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DECONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES TO RECONSTRUCT LIVES:

How Formerly Incarcerated Women Resist Social Stigmatization to Reclaim Agency

by

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Abstract

This article draws from lived experience to explore how formerly incarcerated women navigate and overcome the adverse effects of stigmatization during reentry. Prisons are sustained by widespread beliefs in the effectiveness of carceral punishment, and structures of power underlying the criminal legal system reproduce and magnify racial, gender, and class inequality. Involvement within the criminal legal system has life-long implications and fundamentally alters how an individual is perceived, both by others and themselves. I investigate how widespread assumptions about the nature of incarceration—or "carceral narratives"—affect the lives of those that are incarcerated. I also highlight the resilience of formerly incarcerated women in building personal confidence, as well as networks of support, to challenge these narratives, reclaim their identities, and rebuild their lives.

Introduction

The criminal legal system is intricately embedded in society, affecting a multitude of social, political, and economic institutions. Equally multidimensional beliefs about the nature of "offenders" support the existence of carceral institutions like prisons. However, research has demonstrated the adverse, often counterproductive, effects of incarceration, and this growing awareness escalates the urgency of criminal legal reform. Issues with incarceration span the entire process of system involvement, including reentry after incarceration. While many quantitative and qualitative studies have demonstrated the necessity of robust reentry organizations for needs such as housing, drug rehabilitation, mental health, workforce development, and education, these studies sometimes overlook the implicit social beliefs that justify the under-resourcing of reentry programs.

The voices of those directly affected by these reentry programs, especially women of color, have been historically suppressed. This work builds on scholarly literature that elevates the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women to identify specific emotional needs and areas of reform. In this paper, I sought to answer the questions: What damaging beliefs are socially held about incarcerated women? What are the effects of these stigmas, and how do formerly incarcerated women reconcile these effects?

I first classify these social stigmas as "carceral narratives," as they typically reflect assumptions about the character of system-impacted individuals, and are used to justify the denial of agency to these individuals through policing and carceral institutions. I spoke with six Chicagoland-based formerly incarcerated women and identified four main carceral narratives: assumptions of criminality of system-impacted individuals, invisibilizations of the impacts of trauma, expectations of certain gendered behaviors, and restrictions of access to education. I then

illustrate how these narratives are so socially dominant that they become internalized and negatively impact self-perception, causing feelings of powerlessness. Finally, I highlight how the women that I spoke to were able to resist these beliefs of inefficacy through the development of confidence in personal identity, recognition of trauma, and networks of support. They were able to determine and condemn how these beliefs had paralyzed them, instead working towards reclaiming their agency. In this way, these women "deconstructed" carceral narratives and "reconstructed" the lives that incarceration had robbed from them.

Theoretical Framework

<u>Stigmatization of Incarcerated Women</u>

Prisons as physical and political structures are especially oppressive of marginalized groups and should be examined with an intersectional lens that directly addresses identity-dependent circumstances (Crenshaw 1991; Richie 2012; Haney 2010). What this work identifies as "carceral narratives," are established social beliefs and norms about incarcerated individuals, especially women, that contribute to their systemic suppression and invisibilization. These narratives include conditioned abuse, domestic expectations, criminalization, and sociopolitical ignorance. This work seeks to complement previous understandings of material reentry needs for formerly incarcerated individuals by examining the emotional dimension of these needs.

Studies have shown how incarcerated or formerly incarcerated women are more heavily stigmatized than men. With imposed gendered expectations of domestic performance and motherhood, incarcerated women are perceived as having failed their responsibilities–suffering from both internal and external pressure (Rade et al. 2016). The stigma associated with this devaluation often compounds background issues of low self-esteem, anger, guilt, and learned helplessness that are common among women who are incarcerated (Haney 2010). This relates to the differentiated pathways that incarcerated women have taken to become incarcerated, in comparison to men. The majority of women that are incarcerated possess backgrounds of trauma, shaped by sexual abuse, mental health problems, economic disadvantage, and carry these beliefs with them into carceral institutions (Ellis 2021). Women are much less likely than men to have committed violent offenses, and are disproportionately incarcerated for nonviolent offenses, which are typically motivated by poverty or substance abuse (Van Wormer & Bartollas 2021; Bloom et al. 2003). However, incarcerated women are still one of the most under-studied and

invisible populations, and this work seeks to supplement this gap (Covington 1998). As women constitute a minority of the incarcerated population, women's prisons are under-resourced, and specific, gendered needs are typically ignored (Davis 2011; Burton 2019). This work seeks to explore firsthand perspectives of how this systemic ignorance and multifaceted stigmatization affects the lives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women.

Assumptions of Criminality

Post-incarceration disciplinary processes such as criminal records and restrictive rehabilitative shelters have extensive societal consequences (Miller 2022). A combination of social, economic, and racial marginalization, as well as a dominant rhetoric of individual responsibility, reinforces criminal stigma and legal exclusion (Miller 2014; Wacquant 2012). Women entering the system are constantly reminded of their status as a "criminal" or an "offender" by figures of legal authority like judges, prosecutors, and police, as well as through implicit means such as denial of opportunities and programming. This framework of individual responsibility becomes a barrier to identity transformation, empowerment, and successful reintegration (Hart 2016). I investigate the implications of such processes of dehumanization, and how formerly incarcerated individuals navigate the emotional weight of this stigmatization during and after their incarceration.

Invisibilization of Trauma

For those women that have experienced constant abuse from childhood, many grow numb to the experience of degradation and violence, finding it normal in their interpersonal relationships (Browne et al. 1999). The reality is that women in abusive relationships are often ill-equipped to leave, whether that be materially through limited financial means, or emotional

manipulation (Haney 2010). Incarceration bars these women from proper development, and they are unable to freely explore self-identity and ways of coping. Women that enter the hostile carceral environment with this baggage are expected to navigate the further pressures of the correctional system, in which forms of discipline can retraumatize, signaling to women that their bodies are deserving of abuse and often leading to further harmful behavior or reincarceration (Browne et al. 1999). This work seeks to add to research about how formerly incarcerated women can develop healthy emotional tools to process their histories of trauma and abuse, despite a lack of institutional support.

