parole officers having such heavy caseloads and passing the decision-making to private entities, it is more likely that they will make decisions based on profit and not based on the individual. “The lack of inadequate supervision, oversight, and ineffective management of private entities providing services to parolees is having an adverse effect on the everyday lives of parolees, consequently making their reintegration process more difficult and creating a situation where there is an increased threat to public safety” (Kleis, 2010).

David Kirk wrote an article published in 2016 that tests the effect of prisoner reentry on the culture of neighborhoods, particularly with regard to legal cynicism. Kirk conducted a cross-lagged analysis of the effect of the concentration of returning prisoners on legal cynicism as well as the effect of legal cynicism on the geographic distribution of returning prisoners.

The article starts off with some important statistics and relevant background information. The volume of releases from prison surpasses 600,000 each year. This article discusses that many individuals that are released each year in Illinois most often populate to six communities. Kirk examines these communities and the legal cynicism in those areas where prisoner reentry is highly concentrated in relatively small number of neighborhoods in metropolitan areas.

“More than one-half of prisoners released from Illinois prisons in 2001 returned to Chicago and one-third of these formerly incarcerated individuals were concentrated in only six community areas. These six communities were among the most economically and socially disadvantaged in the city” (Kirk, 2016). Kirk then goes into possible reasons that ex-prisoners tend to concentrate in the same neighborhoods. These include social ties connected to the area as well as limited income, wealth, and job prospects. There is also an unwillingness of owners, landlords and public housing authorities to provide housing and access to the private housing market to felons.

The conclusion and results from this study show that the rate of prisoner reentry in a neighborhood in a given year is positively associated with neighborhood crime rates the next year. The statement is also made that “cynicism becomes cultural through social interaction. In this sense, individuals’ own experiential-based perception of the law becomes solidified through a collective process whereby residents develop a shared meaning of the behavior of the law” (Kirk, 2016).

Adam Matz from the University of North Dakota wrote an article that provides an overview of community corrections, health problems associated with community corrections populations, programming considerations, and notable barriers to expanding justice-health collaboration.

Matz makes very insightful observations in the first part of the article when he states that many individuals have been residing and will be returning to disadvantaged communities when released from prison. He also discussed that most of these individuals have some kind of health needs, especially related to substance abuse and mental health. Both substance abuse and mental health issues overlap with criminogenic behavior necessitating greater justice-health collaboration.

It is stated in the article The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that community supervision remains the most prevalent form of correctional control at 4.7 million, or about 70% of the adult correctional population. Roughly 1 in 37 adults are under some form of correctional control in the United States and 1 in 286 adults that are part of the adult correctional population are on parole. Some research has pointed out that community supervision is very cost-effective, as it is \$3.42 for probation supervision compared to the \$79 a day in an institution. With that being said though, there is also evidence this leads to the haphazard early release of prison inmates onto parole supervision which has been shown to increase arrest rates and recidivism.

It was also shown that probationers and parolees were significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes, participate in binge drinking, as well as engage in illicit drug use including marijuana, powdered cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, hallucinogens, inhalants, Oxycontin, and tranquilizers. Probationers and parolees were also more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, have asthma, and possess a sexually transmitted disease. Out of 330 adults under community supervision, 87% reported one or more substance dependencies, 63% reported antisocial personality disorders (compared to the general population at 1-3%), 42% reported anxiety disorders (compared to the general 29%), and 16% reported depression. Suicidal ideation was also high at 38% (compared to the general 9%), out of which 17% had previously

attempted suicide (compared to the general 4%) and 12% had deliberately harmed themselves at one point. What is even more surprising is this next statistic: While 47% of the sample reported possessing serious mental health symptoms, only 10% were in a formal treatment program despite being under community supervision. Failure to connect these individuals to the services they need increases the risk of unemployment, further substance use, criminal behavior, and ultimately recidivism. Connecting these at-risk individuals to appropriate services in the community, with probation and parole officers serving as the key referral agent, is imperative to offenders' long-term desistance.

Lastly, Marie Proyer wrote an essay about how policy gridlock can impede the transition of individuals from prison into the community, and how this contributes to the economic and social affliction of the urban communities.

Within the first couple of paragraphs, Pryor calls our criminal justice system "a system that is engineered to keep the elite in a position of power and status, and the economically disadvantaged minorities in a perpetual state of degradation" (Pryor, 2010). This essay shares and discusses some common themes with other articles, one of which is the issue of employment when an individual is released from prison. In this essay, the phrase "paper chase" is used. This is defined as the excessive action of having to fill out forms and paperwork for different necessities, like the process of gaining personal identification, or financial resources. Usually, these processes involve a lot of paperwork and can be considered excessive, confusing, and frustrating. The article also talks about how the job search and the paper chase make it difficult to obtain and maintain employment. More than not, individuals are released and have every intent on never returning but are then met with the immobilizing effects of a system that is bred to make it more difficult, or frankly, impossible. Pryor gives specific examples as a mentor. She

discusses the story of a man that was released and was living with his mother in a nice neighborhood where he felt he could make a fresh start away from all the negative influences he was around before. His new location was too far from the services that he was mandated to receive, so he was forced to move back into his old neighborhood. He was very concerned that he was surrounded by the same people that led to his incarceration in the first place. On top of that, despite being dedicated to making a positive impact in his community, he finds himself a frequent target of random police stops and disreputable others. Whether he chooses to live there or not, he also finds himself surrounded by the very people his conditions of parole forbid him to be around, which is a common theme with the previously discussed article.

A new point is brought up and considered when she talks about another specific story of a woman she mentored. In her case, she had three children, but one of the conditions of her release was that she was to have no contact with the father of her children. This created personal issues like having to leave the toddler (the youngest) in the care of relatives and the older siblings. It is then clear that conditions intended to prevent individuals from negatively influencing one another also cuts them off from valuable referrals to services, job opportunities, housing, and support networks such as family.

