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Education

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| University of Maryland Baltimore
School of Social Work
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Candidate in Social Work | Expected: July 2023 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <u>Dissertation</u>: The role of relationships for adults who served long prison sentences that began in childhood: A mixed methods social network approach▪ <u>Committee</u>: Charlotte Bright (co-chair), Geoffrey Greif (co-chair), Jaih Craddock, Corey Shdaimah, Alexandra Wimberly | |
| University of Pennsylvania
School of Social Policy & Practice
Master of Social Work (MSW) | May 2013 |
| Gettysburg College
Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Religion, Minor in Philosophy | May 2006 |

Publications

Manuscripts Under Review

- Shdaimah, C. S., Becker, T., **Franke, N. D.**, & Leon, C. S. (Submitted for Review). Who do we call “creepy?”: Sex workers’ relationships as targets of intimate intervention.
- Flower, S. M., Pheasant, M., Harmon-Darrow, C., & **Franke, N. D.** (Submitted for Review). Rebuilding bridges: Prisoner reentry mediation and recidivism.

Peer Reviewed

- Franke, N. D.** (In Press). Understanding privilege and engaging in activism: Elevating social justice in social work education. *Advances in Social Work*.
- Bright, C. L., **Franke, N. D.**, Eads, R., & Lee, M. Y. (In Press). “Invest the time for their success”: A qualitative investigation of mentorship in social work doctoral education. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*.
- Shdaimah, C. S., **Franke, N. D.**, Becker, T., & Leon, C. S. (2023). Of house and home: The meanings of housing for women engaged in criminalized street-based sex work. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 40, 54-74. <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201223204>

Eads, R., Bright, C. L., Lee, M. Y., & **Franke, N. D.** (2023). Promoting diversity and inclusion in social work doctoral programs through mentoring: Perceptions and advice from students of color. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*. [10.1080/15313204.2023.2200985](https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2023.2200985)

Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J., **Franke, N. D.**, & Betz, G. (2022). Police diversion at arrest: A systematic review of the literature. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 50(3), 307-329. [10.1177/00938548221131965](https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548221131965)

Franke, N. D. & Shdaimah, C. S. (2022). “I have different goals than you, we can’t be a team”: Navigating the tensions of a courtroom workgroup in a prostitution diversion program. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 16(2), 193-205. [10.1080/17496535.2022.2069544](https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2022.2069544)

Craddock, J. B., **Franke, N. D.**, & Kingori, C. (2022). Associations of social network characteristics and dynamics and individual risk factors with HIV testing, condom use, and interest in PrEP use among young Black women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 51(5), 2473-2483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02306-7>

Lee, M. Y., Eads, R., Bright, C. L., & **Franke, N. D.** (2022). Student and faculty perceptions of social work doctoral mentoring: Navigating academic, non-academic and diversity and inclusion issues. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 19(2), 185-211. [10.1080/26408066.2021.2009078](https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2021.2009078)

Franke, N. D., Treglia, D., & Cnaan, R. A. (2017). Reentry program and social work education: Training the next generation of criminal justice social workers. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 14(6), 409-420. [10.1080/23761407.2017.1367345](https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2017.1367345)

Invited Publications and Reports

Lee, M. Y., Bright, C., Eads, R., & **Franke, N.** (2020). *2020 GADE mentoring survey report: Holistic mentoring practices for today’s research careers: Perceptions from students and faculty*. Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work. <http://www.gadephd.org/Portals/0/2020%20GADE%20Mentoring%20Report.pdf?ver=2020-05-18-151439-940>

Book Chapters

Engstrom, M., Wimberly, A., & **Franke, N. D.** (2017). Mass incarceration: What’s at stake and what to do. In J. L. Jackson, Jr. (Ed.), *Social policy and social justice* (pp. 20-41). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Franke, N. D. & Cnaan, R. A. (2016). Mass incarceration and people of color. In P. M. Jackson (Ed.), *People of color in the United States: Contemporary issues in education, work, communities, health, and immigration, Vol. 2* (pp. 221-228). Greenwood/ABC-Clio.

Research Positions

Doctoral Fellow, Community Justice and Equity Initiative **Jul 2020-Present**

University of Maryland School of Social Work

Faculty mentor: Corey S. Shdaimah, PhD, LLM

- Topic areas: Prostitution diversion courts; criminal and community justice; mandated sex offender treatment
- Spearhead and participate in all aspects of qualitative research including interview guides and procedure development; IRB application completion; recruitment; interviews; and data analysis and coding using NVIVO
 - Write manuscripts and create presentations to highlight qualitative findings
 - Assist in creation of new initiative to address criminal and community justice issues while building collaborations within University of Maryland Baltimore

Research Associate

Aug 2022-Dec 2022

University of Michigan School of Social Work

Faculty mentors: Lisa Fedina, PhD; Bethany Backes, PhD (University of Central Florida)

- Clean, merge, and conduct analyses on 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) data to explore patterns of poly-victimization exposure across racial and ethnic populations in the U.S.
- Funder: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice via Rutgers University Violence Against Women Research Consortium (2016-MU-CX-K011)

Graduate Research Assistant

Sep 2019-Jun 2020

University of Maryland School of Social Work

Faculty mentor: Elizabeth Greeno, PhD, LCSW-C

- Topic areas: Child welfare, foster care, LGBTQ+, implementation science
- Wrote syntax, managed, and analyzed data in SPSS
 - Combined survey tools across multistate sites for seamless evaluation and management
 - Created, edited, and managed multiple surveys using Qualtrics
 - Wrote and edited reports using statewide training data
 - Collaborated with research team

Graduate Research Assistant

Sep 2018-Aug 2019

University of Maryland School of Social Work

Faculty mentor: Charlotte L. Bright, PhD, MSW

- Topic areas: Gender and juvenile justice, doctoral student mentorship, family centered treatment, school absenteeism
- Created, managed, and analyzed survey data using Qualtrics

- Conducted literature reviews, qualitative data coding and analysis, and quantitative data cleaning and analysis
- Prepared results for dissemination, and presented findings at national conferences and in peer-reviewed manuscripts

Research Coordinator for the Dean

Oct 2013-Sep 2014

University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice

Faculty mentor: Richard Gelles, PhD, MA

- Topic areas: Child welfare, preschool expulsion, gambling, criminal justice
- Conducted and wrote literature reviews and research reports
 - Organized and analyzed quantitative data

Social Work Practice and Policy Experience

Goldring Reentry Initiative (GRI)

Director

Sep 2014-Jul 2018

- Developed policies and procedures while overseeing and coordinating all aspects of the GRI, a program that supports people pre- and post-release from the Philadelphia Department of Prisons and is an MSW field placement
- Led recruitment and selection of 100 clients and 15 MSW interns annually
- Maintained relationships with legal partners from courts, jails and parole and coordinated regular status hearings for clients post-release
- Facilitated weekly integrative seminar with all interns on criminal justice topics
- Created and oversaw implementation of evaluative tools for clients and interns
- Supervised three MSW interns directly and oversaw 12 MSW interns and 1.5 staff

Associate Director

Oct 2013-Sep 2014

- Provided clinical support, assistance, and resources to MSW interns
- Built coalitions and collaborations with service providers and legal partners
- Acted as lead organizer of *Breaking Down Walls* conference with 350 attendees

Student Program Coordinator & MSW Intern

Sep 2012-Oct 2013

- Co-chaired committee for criminal justice conference about intersections of mass incarceration and their implications by coordinating all aspects for 300 attendees
- Provided weekly therapeutic support to five clients pre- and post-release from jail to develop and implement individualized reentry plans

Philadelphia Children's Alliance

Sep 2011-Apr 2012

Victim Advocate MSW Intern

- Provided crisis counseling, support, and referrals to over 50 non-offending caregivers of victims of child sexual abuse
- Coordinated support and services with DHS, SVU, and social service providers

Teaching Experience

Adjunct Professor

Aug 2022-Dec 2022

University of Maryland School of Social Work

- SOWK 630: Social Work Practice with Individuals (Hybrid)

Teaching Assistant **Jan 2021-May 2021**
University of Maryland School of Social Work
▪ SWOA 707: Social Policy and Social Change, Joan Davitt (Virtual, Synchronous)

Spanish Instructor **Jul 2013**
Chautauqua Institution, Special Studies Department
▪ Taught Spanish to 40 beginner and intermediate students ages 13-70

Sexual Education Instructor **Sep 2009-Apr 2011**
Various High Schools in Limpio, Paraguay (as a Peace Corps Volunteer)
▪ Taught HIV and sexual education to over 300 youth using peer training model

GED Instructor **Sep 2008-Jan 2009**
Jennifer Road Detention Center, Annapolis, MD
▪ Created curriculum and taught in all major subjects for 20 incarcerated men

Other Relevant Experience

Urban Youth Development Volunteer **Feb 2009-Apr 2011**
United States Peace Corps, Limpio, Paraguay
▪ Built and systematized library after applying for and winning federal grant
▪ Supported women's group administering free meal program for children
▪ Organized and grew triannual concert to promote cultural musical exchange
▪ Revived Peace Corps Paraguay's triannual publication as Head Editor

Union Organizer **Apr 2007-May 2008**
Service Employees International Union Local 503, Portland, OR
▪ Launched a union at Rosemont Treatment Center and School by cultivating internal support and external community alliances

Residential Skills Specialist **Nov 2006-Dec 2007**
Rosemont Treatment Center and School, Portland, OR
▪ Facilitated Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) psychosocial skills courses and implementation in milieu
▪ Provided support, structure, and individualized treatment plans for girls ages 12-17 with behavioral, mental health, and substance use disorder histories
▪ Led groups on life skills, anger management, relationships, and communication

Extern **Jun 2006**
Petersburg Federal Correctional Complex, Richmond, VA
▪ Shadowed warden and explored all aspects of federal prisons in complex

Intern **Sep 2005-May 2006**
Seeds to Success & Emerge Reentry Programs, Gettysburg, PA
▪ Provided career services assistance to people who were previously incarcerated

Presentations

Refereed Presentations

Franke, N. D. (2023, January). *Navigating competing goals and perspectives in a prostitution diversion court workgroup* [Oral Paper]. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Phoenix, AZ.

Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J., & **Franke, N. D.** (2023, January). *Police diversion at arrest: A systematic review of the literature* [Poster Presentation]. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Phoenix, AZ.

Franke, N. D. (2022, November). *Role of relationships for adults returning from long prison sentences starting in childhood* [Roundtable]. 2022 American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Franke, N. D. & Shefner, R. S. (2022, November). *Navigating tensions and requirements of mandated sex offender treatment* [Roundtable]. 2022 American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J. A., & **Franke, N. D.** (2022, November). *Police diversion at arrest: Current program landscape* [Roundtable]. 2022 American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J. A., **Franke, N. D.**, & Jackson, A. (2022, September). *Police diversion at arrest: Literature, best practices, and critical tensions* [Presentation]. Social Work and Law National Symposium: Strengthening Pathways and Partnerships to Advance Empowerment, Justice, and Change, Virtual.

Franke, N. D. & Shdaimah, C. (2022, July). *"I have different goals than you, we can't be a team": Navigating the tensions of a courtroom workgroup in a prostitution diversion program*. In C. Leon's (Chair), *Navigating Boundaries: Personal and Professional Roles and Risks in Criminal Legal Contexts* [Symposium]. Law and Society Annual Meeting, Lisbon, Portugal.

Harmon-Darrow, C., Jackson, A., Mueller, D., **Franke, N. D.**, Afkinich, J., & Shdaimah, C. (2022, January). *National landscape of police-assisted diversion programs: A qualitative study examining an alternative approach to policing and public safety*. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Washington, DC.

Mueller, D., **Franke, N. D.**, Afkinich, J., Jackson, A., Harmon-Darrow, C., & Shdaimah, C. (2021, November). *Navigating theoretical tensions and perspectives across the national landscape of police-assisted diversion programs* [Roundtable]. American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

- Franke, N. D.** (2020, November). Understanding privilege and engaging in activism: Social justice in social work. In T. D. Becker (Chair), *Critical Race Theory in action: A multisite inquiry of MSW education* [Symposium]. Council on Social Work Education 66th Annual Program Meeting, Virtual.
- Bright, C. L. & **Franke, N. D.** (2020, November). Tailoring mentoring practices for historically underrepresented students in social work doctoral programs. In M. Y. Lee (Chair), *Mentoring practices to promote diversity and inclusion in social work doctoral programs* [Symposium]. Council on Social Work Education 66th Annual Program Meeting, Virtual.
- Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J., & **Franke, N. D.** (2020, June). *Law enforcement pre-arrest diversion of adults: A systematic review of the literature*. National Organization of Forensic Social Work Conference. [Cancelled due to COVID.]
- Franke, N. D.** (2020, March). *Understanding privilege and engaging in activism* [Poster Presentation]. University of Maryland, Baltimore 42nd Annual Graduate Research Conference, Baltimore, MD.
- Burry, C. L., McCarthy, L., **Franke, N. D.**, & Bright, C. L. (2019, January). *Outside in and inside out: The challenges of conducting research in criminal justice settings and strategies to overcome these* [Roundtable]. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, San Francisco, CA.
- Franke, N. D.** (2016, November). *Integrating social work and criminal justice: A university-based reentry initiative* [Roundtable]. 2016 Vision Summit: Looking Toward the Future of Re-Entry, Texas Reentry Advisory Council, Austin, TX.
- Engstrom, M., Wimberly, A., & **Franke, N. D.** (2016, January). *Mass incarceration: What's at stake and what to do* [Roundtable]. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Washington DC.
- Franke, N. D.** & Cnaan, R. A. (2014, October). *University-based reentry initiative: A collaborative criminal justice field placement model* [Roundtable]. Annual Program Meeting, Council on Social Work Education, Tampa, FL.

Invited Presentations

- Lee, M. Y., Bright, C., Eads, R., & **Franke, N.** (2020, January). *Holistic mentoring practices for today's research careers: Perceptions from students and faculty* [Roundtable]. Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Washington, DC.
- Franke, N. D.** (2019, January). *Inequalities in the criminal justice system* [Conference Session]. Martin Luther King Day of Service, Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, PA.

Franke, N. D. (2018, May). *Realities of reentry: Preparing for the returning citizens tour guide project* [Panelist]. All Staff Meeting, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, PA.

Franke, N. D. (2016, December). *Holistic and humane practices in the era of mass incarceration* [Plenary Panelist]. Re-Imagine Justice: Mass Incarceration, Re-Entry & Trauma Conference, Silver School, New York University, New York, NY.

Franke, N. D. (2016, September). *Incarceration and reentry* [Plenary Panelist]. Fall Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.

Franke, N. D. (2015, June). *Client as the expert: Social work in reentry* [Panelist]. Beyond the Walls: Prison Health Care & Reentry Summit, Philadelphia FIGHT, Philadelphia, PA.

Franke, N. D. (2014, April). *Returning citizens and expungement projects* [Panelist]. Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference, National Lawyers' Guild, Philadelphia, PA.

Franke, N. D. (2014, January). *The GRI and successful reentry from the Philadelphia Prison System* [Plenary Panelist]. New Year's Day of Responsibility, Pennsylvania Prison Society, Philadelphia, PA.

Franke, N. D. & Zaveloff, E. (2013, June). *Necessary vs. possible: Social work values and practices in the criminal justice system* [Panelist]. Beyond the Walls: Prison Health Care & Reentry Summit, Philadelphia FIGHT, Philadelphia, PA.

Funding

Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (unfunded) **Mar 2022**
Social and Economic Rights Associates

Dissertation Grant (unfunded) **Dec 2021**
Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy

Grand Challenges Dissertation Award **Oct 2021**
University of Maryland School of Social Work
▪ \$4,000

Travel Support

University of Maryland Graduate Student Association **Jan 2023**
University of Maryland School of Social Work **Nov 2022**
University of Maryland School of Social Work **Jan 2020**
University of Maryland School of Social Work **Jan 2019**

New York University Silver School of Social Work	Dec 2016
University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice	Nov 2016
Texas Reentry Advisory Council	Nov 2016
University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice	Oct 2014

Phoebus Criminal Justice Initiative Grant	Mar 2013
Bread and Roses Community Fund	
▪ <i>Breaking Down Walls</i> community event: \$3,000	

Small Project Assistance Grant (non-academic)	Jan 2011
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	
▪ To build and stock community library in Paraguay (during Peace Corps): \$3,000	

Academic Service & Independent Research Projects

Committee Member	Jun 2022-Present
Grand Challenges of Social Work Dissertation Award Committee	

Co-Lead	Jan 2022-Present
UMB Qualitative Research Interest Group	

Grand Challenges of Social Work	
Smart Decarceration Reentry Working Group Co-Lead	Jan 2022-Present
Smart Decarceration Police-Assisted Diversion (PAD) Working Group Member	
▪ PAD Qualitative Study	Mar 2020-Present
▪ PAD Systematic Literature Review	Jan 2020-Present

Ad-Hoc Reviewer	Apr 2021-Present
<i>Advances in Social Work</i>	
<i>Ethics and Social Welfare Journal</i>	

Member	Jan 2018-Present
SSWR Criminal and Juvenile Justice Special Interest Group	

Service at University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice	
Staff Advisor, Criminal Justice Bloc Student Group	2013-2018
Member, Green Team Environmental Group	2017-2018
Wrote proposal and curriculum, Criminal Justice Specialization	2016
Helped create syllabus, Social Work & Criminal Justice (SWRK 785)	2014
Founder and Co-President, Criminal Justice Bloc Student Group	2012-2013
Vice President of Outreach, Hispanic/Latino Alliance for Change & Equity	2012-2013

Community Service

Election/Poll Worker	2018, 2020
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Member

Philadelphia Reentry Coalition **2013-Present**
Juvenile Life without Parole (JLWOP) Reentry Working Group **2016-2018**

Class Agent

Mercersburg Academy **2013-Present**

Advisor

Pennsylvania Prison Society Mentor Program **Mar-Sep 2017**
Eastern State Penitentiary Returning Citizens Tour Guide Project **2015-2017**

Advisory Board Member

Mural Arts Restorative Justice Symposium **2013-2014**

Select Trainings

Qualitative Interest Research Group NVIVO Training with Stuart Robertson **Nov 2021**

Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Training with Adar Ayira **May-Jun 2021**

Qualitative Research & Coding Workshop with Johnny Saldaña **Feb 2020**

Narcan and Harm Reduction with Prevention Point Philadelphia **Dec 2017**

JLWOP Mitigation and Vicarious Trauma Training **Aug 2016**

Thinking for a Change Facilitator Training with U.S. Attorney's Office **May 2014**

Essentials of Trauma-Informed Care in Criminal Justice with Sandra Bloom **Mar 2014**

Trauma-Informed Supervision with SP2's Field Office **Feb-Apr 2014**

Abstract

The US is the only country in the world to sentence children to die in prison. As of 2016, there were over 12,000 people in US prisons who had, starting between the ages of 12 and 17, been sentenced to spend the rest of their lives behind bars. Several Supreme Court rulings have opened the door for reconsideration of some of these sentences, resulting in the release of more than 980 “juvenile lifers.” Trauma histories, depleted social networks, diminished well-being and complex barriers to reentry are well-documented realities for people leaving prison after long sentences that began in adulthood. However, the post-release lives of those who served life and long sentences that began during childhood remain almost completely unexplored.