Expectation of Gender Performance

Due to socially ingrained misogynistic standards, incarcerated women are viewed to be transgressors of "fundamental moral principles of womanhood" (Davis 2011, 70). Many women that enter carceral facilities are mothers raised with traditional ideas of womanhood, involving domesticity, docility, and caregiving, that feel as if they have failed (Haney 2010; Solinger 2010). Policy, education, and employment all fuel these stigmas—the law is largely dismissive of domestic abuse, and classes provided in women's prisons are typically solely focused on home-making, or qualitative subjects insufficient to earn a degree (Morash 1994). Further, underfunding of correctional facilities is disproportionately reflected in women's prisons, manifesting in a marked lack of medical and mental health care (Van den Bergh et al. 2011). This, in turn, leads to increased risk of reincarceration (Willging et al. 2013), as well as substance abuse after incarceration (Binswanger et al. 2007). Additionally, prisons are especially hostile towards women because of power dynamics between women and correctional officers. Many women have spoken out about instances of sexual abuse and misogyny from correctional officers, which often are underreported or ignored due to a lack of accountability mechanisms

(Human Rights Watch 1996). I look to illuminate the historically neglected perspective of women affected by the criminal legal system and illustrate the consequences of these internalized gendered expectations.

Denial of Education

Women with adverse backgrounds are typically disillusioned with the world and indifferent to larger social issues, having been conditioned to prioritize self-preservation above all else, including education (Haney 2010). Many women entering the system do not have above a high school education, much less a rigorous sociological education, and are thus unaware or indifferent to the structural injustice latent in the criminal legal system. Survival mentalities bred by hostile carceral environments further entrench incarcerated women in myopic worldviews and cynicism (Pollack 2019). This cycle of legal cynicism ultimately results in increased recidivism and continued antagonism with the law (Kirk 2016). The understanding of prison as an extension of slavery and a means of socioeconomic subjugation has been well-explored by theorists (Alexander 2020), and this work seeks to additionally explore how formerly incarcerated women can be empowered by both general education and sociological education about structures of power.

Reentry for Formerly Incarcerated Women

There is growing awareness of the harmful effects of incarceration, both on the individual and society at large, as well as how incarceration exacerbates social problems (Haney 2002; Western & Petit 2010). For women in particular, incarceration also comes with multifaceted consequences, such as separation from family, failure to perform gendered expectations, lowered self-confidence, and more (Belknap 2020). The question of outcomes after prison in the form of

rehabilitative programs has also been studied. Commonly, rehabilitative efforts constitute

halfway homes, shelters, drug rehabilitation programs, and mental health counseling, but are still

dominated by rhetoric of crime control and become means of re-criminalization (Garland 2002;

Wacquant 2012). Studies have shown how existing reintegration services are often scarce,

meaning that many individuals struggle with material hardship after prison (Western et al. 2015).

Furthermore, rehabilitative programming is typically generalized, as individual behaviors, rather

than environmental and social circumstances are expected to be reformed (Raynor et al. 2005).

Not only are individual needs usually not met, but this again precludes the need for gender-

responsive treatments, which have been demonstrated to be necessary and effective (Van

Voorhis et al. 2012). Women face different challenges after prison as a result of the

aforementioned carceral narratives and their uniquely marginalized positions in society (Richie

2001). Due to scarcity and internalized stigmas, reentry programs ranging from housing to

employment support, have still been documented to be restrictive, sexist, and widely difficult to

participate in (Belknap 2001; Bloom et al. 2003). Gender-responsive approaches to reentry

typically place emphasis on family and relationship building, as women have been demonstrated

to be more responsive toward interpersonal support, self-transformation, after gaining their

material needs (Doherty et al. 2014). Existing literature has explored how women build and

empower self-identity, and how this process is critical to positive reentry experiences (Mahoney

& Daniel 2006; O'Brien 2001). I seek to synthesize these processes of identity-building as well

as identify the importance of a critical consciousness for formerly incarcerated women as a

means of reclaiming autonomy.

This work builds upon studies like Beth Richie's life history interviews to continue the

important and necessary elevation of lived experience (Richie 2001). I hope to explore how

politically active formerly incarcerated women came to an understanding of their position within

a carceral society, and how this facilitated empowerment during their reentry processes.

Data and Methods

This work begins and continues with conversation. The purpose of this project is to present genuine narratives of strength that can possibly inform understanding of transformational rhetoric, and to personally explore how privilege can be leveraged toward de-carceral efforts. Through the representation and examination of lived experiences, I hope to demonstrate how formerly incarcerated women have overcome negative internalized beliefs about their own power and autonomy, as well as how certain how experiences before or during incarceration can affect strategies for navigating the reentry process.

My personal interest in the criminal legal system stems from working with system-impacted individuals at public defense offices. I was struck by the extreme lack of reentry programs and resources, particularly mental and physical health support. I learned that many individuals had entered the system traumatized and left even more ill-equipped to grapple with emotional stress. For some, reincarceration was a consequence of an inability to adapt, and the belief that they were irredeemable. Thus, I became interested in hearing more about the impact of experiences and beliefs that formerly incarcerated individuals carry.

I am heavily inspired by Beth Richie's ideas of standpoint epistemology—that "knowledge that is generated by people who are closer to the experience… will be more accurate than knowledge generated by researchers" (Richie 2012, 129). Through this work, I sought to interrogate my own positionality as a student researcher in a position of social, economic, and political privilege. I considered the lens I inhabit within the larger interlocking structures of marginalization that constitute the criminal legal system. I hoped to subvert traditional "subject-participant" research and interview relationships by expressing that I did not see myself as an extractor of information, but rather a vehicle for these women to share their lived experiences.

As such, the open-ended interviews in this work are meant to highlight the inherent scholarship value of these women's stories. My analysis draws from eight calls and conversations with six women who were formerly incarcerated in Illinois prisons. Physical, mental, and emotional struggles of incarceration are implicit and so deeply embedded in an individual's subjective experience that only first-hand narration can provide authentic insight into how systems of power transform thought and perception. The interaction between multiple perspectives can also provide a more comprehensive picture of the diversity of carceral and reentry experiences. Being able to observe points of conflict or empowerment in different individuals' accounts can highlight a variety of poignant areas and strategies toward reform.

Through Professor Alice Kim, Director of Human Rights Practice at the University of Chicago, I was able to get in contact with individuals from the Women's Justice Institute (WJI), a reentry and activist organization based in Chicago. From there, I was able to snowball sample, meeting and speaking with six formerly incarcerated women from an Illinois-wide network.