As written from personal experience, the lines at the end of the essay were really powerful and something we should start abiding by. “We cannot allow the cycle to continue where disadvantaged communities fuel the criminal justice system, and the criminal justice system, in turn, fuels the disadvantage. We must work to reform the policies that tie the hands of newly released individuals and prevent them from improving their own situation as well as the quality of life in their communities” (Pryor, 2010).

## **Methodology**

### *Selection of Memoirs*

To identify memoirs for the analysis, I searched the Amazon database using key words such as prisoner reentry and selected the top titles. In the interest of representing diverse perspectives, I selected memoirs from both males and females who were incarcerated for various crimes and served from 2-16 years in prison (see Appendix A). The race of the authors could not be determined. The five memoirs that I selected were *I Can Take it from Here* written by Lisa Forbes, *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose* written by Chris Wilson, *Corrections in Ink* written by Keri Blakinger, *Ink from the Pen* written by Mark Olmsted, and *Everything I Ever Needed to Know about Life I Learned in Prison: A Memoir* written by Kevin Gilford.

### *Coding and Analysis*

In the interest of giving the authors voice, an inductive analytical approach was used to identify common themes within the memoirs. In contrast to a deductive coding approach based on prior knowledge and hypotheses, I allowed the authors to tell the story. The authors themselves would be the ones to reveal the issues they faced.

While reading the five memoirs, a codebook was developed to structure and organize all of the prominent themes that arose (see Appendix B). The four prominent themes that were extracted included traumatic lives, prison and jail experiences, procedural justice, and the reentry process. In addition to these major themes, the coding process also revealed important subthemes. The next section of this paper includes a brief introduction to the authors and discusses these findings and includes salient quotes from the memoirs that capture the essence of the authors' stories.

## **Findings**

### **Introduction to the Authors**

#### *I Can Take it from Here: A Memoir of Trauma, Prison, and Self-Empowerment*

Lisa Forbes wrote a powerful memoir about how the struggles of her childhood affected her entire life including why she stabbed and killed the father of her child and went to prison for murder. Lisa Forbes experienced a traumatic childhood where she was bullied by her siblings, neglected by her mother, sexually assaulted by her brother, and even hit by a car when she was four years old. Lisa tells a captivating story about her life before she committed her crime and explains why she ended up stabbing the father of her child. She then has years of transformation, after serving 25 years in prison, where she eventually addresses all the issues she struggled with, but most of all, her identity and who she was going to be moving forward, especially after being released from prison.

#### *Everything I Ever Needed to Know about Life I Learned in Prison*

Kevin Gilford tells an enthralling story about his struggle with substance abuse and how it led him to prison. He gives us an insider look on his life behind bars for five years with stories of his struggles with other inmates, how he handled and spent his time on the inside, and most importantly, what he learned from prison and how it affected his life when he was released.

#### *Ink from the Pen*

Mark Olmsted writes his story when he gets out from behind his bars after being convicted of a drug-related offense. He tells his story about being an HIV positive, gay man in prison, how it affected the time he served, and how he viewed the outside world when he got released. Mark Olmsted spent a little over a year in prison and wrote poems based on his

experiences in prison and his relationships with other inmates, one of which is shared in this content analysis and can be referenced through Appendix C.

### *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose*

Chris Wilson wrote his “master plan” while serving his life sentence in prison for murder. He shared what his “master plan” and the steps involved in specific chapters in his memoir. The plan first involved steps he would follow to get his life back on track while serving his time and as it was amended, it eventually included goals he had when he would be released. Chris’ efforts eventually paid off and the judge lessened his sentence. This led to him only serving about 16 years before being released on parole, which is amazing considering he was first sentenced to serve the rest of his entire natural life behind bars. Chris then takes us through the execution of his “master plan” when he gets released from prison.

### *Corrections in Ink*

Keri Blakinger takes us on her journey through her struggles with mental illness, eating disorders, and her drug addiction. This addiction eventually led to her arrest and conviction of a drug-related offense. She served a little under two years in prison and is determined to make a better life of herself when she is released. She first must address her trauma and her drug addiction, but she eventually ends up writing about her struggles and working to help other individuals when they are released because she knows how difficult it is firsthand.

### **Traumatic Lives**

The authors themselves described traumatic lives that contributed to their involvement in crime and later to their transition back to the community. All of the authors referenced problems with mental illness/substance use, environmental factors and/or childhood trauma as reoccurring challenges in their lives.



*Mental Illness/Substance Abuse*

Mental illness is very prevalent in the criminal justice system, and it is something to consider when talking about the lives of returning citizens. A large population of today's prisoners suffer from co-occurring disorders while they are incarcerated. These authors were no different and described how this impacted their life in different aspects, even before they commit a crime.

Lisa Forbes (2022) expressed a lot of sadness, loneliness, and frustration with her life, even as a young girl. She stated that "I was so miserable, I thought about killing myself every day" in one of the earlier chapters of her book. She reported feeling "disconnected from my body and everyone around me."

Keri Blakinger (2023) also described her struggles with mental illness and substance use dependency. Keri expressed her struggles in graphic detail. In the first chapter of her book, she discusses the day that she gets arrested and the thoughts and feelings going through her head about her life. One of the most startling and graphic statements Keri made was "my veins were all shot out and scarred and hard to find, so my stabs at oblivion usually involve a few hours of crying as I bleed all over the floor." She describes how her struggles with addiction made her feel disconnected and lonely most of the time. Kevin also struggled with substance use and stated that throughout this life, up until prison, "the drug always came first" (Gilford, 2017). Keri made further comments and stated that she was "seventeen and alone" and she wanted to "get away from the darkness I'm running from – or towards," specifically referring to her drug addiction and her depression.

