THE WEIGHT OF THE GAVEL: PRISON AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

by

EDWARD L. W. GREEN

B.A., Eastern Kentucky University, 2005
M.S., Eastern Kentucky University, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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# Abstract

This qualitative study draws from 54 interviews with "lifers"—those serving 20 years or more—from three correctional facilities across Kansas; it addresses the stark void in criminological literature about prison culture in the context of late-modern penality. This dissertation explores identity transformation of inmates serving a life sentence, proposing that incarceration represents a new rite of passage for 2.22 million citizens in the US. This inquiry utilizes the concept of *liminality* to capture the "betwixt and between" component of significant life transitions such as being handed a life sentence. Extending Jewkes' (2002) work on liminality, the study advances and supports the notion of a *suspended liminality,* an elongated vulnerability to one's sense of self, which, for those serving a long prison sentence, generally occurs during the first five years. Eventually, some lifers are able to rebuild social networks. The process of identity transition reflects an interstitial drift between suspended liminality and prisonization, contingent upon social support, sense of belonging, and forms of hope. Reconsidering the notion of a permanent "social death," this study provides evidence of a *social purgatory*, yielding a period of chaos and confusion in which the self is in turmoil, engaged in a battle to find meaning and purpose. The analysis employs group interviews, multiple on-site observations, field notes, and a night in solitary confinement; three inmates assisted in the interview design. This dissertation contributes a "thick description" of contemporary life in US prisons and transitions through long sentences that may present barriers to successful reentry.

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This qualitative study draws from 54 interviews with "lifers"—those serving 20 years or more—from three correctional facilities across Kansas; it addresses the stark void in criminological literature about prison culture in the context of late-modern penality. This dissertation explores identity transformation of inmates serving a life sentence, proposing that incarceration represents a new rite of passage for 2.22 million citizens in the US. This inquiry utilizes the concept of *liminality* to capture the "betwixt and between" component of significant life transitions such as being handed a life sentence. Extending Jewkes' (2002) work on liminality, the study advances and supports the notion of a *suspended liminality,* an elongated vulnerability to one's sense of self, which, for those serving a long prison sentence, generally occurs during the first five years. Eventually, some lifers are able to rebuild social networks. The process of identity transition reflects an interstitial drift between suspended liminality and prisonization, contingent upon social support, sense of belonging, and forms of hope. Reconsidering the notion of a permanent "social death," this study provides evidence of a *social purgatory*, yielding a period of chaos and confusion in which the self is in turmoil, engaged in a battle to find meaning and purpose. The analysis employs group interviews, multiple on-site observations, field notes, and a night in solitary confinement; three inmates assisted in the interview design. This dissertation contributes a "thick description" of contemporary life in US prisons and transitions through long sentences that may present barriers to successful reentry.

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# Acknowledgements

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No acknowledgement would be complete without the unwavering patience and support of my wife and partner Heather Nicole Branham-Green, not to mention her introduction of Victor Turner's work on rites of passage to me. Special acknowledgment also belongs to my sister Sabrina Harris-Norris for rarely doubting my potential and refraining from ending it often.

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# Dedication

To my mother Linda Reep-Hicks and the memory of Bill, Edna Mae, and Nonnie.

Martha McWhorter-George insisted that, "we shall overcome." This simple mantra reinforced a

disposition that rings through Southern Appalachians to plow through and pay forward.

# Preface

Each chapter begins with a selection of song lyrics. Some of these songs are well known, some are more obscure, but all of them have accompanied me as a scholar and artist throughout this transition of my own. Music is universal to being human. A great song forces the listener into an arrested state of reflection—much like my own experience with art and knowledge. Songs are often playing in my mind while I ruminate on puzzles that seem inherent in the social sciences. Each chapter is introduced by a lyric that continually rang in my mind's eye upon construction. I remember at every facility where we interviewed lifers, an MP3 player was considered gold. Not only were the digital gadgets coveted, but also I often heard that a player full of songs was worth more than a used car. Money is held at a premium in prison and music even more important. Each song could be downloaded for about two dollars each. Music was also a common thread between both my journey as well as many of the participants in this study of lifers.

# Chapter 1 - Introduction: Prison as a Rite of Passage

*Wide awake and feeling mortal*
*At this moment in the dream*
*That old man there in the mirror*
*And my shaky self-esteem.*

—Kris Kristofferson, "Feeling Mortal"

When I asked a self-described "old con" what he dreaded most, he replied, "I dread dying in here." The six-foot plus inmate, tattooed and aging, began to cry. He seemed utterly alone in his reflections as he lamented being incarcerated when his mother passed away, unable to attend the funeral or grieve properly. This moment of recollection sat uncomfortably between perceptions of unfairness for a life stolen away and the horror-stricken regret of his own decisions, enacted decades before. Time—notably significant time alone with one's thoughts— seems to carry a higher level of burden for these prisoners, one which, as Kristofferson writes, leaves them feeing mortal and often helpless.

This ethnography explores the impact of lengthy prison sentences on identity, or one's sense of self, an area of research almost totally absent from contemporary prison scholarship. Identity is explored from the inmate's perspective—reflections on who they were, are, and will be—all within the confines of a long prison sentence. Studying identity from within a prison becomes especially important because, as Cooley (1998) at the turn of the 20th century teaches, the self emerges, not in isolation, but rather in the company of others, though a cycle of interactions and interpretations. In particular, this study addresses a stark void in the criminological literature about prison life, recognizing that the milieu in which one serves a long prison sentence may be particularly impactful. This study, positioned in the context of late-

modern penality and an explosion of mass incarceration, sheds light on the process of identity transformation, among those serving life in prison, all within, arguably, the most consummate of total institutions. As we enter an era of burgeoning public concern with the prison system, this study contributes to the debate about its effectiveness and possible reform.

Sociologist David Stark (2013) recently argued that sociology is not about studying humans, but the study of being human. This is an appropriate approach to interviewing people doing a life sentence in prison. Understanding complex notions of hope and identity demands a certain *verstehen,* defined as "a process of subjective interpretation on the part of the social researcher, a degree of sympathetic understanding between researcher and subjects of study, whereby the researcher comes in part to share in the situated meanings and experiences of those under scrutiny" (Ferrell 1997:10). Ferrell (1997) asserts that criminological *verstehen* is needed at the etiology of a criminal event to fully appreciate its unfolding. Extending that perspective, I argue that an understanding of constructed identities through long-term incarceration also demands a certain intimacy through which to feel and understand the situated logics and emotions of incarceration.

Similar to the tension between unfairness and self-blame, as described with the "old con" in the introduction, the project itself also shifts, at times, between stories of the inmates and the reflexivity of the observers[1]; between individual proclivities and group behavior; between trained observations and insider perspectives. Such is the nature of deep, ethnographic-like research. To unveil these dynamics, the current study is rooted in 97 interviews of 20-plus-year inmates and prison staff from five facilities across Kansas, a state with incarceration rates that sit at

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[1] Interviews and focus groups for this research were conducted by the author, colleague Will Chernoff, and major professor Dr. Sue Williams.

midpoint in national numbers while also showing promising declines in recidivism rates (Pew Center 2011). The study also employs 40-plus hours of group interviews, multiple on-site observations, volumes of field notes, and a night in solitary confinement as data. Further, three inmates assisted in the interview design as well as contributed toward "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of prison life through recalled transitional moments.

In examining the home of lifers from the outside, both as citizens and as scientists, we vaguely understand that the singular function of a modern prison is the secure control of movement. This spatial confinement subsequently affects interaction, identity, and the parameters of hope. From inside the prison, everything else becomes secondary, blurred, and subterranean—or so it seems. Yet, a certain look, a nod, a piece of fresh fruit may take on mammoth proportions of meaning. To the outsider, these intricate interactions are largely imperceptible.

The view from the inside is altogether different. It is at once intimately secretive and, once one sees, starkly naked. It can be loud or strangely silent, friendly or dark and guarded. All the while, many parts of being human are held in place—both in the physical and abstract sense—waiting for doors to be opened and closed.

The prison community, focused on the extreme control of movement, paradoxically is fluid and dynamic much like any other social collectivity. Yet the successions of experience that mark normative social transitions in life are on pause inside prison walls. Such stasis while incarcerated excludes significant life events such as graduations, marriages, births, and burials of loved ones. Spatial confines and the cultural geography of a prison limit these mile-markers of life. Yet, prison life is marked with rigorous routine; it can be described like driving around the same few roads, daily, like a '90s Bill Murray movie. The question becomes, if the cycle of life

inside prison walls is confined and dominated by a treadmill of largely reoccurring narratives, is one's sense of self also suspended, as if in limbo?  We will briefly return to this question in chapters four and five to further explicate the possibility of a suspended sense of self.  This suspension of self is a major point of exploration.

This observation leads to the question, how does one sustain identity as a long-term prisoner?  There was a self before prison; who/where is it now?  Surely, the person in front of us is not merely a number; yet is s/he distinctly different from the previous self?  Does s/he envision an anticipated, future self?  Would not those identities be important in understanding daily interactions and long-term goals? Here we are interested in sense of self, transformations, and the stages of identity change.

I argue that both individual-level agency and its structural constraints can be captured, at least in part, by examining the transition between citizen and convicted felon—a passage largely unexplored.  Theoretically, this dissertation builds an argument for situating the anthropological concept of *liminality*—described by Victor Turner (1969) as the "betwixt and between" space in rites of passage—into the social theory canon, specifically as applied to the interrupted space and time that becomes known as prison.

The concept of liminality is a three-stage transformation.  First, the person experiences separation or segregation.  Next, the person experiences the liminal moment of becoming someone else—in this case, a convicted felon.  The third phase, reaggregation, represents the most challenging task to explore:  How does the "new self" deal with reentry (either within a prison community or back into general society), especially with regard to very long sentences? Do inmates experience a sense of community within the prison environment, and does that constitute reaggregation?  Or can "true" reaggregation occur only when the sentence is

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completed and the subject reenters larger society?  If so, what is to be made of the time spent

incarcerated, and where (and what) is the interim self?

## Identity and Stigma

Identity development and maintenance seem to be universal traits of humankind.  Every

person has multiple identities depending on the context of the social relationship or position.

Identity has been defined as an "internalized positional designation" (Stryker 1980:60).  Beyond

general trends of basic human traits, prison offers a particularly challenging environment for

identity transitions and self-modification (Schmid and Jones 1991).  The prison environment

presents consistent parameters through which to ask questions about identity transformations.

Everyone is processed in a similar fashion, though this is not to suggest that everyone shares the

same personal experience.  Environmentally, being processed into prison tends to generate

similar strategies of identity protection and impression management (Goffman 1959; Schmid and

Jones 1991).  Impression management concerns being perceived by one's peers (or superiors for

that matter) as authentic or "real," as some inmates describe it (Goffman 1959).  Through the

anticipated projection of what prison is like, many new inmates create defensive identities based

on impression maintenance.  For example, one inmate described his defensive identity as "acting

like a badass."

Related to defensive identities, Goffman (1963) addressed "spoiled identities."  In *Stigma*

(1963), Goffman explained three types of stigma:  abomination of the body, blemishes of

individual character, and tribal stigma.  This work focuses on the second; Goffman (1963)

explains:

> Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will,
> domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and
> dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example,

mental disorder imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior. (P. 4)

While the concept of blemished, or spoiled identity, is approached from an objective, if not sympathetic, perspective, much like Garfinkel (1956), I contend that the transition to a convicted felon is a formal degradation of social standing among general society, one so extreme that it serves as a critical focal point of this study.

The idea of "spoiled identity" assigns a negative connotation to the stigmatized. This negative blemish may be assessed and managed through redemption narratives. That is, if one perceives the need to atone for who s/he is or was (not simply for the act itself), then stigma is implied, which, in turns reshapes the self. The ritual involved would consist of the criminal due process of court, conviction, and sentencing. Crawley and Sparks (2005) argue:

> In the prison setting, discrediting (and public) social attributes or stigmas—in this context stigmas of character—have significant implications, not only for how individuals and groups are treated by other prisoners and prison staff, but also for the maintenance (or destruction) of the "private" self. (P. 345)

Such references to self—past, present, and future—often give rise to perceptions of identity and transformation.

## Rituals, Rites of Passage, and Liminality

Throughout history, humans have elevated or exiled people from within their own societies. It is through a (social) ritual process and/or ceremony that society has endeavored to reshape identity of individuals (Garfinkel 1956). These ritual processes have been socially and structurally derived for a number of transitional phases in one's life. The presiding theoretical concept related to rites of passage, with a robust body of literature, is liminality. It is through the notion of liminality that we explore the socially stigmatized identity of a "lifer" in an advanced

industrial prison landscape.  Considering prison as a rite of passage reorients how we consider

the process of becoming a felon through a threshold moment or liminal transition.

Liminality as a concept came into existence in Van Gennep's 1908, *The Rites of Passage*.

The French scholar suggests that, "it is really a rite of either separation, transition, or

incorporation" (Van Gennep [1908] 1960:166).  Van Gennep used this series of acts to describe

the social passage from one phase of life into the next.  Van Gennep ([1908]1960) argues:

> Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically
> includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of
> transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific
> instances these three types are not always equally important or equally
> elaborated. (P. 11)

Originally, he applied the rite of passage to ceremony and celebrated moments of life course that

established a change for the individual or group, either for positive or negative transitions.

Importantly, the concept of liminality can advance the discipline's *criminological verstehen*, or

deep understanding of the moment when one becomes a felon.  The theoretical orientation that

Van Gennep proposes represents social identity structures that will, in turn, inform

criminological perspectives pertaining to long-term prisoners.

### *Liminality as a Theoretical Contribution to Criminology*

Arguably, between the 1940s through the 1960s, structural functionalism played the

default role in social theory.  As Appelrouth and Edles (2011) state, "Structural functionalists

envision society as a system of interrelated parts and emphasize how the different parts work

together for the good of the system" (p. 21).  Furthermore, as the authors suggest, "structural

functionalists emphasize 'systems within systems'" (Appelrouth and Edles 2011:21), within

which exist formal and informal control mechanisms. Turner certainly considered the macro-

structural in formulating his extension of Van Gennep's model of rites of passage. For Turner

(1997 [1969]) there is a dialectic relationship between the individual and structural levels:

> From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of
> dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low,
> communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and
> inequality. The passage from lower to higher is through a limbo of
> statelessness. (P. 97)

Turner (1997 [1969]) summarizes, "In other words, each individual's life experience contains

alternating exposure to structure and communitas, and to states and transitions" (p. 97). If a state

of limbo is experienced in upward mobility, it would only make sense that a degradation of

station would cause a period of identity limbo.

The word *limen* is a Latin term meaning threshold. Van Gennep ([1908]1960) describes

the concept further:

> In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always
> remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of
> these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of
> waiting, and of departure—that is, as rites of passage. (P. 25)

When applying the idea of liminality to this study, the question of how long term prison

sentences affect the sense of self and identity begins to emerge.

Victor Turner (1969) later extended liminality in *The Ritual Process* by adding the term

*communitas* to the process of transition. Communitas is another Latin term that means "an area

of common living." Turner prefers the use of communitas in lieu of the word community; the

distinction removes the environment of the common, suggests a more complex meaning of

collective, and differentiates the state or space between traditional social institutions and the

presence of cultural tendencies beyond the basic hierarchy within social arrangements. As

Turner (1969) asserts, "Communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into

the future through language, law, and custom" (p. 113). In other words communitas is the ghost

of what culture has been, yet presently affecting the socialization of those coming into a community or being initiated.

With regard to the present study, communitas encompasses a sense of community within the prison itself. For example, communitas would encompass the looking-glass-self sense of place, identity, and status within the prison community. In this case, the communitas within a prison would be notably nuanced by the spatial comings and goings of inmates, both physically (as being controlled) and through navigating identity and community within an extreme asymmetry of power. In other words, inmates are not free to move about the same way as those in the larger society. Inmates are, however, part of an institutional area of common living, sometimes finding or constructing commonalities. Much like David Stark considered sociology the study of being human, communitas is about a sense of community—being part of that internal community. Discovering indicators of communitas would suggest that the liminar has been reaggregated into the cultural fabric of the prison culture, with a deep sense of belonging— and or the community as a whole in a type of liminality state.

While this study examines the transition between citizen and inmate as a rite of passage, the environment of a correctional facility fits a particular type of organization known as a total institution. Goffman defines total institutions as "symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, bared wire, cliffs, water, forests, or moors" (1961:4). Clearly, prison embodies the very definition of a total institution physically, but have permeable barriers culturally.

The process of liminality becomes even more visible when marking the moment of transition into a total institution. This moment engenders new status, socially destroying who the

liminar once was and labeling who they are to be, yet before any experience is garnered as the

new status. Turner explains the intervening "liminal" phase as ambiguous and suggests a

common experience of the liminar, stating that "he [she] passes through a cultural realm that has

few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (1969:94). The convicted, before

learning the prison landscape, knows that s/he is not who they were, but hardly has been

graduated into an "old con" yet. Turner's famous description of this point, or moment of

liminality, states that "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between

the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (1969:95).

While the convicted is now deemed a felon, the newly sentenced are yet to have navigated the

prison (or prisonization) experience.

**Figure 1.1 Rite of Passage**
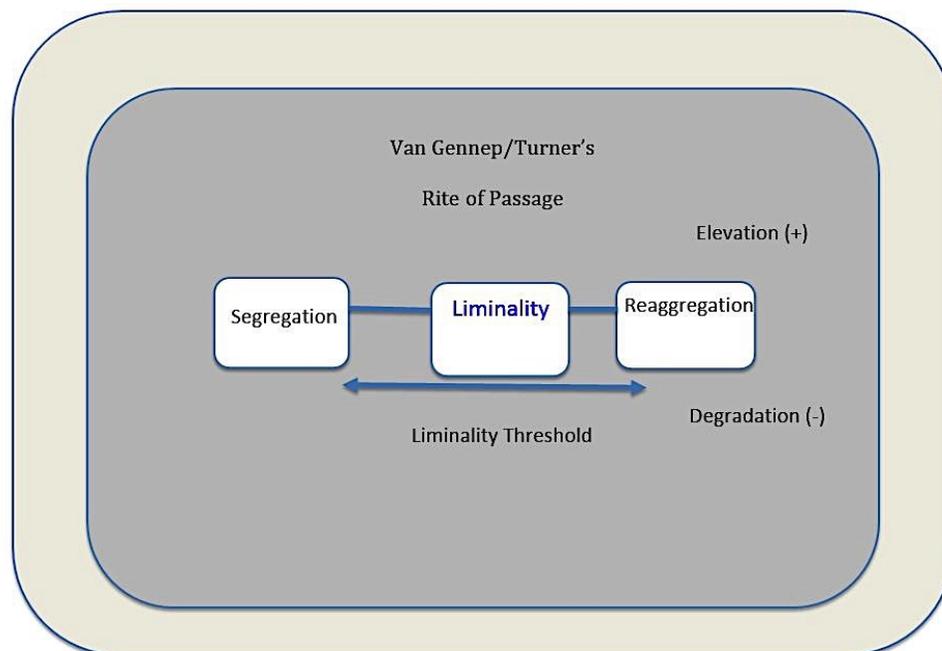


Figure 1 illustrates the three primary phases of liminality through the process of a rite of passage.

To reiterate, the stages of a rite of passage are 1) segregation, 2) liminality, and 3) reaggregation

through the facility of communitas.

When a person is sentenced for a crime, the gavel strikes and a new identity is labeled on the individual. That identity becomes a life moment in which a person is no longer just a citizen; now that person/citizen is a convict. "Branded" is how one interviewee in Lansing Correctional Facility defined being known as a convicted felon. Upon being separated from society, leading up to being sentenced for a crime, begins the preliminal rites—the rites of separation. If prison can be conceptualized as a rite of passage, then this narrative has become the story of 1,574,700 U.S. citizens at the end of 2013 (Carson 2014). More important than numbers and demographics, this research advances a primary question: How does the process of long-term incarceration affect individuals and their sense of self? Further, within social structures lie spaces, and social institutions define such space. How do we learn the meaning of such spaces? As Ferrell (1998) suggests, "experiential immersion on the part of field researchers can begin to unravel the lived meanings of both crime and criminal justice" (p. 20). The aim of this qualitative research is to identify critical identity junctures and to unravel the coping mechanisms that long-term inmates construct for identity-preservation or transformation, and hope.

## *Conceptualizing the Weight of the Gavel*

The conceptual map, Figure 2, is displayed below. It lays out the initial process through which this study will analyze interviews, focus groups, and field notes.

**Figure 1.2 Conceptual Model.**
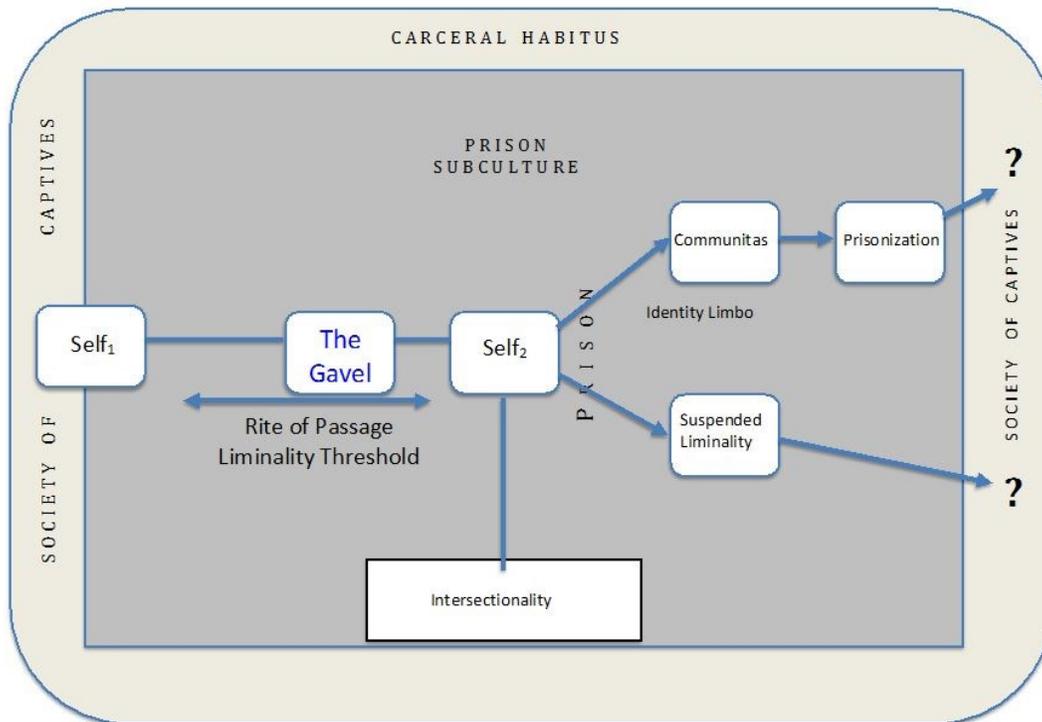


The outer ring of carceral habitus suggests the overall punitive milieu that leads to the United States housing more inmates than any other country in the history of civilization. The society of captives (Sykes 1958) represents the environment and effects of imprisonment. The identity of *Self₁* and *Self₂* in the conceptual model (see left-hand side) represents the accused's identity before and after transformation. The overall ritual of legal due process acts as the beginning of a rite of passage, while the process of being found guilty and sentenced to life changes the life trajectory of all who experience it.

The *Gavel* "moment" in the model above indicates the time wherein the lifer is sentenced. The *Gavel* also represents the moment when the potential for *Self₂* is created. The question becomes whether the individual experiences a "social death" of sorts, suspending and protecting the original identity, creating the box indicated as *Suspended Liminality*; or, conversely, does the felon experience a communitas while incarcerated, undergoing the

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enculturation of prison and thus experiencing what is referred to here as *Prisonization?* Note that the area surrounding *Suspended Liminality* is referred to as *Identity Limbo*, indicating the pains of imprisonment while attempting to maintain *Self₁*. *Prisonization* represents an acceptance of *Self₂* as something else entirely, also known as becoming "institutionalized." While this dissertation does not directly analyze multi-faceted aspects of social identity, the model does mark an acknowledged sensitivity with regard to *Intersectionality*, paving future research for considerations of race, class, and gender.

The first research question for this dissertation emerges at the *Gavel* moment. While it is clear that being convicted a felon and sentenced to life physically removes one from society, it also initiates him or her into the society of captives **as a felon**. But what happens to self, identity, and hope during this transformation? The answer, while complex and one that has thus far eluded a thorough investigation, is crucial for understanding a population that must be held for long periods of time and prepared for possible reentry into society (most lifers are released at some point). This conceptual model will initiate this study into the inductive process of prison ethnography.

Regarding a structural level implication, what can we expect from a growing disenfranchised population of felons in a democratic society? We release approximately 700,000 felons a year back into society. The majority of these convicted citizens return to society unprepared and do not even have the right to vote. How are these individual's identity structured by social institutions such as prison? While it is contentious as to whether larger prison populations equate with lower crime rates, releasing a large number of disenfranchised citizens with little access to political self-determination is worth considering more closely. This research

examines prison through the lens of a rite of passage, representing a ritual that rebrands a person with the mark of a criminal.

### *Research Questions*

The following general questions guide this research:

1. Do long-term prisoners experience a liminal threshold, or critical identity transition point, at the time of sentencing?

2. Do long-term prisoners transition from a pre-prison identity (self 1) to an alternative identity (self 2) after sentencing? If so, what time frame for the transition is most evident?

3. Do long-term prisoners experience communitas into the prison milieu? If so, what evidence of prisonization (conforming to prison norms and values) is found?

4. Alternately, do we find evidence of an identity limbo, or suspended liminality, during which the sense of self seems fluid and dynamic?

## **Conclusion and Summary of the Following Chapters**

Chapter One serves as the introduction and guiding theoretical premise for the study. Much of the study has been formed because I have been afforded access to this important but vulnerable population. Research such as this, while committed to maintaining human dignity between society and its most marginalized populations, still often meets extreme barriers to such access. I owe this opportunity to the Kansas Department of Corrections and Kansas State University; administrators and inmates alike could not have been more facilitating. Dignity for the inmates, staff, administrators, and state officials of these correctional facilities underpins this dissertation effort. While transitions are normative parts in every human experience, for lifers,

that moment stems from the weight of the gavel, which redirects their lives forever.  Perhaps self-esteem for all of us succumbs to age and often rests on the question of whether or not our life was meaningful.  Understanding how inmates adjust to these questions while imprisoned may well unlock implications for successful reentry into society or our understanding of life transitions.

Chapter Two, "Literature Review: Prison, Identity, and Liminality," comprises the salient literature and history of prison philosophy, research, and ethnographic inquiry.  While the United States leads the world in the number of prisoners, very little qualitative research is being done to understand how unprecedented punitivity is affecting individuals serving life sentences.  Chapter two situates this study and contributing concepts in the existing body of knowledge.  Furthermore, I argue that cultural criminology, with its focus on crime, context, and control as cultural products, is the most current and salient perspective through which to resurrect U.S. prison sociology.

Chapter Three, "Methodology: Barred Ethnography," involves the potential of ethnography for prison research, the methodology and tools with which the study is conducted, and explanation of how this project intends to contribute to the corrections body of knowledge.  While I do not claim to have conducted a fully developed ethnography (which might take a decade of work), this study is the result of ongoing four-year ethnographic-like inquiry into the identities of lifers.  As briefly mentioned above, this dissertation will contribute a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of lifers in the Midwest during the height of U.S. incarceration.  The methodological focus of this study is rooted in original interview data and inductive analytical techniques.

Chapter Four, "Analysis: The Long and Short of a Life Sentence," presents a qualitative analysis of interviews, concerns the emotional weight of receiving a life sentence, examines certain spacing and tempo of "doing time," and explores how lifers maintain hope. Doing time is a concept that Irwin (1970) taxonomized in *Lifers*. People doing life tend to minimize meaningful interactions with others to stem drama that leads to disciplinary restrictions in hopes of reducing their time in prison. The concept of doing time is about longitudinal aspects of serving a sentence, encapsulating how an inmate chooses to live, and illuminating moments that changed how s/he does time under the conditions of prison. Inmates tend to construct their personal stories through the notion of how they individually do their time. Reflection and redemptive narratives imply identity suspension or transformation, and explain how inmates maintain hope while serving a life sentence.

Chapter Five, "Conclusion: Betwixt and Between Reflection and Directions," concludes this dissertation. This chapter summarizes findings, discusses implications, and offers recommendations for policy and future research. The implications of this research apply to inmates currently incarcerated and the growing population of felons being integrated into society with limited access to social, material, and political self-determination. The average number of released felons consistently has been more than 600,000 annually since the year 2000; we have produced an underclass of convicted felons (approximately 8.4 million) in the United States about the size of New York City (which in 2013 was 8.406 million people). Perhaps reconsidering identity change as a rite of passage for prisoners, one in which they are initiated into the pains of imprisonment and a "spoiled identity," will offer insights toward a more successful reentry into society.

Gresham Sykes (1995) himself ended an essay concerning the influence of structural functionalism, purporting incarceration as a service to society, on prison research:

> When all is said and done about rehabilitation, incapacitation, and deterrence, the prison remains an instrument of retribution.  The public demand for retribution, finding expression in the political arena, cannot simply be dismissed as an irrelevant barbarism or the irrational goal of a misinformed public, and until we come to grips with this fact our understanding of the prison and our ability to introduce change are likely to remain inadequate. (P. 84)

Despite the ineffectual, costly, and debilitating consequences of our current system of incarceration, prisons will remain a condemning institution of retribution if more forms of research are not permitted.  A more laborious return to prison sociology, requiring the researcher to explore the totality of a social space and the actors within, will elucidate nuances among the complexities of mass incarceration. While rock and roll and blue jeans are generally thought of as cultural exports, carceral logics and governance through crime are also tendencies that characterize U.S. influence around the world (Garland 2001; Simon 2007).  It behooves any society that relies on incarceration for public retribution to understand the social and human costs of incarceration, especially if the nation is reproducing carceral habitus culturally.

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Prison, Identity, and Liminality

*Ring the bells that still can ring*
*Forget your perfect offering*
*There is a crack, a crack in everything.*
*That's how the light gets in.*

—Leonard Cohen, "Anthem"

Few other environments are as claustrophobic as prison. Becoming a prisoner is at once alienating and transformative; it tears at the core of who one is, calling into question personal and collective identity, sometimes leaving an individual in a state of limbo—a threshold moment of liminality that is often defined as a "betwixt and between" state of being. This research addresses such transitions as experienced by people in prison. This is not an insignificant population; American citizens are imprisoned at a rate of 750 per 100,000, with 1.6 million Americans now behind bars (Sentencing Project 2013). Reciprocally, the U.S. releases more than 600,000 felons a year (BJS 2014), implying what is often called the "revolving door" of American incarceration. For this research, I explore experiences of those serving a life sentence, a group that comprises one in nine of the prison population. Potentially, these "lifers," more than any other prison segment, experience an extended time in identity transformation and crisis.

