Full and Free Lives:
Social and Economic Opportunity Among Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

By

Kymberly Lynette Byrd

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Community Research and Action

May 13, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Brian Christens, PhD

Sarah Suiter, PhD

Kimberly Bess, PhD

Bernard Turner, EdD

Copyright © 2022 Kymberly Lynette Byrd
All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES……………………………………………………………………..vi

INTRODUCTION……………………………..…………………………………….. 1

Current Study...4
References 7

1. Interrogating Carceral Citizenship 10

Abstract 10
Introduction 11
Theoretical Framework: Carceral Citizenship......................................12
Feature One 14
Housing Market 14
Labor Market 15
Feature Two 17
Feature Three...18
Methods...20
Settings..20
Sample...20
Procedures 21
Data Analysis...22
Results...23
Feature One 23
Housing Market..23
Labor Market..25
Feature Two...28
Prisons, Parole, and Probation 28
Halfway Houses 29
Feature Three...31
Family 31
Church...32
Self-Help 33
Discussion 34
Limitations 37
Conclusion...38
References 40

2. Examining Asset-based Approaches in Reentry Programming......................47

Abstract 47
Introduction 48
Literature Review 49
Defining Asset-based Approaches 49
Criticisms of Asset-based Approaches 51
Asset-based Approaches in Reentry Programming 52
Methods...54
Settings...54
Sample..55
Procedures 56
Data Analysis...57
Results...58
Skills Developed...58
Knowledge Gained 62
Connections Cultivated 64
Cultivating Support 64
Affirming Dignity...69
Facilitating Growth..71
Discussion 73
Limitations 78
Conclusion...79
References 81

3. Charting a Path to Full and Free Lives: An Abolitionist Vision for Reentry.. 85

Abstract 85
Introduction 86
The Current Landscape of Reentry 87
The Constraints of Reform 90
Why Abolition? 91
Methods...94
Settings...94
Sample..95
Procedures 95
Data Analysis...96
An Abolitionist Vision for Reentry 97
Social Opportunity...97
Autonomy 97
Pursuing Peace 99

Family 100
Community Engagement 102
Economic Opportunity 103
Financial Freedom 103
Entrepreneurship 104
Discussion 105
Limitations 109
Conclusion 110
References 112

CONCLUSION 118

APPENDIX A 121

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1. Skills Developed 59
2. Knowledge Gained 62

INTRODUCTION

The United States is home to five percent of the world's population but 25 percent of its prisoners (Pfaff, 2017). Scholar and activist Angela Davis writes, "Short of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time" (Davis, 2003, p. 11). While these staggering statistics are cause for alarm, it is important to note that mass incarceration is a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States. In the 1970s, the incarceration rate was comparable to most European countries and had been stable since the late 1800s (Pfaff, 2017). The number of people in state or federal prisons rose from under 200,000 in 1972 to over 1.2 million in 2020. During this span of time, the incarceration rate for state and federal prisons increased from 93 per 100,000 to 358 per 100,000 (Carson, 2021; Pfaff, 2017).

The rapid, expansive growth of the carceral system now draws comparison to the American higher education system. Scholars find this comparison helpful in demonstrating the scale of the carceral system. Each year, the number of men who graduate from college is comparable to the number of men released from prison (Knapp et al., 2008; Massoglia & Pridemore, 2015). The size of the incarcerated population is approximately the same as the enrollment at all American research universities (Massoglia & Pridemore, 2015; Snyder & Dillow, 2010).

Although activists have been voicing their concerns about mass incarceration for decades, in recent years these concerns have become more mainstream. The social, political, and economic implications of mass incarceration now garner widespread attention from advocates, politicians, and concerned citizens. Many believe that the extreme rates of incarceration in the United States are unsustainable. The United States spends $80 billion each year on corrections,

which includes prisons and jails and agencies responsible for probation and parole (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Another $100 billion is spent on the policing and court system (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). Political leaders across the country are growing concerned about corrections spending impinging on state funding for education, health, and other vital services. In 2010, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger advocated for a constitutional amendment that would prohibit corrections spending from exceeding spending for the public university system (Mauer, 2011; Steinhauer, 2010). A 2016 report from the United States Department of Education noted that state and local spending on prisons and jails has increased at triple the rate of funding for public education from preschool to grade 12 between 1979 and 2013. Preschool to grade 12 spending increased from $258 billion to $534 billion while corrections spending increased from $17 billion to $71 billion. State and local appropriations for public colleges and universities remained flat while corrections spending increased by 90 percent between 1989 and 2013 (United States Department of Education, 2016). Appropriations for public colleges and universities increased from $67 billion to $71 billion compared to an increase of $17 billion to $71 billion in corrections expenditures (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Race and class disparities concentrate the effects of mass incarceration on specific segments of society. Wakefield and Uggen (2010) suggest that racial disproportionality in imprisonment can be attributed to "political and institutional processes, racial threat, and lingering cultural fears of Black men" (p. 393). These claims have been reinforced by social scientists across decades (Beckett, 2000; Feeley & Simon, 1992; Garland, 2017; Mauer, 2006; Tonry, 1996). Loic Wacquant (2000, 2001) asserts that the racial character of imprisonment is not driven by crime rates. Instead, the United States has a desire to "manage dispossessed and

dishonored groups" in a manner similar to slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the ghettos (Wacquant, 2001, p. 95).

As incarceration rates have grown, there have also been increases in the number of people exiting prisons. Unprecedented numbers of individuals are leaving prisons and returning to their communities each year. In 2020, state and federal prisons admitted 346,461 individuals and released 549,600 individuals (Carson, 2021). Forty years ago, less than 200,000 individuals made the journey from prison to home (Visher & Travis, 2011a). Though there are many individuals serving long sentences, far more people are incarcerated for shorter stints of time. There are also many people cycling in and out of prison for short spells for a substantial period of their adult lives. Nearly all individuals who are incarcerated are released from prison and most are released within five years of admission (Travis, 2005).

Given this increase, advocates and politicians are demanding that more resources be dedicated to reentry. While this terminology is well-intentioned, Alexander (2010) writes,

> People who have been convicted of felonies almost never truly reenter the society they inhabited prior to their conviction. Instead, they enter a separate society, a world hidden from public view, governed by a set of oppressive and discriminatory rules and laws that do not apply to everyone else. They become members of an undercaste— an enormous population of predominately black and brown people who, [are] denied basic rights and privileges of American citizenship and are permanently relegated to an inferior status (pp. 186-187).

The individuals in this "undercaste" are often returning to communities burdened by unemployment, lack of affordable housing, poor public transportation, and inaccessible health care. Many need transitional and supportive services such as job training, housing assistance, and mental health and substance abuse treatment, services that may be unavailable in the neighborhoods where they reside (Visher & Travis, 2011). The difficult journey from prison to home is further complicated by the discrimination that many individuals encounter. Alexander

(2010) explains, “Once you’re labeled a [felon], employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service are suddenly legal” (p. 2). Alexander (2010) describes this as a “parallel universe” where discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are legal and individuals are denied the privileges of citizenship (p. 94).

Jeremy Travis (2002) describes this experience as “invisible punishment” (p. 16). This term refers to the sanctions imposed on people after leaving prison that often operate outside of public view. Instead of being imposed by a sentencing judge, these sanctions are operations of law. Alexander (2010) suggests that these sanctions can be more impactful than the time spent incarcerated. Travis (2011) writes, “In this brave new world, punishment for the original offense is no longer enough; one’s debt to society is never paid” (p. 19). Abd’Allah Lateef, a man who spent 31 years incarcerated, echoes these sentiments and describes formerly incarcerated individuals as “nominally free” (Lateef, 2019, para. 7). Lateef feels that their freedom is marred by stereotypes, myths, and biases that “distort their value as human beings” (Lateef, 2019, para. 10). He explains that he and his formerly incarcerated peers remain in search of “meaningful access to equity, opportunity, happiness, and prosperity” (Lateef, 2019, para. 10).

Current Study

As Abd’Allah Lateef explains, many formerly incarcerated individuals are experiencing nominal freedom. If we wish to build a world where these individuals experience full and free lives after incarceration, we must examine the barriers and facilitators to social and economic opportunity among this population. The first paper describes the world as it is, the second paper explores the world we are building, and the third paper imagines the world as it could be for formerly incarcerated individuals.

The first paper focuses on carceral citizenship as a barrier to social and economic opportunity. Carceral citizenship refers to the legal and extralegal sanctions imposed on the formerly incarcerated, their families, and the communities where they reside. It examines the host of actors administering these sanctions and how the discrimination, stigma, and exclusion the formerly incarcerated experience produces specific outcomes (Miller & Alexander, 2016). Drawing from interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, this paper explores how they navigate carceral citizenship and how these experiences converge with and diverge from Miller and Alexander's framing of carceral citizenship. The findings from this paper demonstrate that carceral citizenship has produced an alternate reality for the formerly incarcerated. In this alternate reality, they are navigating a social landscape of constrained, limited possibilities.

The second paper examines a social enterprise, prison entrepreneurship program, and reentry court committed to building a better world for formerly incarcerated individuals. Each of these organizations employ asset-based approaches to facilitate social and economic opportunity. Asset-based approaches recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections to promote wellbeing (Garven et al., 2016). Participants were asked to describe the skills, knowledge, and connections they cultivated in these programs. The findings from this paper demonstrate the importance of relationship building in reentry programming. While the skills they developed and the knowledge they gained continue to be useful, it is abundantly clear that the connections participants cultivated are their most valuable asset.

The third paper offers an abolitionist vision for reentry to imagine the world as it could be for formerly incarcerated individuals. Abolition aims to render prison obsolete by solving the social problems that drive mass incarceration (Davis, 2003). It is a structural and systemic intervention that can create the social and economic conditions for full and free lives after

incarceration. In this paper, formerly incarcerated individuals reflected on full and free lives after incarceration and described their best possible futures. When imagining the boundless possibilities for their future, participants named desires that spanned both social and economic opportunity. Their vision for full and free lives can be achieved with the social and economic transformation that abolition demands.

Interrogating the barriers to social and economic opportunity among the formerly incarcerated exposes the invisible punishment (Travis, 2002) they encounter daily. Exploring the facilitators to social and economic opportunity helps to chart a path forward as we aim to move past nominal freedom (Lateef, 2019). By describing the world as it is, exploring the world we are building, and imagining the world as it could be for formerly incarcerated individuals, this paper confronts our difficult present while imagining a liberated future.

References

Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New Press.

Beckett, K. (2000). *Making crime pay: Law and order in contemporary American politics*. Oxford University Press.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2019). *Corrections*. https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=1

Carson, E. A. (2021). *Prisoners in 2020* (pp. 1–38). Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf

Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

Feeley, M. M., & Simon, J. (1992). The new penology: Notes on the emerging strategy of corrections and its implications. *Criminology*, *30*(4), 449–474. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1992.tb01112.x

Garland, D. (2017). *The culture of control: Crime and social order in contemporary society*. University of Chicago Press.

Garven, F., McLean, J., & Pattoni, L. (2016). *Asset-based approaches: Their rise, role and reality*. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1240297

Knapp, L. G., Kelly-Reid, J. E., & Ginder, S. A. (2008). *Postsecondary institutions in the United States*. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008159rev.pdf

Lateef, A. (2019, June 14). What does ‘reentry’ into society after prison mean? Here’s what people living it have to say. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/reentry-criminal-justice-reform-philadelphia-20190614.html

Massoglia, M., & Pridemore, W. A. (2015). Incarceration and health. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *41*(1), 291–310. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112326

Mauer, M. (2006). *Race to incarcerate*. New Press.

Mauer, M. (2011). Addressing racial disparities in incarceration. *Prison Journal*, *91*(3 Supplement), 87S-101S.

Mauer, M., & Chesney-Lind, M. (2003). *Invisible punishment: The collateral consequences of mass imprisonment*. New Press.

Miller, R. J., & Alexander, A. (2016). The price of carceral citizenship: Punishment, surveillance, and social welfare policy in an age of carceral expansion. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*, *21*(2), 291–314.

Pfaff, J. F. (2017). *Locked in: The true causes of mass incarceration--and how to achieve real reform*. Basic Books.

Snyder, T. D., & Dillow, S. A. (2010). *Digest of education statistics 2009*. United States Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010013_0.pdf

Steinhauer, J. (2010, January 6). Schwarzenegger seeks shift from prisons to schools. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/07/us/07calif.html

Stullich, S., Morgan, I., & Schak, O. (2016). *State and local expenditures on corrections and education: A brief from the U.S. Department of Education, Policy and Program Studies Service*. https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures-corrections-education/brief.pdf

Tonry, M. H. (1996). *Malign neglect—Race, crime, and punishment in America*. Oxford University Press.

Travis, J. (2002). Invisible punishment: An instrument of social exclusion. In M. Mauer & M. Chesney-Lind (Eds.), *Invisible punishment: The collateral consequences of mass imprisonment*. New Press.

Travis, J. (2005). *But they all come back: Facing the challenges of prisoner reentry* (1st ed). Urban Institute Press.

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2011). Life on the outside: Returning Home after Incarceration Criminal Justice Reform: Issues and Recommendations for Corrections. *Prison Journal*, *3 Supplement*, 102S-119S.

Wacquant, L. (2000). The new "peculiar institution": On the prison as surrogate ghetto. *Theoretical Criminology*, *4*(3), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480600004003007

Wacquant, L. (2001). Deadly symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh. *Punishment & Society*, *3*(1), 95–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/14624740122228276

Wagner, P., & Rabuy, B. (2017, January 25). *Following the money of mass incarceration*. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html

Wakefield, S., & Uggen, C. (2010). Incarceration and stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 387–406.

CHAPTER 1

Interrogating Carceral Citizenship

Abstract

Unprecedented numbers of individuals are leaving prisons and returning to their communities each year. The social, political, and economic implications of mass incarceration now garner widespread attention from advocates, politicians, and concerned citizens. Carceral citizenship, which refers to the legal and extralegal sanctions imposed on the formerly incarcerated, has created further cause for concern. Carceral citizenship complicates their relationship with the housing market, labor market, and many other institutions, creating a difficult transition for those returning to their communities. Given the mainstream attention on the formerly incarcerated, there is a need for this population to narrate their experiences to inform practice and policy. This paper will explore how formerly incarcerated individuals navigate carceral citizenship. I will conclude by discussing implications for policy and practice.

Introduction

Unprecedented numbers of people are leaving prisons and returning to their communities each year. As incarceration rates have grown, there have also been increases in the number of individuals exiting prisons. In 2020, state and federal prisons admitted 346,461 individuals and released 549,600 individuals (Carson, 2021). Forty years ago, fewer than 200,000 individuals made the journey from prison to home (Visher & Travis, 2011b). Though there are many individuals serving long sentences, far more people are incarcerated for shorter stints of time. There are also many people cycling in and out of prison for short spells for a substantial period of their adult lives. Nearly all individuals who are incarcerated are released from prison and most are released within five years of admission (Travis, 2005).

Although activists have been voicing their concerns about mass incarceration for decades, in recent years these concerns have become more mainstream. The social, political, and economic implications of mass incarceration now garner widespread attention from advocates, politicians, and concerned citizens. Formerly incarcerated individuals are often returning to communities burdened by unemployment, lack of affordable housing, poor public transportation, and inaccessible health care. Many need transitional and supportive services such as job training, housing assistance, and mental health and substance abuse treatment, services that may be unavailable in the neighborhoods where they reside (Visher & Travis, 2011). The difficult journey home is further complicated by the housing discrimination, employment discrimination, denial of voting rights, denial of educational opportunity, and the many other forms of exclusion this population encounters (Alexander, 2010). Alexander (2010) argues that formerly incarcerated individuals occupy a “parallel universe” where discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are legal and individuals are denied the rights and privileges of citizenship (p. 94).

Miller and Alexander (2016) coined the phrase carceral citizenship to describe this phenomenon. Carceral citizenship refers to the legal and extralegal sanctions imposed on the formerly incarcerated, their families, and the communities where they reside. It examines the host of actors administering these sanctions and how the discrimination, stigma, and exclusion the formerly incarcerated experience produces specific outcomes (Miller & Alexander, 2016).

Given the increasing attention to the formerly incarcerated, there is a need for this population to narrate their experiences and inform practice and policy. Drawing from interviews with 31 formerly incarcerated individuals, this paper explores how they navigate carceral citizenship and how these experiences converge with and diverge from Miller and Alexander's framing of carceral citizenship. In the interviews, participants narrate how the legal and extralegal sanctions that Miller and Alexander (2016) identified complicate their relationship with the housing market, labor market, and other institutions. They also describe how carceral citizenship shapes their interpersonal relationships. I will conclude by discussing implications for policy and practice.

Theoretical Framework: Carceral Citizenship

Citizenship has been defined as membership in a political community with attendant rights, privileges, and responsibilities (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Miller & Stuart, 2017). Carceral citizenship is a distinct form of political membership that is experienced by and enacted upon formerly incarcerated individuals (Miller & Stuart, 2017). It differs from second-class citizenship wherein the state fails to guarantee rights to a subgroup that would be considered full and equal members of society under normal circumstances. Examples of second-class citizenship include discrimination based on race, gender, class and other characteristics. Miller and Stuart (2017) argue that carceral citizenship is "distinguished from other forms of citizenship by the

restrictions, duties, and benefits uniquely accorded to carceral citizens" (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 533). These restrictions, duties, and benefits have created an alternate economic, social, and political reality for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Carceral citizenship has three defining features. First, it consists of laws and policies that dictate how formerly incarcerated individuals engage with institutions. For carceral citizens, a criminal conviction changes the nature of their interactions with the housing market, labor market, and other institutions. They occupy a different political community because of the laws, responsibilities, and entitlements that are unique to carceral citizens (Miller & Stuart, 2017). The many restrictions they encounter and the unpredictable nature of their enforcement can make it difficult to obey the laws they are subject to, know which laws they are violating, or anticipate what their conviction status means at different times and in different locations (Miller & Stuart, 2017). Consequently, carceral citizenship consists of both formal laws and policies and the arbitrary, informal enforcement of those laws and policies.

Second, the carceral citizen is included in practices of supervision, correction, and care that are unavailable to conventional citizens (Miller & Stuart, 2017). This includes access to public and private reentry programs focused on housing, employment, healthcare, and other needs, access to social service organizations targeting the formerly incarcerated, and access to services administered by probation and parole. Miller and Stuart (2017) argue that carceral citizens are rights-bearing subjects that have access to benefits unaccounted for in the literature. They use the term benefits to refer to the entitlements afforded to a group of individuals as a result of their political membership. They explain, "The benefits of carceral citizenship are only made possible in the wake of the state's failure to ensure the social rights of citizenship to begin

with, and to provide adequate protections against social and environmental risk" (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 543).

Third, carceral citizenship has created a society in which third parties in both the public and private sphere manage, correct, sanction, and care for the carceral citizen (Miller & Stuart, 2017). Similar to other forms of political membership, informality is central to carceral citizenship (Glenn, 2011). Formally, the state contracts social service providers to address the needs of the formerly incarcerated, despite lacking the capacity to address these needs in a comprehensive manner (Taxman et al., 2007). Informally, family, friends, and community members attempt to fill in the gaps of this poorly constructed safety net (Comfort, 2008; deVuono-Powell et al., 2015). Given their experiences in the housing market and labor market, many formerly incarcerated individuals must depend on the goodwill of others to meet their basic needs.

The next section examines research into each of these three features of carceral citizenship. It focuses first on the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals in the housing market and labor market. Second, it highlights the different approaches to supervision, correction, and care for the formerly incarcerated. Third, it examines the roles of family and friends. The roles of private and public third-party actors will be explored in the paper on asset-based approaches in reentry programming.