All the women I spoke with are active, eminent community organizers and activists in movements toward decarceration, criminal legal reform, and reentry support. They are prolific writers and speakers that are passionate about specific points of necessary reform within the scope of the criminal legal system.

I first spoke with Sandra Brown (she/her). Sandra is the Analytical Senior Advisor and Writer in Residence at the Women's Justice Institute. She is passionate about improving public understanding of public policy and social justice issues through research and public speaking. Her research interests entail methods to improve educational and professional opportunities for disempowered populations via instruction, advocacy, and public policy.

Next, I spoke with a formerly incarcerated woman (she/they), who wished to remain anonymous.

I also spoke with Dyanna Winchester (she/her/them). Dyanna is a Black woman and a mother of two. She serves as a Reclamation Specialist for the Women's Justice Institute, where she helps justice-involved women understand, navigate, and work through their rights and needs. She is passionate about healing, as well as working with individual women to overcome their unique histories of trauma and abuse.

I also had a conversation with Heather Canuel (she/her). Heather is an activist, mother, and stylist often referred to as "the last woman to give birth cuffed to a bed while incarcerated in Illinois." She is currently an Advisor for the Envisioning Justice team at Illinois Humanities, the Founder of Art from the Heart—an organization that creates a safe space for children that have experienced the loss of a parent to incarceration and helps them to use art as a therapeutic tool for emotions. The biggest motivation for this organization developed from her now 19-year-old daughter that was featured in Teen Vogue for her role as a mentor in the program. In her role at the Women's Justice Institute, she has developed resources, such as the first Resource Guide for teachers that work behind the walls with the Illinois Coalition of Education and Prison, and advocated for policy change around the country. She has recently edited and compiled a Healing Workbook that will be used inside six Youth and Adult facilities in Illinois. Heather is dedicated to fighting the narrative around the carceral system and impacting individuals through arts and healing.

I also spoke with Lydia Hope Vision (she/her), a formerly incarcerated trans woman. Lydia has an associate degree in sociology, as well as a paralegal certification, and is interested in pursuing a potential legal career. She has worked with the Women's Justice Institute and is

currently employed at the WIN Recovery Foundation. Lydia has a passion for criminal legal reform and helping other women who are in need.

I was also able to speak with Colette Payne (she/her), an organizer, leader, student, mother, and grandmother. Her passion is to educate families to build healthier communities. In 2020, she was appointed to serve as the first Director of the Women's Justice Institute (WJI) Reclamation Project, the first initiative of its kind in Illinois to be led by-and-for system-impacted women. In this role, she is leading the launch of an innovative Reclamation Center in the Pilsen Arts Corridor that will serve as the Reclamation Project's home for arts and advocacy, mutual support, healing and connection, community building and leadership development among women with lived experience. In her role, Colette engages women directly impacted by the criminal legal system to become agents of change and create solutions to end the incarceration of women and girls. She is frequently featured as a speaker and moderator of community events on topics ranging from the reunification of children and mothers, reproductive justice, mental health care, the need for increased programming in prisons, and barriers to employment for people with criminal records. In 2015 Colette joined the WJI's historic delegation to conduct a Gender Informed Practices Assessment (GIPA) of Logan Correctional Center, the largest and most complex prison in Illinois, and becoming the first formerly incarcerated woman to serve in this role in the entire United States. Colette has appeared on television and spoken at conferences, churches, and universities, and provides expert testimony before legislative committees. She has received several awards for her leadership, including Claim's JoAnn Archibald award (2013), the Jane Adams Center for Social Policy and Research Community Leadership Award (2015), Safer Foundation's Carre Visionary Award (2018) and the Chicago Foundation for Women (CFW) 2020 Impact award for her dedication to improving the lives of women and girls in the Chicago

area. Previously, Colette served as the coordinator of the Visible Voices program for CLAIM (Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers), a program of Cabrini Green Legal Aid.

The main topics I was interested in discussing were informed by common themes I gleaned from oral histories compiled by Ayelet Waldman and Robin Levi in *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons* (2017), as well as Susan Burton's memoir, *Becoming Ms. Burton* (2019). These issues included sexual violence, denial of adequate healthcare, abuse under the guise of corrective action, and overall robberies of human dignity. I began each conversation by informing participants of my interest in their comprehensive stories, and that I wanted them to have maximal liberty to share what they were comfortable with (Voith et al. 2020). After having a few conversations, I further streamlined my topics of interest into four central stigmas that I asked participants about: criminalization, understated trauma, gendered domesticity, and restricted education. Throughout the course of each discussion, participants shared a multitude of perspectives, ranging from heartbreaking stories of experiences on the inside, to inspirational and empowering accounts of camaraderie and creativity.

There are few ways to reach the disparate population of system-impacted women, and location and time restrictions unfortunately foreclosed more thorough outreach and in-person interactions. Additionally, having no experiential conception of the inhumane environment of the prisons and criminal legal processes, meant that it was unreasonable for me to rely on any argumentative assumptions going into this work. The few conversations I had cannot encapsulate the vastly diverse experience of incarceration, and as such, this work is meant to be a limited, inductive analysis of how women survived, and continue to survive an indifferent, antagonistic system.

Results

<u>Carceral Narratives</u>

Assumed Criminality

Incarcerated individuals are socially perceived to be "offenders" due to assumptions that these individuals definitively committed crimes and did so out of an inherent immoral motivation. This carceral narrative also typically includes beliefs that punishment through prisons is necessary for social order. Dyanna sees these perceptions as consequences of a "judgmental and unforgiving" society, where people want to act as a "Big Punisher and continue to cause you to suffer." The women posit that these carceral beliefs are consequences of unempathetic upbringings. Colette recalls how her childhood experience with criminalizing rhetoric impacted her self-perception.

> "And people used to think that something was wrong with me. Because they
> didn't understand how I saw that system. And how I was bad. They labeled me
> as bad."

The premise that convicted individuals deserve to be incarcerated assumes that their behavior is entirely contingent on intentional choices. Ironically, such assumptions of autonomy strips agency from these individuals, as they begin to believe the narratives surrounding them, and become confined by the mindset that they are inherently, and eternally, criminal. This narrative is bolstered by an antagonistic trial process, where blame becomes binary and the convicted is seen as irretrievably "wrong." Lydia characterizes how legal authorities like judges and prosecutors constantly remind the accused of their status as a criminal "because they view it

as their job to be the arbiter of what's right or wrong." Sandra also expresses the danger in the way a non-nuanced culture of blame pervades the entire system of law enforcement.