Theoretically, lifers promise insight into this sort of limbo-existence where who one was suddenly disappears, as if dropped from a cliff, and who one may become remains unknown. "Life," however, is technically a misnomer. For purposes of this research, a life sentence is regarded as anything more than 20 years. Lifers in the U.S. now exceed 160,000 (Sentencing Project 2013); the number has grown a staggering 745 percent over the past 30 years (Sentencing Project 2013; Weisberg, Mukamal, Segall 2011). Almost 50,000 are serving life without parole

(Sentencing Project 2013). Contrary to common wisdom, 95% of all prisoners will be released from prison; the number is currently approaching almost 700,000 per year nationally (BJS 2015), and even many lifers get out of prison. Projecting from the number of total lifers (approximately 160,000), and considering that around 50,000 will not be paroled, mathematically speaking, that would mean that more than 100,000 of the lifers now in prison will someday be released. Exact numbers, however, are far more difficult to estimate due to differences between state statutes and differing political will and degrees of punitivity among administrations. A study at Stanford University (Weisberg, Mukamal, Segall 2011) estimated that a lifer (at the time of the report) stood an 18 percent chance of being granted parole by the board of parole hearings in California. Nevertheless, this population of lifers—whether or not they will ever be paroled—remains the focus of this research, as they mark a critical study in long-term identity transitions.

This chapter first offers a brief history and theoretical background, and then summarizes relevant literature regarding prison experiences, self-identity, and significant liminal transitions. The use of prisoner narrative potentially provides a "crack" in a total institution, which, as Cohen suggests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, will shed light on the self as it survives in an oppressive environment.

Understanding identity change requires consideration of social context, as well as the interplay between the individual and certain social structures – in this case, prison. As argued throughout this study, prison may be regarded as an elongated rite of passage. Typically, rites of passage are comprised of three phases: segregation, liminality, and reintegration (Turner 1969). Such life transitions commonly apply to formal changes of social station. Graduating high school, marriage, and even the finality of funerals all represent rites of passage from one phase of life into another. Most of these transitions are viewed positively, as appropriate transitions

through socially approved life stages. For example, graduating college often reshapes the identity of the graduate, in addition to unlocking structural opportunities.

However, not every rite of passage leaves the participant in a better or more positive situation. Other rites of passage, such as felony convictions and subsequent prison sentences, also correspond with life transitions, albeit less desirable ones. Prison—although originally designed for penance or reform through reflexivity—often leaves people stigmatized as a criminal or felon and certainly plays a part in shaping a person's identity.

Identity demarcates internal indicators of direction or a map of sorts as a general guide through current and future situations. But we know less about how people describe their own changes over time while incarcerated, particularly lifers (Kazemian and Travis 2015). Understanding identity transitions could unlock valuable concepts toward preparing long-term inmates for positive change and even for reentry into society. For instance, Irwin (1970) and Pager (2003) found that for those labeled a felon, the mortification of self translated into a significantly lower chance of gaining employment, while others document loss of fundamental rights, including felon disenfranchisement regarding lack of political self-determination (Manza and Uggen 2006). Understanding barriers that prisoners face toward reentry remains paramount, especially within the continued growth of prisonization.

This chapter begins with a brief background of prison research, followed by a description of several overlapping theoretical traditions. For example, identity transitions and stigma emanate historically from sociology, while liminality originates from anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork. At the end of the theory section, the concept of *carceral habitus*—micro interactions producing structural punitivity—is reviewed. The last and largest section of this chapter consists of contemporary research trends and findings regarding crime

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control, prisons, and prisoners.  A brief section then concludes, supporting

the need for a critical prison ethnography.

## Brief Background of Prison Research

Interestingly, the U.S. hosts the largest prison population in the western industrial world,

but Great Britain is responsible for producing much of the current prison sociology (Bennet,

Crew, and Azrini 2008; Crawley 2006; Crew 2005; Liebling 1999).  This has not always been

the case.  The body of knowledge that forms the foundations of prison sociology is originally

conducted in the U.S.  A pioneering line of landmark prison sociology was produced during the

twentieth-century, built around the sociological principle that structures exert significant

influence on individuals. Examples include Clemmer's (1958 [1940]) groundbreaking work,

attempting to understand social stratification in prison culture of the 1930s.  Sykes (1958), on the

other hand, found nuances and subcultural components unique to a "society of captives" and

described the pains of imprisonment for both individual prisoners and guards.  Goffman (1961)

considered mortification rituals, the dehumanizing processing of an individual in total

institutions, and how consistent degradation structures a patient's social wellbeing. Irwin (1970),

through participant observation, described cultural values, attitudes, and the morals of prison

culture and the felon.  Through Irwin's focus on subcultural tendencies such as argot, in

group/out group dynamics and the notion of doing time, prison life came to be seen as much

more complex.  Extending Irwin's work, Jacobs (1977), a sociologist and legal scholar, claimed

that subcultures controlled the administration of the penitentiary; subculture perspectives soon

pervaded corrections literature and organization philosophy, and did so until the mid-eighties.

Dilulio's (1987) *Governing Prisons*, however, signaled a new perspective—the military

implemented model of corrections and the disappearance of prison sociology in the U.S. (Simon

2000).  As the war on drugs gained political will and catalyzed mass incarceration nation-wide,

so did the reconsideration of managing prisons that were over-populated and understaffed.  How

we administrated prisons in the US also changed, just as did varying levels of punitivity within

political rhetoric such as "tough on crime" initiatives.  This new militarized management strategy

seemed to have also promoted, perhaps tacitly, a reduced reliance on research from within prison

facilities, particularly those concerned with prison subculture.  These trends resulted in or

developed along-side an expanding prison complex that became larger and less accessible.

According to Haney and Zimbardo (1998), social scientists contributed much to the

foundations of modern prison thought, emanating from the early twentieth century forward, but

little since the mid-1980s.   They argue that the lack of prison sociology has created an "ethical

and intellectual void that has undermined both the quality and legitimacy of correctional

practices" (Haney and Zimbardo 1998:721; as cited in Liebling and Maruna 2005:2).  Fast-

forwarding to 2001, noted sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2001) lamented the contemporary dearth

of American ethnographic work in prison, while Travis (2003) voiced the same concern about

knowledge of attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of inmates in the corrections community.

Wacquant notes:

> The result of the closing of the penitentiary to social researchers made
> redundant by the jettisoning of rehabilitation and the latter's growing dis-
> regard for a mode of punishment deemed coarse and passé is that
> observational studies depicting the everyday world of inmates all but
> vanished just as the United States was settling into mass incarceration and
> other advanced countries were gingerly clearing their own road towards
> the penal state. *The ethnography of the prison thus went into eclipse at the
> very moment when it was most urgently needed* on both scientific and
> political grounds. (2002:385 emphasis added)

The stage was set for limited access and eventually a dearth in the very academic literature that

had contributed foundationally to corrections policy and practice.

In summary, the literature illustrates the decrease of prison sociology as it parallels a historic rise in mass incarceration; while the U.S. is the number one jailer in the world, it lags far behind in researching why that is so. One often-cited reason for the paucity of prison ethnography is access. Mark Hamm, for example, acquired eight separate IRB approvals to garner five interviews with prisoners accused of terrorists activity (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015:191; Hamm and Spaaij 2015). In general, qualitative work concerning marginalized and voiceless populations presents challenges of access for researchers (Venkatesh 2008); by design, prisons construct spatial, social, cultural, and political barriers to research (Umamaheswar 2014). Another issue related to access is legal liability; Palmer and Palmer (2010) found that an increasing number of inmates were suing administrators between 1960-1996, and that this trend contributed political pressure to limit access to prisons.

More recently, a special topics issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* (Drake and Earle 2013) hosted several articles concerning prison ethnography and qualitative contributions, specifically addressing the eclipse of prison ethnography argued by Wacquant (2001). Jewkes (2013) brings attention to emotionally attuned ethnography of confinement as more and more secret prisons emerge around the globe. Liebling (2013) claims that systematically analyzed emotional responses can offer insight into the changes of prison life and penal contexts affecting inmates and those working and researching with them. Similarly, Ben Crewe, Warr, Bennett, and Smith (2014) consider the usefulness of connecting "webs of affect" to a concrete social structure, one that could be generalized to other total institutions. These webs of affect include a greater sensitivity toward cultural geographies, emotional and physical well being of inmates, staff, and administrators within prisons.

Since 2005, some limited research has been conducted concerning incarceration issues with prisons, liminality, and/or reentry (Mobley 2014; Martin 2013; Severson, Veeh, Bruns, Lee 2012; Phillips, Lindsay 2011; Raphael 2011; Bahr, Harris, Fisher, Harker 2010; Wacquant 2010), though all this work refers to the paucity of deep qualitative work in prisons.  Hamm (2013) suggests that prison houses the potential of radicalization in combination with religion, but also suggests further studies need to be conducted in order to sort out underlying structures and trends.  International scholarship since 2005 has focused on prison conditions (Crewe et al. 2014(a); Crewe et al. 2014(b); Moran 2014; Jewkes 2013; Liebling and Maruna 2005).  This study responds to the call for more qualitative prison research in general, but specifically here in the United States.  The following section considers the publically embraced culture of prison punitivity and reviews various theoretical threads that inform this study.

## Theoretical Foundations

To understand identity transformation through life sentences as rites of passage, and within the contemporary context of carceral habitus and state level decision-making regarding crime, this research is situated within the overlap of several established areas of sociology.  For purposes of interdisciplinary continuity and contemporary salience, I use cultural criminology as the primary theoretical perspective to illustrate the synthesis of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and critical criminology.  Much like the early American prison sociological work of Clemmer (1958 [1940]), Goffman (1961), and Irwin (1970), cultural criminology provides a central perspective that guides analysis that is both descriptive *and* analytical.  Cultural criminology has never been the central perspective in qualitative prison inquiry, yet its comprehensive approach invites such research (Hamm 2013; Tunnell 1992).

Cultural criminology (Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015) critically examines issues of representation, meaning, and politics in relation to crime and criminal justice. One of the mainstays of the cultural criminology perspective is that meaning and power are embedded in everyday negotiations of culture and social control. Certainly, a primary catalyst of many critical perspectives is the latent consequences of social order maintenance. For example, the use of culture as a theoretical concept began to evolve when class, power, and deviance were considered through a subcultural lens. While the political climate of the 1960s accommodated many Americans in various lifestyle ways, reconsidering the moral authority and legitimacy of the state itself allowed more critical thinking concerning deviance (Young 2011). The context of legitimacy raised important questions that captured a more complex picture of motivations and justification for both a citizen and the state. The era has been argued as the new deviancy explosion (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015), and cultural criminology has moved to the forefront in analyzing the cultural and economic embeddedness of deviance. Due to the emergence of mass incarceration toward order maintenance, a culture of control has evolved into a structural perspective of governing through crime (Garland 2001, Simon 2007; Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015).

Structural forces, however, do not work independently as socio-economics; they function in a dialectic relationship with culture. According to cultural criminology, the lasting contribution of new deviancy theorists is, "to bring culture into the study of crime and deviant behaviour—not simply by acknowledging the obvious presence of culture in social life, but by stressing the creative characteristic of culture, and hence the human creation of deviance *and* the human creation of the systems attempting to control it" (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015:34). Crime and social deviancy had been part of this subculture conversation through Sykes' (1958)

and Goffman's (1962) work in total institutions, specifically as they provided evidence of the culture-structure-individual interplay. The interaction between the individual and the social underpins the cultural, but also experiences culture's powerful structural current.  Much of this dynamic has its roots in symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism has a long history in U.S. sociology and has contributed to various theoretical perspectives.  In particular, Charles Horton Cooley contributed the concept of the looking glass self when he wrote *Social Organization* (1909), arguing that individuals view themselves through how they think others view them.  Cooley was responding to Descartes' notion of, "I think—therefore I am."  Cooley argued that to think was not enough, but what established a person was the complex relationship between self and concern with other people's perceptions.  This view was advanced and refined by such thinkers as George Herbert Mead. Mead suggested that mutually transformative dynamics exist between the individual and the surrounding environment, forming the basis for what Mead's student, Herbert Blumer (posthumous to Mead's death) labeled as symbolic interactionism (Applerouth and Edles 2011). Perhaps no environment presents a more complex dynamic between person and place than prison.

Cultural criminology as a theoretical perspective includes and relies on observation and interviews-as-accounts for data and stems largely from ethnomethodology and cultural anthropology.  Ethnomethodology utilizes the worldview of the actor as evidence, regardless of other relative worldviews and intersubjectivity.  Intersubjectivity, according to Garfinkel, represents a worldview that situates people's subject-positions (Heritage 1984); in other words, one's position subjectively dictates their vantage point in relationship with others. Related, symbolic interactionism urges the researcher to look for such narratives from the situated

perspectives of those that experience both the pains of imprisonment and reflexivity of serving time.  This is a primary premise of sense-making through cultural understanding.

Labeling theory represents yet another perspective that emerged during the new deviancy explosion, rooted in symbolic interactionism in the U.S. (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015).  Prior to the emergence of labeling perspective, there was an assumed temporal order in traditional sociology, suggesting that deviancy preceded social control.  Reconsidering the subcultural values of control mechanisms such as police, prisons, and mental facilities led to the thought that social control contributes or leads to deviancy (Lemert 1967 cited in Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2008).  Howard Becker, in *Outsiders* (1963), promoted this reconsideration with the notion that deviancy is socially constructed more generally.  Becker's treatment of becoming a marijuana user, as well as his study of dance musicians, raised the notion that how to be deviant *is* cultural—and that structure and institutional commitments often shape how deviance is constructed creatively, as resistance to larger social pressures (Tunnell 2014).  Labeling theory also emerged as a process that leads to stigmatizing characteristics (more on stigma and spoiled identity later).  Cultural criminology thus builds heavily from a labeling and phenomenological perspective.

Critical criminology emerged out of the conflict perspective of sociology as rooted in a Marxist analytical framework (Chambliss 1973). One axiom of conflict theory is that the power elite controls the narrative and the means through which to maintain a social order that keeps them on top (Mills [1956] 2000).  This leaves the majority of citizens less self-determinate economically and politically, with control in the hands of a powerful minority.  In short, conflict theory considers asymmetrical power dimensions in society along stratified social classes.  This

concentration of power among elites is reflected in cultural criminology, which also draws structurally from a conflict paradigm.

Ultimately, the theoretical overlap between multiple perspectives comes to the focused point of criminological verstehen (Ferrell 1997). Criminological verstehen seeks to empathetically understand the etiological center of the actors who commit and navigate those actions. As such, cultural criminology looks at crime dynamically, through both culture and the apparatus of class conflict, acknowledging the positional disadvantage of certain actors. This does not ignore historical materialism, nor does it divorce the subject from the material conditions of upbringing; it does privilege the narrative of the affected, much like sociology and cultural anthropology. The purpose of this study is to engage in criminological verstehen, seeking to understand identity transitions following official sentencing of a crime and through a long sentence in prison.

### *Identity in Sociology*

Any sociological consideration of self and identity must assume a dialectic relationship between the self and society (Stryker 1980). Identity, as mentioned in chapter one, is "an internalized positional designation" (Stryker 1980:60). Identities are what represent the self and its components for a variety of social interactions. According to Mead (1934), the relationship *within* a person, or reflexivity, constitutes the core of selfhood; identity is fluid between the reflexive self and the navigation of environments. Prison offers an extraordinarily complex environment within which to manage the [primary] self and the reflection of self through the cumulative and alienating effects of long-term incarceration, or what Sykes (1958) calls the "pains of prisonization."

The transition into prison life is drastic, and thus the constant management of identity through a long sentence becomes necessarily challenging to the individual prisoner. In fact, the penitentiary was originally designed around the monastic philosophy of reflexivity, or time in contemplation, and repentance. Reflexivity is often grounded in moments or milestones that mark memorable transitions in the person's relationship with those around them, loved ones, and the environment of re-identification (Stevens 2012; Leary and Tangney 2003; Stets and Burk 2003). Because identity forms the core of the self in interaction with the reflective other, or the audience, all humans consider their surroundings when mentally projecting one's self. Thus, identity transition presents a central notion between how inmates view themselves upon coming to prison, and then how they view themselves after being in prison. In prison, a sense of self and identity are in constant flux with the spatial management, but also as situated within the prison's organizational and social environment; it is a dynamic relationship.

However, identity transition for prisoners is not simply a transient entity that continues along a given path. Rather, the transition has a specific purpose for both the individual and society at large—to attach a rather permanent mark of dishonor. In 1963, sociologist Erving Goffman wrote *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Goffman argues the origins of stigma and suggests that, "The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (1963:1). The author continues, "Later, in Christian times, two layers of metaphor were added to the term: the first referred to bodily signs of holy grace that took the form of eruptive blossoms on the skin; the second, a medical connection to the religious allusion, referred to as bodily signs of physical disorder" (Goffman 1963:1). Goffman goes on to argue that much of the literal definition has been stripped away from the

employment of stigma, and that the term has evolved into a significant exclusionary tactic of modern society.  Unfortunately, life offers up ready examples of exclusion as stigma, often pertaining to the handicapped/disabled, psychologically diagnosed, chronic physically ailed, racially marked, and, of course, the focus of this research—the felon.  Being a convicted felon all too often becomes a type of permanent spoiled identity.

Identity changes are generally remembered (or reconstructed) along milestones that mark certain changes; such liminal transitions may be related to life course disruptions. Kubrin et al. refer to precocious transitions as those that "take place earlier in the life course than what is normatively expected" (2009:260). Following that logic, Krohn, Lizotte, Perez (1997) and Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, and Tobin (2003) extend the concept and identify *precocious transitions* as those of young people linked with adult criminal offending (Kubrin, Stucky, Krohn 2009). Considering disruptive events such as these may shed light on whether interstitial thresholds (or intermittent moments) such as being declared a felon have specific and climactic symbolic meaning for inmates and their sense of identity.

### *Liminality and Identity*

Anthropology and sociology have long considered cultural values and elevation or degradation ceremonies in societies (Garfinkel 1956).  Rites of passage, as illustrated in chapter one, are socially constructed rituals through which the individual experiences transition in social status (Van Gennep [1908] 1960). For this research, long-term incarceration is theoretically characterized as an elongated rite of passage—perhaps constructed of a series of liminal transitions—a term typically reserved for positive life transitions such as proms, graduations, and marriage; however, Turner (1969) argued that negative rites of passage also exist.  Related, Jewkes (2005) has described the pains of imprisonment as disrupted life courses (Jewkes 2005),

and Thornberry et al. (2003) refer to these disruptions as "precocious (or premature) transitions"—all of which label individuals and redirect their structures of opportunities in negative ways. This use of the term precocious transitions seems most apt in the cases of young offenders receiving long sentences; certain life events such as graduation, marriage, parenthood become eclipsed, and adult-like statuses are suddenly thrust upon them. As the number of prisoners serving life sentences continues to grow (with little evidence that it increases public safety) (Sentencing Project 2012; Gendreau, Goggins, Cullen 1999), state interventions via the criminal justice system intensify such disruptive events and the scope of such precocious transitions grows exponentially.

A rite of passage does not exist in isolation but must be culturally codified. Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) originally held that birth, puberty, marriage, and death are marked by ceremonies, which may differ culturally, but are universal in function. In a Great Britain study, Jewkes (2005:367) suggests that, "[L]ifecourse transitions are the public rites of passage which usually involve a range of symbolic representations and rituals—from ultrasound scans through to post-mortems—and which validate the meaning of the event for the individual, the social group, and the wider society" (see also: Billington et al. 1998). For example, crime events, the trial, and sentencing are often heavily mediated and consumed. Recognizing these cultural connections, Eugene Debs (2000 [1927]), the early labor organizer, wrote about being in prison: "The sentence of the law is executed with all the solemnity and ceremony of a funeral and the culprit, with head bowed either from grief or rage, is led from the courtroom between two feelingless factotums to begin his punishmen[t]—justice is served, society is avenged, and all is well once more" (p. 48). Being handed a life sentence and becoming a felon marks just such a transition, one that marks an individual indefinitely.

Identifying that instance of transformation becomes critical. Liminality is the moment "betwixt and in between" the identity that the person once occupied in society and the place that this person will occupy in the future (Turner 1960). A liminal moment in general can be characterized as an ephemeral moment between identities and social spaces, but fluid and dynamic nonetheless; a liminal transition generally occurs in a flash moment or during a fairly brief process. Referring to chapter one, a rite of passage is composed of three parts: segregation, liminality, and reaggregation. Liminality exists as the interstitial component in a rite of passage, that is, the ephemeral parcel that exists between two more obvious points. Even so, liminality is constituted of distinct elements. The first stage of segregation separates the liminar from a person's normal group. The second state of a rite of passage is the liminal moment, the interstitial space between the previous and new social status. The third stage of reaggregation reconnects the liminar back into the group, but with the changed social status. The liminal transition occurs interstitially between the externally socially constructed rites as well as within (interpersonally) the liminar through a relabeling process.

**Intersectionality**. No discussion of identity and status would be complete without considerations of ways in which meaningful social characteristics cross and interact; this bundle of identities is referred to as intersectionality. Intersectionality (Collins 1998; Crenshaw1991), as a concept, stems from an assorted web of identifiers based on power and transgressions. Identity limbo, an interstitial state within liminality (discussed later), also incorporates a confluence of identifiers that take shape depending on social circumstances. At first blush, the close confinement of prisons seems to blur meaningful social lines. We now know that, instead, experiences vary widely, especially those based on characteristics such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and religiosity. For example, while Black men and women may experience racial

oppression, they may experience it differently as a result of how gender intersects with racial inequality. Though a full analytical treatment of intersectionality is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this study remains sensitive to such intersectional distinctions within prison walls.

The fluid links of identities are often a complex amalgamation of demographics and socially constructed identifiers such as gender. Collins (1998) opposes the consideration of race, class, and nation as separate systems of oppression. The eminent scholar critiques the U.S. media's routine characterization of feminism as anti-family, as one example, rather than considering a more fluid and complex interplay between descriptors (Collins 1998). For example, Roberts (2012) writes about how state mechanisms of surveillance and punishment overlap and disproportionately affect Black mothers. Hancock (2007) argues, "While intersectionality is by no means unique in its attention to applications, the ways in which it conceptualizes the constitution of, relationship between, and multi-level analysis of categories of difference is in fact unique" (p. 71).

Some research suggests that prison life limits important social characteristics that interact with certain life transitions. For example, Jewkes maintains that race and gender offer substantive identifiers within social structures that are affected by rites of passage. She argues a gender difference as follows: "For women across all socio-economic groups, motherhood is proof of adulthood and a natural consequence of marriage or a permanent relationship with a man" (Jewkes 2005: 368; Jewkes and Letherby 2002; Letherby 1994). A long prison sentence marks a significant disruption and furthermore denies a woman of the agency related to birthing and/or mothering (Jewkes 2005; Walker and Worrall 2000). Similarly, men who are imprisoned are more generally denied the status of husband, provider, and skilled worker that they might

otherwise be afforded.  In turn, prison becomes a subcultural environment where certain (non-traditional) identifiers affect one's social standing.

This complex web of social relationships referred to as intersectionality may even intensify within the harsh prison environment.  McCall (2005) argues that methodologically, intersectionality is too complex to measure quantitatively.  While this research will not look for any single indicator of intersectionality, nor a way to quantify its overall effect, it will remain sensitive to intersectional perspectives and shifts during interviews (Simien 2007).  That is to say, this research endeavors to maintain conscious attention to the interplay of factors that contribute to a person's identity.  The imperative is to understand the moments and process that may shape a new direction in an inmate's personal change.  Overall, however, I focus on the experiences of transitions common to all prisoners as they enter the world of felon identity.

Identity is clearly an amalgamation of labels, self-identifiers, and often a strong determinant of life experiences and structural opportunity.  Individually, however, these labels do not encompass a total being.  Reflecting back on an early sociological notion of the "looking glass self," any query of personal change would be remiss without structural and external social forces.  The conversation will now turn toward a wider consideration of culture on a structural level.

### *Governing Through Prison*

The development of contemporary corrections and use of carceral punishment in late-modern governance has been widely written about and cited (Wacquant 2009; Simon 2007; Garland 2001; Christy 2000; Foucault 1977).  Focusing on crime control provides a wide-lens perspective on a culture of social control and the increasing trend toward governance through punitivity (Simon 2007).  Much of this literature addresses social structure.  Further, on an

interactional level, identity formation has been elucidated through situated narratives in which individuals develop a sense of self in prison (Cohen 1979; Goffman 1961; 1963;Sykes 1958), as noted in earlier decades. Amidst the ironic dearth of prison sociology during historic incarceration growth, more research has been conducted *about* prisoners and prison life than actual research *within* prisons (Drake and Earle 2013; Jewkes 2013 Gilmore 2007; Liebling & Maruna 2005).

Jonathan Simon (2000) cites Sykes' (1958*) The Society of Captives* and Clemmer's (1958 [1940]) *The Prison Community* as the beginning of a research era that ushered in policy implications and management strategies as crime control in the U.S. Both Sykes and Clemmer were concerned with the inmate culture influencing organizational strategies for facility management. John Dilulio's (1987) *Governing of Prisons*, on the other hand, has been argued as the *new* model of prison administration, coinciding with the end of progressive prison sociology and the increase in mass incarceration in the U.S. (Simon 2000). Dilulio argued that administrators could secure a prison through military-like hierarchy, ignoring culture and relationships within the facility. At the risk of repetitiveness, while the field of corrections has been organized around security and hierarchy, research *within* prisons has all but disappeared.

For a good portion of the late twentieth century, sociological perspectives, such as latent or unintended consequences of functionalism, compelled social scientists toward and promoted interest in prison research. Clemmer's (1940) *The Prison Community* asserted that prison hierarchy reflected the socio-economic status of an inmate before coming to prison. Irwin (1970) would both challenge and extend Clemmer's work, partly through a more sophisticated level of identity immersion in criminal subculture. Irwin, with experience as a felon himself, followed the career of felons from teenagers through prison and release. Like Clemmer, Irwin

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suggested that prison subcultures were shaped by class, but also by the process of prisonization (the inculcation of a convict culture) and the stigma of being labeled a convict after release. Jacobs (1977) went one step further, arguing that prisoner subculture ultimately governed the prison. The concern of prison sociology was not limited to the staff of prisons and the effect of power, control, and (as Sykes described) the whole society of captives, but also included how the system itself affected the convicted.

The era of prison sociology, however, would largely come to a halt by the mid-1980s. John Dilulio (1987) challenged prison sociology, arguing that administrators and prison officials—not inmates as Sykes, Irwin, and Jacobs (1977) argued—dictated the quality of prison facilities. As a result, focus shifted to *how* prisons are organized. Dilulio promoted a paramilitarized-style of security, consisting of a strict form of bureaucratized facility management, that would—he claimed—best maintain order. This trend was in opposition to the cooperative model that Sykes had observed and promoted. Simon (2000) argues that Dilulio's *Governing Prisons*, as well as the war on drugs in the 1980s, demarcates the end of prison sociology as a scientific project and the beginning of what would become the largest prison population in the history of civilization. The turn toward mass incarceration had grown to include over 2.4 million U.S. citizens by the end of 2013 (Carson 2014).

Two examples of influential studies have gone on to suggest that future research needs to focus on cultural components. Gendreau, Goggin, and Cullen (1999) found that prisons are fairly ineffective at crime control, concluding that they should not be used with the expectation of reducing criminal behavior. The study then goes on to suggest that research must include broader measures, and that, "it is incumbent upon prison officials to implement repeated, comprehensive assessments of offenders' attitudes, values, and behaviors while incarcerated to

understand the effectiveness of policy and programs" (Gendreau, Goggin, and Cullen1999). MacKenzie (2011; 2006; 2000) under the research inquiry of what works, suggest that while individual transformation must occur first in prisoners themselves, future research should address characteristics, such as attitudes and values, of inmates for more comprehensive understanding of programming and policy evaluation. Still, little research has answered that call.

Part of attitudes and values is identity. Identities are formed and employed at all transitions in every human (Burke and Stets 2009). Everyone in prison is removed from the social groups, values, and influences prior to incarceration, and everyone goes through transitions of identity. Sampson and Laub (1990) found that most people mature through the social bonds of work and family, but little has been done to explain how and when such maturity occurs. More recently informal control has become a major concern of age-graded theory (Sampson and Laub 2005), suggesting a longer process of transition. In fact, Irwin (2009) observed that most lifers mature after serving years in prison.

As Burke and Stets (2009) assert, "Some social positions are considered normative given one's life trajectory such as a student, worker, spouse, and parent; but they may also include those that are counter-normative, such as criminal, alcoholic, or homeless person" (p. 114). Counter-normative social positions, such as becoming a felon and serving prison time, present a host of potential negative life trajectories. Exploring transitions of identities, beliefs, transitions, and social positions will contribute to both social displacement and aging populations.

Social trajectories often affect how people feel about themselves and are important for moving forward positively. Some may suggest that counter-normative or degradation rites of passage represent more than a spoiled identity or stigma; for some, it is characterized as a

terminal prognosis or even a "social death." Yvonne Jewkes (2005) quotes from an interview, applying liminality to long-sentenced prisoners:

> Being given a life sentence is like being told by a doctor that you're going to die, you know, like you've got a terminal illness. You feel as if your life's effectively over. And even when you've got your head down and started doing your time it doesn't get any better 'cos you don't know when you'll be able to start your life again, or even if you'll get that chance. It's every prisoner's greatest fear you know…that they'll be taken out of here in a coffin. (Jewkes 2002:366)

Irwin (1970) argues that in spite of being sentenced to prison that people must maintain some dignity between self and society upon being degraded during mortification rituals. Mortification is being processed into a number instead of a human name, experiencing the loss of both personal privacy and self-determination—In short, becoming a convict. These mortification rituals exist within the context of a total institution, like prison.

### *Total Institutions*

Erving Goffman, in *Asylums* (1961), characterizes total institution as "symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forests, or moors." Goffman goes on to describe the total institution as "a social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization; therein lies its special sociological interests," further arguing that, "[t]he process of entrance typically brings other kinds of loss and mortification as well" (1961:12). Mortification refers to pain associated with bodily restriction, but also psychological and emotional shame. Even more deeply, mortification, according to Goffman, begins radical shifts in one's moral career, comprised of fluid changes in beliefs concerning one's self and others. In other words, Goffman suggests that admission into a long-term total institution breaks

the inmate from past roles (or self) and toward a new position or self. Goffman's work on total institutions is especially instructive for this study.