Feature One

Housing Market. People returning home from prison face many barriers to obtaining secure, affordable housing. Background checks and cost constraints may exclude them from the private housing market (Geller & Curtis, 2011). In a survey of 196 property managers, 43% reported that they would be reluctant to accept the application of an individual convicted of a

crime because of concerns for neighborhood safety (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Furthermore, an individual with a history of incarceration may have short or poor credit and rental history, making them a less desirable tenant than another individual with the same income. Public housing authorities have the power to exclude or evict individuals with criminal histories and family members also risk eviction for housing these individuals. Living with friends or family may not be feasible if relationships were strained before or during incarceration (Comfort, 2008; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Petersilia, 2009; Roman & Travis, 2006; Western, 2006). Many family or friends do offer to house the individual returning home from prison, but this arrangement is often temporary (Bolland & McCallum, 2002). Parole restrictions may prohibit an individual from living with family or friends with criminal involvement, which further constrains housing options (Petersilia, 2009). For formerly incarcerated individuals, barriers abound in the housing market.

Labor Market. Many people transitioning from prison to home cite employment as their most pressing need. In a longitudinal study of 122 men and women leaving Massachusetts prisons, finding a regular income was a leading concern in the first 2 months after prison (Western, 2018). Pape (2014) argues that the three factors essential to a successful transition are employment, housing, and transportation and individuals cannot afford stable housing or reliable transportation without employment. At the time of their arrest, most people who are incarcerated were working low-paying, low quality jobs (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). By creating gaps in employment histories, incarceration further reduces employment prospects for a population with limited skills and low educational attainment (Pettit & Western, 2004). While vocational and educational training is available in prisons, Visher and Travis (2003) explain that participation is low and declining and does little to enhance these skills. Incarceration can also disrupt the social

networks needed to secure employment. Individuals who find employment shortly after release often secure these opportunities using their personal connections. Individuals unable to maintain these connections during incarceration experience longer periods of unemployment when returning home from prison (Pogrebin et al., 2017).

When examining the relationship between reentry and employment, the parole system warrants further discussion. In 2018, nearly 80 percent of people leaving prison were under parole supervision (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Parolees are typically required to maintain employment to meet their parole conditions. The inability to find and maintain work is considered a parole violation and can result in a return to prison. Standard conditions of parole also include payment for drug testing, mandatory treatment and parole fees (Pogrebin et al., 2017). These fees include court costs, court fines, one-time fees, monthly supervision fees, and restitution. Individuals who do secure employment still may not have sufficient income to meet the financial demands of parole supervision. As the number of individuals under parole supervision increases, the costs of parole supervision are being shifted from the carceral system to parolees (Pogrebin et al., 2017).

Though employment is a pressing need for most people during their transition home, the "credential" of a criminal record results in discrimination, stigma, and exclusion in the labor market. Pager (2007) explains that this credential is comparable to educational or professional credentials and serves as a "formal and enduring classification of social status" (p. 4). In Pager's 2003 audit study of entry-level jobs in Milwaukee, two-person teams of testers were assigned resumes with equivalent education and employment histories. Within each team, one tester was randomly assigned a criminal record. After applying for entry-level jobs, testers with criminal records received fewer callbacks and the penalty of a criminal record was higher for Black

testers. Approximately 34% of White testers without criminal records received callbacks from employers, compared to 17% of White testers with criminal records. For Black testers, the corresponding percentages were 14% and 5% (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). This study was replicated in New York City the following year and the results mirrored the Milwaukee study. A criminal record reduced the likelihood of a callback by nearly 50 percent and the negative effect of a criminal conviction was significantly larger for Black testers (Pager et al., 2009). As Alexander (2010) explains, discrimination, stigma, and exclusion create seemingly insurmountable obstacles for individuals transitioning home from prison.

Feature Two

Across the United States, countless reentry programs are providing supervision, correction, and care to the formerly incarcerated. Reentry programs are diverse in their focus as they attempt to address the many issues individuals encounter when transitioning home from prison (Kesten et al., 2012; Ndrecka, 2014; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Visher & Travis, 2011b). Some programs utilize a wraparound approach and offer several services that address multiple needs (Lattimore & Visher, 2010). Others are more specialized and focus on a specific need, such as mental health or substance abuse (Kesten et al., 2012). The structure of these programs also varies. There are programs that begin while an individual is incarcerated and continue after their release (Inciardi et al., 1997; Robbins et al., 2009), programs that focus on pre-release (Wilson & Davis, 2006), and programs that begin providing services after an individual has been released (Zanis et al., 2003). Reentry programs also target different populations, with organizations that focus specifically on juveniles, men, or women (Lattimore & Visher, 2010; Ndrecka et al., 2017).

Feature Three

Research has highlighted several protective factors for a successful transition from prison to the community, some of which include employment (Liu, 2021; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Uggen, 2000), mental health services (Prendergast, 2009; Robbins et al., 2009), and prosocial relationships (Boman & Mowen, 2017). Liu and Visher (2021) argue that none of these protective factors rival the role of family (Arditti & Few, 2006; Braman, 2004; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). Anywhere from 40% to 80% of recently released individuals relied on family members immediately after their release (Berg & Huebner, 2011). In one study of formerly incarcerated individuals, 84% were living with their families seven months out of prison and 92% received cash assistance from their families (Liu & Visher, 2021). Research has demonstrated that family support is associated with decreased recidivism (Boman & Mowen, 2017; Mowen et al., 2019), increased odds of employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011), and improved mental health outcomes (Grieb et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2016).

Formerly incarcerated individuals also utilize friendships as valuable supports when feeling overwhelmed with their transition from prison to the community. Friendships also help to combat loneliness during this period that many describe as emotionally taxing (Clone & DeHart, 2014). In a study of formerly incarcerated women, individuals surrounded by supportive and encouraging friends felt better equipped to navigate day-to-day challenges and felt they had someone to depend on in times of need. These relationships helped to reduce some of the stresses associated with their transition and supported their rehabilitation (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002). O'Brien (2001) conducted interviews of formerly incarcerated women who had successfully reintegrated and all of the participants mentioned the importance of developing

relationships with individuals in the community. Family and friends help them to cope with life after prison and adjust to living in the community.

Research has examined the alternate economic, social, and political reality that the formerly incarcerated occupy. In the housing market and labor market, they are subject to formal laws and policies and the arbitrary, informal enforcement of those laws and policies (Miller & Stuart, 2017). They also engage with institutions providing supervision, correction, and care, which Miller and Stuart (2017) describe as benefits they are afforded as a result of the "state's failure to ensure the social rights of citizenship" (p. 543). This failure has created a poorly constructed safety net for the formerly incarcerated and we see family, friends, and community members attempting to fill in the gaps.

This study draws from interviews with 31 formerly incarcerated individuals to further examine this alternate reality. This study examines how participants' experiences converge with and diverge from Miller and Alexander's framing of carceral citizenship. The study aims to add depth and nuance to their framework by exploring how participants' interactions with family and friends, the housing market, the labor market, and institutions providing supervision, correction, and care affect their transition from prison to the community. Miller and Stuart (2017) describe carceral citizenship as a distinct form of political membership. Given this distinction, there is a need for this population to narrate their experiences navigating carceral citizenship that can inform practice and policy. Practice and policy impacting the formerly incarcerated must account for the "restrictions, duties, and benefits uniquely accorded to carceral citizens" (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 533). This study aims to explore how these restrictions, duties, and benefits shape the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated.

Methods

Settings

Participants were recruited from three different organizations in the southeastern United States: a social enterprise, a prison entrepreneurship program, and a reentry court. The social enterprise is an employment-focused organization providing wraparound services to individuals transitioning from prison to the community. The prison entrepreneurship program is a six-month entrepreneurship education program targeting individuals who are incarcerated. The reentry court offers individual and group support to individuals recently released from federal prison. Individuals who successfully complete the 52-week reentry court receive a one-year reduction in their parole terms. Recruiting participants from three organizations provided an opportunity to compare and contrast approaches in social enterprises, prison entrepreneurship programs, and reentry courts. This study provides a platform for participants to narrate these similarities and differences as they relate to elements of carceral citizenship.

Sample

A total of 31 participants were enrolled in the study. There were 16 participants from the social enterprise, 12 participants from the prison entrepreneurship program, and 3 participants from the reentry court. The number of participants from each organization reflects the size of the organization. The social enterprise provides services to the largest number of individuals and the reentry court provides services to the smallest number of individuals. A majority (61.2%) of the participants identified as male and 38.7% identified as female. Over half (54.8%) of the participants identified as White, 41.9% identified as Black, and 3.2% identified as Other. Participants ranged in age from 28.6 years to 63.9 years and their average age was 42.7 years (SD=10.1).

Procedures

Staff at the three organizations identified inclusion criteria for the study. The social enterprise included individuals who were transitioning out of subsidized employment. The prison entrepreneurship program included graduates of the program at different stages at reentry (e.g., released for months, released for years). The reentry court also included graduates of the program. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program conducted recruitment by phone using a script I developed. I attended a reentry court meeting to recruit participants using the same script. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program provided contact information for individuals who were interested in participating and I contacted them to schedule an interview. At the beginning of the interview, participants completed an informed consent form, provided demographic information, and selected a pseudonym (see Appendix A).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in October 2020, January 2021, and April 2021. 31 individuals participated in Interview 1, 24 individuals participated in Interview 2, and 21 individuals participated in Interview 3. Participants were compensated with a $25 gift card after each interview. Interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted an average of 25.9 minutes. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and on two separate audio recorders. Rev.com was responsible for transcription. Interview 1 focused on the pursuit of a full and free life after incarceration, Interview 2 examined asset-based approaches in the three organizations, and Interview 3 had an emphasis on program evaluation for the three participating programs.

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory guided data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory "emphasizes studying processes and thus fosters making connections between events and situations, meanings and actions, and individuals and social structures that otherwise may remain invisible" (Charmaz, 2020, p. 167). It examines the social, historical, and situational contexts in which participants live. Constructive grounded theorists are concerned with the specific conditions giving rise to outcomes of interest and the responses of different participants to these outcomes. It is a useful framework for examining both micro and macro discourses and "how, when, and why people invoke, ignore, or challenge them" (Charmaz, 2020, p. 171). Charmaz explains that not every researcher who adopts this method aims for theory construction. Instead, constructivist grounded theory can offer a new perspective on an existing concept. It provides an opportunity to enrich and expand existing theoretical frameworks.

To analyze the interview transcripts, I utilized Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method. The first step of my process was open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1991), where I identified events in the data and constantly compared them to decide which belong together (Harry et al., 2005). The next step was axial coding, where open codes are clustered around points of intersection. The third step was thematic coding (Harry et al., 2005), where I decided how the codes related to each other and began to construct a narrative about these codes. Each step of this process was conducted using NVIVO. Following thematic coding, I identified carceral citizenship as a theoretical framework that I could draw on to interpret and organize my findings. I then coded the data using the three features of carceral citizenship outlined in the literature review. During this step, I used thematic coding to identify the themes that emerged

within these three features, ultimately expanding and enriching understanding of carceral citizenship.

Results

Feature One

Housing Market

When reflecting on their experiences navigating the housing market, several issues emerged in participants' descriptions of their experiences. Nicole claimed that individuals have "nowhere to go" and this lack of options explains why the "recidivism rate is so high." She continued, "Without that opportunity, you don't do anything different. You go back to what you know. And that's anything in life. You go back to what you're comfortable with and what you know." Participants navigating the lack of options in the housing market experienced feelings of defeat and despair. Several participants discussed applying for several apartments and receiving several rejections. Those who did secure housing often had to wait several months. Cynthia shared,

> So I just recently, like right at a year in August, was able to find a place. But it wasn't because he checked applications because believe me, I had applications. I wouldn't get to the application. I'm not paying an application fee when I know you're going to check my background and you're going to see this horrible charge, the drug charge.

After a yearlong search, Cynthia secured housing because of a compassionate landlord willing to overlook her background check. Facing rejection after rejection on their housing search, participants felt they were being punished indefinitely. Marie had a violent charge "27, 28 years ago now" and three decades later, apartment complexes refused to rent to her. Taz feels the government needs to "back off" and John echoed these sentiments. John expressed,

> I really think that they could make it easier to get a lesser felony taken off your record rather than it just being stuck with you forever, which hinders you on trying to find [an] apartment, or all kinds of things. It takes into consideration because there's places I'll never be able to live. [And] it's just hard.

As they waited to secure housing, some participants opted to live in shelters. However, Taz shared that "it's really hard on them in there" and many would rather live on the streets than live in a shelter. He continued, "There were a couple of times I had friends that stayed in the shelter, they put their phone up on them and when they wake up, their phone is gone." OG also had a negative experience in a shelter. He claimed he had "never seen nothing like it in my life, the filth and the nastiness. I mean, it's unbelievable. If a person really know how that place is run, it is a worst place I've ever seen in my life." Since participants in the study resided in urban, rural, and suburban areas, the interviews provided insight into the disparate housing opportunities in each area. Katrina discussed the limited housing opportunities in her suburban community. She explained,

> In order to get any kind of help with housing in this area, you have to have at least been ... Your charges have to be at least a minimum of three years old. So, in order to get any kind of housing assistance you have to at least meet that criteria. So for those three years, there's nothing you can do. So, that's also a thing that is it's a real struggle and it's a real stressor because if you can't get a place to live you can't get your family back. So you can't get your kids back. You can't start rebuilding. And that's all you think about while you're in is, 'Oh, I want to get out and I want to do the right thing.' But then when you get out you have all these roadblocks where you can't make these things happen.

Mac, who lives in a rural area, felt that the transition home was “different” for people who live in urban areas because they have access to more resources. She stated, “They have things like that up there but I don’t. I didn’t have any of that here”. The lack of opportunities was a hindrance for participants eager for new beginnings. Different convictions also created different restrictions. Jin explained that there are few housing options for people with his conviction and all they have to choose from are “motel, little run down, hole in the wall motels”. He stated that apartment complexes “will do background checks and more than likely would turn people like me down because they see what we were arrested for and what we are currently on probation for.” Participants were left with little to no options in the housing market.

Labor Market

Similar to the housing market, navigating the labor market created feelings of defeat and despair. Tiffany explained, “I really hate how people have to come out and look for jobs. And they’re usually given the lowest of the low because they run that background. And it sucks. And that alone deteriorates anybody.” Danielle also found the job search discouraging. She shared,

> As far as with jobs, because it is so hard and discouraging being a felon and going out, trying to get a job and everybody’s like, ‘No, no, no.’ Automatically. Say you’re a felon and it’s just shut down. And we’re already so emotional, so bare, so scared of trying to live a new life. It’s easy to fall back into old patterns and keep getting rejected, shunned, and frowned upon when you’re trying so hard to be different.

Several participants asserted that society does not want formerly incarcerated individuals to succeed. Eugene stated, “Then if you come home with a felon or anything, they really don’t even want you there period. They don’t want you to have a job, they don’t want you to be able to survive to support and help your family.” Demetrius expressed similar sentiments. He explained

that many formerly incarcerated individuals are forced to work low-wage jobs which creates little opportunity for upward mobility. He shared,

> But you come home and you don't got nothing so then you go get a job and that job is paying $9 and then you've got rent, you might got a little piece of car, a little car note, you can't pay all that with no $9 job. So it's just like, $9 an hour job, it's bad. I feel like it's set up for us to lose. I really do. I really do think that the system is set up for you to fail.

As they navigated both the housing market and the labor market, participants felt they were being punished indefinitely. Because of the lack of opportunities, people did not feel free. Taz stated, "We did our time, but in the long run, we're still locked up." While they are no longer locked in cages, they feel locked out of the labor market. Taz continued, "You see because even when we go fill out applications looking for work, 'Oh, you got this on your record, we can't hire you.' Yes, but that's been 20 years." Decades later, they continued to encounter discrimination, stigma, and exclusion. Another similarity between the housing market and labor market are the different restrictions based on different convictions. Anthony expressed that he doesn't "feel quite free" because his conviction limits his job opportunities. He continued, "There's this thing called an exclusion zone kind of thing. Certain areas... We can qualify for a certain job, but if there is a day care or a school or some kind of a park around there, or even a YMCA in that area, we're not allowed to be there." Mac, who commented on the limited housing opportunities in her rural community, felt the same about the labor market. She shared, "There's one grocery store and two gas stations, and a Hardee's. There's not a lot." She found an opportunity at a factory, but described this position as the "worst job I've ever had in my life." Mac did not "have a lot of options" in her rural community because of her conviction.

Participants who attempted to have their records expunged encountered these same issues. Eugene explained,

> I got all of my charges pretty much expunged but one or two of them. They didn't want to take them off, because they wanted to keep my record tarnished. Then they didn't take them, because they still pulling some of the jobs that I went to. They was still able to pull them up, and I was like, 'Wow.'

Participants who attempted to take the appropriate steps continued to encounter rejection. The never-ending rejection made it difficult to lead with integrity as they navigated the labor market. Cynthia expressed, "I did do an interview with one other salon that I told the truth that I had a felony, and that did not get. I never got that. And my resume, I should have gotten called back, at least been interviewed, at least a face-to-face. I did not. So then at that point on, I did not tell the truth." Cynthia was able to secure a job after withholding the truth about her record. Reflecting on Cynthia's experience, this felt necessary considering how many participants were denied opportunities they deserved. Anthony elaborated,

> The biggest question they ask is, 'Were you ever convicted of a felony?' 'Yes.' 'What's your felony.' Then as soon as you tell them, it's like, 'Okay. We'll get back to you and give you a phone call if we think you're available.' We know damned well though, as soon as they say that it's like, 'Screw you. We can't take you because you're a felon. We don't trust you.' I would feel better if a job would be like, 'We would look at this, and whether or not you're a felon or not, let's go ahead and try this,' because there's people in there that have jobs that I went to that I'm more qualified than the person behind me that got the job, but I can't get it because I'm a felon.

Because of their records, participants in this study were seldom provided the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. Both the housing market and labor market provided little to no opportunities.

Feature Two

Prisons, Parole, and Probation

Several participants commented on the poor transition planning in the prisons. Nicole shared, “They don’t even let you apply for halfway houses until you’re 30 days to your release date. And you can barely get in the halfway house in 30 days. Three to six months. Yeah. So it sets you up for failure.” In addition to their inadequate timing with housing applications, prisons also provided inadequate support to individuals who are not granted parole. Marie commented,

> Another thing is that we have 85% or 100% sentences of charges, which basically mean that you don’t go up for parole. You complete your sentence and you are released from prison. If you fall into that category, then the board of paroles or the in-house probation of parole officer will not help you find housing because they are there to help those individuals who are granted parole. Because individuals who are granted parole have to go to a parole board approved halfway house. And so, they take priority in those particular spaces. Whereas if you’re not going up for parole, then you don’t have to have a board of parole. But I’m not going to help you because my time is focused over here.

Individuals who were not granted parole appeared to have little support navigating their transition from the prison to the community. Marie also discussed the implications of prisons failing to provide identification cards. She explained there was a law implemented requiring prisons to provide individuals identification cards before their release. Many institutions do not offer this, which complicates the transition home. She elaborated,

> If you're on parole and you get stopped for not having an ID on you, you've technically had engagement with a police officer. And so, there's the possibility that you could be violated because you didn't have an ID. You can't get a job. And there's almost that loophole of, you have to have a social security card in order to get an ID and you have to have an ID to get a social security card. And you have to have the birth certificate get an ID, but you have to have the ID to get this birth certificate. It is this really, really tangled web of how you were able to get any of that information.

Prisons failed to meet this basic need. Similar to their negative experiences transitioning out of prison, participants were also critical of the parole system. Jasmine expressed that "the parole board wants you to jump through hoops" and that it's a system "set up for failure." OG felt that parole had no regard for his wellbeing. He stated, "The federal parole people aren't going to do nothing, but lock you up. They're not going to help you do nothing, they aren't going to do nothing, all that is, is a warehouse for the walking dead." The parole system did not seem committed to helping individuals succeed. Chloe remarked, "Even my PO, he's just like, 'As long as you show up and pass your drug test, I don't really care what you do is.'" She felt that parole was a system of empty promises. Chloe continued, "They're like, 'If you need me, call me. If you need any help, we got this. If you need any help, we got that.' No, they don't. They could care less." Prisons, probation, and parole did not appear to be invested in supporting these individuals during their transition.