This dissertation study, believed to be the first national study of returned juvenile lifers, used mixed methods with a social network component to explore the post-release lives of this population. Findings are reported from a quantitative sample of 78 juvenile lifers from 24 US states and Washington, DC, with social network analytic tools considering the type, quality, and social support of the sample’s 555 social network members. Data from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 46 of the 78 participants were compared and integrated into the quantitative data. Quantitative analyses included multivariate regression and multi-level modeling, while qualitative analyses used thematic analysis.

Respondents report high quality of life, overall positive relationships, high amounts of social support, and very little undermining. In a multiple regression model, attending religious services, spending more than 20 years in prison, and having fewer unmet reentry needs were all associated with higher well-being. Themes were developed

regarding how respondents navigated different types of relationships (with family members, romantic partners, friends), life in prison, barriers to reentry, and parole, as well as their well-being. Positive relationship assessments, supportive relationships, number of types of support, and proportion of friends in a network were all associated with higher quality of life scores in social networks. Social network age, race, employment, and incarceration history were also associated with altered levels of well-being. Research, policy, and practice implications are discussed.

The Role of Relationships for Adults Who Served Long Prison Sentences that
Began in Childhood: A Mixed Methods Approach

by
Nancy Digby Franke

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, Baltimore in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

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Dedication

To the thousands of people who were sentenced to life and long sentences as children and remain behind bars today, may you come home soon and safely.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not be possible without the support and enthusiasm of so many people. First and foremost, I want to thank the individuals who had been sentenced to spend many or all of their years in prison beginning when they were children. It was truly an honor and a privilege to conduct this research, speak with so many amazing people, and attempt to tell these stories in the fullest, most complete way possible. I am forever indebted to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, an incredible organization that advocates for the end of extreme sentences for children, and their exceptional team members, including but not limited to: Abd'Allah Lateef, Catherine Jones, Eddie Ellis, Rebecca Turner, Donnell Drinks, and Crystal Carpenter. A special thanks to all of the participants who completed this survey and the 46 individuals I had the privilege of speaking with and getting to know.

I also must thank my wonderful dissertation committee. My longtime mentor and co-chair, Dr. Charlotte Bright was instrumental in forming research questions and build a study from my broad, wandering interests. Co-chair Dr. Geoff Greif was always there with a kind word and a gentle push, exactly how and when I needed it; his thinking about relationships was essential. Committee member Dr. Jaih Craddock gave me the gift of thinking about social networks and the many ways they can be used to explore people's lives through a social work lens. I thank you for your expertise and for reminding me just how horrific criminal legal systems are. Dr. Alexandra Wimberly, always both a practitioner and a researcher, encouraged a focus on what can be changed and how research applies to human beings, their well-being, and daily lives. Last but certainly not least, Dr. Corey Shdaimah's constant Critical and sharp eye, openness to our meandering conversations covering all corners of criminal legal systems, and helping me to connect all the dots, was immeasurably helpful. I appreciate each of you immensely.

Others at UMB's School of Social Work were likewise vital in the completion of this dissertation. Jen Canapp keeps the PhD program running like clockwork, through a pandemic and obstacles large and small about which us PhD students and candidates know little! Dr. Bethany Lee was always happy to meet, talk through my confusion and frustration, and provide support. Dr. Rod Rose was central to quieting my quantitative anxieties and stopping my spiraling, supporting me as I waded through the muck of an ugly variable and conducted several complicated analyses for the first time. Dr. Bruce DeForge's support, patience, and detailed IRB-related feedback was also invaluable. Thanks also to Dr. Rick Barth, who funded the Grand Challenges of Social Work Dissertation Award, which allowed me to conduct this research in an equitable way that aligned with social work values.

I had the joy of being in the world's biggest cohort, and thank you all for our shared learning and comradery in the midst of a global pandemic. Special thanks to (soon to be Dr.) Danielle Phillips, for your constant unconditional positive regard, thoughtful qualitative brain, time, and magical vibes. Thanks to (soon to be Dr.) Todd Becker, for commiserating, distractions, and APA and quant expertise. Thank you to Sarah Clem, who helped with transcriptions and shared my joy and enthusiasm in talking about these incredible interviews. Thanks also to: Dr. Jenny Afkinich, Dr. Caroline Harmon-Darrow, Dr. Rachel Imboden, Kim Leffler, Yao Wang, and so many others for a million things.

Thanks to my non-UMB friends—too many to list here—for your support, distractions, and shared curiosity!

Lastly, thank you to my family. To my dad, your enthusiasm about my dissertation and belief that it will change the world has meant the world. To my mom, you taught me long ago that I can be any and all of the things, and that it's okay if those things change completely at any point in life. That has given me the courage to try all the new things. To my sister, Mimi, your dedication to large-scale social justice reform and incredible brain never cease to impress and motivate me. To my brother, Rahde, your questions and curiosity have and will always keep pushing me to think differently and challenge my assumptions. To my broader family of aunts, uncles, and cousins who showed up, encouraged me, and asked questions about my work and prisons in general, thank you. And last, but certainly not least, to my husband Steve Hand, your interest in, excitement about, and support of this entire PhD process and my dissertation made all of this possible in a million ways, large and small. Your energy, compassion, and love never cease to amaze me. I love, like, and appreciate all of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

People returning to the community from life or long prison sentences contend with multiple and complex barriers to their reentry (Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Western, 2015). These barriers expand for people who began that life or long sentence during childhood. The practice of incarcerating children in adult prisons for life or long-term sentences is harmful to children, families, and society at large (Shook, 2014).

In the last few decades, every U.S. state adopted laws to facilitate the process of treating children (those who are under 18 years old) as adults in the criminal legal system, including sentencing them to remain in prison until they die (Shook, 2014; Visser & Shook, 2013). U.S. Supreme Court decisions between 2005 and 2016 resulted in the resentencing and release of some of the individuals who, as children, were sentenced to die in prison (Levick, 2019; Rovner, 2023). Though the number of people returning from all life or long sentences imposed on them as children is unclear, over 949 people sentenced to life without the possibility of parole as children have been released since 2016 (Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, 2023). For those returning home, the reentry process requires skill, social support, and knowledge of resources, while simultaneously navigating the newness of a world only previously known as children and vastly changed in their absence.

Defining long-term and life sentences is not as clear-cut as one may imagine. The term “lifer” is often a misnomer, as most people are eventually released (Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Though the percentage of people released after receiving a life sentence is unclear, Mauer (2004) estimated that people sentenced to life in prison in 1997 served an average of 29 years before being released. Long-term incarceration is not universally

defined, with definitions complicated by the use of indeterminate sentences and disagreement around measurement (of sentence length, time served, or years remaining; Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Ten years of time served has been used as the threshold in many studies over the decades and falls solidly within the range of years used to define long-term in studies in the U.S. and abroad (see Kazemian & Travis [2015] for an excellent discussion of defining long-term incarceration). Therefore, 10 years of time served is the threshold used in this study.

Sentencing children to life or long sentences is especially concerning considering the disregard for the fact that children are developmentally different from adults (Levick, 2019) and sending them to adult prison does not make society safer (Shook, 2014). Furthermore, the racial disparities within the sentencing of children to the adult system means that Black and Latine children are disproportionately affected by transfer laws and juvenile life without parole sentencing (Rover, 2023; Shook, 2014). Little is known about this population, but it is clear that many children incarcerated for extended periods in adult prisons have long, complex trauma histories prior to incarceration that are made worse by prolonged stints behind bars (Nellis, 2012; Shook, 2014).

This dissertation explores the in-prison and post-release lives of adults who have returned after serving long or life sentences imposed during childhood. The focus is on their changing relationships and overall quality of life. By better understanding this population's relationships and social networks, quality of life, and the reentry process, improvements can be made in policies, legislation, and social work practice regarding the treatment of people during and after their life or long sentence stemming from childhood.

Background

The U.S. prison population stayed firmly at about 100 per 100,000 residents from 1925 until the 1970s (Gottschalk, 2015) but has since grown so that nearly two million people are incarcerated in the U.S. on any given day (Sawyer & Wagner, 2023). This surge in our prison population stemmed from policies that imprisoned people for more minor offenses than previously; imposed longer prison sentences for those repeatedly caught in the system and for those convicted of violent crimes; and more aggressively policed and penalized individuals for drug charges (Nellis, 2021; Travis et al., 2014).

Lifers and Long-Termers

The rise in the number of people serving life and long sentences mirrors the surge in the general prison population. In 1984 (the first year for which there are data), there were approximately 34,000 people in the U.S. serving a life sentence, equating to about one in 13 people in prison (Nellis, 2017). The number of people sentenced to life in prison now exceeds the entire prison population of 1970. As of 2020, over 203,000 people were serving a life sentence in U.S. prisons—an increase of nearly five times since 1984—which equated to one in seven people incarcerated in U.S. prisons (Nellis, 2021). That number includes those sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), life with the possibility of parole (LWP), or virtual life, meaning that a person's sentence exceeds their expected lifespan, measured by The Sentencing Project as 50 or more years (Nellis, 2021). Despite the fact that the violent crime rate peaked in 1991 followed by the murder rate in 1993, the prevalence of life sentences and people serving them continues to grow (Nellis, 2017). Although LWP and LWOP sentences have both increased over the years, LWOP sentences grew at nearly four times the rate of LWP

sentences between 2003 and 2016 (Nellis, 2017). The U.S. is a standout in its frenzy to incarcerate people for life—though the U.S. has less than 5% of the world’s population, we have about 40% of the world’s lifer population (Smit & Appleton, 2019).

As is the case in the rest of the criminal legal system, racial and ethnic disparities among lifers are stark. As of 2020, people of color made up over two-thirds of lifers or virtual lifers (Nellis, 2021). Of all Black men in prison in the U.S., one in five is serving a life sentence (Nellis, 2021). Additionally, 16% of people serving life sentences are Latine (Nellis, 2021). Although that is close to the proportion of Latine people in the U.S., Latine ethnicity is likely under-reported in criminal legal systems. Life and long sentences trap people in prison for decades of their life, and do so disproportionately to people of color.

Juvenile Lifers and Long-Termers

Most children who enter the legal system are held in juvenile rather than criminal legal settings. However, transfer and waiver policies enable the criminal legal system to give children adult sanctions. The widening of situations that led to transfer to criminal court coincided with an increase in crime in the 1980s and early 1990s (Nellis, 2012; Shook, 2014). As the juvenile homicide rate tripled from the previous decade, public fear soared. By the time political scientist John Dilulio coined the term “super-predator” to refer to children in 1995, the juvenile homicide rate had been decreasing for two years (Nellis, 2012). Laws that mandated or allowed children to be tried as adults existed in every state by the mid-1990s (Nellis, 2012; Shook, 2014), paving a path for children to be sentenced to life without parole (juvenile life without parole [JLWOP]), life with parole (JLWP), or sentences of more than 50 years. The minimum age for adult prosecution

generally ranges from 10 to 13 in most states, but children as young as eight years old are tried as adults in some jurisdictions (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.).

Transfer to adult facilities and receipt of a life or long sentence is a reality for many children. Although the number of children sent to adult courts annually is unclear, estimates have ranged from more than 14,000 (with some states missing data) to 250,000 (Shook, 2014). Some estimates show the rate of children waived into the adult system as plummeting since the height of the panic about youth crime in the 1990s, but some recent estimates remain at about 53,000 children (Kelly, 2021). At year-end 2016, there were 2,310 people serving juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) sentences in the United States—the only country that sentences children to lifelong imprisonment (Rovner, 2023). There were a total of 12,000 juvenile lifers incarcerated in the U.S. as of 2016 (including those serving life with the possibility of parole or de facto life sentences; Nellis, 2017). This number has been falling in recent years. In 2020, an estimated 8,600 people were incarcerated for parole eligible life sentences that began in childhood (Nellis, 2021).

Incarcerating people for their entire life for their behaviors during childhood is not only inhumane; it is expensive too. At an average annual cost of \$34,135, which nearly doubles once a person is over 50 years old, it costs approximately \$2.25 million to incarcerate a person for 50 years starting at age 16 (Rovner, 2020). The oldest and longest serving juvenile lifer, Joe Ligon, was released in February 2021; it cost the state of Pennsylvania an estimated \$3 million to keep him behind bars for almost seven decades (Heller, 2021).

Although little is known about people serving long and life sentences stemming from childhood, some demographic and background information is available. A national survey of people serving JLWOP sentences found that nearly all participants (97.2%) were male and had served an average of 15 years in prison (Nellis, 2012). Over a fifth (22.7%) had been in prison for at least 21 years. An earlier study of people incarcerated with JLWOP sentences reported that half of the 1,291 respondents were 15 or younger at the time of their offense, and a small percent (0.5%) were just 13 years old (Parker et al., 2005).

Racial and ethnic disparities in sentencing, arrest, charging, and prosecution practices result in a majority of people serving JLWOP sentences being people of color. Most respondents in the Nellis (2012) study were Black (60.0%) or Latine (14.3%), and about a quarter (24.9%) were White. A more recent study noted that racial disparities in sentencing practices for this population have gotten worse since Nellis's (2012) study, with 72% of children sentenced to JLWOP being Black (Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, 2018). For those facing homicide charges, about half (47%) of the victims were White, a third (34.3%) were Black, and a tenth (9.2%) were Latine (Nellis, 2012). Various studies have demonstrated the importance of the homicide or serious crime victim's race as it relates to severity of sentencing in death penalty and life imprisonment cases (Death Penalty Information Center, n.d.). This was mirrored in the sentencing of JLWOP: there were a disproportionate amount of Black children serving JLWOP sentences for killing White people: nearly twice the rate of arrests of Black youth killing White people (Nellis, 2012). The inverse was also true: White children's rate of

JLWOP sentences for killing Black people was half the rate of arrests of White children being arrested for killing Black people (Nellis, 2012).

The national study of people serving JLWOP sentences found that, like people serving LWOP sentences imposed during adulthood, prior to incarceration, respondents lived in poor areas where they perceived the neighborhoods to be unsafe and had witnessed drug sales (Nellis, 2012). Almost a fifth (17.9%) reported being homeless prior to their incarceration, about a third lived in public housing, and less than 25% lived with both parents (Nellis, 2012). Individual experiences of trauma and abuse were high: 79% witnessed violence at home, half (49%) experienced physical abuse, and a fifth (20.5%) experienced sexual abuse as children prior to their incarceration (Nellis, 2012). These difficult and trauma-filled childhood experiences reflect those of people serving life sentences imposed during adulthood (Liem, 2016).

U.S. Supreme Court Rulings Regarding Juvenile Lifers. If the last decades of the 20th century were harsh for children convicted of serious crimes, the 21st century had a period of hopeful progress with a few crucial, positive developments. Four U.S. Supreme Court rulings between 2005 and 2016 acted as catalysts for those remarkable changes. Each of these Supreme Court rulings was based on the understanding that children are inherently different from adults and should be treated as such (Levick, 2019). These decisions deemed that treating children as adults was akin to cruel and unusual punishment (Eighth Amendment) and violated the right to due process (Fourteenth Amendment; Levick, 2019). The death penalty was abolished for children in the *Roper v. Simmons* (2005) decision. Five years later, *Graham v. Florida* (2010) halted life without the possibility of parole for non-homicide charges. Then, in 2012, *Miller v. Alabama*

banned mandatory JLWOP sentences for children, regardless of the type of crime.

Montgomery v. Louisiana (2016) made that decision retroactive. The *Jones v. Mississippi* (2021) decision marked a notable shift in rulings regarding sentencing of children, but it remains too early to see its affect (Nellis, 2021). See Table 1 for a list of Supreme Court decisions and their impact.

Table 1: Supreme Court Cases and Rulings

Supreme Court Case	Ruling
<i>Roper v. Simmons</i> (2005)	Banned the death penalty for children
<i>Graham v. Florida</i> (2010)	Abolished life without parole sentences for children convicted of crimes other than homicide
<i>Miller v. Alabama</i> (2012)	Banned mandatory life without parole sentences for children, even if convicted of murder or felony murder ¹
<i>Montgomery v. Louisiana</i> (2016)	Applied <i>Miller</i> retroactively, held JLWOP sentences should be used only in very rare circumstances
<i>Jones v. Mississippi</i> (2021)	Emphasized importance of judicial discretion and ignored need for children be deemed "permanently incorrigible" to receive a lengthy or JLWOP sentence

JLWOP Today. *Miller* (2012) and *Montgomery* (2016) held that JLWOP sentences could not be given mandatorily and could only be used in rare circumstances. The results of those decisions have been inconsistent across the states because of the flexibility in procedural application, which may include parole hearings or resentencing (Levick, 2019; Rovner, 2023). These differences are seen both in how states sentence children newly convicted of homicide or felony murder and how states resolve cases of individuals who were previously sentenced. On one extreme, California, which previously had one of the largest populations of the country’s citizens serving JLWOP

¹ Felony murder means a person is killed in the process of committing another felony; a person can be convicted of felony murder even if the victim’s death was an accident, unforeseen, or committed by another person (Levick, 2019).

sentences, now gives a meaningful chance at parole after 15 to 25 years by allowing people serving those sentences to petition their judge to reconsider their sentence (Rovner, 2020). On the other extreme, despite the *Miller* (2012) decision abolishing JLWOP sentences except in rare circumstances, 57% of all children charged with murder in Louisiana since 2012 have been sentenced to JLWOP (Webster, 2020).