Total institutions should ameliorate a problem. In particular, penance, or reformation, of prisoners has long been the penitentiary mission and has been deeply rooted in religiosity. Hamm (2013) argues that prisons, both internationally and domestic, are also a site of radicalization regarding religious and political views. Religion is an important aspect of prison and identity transition. Turner elaborates, referring to many intellectuals of the early twentieth century:

> Most of these thinkers have taken up the implicitly theological position of trying to explain, or explain away religious phenomena as the product of psychological or sociological causes of the most diverse and even conflicting types, denying to them any preterhuman origin; but none of them has denied the extreme importance of religious beliefs and practices, for both the maintenance and radical transformation of human social and psychical structures. (1969:4).

Prison was originally conceived based on monastic reflection and Spartan living conditions and continues to be a pervasive component of corrections philosophy. Many prisoners cite "finding religion" as a positive influence on change while being incarcerated.

## *Carceral Habitus*

Crime and justice pervades the cultural milieu of contemporary society. For purposes of this study, I define *carceral habitus* as micro-level interactions contributing to a structural-level perspective of punitive governance. As one obvious example, the notion of mass incarceration is no stranger to news media. *The New York Times* published a collection of stories titled "Prison Planet" (March 2015), reflecting the 700% increase in U.S. incarceration rates since 1970 (ACLU 2015). While this exponential growth could be considered a success from the "get-tough-on-crime" stance, others contend that it has led to fundamental change, not only in the

number of prisoners, but also in promoting a new form of punitive governance (Wacquant 2009; Simon 2007; Garland 2001).  Recently, the Bloomberg BNA (Bureau of National Affairs) reported that U.S. District Judge Rakoff, in a keynote speech at Harvard Law School, criticized the judiciary bar for silence concerning such mass incarceration trends (Friedman 2015). Schept (2013) argues that even in liberal-leaning small towns a milieu of *carceral habitus*, or an overall logic of punitivity, becomes generalized political currency.  He explains:

> Habitus suggests that the logics and practices of mass incarceration reside
> not just "out there"—in media representations of crime and criminal
> justice, in the racialized "tough on crime" rhetoric of politicians, and in the
> everyday operations of criminal justice systems—but also, "in here," that
> is, in our everyday negotiations and productions of the social world.
> (Schept, 2013:77)

Crime has become not only heavily mediated, but also infused into cultural political narrative. Simon (2007) argues the growth in the use of prisons since 1980 has occurred through policy and legislation, culminating in one in 35 adults in the U.S. under some form of correctional supervision at year end 2013 (Glaze, Kaeble BJS 2014).

On a state level, punitive legislations have grown alongside federal sentencing matrices. One example is the amendment of hard forty-year life sentences (1994) in Kansas, which were then amended to hard fifty-year sentences (1999).  Judges may choose to impose the hard-fifty sentence in cases with one or more aggravating circumstances, imposing a life sentence of fifty years before possibility of parole (KSA 2012 Supp. 21-6620).  The constitutionality of the "hard fifty" was overturned by the United States Supreme Court in *Alleyne v. U.S., 133 S. Ct. 2151* in 2012, but remains an example of "tough on crime" rhetoric.  Legislatures across the U.S. have created similar laws, setting a precedent internationally and increasing incarceration to historic proportions.

As prison populations and sentences continue to grow, so do concerns with prison communities and reentry. In contrast to punitive sentence legislations, the federal 2007 Second Chance Act (Pub. L. 110-199) supports community programs designed to help individuals released from prison. This legislation was in response to the tremendous cost burden of the justice system on taxpayers amid the increasing number of individuals released from prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities. Less has been accomplished, however, in understanding **how** to best prepare inmates for reentry into society. MacKenzie (2011; 2006) argues that future prison research needs to focus on characteristics of participants, an element missing from most studies about incarceration. *What works* is to first reject "nothing works," a mantra that influenced corrections research in the U.S. for the last quarter of the twentieth century (Cullen and Gendreau 2001).

The perspective of *nothing works* exerted major influence on corrections research during the biggest boom in incarceration rates due to an early meta-analysis by Martinson (1974). For example, Cullen and Genreau (2001) cite Martinson's (1974) article, claiming that "with few and isolated" exceptions, " the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have no appreciable effect on recidivism" (2001:321; 1974:25). Currently, evidence supports some success through human services/rehabilitation programs and cognitive transformations (MacKenzie 2011), though much remains to determine individualized needs. Regardless of epistemic subscription, or whether or not prisons work or do not work—or whether prison should or should not be abolished whole-stock—the U.S. currently incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country, **in history**. Research needs to contribute toward a deeper understanding of the pains of imprisonment, and to identify transitions that prisoners undergo in order to properly assess successes and failures of the current system. This research endeavors to do just that, to

*understand* how and when people change, and to hear from the perspective of those undergoing and surviving the transition from citizen to felon.

## Conclusion

The National Research Council (2014) concluded that long prison sentences do not increase public safety, that justice was not proportional to crime, nor handed out equally among racial or ethnic divisions in society. These trends have developed along side a historical rise in the use of prison. These recent points of consensus are not unique to the academic literature. There is a paucity, however, of research concerning how long-term sentences are affecting the currently incarcerated. The literature clearly notes that access to qualitative prison research has declined as incarceration rates have increased. This leaves the academic body of knowledge in the dark concerning how we govern.

This study, using a cultural criminological framework, situates the concept of liminality and socially constructed rites of passage into contemporary sociology/criminology/penology. Cultural criminology builds the overlapping theoretical center to anchor critical sensitivities that will allow this research the breadth, inductively, attuned to a range of sensitivities toward concepts such as intersectionality, religiosity, identity, and prison culture. While little prison sociology is currently conducted in the U.S, pioneering prison studies and foundational concepts such as stigma and prisonization originated in the U.S. This work is an attempt to revive and extend the sociological groundwork of earlier prison scholars through a contemporary cultural criminology.

Reconsidering contemporary prison sociology, as described through a cultural lens *within* prison, positions this research firmly into scholarship that was previously splintered areas of knowledge. This chapter has reviewed relevant literature through which to root concepts,

questions, and analysis for this dissertation, seeking to help fill the identified dearth in contemporary prison studies. By focusing on individual attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors of those incarcerated this research further contributes to calls to action by leading scholars and professional organizations such as the American Society of Criminology. Qualitative research seeking criminological verstehen stands to contribute new insights for policy concerns and evaluation toward existing reentry models, but also particular concerns for a growing population in US prisons—lifers. More specifically, this research will accompany the inevitable exodus as lifers are turned back into society over the coming years of justice reform. While prison literature continues to argue whether prisons are effective at a structural level, this descriptive analysis appeals to prisoner's narratives for insight into critical transitions while incarcerated.

It is clear that we have much to learn regarding the transition between citizen and felon in an age of mass incarceration. Between the rich histories of anthropology, criminology, criminal justice, and sociology lies a convergence of knowledge that postulates what it is to *be* human, and how the institutions that we construct to constrain certain populations may become barriers to us all. While being human is itself a complex intersection, adding the complexity of confinement, identity, and rites of passage creates a unique intellectual perspective. This study seeks to understand the segregation, liminality, and possible reaggregation of prison as a rite of passage.

# Chapter 3 - Methodology: Barred Ethnography

*So how can you tell me you're lonely,*
*And say for you that the sun don't shine?*
*Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets of London,*
*Show you something to make you change your mind.*

—Ralph McTell, "Streets of London"

Leading scholars have noted the dearth of contemporary qualitative prison research (Drake and Earle 2013; Jewkes 2013; Wacquant 2000); yet, very little qualitative work inside prisons has been accomplished in the last three decades. Paradoxically, "behind bars" research launched the early sociological study of life (Goffman 1961; Sykes 1958; Clemmer [1940] 1958). Just as McTell's song suggests to the traveler (above), ethnographic work takes the reader by the hand and carries them to where people study, live, work, interact, and struggle. As established in chapter two, the consensus-based trend of explaining prison as social control, dating back to the golden era of mid-twentieth century scholarship, included notable qualitative studies that placed prison sociology squarely at the intersection of "knowing the prison scientifically and governing the prison effectively" (Simon 2000:288). In particular, two prison ethnographies—Clemmer's (1940) 10-year study (at the Menard Branch of Illinois State Penitentiary) and Sykes' (1958) three-year field study (at New Jersey State Maximum Security Prison)—Influenced decades of prison research to follow. This chapter describes the methodology for a qualitative prison study conducted over the past four years at five state facilities in the Kansas. While I do not claim that the research constitutes a full-blown ethnography, the study incorporates several ethnographic components, including deep, onsite interviews, observation, focus groups, field notes, and a night in solitary confinement.

# Thick Description as Evidence

The companion of prison ethnography involves what has become referred to as "thick description."  Turner's notion of liminality was influenced by Geertz's notion of *thick description,* which provides a means for collecting data and connecting the individual with social structure.  As described by McGee and Warms, "Geertz believes that culture is acted out in public symbols such as the cockfight and is the mechanism by which members of a society communicate their worldview" (2008: 511).  In this regard, the researcher links individual narratives to structural imaginings and constraints.  Geertz immersed himself in a culture to understand symbolic actions, and believed that these gestures or postulates suggested a people's connection to structure, a point he emphasized in his famous "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight":

> Now, a few special occasions aside, cockfights are illegal in Bali under the Republic (as, for not altogether unrelated reasons, they were under the Dutch), largely as a result of the pretensions to puritanism radical nationalism tends to bring with it.  The elite, which is not itself so very puritan, worries about the poor, ignorant peasant gambling all his money away, about what foreigners will think, about the waste of time better devoted to building up the country.  It sees cockfighting as "primitive," "backward," "unprogressive," and generally unbecoming an ambitious nation.  And, as with those other embarrassments—opium smoking, begging, or uncovered breasts—it seeks, rather unsystematically, to put a stop to it. (McGee & Warms, 2009:512)

Sometimes acting out, and engaging in behavior frowned upon by the establishment offers a kind of desistance or at least obstinance.  Cultural obstinance under harsh structural conditions seems to haunt many tropes and maxims pertaining to justice.  Obstinance would suggest culturally enshrined questions of legitimacy to authority or official social order maintenance.  But more important, the symbolic value that the colonized Balinese placed on cockfighting, even though it was illegal, is a part of thick description.  Finally, thick description, as a technique, shares the cultural insights of the *other*.   The "other," as employed here, refers to someone or some group

outside the cultural parameters of the observer (Young 2011; Becker 1973). Geertz and Turner were interested in world-views of those lived experiences, providing a model for this current research as it was conducted behind bars. Similarly, the criminological *verstehen* this research hopes to achieve from interviews inside prison walls.

Further, the design of this study reflects the primary theoretical premise of identifying critical transitory moments in time. For example, Turner, in seeking to identify liminal thresholds, considered thick description an immersive and textual description as a way to capture the symbolic interaction between an individual worldview and structural constraints that shape its parameters. However, it is during the liminal processes of a rite of passage that a person's social status becomes denoted differently, either elevated or degraded. As Turner (1969) suggests, "The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (p. 95). In other words, the categories defining those individuals undergoing liminal transitions are not always clearly defined. This study aims to capture such transitions through multiple questions and observations, asking the interviewees to recall previous times and to project toward future moments.

## Background and Focus

Scale, use, and population of prisons have changed significantly over the past decades. As noted by Christie (2000) and Simon (2001), hyper-incarceration has changed the dynamic of the prison experience, as highlighted and measured by incarceration rates and population statistics. Self-evidently, prisons look different than they did 50 years ago, and so does the research. Most research in the past 35 years has been heavily quantitative. Furthermore, with

exponentially more incarcerated individuals, the cultural milieu has also changed and perhaps codified a need to revisit prison as a unique cultural environment.

In the current era, some scholars demand a return to *dirty pants sociology*, a phrase echoing the early Chicago school, which requires the researcher to go to the environment where the social action and actors under consideration interact and live—in this case, prisons (Berg 2009:11). Prisons proffer opportunity for thick description, expressions of *verstehen*, and poignant openings to expand the empirical understanding of human experience and the human cost within the age of mass incarceration.

Though dwarfed by quantitative studies, qualitative prison research is not totally absent in contemporary scholarship. Building on the works of Clemmer (1958 [1940]) and Sykes (1958), as previously mentioned, others have conducted prison research in Washington State (Rhodes 2004); Great Britain (Crewe 2009, 2007; Jewkes 2005); Ohio (Frederique and Sexton 2014); and California (Jenness 2010; Irwin 2009; Gilmore 2007; Owen 1998). Most of these studies have to do with prison culture and mechanisms of power and control exercised by prisons over prisoners. However, work on identity transition in prison is extremely sparse (though noted exceptions are Jewkes (2005) and Schmid (1991), and to date, no one has examined the process and effect of identity change with long-term prisoners. In fact, Kazemian and Travis (2015) published an article in *Criminology and Public Policy,* underscoring an "imperative" for including research on lifers, confirming the dearth established in chapter two. This dissertation and research answers the call to action and, more important, offers voice to inmates currently serving life at the height of mass incarceration in the U.S., filling such void by a) reporting an in-depth, qualitative study of prisoners; and b) examining the transition from citizen to captive as a rite of passage, an experience that includes the liminal moment (however brief or extended) in

which one's sense of self is transformed.  Before describing the specific methodology, it is instructive to first see how others have defined ethnographic research.

Ethnography refers to a close exploration of a social subset, using several sources of data; it typically entails long-term engagement in the field (Hoey 2014).  What constitutes "pure" ethnography, then, may vary in interpretation.  In any event, the goal of ethnography is to provide a "thick description" (in-depth) of everyday life and practice, which reflects a socially constructed "web" of meaning.  Specifically, Jewkes (2014:14) characterizes prison ethnography—a relatively rare form of ethnography—as "accounting for what it means to be human in carceral environments."  Even more rare is convict criminology, championed by Irwin's work (*The Felon* in 1970, and more recently through his study at San Quentin in 2009), in which prisoners and/or those formerly incarcerated produce scholarly accounts.  In line with Irwin's legacy, this research appeals to the expertise of inmates in an attempt to bring the most authentic voice to prison research.

For all these reasons, I refer to the research produced here as a qualitative prison study, using ethnographic methods.  The complete data set consists of individual, face-to-face in-depth interviews with inmates, but also incorporates interviews with prison staff, observation, group interviews (or focus groups), field notes, document reviews, and a single night in solitary confinement in a "supermax" unit. The study also involves collaborative ethnography, relying on many hours of round-table like discussions with three inmates who provided consultation, discussion, and input into the design and question guide used in the individual interviews. However, I employ a purposive selection process to carve out a subset of interviews for the purpose of this dissertation.  Throughout, the current work seeks to allow voices of the marginalized to contribute to the body of prison sociology, and how we consider effects of long-

term prison sentences on human identity.  This chapter describes, categorizes, and organizes the data collection and analysis methods.

## Gatekeeping and Methodologies

In general, lack of access often impedes the inability to carry out ethnography, especially within prisons in the U.S. (Chenault 2014; Umamaheswar 2014; Palmer and Palmer 2010; Reeves 2010; Venkatesh 2008; Marquart 1986); access became even more restrictive with the increasing punitivity of mass incarceration (Wacquant 2002).  This trend became particularly salient, noting the dramatic change in prison demographics and landscape over the past 30 years of prison expansion, with few ethnographies occurring here in the U.S., a trend not as evident in other industrial countries, namely Britain (Bennet, Crewe and Azrini 2008; Crawley 2006; Crewe 2005; Liebling 1999).

The rather nebulous genesis of this project began during a semester-long graduate seminar class that included three inmates, Wat, Ball, and Wrave from one of the field sites.  The inmates, along with the class, read several journal articles and Edward Bunker's (2000) book, *Education of a Felon*.  Bunker offered up lucid and sobering points of conversation regarding dynamics between inmates and staff.  As we sat with the group of three, which included two lifers, we were able to fully discuss several points of prison life, with them sharing issues of agreement and disagreement.  The result of this semester-long focus group resulted in the interview guide (included as Appendix D) and a set of pilot interviews to clarify language and validity of the questions.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) application at Kansas State University, with Dr. L. Sue Williams as principal investigator and myself and Will Chernoff as co-investigators, was pursued and awarded during the spring of 2012.  The IRB required a full committee hearing,

which included a community member to represent prisoner interests; we were asked pertinent questions about the content, process, and protective measures associated with the research. Appendices A, B, C, and D represent four successive IRB approval letters, requiring updates and annual review of research projects concerning human participants.

Typically, access to vulnerable populations such as prisoners is restricted not only by IRBs and similar entities, but also by the prison organization itself. By design, prisons are closed systems, governed by large bureaucracies with tight regulations and practices. Reiter (2014:417) argues that prisons resist scrutiny in two ways: first, as "structurally and bureaucratically closed off from research," and second as "emotionally disconnected." Reiter goes on to explain: "These two layers of obfuscation maintain the prison as a social 'black site': physically located outside of our communities, invisible to the public and the researcher alike." Other researchers have similarly expressed the tight resistance of prisons to scrutiny, often citing organizational, political, psychological, and even local (through passive resistance) barricades to doing prison research (Piche, Gaucher, and Walby 2014; Smith 2014; Ugelvik 2014; Sutton 2011; Waldram 2009).

Given these (and other) barriers, we were fortunate in four ways, drawing from: a) a long-standing relationship of the principal investigator with the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC); b) first-hand acquaintance and experience with two wardens; c) recent advancement of key KDOC administrators who value research and collaboration; and d) "meeting of the minds" of the seminar instructor and committed graduate students. These fortuitous events resulted in unprecedented access to prisons and prisoners in Kansas, forging a relationship that will likely endure for some time to come.

*Field Sites*

The state of Kansas sits directly in the geographic center of the United States. The last official study of national recidivism statistics was published in 2011 (Bureau of Justice Statistics), demonstrating a decline in recidivism from 2000-2009 of 23.57% for Kansas. Kansas incarceration rate, reported as of June of 2013 was 324 per 100,000 residents, ranking the state as the 15th least in incarceration rates nationally (BJS). The total number of inmates through February 12, 2016, was 9,636. For the fiscal year of 2014 Kansas released 5,366, which averages approximately 472 statewide inmate releases monthly.

Figure 3.1 (below) shows facilities across Kansas (KDOC 2013); the five field sites for this study—selected for a variety of purposes including diversity in structure and population— are marked with red ovals.

**Figure 3.1 Map of Kansas State Correctional Facilities.**
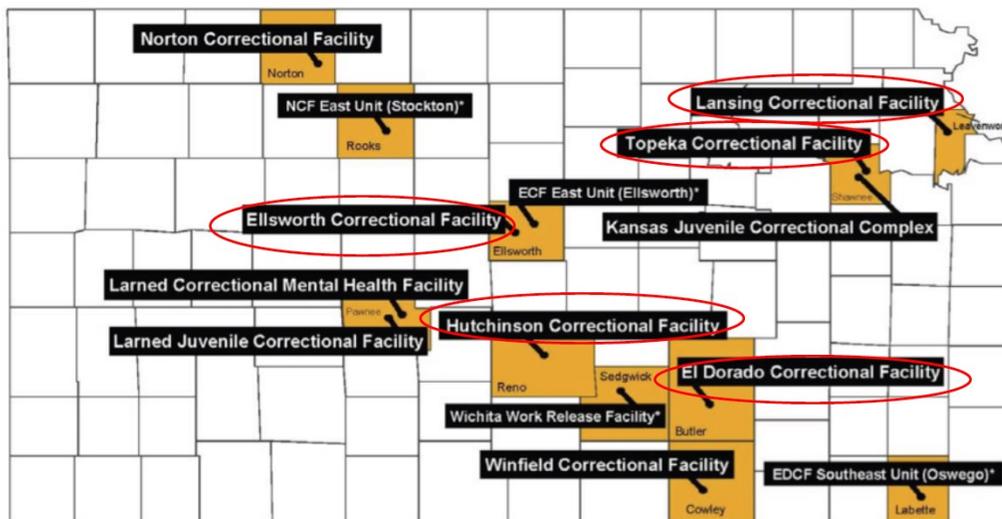


Currently, the interviews are sorted and organized by facility and sex. We have observed significantly different ambiences in the five facilities where research was conducted, opening the

possibility of observing, as one example, whether older facilities exhibit a different culture toward more conservative tactics. One particular administrative interview suggested that the old Pennsylvania facilities were run more traditionally. Further, a significant component of the current study was conducted in a women's facility, bringing a different demographic, culture, and dynamic to bear. Women constitute the fastest growing inmate population in U.S. prisons (Carson and Gonelli 2013). While, as mentioned previously, it is my intention to remain sensitive to categories that emerge from the data itself, coding will refrain from assuming analytic relevance of traditional variables such as age, sex, social class, until the data suggest otherwise (Berg 2009:355). While the initial formulation of this research began in the literature and is theoretically driven (deductive), the analysis will shift toward emerging themes through an inductive approach. In other words, "Experience, thus, underpins both inductive and deductive reasoning" (Berg 2009:356; Corbin & Strauss 1990). While some critiques could be levied toward a more pure inductive process, this study is rooted in the existing literature, and this chapter describes how the research proceeded.

Table 3.1 (below) exhibits information for each field site, including demographics for each town and facility, as well as the number of interviews at each location. Each facility was quite different, not only in architecture, but also in the prison culture and the surrounding town.

**Table 3.1 Summary of Field Sites and Interviews.**

| | Ellsworth | Topeka | Lansing | El Dorado | Hutchinson | State (KS) | US |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| County Population (2012) | 3,116 | 127,939 | 11,591 | 12,900 | 41,962 | 2,885,398 | 313,128,839 |
| Population Change since 2000 | +5.1% | +4.5% | +26.0% | +7.0% | +2.9% | | |
| Male (% Male) | 1,929 (61.9%) | 61,163 (47.8%) | 6,879 (59.4%) | 6,223 (48.2%) | 20,859 (49.7%) | 49.7% | 49.2% |
| Female (% Female) | 1,187 (38.1%) | 66,776 (52.2%) | 4,712 (40.6%) | 6,677 (51.8%) | 21,103 (50.3%) | 50.3% | 50.8% |
| White (% White) | 2,574 (82.5%) | 88,401 (69%) | 8,101 (72.9%) | 11,762 (90.4%) | 34,516 (82.3%) | 87.2% | 77.9% |
| Black | 290 | 14,271 | 1,064 | 220 | 1,790 | 6.2% | 13.1% |
| Hispanic | 194 | 17,336 | 527 | 602 | 4,307 | 11% | 16.9% |
| Other | 64 | 8,186 | 1425 | 421 | 8 | 6.6% | 8.9% |
| Facility Inmate Population | 913 | 815 | 2351 | 1511 | 1784 | 9,451 | 1,561,500 (2014) |
| Total # of interviews at site | 28 | 34 | 20 | 8 | 6 | 96 | NA |
| Inmates Interviewed | 25 | 29 | 19 | 8 | 0 | 78 | NA |
| Staff Interviewed | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 18 | NA |

## Target Population and Sample

This research expressly targets long-term prisoners, primarily those handed a life sentence. According to the Sentencing Project (2013), one in nine incarcerated Americans was serving a life sentence in 2012. Since lifers accumulate, concerns are evident in the rising age groups in prison, and issues arise such as medical expenses and fear of death (Aday 2006; Mitka 2004; Regulus 2004). In 2012, there were 159,520 people serving a life sentence in the U.S. (Sentencing Project 2013). It is reported that approximately 10,000 lifers nationally have been convicted of non-violent offenses. Perhaps most disturbing, half of lifers in the U.S. are African Americans, and one in six are Latinos. There were, in 2012, more than 5,300 (3.4%) female lifers. There was an 11% growth in people serving a life sentence between 2008 and 2012 (Sentencing Project 2013). Life in the state of Kansas is a sentence of twenty years or more. While *true* life sentences, life and a day (after deathly departure), are not handed out often, many people have received life sentences due to sentencing matrices and mandatory minimums. Considering that the Kansas total population of inmates is 9,636, then one in nine would estimate 936 Kansas inmates as currently serving a life sentence.

This research considers lifers and how they maintain hope and identity, focusing specifically on identity transition. Purposive sampling with regard to the target population (20+ lifers per facility) and convenience in terms of selection (each prison provided a list of interviewees) represent techniques employed to gather participants for interview. Four inmates, out of 78, declined to be a part of interviews in the field. A purposeful sampling strategy "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell 2007:125). None of the interviews can be considered as randomly selected or representative of lifers in Kansas. I did,

however, apply theoretical logic while selecting interviews to analyze out of the 96 total interviews conducted for this research. First, the selection process excluded participants who are not serving twenty years or more from the sample. Three inmate interviews had missing information on the state department of corrections website, from which we drew demographic information; they were excluded from the sample. This initial sampling process derived 54 total interviews with inmates serving life sentences.

In addition to the 54 interviews selected for analysis in this dissertation, six independent interviews with inmates currently serving time in solitary confinement were conducted via phone interviews. This was a delicate effort coordinated by Dr. Williams and the warden of El Dorado Correctional Facility. These interviews are counted among the total observation effort collecting this data, but are excluded for analysis in this dissertation.

In a separate selection process, I sorted the interviews by time served, which is organized into quartiles. Each quote from the qualitative interview data has been coded into one of the quartiles of time served so that particular attention can compare narratives between inmates and their respective experience in prison. While by no means is this a longitudinal dynamic in the analysis, it does offer some analysis of similarities and differences between inmates' views, contingent on how long they have *been down* (a phrase commonly employed when talking about time served). Below is a graph, Figure 3.2, showing how long the participants in this study had been incarcerated at the time of the interviews. It should be noted that did not get an even spread of time categories. For example, category two (5-10 years) has only a few participants, but for reasons discussed later, I decided to include those interviews.

**Figure 3.2 Participants Time Served**
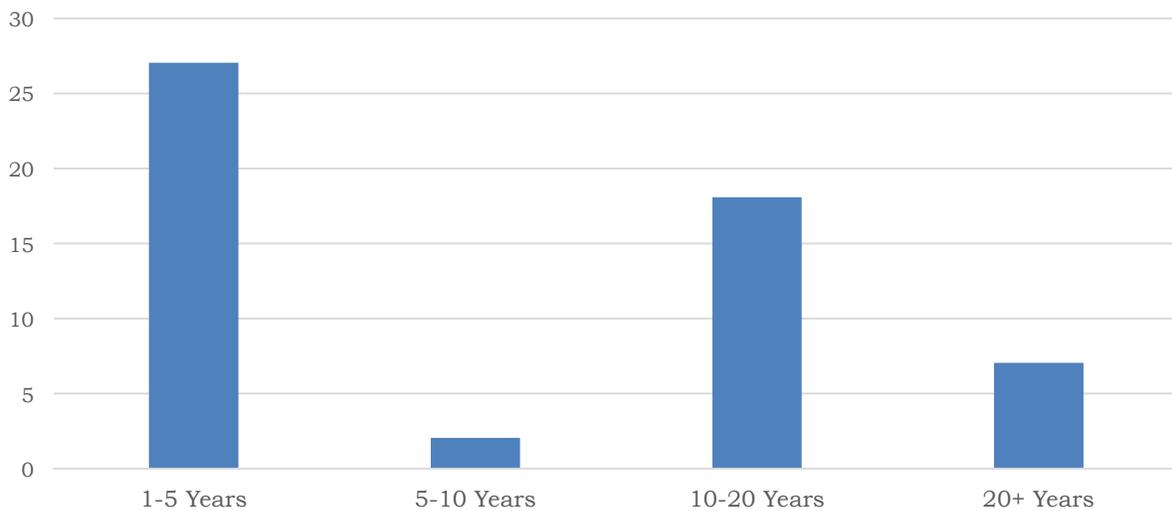


Data have been drawn from the entire pool of 54 inmates. For example, the first question under the concept of *doing time* is, "What are five words that express what prison is like?" Responses to this question are analyzed through a manifest content analysis, using all 54 interviews, compiling a frame that reflects the emotional weight of prison (Crewe 2014). The table below shows the complete list of interviews conducted. The data is organized according to facility and the order of interview. Those interviews grayed were excluded from the sample due to two conditions. First, those serving less than 20 years are eliminated; second, six inmates currently in solitary confinement were excluded. These data will be explored in future studies.