Halfway Houses

Several of the participants also had negative experiences with halfway houses. Many characterized halfway houses as money hungry operations. Nicole shared, "There's tons of money that goes to that. And it's not used correctly." Halfway houses appeared to poorly utilize

their funding. Jasmine commented on how little help halfway houses provided. She explained, "I was basically on my own. They'd put me out every morning and I'd go back there to sleep and take a shower. There was no programs there, it was just the money. It was all about the money." Tiffany expressed her frustration with the financial demands of halfway houses. She shared, "You also can't milk them like a cow either. They're just getting home." Participants felt that halfway houses had unrealistic expectations for residents. Tiffany described her experience in the halfway house as "stressful". Mike had a similar experience in the halfway house. He shared,

> When I got out of prison, I had to go to a halfway house. When I went to the halfway house, I had to pay for rent, $150 a week. If I'm trying to build myself where I could become self-sufficient, where I don't really have to depend on no one else, why would you take so much from me when you see that I'm trying to get there? I can't put money away for transportation, I can't put money away to give me a house or rent a house, to give me some decent clothes because I might have to go for a job interview. Nice pair of shoes. Instead I have to give you $150 out of my hard-earned money. I know it takes money to make money, but you still have a system set up already where there won't be so much of my money being deducted from my check every week. You know that I'm just getting out and I'm starting from scratch trying to get somewhere, so I think the halfway houses need to come up with a better idea to help peoples like myself who are just getting out, and that would take a lot off a person.

In addition to the unrealistic expectations from halfway houses, there are many restrictions on who can reside there. Marie explained that "a lot of halfway houses do not accept you if you haven't had a prostitution charge, an A&B [assault and battery] issue or a mental health issue. And other disqualifiers are that you have an arson charge or that you have a violent charge."

These criteria are based on government funding and determine what types of individuals can reside there. Marie shared that these criteria "leaves a void for those particular people that are coming home." Marie also commented on the restrictions in faith-based halfway houses. She stated,

> There is a particular religious sect that you have to fall in. You have to fall in line with. And if you don't fall in line with that particular thing, then you're either having to serve in a religious space that you are not comfortable or not believing, or you're not committed in that space. And you can also receive disciplinary action or face eviction if you aren't following within that strict religious space.

Similar to prisons, probation, and parole, halfway houses appeared to create more barriers than opportunities.

Feature Three

Family

Many participants attributed their success to the support of family. When reflecting on his experiences with family, Martavius shared that he was "blessed to be able to have a good support system. That's one thing that I know that makes a big difference. If you have a strong, supportive family, you have to have people who really care about you." Family made all the difference during his transition from prison to the community. Nicole claimed there was "no way" individuals could succeed without family. Without this support, individuals are "just returning back to prison." Nicole continued, "And if you have no place to live, how are you going to work? It's very hard. I experienced that. It was very, very hard. So if you don't have family or anything, thank God I have family." Demetrius had less support from his family, but having "only a few" family members still made a difference. He compared his experience to

individuals who had no support. He expressed, “People that come home from prison with nobody, no support system period, that’s the main thing that’s really turning guys back to the streets, if you ask me. Guys coming home like they don’t got nothing.” Family members helped to meet basic needs once participants were released. Sam shared,

> When I first got out my parents, they helped me, they put me up at a hotel for two days I guess, to kind of get some things rearranged. And then after those two days, they... Basically, they came in, they moved me. They let me get some stuff, some clothes and stuff and things.

Similar to Nicole and Demetrius, several participants stressed how difficult the transition was with no support from family. Taz commented, “If you don’t have family or somebody to choose and go stay with when you get out, most of them be back out there on the street.” Katrina added, “Unless you have family support, you are more likely to fall. I mean, more likely not to be able to regain your children and to get a stable home and a good job.” Participants who were estranged from family had to seek other forms of support. Remington, who had a strained relationship with her family, explained, “I don’t really have family. My mentor has been monumental, a key element in showing me what support looks like.” Her mentor provided the support that her family could not. In cases when family members were present, they often provided participants in this study with vital support during their transition.

Church

Faith-based communities also provided support for nearly half of the participants. Danielle commented on how important it was to be surrounded by positivity. She stated,

> But another thing that I’ve learned since getting out is, you have to have a foundational community that supports you and encourages you and feeds you with good stuff. That’s

> why it's so important for me to be active in ministry like I am in Bible study and have these women that can hold you accountable.

For Katrina, her church involvement has been pivotal on her journey. She expressed, "But if I wouldn't have had those people at the church that actually knew somebody and actually cared about what was going on with me I could very well not be where I am today. It could have been that easy." Martavius shared that church "played a big part in me being able to get out and stay up." Malcolm secured employment at his church's daycare. "I do some part-time janitorial work for these ladies at the daycare. That was really great with being a felon and not being able to work around kids, but they are very encouraging about it. 'Come on in, we know who you are.'" These relationships helped him secure an opportunity that otherwise would not have been available to him. Church provided a sense of community for several participants.

Self-Help

While people appreciated the support from family, friends, and community members, many felt they were the master of their own fate. Jin stated, "You have to have the desire to change. So you can want it, but unless you're going to make an effort to actually change, then nothing's going to happen." Em shared that "everyone has to carry their own load" and "find your own way." Several participants commented on how hesitant they were to seek help. OG expressed, "I'm a prideful son of a gun. I don't ask nobody for nothing, not nothing I don't." Sam echoed these sentiments, stating "I'm one of those guys that it's like, okay, I can do this on my own. I got this." While some were hesitant to seek help, others were eager. Mike explained, "When you see people really want to help you, you have to open up and let them in. If you never do them things, you're not going to change." Maurice felt similarly and urged individuals to

“accept the help that you’re given, and then go out there and do right.” Many participants believed they had to help themselves before seeking help.

Discussion

As these findings demonstrate, navigating carceral citizenship is a complicated endeavor. Individuals in this political community encounter rampant discrimination, stigma, and exclusion. The experiences of carceral citizens in this study both converge with and diverge from Miller and Alexander’s framing of carceral citizenship.

Several participants commented on the injustices they encountered in the housing market and labor market. As Miller and Stuart (2017) assert, the participants in this study occupied an alternate legal standing in the housing market and labor market. This alternate legal standing generated feelings of defeat and despair as they encountered rejection after rejection. Many participants believed this alternate legal standing is designed to cycle individuals in and out of prison. They felt they were being punished indefinitely. Decades later, their convictions continued to constrain opportunities. Those who had their records expunged faced these same issues as their convictions continued to appear on background checks. People need housing to secure employment and people need employment to secure housing. As carceral citizens, both are difficult to obtain. Housing options that were available, such as shelters, were less than optimal living spaces. Other participants had to wait several years to receive housing assistance. Similarly, the labor market presented few opportunities. They were offered low-wage, grueling jobs with little possibility for upward mobility. Some were forced to withhold information about their conviction to secure such positions. Otherwise, they would be denied the opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications. Many felt locked out of the labor market.

Miller and Stuart (2017) write, "The benefits of carceral citizenship are only made possible in the wake of the state's failure to ensure the social rights of citizenship to begin with, and to provide adequate protections against social and environmental risk" (p. 543). This study demonstrated the continued failure of the state to ensure the social rights of citizenship. The institutions tasked with supervision, correction, and care of this population provided inadequate protections against social and environmental risk. Instead, these institutions exacerbated social and environmental risks.

Participants in this study described prisons, parole, and halfway houses as institutions plagued by poor planning and predatory practices. Participants shared that prisons were a hindrance to their housing search as they delayed this process for far too long. Prisons also failed to provide identification cards, which makes it difficult to secure housing, employment, and meet other basic needs. While parole and halfway houses have been characterized as institutions designed to support individuals transitioning from prison to the community, these institutions appeared to maintain many of the carceral logics of prisons. Instead of providing support, these institutions were detrimental to the success of the individuals in this study. Participants described halfway houses as financially exploitative. They offered no support to participants while demanding rent that was difficult for participants to pay. Miller and Stuart (2017) claim that carceral citizens have access to alternate systems of benefits, but these systems are mere extensions of institutions that were never designed to ensure the social rights of citizenship. Miller and Stuart (2017) characterize these benefits as perverse benefits, which is appropriate considering the harms these systems perpetuate.

Regarding the roles of third parties, individuals in this study appeared extremely appreciative of the "goodwill of others" (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 539). They attributed much of

their success to the support of family. Some felt that a return to prison was inevitable without this support. Participants also encountered this goodwill in faith-based communities. In spite of this appreciation, comments on personal responsibility were prevalent in the interviews. Several individuals stressed the importance of depending on themselves. Miller and Stuart (2017) suggest that third parties lack the capacity to meet the needs of this population, and the individuals in this study appeared to sense this. Instead of being subject to their whims (Miller & Stuart, 2017), some chose a path of self-reliance. Some may opt for this path because of their experiences navigating the housing and labor market. They expect to encounter rejection and are hesitant to seek support. Similarly, many participants had experiences with prisons, parole, and halfway houses facilitating their failure instead of supporting their success. As these institutions continue to fail them, they are forced to fend for themselves.

The findings from this study demonstrate that carceral citizens are navigating a system that reproduces itself. Laws and policies in the housing and labor market and the supervision, correction, and care provided by prisons, parole, and halfway houses are designed to ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals occupy this alternate legal reality indefinitely. In each of these institutions, there are opportunities for disruption. These could be spaces where the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship are restored. Instead, these institutions conspire to ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals remain indefinitely in a political community rampant with discrimination, stigma, and exclusion. This has created a society in which third parties attempt to care for a population they were never equipped to support. It also burdens formerly incarcerated individuals with navigating a society that was never designed for their success. None of these efforts can compensate for the state’s failure to protect against social and environmental risk.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider with this study. Since the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program were responsible for recruitment, it is possible that they selected individuals with high levels of engagement in the program. Engagement in the program could influence how participants navigate carceral citizenship. For example, those who are less engaged with the program may require more support from family and friends. Those who are more engaged with the program may be more informed as they navigate the housing market and the labor market. While carceral citizenship creates barriers for all formerly incarcerated individuals, these experiences could differ based on their involvement with the program. Future research could compare and contrast experiences navigating carceral citizenship based on engagement.

Furthermore, more participatory methods could have enhanced this study. I began this study with one collaborator from each organization. The collaborators from the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program were former program participants and the collaborator from the reentry court was the court's community partner, a formerly incarcerated man who mentors program participants. Before I began the interviews, each collaborator provided feedback on the interview guide. I intended for these individuals to assist with data analysis and guide the dissemination process, but COVID-19 hindered these efforts. As someone who has not experienced incarceration, my interpretation of these findings may be incomplete. The collaborators have navigated carceral citizenship and their experiences would add depth and nuance to these findings. Participatory methods can help to ensure that research findings accurately reflect the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated.

Conclusion

Miller and Stuart (2017) assert that carceral citizenship is a theoretical framework that explores how supervision, correction, and care shape the social landscape. This study expands on these assertions by demonstrating that carceral citizens are navigating a social landscape that bears little similarity to what the general public is subject to. In this social landscape, discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are rampant. This has created an environment where the formerly incarcerated cannot participate in the housing market, labor market, and other institutions in ways they desire. In both the housing market and labor market, opportunities are not in abundance and they have little room to explore. The institutions that many are forced to engage with, such as halfway houses and parole, are often detrimental to their success. As these institutions fail to meet the needs of the formerly incarcerated, family, friends, and community members attempt to fill in the gaps. The findings of this study demonstrate that the restrictions, duties, and benefits of carceral citizenship are intentional and deliberate processes that have produced an alternate economic, social, and political reality for the formerly incarcerated. These processes were designed to ensure that the formerly incarcerated occupy this alternate reality indefinitely. In this alternate reality, they are navigating a social landscape of constrained, limited possibilities.

While this study focused on the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals, future research could examine the individuals, institutions, and systems they engage with. This research could explore how these individuals, institutions, and systems produce and reproduce carceral citizens. There is also an opportunity to compare the intended aims of these institutions with the experiences of those navigating these spaces. For example, research into the evolution of

halfway houses could explore how and why they are failing to meet the needs of their residents. Similar research could be conducted on the parole system.

Given the bipartisan efforts to improve opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals, research could trace how policies and practices affecting this population have shifted over time. As Miller and Stuart (2017) explain, both formal and informal efforts shape carceral citizenship, so this research could examine the evolution of policies and practices and the individuals responsible for implementing these policies and practices. Local, state, and federal policies differ, so this research could offer geographical comparisons. Locales that produce better outcomes with this population could be a source of best practices.

Recognizing carceral citizenship as a barrier to opportunity, there is a need to examine organizations aiming to dismantle the systems that produce and reproduce carceral citizens. Organizations such as The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, All of Us or None, and JustLeadershipUSA are committed to these efforts. The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls supports leaders to “build hyper-local community-led systems of individual and community accountability, public safety, and financial and political empowerment” (The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, 2021). Their efforts include participatory defense, participatory budgeting, and a basic income guarantee project. All of Us or None engages in legal advocacy, policy advocacy, and grassroots organizing to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals (All of Us or None, 2021). JustLeadershipUSA educates, elevates, and empowers the voices of people directly impacted by the carceral system to build a just America (JustLeadershipUSA, 2021). These organizations are committed to building a world where all can thrive.

References

Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New Press.

All of Us or None. (2021). *About*. https://prisonerswithchildren.org/about-aouon/

Arditti, J. A., & Few, A. L. (2006). Mothers' reentry into family life following incarceration. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, *17*(1), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403405282450

Berg, M. T., & Huebner, B. M. (2011). Reentry and the ties that bind: An examination of social ties, employment, and recidivism. *Justice Quarterly*, *28*(2), 382–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2010.498383

Bolland, J. M., & McCallum, D. M. (2002). Touched by homelessness: An examination of hospitality for the down and out. *American Journal of Public Health*, *92*(1), 116–118. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.92.1.116

Boman, J. H., & Mowen, T. J. (2017). Building the ties that bind, breaking the ties that don't: Family support, criminal peers, and reentry success. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *16*(3), 753–774. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12307

Braman, D. (2004). Families and the moral economy of incarceration. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, *23*(1/2), 27–50. https://doi.org/10.1300/J377v23n01_03

Carson, E. A. (2020). *Prisoners in 2019* (pp. 1–38). Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf

Clone, S., & DeHart, D. (2014). Social Support Networks of Incarcerated Women: Types of Support, Sources of Support, and Implications for Reentry. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *53*(7), 503–521. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2014.944742

Comfort, M. (2008). *Doing time together: Love and family in the shadow of the prison*. University of Chicago Press.

deVuono-Powell, S., Schweidler, C., Walters, A., & Zohrabi, A. (2015). *Who pays? The true cost of incarceration on families.* Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, Research Action Design. https://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf

Geller, A., & Curtis, M. A. (2011). A sort of homecoming: Incarceration and the housing security of urban men. *Social Science Research*, *40*(4), 1196–1213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.03.008

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.

Glenn, E. N. (2011). Constructing citizenship: Exclusion, subordination, and resistance. *American Sociological Review*, *76*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411398443

Grieb, S. M., Crawford, A., Fields, J., Smith, H., Harris, R., & Matson, P. (2014). "The stress will kill you": Prisoner reentry as experienced by family members and the urgent need for support services. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, *25*(3), 1183–1200. https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2014.0118

Harry, B., Sturges, K. M., & Klingner, J. K. (2005). Mapping the process: An exemplar of process and challenge in grounded theory analysis. *Educational Researcher*, *34*(2), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034002003

Inciardi, J. A., Martin, S. S., Butzin, C. A., Hooper, R. M., & Harrison, L. D. (1997). An effective model of prison-based treatment for drug-involved offenders. *Journal of Drug Issues*, *27*(2), 261–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/002204269702700206

JustLeadershipUSA. (2021). *Mission*. https://jlusa.org/about/#our-story

Kesten, K. L., Leavitt-Smith, E., Rau, D. R., Shelton, D., Zhang, W., Wagner, J., & Trestman, R. L. (2012). Recidivism rates among mentally ill inmates: Impact of the Connecticut Offender Reentry Program. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, *18*(1), 20–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078345811421117

Kymlicka, W., & Norman, W. (1994). Return of the citizen: A survey of recent work on citizenship theory. *Ethics*, *104*(2), 352–381. https://doi.org/10.1086/293605

Lattimore, P. K., & Visher, C. A. (2010). *The multi-site evaluation of SVORI: Summary and synthesis*. United States Department of Justice. https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/230421.pdf

Liu, L. (2021). Parole, neighborhood and reentry outcomes: A contextualized analysis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *65*(6–7), 741–762. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X20946928

Liu, L., & Visher, C. A. (2021). Decomposition of the Role of Family in Reentry: Family Support, Tension, Gender, and Reentry Outcomes. *Crime & Delinquency*, *67*(6–7), 970–996. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720987195

Miller, R. J., & Alexander, A. (2016). The price of carceral citizenship: Punishment, surveillance, and social welfare policy in an age of carceral expansion. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*, *21*(2), 291–314.

Miller, R. J., & Stuart, F. (2017). Carceral citizenship: Race, rights and responsibility in the age of mass supervision. *Theoretical Criminology*, *21*(4), 532–548. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480617731203

Mowen, T. J., Stansfield, R., & Boman, J. H. (2019). Family Matters: Moving Beyond "If" Family Support Matters to "Why" Family Support Matters during Reentry from Prison. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *56*(4), 483–523. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427818820902

Naser, R. L., & La Vigne, N. G. (2006). Family support in the prisoner reentry process: Expectations and realities. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *43*(1), 93–106. https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v43n01_05

Ndrecka, M. (2014). *The impact of reentry programs on recidivism: A meta-analysis*. University of Cincinnati.

Ndrecka, M., Listwan, S. J., & Latessa, E. (2017). What works in reentry and how to improve outcomes. In S. Stojkovic (Ed.), *Prisoner reentry: Critical issues and policy directions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Brien, P. (2001). "Just like baking a cake": Women describe the necessary ingredients for successful reentry after incarceration. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, *82*(3), 287–295. https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.200

Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology*, *108*(5), 937–975. https://doi.org/10.1086/374403

Pager, D. (2007). *Marked: Race, crime, and finding work in an era of mass incarceration*. University of Chicago Press.

Pager, D., Western, B., & Sugie, N. (2009). Sequencing disadvantage: Barriers to employment facing young Black and White men with criminal records. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *623*(1), 195–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208330793

Pape, C. (2014). *An exploratory analysis of ex-offender employment in a non-urban setting* [Bowling Green State University]. https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/docview/1645957205?pq-origsite=primo

Parsons, M. L., & Warner-Robbins, C. (2002). Factors that support women's successful transition to the community following jail/prison. *Health Care for Women International*, *23*(1), 6–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/073993302753428393

Petersilia, J. (2009). *When prisoners come home: Parole and prisoner reentry*. Oxford University Press.

Pettit, B., & Western, B. (2004). Mass imprisonment and the life course: Race and class inequality in U.S. incarceration. *American Sociological Review*, *69*(2), 151–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240406900201

Pogrebin, M., West-Smith, M., Walker, A., & Unnithan, N. P. (2017). Employment isn't enough: Financial obstacles experienced by ex-prisoners during the reentry process. In S. Stojkovic (Ed.), *Prisoner reentry: Critical issues and policy directions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Prendergast, M. L. (2009). Interventions to promote successful re-entry among drug-abusing parolees. *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice*, *5*(1), 4–13. https://doi.org/10.1151/ascp09514

Robbins, C. A., Martin, S. S., & Surratt, H. L. (2009). Substance abuse treatment, anticipated maternal roles, and reentry success of drug-involved women prisoners. *Crime & Delinquency*, *55*(3), 388–411. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128707306688

Roman, C. G., & Travis, J. (2006). Where will I sleep tomorrow? Housing, homelessness, and the returning prisoner. *Housing Policy Debate*, *17*(2), 389–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2006.9521574

Seiter, R. P., & Kadela, K. R. (2003). Prisoner reentry: What works, what does not, and what is promising. *Crime & Delinquency*, *49*(3), 360–388. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128703049003002

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1991). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage.