The trajectory of Evan Miller, the petitioner in *Miller v. Alabama* (2012), is a useful, though upsetting, example of the pathway to and following a JLWOP sentence. Miller was 14 at the time of the crime for which he is incarcerated. By that point he had attempted suicide multiple times, beginning at age six. His childhood included time in foster care, prolonged physical abuse, and parental drug use. The Supreme Court decision bearing his name paved the way for the possibility of release for over 1,000 people by requiring reconsideration of JLWOP sentences. Despite the power of his case nationally, at his resentencing hearing in 2021, Miller was once again given a life without the possibility of parole sentence. The presiding judge determined that the severity of the crime outweighed mitigating factors like Miller's age and noted that life without the possibility of parole was the "only just sentence" (Associated Press, 2021, n.p.). This was a major blow coupled with the *Jones* (2021) decision of the same week. As of April 2023, Evan Miller remained in prison.

Although 28 states still allowed JLWOP sentences in 2020, two-thirds of individuals serving those sentences resided in one of three states: Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Louisiana (Rovner, 2020). Pennsylvania had the largest number of people serving JLWOP sentences, with 520 people who had received that sentence, 488 of whom were resentenced, and 285 of whom were released as of February 2023

(Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2023). Of the more than 500 people with JLWOP sentences in Pennsylvania, approximately 325 are from Philadelphia, meaning that that one city constitutes more than 10% of the entire national JLWOP population (Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project, n.d.).

Application of those Supreme Court decisions differed from one state to the next, some using parole hearings and others resentencing to adjudicate. Of the approximately 2,800 people serving JLWOP nationally at the time of the *Montgomery* (2016) decision, as of September 2022, almost 49% have received reduced sentences, 3% have been resentenced to JLWOP, and 23% are awaiting a sentence modification (CFSY, n.d.). As of January 2023, 949 have been released (CFSY, 2023). Louisiana had 982 people serving JLWOP, JLWP, or de facto life sentences in 2016 (Nellis, 2017). Of the 300 or so people sentenced to JLWOP in Louisiana, only 15 to 22% have been resentenced, 33% of whom received continued life sentences (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020). Given the dysfunction of Louisiana's criminal legal system (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.), it should be no surprise that Louisiana's draconian practices have been implemented to the detriment of people serving JLWOP sentences. Comparatively, of the 363 people sentenced to JLWOP in Michigan, 52% have been resentenced since 2016, with two-thirds (66%) sentenced to continued life sentences (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020). This calls into question whether Michigan takes the recommendations of the Supreme Court seriously.

Just as each state has conducted resentencing and parole petition processes differently for people originally serving JLWOP sentences, reentry processes have varied for those who were recently released. As former Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

Secretary John Wetzel said of people leaving prison following JLWOP sentences, “Reentry into our society is like living in the age of the Jetsons” (Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2020, n.p.). Very little is known about the post-release experiences of people who, as children, were sentenced to life or long periods behind bars. One factor that has been documented is the low rearrest and reconviction rates for people returning after JLWOP sentences. Daftary-Kapur and Zottoli (2020) examined the records of the 174 people sentenced to JLWOP and then released in Philadelphia. Of those, after an average of 21 months post-release, just six (3.5%) had been rearrested; four of those cases were dismissed, leaving a mere 1.1% reconviction rate (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020). In an investigation into the 142 people released from prison following a JLWOP sentence in Michigan, only one was found to have been rearrested (Samples, 2021). Additionally, as of June 2022, of the 109 people released in Louisiana since the *Miller* decision, none of them have returned to prison (Louisiana Parole Project, 2023).

Adapting to Life After a Life or Long Sentence

There is a major gap in the literature examining the post-carceral experiences of people sentenced to LWOP and long sentences as children, but some research does exist about the post-carceral experiences of people given LWOP and other long-term sentences as adults. The trauma, stress, and life-disrupting nature of prison faced by people with shorter sentences are often magnified by the sheer length of time lifers and long-termers have to experience them (Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Concerns have been raised about the extended exposure to trauma for long-term and life sentenced prisoners (Liem & Kunst, 2013).

People spending long stretches of their lives in prison face the threat of severely limited or decimated relationships with loved ones on the outside, often leaving them with a depleted support system (Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Munn, 2011). This experience of social death can increase prison violence and decrease morale (Stearns et al., 2019), and may be exacerbated by the limited visiting privileges for people serving life and long sentences (Penal Reform International, 2012). For youth, spending decades in prison inevitably means that people are removed from society during what are often the years in which they would begin families and meet other developmental milestones of adulthood. Post-release attempts to achieve those milestones are often met with feelings of frustration and loss, along with further isolation (Munn, 2011).

Navigating the tens of thousands of potential barriers to reentry post-release (Laird, 2013) would be difficult for anyone, and is compounded for people lacking education, job training or skills, language access, financial stability, and social supports (Gottschalk, 2015). People returning from long-term incarceration are likely to face all of those obstacles while navigating the culture shock of a world changed in their absence. Many of the individuals given long or life sentences as children are now older adults, the oldest of whom was 83 when he was released in 2021 (Heller, 2021). Older adults returning from incarceration report homelessness, substance use disorders, repeated emergency room visits, multimorbidity, functional impairment, hepatitis C infection, recent falls, pain, loneliness, and concerns about safety (Humphreys et al., 2018). People who have spent decades of their life in carceral settings often lack close relationships and support systems (Rakes et al., 2018), making these obstacles even more difficult. Older adults with a felony record are often denied admission into assisted living facilities,

nursing homes, and hospice settings as well, further limiting their housing and social support options (Rakes et al., 2018). This means people do not have the social or institutional safety nets needed to survive and thrive after prison, amounting to continual, unrelenting punishment for thousands of people who have already done their time.

Trauma, depleted social networks, and enormous barriers to reentry are par for the course for people who served life and long sentences beginning in adulthood. The experiences of people who served life and long sentences that began during childhood, however, remain largely unexplored. We do not know if social networks, reentry processes, and quality of life for people who grew up in prison are the same as for those whose sentences began in adulthood.

Specific Aims and Research Questions

This study focuses on the experiences of people who had been sentenced to life and long sentences as children and then released. Long sentences include 10 or more years, and children are defined as anyone who is incarcerated for an event that occurred when they were 17 or younger. Specifically, this study addresses the following aims and research questions:

Aim 1: To describe the lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood and then released.

Research Question 1.1. What are the characteristics of people returning from life and long sentences that began in childhood generally and in terms of their current quality of life and reentry needs since release?

Aim 2: To examine the relationship between demographic and/or prison-related characteristics and quality of life.

RQ2.1. Are certain characteristics (e.g., gender, race, age, time since release, number of years in prison) associated with current quality of life?

RQ2.2. How is post-release quality of life experienced by people who served a life or long sentence starting in childhood?

RQ2.3. To what extent do the quantitative and qualitative results on quality of life align or vary?

Aim 3: To explore the experience and role of relationships in the post-prison lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood.

RQ3.1. Who is involved in the post-carceral lives of this population? What types of relationships (i.e., parent, sibling, partner, friend) are these?

RQ3.2. Are certain types or characteristics of relationships (i.e., family, friend, more supportive, less undermining) associated with current quality of life?

RQ3.3. Are certain characteristics of network members (i.e., mother, sister, incarceration history) associated with differing levels of support, undermining, and relationship assessments?

RQ3.4. How do people who served a life or long sentence beginning in childhood experience relationships?

RQ3.5. To what extent do the quantitative results on relationships agree with or vary from the qualitative data about relationships?

Implications

Findings from this study have myriad real-world implications. Although the incarcerated JLWOP population has decreased since 2012, there are still 1,465 people in prison with JLWOP sentences (Rovner, 2023), with an additional 700 people awaiting a new sentence since the *Montgomery* (2016) decision (CFSY, 2021). Beyond people with JLWOP sentences, many thousands more are still in prison for juvenile life with parole (JLWP) or virtual life sentences imposed during childhood (Nellis, 2017). Understanding the post-release needs and experiences of people who spent a decade or more in prison starting as children would allow programming and policies that best support them.

Social work scholars and practitioners should be especially concerned about this study's foci of quality of life and relationships across the lifespan, as they can be used to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities. This study is rooted in the profession's Code of Ethics, especially principles that emphasize social justice, dignity and worth of individuals, and the importance of relationships (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). Findings from this study can inform social work practitioners in their work with clients, systems, and advocacy in the legislative, judicial, and executive arenas, making them more competent and better equipped to meet the aforementioned ethical principles. People in the criminal legal system are often marginalized in varied and intersecting ways—exactly the people social work purports to support. In fact, promoting “smart decarceration” efforts is one of the Grand Challenges for Social Work (2016). The difficulties associated with people returning from long-term incarceration often overlap with other Grand Challenges like eradicating social isolation, ending homelessness, and achieving equal opportunity and justice. The clear racial disparities in

the criminal legal system and within the population of people serving long and life sentences from childhood in this study align clearly with the newest Grand Challenge for Social Work (n.d.): eradicating racism.

Sentencing children to decades of incarceration flies in the face of the basic tenets of the juvenile legal system and has enormous and disproportional fiscal, personal, and community costs. It does not make us safer, especially as people tend to age out of crime (Mauer, 2018; Gottschalk, 2015), and it harms individuals, families, and communities as a whole (Shook, 2014). Better understanding the post-release experiences of people returning from these inhumane sentences may be the catalyst to change sentencing policies for children and young adults, and may allow us to begin to address and reverse some of the harm that our society has perpetrated upon them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are three distinct time periods in the lives of people who served life or long sentences starting in childhood and were then released: pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration. These are not always linear (people may return to prison) and do not span the same length of time (people may serve 10 years or 40, and may have gone to prison at age 12 or 17). However, these phases act as useful frames through which to examine this dissertation's concepts of interest: relationships and social networks, quality of life, and logistical reentry needs. This chapter will review and synthesize literature regarding these constructs. Since so little is known about people who served or are serving long or life sentences that began in childhood, much of the literature reviewed centers on people sentenced to life or long periods of incarceration that began in adulthood.

There are seven key findings in the literature, as reviewed in this chapter:

1. Pre-incarceration, there is a great deal of trauma and disadvantage in the childhoods, families, and neighborhoods of people in the criminal legal system.
2. The experience of incarceration itself is traumatizing.
3. Incarcerated people have diminished quality of life.
4. Incarcerated people are often isolated with strained relationships.
5. The reentry process is difficult and full of barriers and challenges.
6. Social networks are indispensable in the reentry process, but those relationships vary greatly in terms of providing support (or not), type (family, partner, formal helper, and so on), and utility.

7. Measures of success after prison should center quality of life, rather than only recidivism, to capture the complex nature of life post-release.

Before Incarceration

Here we delve into the first main point of the chapter: that there is a great deal of documented trauma and disadvantage in the childhoods, families, and neighborhoods of people who are currently incarcerated, including those who are incarcerated with long or life sentences starting in childhood.

Pre-Carceral Trauma and Disadvantage for Children with Life or Long Sentences

Similar to their adult counterparts, pre-prison childhood trauma and abuse are common for people sentenced to life without parole as children (Butler, 2010; Nellis, 2012). According to a national survey of people serving JLWOP sentences, Nellis (2012) found that half (49%) experienced physical abuse, a fifth (20.5%) experienced sexual abuse, and four-fifths (79%) witnessed violence at home as children. Reports of trauma and abuse were higher for women serving JLWOP sentences, with most experiencing physical (79.5%) or sexual abuse (77.3%), and witnessing violence at home (84.1%; Nellis, 2012). Compared to a national representative survey of 4,500 children under 18, juvenile lifers were more than six times as likely to report witnessing family violence (Nellis, 2012). For many individuals given life or long sentences as children, being trapped in adult prison must be considered as yet another traumatic experience in their young lives.

The pre-prison living situations for people serving JLWOP sentences often reflect disadvantage. Prior to their incarceration, nearly a fifth (17.9%) of respondents reported being homeless, living with friends or family friends, or being in detention or a group

home (Nellis, 2012). Another 2.2% were in foster care before their incarceration (Nellis, 2012), which is not anomalous for children in the justice system (Bright & Kolivoski, 2017). In a small qualitative study of 11 juvenile lifers, nine were raised by a single adult, most often a mother or grandmother (Butler, 2010), a factor often correlated in other studies with disadvantage. A third of respondents in the national study reported living in public housing at the time of their incarceration, but that varied by state (Nellis, 2012). For instance, just under half (43.6%) of respondents from Alabama and two-fifths (39.7%) of respondents from North Carolina were living in public housing at the time of their incarceration (Nellis, 2012). The vast majority (93.6%) of juvenile lifers who reported living in public housing were people of color (Nellis, 2012).

Likewise, people given life sentences as children reported challenges outside of the home. Nearly two-thirds (62.8%) perceived their neighborhoods to be unsafe, with almost three-quarters (71.1%) of respondents reporting seeing drugs sold openly and experiencing violence in the community (Nellis, 2012). In fact, over half (54.1%) reported seeing violence in their communities at least weekly (Nellis, 2012). In another study, over half (54.5%) of juvenile lifers interviewed indicated that they had been mistreated by police while interrogated prior to their incarceration (Butler, 2010). In the national study, just under half of respondents (46.6%) were attending school prior to their incarceration, two in five had been in special education classes, and the majority (84.4%) had been suspended or expelled at some point (Nellis, 2012). In a qualitative study of juvenile lifers, Butler (2010) found that two-thirds of respondents (63.6%) dropped out of school prior to their incarceration, usually between seventh and tenth grades. Given the prevalence of Black and Latine people in the criminal legal system, one should also

consider the role that the near inevitability of racial trauma has played (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Hardy, 2013). It is clear from these studies that children sentenced to life and long periods in prison experienced a great deal of trauma, poverty, and other challenges prior to their incarceration.

During Incarceration

This section addresses the second, third, and fourth main points of this chapter: the experience of incarceration itself is traumatizing; incarcerated people have diminished quality of life; and incarcerated people are often isolated with strained relationships.

Prison Environment

Though there is a gap in the research about the in-prison experiences of people sentenced to long and life sentences beginning in childhood, much can be learned by considering prison experiences more broadly. Children are legally required to be kept separate from adults in prison, but that mandate does not extend to children who are certified as adults, a process that occurs in order for children to receive a LWOP sentence (Shook, 2014; Travis et al., 2014). The prisons in which people are incarcerated for long or life sentences are higher security facilities, with cells (as opposed to open dormitories), high fences with serrated edges, armed guards, and/or other lethal measures of control (Travis et al., 2014). Unfortunately, data about prison conditions are not systematically or uniformly collected or reported in the U.S., making it difficult to evaluate prison conditions or to compare across prisons or prison systems (Travis et al., 2014).

Trauma in Prison

The prison environment itself can negatively affect the lives of people who are incarcerated (Irwin, 2005; Lynch, 2010; Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Maschi et al., 2011).

Rates of victimization are higher inside prison than in the world outside (Wolff et al., 2009). In a study of over 7,000 men and women incarcerated in one state prison system, about a fifth of men and women had experienced physical victimization by another incarcerated person in the previous six months (Wolff et al., 2009). A quarter of incarcerated men and a tenth of incarcerated women reported being physically victimized by staff in the past six months (Wolff et al., 2009). A fifth of women and a twentieth of men reported being sexually victimized by another incarcerated person in the six months prior, and less than a tenth of men (8%) and women (8%) reported being sexually victimized by a staff member in the six months before the study (Wolff et al., 2009). Wolff and colleagues (2009) found that individuals who had experienced victimization in prison in the past six months were significantly more likely to have experienced victimization during childhood. It is important to note that these experiences of physical and sexual abuse may be underreported for a variety of reasons including fears of punishment and retaliation. Furthermore, given the number of people who reported being mistreated by police while interrogated as children (Butler, 2010), people who are incarcerated may understandably not trust law enforcement personnel. Imprisonment itself is considered a traumatic event in many trauma measures (i.e., Life Stressor Checklist-Revised).

Carceral Trauma for Children Given Life or Long Sentences. As noted, the experience of incarceration is traumatic in and of itself, but this is magnified for children incarcerated in adult prisons (Austin et al., 2000; Clark, 2017; Fagan, 2008; Giannetti, 2012; Parker et al., 2005; Shook, 2014). People incarcerated in adult prisons as children

experience higher levels of victimization than do children in youth facilities (Shiraldi et al., 1997; Steiner & Wright, 2006).

Parker and colleagues (2005) conducted a qualitative study of people serving life sentences starting in childhood. In that study, almost all respondents reported experiencing physical violence by other incarcerated people during their incarceration (Parker et al., 2005). Participants reported that staff were sometimes actively or passively involved in violence against children in adult prisons, either by perpetrating that violence themselves or by ignoring complaints (Parker et al., 2005). Nearly all the juvenile lifers interviewed for the study described either being approached by other incarcerated people for sexual favors or having to protect themselves from attempted rape; many discussed how threats of sexual violence against them decreased as they aged and were incarcerated longer (Parker et al., 2005). Respondents noted that a person who requested to be moved to the prison's protective custody housing unit was assumed to be an informant for prison staff, putting the person at greater future risk (Parker et al., 2005). Juvenile lifers reported witnessing a great deal of violence in the adult prisons in which they were incarcerated—between incarcerated people and perpetrated by staff (Parker et al., 2005). Clearly, for children who are sentenced to life and long sentences in adult prison, experiences of trauma stretch from the community before incarceration to inside prison walls.

Quality of Life

People who are incarcerated have impediments to their quality of life. Overall, there is a higher prevalence of mental illness among people who are incarcerated compared to people who have not been incarcerated (Dudeck et al., 2011). Dudeck and colleagues (2011) found that over half of their sample of people serving at least five years

in prison needed mental health treatment. Nearly a third (30%) of individuals in this study reported attempting suicide at some point in their lives, with about an equal amount reporting an attempt before (12%) and during (13%) incarceration, and a smaller percentage (4%) reported suicide attempts both prior to and during incarceration (Dudeck et al., 2011). Additionally, about one third of that sample reported self-harming behaviors (Dudeck et al., 2011). Wang (2022) noted that as of 2016, over two-fifths (43%) of people in state prisons has ever received a mental health diagnosis but more than half (56%) reported mental health problems at some point in their lives.