**Table 3.2 Demographics and Basic Characteristics of Incarcerated Participants.**

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E001EG | ECF | John Johnson | M | W | 45 | 41 | Rape | 968 |
| E002WC | ECF | Dimitri Black | M | W | 35 | 40 | Rape | 437 |
| E003SW | ECF | Reynaldo Hill | M | B | 43 | 25+ | Indecent Liberty | 1089 |
| E004WC | ECF | Jeffrey Clark | M | W | 33 | 25 | Sexual Exploitn. | 548 |

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E005EG | ECF | Carl Ebers | M | W | 45 | 40 | Rape | 1403 |
| E006SW | ECF | Ethan Thomas | M | B | 50 | 48 | Att. Murder | 1719 |
| E007SW | ECF | Gene Norris | M | W | 60 | 25-life | Murder I | 1761 |
| E008EG | ECF | Ebert *Hernandez* | M | W | 67 | 25-life | Indecent Liberty | 1495 |
| E009WC | ECF | Paul Ford | M | W | 55 | 73 | Rape | 949 |
| E010SW | ECF | Ray Benton | M | W | 52 | 50+ | Rape | 1235 |
| E011EG | ECF | Dean Harmony** | M | W | 52 | 23 | Murder I | 7384* |
| E012WC | ECF | Lee *Garbonza* | M | W | 43 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1516 |
| E014SW | ECF | Fred Jones | M | W | 44 | 21-life | Indecent Liberty | 7028 |
| E016SW | ECF | Iron Nickel | M | W | 35 | 50 | Indecent Liberty | 407 |
| E017EG | ECF | Evan Totes | M | W | 38 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1148 |
| E018WC | ECF | Anglin Pierceson | M | B | 53 | 28 | Rape | 9489* |
| E019EG | ECF | Herb Denny | M | W | 46 | Indet. | Rape | 1010 |
| E020SW | ECF | Pap *Sargeant* | M | W | 59 | 13 years | Indecent Liberty | 3850 |
| E021WC | ECF | Ed Maloany | M | W | 39 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1331 |
| E022EG | ECF | Ted Shivers | M | W | 44 | 39 | Rape | 102 |
| E023SW | ECF | Bill Distill | M | W | 44 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 284 |
| E024WC | ECF | Bob O'Hare | M | W | 32 | 24 | Rape | 390 |
| L001EG | LCF | Rocky Bentley | M | W | 55 | 24 | Rape | 801 |
| L001WC | LCF | Lee Orphan | M | Native | 58 | Indet. | Rape | 9057 |
| L002EG | LCF | Andy Lynn | M | B | 44 | 37 | Murder I | 5626 |

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L003EG | LCF | Keith Cold | M | B | 43 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 619 |
| L005EG | LCF | Stephen Kinsey | M | W | 44 | 47 | Murder I | 7749 |
| L006EG | LCF | Tom *Garcia* | M | W | 41 | 43 | Murder I | 2898 |
| L007EG | LCF | Lindsey Bordown | M | W | 51 | 47 | Rape; Murder I | 7603 |
| L008EG | LCF | Nick Moore | M | W | 59 | 47 | Robbery | 7557 |
| L009EG | LCF | Leroy Smithers | M | W | 49 | 48 | Indecent Liberty | 318 |
| L009WC | LCF | Boyd Herron | M | W | 36 | 25+ | Rape | 546 |
| L010EG | LCF | Steve Louise | M | B | 47 | 95 | Robbery | 7063 |
| L010WC | LCF | Fred Bedrock | M | B | 38 | 40 | Murder I | 5319 |
| L014WC | LCF | Mose Allen | M | W | 42 | 50 | Murder I | 6971 |
| L015WC | LCF | Mark Saint | M | B | 74 | 50+ | Murder II | 8654 |
| L017WC | LCF | Booker Banks | M | B | 35 | 50 | Murder I | 4278 |
| L021WC | LCF | Pete Cootes | M | W | 55 | 48 | Murder I | 490 |
| L023WC | LCF | Al Bolt | M | B | 53 | 89 | Murder I | 6841 |
| L025WC | LCF | Ben Flora | M | B | 45 | 38 | Murder I | 4873 |
| T001EG | TCF | Jesse Harbinger | F | W | 32 | 16 | Murder II | 2320 |
| T001SW | TCF | Wilma Wilhem | F | B | 31 | 7 | Narcotics | 1207 |
| T001WC | TCF | Robin Tankersly** | F | W | 60 | 1 | DUI | |
| T002EG | TCF | Bennie Rock | F | W | 62 | 24 | Murder I | 3853 |
| T002SW | TCF | Laura Lite | F | W | 46 | 24 | Murder I | 4830 |
| T002WC | TCF | Holly Diem | F | W | 24 | 17 | Murder II | 1337 |
| T003EG | TCF | Juicy Nash | F | W | 31 | 2.5 | Robbery | 224 |
| T003SW | TCF | Jenna Adama | F | W | 41 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1688 |
| T003WC | TCF | Becky Baton | F | W | 26 | 12 | Murder II | 767 |

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T004EG | TCF | Kaley Leonard | F | W | 56 | 21 | Murder II | 6909 |
| T004SW | TCF | Senora Riley | F | W | 33 | 10 | Sexual Exploitation | 2229 |
| T004WC | TCF | Holly Day | F | W | 41 | 20 | Rape | 869 |
| T005EG | TCF | Tiger Robinson | F | B | 31 | 20 | Murder II | 4405 |
| T006EG | TCF | Benita Schewin | F | W | 45 | 26 | Murder I | 9050 |
| T006SW | TCF | Gina Sleuth | F | W | 60 | 6 | Man. Narcotics | 808 |
| T007EG | TCF | Melinda *Garcia* | F | W | 29 | 18 | Murder II | 4205 |
| T007SW | TCF | Cindy Shoe | F | W | 42 | 19 | Murder I | 2942 |
| T008EG | TCF | Louis Light | F | W | 46 | 24 | Murder I | 5317 |
| T008SW | TCF | Rhonda Rich | F | B | 43 | 47 | Murder I | 7880 |
| T009EG | TCF | Anti Johnstown | F | B | 60 | 23 | Murder I | 7994 |
| T009SW | TCF | Lina Livings | F | W | 55 | 25 | Conspiracy M. I | 5621 |
| T010EG | TCF | Angel Jobs | F | Native | 42 | 21 | Manslaughter | 1107 |
| T010SW | TCF | Edna Eggers | F | B | 57 | Indeterm. | Murder I; torture | 3760 |
| T011SW | TCF | Eve Eddins | F | W | 47 | 28 | Murder I | 1168 |
| T012WC | TCF | Wanda Wilson | F | B | 51 | 19 | Murder I | 2168 |
| T013WC | TCF | Sara Milner | F | W | 33 | Indeterm. | Murder I | 1379 |
| ED01SW | EDCF | Genesis Revelation | M | B | 20 | 15 | Murder II | 1231 |
| ED02SW | EDCF | Cade Crawford | M | B | 26 | 20 | Aggravated Batt. | 1894 |
| ED03SW | EDCF | Tony Seranade | M | B | 41 | 40 | Murder I | 6097 |
| ED04SW | EDCF | Andy Doner | M | B | 26 | 40 | Murder I | 2714 |
| ED05SW | EDCF | Chester Shytown | M | B | 29 | 20+ | Murder I | 1448 |
| ED06SW | EDCF | Mack Sizestone | M | B | 32 | 13 | Att Murder I | 2334 |
| Total=69 | | | | | | | | |

* Time served since sentencing date as KDOC entered was not available on participant

**Released/deceased since interview was conducted

## *Concepts and Measurement*

I use the conceptual map to organize concepts, as presented in chapter one. Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest this strategy as "flow charting," which, "visualize[s] an order of elements through time or in a process, rather than as a static structure" (p. 199). This qualitative prison study relies on both deductive information generated by previous literature and inductive analysis of the data collected. While immersive participant observation is limited while conducting prison research, ethnographic techniques guide the primary process of data collection. Additionally, the analysis of this research is rooted in both inductive analytical techniques. That is, the researcher goes into the field aware of certain theoretical expectations, allowing ideas to emerge inductively (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Berg (2009) argues that, "a concept map permits you to better organize your ideas and plans as you develop your research design or theoretical frame" (p. 43). The idea of concept mapping allowed the concepts introduced in chapter one to be organized toward operationalization.

Concepts established in chapters one and two are evidenced in the interview guide, which consist of six primary and 16 probe questions. The primary questions are organized into categories including Introduction and Basic demographics, Doing Time, Identity and Liminality, Discursive Consciousness, Redemption Narratives, Anticipatory Status, and a Wrap-up (See Appendix E). Demographic and basic information such as name, age, race/ethnicity, date of entry into the Kansas state prison system, length of sentence, and expected release (if any) is coded and maintained on separate front sheets, which are kept in a 256-bit AES encryption drive for security and storage. Interview recordings and transcriptions are secured separately according to obligations and rules established by the IRB.

The following represents concepts outlined in the theoretical map as it appears in chapter one; a brief explanation of each follows:

- Society of Captives – Evokes a structural or institutional level environment, considering both staff and inmates that make up a correctional social milieu; the concept represents an assumed state, based on previous studies and literature.

- Carceral Habitus – Considers interactions producing the culture of punitivity that connect cultural dependence on the criminal justice apparatus as it grows and expands; the concept represents an assumed state, based on literature.

- Identity – Represented by $Self_1$ and $Self_2$ as one's [changing/changed] sense of self-image; the concept is measured qualitatively through in-depth interviews. In particular, see questions in the Identity and liminality section of the interview schedule (Appendix E).

- Rite of Passage – Represents a socially constructed and codified process of transition, either elevating or degrading one's social status; in this case, entry into prison as a lifer marks the first stage. In particular, What's it like to find out that you have been sentenced to life in prison?

- Liminality – Refers to a transitional/interstitial moment elicited by a rite of passage; in this case, it is represented by the moment of being handed a life sentence. In particular, How would you describe yourself now? And what is the most difficult thing to describe about prison?

- Stigma – Refers to a spoiled identity. This will be interpreted through whether or not the participants reflect on themselves negatively after receiving a life sentence.

The primary areas of the interview schedule are designed to capture the participant's perception and strategies about doing time (Jewkes 2005; Bunker 2000; Irwin 1970), all as it relates to one's self as a newly defined (and continuing) felon (see sections Discursive Consciousness). Identity and liminality, along with the probe questions, gather insights into remembered identity, changes in identity over time, sense of community, and social exclusion, as well as indicators or hints of a suspended identity (Schmid and Jones 1991) (see Identity and Liminality section). Identity is a constantly fluid concept of internal indicators, but sometimes is arrested within dramatic moments, periods or incidents (for example, see sections Doing Time and Anticipatory Status). See Appendix E for the complete interview guide.

Table 3.3 represents an outline of concepts, description, primary resources, interview, observation, and question examples to clarify the organization for readers. Certain selected concepts become the basis for the analysis included in this dissertation and are further developed as coding of qualitative interviews progresses, systematically constructing themes, interview responses, and measurement guideposts.

**Table 3.3 Concepts and Measurement Guideposts.**

| Concept | Brief Description | Primary References | Interview Measurement Guideposts | Observation Measurement Guideposts | Question and Examples |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Identity (Self 1) | Self 1 refers to the recollections, postulates, and descriptions of person in present and past. | Maruna (2001); Jewkes (2002) | Redemptive Narratives; Doing time; miss most; routines; relationships; movie and change; anticipatory status | Personal dress and presentation of self; body language; dynamics with prison staff and programs; | What do you remember most about your life before prison? What do you regret? |
| Identity (Self 2) | Person described in present tense. What has changed from previous self? | Maruna (2001); Jewkes (2002) | Anticipatory Status; projections of self; hope for specific life events | See above | How would you describe yourself now? What do you look forward to? What do you dread? Proud of? |
| Liminality Threshold | The moment between who you were and who you are going to be. | Van Gennep ([1909] 1960); Turner (1969) | The moment of receiving life sentence; coping mechanisms; who was missed most; expected of prison; Were you scared? | See above | What's it like to have been sentenced to life in prison? Ever feel that time has been stolen from you? |
| Communitas | Community in terms of identity and mechanical solidarity. | Turner (1969) | Sense of community; relationships; Doing Time; | See above | Relationship with security officers? Wardens or staff? Other prisoners? |
| Prisonization | Refers to the affects of prison enculturation. | Liebling and Maruna (2006) | Routines; relationships; experience both individually and institutionally | See above | Five words that describe prison? Do you project into a different place mentally/physically? |
| Suspended Liminality | Suspended Identity during the rite of passage of being sentenced to life. | Schmid, Thomas J. and Richard S. Jones 1991; original contribution of this study. | Doing time; miss most; routines; relationships; movie and change; anticipatory status both individually and institutionally | See above | Do you ever feel that time has been stolen from you? How would you describe yourself now? |
| Intersection-ality and trying on gender | Tentative experimentation with gender norms | Williams (2002) Williams et al. (2002) Williams (2009) Crenshaw (1992); Nash (2008) | Doing time; miss most; routines; relationships; movie and change; gender as power; group identification | Personal dress and presentation of self; body language; dynamics with prison staff and programs; . | What is sustained and/or changed in gendered expectations when faced with life in prison? |

| Emotional Labor | Presentation of self, impression management | Hochschild (1983; 2003) | Doing Time; routines; relationships; change; regret; dread. | See above | Do you project into a different place mentally/physically? If so, where? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prison Subculture | | Irwin (1970) | Redemptive Narratives; Doing time; miss most; routines; relationships; | See above | |
| Carceral Habitus | | Schept (2013) | Doing Time; routines; relationships; change; regret; dread. | See above | |

## Data Collection

This study employs a wide array of data collection tools, including the interview schedule, recording devices, observation, reflexivity and field notes, focus group procedures, and participant observation. As documented previously, the collection process extended to four years, from January, 2012, through December, 2015; interviewers include the principal investigator, Dr. L. Sue Williams, this author, and a PhD student/colleague, Will Chernoff. We are indebted to the wardens of the five Kansas facilities included in this study, and especially to Deputy Secretary Johnnie Goddard, who facilitated remarkable access to accommodate this research. All methods are included in the Kansas State University IRB protocol, and data are secured accordingly. In particular, interviews (audio and transcriptions) are stored securely in multiple places, separate from demographic sheets and identity keys. This author is solely responsible for the analysis presented in this dissertation, as supervised by Dr. Williams.

### Observation

General observations for this dissertation encompass a four-year period of visits and over 300 hours of time spent, by this author, in prisons around the state of Kansas. Trips to prisons have included 12 focus groups, 96 interviews constituting more than 140 hours of audio, 14 class tours, and a night in solitary confinement, described further below. Efforts to collect data have been varied and employed essentially any opportunity for me to visit and investigate state prisons.

### Interviews

In-depth interviews constitute the primary form of data collection for this project, yielding 96 individual interviews; each was about one to two hours in length. There are 76 total

interviews with inmates, including 8 phone interviews with inmates in segregation. There were 20 interviews conducted with staff and administrators. The interview schedule was organized to guide communication toward key concepts, with flexibility for elaboration or expansion. This type of "flexible format" allows the interviewee some control when necessary (Lofland and Lofland 1995:85) without the use of overtly leading questions. Note that several of the concepts are elucidated as "side notes" to the interviewer, serving as probes, as well as reminders to the interviewer concerning implications of particularly complex concepts. These mechanisms also further optimized reliability among the three interviewers.

The interview schedule continually serves as a tool for explicating these complex ideas while holding a relatively casual conversation-type interview. For example, discursive consciousness is defined as a point when the actor is able to express what they do and why. We attempted to explicate discursive consciousness indicators with the notion of individual experiences. This is important in recognizing differences among prisoners serving a life sentence, while also remaining alert to broader trends across interviews. For example, we are interested in Giddons' notion of duality of structure, which would suggest a relationship between the individual prisoner's experiences and the carceral structure that helps shape them, something that is not expressly articulated but can be [possibly] gleaned by comparing content across interviews. Further, post-interview discussions among the three interviewers helped to elucidate these more complex concepts.

Similarly, we remained alert to conscious and seemingly unconscious expressions of changes within one's sense of self, especially with remembered and projected experiences. For example, an awareness of redemption (or reconstructed) narratives offers insight into strategies of resistance and empowerment that allow inmates to form entirely new "unspoiled" identities

independent of the past or present circumstances (Irwin 2009; Jewkes 2002; Maruna 2001). These examples represent indicators of identity and strategies for everyday endurance and for maintaining hope. Other indicators are developed throughout the interview schedule (see Appendix E).

Finally, the wrap-up section asks the interviewees, what are you most proud of? Perhaps deceptively simple, this question concluded the interview with one last opportunity to consider how the prisoner views himself or herself, meaningful milestones, and strategies that keep a lifer going from day to day. The three inmates who assisted in constructing the interview guide were invaluable in helping to construct questions and choose language that would best elicit discussion. Refer to Appendix E for the complete interview guide.

### *Field Notes*

Both face sheets and field notes for each interviewee were recorded as suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995:83), organizing basic information and capturing moments during intensive interviewing. Copious field notes were taken during interviews and as we exited the field during prison visitations, all over the course of four years. In particular, instructive notes were recorded during focus groups, interviews, site visits, during an overnight stay in solitary confinement, and at various times during reflexive moments concerning the research. Since the prisons were located all over the state, long car rides often allowed conversations that were recorded for further reflection of interviews conducted that day. Because some days in the field consisted of six to eight one-hour interviews for each interviewer, maintaining organization of data throughout the process was paramount.

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*Focus Groups*

One dozen group interviews, or focus groups, were conducted at various times throughout this research.  The beginning of this study began with focus group-like semester-long seminar meetings with three inmates Wat, Ball, and Wrave.  As stated, the three inmates were instrumental in helping with the language of the interview schedule as well as how to conduct ourselves when establishing legitimacy with participants.  Wat and Wrave were serving life sentences.  They were quick to give us advice on "being real," calling bluffs and games during interviews but also being efficient in establishing that we were not there to help with anyone's case legally, only to voice participant's experience and expertise.  Eventually, we conducted and recorded additional focus groups with these three gentlemen in order to derive the interview guide.  They are not listed in the descriptive demographic table, as they were not analyzed as interview transcripts.  On other occasions we conducted focus groups with the hospice group in the women's facility in Topeka, as well as more informal visits with inmates and staff in various locations.  Focus groups also put some respondents visibly at ease, where interviewees could rely on one another for discussion or reinforcement.

*Participant Observation*

Solitary confinement has become a mainstay in prisoner discipline nationally in both Federal and State correctional facilities (Amnesty International 2014).  With the unique facilitation of the warden at El Dorado Correctional Facility, containing the state's "supermax" unit, I personally conducted an overnight stay (15 hours) in a maximum-security solitary housing unit (SHU), contributing a participant observation component of empirical descriptions of a solitary confinement to this research.  Most lifers experience solitary at some point during their sentence.  This experience was facilitated by the highest security facility, where "death row" is

located in Kansas. I recorded sixty pages of field notes and seven sketches in a nearly sleepless night in SHU. While the specific focus of this dissertation does not include the issue of solitary confinement, it is the contention of this research that participant observation offers tactile and geo-cultural insights that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood. Being there goes further in putting the researcher at the etiology of the moment, eliciting some level of *verstehen*, through observation (Ferrell and Hamm 1998; Ferrell 1997). It is important to note, however, that one night in a solitary confinement cell does not simulate extended time or the emotional weight concerning the uncertainty of how long a person spends in "the hole." This observation, however, contributes to physical descriptions of the accommodations, sounds, and details that interview spaces (often office, classroom, or visitation areas) cannot capture. In general, the experience added to my own personal sensitivity to the position of those we study.

As just described, data are drawn from several sources for this dissertation. Some questions on the interview schedule were designed for specific analysis, while others are more complex and difficult to stipulate. While I am not able to incorporate every piece of data in this dissertation, taken as a whole, the full methodology better sharpens and refines my ability to analyze the body of evidence.

*Analysis*

As I approach the topic of analysis, it is worth noting why qualitative research is needed, particularly in aggregate-dominated research such as prison studies. Mills once argued, "If humans are studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that conclusions—although arithmetically precise—may fail to fit reality (1959; as cited by Berg 2009:8). Ethnography can offer substantive nuance that aggregate methods fail to detect (Young 2011; Ferrell and Hamm 1998). It is with this urgency in mind that I approach analyzing this

rich set of data collected. Analyzing the stories of those affected by prison society may indeed help us understand what confinement during an age of extreme mass incarceration is doing to a contemporary society of captives. Collecting a large data set of interviews and analyzing them for themes and commonalities among the inmates offers insight into how lifers come to condition themselves into everyday life in prison, and the path to acceptance or rejection of progress/change toward either living out their lives, or reentering larger society. In other words, how long-term inmates choose to understand doing time will offer insight in assessing what could work toward better programming for inmates and eventual successful reentry. To reiterate David Stark's notion of sociology is the study of being human, this analysis intends on understanding, more fully, the human cost of incarceration.

While the lack of ethnographic prison work has been noted, many articles over the last few years have addressed what ethnography has to offer contemporary prison conditions and effects (Drake and Earle 2013; Earle 2013; Jewkes 2013; Liebling 1999). Prison ethnography offers the ability to record, assess, and suggest further work toward more generalizable findings. This goal will be accomplished from within the environment that shapes interactions between inmates, staff, and, in this case, researchers. This work will contribute to an area long overdue for field observation and a verstehen-led questioning of what its like to serve life in prison.

The initial formulation of this research began in the literature and is theoretically driven (deductive); the analysis will shift toward emerging themes (inductive). In other words, "Experience, thus, underpins both inductive and deductive reasoning" (Berg 2009: 356; Corbin & Strauss 1990). While some critiques could be levied toward a more pure inductive process, this research is rooted in the existing literature and evolved as the research proceeded.

Open coding, as defined by Berg (2009), "is to open inquiry widely" (p. 353). The analyzed interviews were first open coded, beginning with nine preselected categories of themes from the interview schedule. Through open coding, the interviews yielded 1749 coded quotes and comments, initially into nine (conceptual map-driven) categories, which inductively grew into 52 concepts (See Appendix G). Verification consists of identifying themes, statements and/or positions about describing prison and personal experiences/growth internally from within the data. These categories will then be reapplied to the data set for frequency, intensity, emotionality and consistency. An analytically inductive approach remains sensitive to unknown issues that emerge throughout the interviews. Identifying themes lends particular usefulness for suggested future research as well as the formation of substantive theory. Assessments are reported in Chapter Four and revisited briefly in Chapter Five in order to offer summaries, implications, and suggestions for further research.

## Closing Comments

Mass incarceration affects the entire nation. While the cost of prison can be discussed in terms of economics—clearly breaking almost every state in the nation and costing an estimated $80 billion yearly (The Sentencing Project 2012)—this research concerns itself with the human consequences of a nation binging on incarceration. In a country where one in 36 or 2,780 per 100,000 of U.S. adults are under some form of state supervision, lifers seems like a logical place to understand, on an individual level, how incarceration is affecting society's citizens at the most personal level (BJS 2015). This focus on the human consequence of mass incarceration is an action called for by two of the largest mass-incarceration research projects at the date of this writing (Travis & Western 2015; Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen 1999).

*Dirty pants* sociology, as mentioned previously, refers to the notion of getting out in the field and implementing social-ecological perspectives widely developed in the 1920s and 1930s as part of the Chicago school of thought. Ethnography places the researcher in the midst of what is being studied, answering a consistent call to action for prison research (Drake and Earle 2013; Liebling and Maruna 2005; Wacquant 2002), and especially for that concerning lifers (Kazemian and Travis 2015).

This study is designed to understand the conditions surrounding moments of profound change within the conditions of prison. In order to analyze the 54 interviews of lifers, I employed an inductive analytical approach. Inductive analytics offers a discovery method toward voicing and learning from those subjected to the pains of imprisonment. Moving past the obvious posterity of recording voices during the height of mass incarceration, understanding how people maintain hope requires a deep understanding of the challenges lifers face, both during incarceration and concerning the potential of reentry. While essential gender differences may be beyond the scope of this work, I hope to examine identity transitions in both male and female inmates. In turn, perhaps this knowledge will contribute toward better understanding the challenges of building and evaluating programs for long-term prisoners.

# Chapter 4 - Analysis: The Long and Short of a Life Sentence

*On this old rock pile with a ball and chain,*
*They call me by a number, not a name, Lord, Lord*
*Gotta do my time, gotta do my time*
*With an aching heart and a worried mind*

—Jimmy Skinner, "Doing My Time"

State-issued soap emits a particular smell. The faint scent is not really unpleasant, yet it evokes an unsettling olfactory response, a kind of sensory marker, an omnipresent reminder that you are in an institution of confinement. It's something that you notice, not initially, but eventually; everyone smells the same in prison.

After spending more than 300 hours inside prisons, taking notes, talking to inmates, essentially about institution survival concerning who they are or were or hope to be, details accentuate much that we take for granted. Yet, it was my single night in solitary confinement that brought the soap awareness to sharp relief. As I was handed my state-issued packet of toiletries, the soap stood alone; I suddenly recognized it, almost as an old but not entirely welcome friend. Perhaps it is because when everyone smells the same, we inherently recognize the lack of choice, which, under western individualism, is the greatest cage. The inability for individuals to express themselves by differentiating his or her own person from everyone else— such is the compromise and forced anonymity of being a prisoner, a number, a non-name. Identity complicates everything.

The extraordinary experience of solitary confinement brought to me a particular sensitivity that I hope enhances the analysis presented in this chapter—an acute delicacy, if you will, of the brutal and the mundane existence inside prison walls. Just as with these descriptors,

prison is replete with contradictions.  Yet, as a social scientist, I strive to use this newly-developed consciousness—a criminological verstehen—to interpret findings presented in this chapter with scientific rigor and responsibility.  Chapter Five, will revisit and expand on these insights, hopefully carrying out my mission to grasp understanding about identity making (and re-making) inside prison.

Mass incarceration has become a direct part of at least 2.2 million American stories. Thus far I have integrated various theoretical threads related to rites of passage, reviewed a body of literature combining prison sociology and identity, and developed a methodological approach with a specific orientation toward verstehen or empathic understanding. This research considers a long prison sentence as a rite of passage—encompassing segregation, liminality, and reaggregation—and thus the inmate as a liminar, or the person experiencing transition.  This chapter analyzes interviews of inmates from inside three prisons; I specifically consider evidence of suspended liminality, a concept unique to this research, which represents a "holding on" to a pre-prison identity. Alternatively, prison may demand an entirely different identity in the inmate through submersion into a unique communitas or subculture (Turner 1969; Sykes 1958).  This distinction is critical.  If the prisoner retains the pre-prison identity, security and program design becomes more challenging (both for the inmate and the prison) but also may hold the greatest potential for successful reentry (when possible) into larger society because the person remains multi-faceted and "whole."  On the other hand, if the inmate is totally immersed within a prison culture, then security is more convenient and the appearance of rehabilitation more apparent, but the institutionalized self is left consummately unprepared for a life outside prison walls.

Though the same basic premise of prison as a rite of passage may apply for short-term inmates, this exploration into accounts from long-term prisoners offers the rare opportunity to

observe the impact of time and timing on the progression of identity development. That is, this research benefits from collecting both current and retrospective accounts of long-term prisoners who have been incarcerated between one and twenty plus years. I specifically attend to the effect of time, exploring potential for optimal intervention and possible "door" time. However, as intimated in the Jimmy Skinner quote at the beginning of this chapter, this research seeks foremost to understand the conditions surrounding moments of profound change in long-term inmates while doing their time.

This chapter is organized as follows: First, the *Sample Descriptives* section describes the sample, simply to set a backdrop regarding the sample used in this analysis. Second, the *Five Words* section provides the reader with a sense of the emotional ambiance of prison life, as experienced by long-term prisoners. Next, the *Weight of the Gavel* section addresses the research question, "Do long-term prisoners experience a liminal threshold, or critical identity transition, point at the time of sentencing?" I give specific attendance to the moment of sentencing and "mortification of self," especially with regard to the idea of what others have termed "social death." Following that, *Transitions of Self and Time,* addresses possible shifts from Self 1 to Self 2, with particular focus on time frames regarding years served, as posed by research question two. Next*, Prisonization or Suspended Liminality?* represents the final analysis section, examining data for indications of prisonization and/or, alternatively, suspended liminality (or an identity limbo); this section responds to research questions three and four. Finally, *Summary of Findings and Discussion* recaps major findings, underscores unexpected results, and advances significant implications.

*Sample Descriptives*

A few comments are noteworthy in terms of overall descriptive categories, including gender and racial characteristics. First, as established in Chapter Three, the sampling technique was purposive at the criteria level, with convenience sampling at the facility level. While all participants in the current sample are lifers, we fortuitously achieved a spread in terms of time spent, forming a foundation for analyzing the effect of time and timing on identity transition. The original list of interviews was trimmed to include only participants serving twenty or more year sentences (See Appendix F). With reference to gender, this analysis includes participants from the female facility; women constitute about 27% of the sample. Additionally, Table 4.1 exhibits racial composition, with about 70% of the sample reporting as white. The state does not report ethnicity; however, using surnames as a (rough) proxy, we estimate that approximately five respondents are Hispanic.

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Participants**

|  | n(mean) | %(s.d) |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** (Range 31-74) | 46.95 | 9.15 |
| **Sex** | | |
| Female | 15 | 27.3 |
| Male | 39 | 70.9 |
| **Race*** | | |
| White | 38 | 69.1 |
| Black | 15 | 27.3 |
| Native American | 2 | 3.6 |
| **Most Serious Offense**** | | |
| Murder I | 22 | 40.0 |
| Rape | 14 | 25.5 |
| Indecent Liberty | 11 | 20.0 |
| Murder II | 3 | 5.5 |
| Robbery | 2 | 3.6 |
| Attempted Murder | 1 | 1.8 |
| Conspiracy to Murder I | 1 | 1.8 |
| Manslaughter | 1 | 1.8 |
| Torture | 1 | 1.8 |
| Sexual Exploitation | 1 | 1.8 |
| **Time Served in Days** (Range 102-9489) | 3375.95 | 3010.73 |

\* Hispanic is measured as an ethnicity according to KDOC. Ethnicity was not made available via offender profiles; Hispanics are listed as white. To preserve a sense of ethnic identification, we indicate where Hispanic surnames are used.
\*\* Percentages were calculated against total number of offenders, not offenses.

This study does not claim to be representative of Kansas prisons or prisons in general, and it is important to note where important departures in categories exist. Most glaringly, nationally, women constitute only 7% of the prison population (and about the same for Kansas), but 27% of our sample. While I do not fully analyze gender or differentiate by sex in this analysis, I do acknowledge the over-sampling of women inmates. I specifically note gender and race of the respondent, as well as time served at the time of interview.

Despite not meeting criteria for representativeness, the sample very roughly resembles the overall ethnic composition of Kansas Department of Corrections with a few important caveats. For comparison, nationally, white citizens comprise 77.4% of the population, yet only 32% of the U.S. prison population. In Kansas (2010) whites made up 78% of the total population and are under-represented in the state prison population at 52%. Our sample over-represents whites at 69%. Nationally, Hispanics comprise 17.4% of the population, while they comprise 22% of the U.S. prison population. In Kansas, Hispanics comprise 11% of the state and, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010), 15% of the prison population. African Americans comprise 13.2% of the U.S., yet comprise 37% of the national prison population. In Kansas, Black inmates are even more over-represented; they make up only 6% of the state population, but comprise 31% of the prison population. In this sample, African Americans comprised of 27.8% of our sample. Native Americans comprise less than 1% of Kansas' population, yet make up approximately 2% of the prison population; our sample includes interviews with two people who identified as Native American.

This analysis focuses first and foremost on identity transition, all within a sample of lifers (those serving twenty-year-plus sentences). Following is a breakdown of categories reflecting time served at point of interview, which will serve as points of analysis when observing the

impact of time on identity transitions.  Note that the 5-10 year category of time served is particularly sparse; this observation will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

**Figure 4.1 Participants Time Served**
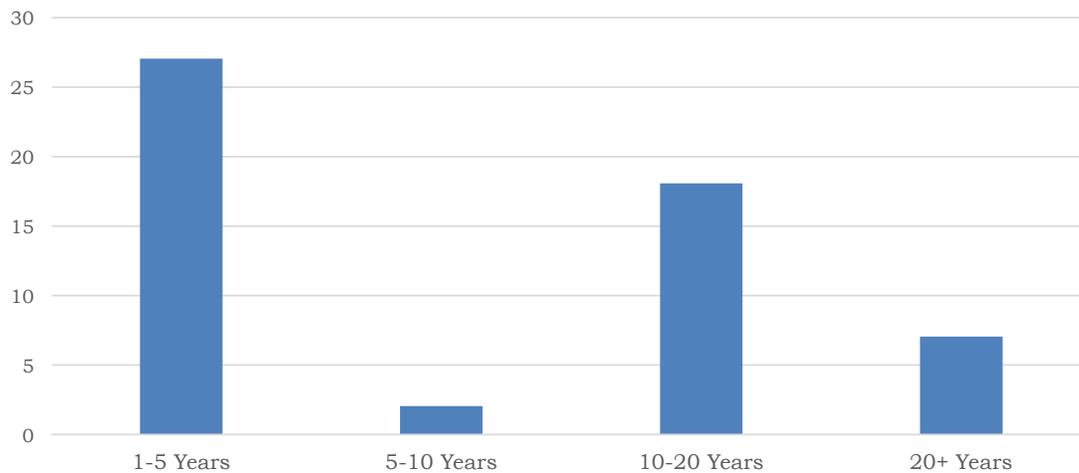


### *Five Words and a Sense of Prison*

We asked all participants to describe prison in five words.  This exercise was instructive on a couple of levels.  First, this device was a good icebreaker toward the beginning of each interview and seemed to engage participants in thinking about their own perspective.  Second, the seemingly innocuous question immediately yielded a list of emotions from long-term inmates, something difficult to do in a limited interview.  Added, this device provided us almost instant access to these experts of contemporary retribution, optimizing the chance for rapport.  Below, the frequency table of the five words used to describe prison by lifers, illustrates that in a place like prison, justice has real, material sensory components.  See Appendix H for a word cloud graphic of the most frequently used words.