Taxman, F. S., Perdoni, M. L., & Harrison, L. D. (2007). Drug treatment services for adult offenders: The state of the state. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, *32*(3), 239–254. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2006.12.019

The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. (2021). *Our theory of change*. https://www.nationalcouncil.us/theory-and-change

Travis, J. (2005). *But they all come back: Facing the challenges of prisoner reentry* (1st ed). Urban Institute Press.

Uggen, C. (2000). Work as a turning point in the life course of criminals: A duration model of age, employment, and recidivism. *American Sociological Review*, *65*(4), 529. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657381

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2003). Transitions from prison to community: Understanding individual pathways. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *29*, 89–113. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.095931

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2011). Life on the outside: Returning home after incarceration. *The Prison Journal*, *91*(3_suppl), 102S-119S. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885511415228

Wakefield, S., & Uggen, C. (2010). Incarceration and stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 387–406.

Wallace, D., Fahmy, C., Cotton, L., Jimmons, C., McKay, R., Stoffer, S., & Syed, S. (2016). Examining the Role of Familial Support During Prison and After Release on Post-Incarceration Mental Health. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *60*(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X14548023

Western, B. (2006). *Punishment and inequality in America*. Russell Sage.

Western, B. (2018). *Homeward: Life in the year after prison*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Wilson, J. A., & Davis, R. C. (2006). Good intentions meet hard realities: An evaluation of the Project Greenlight reentry program. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *5*(2), 303–338. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2006.00380.x

Zanis, D. A., Mulvaney, F., Coviello, D., Alterman, A. I., Savitz, B., & Thompson, W. (2003). The effectiveness of early parole to substance abuse treatment facilities on 24-Month criminal recidivism. *Journal of Drug Issues*, *33*(1), 223–235. https://doi.org/10.1177/002204260303300109

CHAPTER 2

Examining Asset-Based Approaches in Reentry Programming

Abstract

Asset-based approaches recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections to promote wellbeing. In contrast with deficit based-approaches, asset-based approaches treat individuals as part of the solution instead of problems to be fixed. Asset-based approaches have the potential to improve outcomes in reentry programming, which often employs risk-based strategies that fail to meet the needs of individuals transitioning from prison to the community. To explore this potential, this paper examines the assets that are cultivated in programs serving this population. This presents an opportunity to determine which assets are most impactful and identify the factors contributing to this impact. This paper will narrate this process in three organizations supporting people who are transitioning from prison to the community. I will share findings from interviews with program participants as they describe the skills, knowledge, and connections they cultivated in these programs and conclude by exploring implications for asset-based reentry programming.

Introduction

Asset-based approaches identify and enhance the protective factors that help individuals improve their health and wellbeing (Garven et al., 2016). Asset-based approaches recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections without disregarding the social and economic injustices individuals may encounter (Garven et al., 2016). The term asset-based approaches does not refer to a uniform set of policies or practices and is not specific to any field. Instead, the term can be best understood as a strategy to promote wellbeing by "connecting existing assets, raising awareness of assets, and enabling assets to thrive" (Cassetti et al., 2020, p. 8). In contrast with deficit based-approaches, asset-based approaches treat individuals as part of the solution instead of problems to be fixed (Garven et al., 2016). Deficit-based approaches conceptualize individuals in terms of their "perceived deficiencies, dysfunctions, problems, needs, and limitations" (Dinishak, 2016, p. 1). While asset-based approaches have been embraced in education, social work, and other fields, these approaches are less popular in programs serving formerly incarcerated individuals. A risk-based paradigm pervades the carceral system, resulting in the use of deficit-based approaches in many programs. Schlager (2018) explains, "Crimes are differentiated by risk, bail is set based on risk, sentencing is driven by risk, prison classification is determined by risk, attendance in prison programming is often assigned based on risk, parole decisions are predicated on risk, assessments are grounded in risk, and the beat goes on" (p. 2). A focus on deficiencies and dysfunctions (Dinishak, 2016) feels inevitable in these programs given this emphasis on risk. This approach is ineffective, resulting in few interventions effectively meeting the needs of individuals transitioning from prison to the community (Hunter et al., 2016; Schlager, 2018). Asset-based approaches may help to promote wellbeing among a population that is too often treated as a problem to be fixed.

To explore this potential, we must examine the assets that are cultivated in programs serving this population, determine which assets are most impactful, and identify the factors contributing to this impact. This paper will narrate this process in three organizations supporting people who are transitioning from prison to the community. I will begin by reviewing the literature on asset-based approaches and then share findings from interviews with program participants as they describe the skills, knowledge, and connections they cultivated in these programs. I will conclude by exploring implications for asset-based reentry programming.

Literature Review

Defining Asset-based Approaches

An asset-based approach begins with the premise that individuals have skills, knowledge, and connections that can be mobilized to produce better outcomes. Asset-based practitioners ask the question 'What makes us healthy?' instead of the deficit-based question 'What makes us ill?' (Garven et al., 2016, p. 28). Broadly, the central aim of asset-based approaches across various domains is to enhance lives by focusing on what promotes wellbeing. Asset-based approaches celebrate the power of the human spirit and recognize people's strengths, resourcefulness, and creativity (Friedli, 2013).

Assets can be found at the individual, community, and organizational level. Assets can be defined as any factor that enhances the ability of individuals, communities, and populations to maintain and sustain wellbeing (Garven et al., 2016). In social services, asset-based approaches are often referred to as strengths-based approaches and these terms are often used interchangeably. Strengths-based approaches focus on the "potentials, strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits" (Garven et al., 2016, p. 38). This approach focuses primarily on the quality of the relationship that develops between

those providing services and those receiving support. It is also concerned with what those receiving support can contribute to the process. At the heart of asset-based approaches is a person-centered approach that insists that all are unique, and all have unique contributions to make in the world. It is an appreciative approach that acknowledges the intrinsic worth of individuals and communities (O'Leary et al., 2011).

Asset-based approaches have been embraced in social work, education, and other fields. Historically, deficit-based, pathology-oriented models dominated social work (Rapp et al., 2005). McMillen et al. (2004) explain that these models created hierarchical worker-client relationships, blamed clients for their problems, obscured clients' capabilities and overlooked their potential by creating pessimistic expectations, and perpetuated dependency, among other issues. In recent decades, social workers have been urged to embrace "strengths-based, solution-focused, capacity building, asset creating, motivation enhancing" approaches (McMillen et. al, 2004, p. 317). In education, asset-based approaches are grounded in the belief that students', families', and communities' ways of knowing serve as intellectual resources that contribute to high-quality teaching and learning (Celedón-Pattichis et al., 2018). They are a conscious attempt to move away from deficit perspectives that view students, parents, and communities as lacking in different aspects that enable them to be prepared for schooling (Coleman et al., 2017).

Salutogenesis, a theoretical framework developed by medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987) serves as a foundation of asset-based approaches. Antonovsky argues that it is more important to focus on the resources that individuals can access and their capacity to create health instead of the traditional focus on risk, poor health, and disease. The two key elements of the salutogenic framework are an orientation towards problem solving and the capacity to use available resources (Lindström & Eriksson, 2005). Salutogenesis

is “not only a question of the person but an interaction between people and the structures of society—that is, the human resources and the conditions of the living context” (Lindström & Eriksson, 2005, p. 440). This theoretical framework is the opposite of the pathogenic concept that focuses on deficits.

Criticisms of Asset-based Approaches

As with any approach, asset-based approaches possess limitations. Critics assert that asset-based approaches are abstracted from any analysis of social injustice and can obscure the structural and systemic social forces that create and perpetuate injustice (Friedli, 2013; Roy, 2017). With the emphasis on skills, knowledge, connections, and other individual-level factors, asset-based approaches do not always address questions of power and its relationship to the distribution of health. This individual-level focus can function as an alternative to examining how power produces and reproduces inequality (Friedli, 2012, 2013; Phelan et al., 2010). MacLeod and Emejulu (2014) describe asset-based approaches as “neoliberalism with a community face” and “a capitulation to the rise of neoliberalism and its values of individualization, marketization and privatization of public life” (p. 432). In spite of these limitations, Burkett (2011) cautions against abandoning this approach. She writes,

> Certainly, these approaches throw up all the ideological tensions and polemics we now expect within neoliberal policy frameworks – the more benign communitarian discourses that replace a focus on social justice; the agenda of self-reliance that challenges more structural responses; and the individualism and competition that contrast with collective action as a basis for social change ... yet to reject asset based approaches for these reasons would be simplistic and overlook their radical possibilities (p. 574).

Bull, Mittelmark, and Kanyeka (2013) argue that asset-based approaches are not only appropriate but necessary. In their study of rural women in resource-deprived communities, they identified assets such as supportive neighbors, political agency, and cultural pride. These factors did promote wellbeing, but they recommended the distribution of material, natural and infrastructural resources to support these communities. Instead of replacing efforts to promote structural and systemic change, asset-based approaches should complement these efforts (Roy, 2017).

Asset-based Approaches in Reentry Programming

In spite of their limitations, the embrace of asset-based approaches in education, social work, and other fields has impacted individuals, families, and communities. In both social work and education, practitioners have moved away from deficit-based, pathology-oriented models (Rapp et al., 2005). In reentry programming, these deficit-based approaches remain and the potential of asset-based approaches has yet to be explored. We see few efforts to treat individuals as part of the solution instead of problems to be fixed (Coleman et al., 2017, Garven et al., 2016). Examining the origins of reentry programming helps to explain this focus on deficit-based approaches.

Given that mass incarceration is a more recent phenomenon, conversations on reentry were almost nonexistent 20 years ago. Prior to 2000, there were no national data detailing the characteristics of individuals leaving prisons or descriptions of their lives in the months and years following their release (Ndrecka, Listwan, & Latessa, 2017; Visher & Travis, 2012). Little to no information was available on the challenges and barriers that these individuals encountered, which made it difficult to delineate the factors that contributed to successful reentry (Mears & Cochran, 2015). The term ‘reentry’ was popularized by Jeremy Travis in 1999 while working on

a project with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to respond to this gap. Travis and his team were tasked with answering the question, "What are we doing about all the people coming out of prison?" and soon learned that these efforts were nonexistent (Travis, 2005).

Since then, a body of research has emerged that focuses on two areas: identifying best practices by examining what individual-level programming works (or doesn't) and assessing the success of programs based on their ability to reduce recidivism (Schlager, 2013). While we are more aware of individual level attributes that promote success, the system is not producing desirable outcomes. This is evidenced by the fact that 62% of individuals released in 2012 were arrested within 3 years and 71% were arrested within 5 years. Nearly half (46%) of individuals released in 2012 returned to prison within five years (Durose & Antenangeli, 2021). Schlager (2018) attributes this failure to the risk-based ideology that pervades the system and is ineffective in understanding or implementing effective reentry programming. Schlager (2018) explains that risk is the prevailing construct within which individuals in the system are measured and managed. This has resulted in risk-centric reentry policy and practice and this deficit-focused approach limits our ability to think differently about the problem and generate solutions. By employing a paradigm that focuses less on deficits and more on assets, different outcomes are possible. Gavin et al. (2016) argue that employing asset-based approaches presents an opportunity to reframe "what we value, what we aspire to achieve, and how we measure progress" (p. 62). This reexamination has the potential to transform reentry programming. It provides an avenue to focus on what matters most to formerly incarcerated individuals and determine the outcomes we collectively wish to achieve. This study aims to explore this potential by 1) examining the assets that are cultivated in programs serving this population; 2) determining which assets are most impactful; and 3) identifying the factors contributing to this impact. With

these questions, this study intends to uncover what outcomes are possible in reentry programming when employing asset-based approaches.

Methods

Settings

Participants were recruited from three different organizations in the southeastern United States: a social enterprise, a prison entrepreneurship program, and a reentry court. The social enterprise is an employment-focused organization providing wraparound services to individuals transitioning from prison to the community. To be eligible for the program, individuals must meet one of the following criteria: 1) been convicted of a felony in the last 12 months; 2) served time on a felony conviction and been released from a correctional facility in the last 12 months; or 3) been convicted of a misdemeanor, served at least 3 consecutive months in jail, and been released in the past 12 months. All of the participants in this study served time in a correctional facility. Their programming includes prison outreach, workforce development, housing and utility assistance, medical and dental services, identification documentation, direct aid, and referrals to social service providers. Their social enterprises include a temporary staffing service, an affordable housing initiative, property solutions, and disinfecting services.

The prison entrepreneurship program is a six-month entrepreneurship education program targeting individuals who are incarcerated. Individuals must complete a detailed application and be selected by a committee of staff and volunteers to participate in the program. Each cohort consists of approximately 20 individuals. The program consists of four phases. During Phase One, the program seeks to empower students by teaching skills vital to their holistic wellbeing, including conflict management, mediation, goal-setting, and decision making. Business, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial skills are taught during Phase Two. Phase Three occurs post-

graduation and prior to their release from prison. During this period, the program works to remain engaged with graduates through meetings, book clubs, and newsletters. When graduates reach Phase 4, they can tap into the network of program partners as they return to the community.

The reentry court offers individual and group support to individuals recently released from federal prison. Individuals must complete a detailed application, participate in an interview, and be selected by a committee of community partners, probation officers, attorneys, and judges to participate in the program. The cohort size varies, but each cohort consists of five to ten individuals. Participants attend bi-weekly sessions facilitated by reentry specialists where they discuss their progress on employment, housing, education, and other areas. The reentry specialists provide case management when possible. The community partners, probation officers, attorneys, and judges also attend these sessions to provide support. Participants attend group cognitive behavioral therapy after the conclusion of these bi-weekly sessions. Individuals who successfully complete the 52-week reentry court receive a one-year reduction in their parole terms. Recruiting participants from three organizations provided an opportunity to compare and contrast approaches in social enterprises, prison entrepreneurship programs, and reentry courts. These three institutions have similar aims, but each have different assessments of the issues facing formerly incarcerated individuals and how to respond to these issues. This study provides a platform for participants to narrate these similarities and differences.

Sample

A total of 31 participants were enrolled in the study. There were 16 participants from the social enterprise, 12 participants from the prison entrepreneurship program, and 3 participants from the reentry court. A majority (61.2%) of the participants identified as male and 38.7%

identified as female. Over half (54.8%) of the participants identified as White, 41.9% identified as Black, and 3.2% identified as Other. Participants ranged in age from 28.6 years to 63.9 years and their average age was 42.7 years (SD=10.1).

Procedures

Staff at the three organizations identified inclusion criteria for the study. The social enterprise included individuals who were transitioning out of subsidized employment. The prison entrepreneurship program included graduates of the program at different stages at reentry (e.g., released for months, released for years). The reentry court also included graduates of the program. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program conducted recruitment by phone using a script I developed. I attended a reentry court meeting to recruit participants using the same script. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program provided contact information for individuals who were interested in participating and I contacted them to schedule an interview. At the beginning of the interview, participants completed an informed consent form, provided demographic information, and selected a pseudonym (see Appendix A).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in October 2020, January 2021, and April 2021. 31 individuals participated in Interview 1, 24 individuals participated in Interview 2, and 21 individuals participated in Interview 3. Participants were compensated with a $25 gift card after each interview. Interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted an average of 25.9 minutes. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and on two separate audio recorders. Rev.com was responsible for transcription. Interview 1 focused on the pursuit of a full and free life after incarceration, Interview 2 examined asset-based approaches in the three organizations, and Interview 3 consisted of a program evaluation.

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory guided data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory "emphasizes studying processes and thus fosters making connections between events and situations, meanings and actions, and individuals and social structures that otherwise may remain invisible" (Charmaz, 2020, p. 167). This study aims to uncover the processes that occur in reentry programming that employs asset-based approaches. Asset-based approaches require specific actions and this study explores how participants in these programs make meaning of those actions. Charmaz explains that not every researcher who adopts this method aims for theory construction. Instead, constructivist grounded theory can offer a new perspective on an existing concept. Constructive grounded theorists can use this method to enrich and expand existing theoretical frameworks.

To analyze the interview transcripts, I coded the data for skills, knowledge, and connections. In the literature, skills, knowledge, and connections are often referenced when discussing asset-based approaches (Garven et al., 2016). I used the code 'skills' for any mention of skills developed, 'knowledge' for any mention of knowledge gained, and 'connections' for any mention of connections cultivated. Each step of this process was conducted using NVIVO. I then used thematic coding (Harry et al., 2005) to identify themes that emerged within these three categories. With this method, I aimed to enrich and expand the conversation on asset-based approaches by 1) examining the assets that are cultivated in programs serving the formerly incarcerated; 2) determining which assets are most impactful; and 3) identifying the factors contributing to this impact.

Results

Skills Developed

Of the three programs, participants in the prison entrepreneurship program reported that they had developed the most skills. This outcome is expected given the amount of time the participants spent in the program. The program runs for eight hours a day, five days a week for six months. The skills span several different categories, so I have created a table (see Table 1) to visually display this information. The table also offers a visual comparison of the programs. The reentry court participants did not identify any skills they developed, so the program is not included here.