Physical health problems for people who are incarcerated often accompany mental health concerns. One study found that people who were incarcerated were more likely than people without criminal legal system involvement histories to suffer from infectious diseases and stress-related illnesses (including anxiety, depression, and insomnia), when controlling for health conditions from before incarceration (Massoglia, 2008). Physical and mental health related concerns for people who spend time in prison are so severe that they impact a person's life span. For every year a person is incarcerated, there is a two-year decrease in life expectancy (Canada et al., 2019).

Older Adults and Quality of Life. Older adults have particular vulnerabilities to the harsh realities of prison, and present unique mental and physical health needs during their incarceration. Considering the experiences of older adults in the prison system is important in regards to people sentenced to life or long sentences during childhood, as many reach old age while incarcerated. In fact, nearly a third (30%) of people sentenced to life is over the age of 55 (Nellis, 2021). The aging process is so accelerated for people

entangled in the criminal legal system that, for this population, older adults are regularly defined as anyone over the age of 55 (Bolano et al., 2016; Canada et al., 2019).

Mental health is a major challenge for incarcerated older adults. A systematic review found that older adults who were incarcerated had a greater risk than older adults in the community of any psychiatric disorder, depression, schizophrenia/psychoses, bipolar disorder, dementia, cognitive impairment, personality disorder, anxiety disorders, and PTSD (Di Lorito et al., 2018). Over a third (37%) of older adults in one urban jail reported psychological distress, and nearly half (45%) reported social distress (Bolano et al., 2016).

The traumatizing nature of prisons exacerbates existing challenges and creates physically, emotionally, and socially unsafe environments, while simultaneously neglecting to provide necessary services (Canada et al., 2019). Difficulties with the prison environment and mental health history had a statistically significant association with distress for older incarcerated adults (Baidawi et al., 2016). Rigid confinement and safety-related concerns often trump the need for programming and considerations that would benefit older adults (du Toit & McGrath, 2018). Prison can be an exceptionally cruel place for people with dementia, for example, as it is loud and overwhelming, lacks access to nature and other calming environments, and allows little privacy (du Toit & McGrath, 2018). Behaviors associated with advanced dementia (e.g., not following directions, acting aggressively) are often punishable in prisons and jails, and a lack of age-appropriate activities can lead to isolation (du Toit & McGrath, 2018). Incarcerated people with dementia are more vulnerable than other incarcerated individuals to bullying, harassment, and sexual violence (du Toit & McGrath, 2018).

Trauma is deeply impactful for older adults and people serving long sentences. In a study of older adults in jail, 40% had a positive PTSD screen, and PTSD was associated with medication insecurity within the past year, two or more daily living impairments, traumatic brain injury, pain in the previous week, and poor self-rated health (Flatt et al., 2017). Older incarcerated adults have reported experiences of loss, minimal medical attention, abuse by peers and staff, and feeling fearful of their environment (Smoyer et al., 2019). Intensifying these concerns, people with life sentences often face worse prison conditions than non-lifers, including extended periods in solitary confinement, inadequate living facilities, higher-security facilities, excessive discipline, inadequate physical and mental health access, limited visiting privileges, and decreased access to various types of prison programming (Penal Reform International, 2012). Again, examining the experiences of older adults who are incarcerated is beneficial to understanding the lives of people who were sentenced to life or long periods as children because so many of the latter population has aged after spending decades behind bars.

Quality of life and People Given Life and Long Sentences as Children.

Children incarcerated for life or long sentences in adult prisons face the same challenges as those who enter prison as adults, but often more acutely (Austin et al., 2000; Nellis, 2012; Parker et al., 2005). One study found that, although juvenile facilities are more chaotic, children incarcerated in adult facilities reported more mental health and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, and felt less safe (Fagan, 2008). Another study found that children incarcerated in adult prisons had higher levels of depression compared to those in youth facilities (Ng et al., 2011).

People serving JLWOP sentences in adult prisons often struggle to adjust to prison life (Nellis, 2012; Parker et al., 2005). In a study of people serving JLWOP sentences in adult prisons, respondents reported feelings of fear, anger, confusion about their sentence, loneliness, and hopelessness (Nellis, 2012; Parker et al., 2005). In one study, prison staff reported that children in adult prisons were more volatile and difficult than adults (Austin et al., 2000). Behavior that may be age appropriate like volatility and even violence may lead to much more serious consequences in prison than out, like disciplinary infractions and placement in solitary confinement for children in adult prisons (Parker et al., 2005). In Nellis' (2012) national study of people serving JLWOP sentences, nearly all (94.8%) reported receiving disciplinary infractions at some point in their incarceration, with fewer infractions over time. Valentine and colleagues (2019) found that for children waived into adult prisons, the amount of time in solitary confinement was associated with an increase in the number of mental health diagnoses.

Children's lack of coping skills and maturity often lead to behaviors that are punished with solitary confinement or prolonged isolation (Parker et al., 2005; Shook, 2014). Since solitary confinement is itself a traumatizing experience, this only exacerbates other experiences of trauma and isolation for incarcerated children (Parker et al., 2005). Prolonged solitary confinement for children in adult facilities has been described as a "form of child abuse" (Clark, 2017, p. 350) and as "cruel and unusual punishment" (Giannetti, 2012, p. 31). Prison often requires people to adopt a sort of "prison mask" (Liem & Kunst, 2013, p. 335), an idea that was echoed by juvenile lifers in one study (Parker et al., 2005). This masking of emotions may be protective, but simultaneously leads to isolation and loneliness among juvenile lifers, sometimes

resulting in suicide attempts (Parker et al., 2005). Though prevalence of suicidality among juvenile lifers is unknown, multiple respondents in a small qualitative study of people serving JLWOP sentences reported suicidality and self-harm behaviors during their incarceration (Parker et al., 2005).

Adult facilities often cannot or do not offer age-appropriate programs and services for children incarcerated therein (Justice Policy Institute, 2020; Shook, 2014; Travis et al., 2014). Children incarcerated in adult facilities have fewer opportunities to participate in educational or vocational programming than adults in adult facilities (Justice Policy Institute, 2020; Travis et al., 2014). Oftentimes, educational programs are only available for individuals serving life sentences if the person can pay for the courses, which generally falls to the person's loved ones (Parker et al., 2005). In her national survey of people incarcerated for JLWOP sentences, Nellis (2012) found that only a third (38.1%) of respondents were in any sort of programming at the time of the study. Of the two-thirds (61.9%) not enrolled in any programming, a third (32.7%) reported they were not permitted to participate because of their life sentence, over a quarter (28.9%) were in prisons without sufficient programming or had taken all available programs, a tenth (9.4%) were prohibited because they were in solitary confinement or had a custody restriction, almost a tenth (8.9%) were on a waiting list, and nearly a fifth (18.2%) because they had no interest (Nellis, 2012). Just as quality of life and activity looks different for people during incarceration, so do their personal relationships.

Relationships and Social Networks

Relationships are inevitably different for people in prison compared to outside of prison, and incarcerated people are often isolated with strained relationships. This section

will provide an overview of social networks and relationships as experienced by people who are incarcerated.

Social Networks

People's relationships and social networks play important roles in their behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, health, and quality of life (Christakis & Fowler, 2011; Scott, 2017; Valente, 2010). Each of us exists in connection with other people, institutions, places, groups, and other units, all making up our social networks (Christakis & Fowler, 2011; Valente, 2010). Understanding who is in an individual's social network can tell us a great deal about the person of interest, but positionality within that network, the direction of relationships, types of ties between network members, and network structure are also important (Valente, 2010). At the core of social network analysis is the belief that social ties and interactions, rather than just individuals on their own, drive behavioral and attitudinal change (Perry et al., 2018).

Relationships and Social Networks During Incarceration

By definition and design, prison keeps people out of society and away from others. In other words, prison is segregative (Western et al., 2015). Maintaining close relationships is a common challenge for individuals who are incarcerated for short periods, and becomes even more difficult when people are locked away for decades, leading to depleted support systems (Bales & Mears, 2008; Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Increased distance between prisons (which are often in rural areas) and loved ones on the outside (who often live in metro areas) paired with limited public transportation, low incomes restricting access to cars, and jobs with limited personal time off exacerbate this

strain (Pierce, 2015). This is troubling since people who are incarcerated often rely on loved ones outside of prison for financial, emotional, and social support (Miller, 2021).

The frequency or number of visits received during incarceration is sometimes used as an indicator of social support. Bales and Mears (2008) conducted a study in which they found that more frequent visits over the course of a prison sentence were associated with decreased recidivism. Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong (2018) found the same, adding that perceptions of the quality of pre-carceral informal relationships were more strongly associated with reducing recidivism than the number of visits received. More specifically, Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong (2018) found that strong positive maternal relationships prior to incarceration had a statistically significant association with lower recidivism rates. The perceived quality of relationships may be more important than the frequency of interactions.

Having positive, supportive relationships has been found to promote positive outcomes during and after incarceration (Cooper & Berwick, 2001; Rakes et al., 2018). Cooper and Berwick (2001) conducted a study comparing three groups of incarcerated men with high incidence of suicide, including men serving life sentences. They found that lifers in their study had an average of two visits per month (the maximum allowed), and just a twentieth (7%) had no one visit them (Cooper & Berwick, 2001). Considering not just the number of social supports but the nature of those relationships is crucial, as Cooper and Berwick (2001) found that not talking about problems in the past month or year was associated with more anxiety and depression and a decline in well-being compared to individuals who talked about their problems. Over half (59%) of lifers reported having at least one close friend in prison, though only a third (35%) had talked

with another person who was incarcerated about their problems in the previous month (Cooper & Berwick, 2001). Cooper and Berwick (2001) found that two-fifths (40%) of lifers would not talk to anyone if they were worried or upset. Even though many of the respondents reported having friends, they remained socially isolated in terms of being able to talk about their problems. Those researchers found that people spent more time in their cell over time, which is of concern given the aforementioned associations between anxiety, depression, and quality of life as related to talking through problems (Cooper & Berwick, 2001).

Social support has a mediating impact on the relationship between trauma and quality of life. For instance, in a longitudinal study of women who were survivors of intimate partner violence, researchers found that social support had main, mediating, and moderating effects on participants' well-being, with social support and well-being having a positive relationship (Beeble et al., 2009). In another study focusing on older incarcerated adults, Maschi and colleagues (2015) identified five dimensions of coping resources, including social support, that had a protective impact on the relationship between traumatic or stressful events and well-being.

The relationships that people who are incarcerated have with loved ones on the outside can vary by type and are not always supportive. In a qualitative study of over 250 fathers detained in a federal facility, Greif (2014) described respondents who were struggling to find ways to parent while incarcerated, explain to children where they were and why, navigate the behavioral responses of teenage daughters, and cope with missing life events. Relationships with children often necessitated continued interactions with the mother, who was sometimes seen as supportive, but often interpreted as overtly or

indirectly undermining (expressing negative thoughts or critiques of the person; Greif, 2014).

Relationships and Social Networks for Juvenile Lifers Inside. Social relationships of people currently serving life or long prison sentences stemming from childhood are largely unexamined. Parker and colleagues (2005) indicated that people incarcerated as children tend to be more reliant on their loved ones than adults, so their loss of relationships may be felt more acutely and for longer periods. In the national study of people serving life sentences imposed during childhood, Nellis (2012) collected some data about personal relationships. Nearly half (48%) of respondents reported that their families lived more than three hours from the prison in which they were incarcerated (Nellis, 2012). Two-thirds of respondents with family more than three hours away never received visits, compared to about a tenth of people with family within three hours (Nellis, 2012). Respondents with family less than three hours away were more likely to receive regular visits monthly and weekly (Nellis, 2012).

Despite the distance and long incarceration, people sentenced to LWOP as children continued to communicate with family and friends in a variety of ways. The most common mode of communication was phone, with half (50%) of the juvenile lifers surveyed reporting weekly calls with friends and family, followed by a third (35%) corresponding via weekly letters (Nellis, 2012). The majority (91.6%) reported exchanging mail with friends and/or family at least every few months (Nellis, 2012). Examining relationships and social networks of people sentenced to long and life sentences as children will help to understand the impact others have, and what those relationships look like both in prison and once people walk out the doors.

Post-Release

This final section reviews the last three main points of the chapter: the reentry process is difficult and full of barriers and challenges; social networks are indispensable in the reentry process, but those relationships vary greatly in terms of supportiveness, type, and utility; post-prison success must include quality of life. Up until the last couple of years, there has been a dearth of studies examining the post-release lives of people serving life or long sentences that began in childhood. Several recent papers are the exception for juvenile lifers, all of which stemmed from a qualitative study of 10 people who were sentenced to JLWOP in California and then released. Abrams and colleagues (2020) focused on pathways to desistance for these participants. Canlione and Abrams (2021) considered the ways that people sentenced to life without parole as children adapted to that sentence while incarcerated. Washington and that same research team (2022) examined how those returned juvenile lifers navigated lost time within the context of family relationships. Lastly, Abrams and colleagues (2023) analyzed the qualitative data to investigate experiences of joy, shame, and identity following release. A great deal is known about the uphill battle that people in general face once they leave prison, as the criminal legal system extends beyond a period of incarceration and into the world outside prison walls. By considering studies that examine the lives of people who have left prison after life or long sentences, we start to develop a better idea of what those experiences may be for individuals who have come home after a life or long sentence that began in childhood.

Logistical Reentry Needs

The barriers to successful reentry are immense and complex. Obtaining housing, employment, student loans, and public benefits is an enormous hurdle (Gottschalk, 2015). People with a felony record are often ineligible for public housing, student loans, SNAP benefits (food stamps), participating on a jury, and a variety of professional licenses (Gottschalk, 2015). As of 2020, an estimated 4.6 million people were barred from voting because of a felony record (Uggen et al., 2022); many more do not vote because they are unaware of their voting eligibility (Gottschalk, 2015). On top of these barriers is the stigma of having a felony record and the nearly 50,000 legally mandated collateral consequences attached to a felony conviction (Gottschalk, 2015; Laird, 2013). All these factors contribute to a kind of “civil death” (Gottschalk, 2015, p. 2), wherein people do not or cannot wholly participate as full citizens. Even census data do not fully capture the experiences of people who are currently incarcerated, as censuses count people who are incarcerated within the area where the prison is located, which is a form of gerrymandering (Fisher et al., 2021; Gottschalk, 2015). This is all magnified for Black and Brown people, leading to what Michelle Alexander (2010) described as the New Jim Crow.

The differences between people with criminal legal involvement and the rest of the population are stark. For example, the unemployment rate in the U.S. was low in 2018 overall (3.9%), but the unemployment rate for people who were previously incarcerated was over 27%—worse than the U.S. unemployment rate during the Great Depression (Prison Policy Initiative, 2018). Almost 20% of people incarcerated in state prisons have less than an eighth grade education and just over one in five (22%) has a

high school diploma or equivalent (Gottschalk, 2015). Addiction is a major problem for a large percentage of people who are incarcerated, as an estimated two-thirds (68%) of people in local jails, over half (53%) of people in state prisons, and nearly half (46%) of people in federal facilities meet diagnostic requirements for a substance use disorder (Karberg & James, 2005; Mumola & Karberg, 2006).

Homelessness is a common occurrence, with a tenth (10%) of people entering and exiting prison reporting homelessness pre or post-incarceration (Roman & Travis, 2006). Older adults returning from incarceration report homelessness, substance use disorders, repeated emergency room visits, multimorbidity, functional impairment, hepatitis C infection, recent falls, pain, loneliness, and concerns about safety (Humphreys et al., 2018). People with a felony record are often barred from living in assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and hospice settings as well, further limiting their housing and supportive options (Rakes et al., 2018). Clearly people returning from a period of incarceration face many logistical and emotional barriers that can prevent successful reentry into the community. To date, no known study has examined how people given long or life sentences as children navigate the logistical barriers of reentry. One study surveyed currently incarcerated juvenile lifers from 15 states about their reentry planning, finding that respondents were concerned about adjusting to life in the free world, how others would perceive them, learning new technology, and their parole experiences (Taylor, 2023). Respondents reported that they were excluded from programming because of their sentences, largely believed their family would support them post-release, and did not place a lot of faith in friends providing support (Taylor, 2023).

Relationships and Social Networks Post-Release

Relationships are a vital part of people's reentry process following their incarceration (Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Liem, 2016; Travis, 2005; Western, 2018). Social networks typically include both personal relationships with family, friends, and partners, as well as formal relationships with parole officers and social service providers. One study of people who were previously incarcerated reported that social support was the most common coping strategy for life after incarceration, but also found that many respondents lacked social networks (Wimberly et al., 2021). Relationships are important to consider as they impact a reentrant's ability to meet logistical and more holistic needs (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Western et al., 2015). However, people who served long sentences may be especially out of practice when it comes to romantic and other relationships. Men often had minimal and power-ridden contacts with women during incarceration, as the women who were in the prison were usually employees or volunteers (Munn, 2011). When women were at the prison as personal visitors, these interactions were monitored and parties often had little, if any, physical contact (Munn 2011). Men released to the community after a long incarceration struggled to establish and maintain personal relationships (Munn, 2011). Though the people in reentrants' lives play an important role, there is great variability within those connections.

Types of Support. People returning from prison require various types of support from their social network members. Needs vary from person to person, but generally include housing, financial help, and socioemotional support (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Western, 2018; Western et al., 2015). One study of 165 men nearing their release from state prison found that the majority agreed that each of the six types of social support

named in the study (listening, task, emotional, challenge, tangible, personal assistance) was important to their post-carceral success (Pettus-Davis, 2014). Most respondents (with and without trauma histories) reported that they were happy with each type of support they anticipated receiving, but significantly fewer of the men with trauma histories reported being happy with the tangible support they anticipated (Pettus-Davis, 2014). When asked about type of support received, most participants in a study of individuals returning from prison reported that family members had provided high amounts of emotional and tangible support (Visher & Courtney, 2007). Western and colleagues (2015) conducted a longitudinal, mixed methods study with over 200 individuals returning to Boston after time in state prison. They found that about two-thirds of the sample received monetary or housing support in the first week following their release (Western et al., 2015), showing the importance of external support early in the reentry process.