In later chapters, Keri explained her relationship with her parents and how they knew little about the full extent of the issues she was facing. "My parents knew about the eating

disorders, the depression. They do not know about the suicide attempt” She described how her co-occurring disorders distorted self-perceptions. For example, one of the most striking things she says about her life before she was behind bars is that she always viewed her self-destruction as success and that “when it was good, it was great. When it was not, life lost its meaning.” Keri also described herself as being “driven, but not stable” prior to her incarceration.

Although the male authors spent less time discussing mental health and substance abuse, they too talked about how these problems impacted their lives. When talking about his chaotic childhood, Chris tells a story about when the nurse in his elementary school sees him for a lice checkup and tells him that he was missing chunks of hair. “I was so nervous, I had been pulling my hair out.”

Kevin and Mark referenced the role that addiction played in their legal problems. When describing his struggles with substance use dependencies Kevin stated that he would “lose track of how many days I’d gone by without sleep” and that the “things that the drug had been slowly taking from me over the years immediately accelerated, and I began a downward spiral that was utterly beyond my control” (Gilford, 2017). While Mark didn’t discuss much of his life before he was in prison, he also struggled with addiction and was convicted of a drug-related offense.

These findings are consistent with past research that identifies mental health and substance abuse disorders as correlates of criminal behavior. They also reflect research about the greater significance of co-occurring disorders in women’s lives and criminal behavior. Unfortunately, the struggles described by the authors did not automatically get addressed when they entered the criminal justice system. Consequently, as discussed later in this paper, they seemed to play a role in how they spent their time in prison and their reentry process.

*Environmental Factors*

This subtheme is focused on the social environment in which they are embedded, which includes their family lives, how they grew up, and where they grew up. Chris Wilson writes powerful stories in his memoirs about where he grew up in the late 1980s. He shares expressive statements about his neighborhood. One example of this was when he describes the world around him. "This was the late 1980s, and crack was hitting hard. Murder rates were spiking in Lincoln Heights, and even in Temple Hills families were being torn apart by addiction. It was so violent on Division Avenue, the cops put twenty-foot-tall spotlights out on Grandma's block, making it impossible to sleep" (Wilson, 2020). Chris goes on to explain that "I had a bed, but I never slept in it. I was too worried about stray bullets coming in the window. Since the arrival of the Uzis and Mac-11s, it felt like stray bullets were always coming through the windows on Division Avenue." He talks about his family members and his cousins, and states that at some point his brother, Derrick was "running the streets and carrying guns" (Wilson, 2020). He also explains that where he grew up, there was not a good relationship with cops and the criminal justice system in general. When explaining the relationship, he states "all they did was eyeball us, harass us, make us feel like criminals, even though we were kids. Then suddenly, they barreled down the road twenty at a time in six-wheeled combat vehicles, battering down doors and throwing everyone to the floor. We couldn't point to one white cop in the neighborhood who wanted to do us any good" (Wilson, 2020).

Other authors also described problematic aspects of their environments. Lisa Forbes, in her memoir, described always feeling out of place when she was young because no one really knew the full extent of the trauma she was suffering. She explained that she felt under "constant threat" and stated "I felt out of sync with everybody, in purgatory at school and hell at home"

(Forbes, 2022). Similarly, Keri Blakinger talks about how her family relationships and harsh home environment contributed to her substance use disorder later in life.

Stories told by Kevin and Mark clearly implicated their social environments in their drug use and crime. Kevin stated that he “came home drunk at the tender age of thirteen,” which is not something that should have been allowed. He goes on to say that his “meth-fueled focus was paying dividends when it suddenly became apparent to him that he was making more money than his mother, and she had raised two kids on those wages” (Gilford, 2017)! Mark did a fantastic job of articulating, in general, what it is like for most individuals in the criminal justice system. He did a fantastic job of articulating, in general, what it is like for most individuals in the criminal justice system. He states that “it’s hard to understate how foreign the idea of peaceful conflict resolution is to these guys, though. Violence is so deeply ingrained in them – it’s all that most of them have ever known” (Olmsted, 2017). Mark's statement reflects past research on environmental risk factors for crime and delinquency. Without resources and effective coping skills, youth respond to social disorganization and violence-ridden home environments in the only way they know how – by imitating the drug use and aggressive behavior they have witnessed. As demonstrated by the authors, this learned pattern of behavior often extends into their adult lives.

### *Childhood Trauma*

Stories of childhood victimization were embedded within their chaotic social environments. Lisa Forbes goes into detail about her family life and her relationship growing up. When Lisa was just three years old, she was sleeping with her parents when she noticed her father on top of her mother. After watching the motions, she copied them. “I had my first climax and went back to sleep. I was three” (Forbes, 2022). Not only was she introduced to this very

young, but she was also sexually abused and molested by her older brother. She stated that she was “just a little girl” when she talks about her childhood and how she shouldn’t have had to experience that.

These were not the only struggles Lisa experienced when she was little. She got bullied by her siblings and she got hit by a car when she was four years old and didn’t get the help she needed. She commented that “nobody wondered why I started seeing and talking to a [imaginary] little white gurl after I got hit by a car” (Forbes, 2022). Sadly, Lisa says “the people who were tormenting me also slept next to me or made my meals or sat in the tub while I was on the toilet. They were not on the playground. They were in my home” (Forbes, 2022).

Chris Wilson also had a powerful story involving physical abuse when he was a child. Chris told the story about his mother entering an abusive relationship with a cop who was a drunk and an abuser. He explained “I guess she loved him, but he was killing her” (Wilson, 2020). After being punched in the face by the cop for the first time, his mom started to drink during the day. In one specific story, Chris talked about when he tried to stand up for his mom when she was getting beat by the cop stating he “knew he was going to hurt me for real this time” (Wilson, 2020). Unfortunately, the cop decided to take the anger out on Chris’ mom again and this time, he ended up smashing the right orbital bone of her face. “Mom was in bad shape. Her face was bloody and swollen. She was crying so hard her breath would catch, like she was choking” (Wilson, 2020). This was a traumatic event in Chris Wilson’s life and influenced how he felt about the criminal justice system in general. He stated that “the cops didn’t care. They made her wait in a hard chair, without a towel or a drink or water. She fell and they didn’t help her up. It was like they hated us for bothering them. I heard one mutter ‘Stupid bitch. He’s just

going to get back in there.’ They knew the cop was an abuser. But Mom kept taking him back, so they didn’t want to help her. They thought she got what she deserved” (Wilson, 2020).