Table 1: Skills Developed

	Prison entrepreneurship program	Social enterprise
Job readiness	I was able to get out and get a good job. I had great references and all my professors were there for me. And the first job interview, I knew how to do a job interview. And it was just amazing. I got hired the first job interview I went on. And I've been at that job the whole time I've been out. And it's just amazing. – Jasmine And also Toastmasters, which was a public speaking that helped me a lot with a lot of things that I do now. Just interviewing for a job. I learned that all the things I did in there, standing up in front of a class, talking in front of people, it helped me a lot to be able to go in a job, and be presentable, and talk, and know how to say words correctly. [The program] helped me in a lot of different ways with jobs and just regular speaking communication. – Nicole	I've been locked up for 15 years and I didn't know how to do a resume, or job interview. They gave mock interviews. Showed me how to make a resume, how to prepare myself for job interviews. Like, what to wear, you know how to speak, set up proper. I mean, they really showed me a lot. – Jay So they help you to figure out how to put a positive spin on that such as instead of saying, 'I've been in jail for the last three years.' You could say, 'I had been incarcerated for the last three years, but now I'm looking to get my life back together.' And steer away from saying too much about it. Talk about the good things that are happening now, such as for instance, right now I'm in a Christian halfway house program and I steer the conversation that way. And I'll let them know that that lifestyle I was living is no longer a part of what I do now. – John
Digital literacy	And also to the presentations, because we had to do an actual PowerPoint presentation. I couldn't operate a PowerPoint before I went into prison. I didn't know how to do no slideshows. I didn't know how to do any of that. But they taught us that, that's something that will forever be a tool that I got and that will forever, that will last. – Martavius [She] started teaching us how to work the computer and all that, I still can't type as fast as anybody else. I'm still a hand packer but still I get it done. – Taz	They offered help like that. As far as people that had been gone longer than I have and had never set up an email before, they were aware that some people had never even used a cell phone. So they offered help and assistance in doing those things. – Ally Let me go there first, my clerical skills. Yes, accessing it and being able to use the internet. Look up jobs, resources, job center, you know? – Eugene

Business plans	I think it was just like... what I enjoy the most is not only creating a business plan because that's kind of like the coolest thing about it. But it's how to center yourself so that you're able to execute your business plan. That's what I love about [the program]. – Tiffany When I first looked at Phase Two, the part where we had to do the mission statement and just put everything together, I was like, 'I can't, there's no way I can do this,' because I think, what I realized was that I was dreaming too small. I mean, I had a craft but once I realized why from the first part, why I was drawn to restoring things, drawn to seeing things be recreated, how that tied into my personal story it just like blew up for me. – Remington	
Toastmasters	But just being able to communicate without using a bunch of filler words. And because, when you get up and you want to start your own business, you'll have to ... For the most part, you don't have investors and people that invest. And that entails you giving a pitch, speaking in front of people. You can't just be like, 'Oh man, I just want to ... Man, I need money, man.' You can't ... You know what I'm saying? That ain't going to work. – Martavius The Toastmasters was definitely the best. It made me more articulate and be able to just speak with people at the top of a hat and be spontaneous and speak well, and basically carry ... I think I carried myself well anyway, but I obviously, you can always improve. It definitely helped me improve on communication skills in all aspects of living. Being at the bank, buying the car, anything. So all of it. I'm so blessed. – Cynthia	

Goal setting	The program helps you with that because it starts at the very beginning teaching you how to make even small goals. I mean, so we work with making little ones at first. You know, just small ones. And then, once you see the small ones succeed it then gives you an opportunity to move into bigger ones. And as the program builds and it gets a little bit more complicated, then your goals get a little bit more complicated. And as you see those starting to work, it gives you the hope and the desire to keep thinking big and to keep growing with how your goals are. – Katrina Different things like, simple stuff like, things to do like, a things to do list. Having one of those every day kind of helps you execute goals that you're trying to achieve. So over the past, I guess, two months. I disconnected from... so what I did is I wrote this little goal thing that I wanted to do and that's something that [the program] teaches you. So with the goal, I set myself, I want to make $2,000 and I want to make it in 30 days. – Tiffany	
Financial literacy		Financial stability. I'm learning how to budget, and I've never budgeted in my life. But thanks to them, I'm learning to handle my finances a lot better than I guess I would if I was trying to figure it out on my own. – Sam Well, I've learned a lot, basically. I learned how to budget more. I went from one of them courses. I would say, just to be successful as a planner here. Everything I do, I preplan on everything from finances of that class which they taught me a lot, versus like just spending money. It told me to be more wise with the choices I make and like I'm so dedicated to my job, I'm always there early and everything. – Phil

Knowledge Gained

For the prison entrepreneurship program and the reentry court, the knowledge they gained can be attributed to therapeutic interventions. The prison entrepreneurship program participants completed Houses of Healing, a trauma-informed, mindfulness-based, cognitive-behavioral curriculum targeting individuals experiencing incarceration (The Lionheart Foundation, 2021). The reentry court participants attended group cognitive behavioral therapy sessions. Social enterprise participants commented less on knowledge gained, but they did become more aware of programs and services. I have included another table to offer a visual comparison of the programs.

Table 2: Knowledge Gained

Prison entrepreneurship program	And it was like a light bulb went off in my head and it's like my world opened up even more. I was like, wow. And that was the beginning of this, this growth into forgiveness not just for me, but for them, because I never knew that most perpetrators have been victims themselves at one time. Not that it's true for everyone, but for the most part hurt people do hurt people. And that's when my world started opening up as far as forgiveness and really being able to look. I started melting around the heart. -Remington Well, when I got into the program, they started... It was all about you, the inner child, your past. I was like, 'Oh, no. I don't want to talk about none of this. None of this. Let's just get to the business part.' And it really messed me up because, like I said, I had a lot of problems associating with my past. And it's also like God put all them things into place like stepping stones for me to grow and heal and recognize that embracing my past could be beneficial, and that it's not about me, it's about others and what I can do to use that. So much so that when we got into the business aspect, I was like, 'Oh no, no, no. I don't want to stop doing this.' The program was so great for me. I actually made parole in March. I asked to stay until I graduated the program because it meant that much to me. – Danielle
Reentry court	I mean, I know in the cognitive behavior program, I learned not exactly how the brain works, but you know, somewhat, I had, I had a better understanding of how the brain works and you know, how like certain stuff that you've been through affects how you, how you make decisions now. Like, and then even trying my best to make rational decisions rather than, irrational decisions and stuff like that. – Demetrius

Reentry court	I learned they had a model of thinking. You know what I'm saying? Dealing with your trauma in your life, things that you really didn't know affected you, they can affect you. Do a lot of soul searching basically. That was talked about. Basically, how you got your... put your needs before your wants type mentality that was shared. Being the levelheaded person in the situation always pays off basically. That was part of the conversation. – Hulk
Social enterprise	I feel like [the program] shed light on some things. Because it's like how you might need this, or do you have this? Do you have this? I mean, sometimes we don't even think about it. I know for me when I got out, I was just so happy to see the street that I was like, wow. I'm here finally after all these years. – Em And then the way that I did that was just probably just knowing that there are certain places where you can go to and they kind of coordinate the multiple things that you're going to need and just have that to turn to because you might think like a food stamp office or some crap like that, but they're not going to be very helpful. They're not going to help you with multiple things. And I think that that was one of the greatest things about that place, man. They have a wide knowledge of things that you need to know. – Maurice

Connections Cultivated

While participants appreciated the skills they developed and the knowledge they gained, the connections they cultivated were far more impactful. In each of the three interviews, participants reflected on their interactions with their peers, program staff, and volunteers. Much of this reflection occurred without prompting, which speaks to how much they were impacted by these interactions. While I did include questions about connections cultivated, most of their commentary stemmed from questions such as 'What did you enjoy most about the program?' and 'How has your experience in the program changed you?'. Three themes emerged across the three programs that I will now describe in detail.

Cultivating Support

Participants appreciated being surrounded by like-minded individuals. They found these interactions empowering. Reflecting on the prison entrepreneurship program, Remington explained, "We knew that the person sitting next to us was moving in the same direction I was going, we're trying to do something. It just helped me to not just not feel like I'm not by myself in this." Participants felt encouraged knowing there were like-minded individuals accompanying them on their journey. This experience extended beyond the classroom. Marie shared,

> You also have that component of knowing that you're thought of and actually becoming part of community and looking at this as, not as a class, like this wasn't something just happened inside, this is something that has continued out here and that community is just so important to building good confidence and knowing that you have resources and people that you can reach out to.

Marie cultivated this community while in the prison entrepreneurship program, but this community continues to provide support. The programs were a platform for participants to

interact with individuals they may have never encountered otherwise. Hulk, a reentry court participant, expressed, "It gave me a way to build relationships with those type of people who I would never have met or known about, which is useful and to one day come in handy." The programs offered exposure that can have long-term implications. This exposure was a source of inspiration for participants. When reflecting on his interactions in the reentry court with a formerly incarcerated man who is now a successful entrepreneur, Demetrius shared, "Inspirational people, inspirational stories like that. Those are the connections that I'm talking about. Those are the people that I'm talking about. You know what I mean? Because it's like, damn, he was just in the same situation I was in, you know what I mean? And he came out on the good side."

While these interactions were inspiring, participants were also uplifted knowing how much support was available from their community. Jasmine expressed her appreciation for the director of the prison entrepreneurship program who was "always just a phone call away." Jasmine continued, "If I'd get frustrated or just needed somebody to say, 'Hey, you can do it.' And that's been the biggest thing, I think. Just knowing there's somebody there." Knowing that somebody cares made all the difference for many participants. Taz cherished his support system from the prison entrepreneurship program. He shared,

> My experience with [the program] changed a lot in me, because most people could say that when you getting out of prison, that you don't have no support system. [The program] showed me that I had a support system, I had a backup system, I had people that was in my corner, people that I can call up for support, people that I can call up if I needed somebody to talk to, people that I can call up just to blow off steam if I had to.

Several participants were deeply moved seeing how many individuals were willing to invest time and energy in the programs. Danielle explained,

> The fact it's all them people come in to take time out of their schedule, to come speak to us and try to get back and love us, and do all that they've done for us. Most people that are in our personal life have checked out and left us for dead. It's just amazing what they do.

The programs helped to combat feelings of abandonment that some participants were experiencing. Danielle was one of many prison entrepreneurship program participants who was shocked and surprised by how much support they received. Hundreds of individuals volunteer their time for the program each year. Martavius shared that these individuals "genuinely cared about us being successful." He explained that they were willing to "come in and to feed us and give us some of the things that they've learned and some of the ways of how they became successful" and that this commitment was "very surprising." Remington was deeply moved by these interactions. She expressed,

> It showed me people's heart for people who were incarcerated. I never knew that there were people who were like ... How can I say this? People in the community that are people that are really doing something for change or for encouraging. That was alarming. I was really surprised by that in a good way, but I was very surprised.

She was not aware of how many people were concerned for individuals like her who experienced incarceration. Social enterprise participants were also moved by this care and compassion. Several participants described the program staff as their family. Mike articulated,

> I think it's a place sent from heaven because I don't have many people outside myself and they not going to give up on you, no matter what. They're not going to give up, and

> that's what I love about them the most. And I went in there one day and I told them, 'Y'all will always be my second family.' And I meant that, because they've given me a chance for redemption.

For many participants, the program was a source of unconditional love. Anthony shared that the social enterprise had not "made me feel like they're a program. They've made me feel like they're a family, and they really want to help you." Eugene cherished the "warm hospitality and the eagerness for the people that was there greeting you at the door." He felt this experience was "almost like church, or should I say how church should be." Sam appreciated their support as he navigated the highs and lows of life. He expressed,

> They'll call and check in every now and then to see how I'm doing, if I need any help or anything. And for me, that's a really big thing. Especially for somebody... Because you never know how somebody's mental state is going. They could be really down. And just for somebody to call, to check in, it's really nice.

The reentry court participants also appreciated the welcoming, inviting atmosphere. Hulk stated, "I got just a brotherly and sisterly love feeling out of it. You know what I'm saying? And I got a unity feeling out of it, and a feeling of there are people that give a damn out here." Hulk described this feeling as "rewarding." Similar to the prison entrepreneurship program, the reentry court participants were surprised by how many people were willing to invest their time and energy. Hulk explained,

> I enjoyed the fact that people spent their time. People took their time to come together and plan something that is designed to help and influence people, inmates, whatever, coming out of prison to do something different and to be a part of something bigger, to be a part of the community. Because basically everybody in the program is community

> members. You know what I'm saying? You know, they work for the government. And then there's community members, judges and lawyers, and doctors. You know what I'm saying? So it's definitely, it has helped me. So just building the connections, being able to come together with people like that with that goal and just building the connections, that was, to me that's the most valuable thing that I got. You know what I'm saying? That's the thing I appreciate.

The reentry court participants were surprised by how many people volunteered for the program. When he started the program, Demetrius assumed it would "be the judge, my probation officer, and maybe one or two other people." Instead, he soon learned it was "a lot of people, a lot of different people. And people in significant positions in life taking time out of their day to be at that program. So, I mean that was surprising. Other judges and stuff, so that was surprising to me."

For the social enterprise participants, the support they received far exceeded their expectations. Anthony felt that the staff go "above and beyond" and that "every single one of them in there is just amazingly helpful." Jay recounted an experience where the staff supported him in a way he never expected.

> Last week or week and a half ago, I caught a flat. I didn't know what to do, didn't have a spare tire. I called [the program]. They was out there like highway patrol. I swear. They came with a jack and helped me like they help others. So that really did make me cry because I didn't have money for the tire. Didn't know how to ... I was on the side of the road, stuck. I called them and like I said, they was out there like highway patrol.

This is one of many encounters in which staff go above and beyond. Mike was involved with the program several years ago and experienced a repeat incarceration. Staff did all they could to support him. He explained,

> They came to visit me more than once. They kept in touch with the new chaplain, they kept in touch with the lieutenant, they came to my sentence hearing. [The executive director], she came and spoke very highly of me. That experience right there is what changed me. You know what I'm saying? It showed me that they really cared about me. They really wanted to see me succeed. They wrote letters for my hearings. They done everything they could possibly do to help me get out quick as possible. I know right then and there they wasn't playing no games. They was serious about what they do, and they showed their passion.

Participants were deeply moved by the support they received from both staff, volunteers, and their peers.

Affirming Dignity

As they cultivated these connections, participants were reminded that they are more than their mistakes. Reflecting on her experiences with the social enterprise, Amber expressed, "And when I got out, they still welcomed me back in with open arms and they helped me to understand that it's okay, that things do happen. And that was the biggest thing that I was struggling with, because I was so disappointed in myself." Participants appreciated the validation and affirmation they received. Remington recounted a lifechanging encounter with a prison entrepreneurship program volunteer. She shared, "Man, she was the first person that really told me, 'Do you realize that you have worth and value just because you're a breathing human being?' And I was like... I had never, I mean, I'm 50 years old, I've never heard that before so yeah." This exchange

occurred several years ago, but it continues to impact her. For prison entrepreneurship program participants, this was a space where they were free to dream. It was a stark contrast from what they normally experienced in prison. Martavius explained,

> So it was cool being able to be in an atmosphere with people where we had the same goal. And it wasn't one of those things where either of us were trying to make the other one feel like they wasn't hard or something like that, because they had a dream. A lot of times you can feel stuff like that, because in prison, your partners, your homies or something, they might not, 'Ah, man, you're tripping bro. You ain't going to be that.' You know what I mean? It was just ... It was cool being able to be around folks that they had a dream to be something and reach something other than being up in there.

Participants were accustomed to being belittled by their peers. The program was a welcome contrast to that experience and it served as a space where they were encouraged to dream big. Taz explained that his peers who were not in the program often expressed "animosity" towards the participants. He continued, "So you had people in there trying to say, 'Oh, you ain't going to do nothing. Y'all ain't doing nothing." Taz appreciated the staff and volunteers who countered this narrative. He shared, "They try to put you down, but you got people coming in telling you, 'Hey, y'all can do this. If you want to achieve something, y'all can. Don't let nobody tell you that you can't."

Social enterprise participants also appreciated the encouragement they received. Staff urged them to not be defined by their past. Amber shared, "They helped me to accept that it is okay for my past, and that there is a better future. They built my self-esteem. The welcoming in, the loving that they gave me was enough to just help me to love myself again." These interactions helped to restore hope. Jin described the program as a judgment-free zone. He

explained, "Obviously, they know about your charge, whatever you were in prison or jail for. They don't judge, they treat you just like a regular human being, which in my situation is really, really wonderful." Participants were treated with dignity and respect, which was not their experience in other environments. Eugene felt that it was "a blessing when you can walk in somewhere and you get greeted the way you supposed to get greeted." This kindness made all the difference. OG expressed, "They welcome you with open arms. No matter if you've had a bath, had a shower, if you're stinking, you've had your clothes on for a week, they'll dress you." In these interactions, their dignity was affirmed and their worth was validated.

Facilitating Growth

Participants were transformed by their experiences in these programs. For Phil, the support he received in the social enterprise sparked his motivation. He shared,

> It motivates you even more when you've got somebody that's willing to give you a chance and help you in every area that you need help with. You know what I'm saying? All you got to do is ask and ... Well, first of all, show up and ask any type of question like I did. Every question that I asked, I got an answer to and a solution. I just pressing forward since and everything been getting better and better each and every day.

The support they received has been transformative. Em, another social enterprise participant, expressed similar sentiments. He reflected, "It's crazy how humans, some humans will respond to someone just having that small hint of faith in them, you know?" Em shared that programs like the social enterprise "give people that, that little bit of hope" and that "all it takes is a little bit of hope and encouragement and it can alter someone's entire life." Malcolm described the "love, the heart that these people have" at the social enterprise as "impeccable" and "contagious." He continued, "I think they do a great job motivating me, giving me the resource,

when they don’t have the resource pointing me to those who have the resources to help me achieve my goal.” The support they received at the social enterprise challenged their existing assumptions. OG described his interactions with all the “nice people, good people” as an experience that “opens your eyes up.” He was accustomed to environments where people say, “‘No.’ And ‘Hey, get away from me. What do you want?’ ‘Well, we’ll get to it if we can, if we can’t screw you.’” For Eugene, these interactions restored his faith in humanity. He explained, “How it changed me was on my perspective on saying that it ain’t no more good people out here. It ain’t no more... Ain’t no help out here.” This has changed his “way of thinking” and he now believes “it’s still some good people out here and it still to be people that’s really, really trying to work for you to help you get back in.” Eugene elaborated on the transformative power of presence. He expressed,

> When you run across one or two good people, you’re going to be wonderful. But when you run across a whole room full of good people, it makes a big difference for somebody that are already coming out with negative intentions, already feeling like, ‘They’re not going to let me back. I’m not going to get no job. I’m not going to be able to get a job. I’m not ...’ The atmosphere that they present is what makes a difference between whether a young man’s going to walk out that door and be successful, or he going to walk in that door and walk out and still be a failure.

Reentry court participants also described the program as a catalyst for change. Demetrius shared, “I think it just keeps me grounded because it’s other guys in there that’s been through what I’ve been through and trying to change and do it the right way, so that’s the main thing, for real.” The participants appreciated being surrounded by individuals committed to self-improvement. Hulk explained,

> It surrounded me with positive people, as opposed to if I wasn't in the program and I was just out here meeting people along the road, I would've never met these people. You know what I'm saying? It definitely changed me as far as my circle of people who I communicate with. And just it did help me too, a little bit, just to be on top of things and just to do it. And it's paying off. It's paying off for me.

For the prison entrepreneurship program participants, the relationships they developed have left them more open-minded. Tiffany expressed,

> I have become such a humble person. I'm able to look at people and not judge them. Because again, you get in a cohort of different women and they come from all different types of backgrounds but they have beautiful minds and we all make bad decisions. And just the fact that we were able to come together and be like a sisterhood, it changed how I looked at people and individuals like, you don't never know what somebody has been through because it actually allows the individual to kind of like break it down. And there's no judgment zone and everything is left there and it does create a bond. And I thought that was a beautiful thing. And I took that and I'm like, I can do that with any individual as long as they allow me.

Her experience in the program has changed how she navigates relationships. Marie described the program as a space where she built "trust" and "vulnerability." The program provided an opportunity for "breaking down some stereotypes" and "seeing different sides of people." Participants had life-altering experiences in these programs.

Discussion

In each of the three programs, participants had an opportunity to recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections. It is important to note that more similarities than

differences emerged among participants in this study. Within each program and across the three programs, employing asset-based approaches created similar experiences for participants. The skills they developed, including job readiness, digital literacy, and financial literacy, continue to be useful as they navigate life on the outside. Some participants found these skills more useful than others. Participants who have spent decades incarcerated were completely unfamiliar with these topics while others needed less support in these areas. What appeared to be most helpful was skill building that could translate to several different areas. In the prison entrepreneurship program, for instance, they learned that setting long-term and short-term goals can impact both personal and professional development. After completing Toastmasters, participants felt more confident going on interviews, meeting with investors, and navigating other responsibilities. The prison entrepreneurship program is the most time intensive of the three programs, which helps to explain why those participants developed the most skills. In addition, this program emphasized skill building that spanned both the personal and professional. The social enterprise is focused on employment, so skill building was concentrated in that area. This focus is extremely helpful for many participants, but others have little need for resume building, mock interviews, and other employment-focused skills. Participants who spent less time incarcerated needed less support in these areas. The reentry court has no explicit focus on skill development, which explains why participants could not identify any skills they developed.

For prison entrepreneurship program participants and reentry court participants, the knowledge they gained has facilitated healing and restoration. Participants learned how their past has shaped their present. The trauma-informed, mindfulness-based Houses of Healing was a life-altering experience for several participants in the prison entrepreneurship program. Some were reluctant and did not see the value in engaging with the curriculum. With time, they were

transformed by this experience. They reported learning the power of forgiveness, healing their inner child, recognizing that hurt people hurt people, and much more. Reentry court participants also had an opportunity to reckon with their past and present. They learned how the brain functions, how trauma affects executive functioning, and how all of this influences decision-making. They were encouraged to use this information in their daily lives.