**Table 4.2 Word Frequency Describing Prison**

| Word | Length | Count | Weight % |
|------|--------|-------|----------|
| Boring | 6 | 8 | 4.52% |
| Lonely | 6 | 8 | 4.52% |
| Isolated | 8 | 7 | 3.11% |
| Monotonous | 10 | 5 | 2.82% |
| Different | 9 | 4 | 2.26% |
| Sad | 3 | 4 | 2.26% |
| Stressful | 9 | 4 | 2.26% |
| Chaotic | 7 | 3 | 1.69% |
| Emotional | 9 | 3 | 1.69% |
| Fear | 4 | 3 | 1.69% |

The notion that struck me while compiling this list of words was that they are all emotional responses. These are words of those who have lost family, became isolated due to their own actions, and, in addition to doing their time, were required to manage humiliations, crises of self, and confusion that comes along with the deprivation of civil liberties and a sense of privacy over one's own person. The words seem to emit pent-up sensations, often coming from the people you miss and the regrets that you harbor. Doing time seems to be about managing those emotions throughout the loss of relationships and social bonds; these observations served as guideposts while going through transcripts of more than 60 hours of interviews.

Long after the initial interviews, and through a series of fortuitous opportunities, I became a "guest" in solitary confinement in the supermax unit of one of the facilities. As I spent the night in "the hole," I remember thinking to myself, what five words would I call upon to describe this solitary cell. Directly from my field notes, I described prison as follows:

> *My five words to describe prison would be different than someone who, as*
> *one interviewee stated, "had gotten a feel for prison." But I would say*
> *for my first night "down:"*

*Loud (even though I am in the so-called quiet cell house)*

I'll never forget reverberations that sound like total chaos, at least until your ears became attuned to the direction of different sounds. There always seemed to be a spectrum of sounds, from someone screaming, either in anger or jest, someone "poking the bear" (rousting staff), or somebody else acting as jail-house psychiatrist—just talking to another guy who wasn't doing well with the situation.

*Regimented (wrought with scheduled rituals)*

Operations in the cell house were in some regards like clockwork. Between moving inmates to showers, serving food, taking count, changing shifts, and night-time turns in the "dog-runs" for one hour of exercise—everything had a turn.

*Efficient (Very Spartan or monastic in nature)*

Even after many previous hours in the prison setting as an interviewer, I was astounded at the extreme control of movement; everything seemed bare, institutional, and viscous.

> *Lonely (Again I was only here for one night—but could taste the desperation for meaningful companionship and conversation.)*

> *Solitude (While I was in segregation, I concluded that the space in a person's own head would be the real challenge, for better or worse.)*

The reflection of loneliness may seem somewhat contradictory as I also describe constant noise and chaos, but I'm referring to reciprocating conversation—not conversation that feels like the other person is fishing, but the kind of meaningful interaction that leaves you with thoughts, contemplation, and growth rather than survival or genuflection. These empty spaces are reflected in the bleakness of institutional décor.

I offer these details to further understanding of a contemporary prison, to attempt to fathom the subject-position of participants within what Sykes called a society of captives. Even so, my description of prison is bereft of the losses and isolation of long-term prisoners. Revisiting my field notes reminded me of visiting a new city as a tourist. I find myself standing there, looking up in awe of the physical surroundings, presuming to understand. However, residents culturally map the terrain differently. In this case, inmates must navigate the emotional geographies of confinement; yet as a novice visitor/tourist, the physical hulking presence of the facility is what continued to overwhelm me. Still, as I toured through a flood of different sensations during my night in solitary, I felt a degree of camaraderie with the faceless men around me. My notes largely describe the conditions of confinement, but again, my observations were without dissolution of an entire social network and, inversely, the internal direction of what made me…well, me. In other words, I acknowledge that spending a single night does not simulate the dissolution of self that participants describe upon receiving a life sentence. My very identity as a human being was not cast into the purgatory that people describe upon receiving a life sentence. I now turn to that accounting.

## Weight of the Gavel

This section addresses research question one: Do long-term prisoners experience a liminal threshold, or critical identity transition point, at the time of sentencing? We asked inmates to recall their thoughts and feelings when they were sentenced to life. This interview question guides the analysis to explore emerging themes as these participants described the gravitas of hearing the judge hand down a life sentence. Other researchers have flagged this moment as exceptional; for example, Jewkes (2005) argues that this moment is like being diagnosed with a terminal illness. However, previous research has failed to include a significant

number of first-hand accounts as directly expressed by long-term inmates, and none has analyzed

them in terms of a threshold moment of potential identity transformation.  As Garfinkel (1956)

describes successful ceremonies of degradation and Goffman (1961) considers mortification

rituals of total institution, the weight of the gavel signifies the case closed, the ceremony

concluded, and the process of dissolving self as well underway.  Throughout, I contend that the

gavel moment marks a rite of passage, one relatively new, in terms of breadth and scope, to this

culture of mass incarceration, wherein the liminar is ceremoniously transposed into a felon.

### *The Moment of Sentencing*

It is relatively easy to imagine the devastation of being handed a life sentence.  These

respondents commonly described the event as hard, horrible, and fully desolate.  Laura, a 46-

year-old white woman (13.2 years down) recalls the moment of being handed a life sentence:

> Well, that first moment, it's like, "Just kill me."  When you look at your
> family and you realize it's over, you know, it is done and you're like,
> "How did this happen?" You're just like, you know, "How did this
> happen?"  You know, you're so shocked, it's such a shock, and it never
> goes away, and it's total devastation.

Some also cited numbness and shock—like time stopped.   Carl, a 45-year-old white male

(3.8 years down), remembered when he was handed down a sentence of 576 months (which

amounts to 48 years):

> I didn't know what it was but I knew it was longer than I thought I was
> gonna get.  So, numbness.  Yeah, I felt almost a little outside of myself.
> It's almost like it's not real.

Sara, a 33-year-old white female, also shares that gavel-driven epiphany:

> It was like being kicked in the gut.  I was really young when I got
> sentenced.  I was only 17.  So, it was almost surreal.  Like, you're almost
> detached, and you're looking at yourself go[ing] through this and almost

shut down.  Boom! And then, eventually reality kicks in and, whoa, it's
like the air gets knocked out of you.

The devastation, numbness, and surreal notion highlight this vortex of confusion.

What we know less about is one's sense of self, ways in which the newly baptized felon

views the past self.  Most of our respondents expressed a sense that everything close to them

came to an end.  According to Goffman (1961), a fully successful ceremony of degradation

(Garfinkel 1956) not only stigmatizes the liminar, but also marks passage beyond a previous self.

Lindsey, a 51-year-old white male (down 20.9 years) takes us back to his own time of

sentencing:

> Hard 40, hard 50, or people that's got boxcar sentences—that it actually
> registers at that point in time until you're actually away from the court,
> you go back to your holdin' cell where you was, and you sit there and
> think about what was just said.  And then, you know, reality does kind of
> take hold of ya and just…just 45 years, here I am 23, I'm gonna be 67
> years old when I see my board.  I just threw my life away.  **My life's
> done**.  It's done.  It's gone.

Of the 44 participants that answered the question about the moment of sentencing, all

paused to collect themselves and revisit that point in time, some outwardly emotional, others

more stoic.  But all agreed that at some point they realized that moment of sentencing as a clearly

monumental transition in their lives.  However, the realization was not always as straightforward

as Lindsey expressed above.  Several remembered confusion at the moment of sentencing,

primarily because sentences are handed out in months, an unfamiliar way to think about years,

particularly for young people who had lived fewer years than the sentence being awarded.

Anglin, a 53 year-old Black male (down 25.9 years) explains:

> You know, I didn't know whether, with the 25-life, it was, to me, not
> really knowin' the system, was I ever gonna be able to make parole?
> When the man told me, "I could give you three-and-a-half life sentences,"
> that would have been 75 years—it was scary, man.  That means that at 26,

you really don't know what three-and-a-half life sentences are. I really didn't start calculatin' numbers until I got to 25-to-life, and when the man said when my parole eligibility date was 17 years from the day that I got sentenced on the 25, God knows what it would have been if I had 75, you know? That's the only time the numbers really started payin' attention, but I know that three-and-a-half life sentences—that means I'm not goin' home forever maybe. It's scary.

Confusion seemed more common to those who were young at the time of sentencing, and the tendency crossed gender lines. Paula, a 31-year-old Black female (down for 12 years) recalled her sentencing day:

I remember it right when I went through my sentencing, they give our sentences in months. So, they tell you like, I have like 200-and-some-odd months, was my sentence. And, my lawyer's sittin' down there and she writes 200-and-somethin' and she divides that to figure out how many years and when she comes up with 23 years, I looked back at my cousins and I said, 'That's 23 years.' All this time, my life is basically gone.

A striking pattern marks strong support for the liminal flash of identity conversion: At the moment of sentencing everything familiar becomes past tense. In other words, who you were dissolves with the collapse of social networks and becomes part of the past. The newly formed present self is cloaked in an overwhelmingly negative stigma, handed down through the weight of the gavel.

### Social Bonds

After being down for some time, the narrative seems to have shifted perspective from shock-and-awe and total devastation to one of a more gradual awareness of implications of life post sentencing. The shift most typically turned to those on the other side of the sentence—family and friends. In one capacity or another, all of the interviewees spoke of family as a significant part of the transition into prison.

Whether being handed a life sentence occurs in youth or middle age, the transition to becoming a felon—and the weight of a past-tense life—brings change, though at different paces. A strong constant, however, is the realization that a) social bonds through family and community matter; and b) the future of those bonds is tenuous at best. Mose, a 42-year-old white male (19 years down) shared his experience about social connections, observing:

> I mean, you've got to have family ties and, I mean, that's the way we're conditioned. I mean, you have to have 'em. So, you develop 'em or you know, whatever [others may develop them for you]. **You'd sink way too far into this without'em [family]**. I couldn't even imagine that…probably been on death row by now, I'd hope. If you don't have your family to wait on you out there somewhere, then yah, I'd rather be dead. **A lot of those guys, their families abandon them early on, well, and I mean, that's the difference.** I mean, a lot of guys, they're, I mean still runnin' around just 'cause their family still comes up and visits 'em.

Here, Mose underscores the importance of family, suggesting that the definition of "family" may change from one inmate to another. Not only are those connections key to individual well being, but to collective interactions and the culture within the prison setting. Mose goes on to explain:

> You can tell by the way they talk and the way they socially interact in here. **Even family, it keeps you socially active in here, also**. I mean, just, going to yard, walkin' around, interactin' with people, 'cause you'll see some guys that, well, there's guys in here that you never see on yard. Ever. And, you also never ever see'em on [receiving] visits. You never see'em on the phones. I mean, they just sit and rot in their cells. And I think family has a lot to do with that. I don't think their families are there and they haven't put forth the effort to either create new family, or make friends, or stay in touch either. They got too depressed and sank into it. Everybody just forgot'em. **They're the forgotten ones**.

With some interviews, the reference to family was less sentimental, yet still significant in complex ways. As one example, Tom, a 41-year-old Hispanic male (7.9 years down), claimed to have kept silent to protect his family. Tom explains:

> I [felt] sadness for my parents 'cause they raised me the best they could, you know? Like on my case, they told me if I would have told, I'd only

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get five years. But I didn't tell. So, they gave me all this time. And, **my mom kept tellin' me, 'I wish you would tell.'** But, I couldn't 'cause it was my family that was involoved in it. I couldn't do that to my family. So they gave me all this time. It was sadness for them. It was sadness that I couldn't tell them the truth about why I took, why I took this for them, you know? But…and I see 'em every visit that they, how they look, getting' older and older as the years go by and it brings sadness to my heart.

As Tom demonstrates, it is complicated. Although pre-prison bonds certainly do not remain the same, they continue to be important, whether through prison visits (or not), unspoken family secrets (Tom), or, as Mose describes, becoming one of "the forgotten." As we observed earlier, the moment of sentencing is consistently described as the end of everything participants knew, and how they knew themselves. In this context, it seems ironic to hear a lifer describing "the forgotten" as separate from his own understanding. However, Mose stands as a strong reminder that not every inmate embodies the same experience. Just as Irwin (1970) described the collapse of self-boundaries, I found many references to that very feeling of a sort of "vertigo" under the weight of the gavel.

## *Social Death*

Social death was first described by Goffman (1961) as interaction between the individual and the institution, as a characteristic that excludes prisoners from social capital, social redistribution, and political participation (Wacquant 2002). Jewkes (2005) extends the concept of social death to the micro level as "a kind of bereavement for oneself; the loss involving lost worlds, lost futures and lost identities" (p. 370). A question that remains in this research is whether or not long-term inmates experience an unabridged "social death" at the time of sentencing (or thereafter), and, if so, how that identity is managed.

Certainly, as we have seen, the weight of a life sentence can be personally devastating and affects whatever threads remain in the liminar's world, both inside and outside of prison. As one example of such ravages, Bill, a 44-year-old white male (nine months down) describes the depths of his despair:

> Well, **I tried to commit suicide**. Yep. I tied a—what do you call it? A, my pillowcase, super tight around my neck. I go, 'If this is gonna be the rest of my life, I don't want to live.' I couldn't understand, I couldn't register. I was like, 'How could they…?' That quick, you know, no evidence, no nothing, and a person just get the rest of their life taken away from 'em? I don't want to live.' I tied a pillowcase super tight around my neck and I double knotted it. To make sure that I, if I got to that point, I didn't want to be able to undo it. I wanted to follow through. And, I passed out, hit the floor, concrete, it's a miracle I didn't bust my teeth out or anything like that and…I woke up and the knots were out of it, you know?

Another participant had repeated thoughts of suicide but described pushing on toward surviving the transition. Mose, who was quoted earlier and sentenced 48 years for Murder I, remembers:

> What was it like? It was almost suicidal. I mean, I mean, that's it. When I first came down, I used to schedule a time to do it every day. And then I would just force myself to push back the time or the date until the next day. And then force myself to push it back the next day until after a while, you got to where you're pushin' it back a week, or a month, or finally, you know, becoming resolved to it.

Nineteen years down, Mose still vividly recounts the desolation and suffers from what could perhaps be termed as post-traumatic stress. At the least, all involved carry an unforgettable series of disrupted life course events, some of which bear a very low likelihood of retrieval. In terms of a macro perspective, social death is an appropriate descriptor; certainly, the introduction into life as a felon (and especially for long-termers) terminates much of what constituted life. However, I will argue later that the term is misleading in both depth and scope when considering the ebb and

flow of identity construction and reconstruction.  That will become more apparent as the analysis

continues.

On an individual level, the mental state of new inmates is all too familiar within facilities.

One use of segregation is not just for solitary-as-punishment, but as crisis watch, wherein an

inmate is under constant supervision after threatening or attempting to hurt themselves.  Booker

is a 35-year-old Black male (11.7 years down) and remembers:

> **When they handed me the life sentence, they had to put me in a
> padded room**.  I wasn't prepared.  I thought there was always that chance,
> but that ain't the way it worked and then when you realized your life is the
> state's now, basically I just gave up.  I think it's real close to it because we
> know we're gonna die in here, so we know that's on our shoulders; they
> took our life.

Mark, a 74-year-old Black male (23.7 years down), summarizes his recollection as,

"Well, it felt like a death sentence, you know?  Felt like I was gonna die in here."  For Mark

Saint, yes, it's likely that a hard fifty-year sentence will outlast him.  None of these stories,

though, quite capture the transitional self like that of Benita.  Benita, a 45 year-old white woman

(24.7 years down), started this segment of the interview much like many before her, emphasizing

how she felt when the judge bestowed a life sentence:

> I was extremely young and so I just assumed that life was over for me.
> That was it for me.  That my entire life would be spent in prison, and that I
> really felt like I needed to shut everything down other than focused
> directly on prison.  **It was really devastating, and overwhelming**, and
> you now, you didn't have time to grieve or think of any kind of, you
> know, person or place or, other than prison.  Nothin'.  Nothin' but prison
> was on my mind.

But then, with perfect clarity, Benita chronicles the moment of passage:

> I felt like my life had died and **I was reborn as a prisoner** and that's who
> I was, and I identified myself like that.  Yeah, every part of my life died at
> that time.  Everything.  I mean, even my children.  I like went away.

Benita describes the utter dissolution of social bonds, but also suggests a breathtaking, gut-wrenching alteration in her self, her very being and identity. I am not suggesting that Benita's entire past or family or previous self vanished, to never again exist. Nor do I suggest "rebirth" as some kind of growth. I will revisit these ideas in a discussion about suspension. But for now, Benita's sage insight marks direct evidence that many other respondents in this study suggest—a dramatic shift in identity.

Unpacking the moment of sentencing is complex. It should be stated again that no two people experience the moment in the exact same way. However, there are commonalities. A sense of powerlessness is consistent within all accounts. Further, a cycle seems evident. There is a time of shock, disbelief, and devastation, and sometimes confusion, followed by more waves of powerlessness, loss, and anger. Then, at some point in the weeks or months or years that follow, I also found narratives of hope invested in appeals, discovered errors, overturned verdicts, laws changed. These testimonies often seem to depend on social bonds and family support. In fact, one participant, rather colorfully, lays out the emotional response and then a developing pattern that he continually sees around him. Nick, a 59-year-old white male (down 20.7 years) begins by describing immediate reactions:

> Oh, well, **you're pissed off**. I was pissed off. I mean, fuck, fuck you
> son's-of-bitches. You goddamn dirty bastards. I mean, I'm a cussin'
> Christian. You know, piss on you, you know, you sons-of-bitches.
> **You're in denial**.

Nick follows by describing some of the confusion and then the sudden (or gradual) realization of life in prison and all it carries with it:

> But, you have no concept. You haven't been in prison. You have no
> concept of prison and length of time. Now, they come to me with 25-to-
> 50 as a plea agreement. Twenty, shit, it's all over, you know, I'm comin'
> in at 35 [years old]. Well, son-of-a-bitch, that puts you at 60, you know?

> They said, "Well, you know, if you take this to trial, we're gonna bury ya.'
> Well we go to trial and they bury me.  But, you know, give me that
> sentence, and so 180-to-life, 15-to-life stacked 12 times, everything's
> always stacked, the state stacked 12 times.

As Nick continues, we see that on the one hand, reality sets in; but on the other, resistance, sometimes even defiance emerges; and hope—however far-fetched— appears:

> And so, yeah.  Everything is just, hey, have one of them and go square to
> hell, you know?  **And so you fight them**.  I'm gonna get out.

This section began by describing the moment of sentencing, when everything familiar becomes past tense.  People express a critical transition, a disrupted life course, and certainly a liminal moment upon receiving a life sentence in prison.  However, the concept of social death is inadequate to capture the ongoing struggle for connection and revisioning of life and self.  The next section addresses the question of who the inmates were, in their words, before prison, who they have become, and how they describe that transition.  Time—both damning and omnipresent in prison—emerges as a critical part of this analysis.

## *Transitions of Self and Time*

Research question two forms the heart of this dissertation.  Do long-term prisoners transition from a pre-prison identity (Self 1) to an alternative identity (Self 2) after sentencing? If so, what time frame for the transition is most evident?  This section examines accounts from lifers, searching for qualitative descriptions of Self 1 and Self 2, and undertakes analytically to decipher patterns of transition in terms of time served.

### *Self 1—Pre-prison Identity*

Indicators of Self 1, as pre-prison identity, is primarily derived from the question, "How would you describe yourself before prison?"  The following narratives are presented to establish

common recollections of Self 1 among participants and to elicit responses that will be explored after this section in order to establish common themes of transitions.  The final portion of this section will suggest a time frame of transition.

The themes captured have been analyzed through categories of time served in order to identify a shift in narrative between categories (Figure 4.1).  Each following section captures data from the first time category to the fourth on the current sentence, from the time of entering KDOC to the date that interviews were conducted.  Understanding *who* someone was before prison is challenging, but I wanted to create a base-line for *how* people recollect themselves prior to incarceration and how that changed over time.

A notable trend emerged after analyzing the responses of describing *who* they were before coming to prison.  Approximately one-half of the respondents in the first category (0-5 years served) expressed being self-serving, wild, unfaithful, and/or materialistic.  For example, John, a 45-year-old white man (2.6 years down) judged, "Oh I just thought I was, like I say, full of pride and self-serving.  I mean, I chased paper, that's pride and self-serving.  I wasn't raised that way, you know, I mean, I'm sure my parents didn't want me to own a strip club."  Others described themselves as narcissistic or even an outright philanderer.  Iron, a 35-year-old white male (1.1 year down), admitted, "Because I was, I don't want to say a womanizer, but I've never been faithful and always cheated.  And my morals, you know, wasn't up to par."  These reflections make up a number of inmates serving the first five years of their sentence.

Others in the 0-5 category expressed that they were good and loving people before coming to prison and often included some mention of their family.  Ebert, a 67-year-old Hispanic man recollects (4.1 years down):

I graduated from (inaudible) High School there in the northeastern part of
New Mexico, came to Wichita, Kansas, and I worked for Boeing Aircraft.

I spent almost 18 years there…and I had a loving mother, she was next to Godliness, bless her heart. I think without her, I wouldn't be who I am. (tearful) The good part of who I am today. But I've been very fortunate, really. I really don't look at being here as a punishment. I actually have been blessed all my life anyway.

Others participants simply described themselves in alignment with Midwestern working-class values. Boyd, a 36-year-old white man (1.4 years down), summarizes himself as, "Honest, hard workin', loyal, provided for my family, just an all around good guy." Boyd also suggested conventional gendered expectations, which he captures with the phrase of "providing for my family."

A few participants described themselves as lost or without a strong sense of self. Sara, whom I've quoted before, is a 33-year-old white woman remembered herself before prison, some 3.8 years prior to the interview:

I didn't have very good self-esteem. I didn't have, it was horrible. **I was like a doormat for everybody**. I let people treat me any kind of way, and talk to me any kind of way. And I just accepted it and thought that's what I deserved. I didn't speak what I thought very often. You know, I was beat down, and abused, and just broken before I came in here. Even more so, I think, than I am now, which is really weird, you know?

While there was some cross-over within this early time frame, the three most prominent narratives in category one (0-5 years), in order of frequency, were self-absorbed, good and loving, and lost.

Unfortunately, our sampling method (which specifically focused on lifers with at least a 20-year sentence) yielded only one interview in the second time-served category (6-10 years). However, through borderline accounts, and even by omission (to be discussed later), I detected significance here. Jenna (41-year-old white female), for example, who represents a borderline case (she was 4.6 years down), recalls, "Before I came to prison, I thought I was a pretty good

daughter, I was a good mom, I was a teacher." This again represents a positive recollection of *who* a person *was* before coming to prison. It is unknown at this point why we have so few respondents in this category; I will revisit this issue and possible implications in Chapter 5.

Interestingly, however, something seems to change in the data for respondents who have been down for more than ten years. At time category three, for those serving 10-20 years behind bars, most respondents reflected on their pre-prison self quite negatively. Fewer people in time categories three and four (10+ years down) remembered themselves as happy or good people at all, and those who relayed any fond memories largely described an egocentric side to themselves, if not outright narcissistic. The categories of these negative pre-prison recollections are organized below as egotistical, lack of discipline, angry, and low self-esteem.

Anglin, a 53-year-old Black male, introduced earlier, describes his younger self as egotistical and/or hedonistic: "I was egotistical. I had ego issues, man. I really, I mean, I got along with people but only certain people." Other participants described their recollection of their previous self as hedonistic. Fred, a 38- year-old Black male (14.6 years down), recalls:

> I was wild. I was wild. I was a fun person to kick it with. I had a temper.
> I could be an asshole. I always kept a job, always been there to help my
> family in any situation there could possibly be, always dependable…I was
> a go-to person. But, **I was just self-destructive. I mean, that's the thing
> I remember more than most.** I mean, I did, I think everything that it was
> conceivable to do to destroy myself other than just, you know, putting a
> gun to my head.

The above examples demonstrate respondents that reflected on themselves negatively for direct, self-accountable ways. What follows are slightly more complex memories of a former self; these inmates recall negativity, but attribute much of it to being younger and ultimately less responsible.

Several of the participants in the 10+ years categories reflected back on their pre-prison self through social conditions such as a broken home, most often leading to the notion that there was a lack of discipline. Steve, a 47-year-old Black male (19.4 years down) recounts:

> Well, I was a young man who, first of all, **I growed up without a father and I think that kind of made me into who I am today**, a young boy growin' up in the streets. [Although] You know, I think, I was a child that never really was in trouble. I have never had a juvenile case. I never really been in trouble at all when I was a young boy, until I got up in age to where I started gettin' in trouble and came to prison.

Being raised on the streets was a prominent narrative, and this theme seemed to predominant among Black males, though a more directed research would be needed to confirm this observation (which is beyond the scope of this dissertation).

A quite prominent theme in these narratives concerned temper and anger, characteristics often associated with violent crime. However, for some participants, anger seemed connected to a larger part of their life, and some even identified it, in hindsight, as a part of who they were; anger was part of their identity. For example, Ben, a 45-year-old Black male (13.4 years down), reported: "I was a taxpayer, voter, working man, I just had no concerns about society and had a pretty short temper." Ben exerted a work-hard, play-hard ethos and juxtaposed why he was successful with what also landed him his case, or in other words led him to prison.

Anger as an identity also accompanied the only transgendered participant in this research. Like Ben above, anger was how this inmate described his former self and why he ended up in prison. Tiger is a 31-year-old Black transgender male (12.1 years down) in the women's correctional facility; he remembers:

> I was a badass. I was a little, I was something' else. I was a little gangster, and I was just…I was, pfft—**I was a little hothead**, and I'm tryin' to think of how the judge described me because, I think that, you know, what little man syndrome is? The Napoleon complex, that's it.

Tiger described himself with a hint of reverence but also as impulsive, with a somewhat dangerous immaturity. There was tremendous remorse that accompanied Tiger's story, but also a deep complexity regarding identity, gender, and anger—connections that deserve full consideration with regard to transgender inmates, but, again, one beyond the scope of this study.

Somewhat related but distinct from overt anger, some inmates remembered their Self 1 (pre-prison persona) as being lost or having low self-esteem. Confidence, as a complex emotional state of being, sits at the axis of the looking glass self, the point where the social, the personal, and an internalized sense of direction resides. Hints of low self-esteem can be detected in narratives of narcissism, hedonism, anger, and listlessness; many of these emotions become directed inward. Low self-esteem is also associated with one's regard for future potential. Stephen, a 44-year-old white male (21.2 years down) explains, "**I was lost** because I really didn't have a path or a direction that I needed to go. I did it, I lived day-for-day. I never thought about, you know, tomorrow or even the future." Being lost, and perhaps possessing a false bravado, Stephen suggests that such characteristics led him into a life sentence; he thought he wouldn't be caught.

Others associated their low self-esteem with being scared, fearful of life itself. Kaley, a 56-year-old white female (18.9 years down) expressed, "I was scared. I was an introvert. **Had no self-esteem**. I questioned everything." Lacking confidence can manifest in hubris, like Stephen, or a paralyzing fear, as in Kaley—a quality more prevalent in female inmates. More specifically, women prisoners often expressed a lack of self-esteem due to violent abuse in their pre-prison life. Louise, a 46-year-old white woman (14.6 years down), painfully recounts:

> Before coming to prison—[I was] very lame. No, I mean, my idea is that **I had no identity** because everything was so much about what my husband wanted, what my kids might want, **everything was about my family, not**

**me**.  So…I don't even know if I would call it selfless because he had me
so much under his thumb and so beatin' down and had me feeling like I
was so worthless that I couldn't make it without him, that, that in my self,
that I really didn't matter.

Though the majority of women did not overtly express low self-esteem as a product of violent

abuse, this kind of sentiment constituted a running theme among several participants in the

female facility.

It is worth noting that not all people incarcerated for a long time reflected negatively on

their pre-prison identity.  For example, Lindsey a 51-year-old white male (20.8 years down)

remembers himself as, "an athletic-type 'cause I played football, I ran cross country and track in

school.  I played tenor sax in our high school band."  However, I found that this was a rather rare

position to take after a person had served more than ten years in prison.  Lindsey's story stands

as a reminder, though, that people come to prison with a variety of histories and respond

differently to the pains of imprisonment.

The primary take-away from analyzing lifers' narrative of their pre-prison self is that a

story shift, within this sample, and seems to occur at some point within the first ten years in

prison.  Those inmates within the first time category (0-5 years) were just as likely to report

positively as negatively on their own Self 1.  However, the trend changed distinctly for those

incarcerated more than ten years; almost all participants in the 10+ categories described their pre-

prison self negatively.  The following section examines the narratives of how inmates described

their Self 2, the self after coming to prison.

### Self 2—Post prison Identity

The carceral geographies of confinement manifest in a cultural immersion so exhaustive

that the future seems to pause for the exigent conditions of prison survival.  Inmates serving the

first five years of a life sentence talk explicitly about adjusting to prison, what was taken for granted "on the street," and how unforgiving the prison community can be. Participants who had served more than ten years were more likely to speak about positive changes that they have undergone—constituting redemption narratives. Though not integral to the intended analysis, several inmates expressed rather obvious gendered attributes as part of their identity. This section is informed primarily from responses to the interview question, "How would you describe yourself now?" Like other sections, these data are organized to explore patterns of transitions over time spent at the point of interview.

There was no shortage of interviews that described the prison experience as exerting a negative influence. Words like "warped," "violent," "extortion," and a general sentiment of keeping to oneself were omnipresent in the interviews. Paul, a 55-year-old white male (2.6 years down) laments, "You become extremely heartless here—extremely heartless. You become a very guarded individual." This kind of reflection rings through many testimonies, particularly in inmates that were within the first five-year category.

Of course, as evidenced previously, exceptions do exist when exploring such complex narratives within humans. One particular old-timer, Lee (a 58-year-old Native American, 24.8 years down), confides:

> **I used to consider myself a good person, a nice person. I'm not a nice person anymore**. I don't know, it depends on your definition of good. My definition of good, my definition of right and wrong is slightly warped because prison retards social growth.