Though research about the post-carceral experiences of individuals who served life and long sentences is sparse, there is no reason to believe that people returning from long sentences would have lesser needs than those serving shorter ones. The supports identified as central to reentry for the general prison population were reflected in Liem's (2016) United Kingdom-based study of people released after serving decades of life sentences. Liem (2016) found that many respondents relied on friends and family for a place to stay, employment opportunities, and financial assistance. Liem (2016) noted that overcoming restrictive lease agreements and obtaining housing was a possibility for some only because friends or family members vouched for them. The especially long gaps in employment and rental history may necessitate additional support and credibility. There

have been calls for more research that investigates the reentry needs of people returning from life and long sentences (Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Nellis, 2012).

Who Provides Support. Support for people returning from incarceration came from a variety of types of relationships. Family was generally shown to be the most important support (Western, 2018). On the first day following their release from state prison, two-thirds of respondents in Western and colleagues' (2015) study had contact with family members compared to one-third who had contact with friends. Nearly half of respondents stayed with family, and just a fifth (20%) stayed with friends (Western et al., 2015). In Western and colleagues' (2015) study, family support most often came from respondents' mothers, sisters, and grandmothers. During the first six months following their release, the vast majority (80%) of respondents who stayed with family stayed with female relatives, about half of whom stayed with their mothers in particular (Western et al., 2015). This was echoed elsewhere. When Visher and Courtney (2007) asked people returning from state prison to identify their closest relationship, two-fifths (40%) indicated that it was their mother and a quarter (26%) named a sibling. Familial support was not experienced uniformly across Western and colleagues' (2015) sample, with respondents over 45 receiving less support after prison. Six months after their release, twice as many of all respondents reported receiving money from family members compared to romantic partners (Western et al., 2015).

Romantic partners have not been shown to be as central to the reentry process as family. Although over half (57%) of respondents in a study of people recently released from Ohio prisons reported having a spouse or romantic partner, very few named their partner as their closest relationship (Visher & Courtney, 2007). Only about one-tenth of

people returning from Massachusetts state prisons reported staying with romantic partners following their release (Western et al., 2015). Again, this pattern was seen among people returning from life sentences. Only one respondent had maintained his marriage through his incarceration; for the dozens of others in the study, relationships and marriages deteriorated after a few months or years of sentencing (Liem, 2016). Liem (2016) reported that most reentrants who had a romantic partner upon their release met their partner while serving their life sentence.

One study was less clear about the role of romantic partners, as they categorized spouses with family members and boyfriends and girlfriends with friends (Skeem et al., 2009). When asked to indicate the most important person in their network, almost half (45%) of respondents named a family member (which included spouses), a third (34%) nominated a friend (which included boyfriends or girlfriends), and a tenth indicated that either a professional (10%) or other unrelated person (10%) was most important (Skeem et al., 2009). Of the treatment providers that were nominated as the most important person in participants' networks, most (75%) were counselors or therapists (Skeem et al., 2009). Skeem and colleagues' (2009) study brings us to the role of relationships with professionals.

Parole Officers and Other Reentry Professionals. People are usually on parole following their release from prison, which means regular meetings with their parole officers and other restrictions and requirements like regular urinalysis for drug use, enrollment in programs (often related to drug and alcohol use), having to report change in address, and home visits (Western, 2018). Parole officers and other reentry professionals tend to be an unavoidable part of people's post-prison lives, and often play important

roles. Positive relationships with parole officers have been found to be significantly associated with lower recidivism rates (Blasko et al., 2015; Chamberlain et al., 2019), though the causal direction of that association is unclear.

Various studies have considered people who were previously incarcerated and their relationships with parole officers and other professionals post-release. In their egocentric social network study, Skeem and colleagues (2009) found that, for individuals on probation, the quality of their relationships with clinicians (counselors and therapists employed outside of probation) and—to a lesser degree—probation officers and other personal relationships in their core social networks was associated with increased treatment adherence and fewer probation violations. Using Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) data, Bares and Mowen (2020) considered the role that parole officers play in providing support for people recently released from prison. They found that greater support from parole officers was associated with lower recidivism (Bares & Mowen, 2020). Bares and Mowen (2020) found that when a parole officer was perceived to provide professional support (namely giving correct information, acting professional, and treating the person on parole with respect), it had a greater impact on lowering recidivism than when a parole officer was perceived to provide interpersonal support (being helpful in transition, appearing trustworthy, listening, and finding time to help).

Relationships are Complicated. Maintenance of supportive social relationships after a period of incarceration is associated with lower recidivism rates and higher success addressing logistical barriers (Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2018). Furthermore, Levenson and Willis (2019) noted that supportive social relationships and addressing

underlying trauma are crucial in sustaining change for people who were previously incarcerated.

However, relationships are often complicated and may include interactions deemed problematic or criminalized by the legal system for those involved in criminal legal systems (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Wolff & Draine, 2004). In a sample of 165 incarcerated individuals who were nearing their release, Pettus-Davis (2014) found that men with histories of trauma had more negative supports and fewer positive social supports prior to their incarceration compared to men without histories of trauma. Pettus-Davis (2014) classified supports as negative if the respondent reported that they were “heavy drinkers, drug users, who encouraged or accepted the participants drug use, who encouraged the participant to get into trouble and with whom the participant reported that he was at risk of getting into trouble” (p. 515). From there, each participant’s network was categorized as all negative, mostly negative, mixed (equal numbers positive and negative), mostly positive, and all positive (Pettus-Davis, 2014). In a related study, Pettus-Davis and colleagues (2017) compared the anticipated social supports of men and women nearing release from prison and found that men reported significantly higher rates of negative social support overall, and women reported higher rates of mixed and positive social support. Older people reported higher levels of anticipated positive support than younger adults, and non-White men reported significantly higher levels of anticipated positive support than White men (Pettus-Davis et al., 2017). Those two studies relied on the expectations of people who were still incarcerated, though Wolff and Draine (2004) cautioned that both people who are incarcerated and their support systems are often unrealistic about the reentry process in terms of ease of meeting goals and the extent of

the systemic hurdles (including policies that create and reinforce collateral consequences). By having unrealistic expectations of the ease of the process, they may not be prepared for the ups and downs of the process (Wolff & Draine, 2004).

Romantic relationships in particular may be both supportive and undermining. In her qualitative research exploring the lives of young men and neighborhoods under carceral control, Goffman (2014) described the way in which loved ones, and romantic partners in particular, would sometimes use young men's criminal legal system entanglements against them, threatening to call police or parole officers if the young men did not do as the partner wanted. These were often the same individuals who would provide housing and hide the young men from police officers toting arrest warrants (Goffman, 2014). This idea of undermining network members was reflected in the qualitative data from Liem's (2016) study of people released after life sentences. One respondent noted that, as an act of revenge, his ex-girlfriend reported to his parole officer that he had alcohol in his home, which led to his subsequent re-incarceration. Another respondent said his partner called his parole officer with false allegations in an attempt to safeguard their relationship by reincarcerating him (Liem, 2016). Furthermore, none of the respondents mentioned their romantic partner as a reason they stayed out of prison, and most advised that it would be best if people wait at least a year after release to enter into a romantic relationship (Liem, 2016).

Quality of Life After Prison. Prison's impact on a person does not end when that person exits the prison gates but continues into their life outside. Panic, depression, loneliness, and feeling overwhelmed are all common for people returning from incarceration (Western, 2015; Western, 2018). There is what Western (2015) called the

stress of the transition, but that stress extends beyond the reentry process into the months and years after a person leaves prison. For people leaving prison after decades of incarceration, perhaps for the first time as adults, life after prison amounts to building a brand new life in all ways. Unsurprisingly, that can be overwhelming and stressful.

Concerns have been raised about the extended exposure to trauma for long-term and life sentenced prisoners (Liem & Kunst, 2013). One study identified post-incarceration syndrome among this group, which included the presence of complex post-traumatic stress disorder, institutionalized personality traits (e.g., distrust of others, struggling to engage in relationships, lack of decision-making ability), social-sensory disorientation, and social/temporal alienation (Liem & Kunst, 2013). The adaptive techniques people serving long-term and life sentences employ to survive in prison, like being distrustful and masking their feelings, reportedly become additional obstacles to creating human connections with people post-release (Munn, 2011). People serving long or life sentences develop feelings of omniopicism and hyperawareness of vulnerability during incarceration, which may be a response to trauma and certainly impedes the ability to be fully present in relationships (Munn, 2011). In a scoping review, Barrenger and colleagues (2021) noted the dearth of studies that considered quality of life or other more holistic approaches to life after incarceration, explaining that recidivism is a problematic, partial measure of post-carceral success.

Conclusion

Trauma, social networks and relationships, quality of life and post-prison logistical needs are all intertwined for people returning from prison. These constructs are

important to consider as we try to understand the post-prison experiences of individuals who spent decades of their lives in prison starting during childhood.

Chapter 3: Theory

This chapter describes the theoretical underpinning of this dissertation. Three theories were used to frame the research: life course theory; cumulative disadvantage theory; and Critical Race Theory. These three theories complement one another and serve as a relevant lens through which to frame a study of the carceral and post-release experiences of people sentenced to life and long sentenced as children.

Understanding relationships and social networks, quality of life, and logistical reentry needs and the causal mechanisms at play will allow for better policies and programming for people who are serving or previously served these sentences. Life course theory considers the way that the passage of time, different stages of life, and social networks influence the individual, all of which are important in this study of people as they move from incarceration starting in childhood through reentry. Cumulative disadvantage theory falls under the life course umbrella, so considers the passage of time as it relates to the accumulation of trauma and inequity—unmistakable realities in the lives of many people entangled in the criminal legal system. Lastly, Critical Race Theory explicitly points to the ubiquity of racism and its impact on the world. This is crucial to conversations about the criminal legal system, as it disproportionately affects Black and Latine people.

Life Course Theory

When considering the lives of people with life or long sentences imposed during childhood, it is imperative to reflect upon the inevitable and vastly different stages of life through which they pass. These phases are distinct from one another in multiple ways: the environments in which people live (inside and outside prison); the developmental

stages people are in (children, young adults, adults); and the people with whom the individual interacts (family, prison staff, parole officers). Studies of people returning to the community following life or long sentences should center passage through time and stages. Life course theory is an ideal lens through which to examine lives over time, and is the first of three theories used in this dissertation.

Life course theory considers the various stages of life that people pass through as they age and identifies the markers, developmental changes, and rites of passage that are common across a lifetime (Elder, 1998). There are four core principles in life course theory. The first concerns historic time and place, meaning that the life course is embedded in and shaped by historic times and locations in which people find themselves (Elder, 1998). For people sentenced to juvenile life without parole (JLWOP), for instance, time and location are important in terms of sentencing. Location-wise, over 20 percent of all people sentenced to JLWOP came from one of three counties in the United States, even though these counties make up only 4% of the population (Mills et al., 2016). Furthermore, sentencing processes and norms have changed over time. Joe Ligon, the oldest and longest-serving juvenile lifer, was incarcerated for 68 years—from 1953 to February 2021. His lawyer noted that if he faced the same charges today, he would have only received a five to ten year sentence (Heller, 2021). Life course theory's second principle centers the importance of timing in the course of a person's life (Elder, 1998). For the purpose of this dissertation, considering a person's age at the time of first incarceration or at the time that he is sentenced to life or long-term incarceration is important as it relates to his life trajectory. Likewise, timing as it relates to the age at

which a person is released is important, as that person may be 30 or 83, which is inevitably different in terms of stage of development.

The third life course principle is the importance of linked lives, which stresses that the social networks in people's lives matter, since lives are lived in connection with and alongside others (Elder, 1998). Relationships and social networks change over time, as a person ages and changes environments. For people who served life and long sentences starting in childhood, relationships change from childhood in the community to life in prison to life in the community as a returning adult. The final principle is human agency, namely that, although all of these other factors influence a person's life trajectory, that person's actions and decisions do as well (Elder, 1998). The options at one person's disposal in their reentry process following a long sentence may differ from another's based on external factors and components reflected in the other life course principles.

Life course theory is often used in research that examines the lives and experiences of people who are currently or were previously incarcerated (Kazemian & Travis, 2015; Liem, 2016; Washington et al., 2022; Western et al., 2015). Kazemian and Travis (2015) called for researchers to conduct more studies examining changes occurring over protracted periods of incarceration and identified life course theory as the ideal lens to do so. Liem (2016) examined the way that, for people who had completed long periods of incarceration, adhering to the norms and pro-social behaviors typical of traditional life trajectories caused additional challenges. An extended period of incarceration interrupts one's ability to meet certain expectations and anticipated transitional events (i.e., marriage, having children), which leads individuals to have a

sense of being in the “wrong time” (Liem, 2016, p. 180), especially once they leave prison. Liem (2016) argued that some life course theorists’ assumptions are problematic when applied to people who have been released after spending significant time in prison. Specifically, researchers must consider how long-term incarceration interrupts conventional developmental timelines, creating a tension between a person’s internal expectations of their life stage and external assumptions of that person’s life stage.

Life Course and Juvenile Lifers

There has been a call for research that uses a life course lens to consider the changing lives of people serving life and long-term prison sentences (Kazemian & Travis, 2015). This is supported by the immense amount that people change over the course of decades of incarceration, whether sentenced as children (Nellis, 2017) or adults. Each of life course theory’s principles described above coincides with an important component of the lives of people currently or previously serving juvenile life sentences. Life course theory emphasizes that developmental timing matters. For children condemned to serve long-term or life sentences, consideration of their developmental stage of adolescence is important (Shook, 2014). Based on this theory, spending decades of life behind bars simply looks different for people sentenced at the age of 15 as compared to the age of 35. It is also important to consider different stages that each of the people in this study will pass through, including pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration.

Life course explicitly notes the importance of social networks and relationships. Of course, humans exist within the context of others. This may be felt particularly acutely in prison, as people lack the ability to choose all of their networks while incarcerated.

Life course acknowledges that social networks exist, not only in positive ways, and that those relationships influence a person's quality of life. Connections with others influence individuals who are incarcerated and through the reentry process. Life course sees these relationships as changing and dynamic.

Cumulative Disadvantage/Inequality Theory

Many people who are involved in the criminal legal system have long histories of disadvantage, poverty, and trauma (Alexander, 2010; Gottschalk, 2016; Western, 2018). Given the prevalence of this disadvantage, research should explicitly examine inequities and their impact on a person's life. Cumulative disadvantage theory centers inequities including trauma, making it a second useful theoretical lens through which to consider this dissertation's main concepts as they pertain to people who were incarcerated for long and life sentences beginning in childhood.

The five axioms of cumulative disadvantage theory are relevant when considering people who are entangled in criminal legal systems at various parts of their lives, as they center the effects of inequities over time on a person's quality of life. The first axiom is that social systems create inequality, which is displayed over time through demographic and developmental processes (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). The impact of systems like neighborhoods, schools, and prison must be central to discussions of childhood trauma, poverty, racism, and other inequities in studies about people in the criminal legal system. Cumulative inequality's second axiom is that disadvantage increases exposure to risk, and the opposite (that advantage decreases exposure to risk, acting as a protective factor) is true (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009), meaning that risk leads to reduced quality of life. This is illustrated in a study that found that increased exposure to adverse childhood

experiences (ACEs) was significantly associated with both early and long-term involvement in criminalized behavior (Baglivio et al., 2015). Furthermore, privilege and wealth may protect one person charged with a crime by enabling them to hire an attorney rather than be appointed a public defender, present more positively in court, and have access to resources a poorer, less privileged person would not.

The third axiom is that life trajectories are shaped by the accumulation of risk, resources, and human agency (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Elder, 1998). For people returning to the community after a long or life prison sentence, the reentry process necessitates resources and resourcefulness that will additionally be dictated to some extent by the risks those individuals carry, like a history of substance use disorder or mental and physical health concerns. The fourth axiom is that people's perception of their life trajectory influences later trajectories (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). In other words, both objective and subjective components matter. The extent to which a trauma like incarceration affects a person is not solely based on the underlying event, but also on the degree to which it changed the person's life. Cumulative inequality theory's last axiom is that a build-up of inequality may lead to a person's early death (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). For this dissertation and other research, it is important to bear in mind that people with more cumulative disadvantage may be absent not because of a lack of inequality, but because they were excluded from the research at the point of their death.

Cumulative disadvantage and life course theories are sometimes considered together, or with the former under the umbrella of the latter (Dannefer, 2003; Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). For instance, Maschi and colleagues (2011) combined life course theory and cumulative disadvantage theory to consider objective and subjective measures of

trauma as related to post-traumatic stress symptoms. The authors found that subjective impressions of past traumas were associated with higher post-traumatic stress symptoms, and that older respondents reported lower levels of past traumas and subjective trauma than younger participants (Maschi et al., 2011). Within the cumulative disadvantage framework, traumatic events lead to increased exposure to risk, which leads to worsened quality of life (Maschi et al., 2011). Given the many ways that people who are currently or previously incarcerated face and faced disadvantages, it is crucial to consider the accumulation of disadvantage and trauma for this population.

Cumulative Disadvantage and Juvenile Lifers

Children sentenced to life and long prison sentences have experienced a great deal of trauma and faced many obstacles stemming from cumulative disadvantage. Thus, unsurprisingly, the principles of this theory align with the experiences of juvenile lifers. The first tenet of cumulative disadvantage theory is the presumption that social systems create inequality. This is a population that is definitionally in a system that creates inequality; prisons limit opportunity and increase risk, and a person's designation as a lifer limits opportunities to participate in courses and groups in prison. The next principle, that disadvantage increases exposure to risk, is seen in the life trajectories that juvenile lifers have prior to and during incarceration. This is demonstrated in the pervasiveness of trauma, poverty, and racism identified in the lives of people serving JLWOP (Nellis, 2012). Furthermore, criminal records obstruct opportunities for employment, education, housing, and other rights of citizenship post-release (Gottschalk, 2016). Life trajectories are shaped by accumulation of risk, resources, and agency for people returning from prison in obvious and myriad ways. Those with a substance use

disorder, nowhere to sleep at night, and no supports will inevitably have more challenges to their reentry process than those with stable housing, no substance use disorder, and an empathetic family who is able and willing to provide support. The final cumulative disadvantage principle is that cumulative inequality can lead to early death.

Unfortunately, that aligns with findings from prison research. In one study, Canada and colleagues (2019) found that for every two years that a person is incarcerated, they can expect their life expectancy to be shortened by one year. Clearly cumulative disadvantage is relevant for people currently or previously facing long or life sentences starting in childhood.