The stories that Chirs, Keri, and Lisa share about their childhoods and their family relationships are powerful and effected how they saw the world. The feelings expressed reflected how the crimes they committed were, at least partially, a response to not ever feeling safe and having to protect themselves and others.

### **Procedural Justice**

Procedural justice refers to how people feel about the way they were treated by the system, and particularly, whether they think they were treated fairly. Several authors reported feeling mistreated by the system, describing general indifference by system players and the destructive prison environments. When Keri Blakinger was about to get arrested, she ended up swallowing all the pills she had on her at the time. “It’s enough to kill most people, but I have built up quite a tolerance through nearly half a decade of self-destruction” she stated (Blakinger, 2023). This means that she was, at the very least, intoxicated if not out of her mind completely during the process of her being booked. She said that she “sure as hell couldn’t outline any details of the process” (Blakinger, 2023). Keri then goes on to say that she felt it was unfair to have been questioned and booked during this time because she couldn’t remember anything that happened, and she also didn’t understand what was happening. Keri also outlines the process of her recovering from swallowing all those pills. She stated that “The guards chose not to notice or to question why I was still so high. They just asked everyone else in the block to keep an eye on me and make sure I was still breathing as I nodded out again and again, knocking my head on the cell bars when I stood and falling asleep in improbable contortionist positions when I sat”

(Blakinger, 2023). Keri sums the entire process up by saying “the system does not care if you understand it.”

Lisa Forbes also tells her story and how unfairly she felt like she was treated and even represented. She told us that “the jury never heard my story, thanks to my public defender deciding my past life didn’t matter” (Forbes, 2022). After Lisa was originally convicted, her sentence was appealed. In discussing the process of being arrested, “the detectives who arrested me had said I had the right to remain silent, so I clammed up. That, the appellate judges said, was a mistake. I should have told the investigators I intended to remain silent and then clammed up ... they don’t explain how a nineteen-year-old would have known that” (Forbes, 2022). Lisa then goes on to say that the judge gave the jurors incorrect instructions regarding voluntary manslaughter and first-degree murder convictions. The appellate court ruled that the error was harmless because they did not believe it affected the outcome of the trial. Lisa believes she was treated unfairly and states that “none of the things deemed irregular at my trial mattered because I would have been convicted anyway” (Forbes, 2022). She summarized this up by saying that “all the futility, the small circles, the refusal to see us as fully human – it was not a flaw in the system. It *was* the system.”

Chris and Mark both referenced physical spaces within the criminal justice system that made them feel as if the system worked against them. For example, Chris Wilson commented about the courtroom and its purpose and says “I don’t understand the rules there, but I know they are against us: the poor, the dark, and the accused – rightly or wrongly – because that’s the room’s purpose. These are the places America created to finish us off” (Wilson, 2020). Mark Olmstead specifically talks about the prisons themselves. “Cellblocks built in the 1990s, like Delano, were designed to make it hard for inmates in different cells to communicate with each

other. The result was thick walls between cells and a fairly quiet block. But Sycamore is a much older design; stacked cages like San Quentin or Attica, with acoustics to match. The noise, simply put, was overwhelming. My first thought was that it would be impossible for anyone to serve any length of time there without going crazy” (Olmsted, 2017). He also talks about how the “overall effect [of prison] was incredibly dehumanizing; loud and dirty, like a zoo. Everyone else seemed desensitized to the noise and garbage, but I couldn’t imagine getting used to it.”

The authors of these memoirs all felt, to some extent, that the criminal justice system treated them unfairly in some way. Research suggests that the positive treatment by the system to these individuals has been shown to reduce misconduct and violations. The opposite is also true, that the negative experiences with the system have been shown to be correlated with misconduct. If this is true, we need to take a closer look at how our system treats individuals and how we can help make the system fairer to help create more rehabilitative opportunities for individuals.

### **Prison and Jail Experiences**

In all the memoirs, the authors described experiences they had during their incarceration. Most talked about interactions with staff and other inmates that seemed to leave a lasting impression. They also expressed frustrations they had with limited programs within the facilities that didn’t seem to provide much help to them upon their release.

#### *Staff-Inmate Relationships*

Discussions about staff-inmate relationships focused on arbitrary rules and the indisputable power that correctional officers had over inmates. Lisa, for example, expressed that she felt more like a number than a person when she was serving her time and her relationship with the guards was not good. The prisons were overcrowded, understaffed, and underfunded in



the late 1980s and “on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999, - my “out” date – I left prison. A guard said, ‘See you later!’ ‘No, you won’t,’ I replied. The guard laughed” (Forbes, 2022).

Keri Blakinger also expressed frustration with the relationship between inmates and the guards. She stated that she “was never really sure what the real rule was and what an unwritten rule was. In the Twilight Zone of jail, it didn’t really matter. They were equally enforceable.” Keri also commented about a guard that liked to give out punishments on a whim and stated, “crossing my fingers and hoping that we wouldn’t be stuck with the CO who liked punishing us for trivial or entirely imagined offenses by making us stand in the corners of the dorm for hours at a time” (Blakinger, 2023). She described the entire experience as “humiliating” and specifically talked about the bathroom experience. They all shared the same one without any doors and on occasion had an audience when she used the restroom. “It’s also subtly disorientating, a reminder that regular cultural norms don’t exist here – simply going to the bathroom can turn into a shame fest, or pass unnoticed. Like so many other parts of jails and prisons, it seems this setup was not made with women in mind.”