Lee offers an insight that is somewhat rare, especially among those down for more than ten years. In fact, the majority of people that were down for more than ten years described an overall positive change over the years in prison. While they described prison as a challenging environment, they also expressed that over the years they have changed for the better, again the

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redemption narrative. It is initially less obvious about whether they attribute the change to prison rehabilitation or to age and maturity.

As testament to the power of our cultural milieu, positive change in the inmate's reflection of self was often couched in terms of cultural factors, even within the prison milieu. For example, when one has been incarcerated for over ten years, the reality of both formal and informal rules of prison is securely entrenched. One common response in describing a post-prison self includes lessons learned and what was taken for granted outside or before prison. Another distinct pattern was the change linked to aging, growth, and maturity. Dean, a 52-year-old white male (20.2 years down), ponders about the changes in himself: "**I think, becoming older**, I don't know, what probably took somebody at 20 to do, it's takin' me 52 years, I just think differently." Age seems to have a way of maturing people, even in prison.

Another common way for participants to describe the change that they have encountered in themselves is characterized as growth. Tiger, a 31-year-old transgendered Black male, quoted earlier, expressed:

> I think I've changed, I call it growth. **I feel that I've grown**. **I feel that I'm more mature and that I know myself now**. Like for instance, like with my case—I was 18, I put myself in a position and I ended up committing a murder because I didn't know how much I could take. And, I took too much and I blacked out. I snapped. **Yes, I'm different**.

After being incarcerated for some time, learning to navigate prison culture, and dealing with years of initial resistance, inmates tend to see themselves as "growing." Fred, a 44-year-old white male (19.3 years down), suggests that who he is today demonstrates significant personal growth:

> Mainly growth. I took a lot of things for granted and I was careless out there, and now I see that I can no longer be that person, you know? I still feel young at heart, but yet I know I'm older now after [almost] 20 years, and I feel that I have changed and that I feel like I can be a better person, you know, a productive member to society.

Closely related to growth is the expression of hope. Hope stands as a critical concept for many participants, and perhaps is an expected outcome of perceived growth, though it may take different forms. As one example, Andy, a 44-year-old Black male (15.4 years down), professes, "I thought of myself before that I didn't have a lot of options. **I see now that I had many options but I didn't see that then**. So, then I seen myself as still just tryin' to get by the best way that I knew how." It seems that youth can lead us to believe that what we are doing is the best that we can do; with maturity comes growth, hope, and the realization of options.

Others seemed to find prison, in retrospect, as an opportunity. Rhonda, a 43-year-old Black female (21.5 years down) explained: "[I was] a misguided little girl—I believe that's a nice way to put it. Misguided. And, I can't say who I was—I don't really know who I was, you know? When someone says, 'Who were you?' At the time, I believe I was young. So, actually I got to know myself since being here [in prison]." To my surprise, Rhonda alluded to prison as a kind of sanctuary, a place where she was able to get to know herself, safely. While this is a complex finding that needs further research, the idea of prison-as-refuge was more common in the women's interviews.

Closely related, prison often sits on the other side of violence, a pattern that runs strong among women prisoners. Several of the women described surviving abusive situations and living to tell the tale. Lina is a 55-year-old white female (15.4 years down) who now describes herself:

> **I think of myself as a survivor**. Not a victim but a survivor. **I finally found my voice**. Before, when you live in a situation like I lived in, you lose your voice. So, I found that again. There's a lot I would like to do, and I think I do help some of the younger women that are here.

Surviving prison, for many of these inmates, was closely linked to a sense of maturation, personal growth, and the opportunity for positive change.  In this limited study, it is impossible to separate the social experience of prison with so-called "natural" maturation, but perhaps that is so in any situation.  Within the individual, separate from the context of prison, exist personal expectations, though they develop and are expressed not in isolation, but in a community of others.

While gender was not a central focus of this research, ignoring the integral part that gender plays in identity would be irresponsible.  As one might expect, gender expectations played a part in how inmates described themselves, both before and after entering prison.  More salient to this discussion, gender seemed to run in the background of how participants defined a personal sense of worth. For men, being a properly gendered man was often associated with the provider role.  Boyd, a 36-year-old white male (1.5 years down) addresses this in describing how he thinks of himself after prison:

> Worse, you know, **I'm not providin' for my family**.  I'm not takin' care
> of my kids.  I'm not getting' to see my kids go through school and helpin'
> 'em with their school. Basically, I'm not providing for my family and that
> sucks.  **I feel lesser of a man**.

Several male participants expressed their failure as provider as a large part of loss that prison brings.  Gendered identities and expectations form a consistent complaint between men and women.

On the other hand, family offers a master-status beyond stigma, which is also important to inmates.  For example, Rhonda, a 43-year-old Black female (21.5 years down), suggests that her gender expression offers both a positive identity and an extended social network outside of prison:

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I like to say that I've grown into a woman that has morals and values. **I'm a mother, a grandmother.** And, in spite of where I'm at, I would like to believe that I'm good at both of those—mother and grandmother. But, it took a while being here to say that I think I'm a good person. Does that make sense?

For Rhonda, and for other female inmates, the status of mother and grandmother (or even daughter or aunt or sister) represents a master-status more positive and of higher caliber than felon or convict. This was a strong theme throughout the interviews with women inmates.

There is no doubt that time served does age people, and with age comes maturity of some type; however, social bonds shape those narratives. Again, the role of family (or the lack thereof) conditioned the response, regardless of the base, in many testimonies. Anglin, a 53-year-old Black man (26 years down) mentioned earlier, synthesizes over a quarter-century behind bars:

I'm more positive than I ever was, before I was more negative. I think, before, when I was younger, I didn't see anything salvageable, so when I messed up, you know, and continued to mess up just a little bit more. That's not the way I see it anymore, you know what I'm sayin'? **I see myself as a kind, caring, lovin' person, never want to hurt anybody ever again**. I never want to hurt anybody ever again. **You know, I got nine grandkids, man. I never got to raise my kids, dude**.

Prison is an all-encompassing life event. It is clear that the moment of sentencing is a pivotal moment of degradation in social status. This rite of passage represents and signifies the collapse of social networks critical to one's identity. The gavel marks a moment when being human enters the liminal phase of becoming felon; this event is amplified for these participants, who received a life sentence. Prison changes the relationship to everyone around, both pre-prison and upon entry into prison. But it also changes everything through the social exclusion of self— a sort of knifing-off process. Whatever follows seems to be confused and chaotic for at least the first five years of incarceration.

Elucidating the matter of transition and timing, though, becomes tricky. Every person has an individual story about their case/crime, their experiences with the criminal justice system, and being handed a life sentence. Similarly, time frames in some cases of transition were articulated rather clearly, while others were quite murky. Patterns did emerge, however, in the 54 interviews that comprise this analysis and proved to be fairly consistent across the three separate facilities. As demonstrated earlier, the first time category, 0-5 years, encompasses the liminal moment that has drawn a relatively sharp line between Self 1 and Self 2 (which is still in the making); remembrances of Self 1 are viewed more positively during this time frame (though there is great variance); Self 2 tends to vacillate between chaos and hope. The following two accounts support this conclusion:

> Ethan (60-year-old Black male): I was down on myself. I thought everybody else was against me, you know what I mean? They was trying to help me understand. They didn't do it—I did it. Yeah. But, I figure like if I'm layin' up in the cell asleep, they come in and say, 'Okay, shakedown.' I jump up, I'm like, 'Get out, so-and-so. Get out of my room,' and all that. [This angry period lasted] from 2007 all the way up to maybe 2010.

> Jenna (41-year-old white woman, 4.6 years down) expresses a moment of change:

> **I think it would have been towards the end of my year in therapy**, when I just kind of realized, **the light bulb finally went on**, and my mom was happy for that, that I was like, 'you know, I'm never going to be able to please everybody. I need to just be myself and as long as I'm happy with myself, then I'm gonna be happy overall.

Ethan's resistance and anger lasted approximately three years according to his account, and then what he describes as self-accountability set in. While Ethan recalls his bouts with anger, happiness becomes a new key word for Jenna, expressing the moment she decided that she was going to go on and strive toward progress, again, coming between three and four years in prison. This timing seemed somewhat earlier than a lot of participants, who suggested that it

took about five years to realize that "you are going to have to do your own time." Accountability was a large part of the process, though almost all participants used the term *case*, which neutralizes indications of actual guilt when describing their crime.

As noted, the second time category is lacking in depth. Though I cannot properly analyze this category, a few observations are noteworthy. Tom, a 41-year-old Hispanic male, quoted earlier, answers how he feels after being locked-up for 7.9 years:

Yeah, bitter.

EG: Bitter?

Tom: Bitter towards the system, towards everything.

Jesse Harbinger (32-year-old white female, down 6 years), was initially excluded from the current sample because her sentence (for Murder II) was 16 years instead of the 20-year mark criteria. However, for point of reference in this category, I briefly revisited her interview. When I asked her, "Do you ever feel forgotten?" she replied:

> Your friends start to drop off. When I first got locked up, I had a lot of
> mail and a lot of friends that would write me and things. And, it's slipped.
> And, as their life goes on, it's easier for them to detach and you just
> become this person looking at other people's lives just like you're
> watchin' over it, and seeing people live their lives while you just sit here
> and look (inaudible) in a way, you know?

Again, though these observations cannot be marked as definitive due to lack of respondents in this category, it appears that category two (6-10 years down) captures a critical tipping point in social networks and identity transition. The hope of appeals is gone. Initial family support, if it ever existed, is dwindling. It is also within this time frame that people lose loved ones and cannot mourn with their families; they cannot grieve in prison without being considered a "soft" target. Friends disappear over the initial few years in prison. Yet, the inmate may not be fully ensconced into the prisonization process.

Past the 20-year mark, I rely here on Lindsey, a 51 year-old white male (20.8 years down), whom I quoted previously, to help reflect on the long process of change:

> I, for the most part, being in here, transition[ed] from street life into here, **for the first five years, it was kind of hard because I still had the street mentality**, if you will. And, I wasn't ready to accept the fact that this is gonna be where you 're gonna live. You're gonna have to deal with people. And, for a while, that was kind of rough because when I, I'm not gonna sit here and tell you that, yeah, I was a grade-A-person because I wasn't. Because when I came in here, I had an attitude. If someone said something' the wrong way, I was ready to double up and take off on him.

This "street mentality" covers a lot during the experience of the first five years. This was the most common time frame for people serving life to adjust to prison, which will be addressed further in the next research question, and begin to come to grips with the devastation (often referred to as social death) experienced at the moment of sentencing. Even though we have sparse numbers in category two, evidence in this study shows that a critical time frame for transition between Self 1 (pre-prison identity) and Self 2 (post-prison identity) occurs between five and ten years after the point of incarceration. However, great fluctuation, cycling, and identity dissonance occurs throughout the first several years of prison. While I have acknowledged some usefulness in the concept of social death, particularly in describing the segregation of the prisoner from an unforgiving society, what I have witnessed here in terms of identity transformation is more accurately captured in what I refer to as social purgatory—a period of chaos and confusion in which the self is in turmoil and engaged in a battle to find meaning and purpose.

## *Communitas*

Research question 3 addresses the enculturation or assimilation process of prison. Do long-term prisoners experience communitas into the prison milieu? If so, what evidence of prisonization (conforming to prison norms and values) is found?

Communitas represents a sense of belonging, one that emerges from the acceptance into a neighborhood, religion, group, or extended family that alternates or sits aside from so-called "normal" society; in this case, I apply the term to prison society. Upon receiving a life sentence, the liminar experiences, as already established, a social death or the collapse of the self and social network that defines one's identity. However, a period of transition then occurs—now identified as a social purgatory—in which the liminar struggles to develop the new identity. In the contemporary prison setting, s/he finds few tools to foster this in a productive and healthy way (and most do not come into prison well equipped to deal with such pandemonium of self). After an initial period of identity limbo, and some extended time of social purgatory, for better or worse, the liminar appears to settle into prison life. In order to answer research question three, this section will follow time categories chronologically.

Extortion as cultural currency seems like the first lesson learned upon entering a correctional facility—particularly those with sex crimes. Everyone has some kind of a hustle. One's job detail is often the ticket to something that someone else needs. Bill, a 44-year-old white male (almost eight months down) describes what he has learned so far about prison society:

> I'd say I'm in a transition period. Well, I tell ya, prison life is definitely
> very trying. I'll be quite honest about it – the other prisoners, when you're
> in prison, do not want to see you achieve. They don't have goals. **They
> don't have purpose**. They don't have things that they want to
> accomplish. All they want to do and they have is their con. They have
> their status, they have their hustle going' on.

Goals and purpose becomes key to how Bill shapes his emerging identity, and, by association, his "trying out" of place in the new, strange culture. This notion of "othering" separates him, at least from his perspective, and defines him as different. Thus, at once, he enters the prison society but also elevates his own status. Bill goes on to explain further:

> But, here's the problem. **If you're not part of that, you know, you're a target**, you know? You are very much a target every day. You're either gonna get violated sexually, you're gonna get violated by them takin' everything you got, like when store comes they, and they take everything. I mean, or like I said, when they want to prostitute you out, or you know, basically, that's kind of like your options if you're not part of the gang unless, you know…so, it's hard to maintain a positive attitude and not be a part of that 'cause you're definitely a target.

Many participants alluded to and explained the dynamics of facility-wide extortion, often presenting the dilemmas prevalent in prison life. The consistent story that came up regarding prison culture is "crunch" (prison argot for junk food) on the pillow; this is followed with the warning, "You don't eat the crunch or you'll find yourself in debt." In other words, if you eat the "crunch," you will be forever in someone's debt, or at least until you prove yourself. The notion of proving yourself generally means through violence, though it can take many forms within a prison culture.

This constant culture of violence and extortion initiates the new felon into prison society. Upon encountering the loss of self and social bonds, the initial experiences in prison are coupled with a sense of worthlessness and isolation, all in a new existence inside the cage. Change, and the sense of social purgatory, becomes inevitable. However, once the liminar becomes acclimated (to one degree or another), s/he almost instinctively seeks a sense of belonging. One way the inmate does this is by studying and then gaining standing in prison, finding your

"hustle." Once that threshold is crossed, you then become an example to someone else.

Reynoldo, a 43-year-old Black man (2.9 years down) explains:

> Whereas before when I was, you know, contemplating suicide and I didn't
> think I was worthy of anything, more than, you know, death. I do now
> because it's not about me. It's about someone else, and so I have to hold
> myself, I have to tell myself that you have got to do this because
> somebody else is going to be looking at you while they're gonna, they
> want to know how to do this.

He expresses being a quick learner and a mentor of sorts for other young inmates. Reynaldo is

exceptional for someone that is down for only three years. But, laying testament to the looking-

glass self, this adjustment has not come without changes in how he views himself, through the

larger cultural milieu. Like many inmates in the first time category, he considers his pre-prison

self to be a loving person. But he goes on to explain how and why he has changed. Reynaldo

continues:

> **[Before prison] I was a more loving person. But, I can watch**
> **somebody get beat down now and it not bother me.** I mean, it used to
> bother me all the time but I see it so much now that it don't bother me
> anymore. My second week here, I watched a guy get stabbed in the chow
> hall, you know, and I was right next to the guy. You know, he was one
> table over from me and I seen this white guy comin' out and just start
> stabbin' him in the back, you know? It's something that you just turn off.

This kind of desensitization accompanies the initial identity limbo of coming to prison.

Unfortunately, it is during this social purgatory that the prisoner most needs and has little access

to learning pro-social skills. This is emphatically true for lifers, who do not qualify for the scant

rehabilitation programs available. Again, standing in contradiction, the lifer is both inaugurated

into the prison community while also becoming a less trusting person.

Keith, a 43-year-old Black male (1.6 years down) explains his new transition into prison

culture:

So, when I came to prison, I mean, I'm still the same person, you know, I'm very likeable and everything. But I've become more—what is it?— into myself. You know, I just shut down, not trying to know everyone and it just, you know, not be the happy guy, just stay in my room, the cell—I became more not an open person, you know? People person, you know?

This was a common thread as expressed by the participants as they came into the prison community; it was often coupled with shutting down, learning to navigate a new environment, self, identity, and cultural landscape. Over time, people learn to do just that, their time. Doing time captures a multi-faceted concept that includes daily survival, navigating formal and informal rules, and in general avoiding the drama of others' troubles; it can be a long learning curve. However, at the end of the learning phase, comes prisonization—the acceptance of and compliance with prison life.

Prison life is not just a thought or idea or temporary passing; it is the place where the liminar lives. Edna, a 57-year-old Black woman (10.3 years down) illustrates:

One thing prison teaches you, there's a line for everything, so you gonna be very patient when you come out of here. And, I know what I've learned, I watched, just what I've observed, the lifers, before me, I watched and every time I saw certain things, I asked God, "Please don't let me be like that."

Edna is referring to the rituals, the pressed clothes, the orderly layout of the food trays in the mess hall, the well-worn patterns that become like second nature to old convicts. There are many descriptors of old lifers—the old timers, old cons, an old boot, to name a few. These are the inmates who have fully transitioned through prisonization. This level of conformity, acceptance, and (ironically) confidence does not happen without time and measured practice. One of the strongest indicators of communitas comes with the advent of mentoring. Andy, a 44-year-old Black male (15.4 years down) summed it up pretty well, stating:

> I have a strong will and a determination to be better and also to show that better-ness within myself to others. As I help other individuals in here who is less fortunate or less understanding that I am, then **that gives me a sense of worth** as well to know that there is still some hope or somebody may need me, you know, because I'm human, I believe that we need each other in some shape, form, or fashion.

A sense of belonging overlaps Andy's sense of worth through meaningful human interaction, which is quite remarkable given the initial devastation that prisoners experience. Indeed, if one can identify communitas as the deep sense of belonging within prison walls, it comes at the expense of prisonization.

### *Prisonization or Suspended Liminality?*

Research questions three and four juxtapose prisonization (institutionalization) and suspended liminality. The distinction is critical to this research and to implications for a broken system of corrections. If we are to continue a system of mass incarceration, scaled to the current proportion, it seems we have two primary choices: to maintain the warehousing of hordes of long-term inmates, usurping all but bare-bones programming; or to become much more efficient and targeted with the rehabilitative efforts we can garner. With either choice, developing a careful, astute knowledge of the target population becomes an urgent undertaking, one which, given the current state of our system, we can no longer bury. This study marks a modest beginning: does the liminar *become* a prisoner through the prisonization process (which includes a rote acceptance of prison-culture values); or does the liminar retain a sense of self and autonomy, held in suspension outside the institutionalized self? The first is perhaps more convenient in the short run; the second more complex but one that potentially addresses the question of successful reentry. The study of lifers, as directed toward these questions, is important because a) most of them will someday be released back into society; and b) without a

25-year true longitudinal project, this population provides the most complete depiction of over-time effects of prison culture on identity development.

The core of this work focuses on transitions among lifers. As Goffman and others point out, transitions are most difficult in the absence of clear-cut boundaries and celebrated moments of completion. Related, in Jewkes' (2005) work, she finds what she calls permanent liminality, which occurs when a transition of status is interrupted and the liminar is not moving between established boundaries, while Schmid and Jones (1991) observe a suspension of pre-prison identities among short-term inmates. I find some indicators of this phenomenon, described in varying degrees by these participants as being outside themselves, walking around in a dream state, and not dealing with the immediate gravity of the situation. However, an "event" of suspended liminality is much more complex than either of these scenarios suggest. First, just as with the concept of social death, the idea of a permanent liminality seems too finite to capture the fluidity of identity development. Second, what happens with suspension and/or fluidity of identity in the first two years of incarceration (as is the case with Schmid and Jones) provides no instruction whatsoever as to long-term suspension or development. Though the very complexity of identity indicates that tension between prisonization and suspended liminality may not be unambiguous, I will nevertheless analyze the two concepts separately first, beginning with prisonization.

The data consistently demonstrate that the first time category (0-5 years) is rife with strife, chaos, and fluctuation in terms of prison enculturation and identity development. Bill, the 44-year-old white male, down eight months and quoted in the communitas section, even articulated to us, "I'm in a transition period," and very much distanced himself from others who "don't have goals [and] purpose." Most others also illustrated the idea that they were "holding

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on" to their pre-prison identity, or at the least, that they were refusing to accept wholesale the norms and values of a prison culture in which their pre-prison identity becomes blurred and eventually lost. All of these represent strong evidence that during the first years of a long prison sentence, many inmates resist the pull of prisonization.

Eventually, with some variation but also with strong patterns that emerge after being down ten-plus years, lifers show fairly consistent signs of prisonization (which is typically preceded by gradual indicators of communitas), though it can be a long process. Fred, a 38-year-old Black male (14.6 years down) reflects on how he slowly built rapport within the prison community:

> No, it just seem like I attract pretty good company. **I surround myself with good people. And, I took my time and I don't …I don't trust anyone**. So, when I come to a person my first thought is, 'I'm not gonna trust you.' Mmm. [I am] Still an asshole but I don't have no temper. I mean, that's the best way to describe it.

Community is built, seemingly through time, and then prisonization evolves. Laura, a 46-year-old white female (13.2 years down) recollects her slow transition into a prison communitas:

> Because I think that after 13 years [incarcerated] of just, because back then, it was a matter of focusing and concentrating on survival. I don't have to do that no more. And that's one thing—and throughout the, all of this, you know, **I went from survivor to overcomer**, you know, that it, I don't have, my focus doesn't have to be on that anymore.

The enculturation of prison takes time. In fact the most settled are the old-timers. Lee, a 58-year-old Native American (24.8 years down) explains the social challenges of prison, particularly for lifers:

> Well, it's changed from when I first started doin' time. It's confusing too. When I first, when I very first started doin' time, I was in the wrong, you know, and I knew I was in the wrong. And, so whatever they did or whatever I had coming, I had comin' and I accepted that then. I didn't associate with long-timers. Actually, I didn't associate with anybody.

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That's about it, when I first started doing time.  And as time, you know, went on, of course that changed.

Clearly the initial years in prison are challenging on both a personal and social level.  Lee confesses to the confusion of learning to navigate prison culture, how it occurs slowly and often painfully.  Further, he even had to develop the identity of a lifer; it did not simply come with a life sentence, but developed over time, in the company of others

Do long-term prisoners experience communitas and eventual prisonization? Yes, at least to some extent; it comes after years of learning to do time.  Prison culture poses violent and dangerous situations for the newcomer, accompanied with the demand for quick lessons to be learned.  Even so, after years of learning the rules of engagement, people find communities and build networks of relationships.  This sense of belonging, or communitas, comes, though, with the cost of prisonization.

To one extent or another, we all seek belonging and conform to the norms of our society.  The problem that comes with prisonization is the lack of prosocial guideposts and dearth of proactive skill development within prison walls.  As our exceedingly high rate recidivism indicates, even a "good" prisoner (and perhaps especially a long-termer who has become adept at the good-prisoner role) is ill equipped to succeed upon reentry to larger society.

Turning now to the concept of a suspended liminality, we are reminded that life is framed by motion.  Emotionally powerful moments have a way of suspending a spectrum of experiences, recollection, and sense of self.  Sometimes it is hard to deal with something traumatic directly.  Often, traumatic events linger and unfold over time, with varying degrees of cognizance. For the majority of our interviews, this suspension of self seems to linger in the first time category of interviews analyzed.  Herb, a 46-year-old white male (2.7 years down) illustrates:

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> I just felt like I was ripped apart. When I got charged with my sentences, I felt very violated. You know, just to the point where I was, wanted to just scream and pull my hair out and say, 'I'm done.' So, that was really devastating. **I haven't quite dealt with all that yet**.

Herb expresses anger, confusion, and frustration associated with receiving a forty-year sentence. Similarly, Angel is a 42-year-old Native American woman who describes, "I felt like a shell. For the last four years, I've been feelin' like I've been walkin' around in a nightmare, in a shell, I'm not alive." Somewhere between the weight of the gavel, the disintegration of social bonds (in the immediate or over time) and the enculturation of prison norms lie a purgatory of self, neither socially alive nor physically dead. These represent strong evidence of a suspended liminality.

As with every other research question, there are exceptions. There is no clear distinction as to a distinct time in which this elongated interstitial period resides. Steve, a 47-year-old Black male (down 19.3 years) represents one of those exceptions, describing his sentence as something that he still has not dealt with:

> I felt very hurt, sad at that time because, you know, I never been placed in that position to be convicted and sentenced to that type of time, and I know that that was my life, and you know, acceptin', well, **I never really accepted that dealin'** with that having caused a lot of pain throughout my time of doin' time, you know?

Steve expresses living with a plea of innocence and sense of injustice for his sentence, giving little evidence of prisonization; this case certainly demonstrates that a sense of suspension may last much longer than five years.

Some people seem to intentionally stave off comprehension of a long prison sentence. Just as Nick earlier disavowed the legitimacy of his sentence, others describe denial so deeply

that they refuse to deal with the emotional weight of being incarcerated. Andy is a 44-year-old

Black male (15.4 years down) who articulates this refusal period:

> Immediately, the majority of us go into, 'cause I have a long sentence.
> Immediately, a lot of us go into denial to the point where we don't want to
> deal with it. And so, therefore, we're doing everything and anything to
> make sure of that, that reality is not in front of us at the moment. We're
> not ready to face it. We're here, physically, but mentally, our mind is on
> all type of things that's gonna distract us from facin' the reality of what
> your existence may be for the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

This suspension of self is a type of defense, a holding on to hope. Others describe the moment of

sentencing so jarring that they cannot remember physically hearing the judge hand down the

sentence. Louise is a 46-year-old white woman (14.6 years down) who reported the physical

shock of being sentenced to life:

> Shock, it's total shock. (tearful) I think in those kinds of situations because
> it's a traumatic moment, that a lot of times you don't, you can't hear
> what's even being said, literally.

For many of the participants, this suspension of self was a difficult phenomenon to describe. This

kind of traumatic moment elicits a compartmentalization, but also intermittent periods of

suspension.

   While I have demonstrated clear instances of a suspended liminality, the phenomenon is

not so definitive as to set in clear opposition to prisonization. It's complicated. A suspended self

drifts in and out of limbo for a complex number of reasons. According to several old-timers, this

occurs initially out of denial that the system would allow this to happen or that it could happen to

them. On numerous occasions, older inmates insisted that it takes a while to come to terms with

some portion of self-accountability between the new inmate, her/his case (the crime), prison

culture, and the systemic response from the courts.

One interesting exception to the general pattern I found with suspended liminality and time delimited markings seem to occur in long-termers who actually had an indeterminate sentence, or as they called it, "the old law." Indeterminate sentences do not offer a fixed date of completion.  The current structure of a life sentences is described by old-timers as having a "door date," which means a sentence that can be completed within a determined amount of time. Others, under the old law, have no door date.  Anita, a 60-year-old Black woman (21.9 years down) describes receiving an indeterminate life sentence:

> It was, well, see in '91, probably '92, I believe it was, we had opened ended sentences.  We had life.  We didn't have like they have now, they have a month structure – 582 months.  But, the legislature had said that prior to '93, that 15 years was a life sentence, that you will be able to make parole in 15 years.  Okay, that didn't happen. It was my first time ever bein' in prison. And, it's the first time that I even had, you know, I was scared to death.  Totally devastating.

The devastation may initially occur at the moment of sentencing and during the initial period of time incarcerated, but for those without a "door date," the future is fully uncertain.  Though Kansas does not currently hand down indeterminate sentences, several of the older inmates expressed their indeterminate status as being a point of constant uncertainty regarding sense of self. Andy, a 44-year-old Black male (15.4 years down) describes the uneasiness of an indeterminate sentence:

> Let me say this, because I'm what's considered a person who's up under the old law, which means that I have an indefinite sentence.  So therefore my, or people in my shoes, 'cause we talk about it all the time, our question is, **what is it gonna take for you to be satisfied that we are ready for society?**  Give it to us in black and white, so we can try to meet those goals.  Because without those, to me, **it's cruel and unusual punishment just to leave a person in limbo, not knowing how to go about correcting himself in order to be better in society**.

Leaving a person in limbo seems to negate a program of correction. Andy's decry of cruel and unusual punishment resonates with the confusion of an arrested transition, or a suspension of liminality.

Andy and I talked about the topic of personal uncertainty, a sense of purpose, and what he summed up as the antidote of identity limbo—hope. Andy ponders the question, how long is too long?:

> **If you have no hope, then it doesn't matter how much time you have because there's no need for you to change in your mind**. So, the hope has to be there if there is going to be an opportunity for you to get out. And, if you do have that opportunity of hope, then it's more about how, I need to start changin' and I need to start planning, I need to start learnin' business, I need to start into whatever field or trade.

Hope is rooted in a sense of purpose. For someone serving a life sentence and interstitial periods of identity limbo or suspended identity, hope ranks high on the sense of purpose. Andy also suggests in order for stigma to affect the person, hope has to exist. In other words, hope may be what carries a person through the stigma of being a felon:

> A person can come in, like yourself, and I don't mean to be disrespectful or anything, but you can see a guy and don't realize he already knows he's never getting out. So, therefore, it's not a reflection on him as far as how society views him anymore.

Confusion is part of a suspended identity, therefore stigma itself, society's reflection, is also suspended. In other words, the looking glass is cracked.

Suspended liminality seems to exist at different times during the initial years of serving time. A sense of self does seem particularly fluid during the first years in prison. While suspension resonated with most participants describing their first few years in prison, a few long time inmates were still unable to accept their sentence. However, once the initial stage of shock and devastation subsides, the suspended liminality, or the "holding on" period, has more to do

with a persistence of hope rather than a lingering grasp on Self 1, the pre-prison identity. This type of suspension can appear to reside with some degree of prisonization, tending to reorder narratives and a sense of self after the ten-year mark in prison. In general, though, long-term inmates tend to drift away from suspension and toward prisonization over time.

Suspended liminality and prisonization, set in opposition, fails to capture the experience of some, especially those with indeterminate sentences. Lifers with indeterminate sentences, wherein the rules and boundaries of their punishment were not clear, tended toward a kind of permanent liminality. Regardless, participants were quite clear about the need for hope in the process of change and the projection of a better self.

## Discussion

This section revisits each research question briefly and discusses the findings, then notes where findings overlap conceptually. Finally, I offer an updated conceptual map, revising the one proposed in Chapter 1. Reconsidering prison as a rite of passage provides a more comprehensive perspective in analyzing identity transformation among lifers. It is their words that both inform and lead us through the long and the short of a life sentence.

Question one asks, do long-term prisoners experience a liminal threshold, or critical identity transition point, at the time of sentencing? This study found that yes, in fact, being handed a life sentence represents a definitive liminal moment for each participant. Inmates consistently reported being devastated, crushed, and even suicidal under the emotional weight of the gavel. After the initial shock and identity crisis (who/what/where am I?!), several sources of hope accompanied the transition into becoming a lifer and seemed to stave off the effects of prisonization, at least initially.