Critical Race Theory

Beyond the high rates of trauma and disadvantage seen in the criminal legal system, a disproportionate number of Black and Latine people are currently or previously incarcerated. Examination of the criminal legal system and the individuals whose lives have been entangled therein necessitates that race be explicitly, intentionally, and critically considered. Critical Race Theory (CRT) meets all of those requirements and is an ideal theoretical lens through which to explore the experiences of people who were sentenced to life and long-term incarceration as children.

CRT is based upon six tenets. The first tenet is that racism is commonplace, rather than aberrational, and is an everyday experience of most people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Racism is displayed not just through words and violence, but also through institutionalized forms. This pertains to people entangled in criminal legal systems, given the disproportionate number of Black and Latine people negatively impacted by these systems through policies like stop and frisk, over-policing,

curfews, and charging practices. The second tenet is interest convergence or materialist determination, which maintains that racism benefits White people and that change only occurs when those in control (White people) benefit (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The third feature of CRT is that race is a social construction (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Within this tenet is the importance of the way that society opts to ignore the enormous similarities between people, creates races, and then assigns them with semi-permanent qualities and assumptions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This is reflected in the assumed criminality of Black and Brown bodies and in racially loaded terms like “super predator” (Moriearty & Carson, 2012).

The fourth component of CRT is differential racialization, in which people in power racialize minority groups differently at various points in time in order to meet the needs of the historic moment (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Black and Latine people similarly make up a disproportionate share of the prison population in the U.S., and are treated differently in various ways, even within a criminal legal context. Latine people, for instance, may be asked for documentation proving citizenship, when Black people are not. Partially because of differential racialization and some claims that CRT is too focused on a Black-White binary (Dill & Kohlman, 2012), various other critical theoretical approaches exist. For instance, LatCrit theory centers on the unique experiences of Latine people, emphasizing issues that are unique to or more prevalent within that ethnicity like immigration and multilingualism (Dill & Kohlman, 2012; LatCrit, n.d.). The fifth tenet is intersectionality or anti-essentialism, which acknowledges that people draw on a variety of identities that overlap and may clash with one another (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). A person may be Black, currently incarcerated, a father, a

son, and a student, and those identities overlap and may be more or less salient with one another at various times in that person's life. Intersecting identities may also compound or intensify privilege or disadvantage, such as when people have multiple marginalized identities. The final tenet of CRT is the importance of voices of color, which posits that, due to the different histories and experiences with oppression, people of color are uniquely able to discuss race and racism. This tenet acknowledges that people in power exclude the perspectives of minority or disenfranchised people in their accounts of history to justify their power (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Popular culture narratives about people involved in the criminal legal system often center victims and paint incarcerated people with a broad brush that is full of negative stereotypes, without considering incarcerated people's humanity and sometimes victim status (Britto et al., 2007; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; see also Running from COPS podcast for an examination of the show COPS and its place in popular culture). The fight against CRT's use in academic settings and broader discourse (Parrish, 2021; Sprunt, 2021) is a clear example of this particular tenet.

CRT and Juvenile Lifers

People of color, especially Black and Latine people, are disproportionately represented in the criminal legal system (Alexander, 2010). Critical race theory is an appropriate lens through which to consider people in the criminal legal system as a whole, including individuals sentenced to life or long sentences as children (Capers, 2014; Fornili, 2018). CRT's tenets are reflected in this population. First of all, CRT states that racism is endemic and deeply embedded in social structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This includes prison and other systems of carceral control (i.e., probation, parole,

policing; Fornili, 2018). Race has unmistakably mattered within criminal legal systems, dictating who can be on a jury, who could testify in court, who could be police officers, and even who Black police officers could arrest (Capers, 2014; Forman, 2017). Policing evolved from slave patrols, and never ceased its work in furthering white supremacy and targeting Black and Brown bodies (Alexander, 2010; Forman, 2017; Jackson et al., 2020). CRT tells us that race is a social construction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). People are clearly raced and assigned certain attributes within the criminal legal system; just one demonstration of this is the assumed criminality of Black and Brown bodies (Capers, 2014). For instance, when asked to imagine a drug dealer, most people imagine a Black man, despite the fact that White and Black people use drugs at approximately the same rate and generally buy drugs from a person of their same race (Alexander, 2010). CRT's focus on differential racialization (that different racialized groups are treated and racialized differently depending on time and place) is pertinent to juvenile life sentences. For instance, Black children who would have once been designated "super predators" are no longer seen as such.

The other tenets of CRT can be applied to research regarding juvenile lifers as well. In this context, interest convergence means that there has been a change in the way we treat people who are incarcerated. The change in JLWOP sentencing practices may be perceived as advantageous to people in power because of the absurdly high cost of incarceration, especially since people sentenced to long periods in prison age and become more expensive to incarcerate (Western, 2018). The fact that so little is known about the carceral experiences of people facing long or life sentences (Kazemian & Travis, 2015) is indicative of the erasure of perspectives of those who are incarcerated. Many studies

focus primarily on recidivism (Kazemian & Travis, 2015), which is important, but only captures a sliver of the realities of life post-prison, and does so as though recidivism is the lone measure of success. Though this is important to policy makers and practitioners, focusing on recidivism alone is short-sighted and incomplete if we care about the individuals in these systems. Using a CRT lens to consider the experiences of people entering the community after a long or life sentence imposed during childhood necessitates that voices of color, and the quality of life of people of color, are centered. The last tenet of CRT is intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). People sentenced to life or long sentences have unacknowledged complex, heterogeneous identities (Kazemian & Travis, 2014). Considering people from an intersectional perspective is a partial antidote to the dehumanizing processes that take place in prison (Capers, 2014).

Joining these Three Theories for the Dissertation

These three theories—life course, cumulative inequality, and critical race theory—complement one another and serve as a relevant lens through which to frame the carceral and post-release experiences of people sentenced to long or life sentences as children. The premise of all three theories is that lives and contexts change over time, and those changes are crucial to the central aspects of each theory. Without time passing, there would be no life-course, only a moment in time. Likewise, without time, advantage or disadvantage could not accumulate. In a CRT context, the socio-historical context impacts the differential racialization of individuals and groups. Racialization changes as time passes and exists within a historic context. Connected to the importance of the passage of time is the inevitability that time influences and is influenced by the relationships, settings, and cultural norms of different points in time.

All three of these theories explicitly consider the importance of networks and shared identities, rather than solely the lives of individuals. For instance, in CRT, though race is socially constructed, racialization happens only when there is a comparison group from which to base the “other.” Shared identities are central to these theories in terms of historic context (life course, CRT), intersectionality (CRT), and more macro-level approaches to how certain characteristics can be connected to one’s experience (CRT) and advantage (cumulative disadvantage theory). Each of these theories has the potential to expose how dominant cultures and influences impact people’s lives. Cumulative disadvantage theory specifies that social systems create inequality, aligning with CRT.

These theories have been combined in other studies. For instance, Gee and colleagues (2012) used a life course lens to examine how exposure to racism may impact health disparities. Another study used a cumulative disadvantage theoretical lens augmented by CRT to explore educational achievement and attendance as related to recidivism for children released from a juvenile facility (Blomberg et al., 2012). Lastly, Gonzales and colleagues (2021) examined inequities of health as related to COVID-19 and anti-racist movements through a CRT and cumulative disadvantage lens.

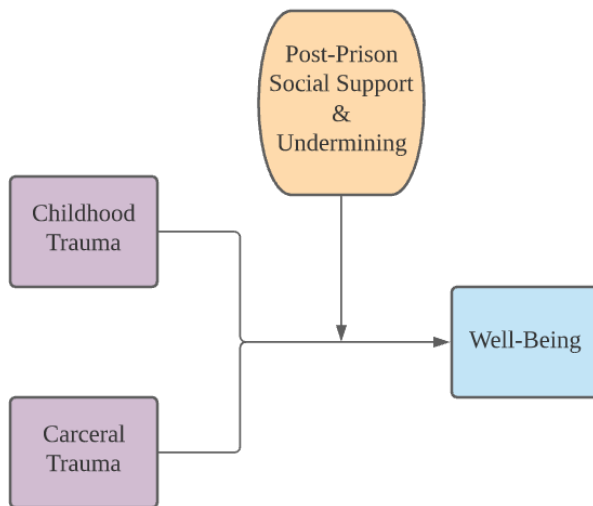
Application of Theories to This Dissertation

In this study, life course, cumulative disadvantage, and CRT were integrated to create a conceptual model to explore experiences of people returning from a life or long-term prison sentence imposed during childhood (see Figure 1). By merging these theories, I hypothesized that traumatic life events from before and during incarceration affect a person’s quality of life. Social support and undermining (defined as comments that indicate negative affect or critique, or behaviors that interfere with a person’s ability

to meet goals) moderate the impact on quality of life. Trauma and quality of life constructs emerge from cumulative disadvantage theory. The role of supportive social relationships, and their effect on quality of life comes from life course theory. Although it is not explicitly in Figure 1, the importance of racism and racism as a trauma both stem from CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hardy, 2013).

The role of various types and degrees of trauma are taken from cumulative disadvantage theory. Likewise, a person's ability to meet various reentry goals aligns with cumulative disadvantage in that a person's life course is shaped by a person's risk, resources, and agency. Questions related to the stresses of racism, and the qualitative components that give voice to Black and Brown respondents in the study align with CRT. Questions regarding the participant's age at incarceration align with both life course and cumulative disadvantage theories. The potential moderating impact of relationships stems from life course and cumulative disadvantage theories. Taken together, these three theories provided guidance for a thorough exploration of the experiences of people who were sentenced to life or long-term incarceration as children.

Figure 1: Theoretical Model



Chapter 4: Method

Study Design

This mixed methods study utilized a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) to explore the lives of people released from prison after serving over ten years of a sentence beginning in childhood. Using a mixed methods design honored the voices of participants while simultaneously gathering data from a larger sample to understand the scope from the problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This design reflected social work values by centering individuals with lived experiences as the experts in their own lives. Quantitative methodology was used to examine associations between the major constructs of interest in the study: relationships and quality of life. However, it could not provide details about how those constructs were experienced by individuals who returned to the community following a long sentence that began during childhood. Qualitative methodology allowed for collection and analysis of richer data about these constructs and the ways they were experienced. It also allowed respondents to be seen as multidimensional people, as happens when analysis is centered on their voices, rather than my own (Shdaimah & Leon, 2018). Together, qualitative and quantitative methods provided a more complete understanding of the post-release lives of people who served a long or life sentence starting in childhood, and can act as the launchpad for future research, policies, and interventions. Additionally, this design leveraged social network analysis; one of the core propositions of a social network perspective is that examination of networks requires multi-method approaches, as social networks are complicated (Perry et al., 2018). Table 2 provides a detailed categorization of the ways that qualitative and quantitative data were used to address each research question.

Table 2: Research Questions and Data Analysis

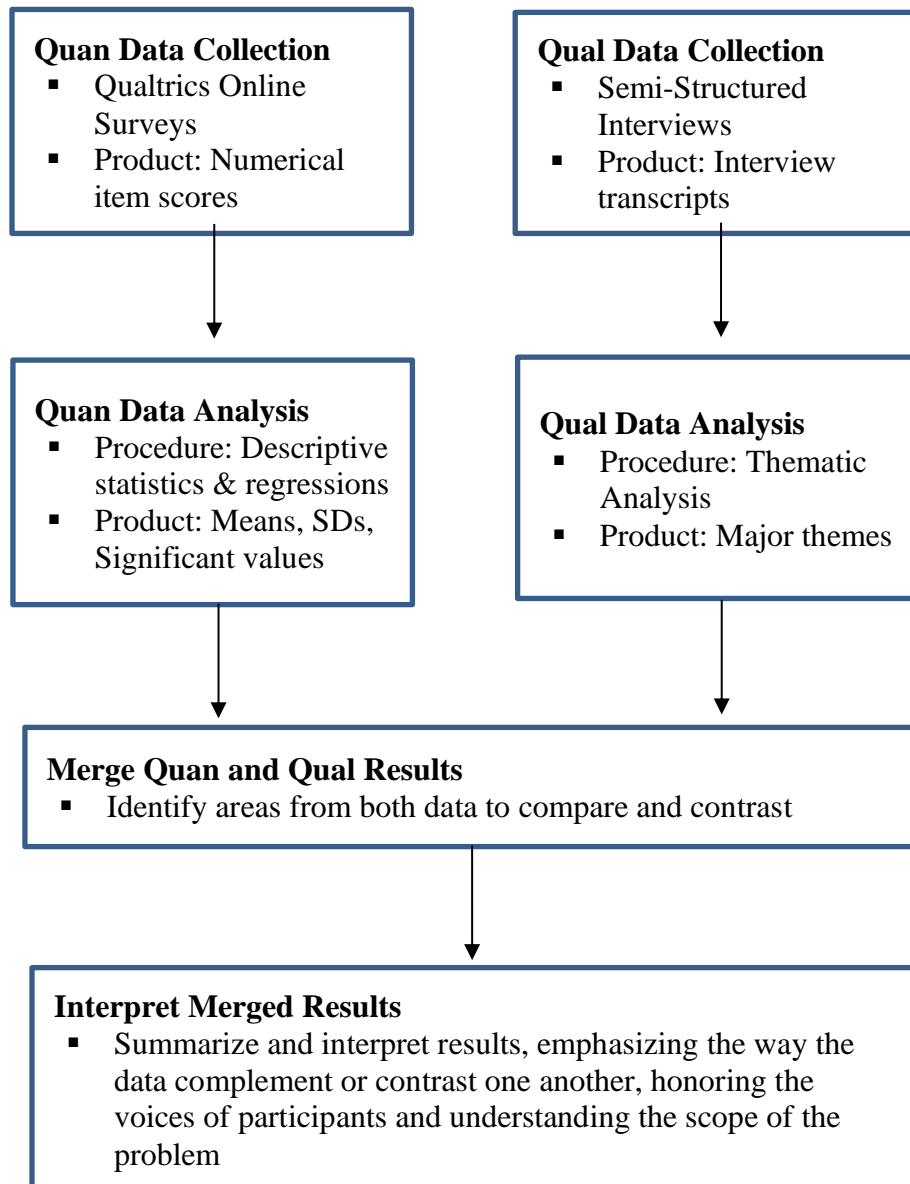
Aim	Research Questions	Study Methods
<p>Aim 1: To describe the lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood and then released.</p>	<p>1. What are the characteristics of people returning from life and long sentences that began in childhood generally and in terms of their current quality of life and reentry needs since release?</p>	<p>Data Source: 1a. Survey (ego-level, alter-level, WHOQOL-BREF) 1b. Interviews (general, reentry process, quality of life) Data Analysis: 1a. Descriptive statistics 1b. Thematic analysis</p>
<p>Aim 2: To examine the relationship between demographic and/or prison-related characteristics and quality of life.</p>	<p>1. Are certain characteristics (e.g. gender, race, age, time since release, number of years in prison) associated with current quality of life? 2. How is post-release quality of life experienced by people who served a life or long sentenced starting in childhood? 3. To what extent do the quantitative results on quality of life agree with or vary from the qualitative data about quality of life?</p>	<p>Data Source: 1. Survey (ego-level, WHOQOL-BREF) 2. Interviews (quality of life) 3. Surveys + Interviews Data Analysis: 1. Multiple regression 2. Thematic analysis 3. Merging and comparing results.</p>
<p>Aim 3: To explore the experience and role of relationships in the post-prison lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood.</p>	<p>1. Who is involved in the post-prison lives of this population? 2. Are certain types or characteristics of relationships (i.e., family, friend, more supportive, less undermining) associated with current quality of life? 3. Are certain characteristics of network members (i.e., mother, sister, incarceration history) associated with differing levels of support, undermining, and relationship assessments? 4. How do people who served a life or long sentence beginning in childhood experience relationships? 5. To what extent do the quantitative results on relationships agree with or vary from the qualitative data about relationships?</p>	<p>Data Source: 1. Survey (alter-level, SSSUS, RAS) 2. Survey (alter-level, SSSUS, RAS, WHOQOL-BREF) 3. Survey (alter-level, SSSUS, RAS) 4. Interviews (general, reentry process, quality of life, relationships) 5. Surveys + Interviews Data Analysis: 1. Descriptive statistics 2. Logistic regression 3. MLM 4. Thematic analysis 5. Merging results</p>

A convergent parallel design was used, meaning that quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred separately in the first phase, and were subsequently analyzed separately before data were merged and interpreted together (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This design provided an avenue for exploration of “different but complementary data on the same topic” (Morse, 1991, p. 122) and was intuitive and efficient (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The design was appropriate for this study given how little is known about this population. By using a convergent parallel design to combine results, the data provided more insight into the research questions than either strand could have on its own. This is crucial, given the complexity of the dynamics and factors at play in the post-release lives of people who served long and life sentences that began in childhood. As is the case in many convergent parallel designs, quantitative and qualitative strands were designed to be emphasized equally (QUAN + QUAL; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study’s convergent parallel design is shown in Figure 2.

This dissertation study also incorporated collaborative design approaches. This was one way in which I used a social justice orientation in my dissertation: by creating the study with (and not for or without) people with these lived experiences (Cornelius & Harrington, 2014; Freire, 2000). As I began to think about this dissertation, I contacted several people I know who were previously incarcerated with JLWOP and long sentences from childhood, several individuals who have worked with people with JLWOP and other long sentences, and researchers who have conducted research with people who had returned to the community following JLWOP sentences. I described my interest in the role of relationships on quality of life for people who were incarcerated for life or long sentences beginning in childhood. I asked for feedback and if these areas aligned with

what they found important in their own lives or in the lives of people with whom they worked. In my interactions with these individuals and the organization with whom I partnered to recruit participants (Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth [CFSY]), I stressed that I wanted the dissertation and topics herein to be useful to their future advocacy efforts.

Figure 2: Diagram for Convergent Parallel Design



Member checking also occurred with people who served life or long sentences starting in childhood and others who have worked with this population during the data analysis, data merging, and result interpretation stages. Furthermore, I have and will continue to share data and analyses as requested by CFSY and other partners. I believe that these partnerships and intentional collaborations are crucial as a social work researcher, a White woman conducting research with predominantly Black and Latine male respondents, and as someone who has never been incarcerated.