> "Everybody who works in law enforcement because again, the term is enforcement. Keyword being 'force.' You're using force for your own objective. Not for objectivity, not for justice. And there is no tempering of mercy with it at all. That person's humanity gets lost in that courtroom. And so many times I've said it before: victims are on both sides of the courtroom, but that gets lost in the interest of winning a conviction."

This criminalization continues even past incarceration, and every woman I spoke with noted how stigmatization continued in their reentry through lasting criminal records, as well as the carceral nature of halfway homes and shelters. Dyanna calls this a "permanent punishment," detailing how shelters "treat you just like prison." Denial of privileges due to criminal records and strict surveillance in housing programs affirm the label of all formerly incarcerated individuals as potential "offenders." These narratives of stigmatization prevent the formerly incarcerated from achieving full material independence from prison, as well as emotional liberation from assumptions of criminality.

Invisibilized Trauma

Historically, the criminal legal system has generalized, understated, or ignored the impacts of trauma and mental health on individuals. As a result, incarcerated individuals' backgrounds of trauma, as well as traumatic experiences within carceral environments are invisible to social perception, which enables the continuation of the callous, overly punitive nature of prisons. Rhetoric that places responsibility on the individual ignores the underlying

psychological factors that may have led to an individual's incarceration and becomes institutional justification for the denial of mental health resources. Yet, this bias also affects women who do seek mental health treatment. Sandra describes how she would hear comments from correctional staff that shamed women for taking medicine for mental health, evoking a perception that incarcerated women were deceptive and wholly responsible for their circumstances.

> "'This is just the way it works. This is what happens when you break the law'... you could hear comments that implied that those of us who were asking for help were probably pretending and really didn't need the help. I would hear these comments sometimes when… the women would need to take medicine, maybe related to trauma and something, to help them sleep. 'Oh, they're just doing it to get high anyway. They can't get what they want on the streets, and so this is how they come in, and they substitute, self-medicate.' And we hear this from—I would hear this from officers. Sometimes I would hear it from the very people administering the medicine."

The invisibilization of the patterns of abuse that run through the backgrounds of many incarcerated women functions to trap women in a state of perpetual maladjustment. Many women are sent to carceral facilities for responses to abuse and attempts at survival, meaning that these women enter the system with conditioned desperation and defensiveness. For those women that have experienced constant abuse from childhood, many grow numb to the experience of degradation and violence and find it normal in their interpersonal relationships. The hostility of the carceral environment only serves to reinforce the violent ways of thinking that might have caused their initial incarceration, leading to antagonism within the prison and recidivism. Lydia

explains how an atmosphere of pain pervades the prisons, ensnaring women in cycles of violence and infighting.

> "You become used to the pain of it… it's always present… And then they get back out in a couple of years and they're hurt even worse, than they went in… or it turns into a different thing. Instead of becoming stronger than their hurt… they become reactionary to… the pain of the place… They're fairly terrifying. They hurt each other real bad… They don't care about violence because they're just immune to it… it's part of… being alive to them."

Dyanna further elaborates how this violent carceral environment is markedly detrimental to women trying to overcome trauma.

> "And a lot of trauma still occurs in there, because fighting, and then abuse, and bullying, and all that type of stuff, so it's not the environment that you would wanna pursue or embrace your healing… Things like that, that will cause you to go back to doing drugs because you're not able to cope with life with times that happens… and that cycle that goes on until you realize or get the help that you need, and are willing to go through the process to heal."

Women are held prisoner physically—confined within walls inhospitable to healing—as well as emotionally—dependent on accessible yet unhealthy coping mechanisms of violence and substance abuse.

Expected Gender Performance

Another carceral narrative lies in gendered expectations by society, correctional staff, and other individuals on the inside. Incarcerated women are subject to magnified stereotypical gender roles, as they have violated both social and gender norms, and these imposed expectations shape their experiences while in prison. Heather identifies how motherhood places an incarcerated woman in a fundamentally different position than an incarcerated man, and how incarcerated womanhood becomes a toxic generational cycle.

> "Reentry for women is different than men because we have children out
> there… If you look, there's several mothers and daughters and sisters and aunts
> incarcerated, because generationally, it trickles down, because there's no
> healing, right?"

Incarcerated women are caught in conflicting narratives, where they are told that they are irresponsible mothers, yet they are denied opportunities to connect with their children due to prohibitive policies. In Illinois, the organization with legal jurisdiction over custody issues is the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and Heather states how she "never saw one woman that was dealing with DCFS in the system that wasn't crying." Another woman I spoke to discusses the reproduction of these pressures when incarcerated women reenter because "we have grandchildren, our nieces and nephews that we wind up in caretaking positions of, or even our parents." They note how caretaking is an informally enforced responsibility, even after incarceration, but that a "hyper-individualistic shift" in social and legal regulations prevent women from obtaining the resources they require to fulfill these responsibilities, leaving them feeling helpless and overwhelmed.

Additionally, women are typically subject to the whims of correctional officers and are expected to bend to their needs. This marked hierarchy signals to the women that their identity as

an individual is inherently inferior. Heather recalls a friend that had a fatal relationship with an officer as a "means of survival," as well as how incarceration often conditions women into a defeated, passive "crumbs are okay" mentality.

While incarcerated women are feminized in how docility is imposed upon them with implicit and explicit threats of force, carceral environments also masculinize women in a way that degrades self-confidence. Colette describes a prison that only reused men's clothing as uniforms, and how this lack of women's clothing signaled to the women that they were less deserving than men.

> "Their clothes aren't cut or tailored to a woman's body… So, the women
>
> complained about as they wear these, this clothing, it conforms their shape to
>
> the shape and build of a man…Women are an afterthought."

Queerness is also greatly stigmatized within carceral facilities. Lesbian and trans individuals face discrimination from both the staff and possibly others on the inside. Lydia provides a picture of the especially cruel circumstances for incarcerated trans women, as well as labels informally imposed upon them.

> "The higher ups and the prison when letters are going to make as much trouble
>
> for the transgender women there as they can. They really, really go far out of
>
> their way for it… The majority of the trans women in there were some level
>
> street level sex worker. And they get treated like that in there. The whole
>
> "pimps and hoes" situation becomes a thing."