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A primary source was family support and ties, acting as an anchor to the outside world and facilitating a sense of belonging. Inmates who had been down for more than five years often described atrophy of these bonds. Appeals and technicalities (e.g., habeas corpus) also offered hope, particularly in the first five years of incarceration until those options fade. Over time, communitas immerses the inmate in social groups within the prison, manifesting a sense of belonging through religion, faith, and, ultimately, identity change ensues.

Question two sits at the analytical core of this research. Long-term prisoners transition from a pre-prison identity (Self 1) to an alternative identity (Self 2) after sentencing. Initially, receiving a life sentence puts the accused in a state of suspended liminality. This interstitial state of being drifts fluidly between Self 1 and Self 2 at different times and depends on support, sense of belonging, and forms of hope. Sometime between the first and third categories (around the 5 year mark) of time spent, initial hope begins to dissolve and prisonization starts to reshape the sense of self, identity, and social bonds. After ten years, liminal suspension of identity gives way to prison enculturation.

While asking inmates if they projected themselves somewhere else, most participants expressed the future through both hope and fear. At the center of the self, between hope and fear suggests a profound uncertainty. Humans need to reimagine themselves doing things differently, after change. This requires a demarcation of a past self; at this point, many participants described a kind of "knifing off" of their current lives, which may relate to what others have termed social death. The notion of social death describes the initial collapse of social bonds and a permanent stigma following being labeled a felon. Following is a time period wrought with a great deal of chaos and confusion, which I characterize as social purgatory. Eventually, social

bonds and networks may reemerge (though of varying strength and utility) through prison, and the transition into a prison identity (prisonization) becomes prevalent.

Questions three and four form a dialectic relationship between communitas and suspended liminality. These concepts initially function in opposition and eventually may represent a kind of web of affect. Certainly, the data demonstrate periods, sometime quite extended, of a suspended sense of self and identity. However, rather than the liminar suspending the transition in order to preserve Self 1 (the pre-prison self), the deliberate suspension attaches to hope. Without suspension of self—that is, the resistance of prisonization and a permanent identity as felon—hope is futile. A suspended liminality accompanies the uncertainty of prison culture.

Long-term prisoners do, over time, become enculturated into prison society and eventually become immersed in the community, expressing communitas. This was exhibited in the results section, primarily in participants down for more than ten years. Even some younger inmates illustrated becoming cold, indifferent to violence, and introverted in order to stave off drama or violent repercussion—a form of "doing time" and an eventual threshold into prisonization. The code of conduct in prisons directs the shape of communitas and eventually overcomes the suspension of a former self, and of hope.

Doing time means several things to each inmate. But most describe this term as minding your own business, avoiding the drama of others, and staying out of both formal and informal trouble so that *your* time can be done by you alone. For lifers, especially, it means becoming the mature/savvy prisoner, the example to others, a mentor; this identity steps directly into prisonization. At the end of prisonization lies the fully transformed identity of the convict, or old con, the "old-timers." One interview in Lansing correctional facility described his stature like

this: "This is my home, the state has decided.  This is what I have to look forward to, this is my life."

Returning to time before the "old con" settles into prisonization, I find several examples of a symbolic space in which a person becomes "arrested" within a rite of passage; this represents suspended liminality.  Clearly, the old status as John Q. Citizen dissolved, but the new status as felon is not fully codified.  The legal status of felon is clear but the boundary of self is left to ambiguity and so-called "personal choice."  This idea of a suspended liminality—an unspecified and uncertain time of transition—has not been fully developed or tested in other research.  In fact, little research specifically focuses on liminal moments in identity construction at all, and none has addressed long-term inmates.

During the rite of passage exists the confusion and oscillation between Self 1 and Self 2, providing an interstitial state of identity limbo.  The state that Turner refers to as "betwixt and between" is supported in this study, but extended to include the cross-over from citizen to prisoner, and delineated as time-dependent.  It is an abstract threshold between the flux of who a person once was and who that person will become.  As established in Chapter 1, Turner (1969) describes a liminal moment as a dialectical process involving a sense of gain or loss, belonging or exclusion, equal or unequal, but profound moment of change.  This threshold marks the "limbo of statelessness."  While originally hypothesized that a long-term prison sentence *suspends* one's sense of self, one's core identity (or some part thereof), the analysis suggests that this suspension is temporary and over time eventually gives in toward prisonization.

Schmid and Jones (1991) published a rare study within a maximum-security prison in the U.S. and found a suspension of identity in short-term inmates (in two years or less). Their work suggests that prison uniquely holds identities in a state of limbo—or perhaps liminality itself is

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held in suspension. Lifers also express evidence of identity limbo, during which the sense of self is fluid, and yet at other times suspended. The moment of sentencing bore several conditions that affected some inmates more directly than others. Inputs of social bonds and external factors of hope exert relatively unique influence on different people's experiences, but I find that in general, suspended liminality staves off prisonization for up through the first five years of incarceration for most participants. Further, the suspension is not to redeem or resurrect a former version of self, but a crucible through which to manifest hope.

It is worth emphasizing that indeterminate sentences seem to affect inmates differently. Uncertainty seems to hold long-term inmates in suspended liminality, perhaps indefinitely. Actually, prisonization often functions alongside of this liminal state. Consider the looking glass self—that we identify through our relationships with others, and that meaning forms through social relationships. Projection into the future relies on belonging and sharing. However, for the inmate without a door date, who are his/her peers? What bonds are available and what purpose do they serve? Where does hope reside? For the lifer with an indeterminate sentence, these questions may hold the sense of self in a permanent state of social purgatory.

Below is a new conceptual model, which incorporates the findings of this research, to further illustrate the sequence of prison as a rite of passage. The model illustrates a more complex overlap between Self 1 and Self 2, as well as a time frame through which prisonization occurs. Social death itself seems limited in explaining what this study finds after the initial five years; instead, this model inserts the concept of social purgatory, which expresses a temporary period of suspension, amidst the confusion and chaos of becoming a felon.

Reading from left to right, the liminar passes from Self 1 at the moment of sentencing. The gavel represents a liminal transition of social status bestowed at this point in the rite.

Reaggregation marks the transition phase of the liminar into Self 2.  Yet Self 2 is wrought with contradicting emotional states of hope through social bonds, denial in identity limbo, and the general chaos that exists, generally for the first five years of incarceration.  During this process, suspension of liminality interrupts the transition toward communitas (and eventual prisonization).

Suspended liminality subsides between time category one and two, prisonization develops through social bonds built in prison, and social death evolve into a more fluid social purgatory.  While the individual level identity is experiencing a suspended liminality, the previous social network has collapsed but is simultaneously and slowly rebuilding a prison network.  This network grows and facilitates prisonization through communitas.  It is worth noting that this process seems to vacillate, perhaps during time category two.

**Figure 4.2 Post Analysis Concept Map**
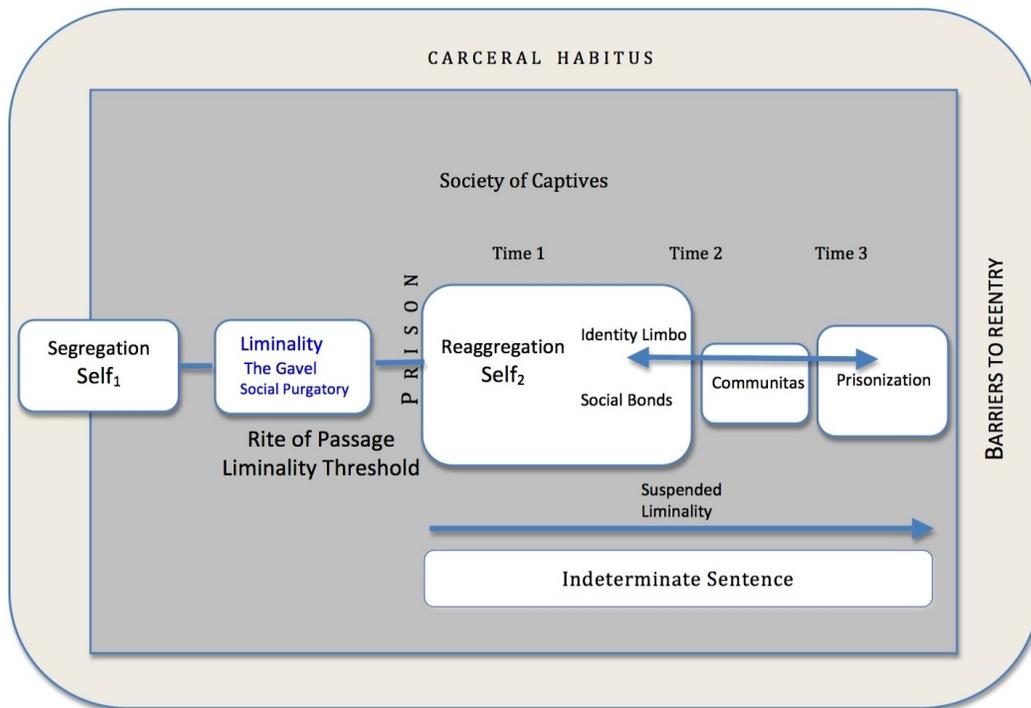
This research found that an indeterminate sentence affects liminal suspension uniquely. Holding rights, social obligations, and the physical being itself indefinitely, without defined parameters of a sentence elongate this state of suspension. One old-timer argued, rather convincingly that indeterminate sentences are "cruel and unusual punishment." For others, at some point between six and ten years down, prisonization begins to occur, and after ten years in prison a sense of communitas, a sense of belonging *as a felon*, is expressed from the majority of participants. It seems that the rite of passage for many into prison culture has been a "successful" ceremony of degradation, fully separating the prisoner from society.

## Conclusion

Identities are often formed, shaped, and internalized through social forces. Social science has long debated the complexity of measuring, weighing, and problematizing these invisible forces. Agency, motivations, a sense of wellbeing, and belonging seem linked to those internal indicators of direction, defined as identity. Yet most senses that evoke comfort and confidence are taken for granted unless they are missed—or forbidden. Whether it comes from being victimized or being neglected, we respond as complex beings through some form of navigation both internally and externally during life transitions.

This analysis found that at the individual level, the moment of sentencing serves as a liminal moment for the identity of self. What follows is a series of confusion, doubt, hope, and sometimes, outright denial during the collapse of the self; together these markers evidence a suspension of liminality, or an arrest of identity transition. Initially, both hope and uncertainty seems to stave off assimilation into the prison culture, but over time, the liminar gives into communitas and eventually prisonization, an immersion into prison identity. While society bestows the stigma of felon, now the liminar becomes the old convict.

At the same time, the weight of the gavel collapses social networks for the liminar. Entering prison means to be initiated into a culture where one is conditioned to "mind your own business," yet also becomes subject to extorting or being extorted. Many such contradictions seem to substitute for meaningful human interaction. Over time, through social bonds, prison and outside (family) relationships begin to both build and dissolve. At time category three, after 10 years in prison, a sense of communitas or social network in prison ushers in a fully immersed and attuned self; prisonization engulfs the liminar and s/he becomes the felon. Some narratives suggested that indeterminate sentences require further analysis, but initially suggested a longer suspension of self.

Prison serves society as a physical manifestation of retribution. While certain tropes are enculturated into the general consciousness of the public's perception of prison, many of the more core sensory details are amiss from the average citizen's imagination. Separation becomes the manifestation of paying a debt to society. A rite of passage begins with segregating the liminar from the rest of society; then, through a systematic process of mortification and stigma, the inmate is cast into a drastically new, strange environment, one with limited access to previous social networks. This forces the liminar into a suspended liminality. To the rest of society, the felon is now formally the "other," becoming invisible to the public eye. This study makes these lifers visible and heard.

# Chapter 5 - Conclusion: Betwixt Reflection and Directions

*I wear black for the poor and the beaten down,*
*Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,*
*I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,*
*But is there because he's a victim of the times.*

—Johnny R. Cash, "Man in Black"

"That's the response of a confident free man," was the first of many lessons uttered that humbled me, letting me know just how little I understood about doing time.  Wat had been down for 23 years at the time he participated in the focus group, which was part of a graduate criminology course.  We were reading Ed Bunker's *Education of a Felon* together.  The conversation had turned to relationships, and the topic of being dumped by a girlfriend came up.  With all the hubris and ignorance of a free man, I said something to the effect of, "there's more fish in the sea."  Upon Wat's statement, I quickly felt small and embarrassed at my ridiculous proposition; I had regurgitated this social trope without any consideration for my study group.  Later, I discovered that Wat had done 12 years straight in solitary confinement, compounding my naïveté even further.

Many deep conversations, as well as the interview schedule for this research, culminated from a semester-long series of focus group sessions with three inmates, including Wat, Ball, and Wrave.  This would lay the foundation of interest, access, and savvy that came to facilitate data collection for this dissertation.  Long before I recognized the omnipresence of state soap, or understood a sliver of the emotional complexities of carceral geographies, a simple lesson as a confident and ignorant free man ignited a deep interest in learning more from lifers and their own sense of self.

Eventually, Wat (and others) evoked a curiosity about the meaning of "doing time," the effect of time spent and time in solitary, the effect of prison time on one's sense of self. Drawing on the concept of rite of passage, I began to study identity transitions at critical life junctures. Thus, while I came into this project focused on identity and the threshold liminal moments, time soon emerged as a critical element in this inquiry.

In particular, I wanted to know how identity transitions evolve while incarcerated for a very long prison term, and this led to the constructed "time spent" categories, reflecting prison time served at the point of interview. Certainly, there are risks to investigating the timing of transitions, especially in a volatile environment. First, time categories, while convenient for analysis, do not translate perfectly into descriptions of socially occurring phenomena. Further, such constructed categories might be mistaken as support of incarceration or as definitive recommendations for prison sentence length. The more important point is this: In the process of observing critical identity transitions, I inevitably uncovered patterns in the pains of imprisonment. In turn, I hope this research will challenge the pervasive logic and carceral habitus of the current unforgiving society and suggest proactive reforms.

This chapter briefly summarizes findings; discusses implications for theory, methodology, and policy initiatives; and offers insights garnered throughout this research. I also offer reflection on strengths and limitations of this study, the scope of which necessarily has been parsed as an initial phase of analysis.

## Summary of Findings

The weight of the gavel signals a liminal moment in the rite of passage to becoming a felon. The inmate has been segregated, held, and transformed; the moment signifies a formal transition in social status and marks what has been referred to as social death. Yet, as this

research demonstrates, the threshold of transition is much more complicated than previously held.  The self, its relation to both an internal sense of direction and an external sense of belonging, transitions into neither what *was* nor what will *be;* however, neither does it simply dissipate.  The moment of sentencing represents a mortification of self, but one that resonates throughout the course of a life sentence.

For society, the transition serves as retribution.  For the liminar, the moment of transition introduces a new [hostile] cultural milieu within which the devastated self must navigate.  The fragmented self must now connect, either positively or negatively, with a new social network. The institution of punishment consummates the confusing new status through security (control) of the physical being and also mortification of the social self.  Evidence in this study demonstrates that both carceral and emotional geographies must be navigated naively through much of the first five years incarcerated.  This time trajectory varies, depending on social bonds such as family support, denial of magnitude of the sentence, and hope of appeal.  As the inmate experiences this initial chaos and confusion, a suspension of transition occurs, often intermittently, which staves off prisonization, or gross assimilation into the world as prison. After years of incarceration, the enculturation of prison norms becomes not only the geographical community, but also the community of identification.  These data indicate that the optimal time frame for suspension is within the first five years, and that the tipping point for immersion into prisonization comes after the ten-year mark.

Every door throughout the prison sentence represents a potential threshold.  Thresholds were described in many ways by lifers, from devastation to growth to a full concession to prison assimilation.  Some marks, such as isolation, exploitation, and loneliness, were described as cruel and unusual, while others were accepted as community life. To explore important junctures, even

as a rough approximation, this study employed time categories within which to organize data. These categories of time were not casual; they emerged through interviews and through discussions on multiple occasions with inmates and staff. The four time categories are 1-5 years, 5.1-10 years, 10.1-20 years, and 20 years or more. Participants consistently indicated that the initial liminal moment—when the gavel strikes—represents a time when the entire self is ravaged, the foundations of self shook to the core; and that it takes about two years just for a sentence to sink in cognitively. Again, at the moment of sentencing, a sharp line was drawn between Self 1 (pre-prison) and Self 2 (post sentencing); but five years was an extended mark within which to witness, experience, and learn to navigate rules, both formal and informal, in a society of captives.

The time categories marked certain trends as significant. For example, about one-half of category one respondents reflected positively on their pre-prison self—something not observed in other time frames. Once the initial mortification of self had abated, at least to some extent, cycles of denial, hope, and connections to social bonds seemed to stave off full enculturation into the prison milieu (though the entire period was often marked by confusion and chaos). Others described themselves as being lost, directionless, and with low self-esteem prior to coming to prison, though the pattern looked somewhat different between men and women; women were more likely to report negative forces, especially abuse, in their pre-prison life.

By implication, this research suggests that the second time category (5.1-10 years) represents a puzzling but intriguing time in the trajectory of a long prison sentence. The [trimmed] sample yielded only one participant in that category, but by observing borderline cases, and by observing stark contrasts between categories one and three, the data suggest that this time category represents a period of great change and turmoil. Hope and social bonds are

more prominent in time category one; those in category two express bitterness and dissolution of bonds. Several participants directly marked category two (in retrospect) as a time of great bitterness, loss, and bereavement.

Accounts from inmates clearly describe major transitions after being down for more than 10 years. It is also during this time that the inmates' remembrances of their pre-prison self were overwhelmingly negative. While I cannot determine whether this trend is attributable to this particular group/panel of inmates (a cohort effect), or whether the accounts actually change over time (developmentally), we do know that this portrayal was accompanied by a plethora of redemption narratives. That is, the participant described his/her pre-prison self as broken and lost, but now found and redeemed. Almost every participant in the most advanced categories (three and four) viewed themselves as having changed, matured, and grown exponentially. They had redeemed themselves (and/or could attribute it to some force, either inside or outside prison). Whereas the younger inmates hoped for an overturned case or habeas corpus, the old timers were focused on "doing their own time;" they became acculturated into the routine of prison life, avoided "drama," and were more selective in the company they kept. They often said what they dreaded most was dying in prison. As hope begins to dissolve, prisonization reshapes one's sense of self, indeed the remainder of one's life, whether inside or outside prison.

Prisonization represents the cumulative impact of prison culture itself on inmates. Perhaps it is all but inevitable for lifers. However, this study finds that hope and external social bonds staves off prisonization, at least to some degree and for some time. Further analysis will be required to pinpoint what factors contribute toward re-identification and emerging networks. It is the contention of this study that being human requires belonging and purpose. One possibility of purpose came when old-timers looked to mentor younger inmates. These

mentoring relationships established both communitas and a trajectory of doing good, toward a small kind of redemption through helping others. This sense of altruistic restitution was common among participants in time categories three and four. Ironically, however, these relationships also marked a sense of communitas, which is strongly connected to prisonization. Further, both communitas and prisonization are socially "contagious"—the more someone belongs and accepts the identity of an old con, the deeper the assimilation for both the old con and the mentee.

This research set out to understand the waves of change in identity and transitions set in motion from the point of being handed a life sentence. This moment is so life changing that people not only described it as "walking around in a dream," but also as total devastation and near death. Understanding these impacts and transitions is more important than ever before. Currently, one prisoner in nine is serving a life sentence (Sentencing Project 2013). Despite strong evidence that long sentences serve little in terms of public safety and crime prevention, sentencing matrices and mandatory minimums place younger and younger offenders in prison for longer and longer periods, with little understanding of how the current trend in punitivity is affecting everyone involved, including society as a whole. The sample in this study demonstrates its own relevance for some time to come. The largest time category of participants was the first five years of a life sentence. The majority of the respondents in this study, consequently, will be incarcerated for at least another fifteen years past the completion of this dissertation.

## Implications

We release more than 600,000 felons a year in the U.S., and we currently incarcerate more than two million citizens. This research holds implications for those attempting to reenter

society, as well as for inmates currently incarcerated. These two groups—current prisoners and ex-felons alike—constitute a population on the same journey but at different junctures; all undergo a tremendous crisis of self—what I have referred to as social purgatory—and all are severely hampered by limited access to social, material, and political self-determination. Reconsidering the process of becoming a felon as a rite of passage provides means with which to re-examine identity transformation and prison enculturation as a time delimited process, one with abundant markers of both crisis and promise.

It has been too long since analytic and descriptive research has influenced policy in corrections. Beyond the limitations of conventional forms of evidence (such as medical experimentation), a culturally attuned narrative-based analysis can contribute generally to the age-old question of "what works?" in the corrections literature. Maruna argues, "evidence-based practice is really not a synonym for using research in practice" (2016:316). Based on what prison sociology has established, despite being all but banned from influencing policy for the past half century, an analytically inductive "dirty pants" approach to corrections is called for; this study contributes to that call. To understand the pains of imprisonment under contemporary conditions requires analysis and narratives of everyday notions circling inside prisons. This depends on a cultural understanding of not only being human in contemporary society, but puts the onus of evidence on the shoulders of researchers to widen the gaze of what counts as evidence toward policy recommendations.

Incarceration as a new American-made rite of passage has come to replace a significant number of affirming life guideposts for a substantial number of Americans. Prison has become the place where devastation too often becomes permanent, where manipulation substitutes for maturity, and acquaintances replace family. Most relevant to this research, the rite of passage—

like all rituals—changes who we are and how we see the world—and conversely how the world sees us.  This very process of ascription, status, and stigma affects everyone to varying degrees.  Certainly, rites of passage and identity transition elucidate fundamental elements of being human, something common to us all.  The everyday negotiation of a carceral habitus necessarily connects us to the 2.22 million incarcerated Americans in ways large and small; it becomes a lens through which to process the stories of people on the inside of cages constructed by those on the outside.

Employing the concept of rite of passage creates theoretical space through which to study contemporary prison society at the apex of a period of unparalleled mass incarceration.  Through rite of passage, individual-level narratives provide insight into identity change, but also demands attention to historical, structural, and political context.  The rite of passage is, if nothing else, a deeply social and structural phenomenon.  As argued in this dissertation, a unique, culturally attuned perspective invokes scrutiny toward topics such as enculturation and conformity, transformation and abeyance, structural barriers and resistance, and the fluidity of identity over time (though not a smooth, always predictable process).  In a nutshell, rite of passage accommodates exploration at the micro (individual prisoners), meso (facility/local milieu), and macro (social-structural) levels of analysis.  But further this culturally attuned perspective offers general insights into fundamental universals of being human.

As a larger theoretical framework, cultural criminology provides scaffolding to accommodate the three levels of analysis, all within contemporary prison milieu.  Its roots include the synthesis of Chicago-school "dirty pants" sociology, late-20th century Birmingham school of cultural studies, and mid-20th century anthropology.  This perspective bridges the multiple levels of analysis, incorporating symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, and conflict

frameworks, affording this dissertation its focus on individual narratives within a closed system of structure, culture, and power dynamics. Further, it has encouraged an inclusion of experiential reflexivity of those living through the pains of imprisonment, contributing toward a theoretically attuned inquiry and analysis into the human consequences of contemporary incarceration. Cultural criminology is the current paradigm most capable of handling individual, facility, and macro levels of analysis, yielding a contemporary return to culturally attuned prison sociology.

Going well beyond the analytical framework, cultural criminology provides an approach that incorporates the manufacturing of meaning around issues of crime, transgression and control (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015). Following that mandate, this study has employed a critical humanist position toward the study of lifers. Humanism can be described, "a scholarly and moral commitment to inquire into people's lived experiences, both collective and individual" (Wilkinson, 2005 as cited in Ferrell et al. 2015:91). The critical nature of this research is made further possible because I, as a researcher, was able to embed well into a phenomenon that is not easily or readily accessed. The narratives of vulnerable voices contribute specifically to the matter of the control and transgressive nature of the state. Prison becomes its own machinery of culture and incarceration a mechanism for manufacturing third-class citizenry. Such revelations are at the heart of cultural criminology.

Theoretically, cultural criminology is oriented toward a dynamic paradigm that privileges fluidity and drift of both the individual and social structure while paying respect to spatial dynamics of late modern society. This schema could hardly fit better in framing the current research through liminal transitions of identity. As a type of extended case study, one would be hard pressed to find a single institution that is more pervasive, contentious, or controversial than the corrections system. Adult correctional systems supervised an estimated 6,851,000 people,

while 2,224,400 were incarcerated at the end of 2014 in the United States (BJS 2015). Supported through politically promulgated crime legislation (Simon 2007) and general practices of carceral habitus (Schept 2013), the prison represents a cultural ornament on the mantel of modern governance. Yet scholar after scholar, report after report, bemoans the lack of scientific research, and especially prison ethnography, which investigates processes and effects at its most basic level—within the prison environment, among prisoners.

With regards to contributions of cultural criminology to social scientific literature, the emphasis on observed phenomena is critical. Valverde (2010) called for an intellectual halt on theoretically obfuscating terms such as "governmentality" and "neo-liberalism," and the collection of solid, empirical data. In other words researchers needs to report and analyze what is happening to people. Similarly, Haney (2015) further critiques the "bathwater" approach: "Instead of silencing the conceptual to make room for the empirical, I suggest we work to disrupt the bifurcation altogether" (p. 238). This would employ theoretically rich inquiry into such institutions while inductively appealing to narratives and lived experiences in order to understand human consequences of punitive structures. This study attempts to do just that, to include accounts from those affected most intimately, all through the lens of prison as a rite of passage.

Cultural criminology provides a pathway toward exploratory, analytically inductive, and qualitative research—a much needed area of research in assessing the damage of mass incarceration and collateral damages. As only two examples of recent signals for research in this sphere, Jewkes (2013) called for an emotionally attuned ethnography of confinement, while Liebling (2013) suggested a systematic analysis of emotional responses in prison life. In particular, Kruttschnitt, in her 2015 presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, specifically called for research on gender and crime, with specific attention to prison research.

Indeed, recent responses to such calls for prison research are emerging. Price (2015) published a book, *Prison and Social Death*, and several articles in prominent journals have appeared as of this writing, including Casey, Day, and Reynolds (2016) on prison climate in Australia; Blagden, Winder, and Hames (2016) on therapeutic prisons in the U.K.; Cochran et al. (2016) on inmate access to social ties in the U.S.; Kigerl and Hamilton (2016) on prisoner misconduct; Ricciardelli and Sit (2016) on social disorder in Canadian prisons; and Rowe (2016) on agency and power in women's prisons. It is my hope that this current study contributes, extends, and motivates more primary research on prisons in the U.S., paving way for greater communication, through critical humanism, and correspondence between the research community and practitioners.

Regarding policy implications of this research, motivation for change comes in different forms and at different levels. While I believe that, with time and education, the human consequences of mass incarceration will become evident and inspire change, a more immediate provocation is likely to take the form of economics and practical applications. As a policy, mass incarceration is exorbitantly expensive. Virtually every state in the U.S. is hemorrhaging economically with regard to prisons as a big budget item. With one in 36 adults under some form of correctional supervision at year-end 2014 (BJS 2015), the financial burden is staggering. As a result of security-as-industry, we host a horizon full of what Nils Christie (1990) called Western-style gulags, or warehouses for disproportionately powerless populations. Some estimates place the direct cost of the U.S. prison complex at $80 billion annually. Increasingly, state budgets are bending under the financial burden. The Sentencing Project (2013) reported that at least six states closed correctional facilities, potentially eliminating more than 11,000 beds and resulting in estimated five-year cost savings of over $229 million.

Understanding significant transitions among the convicted should encourage us as a society to revisit the pains of imprisonment, recalibrate the binge on punitivity, and offer a fresh and sober reconsideration of a general carceral habitus.  Handing out continually longer and longer sentences to younger and younger offenders, while states go broke, bear all the markings of a system in trouble.  Further, recidivism rates hover unchanging at around 65%, and mass incarceration unequivocally affects minority groups disproportionately.

Taking a somewhat more nuanced and far-sighted approach, prisons, without facilitating pro-social identity transitions, ultimately exact a tremendous public cost in terms of both economic and social wellbeing (much of which is hidden or indirect). This is not new news, but one that we often ignore.  Pioneer of prison sociology.  Sykes (1995) observes:

> I must admit I am also struck by the fact that academic studies of the prison seem to have had little impact on public policy, and that in the last forty years or so the conditions of life in prison do not appear to have improved, and may indeed have grown worse.  It is possible that remedies have been formulated and applied, but whatever changes have been introduced have been overwhelmed by vast increases in the rate of imprisonment and a variety of social conflicts arising outside the prison walls. (Pp. 83-84)

Considering that this statement was more than 20 years ago, we do not fare well in terms of correspondence between research and public policy.   While reasons for a dearth in qualitative prison research cited are complex and far-reaching, initial inquiry must launch the process. That is our responsibility as researchers.

On the state level in Kansas, the site of this research, preparation, reentry, and recidivism reduction have formed central topics for corrections policy rhetoric for the past 15 years.   Yet the current political current in Kansas, like many states around the country, is to build more prisons, add more beds, and cut programs to the bone.  In the meantime, public education (as one

example) pays the price in terms of deep budget cuts. Still, the gears of prison expansion continue to grind on, with budget estimates projected through 2023 (KDOC).

One notable program that has been implemented, which was mentioned by research participants, is the Kansas Mentoring Initiative. This program links inmates prior to and after release to an individual sponsor to help alleviate some struggles of reentry. From the findings of this research, mentoring is in line with a sense of belonging and purpose, helping to alleviate a significant barrier to successful reentry. With some early noted success (Kansas.gov), more systematic research is needed to assess the effectiveness of these types of reentry initiatives. It does, however, illustrate some hope and potential in placing the research community and policymakers in tandem, working specifically to address reaggregation.

Related, this research has described and categorized critical moments or periods in an inmate's experience pertaining to substantive identity transitions. This adds significantly to other research that suggests a greater understanding of transformations in order to reduce recidivism (MacKenzie 2006, 2011). Further, these findings contribute valuably to previous research about the questionable use of extended incarceration (Cochran et al. 2016) and difficulty in adjusting to prison (Felson et al. 2012). Most important, this study answers the loud and largely unanswered call for investigation into what occurs behind prison walls, from the perspective of prisoners. Substantively, qualitative studies are better equipped to understand behavior, identifiers of readiness to change and adapt, and accounts of identity transition.

This study also responds to the over-prisonization trend in the U.S. The National Research Council (2014) reported that prison populations have climbed to historic levels with large racial and ethnic disparities, citing increasingly punitive legislation. The NRC (2014) concluded:

> [G]iven the small crime prevention effects of long prison sentences and the possibly high financial, social, and human costs of incarceration, federal and state policy makers should revise current criminal justice policies to significantly reduce the rate of incarceration in the United States. (p. 9 as cited by Travis and Western 2015).