Mark Olmsted (2017) discusses his relationship with guards, as well and even says during an interaction with a guard he distinctly “noticed the whiff of alcohol on his breath.” Kevin Gilford is no outsider and explains the staff and inmate relationships in his memoir. When Kevin was first transferred to the prison where he served his sentence, the sheriff gave an orientation and stated that “the sheriff at the county jail doesn’t want his deputies putting their hands on the inmate, here we encourage it. If you step out of line or give one of my officers any flack, you can expect a beating like you’ve never known before” (Gilford, 2017). He ends the chapter with his thoughts about the power that the guards had over him in the prison. “The level of power these guards had over me was also apparent. In county, although my freedom was taken from me, I

never feared the guards. Quite the opposite. I saw them as being there to protect us should anything go down. Here, I now knew, I would have to show these men and women the utmost respect” (Gilford, 2017).

The relationships with parole officers and parolees have already been shown to be crucial in determining whether the individual successfully reintegrates or not. If this is true, we should also assume that relationships with guards and other criminal justice professionals within the prisons and jails have at least some effects on individuals. It is devastating to hear the treatment of inmates by guards in the stories these authors shared because of how terrible the conversations and treatment seem to be.

### *Inmate-Inmate Relationships*

Several authors described co-existing with other inmates, but it was Mark Olmsted who talked at length about impressionable conversations he had with other inmates about the cycle of recidivism. Describing one conversation, Mark said “he told me he had ‘relationships’ with guards who brought in cigarettes, and they all made money. He worked out a lot, learned to box, got his G.E.D. But then he’d get out, have trouble finding a place to stay or a job, start hustling again, violate his parole, return to prison, get caught smuggling or fighting, get punished and so on. Lather, rinse, repeat.” A different inmate told him “I’ve spent way more time in here because of candy-ass parole violations, or extensions to my sentence from infractions committed in here, than for any crime I actually committed on the outside” (Olmstead, 2017). He learned from other inmates that the reentry process, to some extent, was set up for individuals to fail upon their release from prison. Reflecting on his peers in prison, Mark stated “it’s very easy to feel sorry for yourself in prison, but every time I start to go down that road, I have an encounter that reminds me that I am still extremely lucky compared to most of these guys. I hadn’t noticed the co-pay

because my family deposits \$200 a month in my account. Imagine what it must be like for some of these families to have to choose between gas money to visit their loved one and putting money on his books so that he can buy some toothpaste or see a doctor? Imagine if I could never call my sister because she couldn't afford to accept the jacked-up rates they charge for collect calls from prison. You'd think poverty was punishment enough for being poor." These relationships between inmates within the prison system are important because when you are around people, you learn things from them and eventually, "you are who you hang around." Furthermore, the aspect of social support is very important, and this includes the relationships in these individuals lives.

### *Programs and Education*

The authors spoke about their feelings and opinions about the programs and education offered in the criminal justice system and how it affects life on the outside. Lisa (2022) tells us that she "worked five days a week and earned \$15 a month cataloging the packages and clothing sent to the women in Dwight." She had "earned degrees in applied science, commercial arts and photography, and computer technology in prison." Despite this and having a paralegal certificate and experience as a secretary in Chicago before her arrest, she struggled with obtaining employment when she was released. Lisa was also mandated to have mental health counseling, which was not available in the prison where she served time. Lisa (2022) explains an interaction with a receptionist at a mental health counseling center in which the receptionist says, "you're not in our territory, we can't help you." This frustrated Lisa and when she finally went to the place she needed to go, it took her days and money out of her pocket to figure it out. Lastly, when Lisa was released, she eventually went to work with people that were trying to help improve the criminal justice system and the resources individuals had when they were released.

Lisa (2017) states that “a lot of people, some of them former prisoners, were frustrated with organizations that claimed to help ex-cons but didn’t. A few of them had started or wanted to start new and better nonprofits – ‘ones that worked.’”

Mark (017) expresses frustration about programs and education within the system and states that “it’s positively comical how they called our two weeks in Cedar ‘orientation’ when they didn’t even hand out so much as a flyer detailing new routines and procedures, or how they were going to change.” Mark also gives us an example about an individual that should have had a different fate, but instead will probably end up in a janitorial job. He expresses that “someone like Phil, for example, should have left here with a degree in early childhood education. He would make an excellent elementary school teacher. Instead, he’s going to get some janitorial job – if he’s lucky – and will probably still end up back here, costing the taxpayers \$20,000 a year.”

All of the authors talk about their experiences in jail and in prison and how it would likely impact their released. Many of them expressed that there were so many programs, work, and education available in prison, but it wouldn’t necessarily matter. They all believed it wouldn’t make much of a difference when they were finally released. In Lisa’s case specifically, it didn’t for a number of years. She worked at a job she was overqualified for years. The authors thought that they could have spent more time on programs, work and education that pertained to them individually and would help benefit them instead of a generalized program or job. For the most part, they believed that it was not the most beneficial use of their time and wouldn’t help when they were released.

### **Reentry Process**

This section of the paper will focus specifically on when these individuals were released from prison and the challenges they faced. The most prominent challenges are below and are

important to address so we can help others understand the challenges and to potentially help bring awareness, and eventually a solution, to some of these struggles.

### *Impact of Mental Illness*

The mental illness referenced earlier continued to challenge the authors after their release from prison. How do the authors deal with the issues of substance dependencies, depression, and other mental illnesses when they are released? Unfortunately, many of the authors went into detail about how lost and isolated they felt even when they were back in the outside world. For example, describing the emotions he felt upon release, Mark (2017) states that he had “literally not allowed himself to just ‘be’ with feelings of anxiety, depression, excitement or joy for the better part of two decades. There was a lot you didn’t want to feel.” He goes on to express the struggles some of the other inmates faced. Olmsted (2017) states “there’s a lot of angry people here. Most of them because they don’t know who they are. They don’t know who their daddy is, and a lot of them, they don’t know who their momma is neither. I had this girl on the streets, her momma left her in the hospital when she was on crack, and this girl cried and cried in my arms and said to me, ‘I don’t even know who I am, I don’t even know who I am.’”