Forced domesticity under threat of revoked education also demonstrates how carceral modes of control are implicitly exerted in programming within prisons. Sandra notices how GED

programs are typically available in men's prisons, but the classes provided in women's prisons are either solely focused on home-making, or qualitative subjects insufficient to earn a degree. Colette expands on Sandra's explanation and draws a connection to why women are "unsuccessful" in reentry as a result.

> "[Men] have more programming than we have. They have more trades than we have. So, you know, what does that look like for when they come home? If they have a trade up under their belt, whether it be truck driving, you know, wood shop, making things there. That's a trade that they can take with them. Something that they learn, hands-on training. When you have a nail tech, and you're taking nail tech while you're inside, but you can't get a certification on the outside because of your conviction, that doesn't even matter. You know, why does it even matter? Why are you offering me something that I couldn't possibly use?"

Incarcerated trans women are denied any actual gender-specific resources or help, yet are still expected to perform stereotypical femininity. These discordant narratives of gender function toward the detriment of incarcerated women, causing additional feelings of powerlessness because of their biological disposition.

Restricted Education

Expectations for incarcerated individuals to be docile stems from perceptions of prison as primarily a form of punishment, rather than rehabilitation. This also has adverse effects that are reflected in the lack of educational programs, a barrier to employment and economic stability upon reentry. Sandra points out that this carceral narrative that justice-involved individuals are

not deserving of education is because many see education as a "privilege, rather than a necessity." The denial of education relegates formerly incarcerated women to dependence, unable to be self-sufficient. Sandra identifies an expectation to be "productive citizens of society" upon reentry, yet "We deny educational access to this population… How do we expect somebody with less than a fourth-grade education to function outside?"

As a result of this carceral narrative, education is woefully underfunded within carceral institutions, as well as in reentry programs. The scarcity of resources leads to policies where access to education is dependent on the length of one's sentence or behavior, upholding the idea that incarcerated individuals must earn their education by being submissively acquiescent. Dyanna recognizes how inability to gain legal employment increases rates of incarceration.

> "Maybe less people will go to prison because they're not in a position where 'I have to survive, so I can't get a job, so I have to go sell drugs. So I have to go sell my body, because I don't have the things that I need.'"

Similarly, Lydia recognizes how this carceral narrative fuels incompetency and the prison-industrial complex—the intersection between oppressive economic and carceral structures (Davis 2011).

> "They don't want you to know anything. They want you to fail, to come back. It's their business model. If nobody that ever went in came back, they would have a hard time justifying why they have so many employees and so many facilities. But if they set you up for failure and you fail… you come back."

Denying incarcerated individuals education limits their opportunities, making re-incarceration a path of least resistance. Inadequate education in prisons stems from a social

perception that education is unnecessary or fruitless for incarcerated individuals, resulting in a cycle where system-impacted people are perceived as unproductive by themselves and others because of an inability to gain employment, worsening prejudice and leading to more punitive measures. The carceral narrative that restricts education reinforces the existence of a prison-industrial complex by limiting formerly incarcerated individuals' agency to pursue true liberation after prison.

Internalization of Carceral Narratives

Intra-prison Discipline

The women I spoke to emphasized the weight of these social stigmas on their identities and healing processes. Carceral narratives echo in every aspect of the prison environment, reminding incarcerated individuals that their lesser requires constant policing (Foucault 1977). Inhumane disciplinary measures can be retraumatizing, especially for women who are subject to sexually abusive punishments, such as invasive strip searches. Sandra recalls an experience where correctional officers stripped her, along with many other women, down in the hallway without regard to any bystanders. At the time, Sandra was also menstruating, and was forbidden from cleaning herself or using any hygiene products. The staff chained Sandra and other women into a barren room and forced them to sit for multiple hours. Sandra explains how, throughout the search, she felt so powerless that she began to wonder whether her act of self-preservation was worth it.

> "In that moment, I thought, 'All of this because I fought for my life.' That was
> my thought. And the next thought that followed after that is, 'Maybe I

should've just took the bullet.' It just kind of reinforces the mentality that you

did this to yourself. It's your fault that you're being violated like this."

Instead of a site for rehabilitation, those on the inside are constantly degraded and reminded of their systemic worthlessness by correctional officers. Forms of discipline within carceral institutions remind those on the inside of their status as deserving of punishment and abuse. Even educational programs or efforts to "rehabilitate" can be weaponized as means of discipline. As a result, attempts to liberate or enlighten oneself can seem futile, only subject to the whim of correctional officers. Sandra also details how other women came to be disillusioned and turned away from educational opportunities because of harassment.

"'Forget it, I'm not going because I'm tired. I'm tired of always trying to go,

and then Officer so and so… they're always harassing me. So I'm just going to

let it go...' Quite a few of us learned to be complacent and to just take whatever

comes, because we know that if we speak out against it, or say maybe we

respond in kind, there's some retaliation… education has been weaponized…

I've seen that happen often."

A consequence of working in a system that rewards the use of harsh punishment, staff workers in carceral facilities are incentivized to utilize emotional and physical abuse to induce compliance and docility. Dyanna also expresses how they adopted an overall passive mentality for the sake of survival.

"Like I do have the thought that they feed me, and some of the meals wasn't

that bad, but I think we just tell ourselves that to survive."

The maintenance of carceral environments through constant surveillance and the deprivation of basic dignity results in the internalization that punishment of this nature is deserved. Such disciplinary procedures serve to wear down resistance, functioning as means of corporal and emotional control inside prisons. The enforcement of arbitrary, inhumane disciplinary actions inverts the supposed intended rehabilitative purpose of prison. Ideas that incarcerated "offenders" require harsh punishment to be controlled cements individuals' perceptions of themselves as an eternally criminalized.

Lack of Medical Care

Under-resourcing of medical care bolsters carceral narratives by denying incarcerated individuals the opportunity to learn that there are tools available to overcome toxic cycles of trauma, while also highlighting the disposability of their lives. Women are especially affected by the insufficient medical care in prisons, as more resources are dedicated to the higher population of incarcerated men. The necessary tools to address trauma usually arise in counseling and mental health care, yet the scarcity of such services in prisons leads to individual needs going unaddressed, and continued trauma-induced behavior. All the women I spoke with reported how their needs were either neglected completely or were dismissed with prescriptions of psychotropic medicine. Even the counseling that does exist propagates harmful narratives. One of the women I spoke to describes how some suggestions are not sensitive to backgrounds of trauma, rather causing more pain and feelings of helplessness.