The NRC developed a framework of agreed upon normative principles governing the use of prison. The third principle asserted, "penal sanctions should not be so lasting or severe as to violate a person's citizenship, one's fundamental status as a member of the social compact" (Travis and Western 2015 p. 6). The findings in this research underscores support for a massive reduction in sentence lengths, which will, in turn, mitigate some degree of social harm while addressing economic concerns at both state and federal levels. From these results, it is my contention that no sentence need be more than 15 years for substantial identity transformation in a range of convicted lifers.

What took the United States almost 50 years to build, need not take as long to disassemble. More humane and effective policies require a deeper understanding of prisonization and the time frames through which it occurs. Sykes (1995) elucidates the importance of such understanding for policy formation and future evaluation: "This sociological work provided an indispensable base for later studies, but with some notable exceptions it was mainly descriptive, an ethnography of the confined" (p. 79). In some modest way, this study extends Sykes' base.

## Limitations

Limitations of prison research exist on a few levels; number one is access. Prisons are complex facilities with a myriad of security protocols and physical precautions toward controlling the secure movement of a large population. The second barrier and limitation is explicitly due to dealing with a vulnerable population with limited autonomy; as such, prisoners are a legally protected research population. Institutional review board processes are necessary

but complex; forms documenting the process for this study can be found in the Appendices following the reference section of this document. The Kansas Department of Corrections facilitated this research, providing valuable access and cooperation at the state and facility level. The participants were generally hand picked by staff at each facility, for reasons not always apparent to us, but decisions were probably based on good behavior and other disciplinary conditions. Though the response rate of individual inmates was high, not every inmate chose to participate.

As noted in Chapter 4, demographic limitations exist within the analyzed sample. While we oversampled female participants, there is an underrepresentation of racial minority participants. Further, ethnic categories did not include Hispanic; instead, I identified Hispanic participants through surnames and instanced in which the person identified as such during the interview—all certainly less than ideal. Data were collected by three interviewers; field notes and comparative discussions helped to increase coding reliability throughout the analysis. As a further attempt to optimize comparability, only lifers (those serving 20 or more years) were retained in this sample.

This research has absorbed my life for more than four years. During those four years, considerable resources had to be managed in order to conduct this study. The distance between most facilities in this study and Kansas State University is about two hours on average, all in different directions. Each trip to the prisons was done in a state vehicle from the university motor pool. The transcription of somewhere around 100 hours of interview time was a gargantuan task. Due to the sheer volume of data, a professional transcriptionist was employed to transcribe most of the interviews. Dr. Williams supported this entire research effort through internal development and research monies.

A considerable amount of time has been invested in this study.  The estimated 300 hours devoted within facilities does not include travel to and from facilities or discussion and down time outside the facilities.  This type of fieldwork, including collection, organization, and analysis, is time intensive; to estimate its total would be prohibitive. Collecting and analyzing original data offers both a remarkable research experience and a tremendous challenge; hundreds, if not thousands of hours went into organizing and analyzing these data. However, it was the initial seminar-driven focus group that exerted the greatest influence on the direction and initial efforts of this research.  Wat, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, together with Ball and Wrave, helped shape the language, ideas about becoming a felon, and methods of conducting and gaining rapport during interviews.

Building rapport with participants can be challenging and sometimes represented a minor limiting factor in collecting data.  I met with some participants wherein my regional accent, for example, seemed to endear me.  With other interviewees, being white and male may have hindered me in gaining rapport.  Another sensitive topic was balancing basic politics while getting to know inmates and staff alike.  While this did not pose a great challenge, I tried to be vigilant in navigating potential information or situations that could compromise the trust of both inmates and staff.  Professionalism and discretion was upheld in order to respect both parties and positions. Overall, it is my sense that the vast majority of participants was happy to share their experiences and often expressed thanks for our interest in the emotional and physical wellbeing of prisoners.  In fact, I heard many times how rare it was, from their perspectives, that anyone was interested in how prison itself had changed them.

Several limitations are inherent to qualitative work more generally.  Most notable is the ability to generalize findings from descriptive and inductively analytic research.  Yet, given the

rare and exploratory nature of this unique work, this study raised interesting findings through

analytical rigor.  While all 54 interviews were organized according to time categories, the lack of

participants in time category two limits evidence found for participants incarcerated between 5.1-

10 years.  This time category also raises interesting questions for further study, as its gap

represents a "black-box" question for glaring differences between categories one and three.  The

contributions of this study, in light of these limitations, will still place into focus and voice a

rarely accessible and vulnerable population of inmates serving a life sentence.  In addition to

current contributions, this study will help guide future considerations pertaining to the identity

transition and the pains of imprisonment.

## Future Research

It would be hard to imagine a qualitative study of this magnitude without offering more

questions than a single study can answer.  The findings in this research of identity transitions

require further analysis, particularly as focused on demographics and other social characteristics.

The most glaring concerns gender and race.  The purpose in this study from the beginning was

not to ignore race and gender, but also not to particularize it to the distraction of broader trends

in the narratives.  In other words, for this research, I wanted to look for commonalities and

overlap between participants rather than differences.  This orientation, by design, requires further

consideration and significant future research.  While gender and race reflect the most obvious

disproportionate factors in prison populations, other considerations include class, sexuality, age,

and ableness.  This nexus of attributes and identities represent the intertwined matrices of

intersectionality.

The next most obvious gap in this study comes with the curious lack of participants in

category two time frame (5.1-10 years down).  There are a number of potential explanations for

limitations in this small category. Participant narratives in time categories prior to and directly after category two show stark differences in reflection of previous self and present self. In other words, the analysis suggested many indicators that several transitions occur in the identity of the participants during the second time category. This analysis suggests that is this period of time when initial hopes of court technicalities and much family support dissolves, and by this timeframe, many have experienced the loss of someone in the immediate family. It is obvious that this time category needs to be further explored; this will be one of my next tasks.

Yet another element to be analyzed is the interview set with staff and administrators. We conducted 20 interviews with staff, primarily wardens and top-level assistants. These interviews used the same interview schedule as the interviews with inmates. One interesting discussion that often came up, especially with administrators, was the similarity in career tenure as compared with inmates serving a life sentence. It was often said with humor that they serve a life sentence too. Much remains to be explored in these interviews, including how long-time prison staff describe their own identity changes before and after working in the department of corrections. Future analysis will explore insights into the other side of the society of captives.

Another aspect of this research that requires further investigation is particular attention to both physical and emotional geographies in prison. In order to understand how prison affects a person, it becomes important to understand some spatial context of total institutions. Just like the fluidity of identity, spatial dynamics also influence the contested confluence of emotionality, sense of being, and future trajectory of hope. The growing body of Convict Criminology will also to help inform and validate further studies. The institutional setting of prison dictates more than the control of physical movement, but also the less understood range of personal barriers and/or growth toward pro-social skills sense of communitas, or belonging.

In one capacity, a study of spatial milieu has already begun. The same research team responsible for collecting data for this study recently conducted a pilot climate survey in two contrasting facilities, assessing whether a sense of security, belonging, and institutional adaptability is measurable. The survey represents a modified instrument employed and validated in multiple studies in Australian prisons (Tonkin 2015). In December of 2015, Will Chernoff and I administered 187 surveys (78 staff; 109 inmates) to both inmates and staff in the two facilities. We then compiled the results and conducted T-tests for an initial inquiry into the significance of the survey questions. An early finding suggests that one facility exhibited a significantly higher sense of belonging and community for both inmates and staff. This qualitative research has already yielded a measurable variable of social cohesion, a sense of belonging, at the facility level. A full analysis of these data will follow the completion of this dissertation.

Place-based liminality, or physical transitions in one's life station, is something that geographers use concerning gentrification and areas experiencing severe economic change. Extending this logic, we can conceive of cultural "ghosts," so to speak, that gather where places, history, and people intersect. Prisons offer a unique place-based regime within which to study cultures, traditions, histories, emotion, and politically motivated tendencies toward corrections (Crewe 2014; Hamm 2013; Tunnell 1992). As one example, buildings (prisons in this case) often host transitional spaces such as visiting rooms, which, as Moran (2013) argues, function as liminal spaces within the facility. In other words, prisoners are able to slip into different identities when visiting with families, one often very different from the "convict" identity needed for survival in the prison society, but also encapsulated in varying emotionalities.

Finally, redemption narratives call for more attention. Inmates serving a life sentence, after a radical transition in social position, must recalibrate their sense of self, place, and identity. Redemptive narratives emerge retrospectively and serve to reestablish the legitimacy of one's self. Often these narratives represent strategies of resistance and empowerment that allow inmates to form entirely new, "unspoiled" identities, independent of their past or present circumstances (Irwin 2009; Jewkes 2002; Maruna 2001). Irwin (1970) argues that the felon's redemptive narrative, designed to maintain some self-dignity during the transition phase, is distinct from conversations between the sentenced and the employees of the justice system. Further analysis will privilege a narrative category of redemption and how those reflect on pre-prison identities as well as temperament or change in post-prison identities.

## Concluding Thoughts

This research has transformed my appreciation for meaningful human interaction and dignity. During the last leg of this research, something that has profoundly changed me as an individual, perhaps forever, is the juxtaposition of my social elevation while studying inmates' social degradations. Considering the criminal justice apparatus as a codified ceremony of successful degradation, it has not escaped me that I benefit from trying to understand the mortification of others. The irony has facilitated significant emotional labor during the course of this dissertation, yielding much reflection on ethical dilemmas. In fact, it has caused much reflexivity on various levels. But as much as anything, it has forced me to consider the plea of C. Wright Mills ([1959] 2000) and Jock Young (2011), as directed toward criminologists. That plea, in my best estimation, was to understand structurally and institutionally how and at *what cost* we maintain the appearance of social order, without losing sight of the interconnections between individuals and social structures. That task demands inquiry into social problems on

multiple levels of analysis, while maintaining engagement with the sociological/criminological imagination.

In order to understand the social impact of mass incarceration, we need to also incorporate the distracting complexities and speed of late modernity, maintaining a focus on the human impact. Young (2007) refers to these ontological insecurities, or the vertigo of an over-stimulated late modern society, when he argues against the dwindling force of reason and the absence of extending humanity generally but especially to those that cause social harm. In an era of mass media, accompanied by heightened security and fear mongering (despite declining crime rates), the addiction to punitivity tends to target the most vulnerable, fracturing social institutions and establishing a society of captives. Ferrell, Hayward and Young (2015) evocatively describe late modernity:

> [S]pace and time compress under the forces of economic and cultural globalization, culture comes loose from locality, and material and virtual realities intermingle, with many people consequently experiencing a profound sense of disembeddedness and dislocation. (P. 55)

Although a culture of punitivity extends beyond prison walls, within prison in a late-modern context a unique culture has emerged. Hamm (2013) has observed that prison can facilitate even terrorist radicalization in a "spectacular" few. This research seeks to describe identity transitions found in the common experiences of lifers. Little research, however, is conducted from within the prison environment. It is the contention of this research that a culturally attuned paradigm of multi-level analysis is required to understand cultural habitus both outside and inside of the current prison industrial complex. Cultural criminology, with its critical humanist approach, is uniquely positioned theoretically and methodologically as a paradigm within which to resurrect a late-modern attuned prison sociology.

While the argument between prison abolitionists and revisionists continues, a sober evaluation of contemporary punishment occupies an important place in the conversation. At this time, there seems to be little social or political will toward outright abolishment in the use of prisons. Instead, this research is focused on understanding the deep effects of mass incarceration, and, in particular, the ongoing search for self, meaning, and purpose among those most damaged by our binge on punitivity. It is the hope that individual narratives will shine a light on the excessiveness of the current use of prisons for warehousing human beings beyond a productive period of retribution.

Ultimately, we should reintegrate people with the same effectiveness that we ostracize and punish offenders after serving their time. It is clear that everyone matures through age (biologically) to varying degrees. However, this research extends our understanding of time progression in terms of the dissolution of social bonds over the course of a flat-forty or hard-fifty-year sentence—or perhaps even more cruelly, the indeterminate sentence. While much of this research is new, fresh, and nuanced, I also found evidence to support prison sociologists of the past. Save the caveat of serious mental illness (which is beyond the scope of this discussion), life sentences with no hope of a path toward socially recognized redemption and reintegration, is counterproductive for the prisoner and for our society.

Having said that, a monumental challenge of this study, one that long haunts me, is how to explain the implications of this research to victims. While this charge may seem less than eloquent, here it is: The ontology of this work humanizes a group of people that have left a wake of victims. While I cannot speak toward hyper-urban areas of major cities or more punitive states that host massive correctional systems such as California or Texas, in the rural Midwest, most lifers are there for serious, violent crimes. For all its challenges and limitations, the

criminal justice system also delivers segregation and punishment for those who have caused much damage, pain, and grief, resulting in what some believe is retributive justice. Many of my interviews were with people who made permanent and almost unbearable impact on victims and their families. On the other hand, restorative justice studies provide some evidence that severity of punishment does little to heal or to help victims on the road to recovery (Suttie 2015).

Ethnography is much like art; it is never done. Living with and living through mistakes, broken dreams, and irreversible acts represent a narrative arc as old as story itself. Understanding deviance and crime requires an attunement with the range of possibilities of interaction with people. Much of human interaction is wonderful. Some interaction bears horror and finality. The interstitial moments between the best and worst of human capacity is as complex as the concept of agency. Institutions, on the other hand, are constructed with intention and purpose; we would do well to understand the intended and unintended periphery of retribution and segregation. Again, similar to art, ethnography demands face-to-face interaction through moments of arrest, contemplation, and contradiction, always a moving target because being human is social and fluid, through ever-changing contexts. I often jest, that humans do not have retractable claws; as inherent pack animals, meaning must be shared. As such, the identity of who we are depends on belonging and purpose. These social facts exist within prison walls; being human does not disappear in prison, nor does society benefit from being blind to the effects of punishment. How we identity with ourselves is intrinsically tied to the looking glass self, but even more profoundly, how we punish the worst and the least among us reflects on us as a society.

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# Appendix A - IRB Approval Form

**KANSAS STATE** | University Research Compliance Office
**UNIVERSITY**

TO:     L. Susan Williams
        Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
        Waters Hall                              Proposal Number: 6248.0

FROM:   Rick Scheidt, Chair
        Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

DATE:   May 1, 2013

RE:     Continuing Review of Your Proposal Entitled, "Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage."

**Originally Approved by the IRB: 6/5/2012**

**Expiration Date: 6/5/2013**

Federal regulatory officials (OHRP) have interpreted that human subjects protocols / activities can be approved by IRBs for only **ONE YEAR** at a time. For your current human subjects activity to continue past that one year **EXPIRATION DATE**, the protocol / activity must undergo "continuing review" and approval, if appropriate, by the IRB.

Consequently, if you want your project to continue past the expiration date, it is critical that you are responsive to this request for information for the IRB "continuing review." Once the expiration date has arrived, the activity involving human subjects must stop if continuing review and approval has not occurred.

1.  Your project was classified by the Committee as involving

    ☒   No more than minimal risk to subjects
    ☐   Greater than minimal risk to subjects

    The Federal definition of minimal risk is that "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests."

2.  What is the status of this project?

    ☐   a. Project has been completed. (Approximate date of completion _____).

    ☐   b. Project was never undertaken and <u>will not be</u> undertaken in the future.

    ☐   c. Project has not begun but may be undertaken in the future (approximate starting
            date _____).

    ☐   d. Project is in progress. (Approximate date of completion _____).

    ***If you checked (a) or (b) above, skip to Item 12. If you checked (c) or (d), answer the rest of the questions.

# Appendix B - IRB Approval Form

**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY** | University Research and Compliance Office

TO: Susan Williams
SASW
204 Waters

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/27/2013

RE: Proposal #6248.1, entitled "Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #6248, ENTITLED, "Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage"

EXPIRATION DATE: 06/05/2014

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

1863 2013
**150**

203 Fairchild Hall, Lower Mezzanine, Manhattan, KS 66506-1103 | (785) 532-3224 | fax: (785) 532-3278 | k-state.edu/research/comply

# Appendix C - IRB Approval Form

**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY** | University Research and Compliance Office

TO:     Susan Williams
        SASW
        204 Waters

FROM:   Rick Scheidt, Chair
        Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE:   06/27/2013

RE:     Proposal #6248.1, entitled "Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage."

        MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #6248, ENTITLED, "Exploring Prison as an
        American Rite of Passage"

        EXPIRATION DATE:  06/05/2014

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the
request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that
the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include
the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also
be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research
Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others
must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding /
contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding /
contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

1863  2013
**150**

203 Fairchild Hall, Lower Mezzanine, Manhattan, KS 66506-1103  |  (785) 532-3224  |  fax: (785) 532-3278  |  k-state.edu/research/comply

# Appendix D - IRB Approval Form

**KANSAS STATE**
**U N I V E R S I T Y** | University Research Compliance Office

TO:     L. Susan Williams                          Protocol Number: 6248.0
        Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
        Waters Hall

FROM:   Rick Scheidt, Chair
        Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE:   April 16, 2015

RE:     Approval of Your Proposal Entitled, "Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage."

Federal regulations stipulate that human subjects protocols can be approved by IRB's for only one year, and require "continuing review" and approval to continue past the expiration date.

On the basis of the IRB "continuing review," your project is classified as follows:

> **Active.** The activity is pending or in progress, and there have been no changes that have occurred or are contemplated that would affect the status of human subjects.

**EXPIRATION DATE: 6/5/2016**

If the activity persists, it will be eligible for continuing review several months prior to the new expiration date.

# Appendix E - Interview Guide

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Exploring Prison as an American Rite of Passage**

**Introduction and Basic Demographics**

*After going over the informed consent document and securing signatures, the researcher will spend some time*

*further explaining the goals of the project, sharing background information, and gathering basic demographic*

*information from the participant, including full **name, age, race/ethnicity, place of birth and childhood***

***information, date of entry into the Kansas state prison system, length of sentence**, and **expected release** (if any).*

**Doing Time**

*Books, articles, and informal discussions with inmates invariably refer to the concept of "doing time."  However,*

*researchers and convicts alike propose a diversity of definitions and interpretations of what the term means.  This*

*section will attempt to elicit the **participant's ideas about doing time**, but also specifically with regard to how those*

*ideas may **change over time**.  (Bunker, 2000; Jewkes, 2005)*

Can you give me five words that describe prison life in general?  Describe for me what life in prison is like for you.

Probes:

What's it like to find out that you have been sentenced to _____ [term] in prison?

What do you miss most about life on the outside?

Do you ever feel that time has been stolen from you?

**Identity and Liminality**

*This section addresses the heart of the current research, and the researcher will spend some time eliciting information from the participant about a **remembered identity**, retrospective effects on identity when entering the prison system, **changes over time**, and how these issues may relate to a sense of **community** inside the prison walls. Included will be an exploration of their feelings of **social exclusion** (sometimes referred to **as permanent liminality),** "in that they are not moving between established boundaries." We are sensitive to the possibility of a sort of **suspended liminality** to describe a prisoner's situation that has the hope of parole. The literature cited pertains to terminally ill; although comparisons can be drawn, the situation of lengthy sentences does not suggest a literal prognosis, but a symbolic one (Douglas, 1966).*

[Start this section with a labeling exercise, involving tags for both inmate and researcher. Each identifies a personal label that has been attached and which has negatively or positively affected the person's life.]

How did you think of yourself before coming to prison? How would you describe yourself now?

> Probes:

> What do you remember most about yourself before you came to prison?

> What routines of daily life do you miss the most?

> What is your relationship with the security officers? Wardens or staff? Other prisoners?

**Discursive Consciousness**

*Discursive consciousness refers to one of two levels of reflexivity in which social actors are continually engaged (Giddons 1984; Jewkes 2005, pg. 376); while some intuition may take place unconsciously, discursive consciousness occurs when the actor **is able to express what they do and why**. This idea is tempered with Giddons notion of **duality of structure** (1984). Jewkes describes the duality of structure by suggesting that the concept "should alert us to the dangers of assuming that a life sentence (or any other prison sentence for that matter) is experienced in the same way by all those who undergo it" (2005, pg. 377). Also related to consciousness, Foucault's notion of '**limit experiences**' (1977, 1978) refers to "activities laden with risk or danger that explode the limits of consciousness, breaching the boundaries separating the conscious and unconscious, reason and unreason, pain and pleasure and*

*ultimately life and death" (Jewkes 2005, pg. 377; Miller 1993). While very abstract, we will look for indicators of a relationship between the spoke and unspoken, the past and present, the "real" and imagined identity.*

While this may seem like a crazy question, what is it that is very difficult, or even impossible, to express about prison life?

Probes:

Do you project yourself into a different place physically? If so, where and how do you imagine yourself?

Do you project yourself into a different place mentally? Do you fantasize about any of this?

## Redemption Narratives

*Here we will look for both overt and subtle references to what is referred to in the literature as redemption or reconstructed narratives. These represent strategies of **resistance** and **empowerment** that allow inmates to form entirely new, 'unspoiled' identities independent of their past or present circumstances" (Maruna 2001; Jewkes 2002). Bruno Bettelheim's "deep feeling impressions one receives in an extreme situation" (1960, pg. 13; Jewkes 2005, pg. 379).*

If your life were a movie, what would the title be?

Probes:

Did you go through a period of resisting the rules and authority when you arrived in prison? What about now?

What activities have your started since you've been incarcerated?

Do you think of yourself as changed or as a "better" person now?

## Anticipatory Status

*We are interested in prisoners' **projections of self**, as well as the **hope for specific life events** such as "getting out," maintaining a relationship, getting married, becoming a parent, having a career or good job. In particular, Jewkes (2005) mentions the fear of one's own mortality. While we will not ask directly about death or dying, we will be*

*alert to whether or not that concern is expressed.  We also will pay attention to what Bruno Bettelheim refers to as*

*"deep feeling impressions one receives in an extreme situation" (1960, pg. 13; Jewkes 2005, pg. 379).*

What do you look forward to?  Regret?  Dread?

Probes:

Do you ever make plans about tomorrow?  Next month?  Next year?

**Wrap-up**

*In addition to the goal to end on a positive note, this section will include the debriefing statement and conclusion to the interview, with an explanation of what to expect for follow-up.*

What are you most proud of?

# Appendix F - Demographics and Basic Characteristics of Analyzed Participants.

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E001EG | ECF | John Johnson | M | W | 45 | 41 | Rape | 968 |
| E002WC | ECF | Dimitri Black | M | W | 35 | 40 | Rape | 437 |
| E003SW | ECF | Reynaldo Hill | M | B | 43 | 25+ | Indecent Liberty | 1089 |
| E004WC | ECF | Jeffrey Clark | M | W | 33 | 25 | Sexual Exploitation. | 548 |
| E005EG | ECF | Carl Ebers | M | W | 45 | 40 | Rape | 1403 |
| E006SW | ECF | Ethan Thomas | M | B | 50 | 48 | Att. Murder | 1719 |
| E007SW | ECF | Gene Norris | M | W | 60 | 25-life | Murder I | 1761 |
| E008EG | ECF | *Ebert Hernandez* | M | W | 67 | 25-life | Indecent Liberty | 1495 |
| E009WC | ECF | Paul Ford | M | W | 55 | 73 | Rape | 949 |
| E010SW | ECF | Ray Benton | M | W | 52 | 50+ | Rape | 1235 |
| E011EG | ECF | Dean Harmony** | M | W | 52 | 23 | Murder I | 7384* |
| E012WC | ECF | *Lee Garbonza* | M | W | 43 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1516 |
| E014SW | ECF | Fred Jones | M | W | 44 | 21-life | Indecent Liberty | 7028 |
| E016SW | ECF | Iron Nickel | M | W | 35 | 50 | Indecent Liberty | 407 |
| E017EG | ECF | Evan Totes | M | W | 38 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1148 |
| E018WC | ECF | Anglin Pierceson | M | B | 53 | 28 | Rape | 9489* |
| E019EG | ECF | Herb Denny | M | W | 46 | Indet? | Rape | 1010 |

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E021WC | ECF | Ed Maloany | M | W | 39 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1331 |
| E022EG | ECF | Ted Shivers | M | W | 44 | 39 | Rape | 102 |
| E023SW | ECF | Bill Distill | M | W | 44 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 284 |
| E024WC | ECF | Bob O'Hare | M | W | 32 | 24 | Rape | 390 |
| L001EG | LCF | Rocky Bentley | M | W | 55 | 24 | Rape | 801 |
| L001WC | LCF | Lee Orphan | M | Native | 58 | | Rape | 9057 |
| L002EG | LCF | Andy Lynn | M | B | 44 | 37 | Murder I | 5626 |
| L003EG | LCF | Keith Cold | M | B | 43 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 619 |
| L005EG | LCF | Stephen Kinsey | M | W | 44 | 47 | Murder I | 7749 |
| L006EG | LCF | *Tom Garcia* | M | W | 41 | 43 | Murder I | 2898 |
| L007EG | LCF | Lindsey Bordown | M | W | 51 | 47 | Rape; Murder I | 7603 |
| L008EG | LCF | Nick Moore | M | W | 59 | 47 | Robbery | 7557 |
| L009EG | LCF | Leroy Smithers | M | W | 49 | 48 | Indecent Liberty | 318 |
| L009WC | LCF | Boyd Herron | M | W | 36 | 25+ | Rape | 546 |
| L010EG | LCF | Steve Louise | M | B | 47 | 95 | Robbery | 7063 |
| L010WC | LCF | Fred Bedrock | M | B | 38 | 40 | Murder I | 5319 |
| L014WC | LCF | Mose Allen | M | W | 42 | 50 | Murder I | 6971 |
| L015WC | LCF | Mark Saint | M | B | 74 | 50+ | Murder II | 8654 |
| L017WC | LCF | Booker Banks | M | B | 35 | 50 | Murder I | 4278 |
| L021WC | LCF | Pete Cootes | M | W | 55 | 48 | Murder I | 490 |
| L023WC | LCF | Al Bolt | M | B | 53 | 89 | Murder I | 6841 |
| L025WC | LCF | Ben Flora | M | B | 45 | 38 | Murder I | 4873 |
| T002EG | TCF | Bennie Rock | F | W | 62 | 24 | Murder I | 3853 |
| T002SW | TCF | Laura Lite | F | W | 46 | 24 | Murder I | 4830 |

| Project ID# | Facility | Pseudonym | Sex | Race | Age | Sentence (in years) | Offense (most serious) | Time Served (in days) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T003SW | TCF | Jenna Adama | F | W | 41 | 24 | Indecent Liberty | 1688 |
| T004EG | TCF | Kaley Leonard | F | W | 56 | 21 | Murder II | 6909 |
| T004WC | TCF | Holly Day | F | W | 41 | 20 | Rape | 869 |
| T005EG | TCF | Tiger Robinson | F (M) | B | 31 | 20 | Murder II | 4405 |
| T006EG | TCF | Benita Schewin | F | W | 45 | 26 | Murder I | 9050 |
| T008EG | TCF | Louis Light | F | W | 46 | 24 | Murder I | 5317 |
| T008SW | TCF | Rhonda Rich | F | B | 43 | 47 | Murder I | 7880 |
| T009EG | TCF | Anti Johnstown | F | B | 60 | 23 | Murder I | 7994 |
| T010EG | TCF | Angel Jobs | F | Native | 42 | 21 | Manslaughter | 1107 |
| T010SW | TCF | Edna Eggers | F | B | 57 | Indeterm. | Murder I; torture | 3760 |
| T011SW | TCF | Eve Eddins | F | W | 47 | 28 | Murder I | 1168 |
| T013WC | TCF | Sara Milner | F | W | 33 | Indeterm. | Murder I | 1379 |
| Total=54 | Male=39 70.91% | Female=16 29.1% | White= 38 69.09% | Black=15 27.27% | N=2 3.64% | | | |

\* Time served since sentencing date as KDOC entered was not available on participate

\*\*Released/deceased since interview was conducted

*Italicized* are Hispanic surnames.

# Appendix G - Emergent Theme Table

| Themes | Ref. | Sources (n = 54) | % of total interviews | Themes | Ref. | Sources (n = 54) | % of total interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Doing Time** | 156 | 51 | 94.40% | **Miscellaneous Topics** | 126 | 42 | 77.78% |
| Economics | 6 | 5 | | Books | 2 | 1 | |
| Food | 13 | 10 | | Implications | 19 | 13 | |
| Health | 3 | 2 | | About this research | 13 | 10 | |
| Presentation of Self | 11 | 7 | | Participants questions | 6 | 5 | |
| Stolen Time | 42 | 38 | | Mental Illness | 1 | 1 | |
| **Purpose** | 293 | 54 | 100.00% | Music | 7 | 5 | |
| Crime Drama | 18 | 14 | | Participant suggestions | 93 | 37 | |
| Education | 10 | 6 | | Elderly | 2 | 2 | |
| Looking forward | 54 | 41 | | Politics | 64 | 33 | |
| Most Proud of | 46 | 46 | | Prison differences | 21 | 13 | |
| Movie Title | 56 | 50 | | Recidivism | 6 | 4 | |
| Projection | 30 | 22 | | Solitary Confinement | 2 | 1 | |
| **Identity** | 386 | 54 | 100.00% | Suicide | 2 | 1 | |
| Gender | 29 | 22 | | **Prison Described** | 345 | 52 | 96.30% |
| Sexuality | 8 | 8 | | 5 Words | | | |
| Women vs. Men | 19 | 16 | | 5 Words Only | 111 | 40 | |
| Self 1 | 218 | 54 | | Boredom | 8 | 5 | |
| Before Prison | 104 | 51 | | Case | 17 | 13 | |
| Miss the most | 50 | 30 | | Difficult Description | 143 | 47 | |
| Regret | 64 | 43 | | Emotions | 2 | 2 | |
| Self 2 | 185 | 54 | | Feelings of Guilt | 5 | 4 | |
| After Prison | 79 | 42 | | Indeterminate Sentence | 1 | 1 | |
| Dread | 43 | 37 | | Plea of Innocence | 12 | 8 | |
| Institutionalization | 11 | 8 | | **Social Bonds** | 217 | 52 | 96.30% |
| Stigma | 6 | 5 | | Administration | 50 | 28 | |
| **Liminality** | 226 | 53 | 98.15% | Children | 13 | 9 | |
| Death of a loved one | 5 | 4 | | Communitas | 98 | 35 | |
| Length of Sentence | 7 | 5 | | Ethnicity | 4 | 3 | |
| Moment of sentencing | 54 | 44 | | Family | 17 | 9 | |
| Programs | 45 | 23 | | Hospice | 8 | 4 | |
| Redemptive Narratives | 9 | 9 | | Religion | 26 | 15 | |
| Resistance | 5 | 1 | | Work | 1 | 1 | |
| Technology | 5 | 1 | | | | | |
| Transition | 82 | 34 | | | | | |

# Appendix H - Five Words Describing Prison Word Cloud