Quantitative data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey that included both individual and social network level questions, then was analyzed through descriptive statistics and regressions. During the same phase but in a second step, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews. Thematic analysis was used to examine qualitative data. Once qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed, results were merged and interpreted, comparing data from each strand with the other. Mixed method results were presented as narratives to present the ways quantitative and qualitative findings complement or diverge from one another.

Data Source

The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY) is a non-profit organization that works to end life without parole and other extreme sentences for children. CFSY has a list of most of the people in the United States who were sentenced to life without parole as children and then released from prison as adults. As of April 2023, 983 people have returned to the community following a JLWOP sentence (R. Turner, personal communication, April 27, 2023). Although CFSY does not have contact information for all of those individuals, they did have email addresses for 218 individuals

who were part of CFSY's Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN), which they provided to me. Participants for this study were contacted through CFSY's networks via email. CFSY employees assisted in the recruitment process, as described in the Quantitative Procedures section below.

Sample Characteristics

The inclusion criteria for both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study were the same. Participants must have been incarcerated for at least 10 consecutive years starting when they were 17 or younger, must not be incarcerated at the time of survey or interview completion, and must not have resided in a halfway house at the time of the survey. Furthermore, participants must have a valid email address. Participants could be from anywhere in the United States.

The decision to use ten years as the minimum for long-term sentences was made for several reasons. Long-term incarceration is not universally defined, with definitions complicated by the use of indeterminate sentences and disagreement around measurement based on sentence length or time served (Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Time served is often used in that definition, but the number of years that constitutes long-term incarceration is a moving target that has changed over time (Kazemian & Travis, 2015). Ten years has been used as the threshold in numerous studies (Council on Criminal Justice, 2023; Courtney et al., 2017; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2006) and falls within the range used by researchers over time (see Kazemian & Travis, 2015 for an excellent review of what constitutes long-term incarceration). Furthermore, in a meeting with multiple representatives from CFSY, they identified 10 years as their demarcation of long-term sentences. As described in Chapter 1, the Supreme Court identifies children as different

from adults. This study used 17 as the maximum age at the time of sentencing to reflect the US delineation between adults and children and to focus on the experiences of an oft-forgotten group of people in this country's criminal legal system.

Procedures

Quantitative and qualitative data collection both occurred in the first phase, but in two steps. In the first step, the quantitative survey was sent out via email. At the end of the quantitative survey, participants could express interest in participating in the qualitative interview.

Quantitative Procedures

An employee of CFSY sent an email to their network of people who were sentenced to life without parole and long sentences during childhood, alerting them that they would soon receive an email from me. Having a known, dependable contact send out surveys is known to add an additional level of trust for recipients (Dillman et al., 2014), and CFSY's engagement appeared to do so. Employees at CFSY were not informed who did or did not participate. Dillman and colleagues (2014) noted that sending follow-up emails to survey recipients at regular intervals increases participation. Therefore, after sending an initial survey link and message via Qualtrics, those who had not yet completed the survey received follow-up emails 10 days and three weeks after the initial message. A Qualtrics feature allowed for these reminders to be sent while maintaining the anonymity of responses. All emails contained an explanation of the study and a link to the anonymous Qualtrics survey. I did not use Qualtrics to track IP addresses and did not request any identifying information during the survey, except as mentioned regarding those who preferred to participate by phone or video. Appealing to the social justice

aspects of the study and the importance of gathering data to ideally support others often increases respondent buy-in and participation (Dillman et al., 2014). As such, this was explicitly stated in the correspondence. Additionally, to increase participation, all individuals who participated in the survey received a \$25 Tango electronic gift card, redeemable at various companies' websites. Incentives used in research with people who were previously incarcerated tend to range from about \$25 to \$100 (Abrams et al., 2020; J. Bennett, personal communication, January 29, 2021; T. Daftary-Kapur & T. Zottoli, personal communication, March 5, 2021; Harding et al., 2014; C. Shdaimah, personal communication, May 6, 2021; Western, 2018).

Although email surveys have been infrequently used with people who were previously incarcerated, one recent study of people released following JLWOP sentences had a 71% response rate to surveys sent electronically (T. Daftary-Kapur & T. Zottoli, personal communication, March 5, 2021). People who received the email were given my Google Voice number if they preferred to conduct the survey over the phone or through a Zoom video call as opposed to via Qualtrics. (Although this reduced confidentiality, I did not record any identifying information beyond what was needed to contact them for the survey.) Providing participants with the option to complete the survey over the phone was done to assuage concerns about limited computer literacy and comfort among this population (J. Adjoian, personal communication, August 18, 2021).

The first page of the Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A) began with three questions to ensure that the participant met the inclusion criteria: "Were you incarcerated for at least 10 consecutive years (in a row) starting when you were 17 or younger?"; "Are you currently incarcerated?"; and "Are you currently living in a halfway house due to

conditions of your parole?” All three questions were dichotomous (yes/no) and inclusion required the respondent to reply positively to the first question and negatively to the second and third. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were thanked for their interest and exited out of the survey. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the survey, emails introducing the survey explicitly noted that some questions may bring up difficult topics and a list of support resources was provided. This list of resources was provided in the emails and at the end of the survey. Furthermore, I gave my email address and Google Voice phone number (which could be texted or called without release of my personal cell phone number) as well as contact information for one of my committee members for respondents to contact if they had questions or concerns they would like to address.

Quantitative Sample. There were 78 individuals who completed the quantitative survey. Of the 78 quantitative respondents, 66 (84.6%) were cisgender men, 12 (15.6%) were cisgender women (see Table 3). Participants ranged in age from 35 to 64 years old, with a mean age of 46 years ($SD=5.9$). The racial divisions of this sample align with the racial percentages of all who have been released: two-thirds (67.5%) of the sample is Black, about a quarter (26.0%) is White, and a little over a tenth (12.8%) are Latine. The vast majority (92.2%) identified as straight or heterosexual. Of the quantitative sample, over a third (37.7%) have children, and of those 28, 13 (46.4%) had children from before incarceration, 13 (46.4%) from after incarceration, and two (7.1%) have children both from prior to incarceration and following their release. Most (63; 80.5%) of participants report having full-time employment, while about 13% are working part time, and just five people (6.5%) are unemployed and looking for a job. In terms of educational attainment

to date, all but two respondents have at least a high school diploma or GED. A third of participants currently live in a large city (32.5%). Just over half (51.9%) of the quantitative respondents report attending religious services and, of those 40 participants, most (60%) report attending religious services at least weekly.

Table 3: Quantitative Sample Demographics

<i>Sample Demographics (N = 78)</i>				
Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
Age			46 (5.9)	35-64
Gender				
Cis Man	66	84.6%		
Cis Woman	12	15.4%		
Race				
Black	52	67.5%		
White	20	26.0%		
Latine	10	12.8%		
Urbanicity				
Large City	26	33.3%		
Suburb	20	25.6%		
Small City/Town	22	28.2%		
Rural Area	10	12.8%		
Education				
Some High School	2	2.6%		
HS Diploma/GED	23	29.5%		
Some College	22	28.2%		
Vocational Training	9	11.5%		
2-Year Associates	10	12.8%		
4-Year Bachelors	9	11.5%		
Graduate/Masters	3	3.8%		
Religion				
Christian	28	35.9%		
Muslim	17	21.8%		
Nothing in Particular	16	20.5%		
Catholic	6	7.7%		
Agnostic	5	6.4%		
Spiritual/Other	6	7.7%		
Attend Religious Services	41	52.6%		
Rel. Svc. Attendance (N=41)				
Weekly or more	24	58.5%		
Monthly or more	10	24.4%		
Less than monthly	7	17.1%		

Table 3 Continued

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
Relationship Status				
Married	25	32.1%		
Serious Relationship	20	25.6%		
Single	20	25.6%		
Dating/Casual	11	14.1%		
Have Children				
Pre-Prison	13	16.8%		
Post-Prison	13	16.8%		
Both Pre and Post	2	2.6%		
Employment				
Full Time	63	80.8%		
Part Time	10	12.8%		
Looking	5	6.4%		
Living Wage (N=66)	44	66.7%		

Qualitative Procedures

At the end of the Qualtrics survey, there was an explanation of the qualitative component of this study and an invitation to participate. Anyone who was interested in participating in the qualitative interview could call or text my Google Voice phone number (which routed calls directly to my cellphone without giving my cell phone number) or complete the questions at the end of the Qualtrics survey to provide their name and contact information. Initially an anticipated 12 to 18 qualitative interviews were planned to meet saturation of themes in response to the research questions (Guest et al., 2006). However, there was a great deal of interest in the qualitative interviews and fewer quantitative survey respondents than anticipated. Many were very enthusiastic about sharing their stories and about being seen as complex, whole people beyond their charges. Ultimately, choosing specific qualitative study participants solely from a few demographic items seemed problematic and to stray from the social justice goals of the study. For those reasons, and because I had enough funds to pay all qualitative study

participants, I interviewed all people who indicated that they were interested and responded to follow up messages about scheduling.

For those who opted to participate in the qualitative interview, participants received a consent form via email prior to the interview and, before the interview began, were asked if they had any questions and then gave verbal consent. One-time semi-structured interviews using the interview guide took place via Zoom or phone and were recorded so that a transcription could be created and coded afterwards. I configured Zoom to create transcripts, though those often require extensive editing, which I did while watching or listening to the interviews and removing any identifying information.

Respondents were asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. In order to provide an additional level of confidentiality, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript after their interview, during which point they could choose to delete, edit, or clarify any part. All qualitative interview participants were given a \$50 incentive (in addition to the \$25 quantitative survey incentive), provided as an electronic Tango gift card.

Positionality Statement. As a qualitative and mixed-methods researcher, it is important to be transparent about my own positionality in working with and conducting research that focuses on the lives of people who are currently or previously incarcerated. I am a white, cisgender woman who has never been incarcerated. My lack of incarceration history reflects not a pristine, forever-lawful life lived, but a life lived in a body and in spaces that were not criminalized or over-policed. In short, I have many intersecting identities that nearly all provide and increase privilege. Though my financial situation in recent years, especially as a PhD student, has been challenging, it has never

been so dire that I worried about my ability to have food, shelter, or other needs met. Incarceration and substance use disorders have impacted my broader (not immediate) family in ways that allowed me to separate my work from my daily life.

My privilege and distance from the tendrils of mass incarceration in my personal life have made it even more essential for me to be intentional about the way that I do this work. From 2012 until 2018, I worked with the Goldring Reentry Initiative, a reentry program for people pre and post release from the Philadelphia county jail system, working directly with those coming home, and then as the program's director, coordinating all aspects of the program while training master of social work students to work in the criminal legal system field. In that capacity, I partnered with Philadelphia-based organizations that worked with people returning from juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) sentences, discussing reentry needs and also orchestrating individualized pre-release reentry planning for people returning to the city. Previously, I worked with teenage girls incarcerated at a residential treatment center, women in a halfway house after their release from imprisonment, and men in a horticultural work release program.

My work in Philadelphia sparked my early thoughts about this dissertation and also provided a multiple long-term professional relationships with people working in this field and/or who were previously incarcerated themselves. One crucial connection is with Abd'Allah Lateef, who suggested and then made possible this dissertation as a national study. Lateef had been incarcerated for a JLWOP sentence and then came home to Philadelphia, where we met. He is the Co-Deputy Director of CFSY and a friend.

Within this dissertation, being intentional about my positionality has manifested in several ways. I have used memoing as a tool to reflect on my reactions and biases to

what I have read, heard, and seen in the data. I do not consider myself an expert in this topic, despite having some expertise. I know that, as someone with my privilege and as someone who has not been incarcerated, I will never fully understand what it is to spend decades of life in prison and then try to navigate life post-release. I have used peer debriefing with other people who work or worked in this field, especially other white cisgender women, to not overburden Black and Brown people and/or those who have experienced the torture of prison. I have also depended on my relationships with those who were previously incarcerated to discuss my research questions, findings, and interpretations of the data. Many of these relationships have spanned years and have been bidirectional. I trust those in these spaces to be frank with me when I am wrong or missing the mark. I also work hard to be open to hearing when I am wrong or missing the mark. I have also thought long and hard about how to present the findings in this study, knowing that some findings may be used against people who are or were sentenced to spend many or all of their years in prison starting in childhood. I am honest about the threat my work poses and intentional about how I frame and consider the lives of people I have had the honor and privilege to know through these surveys and interviews.

Qualitative Sample. Of the 78 quantitative survey participants, 46 also participated in the qualitative interview. Interviews were an average of 90 minutes ($SD = 22$ minutes). Qualitative respondents were incarcerated in one of 18 states. They had been out of prison an average of 37 months ($SD = 34$), though some participants had been released as recently as two months prior to the interview or as much as 192 months (16 years) prior. Of qualitative respondents, 39 (84.8%) identified as men, 7 (15.2%) identified as women. Almost three-fifths (58.7%) identified as Black and a quarter

(26.1%) identified as White. All qualitative participants chose their own pseudonyms (see Table 4).

Table 4: Qualitative Sample Demographics and Pseudonyms

Qualitative Sample Demographics and Pseudonyms (N=46)

Pseudonym	Current Age	Gender	Race/Ethn.	Years in Prison	Years Since Release	Age at Prison Entry
Albert	48	Man	White	23	4.5	17
Alejandro Fuentes	40	Man	Black	23	0.5	15
Alex	42	Man	Latino	22	1.6	17
Asm	44	Man	Black	26	0.6	17
Bill Castle	46	Man	White	23	5.8	16
Boobie	44	Man	Black	26	2.3	17
Boricua X.	47	Man	Latino	29	2.8	16
Brian Groovy	46	Man	Black	22	3.7	17
Bryan Stevenson	47	Man	Latino	26	3.5	16
Burger	46	Man	Black	26	3.4	17
C	57	Man	Black	39	1.8	16
Czar	45	Man	Black	25	2.8	17
Drew	41	Man	Latino	23	1.8	15
Ed	47	Man	Black	15	16	16
El	50	Man	Black	31	3.5	15
Eugene	52	Man	Black	32	5.0	15
Fiona	44	Woman	White	25	3.2	16
Funk	50	Man	Black	30	2.0	17
George	55	Woman	White	32	5.2	17
Idris	53	Man	Black	35	2.8	17
J	44	Man	Latino	24	0.3	17
Jackass	46	Man	White	26	3.8	16
Joe Johnson	43	Man	Black	24	1.9	17
John	52	Man	White	34	1.8	16
Julian Ignatius	46	Man	Black	27	0.9	17
Junior	42	Man	Black	27	2.7	12
King	43	Man	Black	22	2.2	17
Marcus	37	Man	Black	19	1.1	17
Mark Grace	42	Man	White	23	1.6	17
Meemaw	55	Woman	White	32	4.3	17
Meredith	35	Woman	White	19	0.6	16
Mr. Grateful	45	Man	Black	24	4.3	16
Nikki Giovani	38	Woman	Black	10	11.6	15
Pickle	47	Man	White	27	3.1	16
Rafiq	47	Man	Black	27	2.9	17
Ralph	60	Man	White	42	1.1	16
Robert	45	Man	Black	27	0.8	17

Table 4 Continued

Pseudonym	Current Age	Gender	Race/ Ethn.	Years in Prison	Years Since Release	Age at Prison Entry
Sakina	64	Man	Black	42	4.8	17
Sapio Scorpius	45	Man	Black	28	1.7	15
Scorpio	46	Woman	Multi	31	0.4	15
Sharuka	52	Man	Black	34	0.9	16
Sunshine	42	Woman	Black	17	5.8	17
Ted Black	49	Man	Asian	31	1.4	17
Top Flight	47	Man	Black	30	0.2	16
Troy	38	Man	White	18	6.2	14
ZagLaw	44	Man	Black	27	2.7	14

Confidentiality & Data Protection

There are several ways that I was proactive in protecting participants' identities and data. University IRB approval was received prior to this study. In addition, to prevent concerns about the possibility of having survey data subpoenaed, I sought a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In terms of data collection, participants were not asked their name or contact information in the survey. To receive the incentive for participating in the quantitative portion of this study, they were rerouted to a new page to input their e-mail addresses, which were not connected to survey responses. This list will be destroyed within one year of the study's completion. Respondents were asked to list up to 10 network members (alters) for the social network related questions. Directions in the survey encouraged them to use nicknames or initials so as not to provide alters' names. During data cleaning, I reviewed and edited alter names to be sure no alters were easily identified. For the qualitative data, I only retained documents with deidentified information.

Measures

Measurement Development

Both the quantitative survey and the qualitative semi-structured interview guide were finalized with feedback from people who served long or life sentences beginning in childhood, individuals who have worked with people who are currently or were previously incarcerated, and other peers. After having one-on-one or small group meetings described earlier in this chapter, I began to create both the qualitative and quantitative tools for this study. These tools reflected the feedback I received in those meetings and specific questions people with whom I spoke deemed important.

None of the people with whom I spoke had been previous clients when I worked in the reentry field, but other power dynamics, especially based on race and education, may have been at play. Power relationships can easily coopt parts of the research (Maxwell, 2012). I worked to mitigate some of the ways power dynamics interfere, including through self-reflection, treating participants and key informants as connections rather than as a means to gain access, and being intentional about continual renegotiation of trust and reciprocity (Maxwell, 2012). Furthermore, the fact that many of these relationships have spanned years and have included bi-directional support means that some level of trust and intimacy was already established.

Once I developed the quantitative survey and qualitative interview guide, I sent the survey and interview guide to some of these same key informants for further feedback. The quantitative survey was reviewed by a group of people who work at CFSY, at least three of whom returned to the community following long or life sentences imposed during childhood. Another individual who was previously sentenced to JLWOP

and is employed to support others returning from JLWOP sentences also provided feedback and pilot tested the survey. I have known him and one of the individuals at CFSY with lived carceral experience since 2017.

The quantitative survey was pilot-tested by PhD students and several people who work or have worked with people who are currently or were previously incarcerated. The semi-structured interview guide was, like the quantitative survey, reviewed by several individuals who were previously incarcerated for long or life sentences that began in childhood. The semi-structured interview guide was adapted and edited as needed as interviews progressed (McGrath et al., 2018). For instance, being concerned about the upsetting note on which interviews seemed poised to end, I added the question “What brings you joy now that you’re home?” as the second to last question. Otherwise, interviews followed the guide, with some questions eliminated due to time constraints.