The social enterprise did not offer any therapeutic interventions, so the knowledge these participants gained differs from the other programs. They described the social enterprise as a resource hub, which is vital for formerly incarcerated individuals interacting with systems that are often overwhelming to navigate. Some individuals are unaware of all that they need when they are first released and the social enterprise is several steps ahead. Instead of calls and visits to several different offices for food stamp applications, child support assistance, and other needs, they can receive the support they need in one location. The time and effort that participants save eases their burden during a transition that is difficult enough to navigate.

The connections they cultivated in these programs continue to have a lasting impact. These relationships provided support, affirmed dignity, and facilitated growth. In the prison entrepreneurship program and reentry court, peer support was extremely important. Participants relished the opportunity to be surrounded by like-minded individuals. Many of them bonded over shared lived experiences. They were inspired by their peers charting a new path after their time in prison. Many were accustomed to interactions with peers full of doubt and discouragement, so these experiences were a welcome change.

The social enterprise focused less on peer relationships, but in all three programs, participants raved about their interactions with staff. For those without support from family and friends, these relationships were a lifeline. They felt less alone as they navigated the difficult

transition home. Many were accustomed to friends and family abandoning them during times of adversity. Staff in these programs were committed to accompanying them during the highest highs and lowest lows. Many staff went above and beyond their assigned duties to provide support. This helps to explain why many of the participants describe the staff as family. The welcoming, inviting atmosphere in these programs was much appreciated. In the prison entrepreneurship program and the reentry court, this appreciation extended to volunteers. Participants were moved to witness how many individuals were committed to their success.

These programs also validated and affirmed their dignity. Many commented on how much they appreciated being treated with respect, which speaks to the stigma that formerly incarcerated individuals encounter daily. While they were accustomed to environments where they were defined by their past, these programs reminded them that they were so much more. In these spaces, they were free to dream of a future where they were not defined by their past. They were not belittled for believing they could achieve whatever they desired. They were encouraged to foster ambitions and aspirations that far exceeded society's expectations of formerly incarcerated individuals.

These experiences had a transformative effect on participants. Participants were more motivated to succeed because of the outpouring of support they received. Many were scarred by experiences where individuals saw a need but offered no help. In these programs, staff and volunteers did all they could to provide support. For those far too familiar with a cold, cruel world, these programs provided an abundance of compassion. This compassion is often the difference between success and failure.

Their relationships with their peers were another source of motivation and inspiration. As much as they appreciated the staff and volunteers, only individuals who have been incarcerated

fully understand their lived experiences. Being accompanied by like-minded individuals on this journey made all the difference. They were surrounded by individuals who shared their same commitment for self-improvement. Participants also left these programs more open-minded. While many had similar lived experiences, they also had the tendency to judge their peers for their decisions. In the programs, they learned to lead with compassion. They recognized how harmful it is to cast judgment, especially when knowing so little about a person's past. This awareness now influences how they navigate relationships.

It is important to note that risk-based ideology does not pervade these programs. There is no emphasis on perceived deficiencies and dysfunctions (Dinishak, 2016), which helps foster a welcoming environment to recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections. These programs enable assets to thrive (Cassetti et al., 2020) by focusing on "potentials, strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits" (Garven et al., 2016, p. 38). Each of these programs also focus on the quality of the relationships that develop among participants, staff, and volunteers. This emphasis on relationships creates a welcoming, affirming environment where participants are eager to build skills and gain knowledge. Instead of focusing on their limitations, support from their peers, staff, and volunteers empowers them to explore their fullest potential. These connections have a lasting impact because the relationships remain long after their participation in the program concludes. The end of the program does not signal the end of their relationships with peers, staff, and volunteers. These interactions continue to provide support, affirm dignity, and facilitate growth. While the skills they developed and the knowledge they gained continue to be useful, it is abundantly clear that the connections they cultivated are their most valuable asset.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider with this study. Since the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program were responsible for recruitment, it is possible that they selected individuals with high levels of engagement in the program. Their experiences could differ from those who were far less engaged with the program. It is possible that the effectiveness of asset-based approaches is determined by the level of engagement in the program. It may be more difficult to recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections among individuals who are engaging with the program less consistently. Asset-based approaches may be less impactful for these participants. Future research could compare and contrast experiences in these programs based on engagement.

Participatory methods would have enhanced this study. I began this study with one collaborator from each organization. The collaborators from the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program were former program participants and the collaborator from the reentry court was the court's community partner, a formerly incarcerated man who mentors program participants. Before I began the interviews, each collaborator provided feedback on the interview guide. I intended for these individuals to assist with data analysis and guide the dissemination process, but COVID-19 hindered these efforts. As someone who has not experienced incarceration, my interpretation of these findings may be incomplete. Participatory methods help to ensure that research findings accurately reflect the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated.

Conclusion

Asset-based approaches present an opportunity to reframe "what we value, what we aspire to achieve, and how we measure progress" (Gavin et al., 2016, p. 62) in reentry programming. They provide an avenue to focus on what matters most to formerly incarcerated individuals and determine the outcomes we collectively wish to achieve. Instead of treating these individuals as problems to be fixed, reentry programming can be a space to recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections.

The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of relationship building in reentry programming. While programs should continue to focus on skills and knowledge, this study suggests that connections leave a lasting impact. Programs can incorporate relationship building into existing programming focused on skills and knowledge. For example, programs can allot time for peer sharing after a class on interview skills. Meaningful connections often develop during informal interactions, but programs should be intentional about creating spaces for connection. This study also demonstrates how much staff and volunteers impact participants in these programs. Staff and volunteers must commit to a person-centered approach that emphasizes the inherent worth of individuals.

Asset-based approaches can also transform research and evaluation in reentry programming. These approaches compliment participatory methods in research and evaluation. Outcomes of interest to the programs (e.g., recidivism rates, employment rates) can be accompanied by outcomes of interest to the participants. Participants can identify the skills they wish to develop, the knowledge they want to gain, and the connections they desire to cultivate. While programs may not have the capacity to meet all of these requests, it is imperative that they prioritize the desires of participants. If we wish to achieve better outcomes in reentry

programming, we must first know what participants desire from these programs. We are then better equipped to measure the success of these programs.

For asset-based approaches to produce desirable outcomes in reentry programming, practitioners must contend with the limitations of these approaches. There are many structural and systemic forces creating and perpetuating injustice (Friedli, 2013; Roy, 2017) in the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals. Many of these organizations choose to prioritize direct service because of organizational capacity. Two of the three programs in this study have few paid staff and believe they can have the most impact with direct service. However, it is imperative that they support advocacy and organizing efforts to dismantle these forces of injustice. Direct service helps to address urgent needs while advocacy and organizing can build structures and systems where all can thrive. This study demonstrates the potential of asset-based approaches in reentry programming, but different outcomes can be possible when asset-based approaches complement efforts to promote structural and systemic change (Roy, 2017). This can include advocacy and organizing efforts related to employment, housing, education, public benefits, voting rights, and other issues affecting formerly incarcerated individuals. They can support these efforts by attending meetings, signing petitions, and participating in similar activities. Asset-based approaches can support the flourishing of individuals, families, and communities.

References

Antonovsky, A. (1979). *Health, stress, and coping* (1st ed). Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well* (1st ed). Jossey-Bass.

Bull, T., Mittelmark, M. B., & Kanyeka, N. E. (2013). Assets for well-being for women living in deep poverty: Through a salutogenic looking-glass. *Critical Public Health*, *23*(2), 160–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2013.771811

Burkett, I. (2011). Appreciating assets: A new report from the International Association for Community Development (IACD). *Community Development Journal*, *46*(4), 573–578. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsr054

Cassetti, V., Powell, K., Barnes, A., & Sanders, T. (2020). A systematic scoping review of asset-based approaches to promote health in communities: Development of a framework. *Global Health Promotion*, *27*(3), 15–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975919848925

Celedón-Pattichis, S., Borden, L. L., Pape, S. J., Clements, D. H., Peters, S. A., Males, J. R., Chapman, O., & Leonard, J. (2018). Asset-based approaches to equitable mathematics education research and practice. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, *49*(4), 373–389. https://doi.org/10.5951/jresematheduc.49.4.0373

Charmaz, K. (2020). “With constructivist grounded theory you can’t hide”: Social justice research and critical inquiry in the public sphere. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *26*(2), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419879081

Coleman, S. T., Bruce, A. W., White, L. J., Boykin, A. W., & Tyler, K. (2017). Communal and individual learning contexts as they relate to mathematics achievement under simulated

classroom conditions. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *43*(6), 543–564. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798416665966

Dinishak, J. (2016). The deficit view and its critics. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *36*(4). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i4.5236

Durose, M. R., & Antenangeli, L. (2021). *Recidivism of prisoners released in 34 states in 2012: A 5-year follow-up period (2012–2017)*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Friedli, L. (2012). Speaking allowed: The political voice of public health. *Slovenian Journal of Public Health*, *51*(1). https://doi.org/10.2478/v10152-012-0002-3

Friedli, L. (2013). 'What we've tried, hasn't worked': The politics of assets based public health. *Critical Public Health*, *23*(2), 131–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2012.748882

Garven, F., McLean, J., & Pattoni, L. (2016). *Asset-based approaches: Their rise, role and reality*. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1240297

Harry, B., Sturges, K. M., & Klingner, J. K. (2005). Mapping the process: An exemplar of process and challenge in grounded theory analysis. *Educational Researcher*, *34*(2), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034002003

Hunter, B. A., Lanza, A. S., Lawlor, M., Dyson, W., & Gordon, D. M. (2016). A strengths-based approach to prisoner reentry: The Fresh Start prisoner reentry program. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *60*(11), 1298–1314. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X15576501

Lindstrom, B., & Eriksson, M. (2005). Salutogenesis. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, *59*(6), 440–442. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2005.034777

MacLeod, M. A., & Emejulu, A. (2014). Neoliberalism with a community face? A critical analysis of asset-based community development in Scotland. *Journal of Community Practice*, *22*(4), 430–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2014.959147

McMillen, J. C., Morris, L., & Sherraden, M. (2004). Ending social work's grudge match: Problems versus strengths. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, *85*(3), 317–325. https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.1492

Mears, D. P., & Cochran, J. C. (2015). *Prisoner reentry in the era of mass incarceration*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483390727

Ndrecka, M., Listwan, S. J., & Latessa, E. (2017). What works in reentry and how to improve outcomes. In S. Stojkovic (Ed.), *Prisoner reentry: Critical issues and policy directions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Leary, T., Braithwaite, K., Burkett, I., Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, & Association internationale de développement et d'action communautaires. (2011). *Appreciating assets*. Carnegie UK Trust.

Phelan, J. C., Link, B. G., & Tehranifar, P. (2010). Social conditions as fundamental causes of health inequalities: Theory, evidence, and policy implications. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *51*(1_suppl), S28–S40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510383498

Rapp, C. A., Saleebey, D., & Sullivan, W. P. (2005). The future of strengths-based social work. *Advances in Social Work*, *6*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.18060/81

Roy, M. J. (2017). The assets-based approach: Furthering a neoliberal agenda or rediscovering the old public health? A critical examination of practitioner discourses. *Critical Public Health*, *27*(4), 455–464. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2016.1249826

Schlager, M. (2013). *Rethinking the reentry paradigm: A blueprint for action*. Carolina Academic Press.

Schlager, M. (2018). Through the looking glass: Taking stock of offender reentry. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *34*(1), 69–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986217750443

The Lionheart Foundation. (2021). *Houses of Healing*. https://lionheart.org/lionheart-programs/houses-of-healing

Travis, J. (2005). *But they all come back: Facing the challenges of prisoner reentry* (1st ed). Urban Institute Press.

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2012). *The characteristics of prisoners returning home and effective reentry programs and policies*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199730148.013.0028

CHAPTER 3

Charting a Path to Full and Free Lives: An Abolitionist Vision for Reentry

Abstract

Scholar and activist Angela Davis writes, “Short of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time” (Davis, 2003, p. 11). With approximately 600,000 people exiting prisons each year, reentry efforts have garnered local, state, and national attention. Many of these reentry efforts do little to improve the social and economic conditions of those returning home. By failing to examine the social and economic forces driving incarceration, these efforts often reproduce the oppressive conditions they intend to address. While there have been bipartisan efforts to reform the system, prison abolitionists argue that the system is beyond repair. In this paper, I examine the issues with existing reentry efforts and articulate the need for an abolitionist vision for reentry. Drawing from interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, this paper demonstrates how abolition can create the social and economic conditions for full and free lives after incarceration. I conclude by exploring the role of prefigurative politics in crafting an abolitionist vision for reentry.

Introduction

Many would describe the prison experiment in the United States as a catastrophic failure (Bell, 2021). The many efforts to reform the carceral system is evidence of this failure. Prisons were designed to reduce crime, create accountability, and promote public safety, but research demonstrates that prisons achieve none of these aforementioned goals. Instead, prisons exacerbate the conditions they were designed to address (Bell, 2021). Incarceration contributes to increased crime in certain circumstances. In states with high incarceration rates and in neighborhoods with concentrated incarceration, higher rates of incarceration may be associated with increased crime (Clear, 2008; Liedka et al., 2006; Stemen, 2017). High rates of incarceration disrupt social bonds, remove adults who can nurture children, deprive communities of income, and reduce future income potential. As incarceration becomes concentrated in certain neighborhoods, any potential to improve public safety is hindered by the disruption to families and groups that can help keep crime rates low (Clear, 2008; Stemen, 2017).

In light of this, the focus has shifted to reentry policy and practice to respond this failure. Nearly all individuals who are incarcerated are released from prison and most are released within five years of admission (Travis, 2005). Numerous programs and policies have been implemented to support the hundreds of thousands of individuals coming home. In spite of these efforts, recidivism rates in this country are comparable to the peak of the crime era (Bell, 2021; Jonson & Cullen, 2015).

In this paper, I examine the many issues with existing reentry efforts. Many exclusively focus on individual level problems instead of the structural and systemic issues impacting formerly incarcerated individuals. They fail to engage with the social and economic forces driving incarceration. This limits their potential to create meaningful, lasting change (Bell,

2021). Additionally, many of these programs create low quality of life standards and expectations for formerly incarcerated individuals. This often results in solutions that reproduce the unjust conditions these programs were designed to address (Bell, 2021; Burch, 2017; Byrd, 2016; Currie, 2013; Goddard & Myers, 2017). I then explore an abolitionist vision for reentry. Abolition requires structural and systemic interventions that have the power to transform the existing approach to reentry. In this study, I examine how formerly incarcerated individuals describe full and free lives after incarceration and how they describe their best possible futures. I then explore how abolition can create the social and economic conditions for this to be achieved. I will conclude by exploring the role of prefigurative politics in this abolitionist vision for reentry.

The Current Landscape of Reentry

Unprecedented numbers of people are leaving prisons and returning to their communities each year. As incarceration rates have grown, there have also been increases in the number of people exiting prisons. In 2020, state and federal prisons admitted 346,461 individuals and released 549,600 individuals (Carson, 2021). Forty years ago, less than 200,000 individuals made the journey from prison to home (Visher & Travis, 2011a). Though there are many serving long sentences, far more people are incarcerated for shorter stints of time. There are also many people cycling in and out of prison for short spells for a substantial period of their adult lives. Nearly all individuals who are incarcerated are released from prison and most are released within five years of admission (Travis, 2005).

Given this increase, reentry has garnered local, state, and national attention and recidivism rates often dominate these conversations. In 2018, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released a report on a nine-year follow-up of 401,288 individuals released from state prisons in

2005. An estimated 68% of these individuals were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years. Almost half (48%) of these people were reincarcerated within three years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). These recidivism rates have remained unchanged for the past two decades. Nationally, 25% of prison admissions are the result of technical violations, which refer to noncompliant but non-criminal behaviors such as missing meetings with a parole officer (Fenster, 2020).

While more resources are being allocated to reentry efforts, these efforts continue to be ineffectual and inefficient (Durose et al., 2014). Formerly incarcerated individuals continue to encounter debilitating obstacles in their attempts to access employment, housing, and other necessary resources. At present, reentry occurs in three stages: (1) rehabilitation and reentry programming inside prisons; (2) transitional services immediately after release; and (3) long-term, post-release support that continues after the initial transition period (James, 2014). In each of these stages, programs attempt to reduce recidivism with interventions such as substance abuse treatment, anger management classes, and professional development courses. Many of these programs focus no attention on the structural and systemic barriers that individuals encounter during reentry. Instead, they place the burden on these individuals to change. In many instances, "structural problems such as inequality, exploitation, unequal distribution of resources, and structural racism are translated into individualized deficiencies of system-impacted people" (Bell, 2021, p. 37). When this occurs, individuals are blamed for the problems they encounter as a result of these injustices. Scholars describe this process as responsibilization, where the responsibility to change is placed almost entirely on formerly incarcerated individuals (Bell, 2021; Currie, 2013; Goddard & Myers, 2017; Gray, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2015, 2016).

Research demonstrates that structural factors have more impact on recidivism than individual factors (Currie, 2013; Goddard & Myers, 2017). These structural factors include housing discrimination, employment discrimination, denial of educational opportunity, and the many other forms of exclusion this population encounters (Alexander, 2010; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Pager, 2007). In spite of this fact, reentry efforts often task formerly incarcerated individuals with their own rehabilitation. This approach demands that these individuals learn to tolerate the injustices they encounter and deems them maladjusted if they do not (Bell, 2021; Currie, 2013; Goddard & Myers, 2017). Programs that emphasize personal responsibility and individual blame teach individuals to "locate the sources of their problems mainly, if not entirely, in themselves" (Currie, 2013, p. 5).

These programs also have low standards for what they deem success (Bell, 2021). Reduced recidivism rates are the typical standard for measuring the success of these programs. The highly lauded Second Chance Act (SCA) helps to demonstrate this. The SCA authorizes funding for programs and research pertaining to rehabilitation and reentry, including prison education programs, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and job training (Department of Justice, 2015). The SCA utilizes a single metric to determine success or failure: an appreciable negative impact on recidivism (Department of Justice, 2015). Programs unable to reduce recidivism are deemed failures and often defunded. Programs that negatively impact recidivism are seen as successes and continue to receive funding. By employing recidivism reduction as the standard for success, a program's ability to reduce recidivism has become equated with its ability to rehabilitate (Cullen, 2012; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000).

With recidivism reduction as the metric of success, many programs ignore the quality of life for this population. They have low expectations for what a full and free life can and should be for formerly incarcerated individuals. Currie (2013) writes,

> [W]e measure the "success" of these efforts in very minimal and essentially negative ways: they commit fewer crimes, do fewer drugs … maybe get, at least briefly, some sort of job. And even if the job is basically exploitative and short-lived and their future options are slim and their present lives are still pinched, desperate and precarious, we still count that as all good—as evidence of programmatic success (p. 5).

The Constraints of Reform

The constraints and limitations of existing reentry efforts have left many asking how to improve outcomes for individuals being released from prison and improve conditions in the communities they call home. Many existing reentry efforts could be described as reform since they serve to reinforce and reproduce the current system (Bell, 2021; Ben-Moshe, 2013). These efforts focus on improving a system that continues to fail the formerly incarcerated instead of building a system that could generate different outcomes for this population (Rodriguez, 2018). Many scholars and activists believe that reform is not sufficient. Karakatsanis (2019) describes reform as "superficial and deceptive" (p. 851). Others argue that high recidivism rates, racial inequities, and obstacles to reentry are merely a function of how the system is designed to operate and that it is inherently and intentionally harmful to the poor, people of color, and marginalized populations (Alexander, 2010; Berger, 2014; Butler, 2015, 2018; Davis, 2003; Karakatsanis, 2019). They believe that the current system cannot operate under just, fair, or humane conditions, even under ideal circumstances (Bell, 2021; Karakatsanis, 2019). Scholars assert that reform does more harm than good. Butler (2018) writes that reform has a "pacification

effect" because it "calms the natives even when they should not be calm" (p. 197). Reforms "dupe those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy with promises of equality, fairness, and neutrality" (Butler, 2018, p. 197).