> "They say in treatment and in other spaces: 'Nobody's ever gonna love you
>
> unless you love yourself.' I think that's the most horrible thing to say to

somebody, right? Because that's like telling a motherfucker that they just

doomed."

Denial of proper emotional treatment and learning of healthy coping mechanisms cause incarcerated women to be continually haunted by, and remain hostages to, their backgrounds of abuse. Women's experiences during incarceration are also marred with physical difficulties and the death of their companions. These women live with the understanding that the larger social system is indifferent to their deaths and internalize this perception of worthlessness. This indifference is highlighted by dismissive prescriptions—psychotropic medicine for mental health problems, and Ibuprofen for physical problems. Sandra remarks how this process is "always reactive." Having medical problems is sometimes even punished. Heather gave birth while incarcerated, and explains how "when you gave birth, they put you in seg for 24 to 48 hours after to monitor you. And it was the biggest like moment with God for me, ever." Such inhumane treatment implies that women necessitate a form of discipline purely because they are women and gave birth to a child.

Furthermore, deficient medical attention leaves individuals physically incapable of focusing on already limited educational programming. Sandra describes common tormenting thoughts such as "I don't know how we're able to focus on learning the Pythagorean Theorem when I've had these migraines forever… How can my mind be on this reading comprehension assignment, and I don't know what's going on with my kids at home?" Heather describes how, having gone untreated for years, medical problems could also harm women during reentry.

"Re-entry is not even the tip of the iceberg. Physical health. I've watched

women die in, die in the infirmaries in the prisons, and there's no burial, no

family to notify, they don't know what happened… they don't get to go to a

doctor for 18 years… Now they're out drinking soda pop, and they have a brain

aneurysm. That could be a part of reentry that people aren't looking at at all."

This carceral narrative, that incarcerated women are not worthy of medical care, strips

autonomy from incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, as they are unable to heal when

kept in a constant state of mental and physical weakness. Their bodies are subject to the whims

and finances of the correctional institution, building sentiments of demotivation and desolation

within these women because they feel as if their lives do not matter.

Continued Stigmatization in Reentry

In a similar way, scarcity of reentry resources also causes formerly incarcerated

individuals to internalize ideas of their own criminality and powerlessness. One of the women

expressed how they were expected to be passive and grateful for any resource offered, even if it

was abusive.

> "I was told to, like, just be grateful. And there's this—I don't know—too many
>
> in too many spaces, we have fallen for the scarcity mentality where we're
>
> supposed to be like, thank you for pissing on me, because at least you're not
>
> shitting on me too."

Sandra describes how these mentalities cause lasting harm, and how, in a way, this

culture of punishment becomes a "life sentence."

> "If this thought process is reinforced for years, that they're not deserving. "You
>
> deserve every bad thing that happens to you. You don't deserve to have the
>
> tools necessary to be okay after this is over." It's almost like indirectly or in

> subtle and covert ways being handed a life sentence… At what point are we
>
> done paying our debt to society?"

Heather relates this to a phenomenon she calls "poverty pimping," the process by which formerly incarcerated individuals are forced to rely on systems of state welfare, reproducing cycles of poverty. Difficulty in finding employment is also a barrier to economic security for formerly incarcerated individuals. Oftentimes, convictions are also a product of trauma and external factors, yet system-impacted individuals are assumed to have had full responsibility, resulting in confining policies like dehumanizing post-incarceration requirements, disenfranchisement, and employment discrimination, which further reincarceration (Wacquant 2012; Alexander 2010). Lydia related to me how she felt hindered by her lack of education and employment preparation while on the inside, and how she had to find employment through family and friends. Colette explains how these prohibitive policies only discourage formerly incarcerated individuals.

> "You have jobs, employers who don't want to give you an opportunity,
>
> because… they don't want to be held liable. What does that look like when you
>
> say, 'I am supposed to be rehabilitated after serving my time, but I come home,
>
> and don't have the same opportunity as other citizens who live in the
>
> community in which I stay?'"

These continued consequences of incarceration evoke sentiments of despair as formerly incarcerated individuals feel as if they can never escape the implications of their actions and their past, and this makes rehabilitation feel futile, as these individuals will never fully regain the privileges they had pre-incarceration.

Deconstruction of Carceral Narratives

Confidence in Personal Identity

To counter these carceral narratives requires immense emotional resiliency—incarcerated individuals must identify how these harmful ideas have shaped their self-perceptions and actively work towards reversing these biases. The women I talked to expressed how they were able to gain confidence in their identity through thorough understanding of themselves and their backgrounds. Dyanna notes the importance of "know[ing] who you are in faith, in the face of what people try to throw off of on you as a label, and know that you're not an offender." Sandra explains how she views the carceral process as one reliant on dehumanization. In thinking about her situation, she realized that her only choices were "bad and worse," and that she was a survivor, not an "offender." Heather similarly emphasizes how important confidence in self is, especially in the reentry process.

> "Reentry starts with yourself, your self-esteem, your self-worth… it's just the
> system of dehumanizing, where I've always felt you have to build the woman
> from within: self-esteem, self-worth, self-actualization, and making sure you're
> valued."

Another woman explains that her assurance in her own worthiness is also systemic. She describes how individual criminalization extends further than incarceration, but rather is the basis for a societal and generational under-resourcing.

> "I feel like I'm worthy of all the shit that I never had, that I would like to have.
> I feel like I'm worthy of a life without violence and fear and degradation. I feel
> like my grandchildren, or my daughters, and you, and any children you may

> yet have, and whoever is gonna be here when I'm not, are worthy of life. And
>
> to be able to live life fully right."

A systemic understanding of how such carceral rhetoric originates also allows these women to better recognize their standing within a system, and actively resist misinformed judgments of their character. For these women, they must realize the possibility of autonomy in order to break free from the stigmatizing narratives that are impressed onto them.

The women I spoke to were also able to reconcile their understandings of their gender identities and gendered power dynamics. Lydia explains that, despite hostile conditions, she found power in her journey toward self-fulfillment and does not "want to ever stop pushing towards that happiness." Heather describes how she became cognizant of her internalized subordination and "had to change that structure in my mind," instead telling herself "I am valuable. I am worthy. I am the CEO." Dyanna also explains how, instead of feeling guilty, she used her status as a mother and her children to persevere.