When Lisa Forbes first got arrested and was new to the prison, she noticed and made comments in her book about the other women and the medications they were taking. Lisa (2022) comments that “more than half the prisoners took psychotropic drugs that kept them drowsy. Elavil, Sinequan, and Adapin – mood-altering drugs that were dispensed as readily as breath mints to help the women deal with ‘depression.’” She also discussed seeing these same women get out of prison and come right back because, in part, they didn’t have access to the medication and they had in prison. Forbes (2022) also makes an interesting observation about the women that were serving time with her and states “every one of us, I’m quite certain struggled with acute

trauma tied to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.” Lastly, Lisa (2022) does a fantastic job summing up and articulating the impact mental illness has on returning citizens: “Untreated trauma is at the root of most restored citizens’ continuing problems after they have served their sentences” (Forbes, 2022).

This is an important point to make because if these women aren’t aware of the trauma and the struggles they need to face and don’t become aware of that while they are behind bars, the likelihood of them suddenly becoming aware of the trauma that they need to address won’t suddenly increase when they are released from prison. The impact of mental illness and trauma in these individuals is something that needs to be addressed while people are in the criminal justice system.

### *Collateral Consequences*

Collateral consequences, simply explained, are informal or invisible consequences that extend beyond formal punishment. These are punishments that no one really tells you are going to be issues when you get released from prison and they centered around the stigma of returning citizens.

Lisa Forbes also tells her story about getting evicted from an apartment that she stayed in for two and a half years. When she first put in an application to live there and they ran a background check, it was under her married name, which means that the felony murder conviction did not show up. After changing her name back to her maiden name, they ran a background check and found out that she had been convicted of murder and had spent time in maximums security. “My crime was twenty-seven years old. I had been out of prison for thirteen years. I reminded her again that I had a full-time job with excellent references, I already lived in the complex, and I had paid my rent on time for two and a half years. I had never had a problem

with either a neighbor or the management. She did not care.” She was then consequently evicted. (Forbes, 2022).

Collateral consequences are devastating to the lives of returning citizens. No one can prepare you for the stigma, the lack of support, and the perception that other people will have when they find out you were released from prison. These are invisible and informal punishments, but they are very real, and they are very destructive.

### *Social Support*

Many people leaving prison lack social support in the community. The authors of the memoirs included in this study were no different. Mark describes the futility of pre-release sessions: “I am writing this sitting in Re-Entry Class, which reminds me a little of Health Sciences back in 8<sup>th</sup> grade – innocuous and interminable. The instructor is a well-meaning and earnest man, but ‘preparing’ this population for a life on the outside in two mornings and an afternoon is an impossible task that would defeat Deepak Chopra” (Olmsted, 2017).

Even in places where returning citizens should be able to find support, they are met with disparaging attitudes. Lisa Forbes and Kevin Gilford also share experiences that show the lack of social support shown to individuals being released from prison. Lisa explains an interaction with a receptionist at the mental health counseling center in which she tells her “‘I can see why you’ve been referred to us,’ the woman said snidely, with a sneer on her face. ‘It’s obvious that you’re angry and hostile” (Forbes, 2022). Kevin (2017) makes a statement that we should all consider when he states that there is supposed to be “the idea that family ties help prevent convict from re-offending and returning to prisoner,” but what about individuals that don’t have families to go back to? This helps pile on to the point that social support, specifically in cases

where individuals might not have families and close ties to come back to, is very important to the success of these returning citizens.

When discussing the idea of social support and how it connects to the process of reentry, we have to look at the research and information that has told us that relationships, family ties, and social ties, are some of the most important aspects for successful returning citizens. This also includes the attitudes of guards, parole, and probation officers. The relationship between a parolee and a parole officer has been given a tremendous amount of weight because of the fact that this relationship has been shown, at least to some extent, how successful an individual will be when they are released. Mark expresses his lack of the social support aspect and his frustration with the reentry class he attended before release. If social support was something that was apparent, I would hope at the very least they would take more time to try to teach people about how to reintegrate back into society.

### *Anticipation of Failure*

One of the most prominent themes in the memoirs was the anticipation of failure stemming from. The way they were treated by individuals who work in the criminal justice profession, including guards and parole officers. This also involves how the stigma surrounding the returning citizens affects them.

The anticipation of failure ties into the social support aspect of the reentry process. This specific subtheme includes specific events or relationships that were mentioned in the memoirs that were detrimental to the process of the individual reintegrating back into society. For example, when Chris Wilson (author of *Master Plan*) was released from prison, he talks a lot about his parole officer and the relationship that they had with each other. Chris talks about how badly he is treated by her and expressed that “she had a message for me, and she hammered it



over and over. *You have to give up your dreams. You're a convict. You have to accept that you are at the bottom of society and you always will be*" (Wilson).

In Lisa Forbes' memoir, when she gets released, she specifically is faced with issues about getting the resources she needs. In one specific example, she needs mental health counseling before she can receive any financial support. When she goes to receive mental health counseling, they send her away because she was not able to receive what she needed at that specific place. The place they send her, she ends up having to pay for a bus fare to get across town. "I see why people get out and go right back to prison! My mother exploded. They act like they *want* you to go back!"

Keri Blakinger (2023) explains this idea well in her memoir when she states that "merely opening the prison doors and sending traumatized people back to their traumatized families living in their traumatized communities is not the answer." Chris Wilson also articulates this well when he states: "Parole is brutal. Our system is not set up for men and women released from prison to succeed. It's actually set up for them to fail. I'm not sure if that's intentional – I think it's the result of a lot of small decisions piled up over the years – but one thing is certain: society turned its back on its returning citizens long ago. It doesn't want us back."