Not only are reforms ineffective, but they are harmful in that they create the illusion of addressing problems in the carceral system when instead they reproduce the injustice they purport to address (Karakatsanis, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018; Spade, 2012). Reform efforts tend to divorce problems in the system from their structural causes. Bell (2021) explains that reform efforts dedicated to working within the current systems reify the system, "distracting from the notion that the structure itself is inherently sick, violent, and destructive" (p. 42).

Why Abolition?

Recognizing the inherent destructiveness of the existing system, a more radical approach is needed. Abolition is a theoretical framework through which we can articulate solutions in research and practice (Bell, 2021). This paper has outlined reentry efforts that are situated within the current system, which reproduce and reinforce this system. These programs attempt to address problems by correcting people instead of correcting structures and systems.

Deeply aware of this ineffectiveness, abolitionists believe the carceral system is beyond repair. Kaba and Hayes (2021) explain that prisons perpetuate themselves by maintaining the conditions that foster crime. They write, "From 1978 to 2014, the US prison population rose 408 percent, largely filling its cages with those denied access to education, employment, and human services" (Kaba & Hayes, 2021, p. 51). They argue that the carceral system is geared towards recidivism and fails in its efforts to support public safety and promote public good. Abolition is a political vision that aims to eliminate surveillance, policing, and imprisonment by developing lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Abolition focuses on the elimination of the

prison industrial complex, which describes the "overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems" (Critical Resistance, 2019). Abolitionists envision a world with healthy, thriving communities where harm is met with accountability instead of punishment. Many abolitionists draw inspiration from the Black Radical Tradition, which can be described as a tradition of resistance that has "produced an enduring vision of a shared future whose principal promise is the abolition of all forms of oppression" (Johnson & Lubin, 2017, p. 30).

Many deem abolition an unrealistic, unattainable goal. McLeod (2015) argues that this rejection would be warranted if "abolition is conceptualized as an immediate and indiscriminate opening of prison doors—that is, the imminent physical elimination of all structures of incarceration" (p. 1161). Instead, many argue that abolition should be conceptualized as a gradual project of decarceration. Furthermore, abolitionists often elaborate on the differences between negative abolition and positive abolition. Abolition has been described as a two-part project, consisting of both negative and positive processes (Bell, 2021). While negative abolition focuses on dismantling the prison industrial complex, positive abolition focuses on world building (McLeod, 2018). Describing these world building efforts in further detail, McLeod (2015) writes,

> A prison abolitionist framework involves initiatives directed toward positive rather than exclusively negative abolition. A prison abolitionist framework entails, more specifically, developing and implementing other positive substitutive social projects, institutions, and conceptions of regulating our collective social lives and redressing shared problems- interventions that might over the longer term render imprisonment and criminal law enforcement peripheral to ensuring relative peace (p. 1163).

These positive projects, institutions, and concepts aim to render prison obsolete by solving the social problems that drive mass incarceration (McLeod, 2018). Further articulating the aims of positive abolition, Ruth Wilson Gilmore states, “Abolition is about presence, not absence. It’s about building life-affirming institutions.” Positive abolition aims to address the social and economic conditions that track individuals from poor communities and communities of color into prison (Davis, 2003). Abolition requires government investment in jobs, education, housing, and healthcare to provide individuals the resources they need long before they commit their hypothetical crime (Kushner, 2019). Abolitionists long for a world where cages are not “catch-all solutions to social problems” (Gilmore & Kilgore, 2019, p. 1).

Many also criticize abolition for lacking fully formed solutions to address the harms caused by individuals many characterize as “predators”. Kaba and Hayes (2021) explain,

> But the idea of “predators” and “dangerous people” is complicated by the conditions our society enforces — social and economic conditions that we know generate crime and despair. Communities whose needs are met are not rife with crimes of desperation, whereas struggling communities are; and people from communities that are highly criminalized by our racist system are far more likely to be thrust into the carceral system (p. 53).

Abolition requires an analysis of crime that is linked with social structures instead of individual pathology. Furthermore, any anti-crime strategies must focus on social and economic needs (Davis & Rodriguez, 2000). Abolitionists often do not engage with questions such as, “What about the really dangerous people?” Instead, they treat these inquiries as questions we must collectively answer while problematizing the notion of “dangerousness” (Kaba & Hayes, 2021, p. 55).

Abolition also requires a reconceptualizing of justice. McLeod (2018) explains that justice in abolitionist terms attempts to "achieve peace, make amends, and distribute resources more equitably" (p. 1615). Abolitionist justice abandons punishment in favor of accountability and a carceral system replaced by structural and systemic responses to inequality (McLeod, 2018). Punishment is a passive process that is imposed on individuals. Accountability is an active process that requires individuals acknowledge the harm they committed, acknowledge the impact of that harm, express genuine remorse, attempt to repair the harm, and strive to become an individual who would not commit that harm in the future (Sered, 2019). Abolition demands the transformation of our political, social, and economic lives and a "holistic engagement with the structural conditions that give rise to suffering" (McLeod, 2018, p. 1616).

As McLeod asserts, abolition demands social and economic transformation. As abolitionists engage with the conditions that give rise to suffering, they also must engage with the conditions that give rise to flourishing. In this study, I examine how formerly incarcerated individuals describe full and free lives after incarceration and how they describe their best possible futures. I then explore how abolition can create the social and economic conditions for this to be achieved.

Methods

Settings

Participants were recruited from three different organizations in the southeastern United States: a social enterprise, a prison entrepreneurship program, and a reentry court. The social enterprise is an employment-focused organization providing wraparound services to individuals transitioning from prison to the community. The prison entrepreneurship program is a six-month entrepreneurship education program targeting individuals who are incarcerated. The reentry

court offers individual and group support to individuals recently released from federal prison. Individuals who successfully complete the 52-week program receive a one-year reduction in their parole terms.

Sample

A total of 31 participants were enrolled in the study. There were 16 participants from the social enterprise, 12 participants from the prison entrepreneurship program, and 3 participants from the reentry court. A majority (61.2%) of the participants identified as male and 38.7% identified as female. Over half (54.8%) of the participants identified as White, 41.9% identified as Black, and 3.2% identified as Other. Participants ranged in age from 28.6 years to 63.9 years and their average age was 42.7 years (SD=10.1).

Procedures

Staff at the three organizations identified inclusion criteria for the study. The social enterprise included individuals who were transitioning out of subsidized employment. The prison entrepreneurship program included graduates of the program at different stages at reentry (e.g., released for months, released for years). The reentry court also included graduates of the program. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program conducted recruitment by phone using a script I developed. I attended a reentry court meeting to recruit participants using the same script. Staff at the social enterprise and prison entrepreneurship program provided contact information for individuals who were interested in participating and I contacted them to schedule an interview. At the beginning of the interview, participants completed an informed consent form, provided demographic information, and selected a pseudonym (see Appendix A).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in October 2020, January 2021, and April 2021. 31 individuals participated in Interview 1, 24 individuals participated in Interview 2, and 21 individuals participated in Interview 3. Participants were compensated with a $25 gift card after each interview. Interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted an average of 25.9 minutes. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and on two separate audio recorders. Rev.com was responsible for transcription. Interview 1 focused on the pursuit of a full and free life after incarceration, Interview 2 examined asset-based approaches in the three organizations, and Interview 3 consisted of a program evaluation. This paper draws from Interview 1 and Interview 3.

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory guided data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory examines the social, historical, and situational contexts in which participants live. Constructive grounded theorists are concerned with the specific conditions giving rise to outcomes of interest and the responses of different participants to these outcomes (Charmaz, 2020). In this study, I employed constructivist grounded theory to explore the social and economic conditions necessary to achieve an abolitionist vision for reentry. I aimed to understand the conditions we must create for the formerly incarcerated to live full and free lives. Charmaz explains that not every researcher who adopts this method aims for theory construction. Instead, constructivist grounded theory can offer a new perspective on an existing concept. It provides an opportunity to enrich and expand existing theoretical frameworks.

During Interview 1, participants were asked, ‘I want to begin by asking you to describe a full and free life after incarceration. What does a full and free life after incarceration consist of?’ During Interview 3, participants were asked, ‘Imagine ten years from now. You are living your

best possible life. What does that life look like?' I used thematic coding (Harry et al., 2005) to identify themes that emerged from the responses to these two questions and coded for themes across both waves. Each step of this process was conducted using NVIVO.

An Abolitionist Vision for Reentry

In *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, Mariame Kaba (2021) writes, "Let's begin our abolitionist journey not with the question 'What do we have now, and how can we make it better?' Instead, let's ask, 'What can we imagine for ourselves and the world?' If we do that, then boundless possibilities of a more just world await us." (p. 33). If we wish to create a world of boundless possibilities for formerly incarcerated individuals, we must improve social and economic opportunity for this population. Abolition can help to build this just world. In the following sections, formerly incarcerated individuals reflected on full and free lives after incarceration and described their best possible futures. Their vision for full and free lives can be achieved with the social and economic transformation that abolition demands.

Social Opportunity

Autonomy

For several participants, a full and free life after incarceration was a life of autonomy. Tiffany explained, "Freedom is the fact that I can pretty much make my own decisions, whether that's from financial to personal, all the way for decisions for my child. That's what freedom and full is like for me right now." Malcolm also desired a life "where I am able to make my own choices, basic simple choices of getting up, eating what I'm going to eat, who I'm going to interact with, the ability to go out and seek employment and seek those who I have things or

something in common with." Many participants discussed the importance of having control over their lives. Marie shared,

> I talk often about the hardest thing for me with incarceration was that I didn't have a voice. And so I would put voice at the top of that, the ability to be able to say no, or the ability to be able to say yes, to have some control over things that are happening in your life and make choices. I think those are huge.

The power to say yes and the power to say no is a freeing experience for these individuals. Jay felt that "freedom is enjoyment" when you are "free to do whatever, right or wrong, and hopefully right." Participants value this freedom because prison was a place where they had no power or control. Chloe explained,

> The full part is just the family, the career, the normal routine, just having the normal day of not having the people yell at you to get up in the morning or tell you have to go to bed at a certain time, or you can't walk outside or you have to be at this place at a certain time. And I know you have with normal life. You have to do that too, but it's the freeing part, it's that the decision you can make on your own. You don't have that freewill on the inside. And outside, you can make decisions for yourself. Even on the inside if you're right, you're not right. You can't tell anybody you're right or you get trouble. You're wrong, period, and you do what you're told. And so that's the freeing part is having the free will. But the fulfilling part and a full life is just the normality of school and the day-by-day routine and the kid and the actually being able to just get in your car and go to the grocery store. That's the most normal fulfilling. That's what I see when I say free and full life.

Taz was glad to be free from prison officials "bossing you around." He no longer had to endure commands such as, "'You have to do this right now.' 'Hey, get over here.' 'Hey, it's time for the strip search.'" Taz no longer had to "worry about somebody coming up behind you and pushing you up against the wall because they feel like that you have something on you and they want to search you." Participants cherished autonomy of the mind and of the body.

Pursuing Peace

Several participants were in pursuit of a calm, peaceful life. For some, this was an internal process. Marie was in pursuit of mental wellbeing. Her dream was to have "some of those anxieties removed and being able to be relaxed." In this pursuit, it was important to honor her past experiences. She elaborated,

> I never want to forget the places that I've been in, but I do want to be able to look through those experiences, through a safe lens of understanding that is not current situation for me, but remembering that it is the current situation for other people. And allowing that to motivate me into good emotional space, but also continuing to push me in that good fighting space to help change that for other people.

As she heals, she will be better equipped to support others on their healing journey. Amber also connected her past to her present. She shared, "I've been through a really bad struggle and I'm ready to just be comfortable. So that all this hard work is for a reason, you know?" She hoped that her struggles were not in vain. Others were pursuing peace in their external environment. In her best possible life 10 years into the future, Tiffany was on "somebody's beach." Similarly, Jay was living "somewhere out of town" with "no worries, on the beach." Sam also wanted to experience a peaceful, tranquil environment. He stated,

I'm a nature guy, so I like the mountains. So I'll be somewhere off in the mountains. Just kind of living life. I'm a home body. I wouldn't say like a home body, but like I love just being ... Let me explain this. Let me see if I can explain this. When I say a house in the mountains or out in the country somewhere. I think of like the old farmers that have like the front porches, and you just kind of sit and just enjoy the fresh air and everything. That's my kind of living. I like that. Nice and quiet. Peaceful."

Participants desired peace both internally and externally.

Family

Many participants wished for their families to thrive. Marie shared, "I would love if we were able to adopt and have an adopted child in the house. I told you we're building a house right now. So, being settled in that space and just being happy and seeing my son happy and emotionally mature and socially mature." Martavius expressed similar sentiments. He explained, "Well, ten-year goal. Well, first of all, for my kids, happy and healthy, my family just continue to do what I'm doing. Being there, providing, supporting them, encouraging them to do good in school and make good grades and to be a good person." Like Martavius, Malcolm desired "strong family relationships" that were "truly joyful." Em believed that a healthy family was "vital to a full and happy life."

For some participants, their incarceration strained their relationship with their children and they desired to mend these wounds. Remington described this healing process as her most difficult endeavor. She elaborated,

10 years from now? Well, my goals are to get my daughter back, have custody of my daughter, my 16-year-old, get my mother out of the nursing home and care for her at home, and to have my girls, my granddaughters and my other oldest daughter reunited

with me. 10 years, my best life would be to have all of that because it seems like that's what's difficult. Everything else is easy. Working is easy, getting the purses and getting them in that one store I'm working with, that's easy. That's all stuff I can plan for every day. Okay. Every day I know I'm going to work at this time, this time, and I know I'm going to set this time aside to work on a purse, but it's those variables that I dream about, dreaming about getting my mom out of the nursing home and having my daughters and having my granddaughters and having my family united. If that is the picture I have in 10 years, then I know I have lived my best life because those good things will come from that.

Remington felt that restoring these relationships was more difficult than the demands of work and her entrepreneurial pursuits of designing custom purses. Other participants never had the opportunity to experience a healthy family dynamic because of their incarceration. Ally desired a "quiet, normal family-oriented life" which is something she "never had." She continued, "I'm 42, but I still want to, I want another baby. People think I'm crazy, but I messed up my chance to have a family earlier in my life because I chose to sell drugs. But I mean, it's not uncommon to hear ladies my age having a child and starting over. And that's, that's what I want to do." For Ally, starting a family would provide a new beginning. While younger participants like Ally were eager to start a family, older participants were focused on deepening intergenerational bonds. Kimberly commented frequently on his relationship with his granddaughter and was eager to grow closer to her. He missed decades of his son's life while incarcerated and now cherishes the quality time he spends with his son and his granddaughter.

Hulk felt that supporting his family was his life's purpose. He shared,

> My mom, I want to get, make sure she has a house. She don't have a house. She's got an apartment. I want to make sure she has that. I want to make sure that all my family is straight. To me, that's, I could die after that. I could die after that. That's all I want to do. That's my whole purpose, I feel like, of being here is to do something with myself that's going to make the future generations of my family line, of my blood line, of my people, make them straight. Make them straight. And what they do with it is what they do with it. But shit, they're going to know that somebody in their blood line did good, did the right thing.

For several participants, seeing their families thrive would give their life meaning and purpose.

Community Engagement

Several participants described a full and free life as the opportunity to contribute to their communities. Tiffany longed to be an "active member within my community, within my society." Danielle wanted her "life experiences to help others." For her, that meant "being active, giving back, volunteering, helping out in any situation, as being part of community." Remington shared, "A full life, I guess to me, would be just a life that is engaged, intentional as far as getting back into community." Martavius described community engagement as his ministry. He explained,

> Then too, as far as with the ministry, to continue to reach out, continue to hit communities. You feel what I'm saying? To go into the neighborhood, you know what I mean? And actually interact with people, be there for the people, you know what I'm saying? Feed the people, love on the people. You know what I mean? Stand witness to the people, make sure you're there. You know what I'm saying? In the people's lives,

> you know what I'm saying? Showing them that you care being a constant presence, I think that's how you build, you know what I mean? That's how you build.

Participants were excited to contribute to important causes.

Economic Opportunity

Financial Freedom

Many participants were eager to experience financial freedom. Reflecting on his best possible future, Phil shared, "I'm financially stable, owning a house, my own home, and established in just like... Let me see. It'll be financially stable, you know what I'm saying, money wouldn't be tight or whatnot, and to own my own home, and just dedicated to my work." Hulk expressed similar desires. His best possible future would "have to involve myself and my family with no financial worries at all. We could take off, a year off of whatever we're doing and still be straight because we've got, there's money coming in. We don't even really have to work for it." Hulk continued, "You can want to do a lot of stuff with your life, but if you ain't have the finances to do it, you can't do it." For some, financial freedom could be achieved through dignified work. Low-paying, grueling work was undesirable for John. He expressed his desire for,

> A comfortable job where you can have enough freedom and live comfortably with the pay. Somewhere reasonable, because it's hard to find a good job whenever you have felonies on your record. It disqualifies you for most places, and the places that are usually willing to hire you are not very good jobs. Like the people there are sometimes not paid very well or they don't like to be there. So the it's just not a very pleasant place to work. So just a place where you can be able to pay your bills and enjoy your day.

Entrepreneurship

Other participants had entrepreneurial pursuits. Danielle believed entrepreneurship would be less physically demanding than her current position. She explained, “I do know that I want to gear out of such physically demanding job. I’ve got to get out of cleaning full-time with my sinuses, everything like that. I’m getting older. I still want to be my own boss for sure.” Demetrius was also eager to be “my own boss of my company.” Across the three programs, participants from the prison entrepreneurship program were more likely to mention entrepreneurship in their description of their best possible future. Some of this can be attributed to their exposure to entrepreneurship while in the program. There were prison entrepreneurship program participants like Taz who had launched their businesses and were eager for them to grow. Taz, who currently operates a cleaning company and a catering business, longed for his businesses to be “well-known” and for his businesses to be advertised “across the TV screen, the radio, and the newspapers.” His goal was to have his brothers, nephews, and other family members running the businesses. He shared, “We all will be better off with the family helping family. The bigger we grow, we all grow.” Taz believed that his success is his family’s success. Martavius dreamed of opening several radio stations focused on urban ministry. He stated,

> Ten years from now. Okay. Well for me, my family healthy, the radio station, it’s been built in this successfully running, and then 10 years from now having a station, that’s a big goal of mine, you know what I mean? Because the whole radio thing was to reach out to people incarcerated. So having my family healthy, marriage together, kids, you know what I’m saying? Doing well ministry, doing well, radio station up and going and people being saved, people lives being changed. Ten years from now, to see people and hear

people say how infectious they were from the ministry in radio, ten years from now, that will be, that would be awesome.

Several participants associated economic opportunity with entrepreneurial pursuits.

Discussion

When imagining the boundless possibilities for their future, participants named desires that spanned both social and economic opportunity. After years of physical and emotional bondage while incarcerated, they were eager to experience autonomy. For years, they were denied the power to say yes and to say no. Having the ability to decide when to wake, sleep, and eat is a new experience for participants who experienced decades of incarceration. These seemingly insignificant choices make all the difference for participants who felt powerless while incarcerated. The opportunity to live a normal, mundane life is a gift for these individuals. For several participants, a normal, mundane life provided much-needed peace. Peace could be found both internally and externally. Some participants associated peace with mental wellbeing. They had lived difficult lives and were eager to experience less stress. Others wanted to be in peaceful environments, such as beaches, mountains, and the countryside. They believed they would experience serenity and tranquility in these settings.