> "I think it was fear, courage, faith. And like having something to look forward
>
> to, something that I was fighting to get to which were my children."

Rather than allowing structural barriers that continue to stigmatize these aspects, these women expressed how they have since dismissed these expectations and instead live their lives with newfound, reclaimed notions of love and family. They demonstrated that, to regain autonomy, they dismantled deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and toxic narratives to instead survive and feel comfortable in the sociopolitical dimensions of their gender.

Recognition of Trauma

In addition, the women I spoke to all demonstrated an understanding of gaining healthy emotional tools to reclaim their happiness, agency, and self-worth. Dyanna talks about how she loves exercise and Zumba, and another woman I spoke to recalls fond memories of their theater troupe, and how their love of storytelling allowed them to better understand aspects of themselves and their emotions. Colette explains how she learned that "everybody processes trauma differently," which helped her develop a new perspective on her thoughts and actions. A woman I spoke to recalls how a similar systemic understanding caused her to reconsider the ways that she approached the carceral environment.

> "She was one of umpteen motherfuckers just like me, right? Who, if they had had some kind of help and support in their life beforehand, it wouldn't have came to this point. And I decided then I think that I would save my enmity for the system and not for the people that was caught up in it with me. And so I tried to do my entire time like that, that shit wasn't always easy."

Sandra echoes these ideas of psychological insight, and how she believes that society should also come to view incarcerated people's circumstances from a more empathetic, comprehensive perspective.

> "We're missing that people's brains are maybe hardwired differently… And so to assume that because, 'when I went through it, this is what I did; that this is what everyone else is going to do,' I think it's an unfair judgment that some hold on those of us who may not have made the same choices that they did… Not everyone's brain biologically is wired to respond the same way, and yet

there's this expectation that, "because I didn't break the law, you shouldn't have

broken the law."

Just as trauma responses differ, healing processes also differ. Heather explains how she believes that "being able to turn your pain into purpose is really important, because each narrative is different for each woman." This understanding led the women I spoke with to form networks of support, like the Women's Justice Institute, that promote recognition of emotional tools. Heather tells me about the "Women's Justice Pathways Model" a diagram that cites essential needs for re-entering women—relationship safety, health and well-being, economic security and empowerment, safe and stable housing, and supported families. This circle assists women in recognizing where the problem areas in their lives are, and formulates targeted, specific strategies to rebuild them (WJI 2021). With the recognition of these strategies, and the ability to articulate emotions, women navigating the reentry process can reclaim these aspects of their lives by breaking the cycle of dependency and abuse that dictated their lives. These women have come to understand that the abuse was not their fault, but has shaped the way they feel and react to situations. The harsh reality that the resources necessary for the reclamation of their mental health and healthy coping strategies will not be provided for them has empowered some women to independently seize control of their healing processes and actively seek out resources and networks to do so. Colette explains how WJI is a manifestation of how women who have undergone this realization process reach out to help others.

"So it's about building a network of support of people who you can trust and

it's up to the individual to decipher what that is. Because it looks different for

everybody. It looks different. Like you get—I had to go through, seek out a

therapist, talk myself through it, gain some tools of how trauma shows up in

my life. What tools do I have when that trauma shows up? How am I fighting

back against what I'm feeling in my mind, and in my body?"

One of the women I spoke to frames her healing process as an assertion of agency.

"I got a lot from prison, but the prison never meant for me to have it. I took it.

If I didn't take it, it was given to me by the people that I was locked up with…

We need to face, to heal, and unlearn, and learn new ways, reclaim old ways of

being with each other, and learn new ways of being with each other."

In building a robust sense of self-worth, a newfound confidence that comes with

validating one's own desire to continue living, and communities with shared backgrounds of

pain, formerly incarcerated women can regain autonomy through the ability to adapt and process

trauma.

Systemic Understanding and Networks of Support

The women I spoke with identified how recognizing the relationship between

incarceration and capitalism, patriarchy, and racism assisted them in understanding their own

positionality, efficacy, and identity within the system. Heather points out how reactionary

behavior from women is often a result of hopelessness due to ignorance.

"There's no opportunity for them to change their way of thinking, because

there's no opportunities for education… So it was a cycle and a circle of

slavery, I mean, you know it, it really is. So the same thing that, you know,

what we've learned about people's lack of hope, because people beat that out of

them. And not just physically, they don't give them opportunities to learn that

there's something better… They're going to fight. They're going to steal.

They're going to destroy. They're going to do survival tactics. And that

includes violence, that includes sexual favors with guards, it includes a lot of

deploring things that when you look back–go back to–I mean–incarceration is

that. It's a direct derivative of slavery, and poverty is a huge thing, and the

same practices that were kept in the fields are kept in the prisons."

All the women I spoke with understood the American prison system as an extension of

slavery, and themselves as the product of a long history of historical pain and oppression

(Alexander 2010). Dyanna notes how the idea of confinement, the removal of agency by force,

and anti-Blackness latent in slavery became the foundational ideologies for carceral institutions.

"So through black history, we understand how we were put on a slave ship or

forbidden to know or understand comprehension, read books, have access to

knowledge because that knowledge will bring us into the understanding of

what is innovative. These things that make us successful, the creative parts of

ourselves that we are beautiful, that we are intelligent and that we are bigger

than our worst mistake and so, I feel like, because we have learned these things

and we know about the Jim Crow, the lynching, all this type of stuff, like it just

goes back in history… Like anytime a person is taking, you take their freedom

away from them. What else do they have?... They confined… That's what

slavery was: captivity. Any type of captivity. And it don't even have to be like

in your physical body. It could be in your mind. Based on life experiences, this

world is filled with different levels of white supremacy and things like that…

People are raised up to look at us as servants and workers and not as valuable

equals to themselves…The prison population, unfortunately, has so much percentage of us in there that you can't help but to look at it that way."

The women I spoke with came to these conclusions despite the intentional enforced ignorance of the incarcerated population. Dyanna, Sandra, and Colette all expressed how self-driven education was a necessary component of this understanding. Sandra also identified the parallel between slavery and Jim Crow policies and current conditions of incarceration, stating how her education in humanities was critical to reaching this conclusion.