Unfortunately, most of us can relate to the fact that when people don't believe in you and there's doubt in your own mind about accomplishing difficult tasks, it is very difficult to succeed. The anticipation of failure of these individuals is very apparent in their lives and in their stories and it can be crucial to their process of reentering society.

## **Discussion**

### *Overarching Findings*

The overarching findings from the five memoirs include turning points in individual's lives and that it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to successfully reintegrate back into society after being released from prison. This has been shown and the stories have been told by these authors. Even the individuals who wrote these memoirs talk about how they are one in a million, and how lucky they are to have gotten out and not been back. Trauma, the experiences the individuals have within the criminal justice system and with the professionals that work in the system, the conditions of parole along with collateral consequences and lack of social support, are all some of the hardest challenges to overcome as a returning citizen.

### *Turning Points*

“Turning points,” or critical incidents in someone's life, are characterized as events that serve as turning points into crime and out of crime. This specific section is not a prominent theme or a subtheme, but I felt it was an important aspect to discuss. While reading the stories of these individuals and hearing their struggles, it was apparent to me that there are “turning points” in everyone's lives, and that includes the lives of these individuals, as well. Keri Blakinger, Chris Wilson, Kevin Gilford, Mark Olmsted, and Lisa Forbes all seem to have specific events or aspects of their lives that drive them to commit the crime and to eventually turn away from it. Turning points come in all forms. If we better understand common turning points, or critical incidents in someone's life, we could potentially be able to connect others that have been through similar incidents and help build a support system for this individual.

If you think about a turning point in your own life, this will make a little more sense. For example, when you go to college when you haven't really ever been on your own or away from

your parents, or when you end a relationship with a significant other, these are things that usually we, as people, look back on as a turning point where things in our lives shifted and changed. The same turning points happen with these individuals.

Chris Wilson's mother dated a man that was a drunk and an abuser. Not only did his mother's boyfriend abuse her, but he also abused her when he tried to stand up for his mom. Chris ended up watching his mother get beat, almost to death, with the end results being a smashed right orbital bone (her eye.) After this specific event, along with watching his cousin die and his brother beating on him as well, Chris felt angry and started carrying guns to protect himself and his mom if he ever needed to. This eventually led to why he killed the man he killed – he was carrying a gun and was afraid he was going to get jumped by two individuals that had surrounded him and he ended up pulling a gun and shooting and killing one of the men.

Lisa Forbes had a child with a man that was older than her because she was trapped in a cycle of abuse, and she ended up stabbing him with a knife after being abused and left. Keri Blakinger was a known ice skater when her partner left her to be with another ice skater. She felt like everyone else in her life followed after losing her ice-skating partner. She also then started developing eating disorders. Kevin Gilford struggled with drug addiction too early on in his life and Mark Olmsted struggled with being a HIV positive gay man.

These stories are just a few examples of turning points and how they can affect people. Based on what I found with common turning points, I think it is important that early intervention in children's lives is one of the most important things we can do to help reduce the likelihood that an individual will turn to crime. Facilitating the development of social support for these individuals is also vital to their lives.

### **Limitations, Policy Implications, and Future Research**

This content analysis does provide a unique perspective by taking the words of the authors and helping give voice to them. It helps to give a different perspective and a more personal one. Despite this, the research is limited by the small sample of memoirs included in this analysis. Quantitative studies and more in-depth analyses would contribute more to this kind of research. For future research, consider talking to prisoners in a study that involves taking initial data and then following it up some years later for an extended period of time.

This research does help us to investigate what policies could be implicated to help foster returning citizens process of reintegration. Early intervention, mental health treatment, and building positive social networks are all things that could be implicated to help. Some of the conditions of parole and the perception of parole programs, as we have seen in this analysis, are not put in place to help the individual succeed – it makes it more difficult on the reformed citizen. By trying to implement early intervention, we can help individuals manage and cope with trauma that they experience. This also plays into mental health treatment. Many individuals, if they did receive treatment in prison, would probably be shown to have a better likelihood of successfully reintegrating. Lastly, since social support has been shown to play a relatively big part in the success of this process, building positive social networks should be a priority and we could help play a part in connecting individuals to these aspects they need.

The goal of this analysis was to develop an understanding of prisoner reentry because of the assumption that society places on these individuals. We place blame on the individual and think they are solely responsible for going back into the system. Most of the time, we don't really look and try to understand the circumstances surrounding their reentry process. Awareness of these ongoing issues is vital and the failure to connect returning citizens to the services that

they need increases the risk of unemployment, further substance use, criminal behavior, and ultimately recidivism.

At the end of the day, individuals released from prison are not just disappearing. They are coming back to your community, my community, and back into the real world. They are real people, and their struggles are also very real. This research about reentry is vital to the future of our communities and to the future of our returning citizens.

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**Appendix A - Table of Memoirs**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Publication Date</b>	<b>Length of Incarceration</b>	<b>Crime Convicted Of</b>
Ink from the Pen	Mark Olmsted	Male	2017	16 month sentence	Possession of drugs and intent to sell
Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned from Prison	Kevin Gilford	Male	2017	70 months and probation for four years	Carrying a loaded firearm in a public place, ignoring court orders, possession of drugs, receiving stolen property
The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose	Chris Wilson	Male	2020	Sentenced to life, served 16 years before being released	Murder
I Can Take it from Here: A Memoir of Trauma, Prison, and Self-Empowerment	Lisa Forbes	Female	2022	25 years in prison, 14 spent in maximum security	Murder
Corrections in Ink	Keri Blakinger	Female	2023	Two-year term, served 21 months	Possession of drugs and intent to sell