Many participants felt that once their families were thriving, they would also thrive. They associated success with healthy, happy, and whole families. For those whose relationships were strained because of their incarceration, mending these wounds was a top priority. Some hoped to regain custody of their children. Others longed to start their own families and experience a healthy family dynamic for the first time. There were also individuals who were thinking about their family legacy. They were committed to ensuring that future generations would thrive. Family gave their life meaning and purpose. Participants also found meaning and purpose in

service. They wanted to be engaged in the community and use their lived experience to help others. For some, this engagement could be best described as ministry. They longed for the opportunity to share their faith with those in need.

Participants also believed that financial freedom was necessary to live a full and free life after incarceration. They longed to be free from financial stresses and envisioned a life where work would not be necessary. Some recognized that most jobs available to formerly incarcerated individuals cannot provide this financial freedom. They are low-paying, physically demanding jobs that offer little opportunity for upward mobility. For these reasons, entrepreneurship appealed to many participants. They hoped to one day be their own bosses. For some, entrepreneurship was a family endeavor. This pursuit could provide financial freedom to several different generations. Others hoped to launch social impact businesses and believed their entrepreneurial pursuits had the power to change lives.

Reflecting on these desires, it is clear that existing reentry programming is inadequate and incomplete. Their ambitions far exceed the scope of existing reentry programming. These programs lack the organizational capacity to promote social and economic opportunity in the manner these participants have described. It is important to note that several participants described dreams and desires that do align with the mission of many reentry programs. These programs can be effective at nurturing the personal and professional development of formerly incarcerated individuals. However, there are organizational constraints on how much support these programs can provide. For example, a program may inquire about a participant's relationship with their family, but it is unlikely that the program can provide therapeutic support as the participant seeks to restore these relationships. Similarly, a program focused on job placement may not have the capacity to support career development. The demand for reentry

programs far exceeds the supply, which means there are time limits on how long individuals can receive services. These programs are not designed to provide the long-term, holistic support that these individuals need to realize their visions for full and free lives.

Recognizing these inadequacies, we can begin to craft an abolitionist vision for reentry. While negative abolition focuses on dismantling the prison industrial complex and can be conceptualized as a gradual project, our abolitionist vision for reentry can be situated within positive abolition as we seek to build a better world for formerly incarcerated individuals. This is a world we can begin building now. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore states, "Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions." These life affirming institutions would offer dignified work, quality education, affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and so much more. These life-affirming institutions would transform our social and economic realities.

Returning to the interviews, Tiffany, Malcolm, Marie, Chloe, and Taz could experience the autonomy they desire. This autonomy would not be constrained by the discrimination that formerly incarcerated individuals encounter in housing, employment, education, or any other systems. They could choose where to work, where to live, what to study, and so much more. Marie and Amber could access mental health services to support their healing journey. They could also cultivate a social environment (e.g., dignified work, affordable housing, healthy relationships) that would promote mental wellbeing. Tiffany, Jay, and Sam would have the financial resources to enjoy the outdoors. Tiffany and Jay could relax at the beach as often as they wish and Sam could purchase his home in the countryside. Remington would have the resources to support her mother, daughters, and granddaughters. She could experience the unity

she has always desired. Hulk could begin to build his legacy. He could purchase a home for his mother and build a foundation for his family to thrive for generations to come.

In this abolitionist vision, economic opportunity would not be constrained by low-paying, grueling work. Phil would earn a living wage and would no longer stress over his finances. Hulk would have more time to enjoy his family. John would not be limited to job opportunities designated for formerly incarcerated individuals. He would be free to explore his career interests. Danielle, Demetrius, Taz, and Martavius would run successful businesses. Their conviction would not bar them from accessing business loans.

While an abolitionist vision for reentry requires structural and systemic interventions, it is important to note that participants did not articulate the structural or systemic changes necessary to experience full and free lives. They provided vivid depictions of their best possible futures, but focused less on what needed to change to make these dreams their reality. Universal basic income, community land trusts, and worker cooperatives are three interventions that can advance the aims of abolition. Universal basic income (UBI) is a program of consistent, unconditional payments distributed by the government. UBI creates a basic income floor for all regardless of income and allows recipients to spend funds however they choose (Drexel University Center for Hunger-Free Communities, 2021). In UBI pilots across North America, Africa, and Asia, participants have experienced better educational outcomes, lower rates of psychological distress, improved child health outcomes, enhanced social relationships, increased housing stability, and an increase in entrepreneurial pursuits (Baird et al., 2013; Feinberg & Kuehn, 2019; Haridy, 2020; Maynard & Murnane, 1979).

Community land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure long-term housing affordability. The trust acquires land and maintains ownership of the land

indefinitely. By separating the ownership of the land from housing built on the land, market factors are less likely to cause prices to rise significantly. Community land trusts provide low- and moderate-income people an opportunity to build equity through homeownership while ensuring that residents are not displaced by gentrification. Foreclosure rates with community land trusts are notably lower than conventional home mortgages. Many community land trusts are also involved in homeownership education classes, community greening projects, and other community development efforts (Democracy Collaborative, 2021a).

Worker cooperatives are businesses that are owned and operated by their employees. In worker cooperatives, member-owners invest in and own the business together, sharing any profits. Decision-making is a democratic process and each member-owner has one vote. Worker cooperatives create quality jobs for the community, generate profits that remain within the community, and allow employees to accumulate wealth through ownership of the business (Democracy Collaborative, 2021b). Each of these interventions could be described as positive abolition. Abolition creates the social and economic conditions for individuals, families, and communities to thrive. It is a structural and systemic intervention intended to create boundless possibilities for all.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider with this study. While I used data from two different waves of data collection, the analysis did not account for the longitudinal design. There was an opportunity to examine changes over time in how participants described a full and free life after incarceration. This analysis could have provided insight into how participants evolve as time passes.

Different interviewing tactics could have generated more conversation on abolition. I attempted to avoid leading questions, but probing questions could have generated more commentary on the structural and systemic changes needed to experience a full and free life after incarceration. While participants may not have articulated a need for abolition, probing questions may have resulted in reflections on how dignified work, quality education, affordable housing, and other life affirming institutions would shape their lived experiences.

Conclusion

Ineffectual and inefficient reentry efforts abound in this country (Durose et al., 2014). While these reentry efforts divorce problems from their structural causes, abolition illuminates different solutions (Bell, 2021). Instead of engaging in responsibilization, abolitionists demand a transformation of our social and economic realities. As they attend to people's immediate material needs, abolitionists are crafting a vision for a radical transformation of society. An abolitionist vision for reentry can incorporate elements of existing reentry programs, such as job placement, housing assistance, and mental health support. However, the vision must be far more vast. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore states, "Abolition requires that we change one thing: everything." Abolition requires the dismantling of capitalism, racism, and all forms of oppression.

An abolitionist vision for reentry must be designed by those who have experienced incarceration. Far too often, formerly incarcerated individuals are not treated as experts. Their lived experience is not valued in spite of their familiarity with the carceral system. They should have the power to define the problems and design the solutions. This creates an opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals to engage in prefigurative politics. Prefigurative politics refers to the construction of alternative social relations (Yates, 2015). Jeffrey and Dyson (2021) explain that prefigurative politics is "popularly imagined as 'being the change you wish to see'" (p. 641).

Prefiguration is based on five processes: “1) Experimentation as a community; 2) continual and collective reproduction of the group’s political framework; 3) the creation of group norms and values that draw on the desired future; 4) consolidation of the results of these processes into a cohesive vision; and 5) the dissemination and diffusion of this vision within the wider community” (Beckwith et al., 2016, p. 239).

While individuals who have not experienced incarceration should also engage in these processes, these efforts must be led by those most impacted. In this study, participants described a full and free life after incarceration and envisioned their best possible futures. By engaging in the processes described above, they can build a world where these dreams and desires can be achieved. The vision they disseminate to the wider community might encompass housing, employment, healthcare, education, and any other system that impacts formerly incarcerated individuals. Incorporating both negative and positive abolition, we can imagine this vision requires the destruction of these systems as we know them and the creation of life-affirming institutions. With abolition, we can chart a path to full and free lives for formerly incarcerated individuals.

References

Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New Press.

Baird, S., de Hoop, J., & Özler, B. (2013). Income shocks and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Human Resources*, *48*(2), 370–403. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.48.2.370

Beckwith, M., Bliuc, A.-M., & Best, D. (2016). What the recovery movement tells us about prefigurative politics. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *4*(1), 238–251. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v4i1.548

Bell, M. (2021). Abolition: A new paradigm for reform. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *46*(1), 32–68. https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2020.21

Ben-Moshe, L. (2013). The tension between abolition and reform. In M. E. Nagel & A. J. Nocella II (Eds.), *The End of prisons: Reflections from the decarceration movement*. BRILL. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401209236

Berger, D. (2014). *Captive nation: Black prison organizing in the civil rights era*. University of North Carolina Press. http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781469618258

Burch, M. (2017). (Re)entry from the bottom up: Case study of a critical approach to assisting women coming home from prison. *Critical Criminology*, *25*(3), 357–374. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-016-9346-3

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2019). *Corrections*. https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=1

Butler, P. (2015). The system Is working the way it is supposed to: The limits of criminal justice reform. *Georgetown Law Journal*, *104*, 1419–1478.

Butler, P. (2018). *Chokehold: Policing Black men*. The New Press.

Byrd, R. M. (2016). “Punishment’s Twin”: Theorizing Prisoner Reentry for a Politics of Abolition. *Social Justice; San Francisco*, *43*(1), 1-22,119.

Carson, E. A. (2021). *Prisoners in 2020* (pp. 1–38). Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf

Clear, T. R. (2008). The effects of high imprisonment rates on communities. *Crime and Justice*, *37*(1), 97–132. https://doi.org/10.1086/522360

Critical Resistance. (2019). *The Abolitionist Toolkit*. http://criticalresistance.org/resources/the-abolitionist-toolkit/

Cullen, F. T. (2012). Taking rehabilitation seriously: Creativity, science, and the challenge of offender change. *Punishment & Society*, *14*(1), 94–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474510385973

Cullen, F. T., & Gendreau, P. (2000). Assessing correctional rehabilitation: Policy, practice, and prospects. *Criminal Justice*, *3*, 109–175.

Currie, E. (2013). Consciousness, solidarity and hope as prevention and rehabilitation. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *2*(2), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v2i2.114

Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

Davis, A. Y., & Rodriguez, D. (2000). The challenge of prison abolition: A conversation. *Social Justice*, *27*(3), 212–218.

Democracy Collaborative. (2021a). *Community land trusts (CLTs)*. https://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/clts/index.html

Democracy Collaborative. (2021b). *Worker cooperatives*. https://community-wealth.org/content/worker-cooperatives

Department of Justice. (2015, October 1). *Justice Department announces $53 million in grant awards to reduce recidivism among adults and youth*. https://www. justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-53-million-grant-awards-reduce-recidivismamong- adults-and-youth.

Drexel University Center for Hunger-Free Communities. (2021). *Universal basic income: Key to reducing food insecurity and improving health*. Drexel University Center for Hunger-Free Communities. https://drexel.edu/~/media/Files/hunger-free-center/research-briefs/universalbasicincome.ashx

Durose, M. R., Cooper, A. D., & Snyder, H. N. (2014). *Recidivism of prisoners released in 30 states in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010*. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Feinberg, R. M., & Kuehn, D. (2019). *Does a guaranteed basic income encourage entrepreneurship? Evidence from Alaska (No. 2019–02; Working Papers).* American University. https://ideas.repec.org/p/amu/ wpaper/2019-02.html

Fenster, A. (2020). *Technical difficulties: D.C. data shows how minor supervision violations contribute to excessive jailing*. Prison Policy Initiative.

Geller, A., & Curtis, M. A. (2011). A sort of homecoming: Incarceration and the housing security of urban men. *Social Science Research*, *40*(4), 1196–1213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.03.008

Gilmore, R. W., & Kilgore, J. (2019, June 19). The case for abolition. *The Marshall Project*. https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/06/19/the-case-for-abolition

Gilmore, R. W., Kilgore, J., & Kaba, M. (2019, December 4). *Keynote conversation*. Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration, Oxford, MS.

Goddard, T., & Myers, R. R. (2017). Against evidence-based oppression: Marginalized youth and the politics of risk-based assessment and intervention. *Theoretical Criminology*, *21*(2), 151–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480616645172

Gray, P. (2009). The political economy of risk and the new governance of youth crime. *Punishment & Society*, *11*(4), 443–458. https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474509341141

Hannah-Moffat, K. (2015). Needle in a haystack: Logical parameters of treatment based on actuarial risk-needs assessments. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *14*(1), 113–120. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12121

Hannah-Moffat, K. (2016). A conceptual kaleidoscope: Contemplating 'dynamic structural risk' and an uncoupling of risk from need. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *22*(1–2), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2015.1114115

Haridy, R. (2020, March 12). Canada's cancelled basic income trial produces positive results. *New Atlas*. https://newatlas.com/good-thinking/canada-basicincome-experiment-ontario-report-results/

James, N. (2014). *Offender reentry: Correctional statistics, reintegration into the community, and recidivism*. Congressional Research Service.

Jeffrey, C., & Dyson, J. (2021). Geographies of the future: Prefigurative politics. *Progress in Human Geography*, *45*(4), 641–658. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520926569

Johnson, G. T., & Lubin, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Futures of Black radicalism*. Verso.

Jonson, C. L., & Cullen, F. T. (2015). Prisoner reentry programs. *Crime and Justice*, *44*(1), 517–575. https://doi.org/10.1086/681554

Kaba, M., & Hayes, K. (2021). A jailbreak of the imagination: Seeing prisons for what they are and demanding transformation. In *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

Karakatsanis, A. (2019). The punishment bureaucracy: How to think about criminal justice reform. *Yale Law Journal Forum*, *128*, 848–935.

Kushner, R. (2019, April 17). Is prison necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore might change your mind. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html

Liedka, R. V., Piehl, A. M., & Useem, B. (2006). The crime-control effect of incarceration: Does scale matter? *Criminology <html_ent Glyph="@amp;" Ascii="&"/> Public Policy*, *5*(2), 245–276. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2006.00376.x

Maynard, R. A., & Murnane, R. J. (1979). The effects of a negative income tax on school performance: Results of an experiment. *The Journal of Human Resources*, *14*(4), 463. https://doi.org/10.2307/145317

McLeod, A. M. (2015). Prison abolition and grounded justice. *UCLA Law Review*, *5*, 1156–1239.

McLeod, A. M. (2018). Envisioning abolition democracy. *Harvard Law Review*, *132*, 37.

Pager, D. (2007). *Marked: Race, crime, and finding work in an era of mass incarceration*. University of Chicago Press.

Rodriguez, D. (2018). Abolition as praxis of human being: A foreword. *Harvard Law Review*, *132*, 1568–1574.

Sered, D. (2019). *Until we reckon: Violence, mass incarceration, and a road to repair*. The New Press.

Spade, D. (2012). The only way to end racialized gender violence in prisons is to end prisons: A response to Russell Robinson's "Masculinity as Prison." *California Law Review*, *3*, 184–196. https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38228S

Stemen, D. (2017). *The prison paradox: More incarceration will not make us safer*. Vera Institute of Justice.

Travis, J. (2005). *But they all come back: Facing the challenges of prisoner reentry* (1st ed). Urban Institute Press.

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2011). Life on the outside: Returning Home after Incarceration Criminal Justice Reform: Issues and Recommendations for Corrections. *Prison Journal*, *3 Supplement*, 102S-119S.

Yates, L. (2015). Rethinking prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and goals in social movements. *Social Movement Studies*, *14*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.870883

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has illuminated barriers and facilitators to social and economic opportunity among formerly incarcerated individuals. The first paper described the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals navigating carceral citizenship. These findings demonstrated that carceral citizens are navigating a system that reproduces itself. Laws and policies in the housing and labor market and the supervision, correction, and care provided by prisons, parole, and halfway houses are designed to ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals occupy this alternate reality indefinitely. The second paper examined asset-based approaches in reentry programming. In each of the three programs, participants had an opportunity to recognize, value, and build skills, knowledge, and connections. While the skills they developed and the knowledge they gained continue to be useful, it is abundantly clear that the connections they cultivated are their most valuable asset. The third paper described an abolitionist vision for reentry. This vision consists of life affirming institutions that would offer dignified work, quality education, affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and so much more. Abolition creates the social and economic conditions for individuals, families, and communities to thrive. It is a structural and systemic intervention intended to create boundless possibilities for all.

In each of the three papers, we see how relationships shape the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated. As carceral citizens, their relationship with the housing market, labor market, and other institutions is strained. They are navigating a social landscape of constrained, limited possibilities. Because of these limited possibilities, building and maintaining relationships with family, friends, and community members is essential. Countless institutions are failing to meet their needs and family, friends, and community members are now responsible for filling in the gaps. In the social enterprise, prison entrepreneurship program, and reentry

court, relationships provided support, affirmed dignity, and facilitated growth. These connections have a lasting impact because the relationships remain long after their participation in the program concludes. The end of the program does not signal the end of their relationships with peers, staff, and volunteers. In the abolitionist vision for reentry, we see that abolition would create the social and economic conditions for relationships to thrive. The formerly incarcerated would have the resources they need to support the flourishing of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships.

The first paper describes the world as it is for the formerly incarcerated navigating carceral citizenship and the second paper examines organizations committed to building a better world for this population by employing asset-based approaches. The third paper adds nuance and depth to the findings from the first and second paper. Abolitionists believe that our current systems are inherently and intentionally harmful, which helps to explain why carceral citizenship persists. Carceral citizenship has produced an alternate reality for the formerly incarcerated that they are intended to occupy indefinitely. Abolitionists are critical of reentry programming that engages in responsibilization while ignoring structural barriers in housing, employment, and other institutions. Asset-based approaches can be impactful, but these efforts have to be coupled with advocacy and organizing to dismantle these barriers. If not, these inherently and intentionally harmful structures and systems will continue to create constrained, limited possibilities for the formerly incarcerated. Abolition is our path to a world with boundless possibilities for all.

In describing the world as it is, exploring the world we are building, and imagining the world as it could be for formerly incarcerated individuals, this dissertation has demonstrated the importance of centering the experiences of this population. By employing asset-based

approaches, we can focus on what matters most to formerly incarcerated individuals and determine the outcomes we collectively wish to achieve. While formerly incarcerated individuals must be the center of our abolitionist vision for reentry, this vision can only be achieved with commitment from policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. We must explore universal basic income, community land trusts, worker cooperatives, and other interventions that advance the aims of abolition. Policymakers must commit to implementing each of these interventions into local, state, and federal policy. Practitioners supporting the implementation of universal basic income, community land trusts, worker cooperatives, and other interventions must commit to cultivating life-affirming institutions. Those in the general public can support these efforts by contributing resources to ensure their success. With this vision as our guide, we can chart a path to full and free lives for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Appendix A: Pseudonym, Organization, and Number of Interviews

Pseudonym	Organization	Interview One	Interview Two	Interview Three
Phil	Social enterprise	✓	✓	✓
Kimberly		✓	✓	✓
Ally		✓	✓	✓
Amber		✓	✓	✓
John		✓	✓	✓
Sam		✓	✓	✓
Eugene		✓	✓	✓
Jin		✓	✓	✓
Maurice		✓	✓	✓
Mike		✓	✓	✓
Jay		✓	✓	✓
Malcolm		✓	✓	✓
Em		✓	✓	
OG		✓		
Anthony		✓		
King		✓		
Tiffany	Prison entrepreneurship program	✓	✓	✓
Martavius		✓	✓	✓
Taz		✓	✓	✓
Marie		✓	✓	✓
Remington		✓	✓	✓
Danielle		✓	✓	✓
Mac		✓	✓	✓
Nicole		✓	✓	
Jasmine		✓	✓	
Chloe		✓		
Cynthia		✓		
Katrina		✓		
Demetrius	Reentry court	✓	✓	✓
Hulk		✓	✓	✓
Kadasi		✓		