> "When we look at it systemically and historically, I would go so far as to say, one of the main tools that this country as an institution has used to foster oppression is to deny access to education. When we look at the laws regarding teaching slaves, for example. Those who were caught teaching slaves to read were killed for that. It was illegal for slaves to learn or read. And so consequently, as a result of that, when we look at what happened after the emancipation, you had slaves who were freed, but didn't know how to be free, because they couldn't read, they couldn't write, and so 'Let's return to the plantation because at least there we get to eat and we get a place to sleep.' When we fast forward that to the incarcerated population, is it any surprise that the recidivism rate is as high as it is? Because we don't have access to education inside… I started taking these courses, humanities, that talked about the human condition in these different time periods, and these elements that were prevalent in these time periods, I started making the connection. And I thought, wow. This is why they don't want education inside."

In the face of seemingly insurmountable structures of oppression, women formed networks of support to keep each other accountable, and to stand in solidarity against demeaning attitudes. As the founder of WJI, Colette explains that her mission is to provide more women with this structural understanding in order to restore a sense of self, and to encourage them to reclaim their autonomy. Colette reached her breaking point when she realized that her incarceration only fueled the prison-industrial complex. She became determined to stay out of prison and share that knowledge with others.

> "It's a struggle, but I came to the realization during my last incarceration. When they—especially when I left and every time, because they saw me so many times, 'We'll leave the lights on for you, Payne. We'll have a toothbrush waiting on you.' It's the mean things that they say. And those things got stuck in my head, and I was like I'm deserving more. I don't need your freaking toothbrush. I don't need your lights. I don't need any of that, and I'm not your job security. I am not. I will not. When I come back, I'm gonna come in through the front door. And share my knowledge and my experience on what it's like to stay out of prison and jails."

Realizing the importance of learning and knowing leads these women to fight for their rights to education. One of the women I spoke to recognized that "so many of us have this wide, wide range of education and skills that we can motherfucking use. So much creativity, just from art to music to theater," even recalling how her friend Patricia was able to provide mental health and emotional support to individuals for whom trained professional therapists had been ineffective. However, they assert that material security is a prerequisite to radical education.

> "Make sure people have enough. And then you can begin that process of like learning new shit and unlearning stuff. I think a really good question to ask people is… 'How does it fundamentally change your relationships when everyone has enough?' And then act accordingly."

Sandra became educated through a mail program because her institution denied her programming. She expresses how she was initially disillusioned by the vast injustice of the system but has since gained optimism that political reform was possible because that was the mentality with which she survived. She goes on to discuss her beliefs about how these issues should be approached: with a redefinition of crime, and a more comprehensive, empathetic outlook.

> "I get sad and angry at the same time… Because I know what it's like to have no hope… There have been times…where I had to just keep telling myself something, even though I couldn't see that it could ever be true… sometimes holding on to that was the only thing that got me through some of those moments… Is there ever an end to this? How long can America keep ignoring the voices of the impacted that we're growing in numbers every day, every day?... I used to believe in the system before I became impacted by it. And now you know, I still believe that justice is possible. Healing justice, restorative justice is possible. But it takes change in all institutions. Prisons can no longer just warehouse people and punish them without any spaces for healing or restoration. I think legislators need to factor the human condition into the equation when they make these laws designed to get tough on crime. And I just think as a society overall, we need to revisit how we define 'crime.'

Because we find so many people committing acts of survival, who are now

punished for committing those acts."

Many of the women I spoke with had ideas for concrete policy that could potentially

cause incremental reform, such as defunding police forces and correctional facilities, increased

prosecutor accountability, as well as more robust reentry organizations. However, they also all

emphasized the importance of their personal roles as providers and receivers of support. Dyanna

notes that change will only be possible through collective organization.

"We have to continue to stand. And have our voices heard. Will it ever

happen? Am I a believer that it can? Yes. When, I don't know. We just have to

continue to fight. It's almost like, in a spiritual sense, waiting on Jesus."

Conclusion

"Her lived experience is a body of motherfucking research. My lived

experience is a body of research and not a subject of somebody's fucking

research."

Survivors of incarceration are resilient in resisting the carceral narratives they were

constantly reminded of inside prison, as well as haunted by outside prison. Carceral

environments are rampant with systemic violence and resource denial, displaying a disconnect

between the intended, rehabilitative purpose of a "correctional facility" and the harsh reality of

hostility that women face inside these institutions. This manifests in crises of self as these

women attempt to navigate and dissect the discordant narratives created by tangible legal

structures, as well as intangible social perceptions. The women I spoke with shared several key

perspectives that were necessary to their process of healing and reclamation of identity.

Particularly, they all pointed out how many women entering the system, including themselves,

felt labeled as criminals, separated from their backgrounds of trauma, compelled to perform

within certain gendered norms, and excluded from proper education. Without having learnt

healthy coping mechanisms, these stigmas began to modify their own self-perceptions. However,

through personal journeys of rediscovering self-confidence, reckoning with histories of pain, and

forming collaborative networks of support, these women were able to understand how structural

inequality had affected them, and reclaim their identities.

Throughout the course of this work, I was able to learn from women that embody the

definition of resilience. I do not claim to have uncovered any novel theory about how formerly

incarcerated women can all overcome carceral narratives. Rather, I draw on the experiences of a

limited sample of women, who all had similar experiences in similar carceral facilities, and

reached conclusions of self-confidence through mutual empowerment. While the insights from this work may not be generally applicable, I sought to explore alternative methods of deep individual engagement and elevation of lived experience as forms of scholarship. Additionally, I make no claims as to concrete reform strategies. The material needs for reentry have not changed; survivors of incarceration are still in dire need of housing, work, and education. What I hoped to demonstrate with this work is how a culture of carcerality is culpable in sustaining institutions that strip incarcerated individuals of their autonomy.

Most importantly, the voices of more system-impacted women need to be elevated. The silencing of such a marginalized population only obscures their actual needs, leading to performative reform that may actually be harmful, and a sustained system of carceral slavery. A recognition of beliefs in harmful narratives is a step toward advocating for more holistic, empathetic, and tailored reforms that may improve the situations of incarcerated women. Future studies could examine the ways that autonomy could be restored to incarcerated women through specific kinds of intra-prison programming, and whether that improves their experiences during incarceration and reentry. My hope for this work is to fortify existing accounts of lived experience scholarship (Richie 2001; Solinger 2010; Waldman & Levi 2017; Burton 2019), as well as contribute toward the growing conversation surrounding decarceration and the urgent need for the deconstruction of carceral mindsets and policies.

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