## Appendix B - Codebook

Codebook – Inductive Coding			
Prominent Themes	Subthemes	Description	Examples
<b>Traumatic Lives</b>			
	Mental Illness	Mental illness includes any discussion of mental illnesses, substance dependencies, eating disorders, and things related to this	<p>“Nobody wondered why I started seeing and talking to a little white girl after I got hit by a car” (Forbes, 2022)</p> <p>“I was so miserable, I thought about killing myself every day” (Forbes, 2022)</p>
	Childhood Traumas (mental, emotional, physical)	This will refer to specific traumatic events that happened when the individuals were children	“The people who were tormenting me also slept next to me or made my meals or sat in the tub while I was on the toilet. They were not on the playground. They were in my home” (Forbes, 2022)
	Environmental Factors	This subtheme is focused on the social environment in which they are embedded, which includes the family and neighborhood	“This was the late 1980s, and crack was hitting hard. Murder rates were spiking in Lincoln Heights, and even in Temple Hills families were being torn apart by addiction. It was so violent on Division Avenue, the cops put twenty-foot-tall spotlights out on Grandma's block, making it impossible to sleep” (Wilson, 2020)
<b>Procedural Justice</b>		Refers to common concerns regarding their cases in general and how the individual feels about the treatment of the system, the sentencing process, and more. This usually encapsulates feelings about if the individual was treated fairly by the system	When Blakinger got caught, she swallowed all the pills she got caught with. “It’s enough to kill most people, but I have built quite a tolerance through nearly a decade of self-destruction” (Blakinger, 2023). She was high during the process of being book and stated “I sure as hell couldn’t outline any

			<p>details of the process” (Blakinger, 2023)                  “The jury never heard my story, thanks to my public defender deciding my past life didn’t matter” (Forbes, 2022)                  “I don’t understand the rules there, but I know they are against us: the poor, the dark, and the accused – rightly or wrongly – because that’s the room’s (courtroom) purpose. These are the places America created to finish us off” (Wilson, 2020)</p>
<p><b>Prison and Jail Experiences</b></p>			
	<p>Staff and Inmate Relationships</p>	<p>Relationships the incarcerated individual had with guards and perceived relationships</p>	<p>"... crossing my fingers and hoping that we wouldn't be stuck with the CO who liked punishing us for trivial or entirely imagined offenses by making us stand in the corners of the dorm for hours at a time ..." (Blakinger, 2023)</p>
	<p>Peer Relationships</p>	<p>Relationships the incarcerated individual had with other incarcerated individuals and perceived relationships. This specifically looks at the conversations inmates had with each other in the prison system</p>	<p>“He told me he had ‘relationships’ with guards who brought in cigarettes and they all made money. He worked out a lot, learned to box, got his G.E.D. But then he’d get out, have trouble finding a place to stay or a job, start hustling again, violate his parole, return to prison, get caught smuggling or fighting, get punished and so on. Lather, rinse, repeat” (Olmsted, 2017)</p>
	<p>Programs and Education</p>	<p>The feelings and opinions about the programs and education offered in the criminal justice system</p>	<p>“Someone like Phil, for example, should have left here with a degree in early childhood education. He would make an excellent elementary school teacher. Instead,</p>

			<p>he’s going to get some janitorial job – if he’s lucky – and will probably still end up back here, costing the taxpayers \$20,000 a year” (Olmsted, 2017)</p> <p>“A lot of people, some of them former prisoners, were frustrated with organizations that claimed to help ex-cons but didn’t. A few of them had started or wanted to start new and better nonprofits – ‘ones that worked’” (Fobes, 2022)</p>
<b>Reentry Process</b>			
	Impact of Mental Illness	The impact mental illness has on the returning citizen, whether that be counseling services or access to medication	<p>“I literally have not allowed myself to just ‘be’ with feelings of anxiety, depression, excitement or joy for the better part of two decades. There was a lot you didn’t want to feel” (Olmsted, 2017)</p> <p>“Untreated trauma is also at the root of most restored citizens’ continuing problems after they have served their sentences” (Forbes, 2022)</p>
	Collateral Consequences	Invisible or informal punishments like not being able to find a job or housing because of a criminal record	<p>“My crime was twenty-seven years old. I had been out of prison for thirteen years. I reminded her again that I had a full-time job with excellent references, I already lived in the complex, and I had paid my rent on time for two and a half years. I had never had a problem with either a neighbor or the management. She did not care.” She was then consequently evicted. (Forbes, 2022)</p>
	Social Support	Refers to lack of support from people in the	<p>“‘I can see why you’ve been referred to us,’ the woman said snidely, with a sneer on her face.</p>

		individual's life specifically when they are released	‘It’s obvious that you’re angry and hostile’ (Forbes, 2022)
	Anticipation of Failure	The way they are treated by individuals who work in the criminal justice profession, including guards parole officers and the stigma surrounding the individual’s failure of reentry	‘Parole is brutal. Our system is not set up for men and women released from prison to succeed. It’s actually set up for them to fail. I’m not sure if that’s intentional – I think it’s the result of a lot of small decisions piled up over the years – but one thing is certain: society turned its back on its returning citizens long ago. It doesn’t want us back’ (Wilson, 2020)

**Appendix C - Poem Shared and Written by Mark Olmstead**

Poem by Mark Olmstead

Here

Here's to all the babies

Who get left in cribs alone

Who cry for hours

The saddest of songs.

Here's to all the toddlers

Who get slapped and snapped at,

Instead of missed and kissed.

Here's to all the kids

In foster homes or juvies,

Who end up in prison

Or mental hospitals,

Behind bars

Or drinking at them.

Here's to all the people who don't know who they are,

Who don't know how to say –

“I am in so much pain,”

Except on Jerry Springer or Cops,

Screaming at uniform

Here's to all the guards

Who should be teaching,

To all the dealers,

Who should be healing.

Here's to building schools

With walls that support hope

Instead of enclose it.

Here's to a world too full of jails,

Of injured men

With tortured tales.

Here's to making here, there,

And then, there, a place farther away.

Here's to me, here's to you,

Here's to being heard.