Quantitative Survey

The total Qualtrics-based survey (see Appendix 1) took about 30 minutes to complete. The survey was ordered “like a conversation” (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 230) in that the survey began with broader demographic questions and built up to more personal, potentially sensitive questions like those focusing on quality of life and complex personal relationships. The Qualtrics survey was written at a fifth grade reading level.

Demographics. Only the most preliminary information is known about this population. In Nellis’s (2012) survey of people serving JLWOP sentences, she collected demographic data. Additionally, CFSY attorney Rebecca Turner is actively collecting basic demographic data about the 983 people who have returned from life and long sentences that began during childhood. As of April 27, 2023, 67% of those who have

come home are Black, 24% are White, 6% are Latine, 1% are Asian, and 2% have an unknown race. Of those who have returned, 96% are men (R. Turner, personal communication, April 27, 2023).

In order to better understand the demographics and profiles of people who returned to the community following a long or life sentence that began in childhood, various questions were included in this survey. Furthermore, demographic questions were used as control variables in some of the quantitative data analyses (see Table 2). Demographic questions included age, race, ethnicity, relationship status, gender, sexual orientation, education level, employment status, living situation, religion, parental status, and parole status. Age was maintained as a continuous variable. Participants were asked to select all races with which they identify. Options included Black or African American, Asian, Native American or American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, other (with a request to specify), and prefer not to say. In terms of ethnicity, respondents were asked if they identify as Hispanic, Latine, or of Spanish origin, with a dichotomous (yes, no) response option. A question regarding gender included options for cisgender man, cisgender woman, transgender man, transgender woman, non-binary, prefer to self-describe (with a request to specify), and prefer not to say. Definitions for gender responses were provided for clarity. Respondents were asked about their sexual orientation with five response options, including straight/heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, other (with a request to specify), and prefer not to say. Survey respondents were asked about their current relationship status and asked to choose from the following responses: single, dating, friends with benefits or casual sex partner(s), committed/serious relationship, married, separated, divorced, widowed, prefer to self-describe (with a

request to specify) and prefer not to say, with response options stemming from Craddock et al.'s (2020) social network study. The survey asked participants if they had children (yes/no) and, if so, if those children were from before incarceration, since release, both, or prefer not to say.

Additional demographic and background questions inquired about housing, employment, education, religiosity, and parole status. Education was asked about in terms of the highest grade for which respondents completed and received credit. Responses included some high school, high school diploma or GED, some college, vocational training, two-year degree, four-year degree, professional or graduate degree, doctorate degree, or other (with a request to specify). Education level responses were from Pew Research Center (2013). Respondents were asked how they would best describe their employment most of the time during the previous six months, with response options that included full-time paid job (35 hours/week or more), part-time paid job, unemployed and not looking for work, unemployed and looking for work, and student or in vocational training (Craddock et al., 2020). Respondents who indicated that they were employed then asked if they consider their salary enough to be a living wage, which were operationally defined as enough for them to pay for housing and other needs. Individuals who reported being employed were asked what type of employment, with a fill in the blank option.

Respondents were asked where they currently live, with responses that include: own home/apartment; family's home/apartment; partner's home/apartment; friend's home/apartment; rooming house or single room; recovery house; homeless, street, couchsurfing, hotel or motel; other (with a request to specify); and prefer not to say.

These response options reflected what Nellis (2012) found to be the most typical living situations prior to juvenile lifers' incarceration, and my own work with people in the reentry process. The other question regarding urbanicity pertained to the type of community respondents live in, asking how the participant would describe where they live now, with options that included large city, suburb near a large city, small city or town, and rural area (all of which are used as options by the National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Respondents were asked if they attend religious services (yes or no) and, if so, how often, with options including weekly, several times per month, monthly, several times per year, yearly, never, and prefer not to say. Respondents were asked about their current religion, if any. For that question, responses included Protestant or Christian, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Agnostic, Atheist, other (with a request to specify), and nothing in particular. These religiosity questions and categories have been used by Pew Charitable Trust (2018) in past surveys. Lastly, respondents were asked if they are currently on parole (yes, no, previously) and, if so, for how long, including an option to indicate lifelong parole. Many people who were resentenced after serving time on their original JLWOP sentence were given lifelong parole (Lateef, 2021), though it is unclear what percentage of people have lifelong parole and, for those who do not, how long their parole periods are, if they exist at all. Respondents were also asked to estimate how many times they have seen their parole officer in the month prior, which is a question that comes directly from the BJS (2008) National Former Prisoner Survey.

Criminal Legal and Prison-Related Questions. A number of criminal legal and prison-related questions were included in the survey, largely to answer this dissertation's first research question regarding sample characteristics. Participants were asked the

month and year when they were released from prison for the long or life sentence received as a child, with a space to indicate years and months. Participants were asked their age (in years) when they were incarcerated for the long or life sentence received during childhood, and how long they were incarcerated in years and months. Participants were then asked to select what sentence they received as children, with options including juvenile life without the possibility of parole (JLWOP), juvenile life with the possibility of parole (JLWP), and other (with a request to specify both the minimum and maximum sentences). Respondents were asked if they were resentenced after serving some of the long or life sentence received as children (yes/no), and, if so, what the new sentence was (fill in the blank). These options reflect the resulting resentencing that occurred following various Supreme Court decisions between 2005 and 2016 (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.).

Participants were asked about their experiences in prison as related to people in their non-incarcerated social networks. In Nellis's (2012) study of people incarcerated with JLWOP sentences, she included some of these questions and indicated that there was an association between distance from loved ones and the amount and frequency of visits received. Questions in this survey included where respondents were incarcerated the longest during their sentence and about how many hours' drive that was from most of their family and friends. Frequency of interactions with family and/or friends in the last half of the participant's sentence was queried in terms of visits, phone calls, and letters, with responses that included weekly, monthly, yearly, never, other (with request to specify), and prefer not to say. Respondents were asked if contact with friends and/or family changed from the first half of their sentence compared to the second half, with

options that it increased, decreased, stayed the same, and prefer not to say. These questions were modeled after Nellis's (2012) study.

Participants were asked about life in prison more broadly as well. These questions were included in Nellis's (2012) study of children serving JLWOP sentences. For instance, one question asked if participants had ever participated in programming in prison (yes/no) and, if affirmative, to select all kinds of programming that applied to them: high school/GED, college courses, vocational, drug and alcohol, social emotional (e.g., anger management, Choice is Yours), and other (with a request to specify). Those who indicated that they did not participate in programming were asked why, with options that included: chose not to, excluded because of sentence, and other (with request to specify). Nellis (2012) found that most of the people serving JLWOP sentences who did not participate in programming fell into these categories. A question asked respondents to indicate what best described their living situation during most of their incarceration, with options that included an open dorm, a dorm with cubicles, a unit with cells, a unit with rooms, an area not originally intended as housing (such as a gym, classroom, or day room), solitary confinement, other (with a request to describe), and prefer not to say. The next question asked with how many people the respondent shared the dorm, cubicle, or cell, with a fill in the blank space. These two questions were used in the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Former Prisoner Survey (2008). Respondents were asked if they were ever in solitary confinement (no, yes as a child in adult prison, yes as an adult in adult prison, and yes both as a child and adult in adult prison), and for those who had been in solitary, to specify the longest period of time (in days/weeks/months/years) and the total time spent over the course of their entire incarceration (in days/weeks/months/years).

This was important as studies have found solitary confinement as traumatizing for people of all ages, and that solitary confinement is not anomalous for children in adult prisons (Nellis, 2012; Parker et al., 2005; Shook, 2014). Lastly, respondents were asked if they were ever in protective custody (a separate cell or housing unit allegedly for the person's protection), with response options that included no, yes as a child in adult prison, yes as an adult in adult prison, yes both as a child and adult in adult prison, and prefer not to say. Categories were based on Parker and colleague's (2005) study.

Life Before Prison. To have a better understanding of people who were sentenced to long and life sentences that began in childhood, and to consider some of these factors as control variables, participants were asked to recall several aspects of life before prison. Little is known about this population's pre-prison life, other than what was reported by Nellis (2012) more than a decade ago; pre-prison questions reflected those asked by Nellis (2012). First, respondents were asked to indicate the highest grade they completed before going to prison for the life or long sentence administered during their childhood, with an open-ended response. They were asked if they were enrolled in school at the time of their arrest (dichotomous yes/no) and, if not, why not, with options that include expelled, suspended, dropped out, other (please specify), and prefer not to say. Another dichotomous (yes/no) question asked respondents if they had been arrested before the arrest that led to this sentence and, for those who had, how old they were when they were first arrested (open-ended). Respondents were asked to indicate how they would describe the area in which they lived prior to their arrest, and selections included large city, suburb near a large city, small city or town, and rural area. Lastly, respondents were asked where they were living at the time of the arrest that led to the life or long sentence. Responses

included with both parents, with one parent, with grandparent(s), with family friend or other family, with partner, with friend, group home or institution, homeless/street/couchsurfing, other (with a request to specify), and prefer not to say.

Life After Prison. Several questions in this survey focused on the experiences of respondents immediately after they left prison following the life or long sentence that began during their childhood. These questions reflect prior literature that indicated the importance of the first few days after a person's release from prison (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Western et al., 2015). The first question in this section asked where participants went on the day they were released from prison, with options that included halfway house, family's home, friend's home, romantic partner's home, other (please specify), and prefer not to say. Next, participants were asked how they got from prison to where they were staying on the day they were released, with response options including family, friend, romantic partner, lawyer, prison transport, other professional, public transportation, other (please specify), and prefer not to say. Lastly, participants were asked about how much money they had when they left prison. These questions were based on research from Pettus-Davis (2014).

Independent Variables

Independent variables in this study were related to social networks. In Aim 2, the focus was on specific demographic variables and quality of life, but apart from those demographic questions being used as independent variables, all other independent variables were from the social network analysis. Social network-based variables were central to Aim 3: to explore the experience and role of relationships in the post-carceral lives of this population (see Table 2).

Social Network Variables. This study used a social network analysis approach to consider the ways in which people's social networks were associated with quality of life. It used social network variables to better understand the social networks of people returning from prison following a long or life sentence that began in childhood.

There are two ways to investigate social networks: through sociometric or egocentric research designs (Perry et al., 2018; Valente, 2010), but this dissertation focused only on an egocentric approach. Egocentric research designs are more common in research about people who are currently or were previously incarcerated (Whichard et al., 2019). Egocentric research designs begin with an individual (ego) and ask about that individual's networks (Perry et al., 2018). Rather than being able to consider a complete web of intersecting and interacting connections within certain parameters (i.e., a prison, classroom, family), egocentric approaches result in information about separate, unique networks stemming from the initial individual or ego (Perry et al., 2018). Egocentric research is based on the idea that each of us has our own communities within which we live and that our lives are impacted by the composition and structure of that network (Perry et al., 2018). Egocentric approaches allow for consideration of ego outcomes as related to network member (or alter) characteristics and types of connections the ego has with alters (Perry et al., 2018). One example of the use of egocentric research design is Rivlin and colleagues' (2013) study of people who were incarcerated and had attempted suicide, in which the researchers found that those who had attempted suicide had no or few close friends outside of prison as compared to a group of people who did not have suicidal ideation. Most research studying the role of relationships for people who are currently or were previously incarcerated examines aspects of those relationships without

using social network approaches, though a social network approach can provide a richer understanding of those connections.

Following egocentric social network analysis procedures (Perry et al., 2018; Valente, 2010), questions in this study began with a name generator. Respondents were asked to list up to 10 people (“alters”) who have been most important in their lives since their release from prison, and were probed to include parole officers and/or agency professionals specifically. From there, respondents were asked to identify each alter’s gender, age, race, ethnicity, and the type of relationship the respondent has with each person. Just as collecting ego-level demographic data is standard in quantitative studies, so is collecting alter-level demographics in egocentric social network studies (Perry et al., 2018). The relationship types were categorical, so respondents could select from a list that included various family members, partners, friends, parole officers, program or agency professional, or other (with a request to describe). Respondents were asked how long they had known each individual, with response options that included entire life, before prison, during prison, and since release. Skip logic was used so that respondents were only asked if and how they communicated with alters whom they knew while incarcerated. Respondents were asked to report if alters were employed (yes, no, don’t know), and if alters had ever been incarcerated (yes, no, don’t know, currently incarcerated). Participants were asked to indicate which, if any, of the alters provided reentry support after prison and, for those who did, what kind (i.e., housing, financial, accessing program, other). These alter-level questions reflected questions asked by other researchers examining the social networks of people returning to the community following incarceration (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Skeem et al., 2009).

Next, respondents were prompted to choose up to five people who are the most important to the respondent or with whom the respondent spends the most time, starting with the most important person. From there, standardized measures were used to measure the amount of social support and social undermining (both of which are described in the section below) participants received from each of those five core network members, as well as to assess their relationships with each alter in the core network. This method, of identifying core network members along with standardized measures of social support, social undermining, and relationship assessment, was used by Skeem and colleagues (2009) in their study of people on probation.

Social Support and Social Undermining. People's social networks and support systems are often complicated and can include members who are positive, undermining, or both (Pettus-Davis, 2014; Skeem et al., 2009; Western, 2015). To better understand these complexities, the combined Social Support Scale (SSS) and Social Undermining Scale (SUS; Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993) were used. Together, these two components measured the degree of support and undermining by network members in respondents' core network. These have been used in tandem for people who were previously incarcerated (Skeem et al., 2009), with a Cronbach's alpha of .80 for support and .75 for undermining for the top network person. With other populations, the Cronbach's alpha was .89 to .92 for social support and .84 to .86 for social undermining (Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). The social support scale included eight items that reflect emotional, appraisal, informational, and material support, and the undermining scale consisted of five items representing "actions that directly undermine and diminish the sense of self-worth that supportive behaviors reinforce" (Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993, p. 353). Both

used a 5-point Likert-type scale, and were summed, with higher scores indicating more endorsement of the construct (Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993).

Relationship Assessment. The other relationship-based measure that was used in this dissertation was the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick et al., 1998). This seven-item measure used a 5-point Likert-type scale to measure the following for each person in the core network: satisfaction with the relationship, quality of relationship compared to others, regrets about relationship involvement, number of problems in the relationship, caring for the person, and the extent to which the relationship met the respondent's original expectations (Hendrick et al., 1998). Though higher responses indicated more agreement with the item, the 5-point Likert-type scale varied slightly for each item, including those ranging from unsatisfied to extremely satisfied, poor to excellent, never to very often, hardly at all to completely, not much to very much, and very few to very many (Hendrick et al., 1998). Scores were summed and divided by the number of items to determine a mean score, and two items (about how often do you wish you had not gotten into this relationship and about number of problems in the relationship) were reverse scored (Hendrick et al., 1998). In their work with people on probation, Skeem and colleagues (2009) used just six of the seven items, excluding the item about how well the person met the respondent's needs. In that study, Skeem and colleagues (2009) reported a high Cronbach's alpha (.81) for the core members in the network. Based on this approach, only the six-item measure was used in this study.

Dependent Variable.

One construct—quality of life—was treated as the dependent variable. The quality of life variable was included in the analysis to meet Aim 2 (to examine the

relationship between demographic and prison-related characteristics with quality of life) and Aim 3 (to better understand the association between social support and quality of life for this population). See Table 2 for more details regarding research questions and variables used.

Quality of Life. The dependent variable in this study was quality of life, which was measured through the World Health Organization Quality of Life Brief Scale (WHOQOL-BREF; The WHOQOL Group, 1998). The WHOQOL-BREF was adapted from the 100-item version to a 26-item version to more succinctly examine four dimensions of quality of life, including social relationships, environment, psychological health, and physical health (The WHOQOL Group, 1998). Each item was evaluated using a 5-point Likert-type scale, though those scale responses varied by question, with some ranging from very poor to very good, very dissatisfied to very satisfied, not at all to an extreme amount, not at all to extremely, and never to always (The WHOQOL Group, 1998). The WHOQOL-BREF has been used with people who are currently or previously incarcerated (Archuleta et al., 2020; De Smet et al., 2017; Prost et al., 2020). Archuleta and colleagues (2020) used this measure to examine quality of life as it pertained to personal relationships and found a Cronbach's alpha of .71. The Cronbach's alpha was .65 for environment, .68 for psychological health, .82 for physical health, and .71 for social relationships in De Smet and colleagues' (2017) study of older incarcerated adults. In a study of older incarcerated adults, Prost and colleagues (2019) found higher, Cronbach's alphas for those domains, ranging from .79 to .81. Three items were reverse coded. In order to create a single score for quality of life overall, domain scores were summed, with higher numbers indicating greater quality of life. Within the alter-level

data, the summed QOL overall score was made into a binary variable, with higher and lower scores using the 4 out of 5 dividing line, as had been done elsewhere (Wong et al., 2018).

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 2) used for the qualitative component of this study focused on the role of relationships for people released from prison following long and life sentences that began during childhood. Questions in the semi-structured interview guide were used in all three aims in this dissertation (see Table 2). Questions fell into one of eight main categories: general, reentry process, quality of life, relationships, formal relationships, advice, and miracle question. The qualitative interview guide began with a broad introductory question, asking the respondent, “Can you tell me about yourself?” From there, questions progressed to asking about the reentry process in terms of what it looked like for the respondent in the early days and since, what has been most helpful and most challenging for reentry, and if the respondent thinks reentry is different for people returning from long and life sentences from childhood as compared to adulthood. There were two questions asking about respondents’ quality of life. The first focused on if and how their quality of life had changed since their release. The second was simply, “What brings you joy now that you’re out of prison?”

Most questions in the qualitative semi-structured interview guide revolved around relationships. There were probes asking about those relationships in the reentry process generally, and what reconnection with social networks and creation of new social bonds looked like for respondents. More specific relationship-focused questions probed for different types of relationships (including for family, friend, partners, and parole officers

and other professionals), experiences of loss, challenges with power dynamics, things that facilitated and impeded reconnection with social networks, and what has surprised respondents about their relationships since their release. The qualitative interview inquired about what advice the respondent would give to others returning from similar sentences as well. It also used the “Miracle Question,” which is a social work and psychotherapy tool that asks the respondent to imagine an ideal world (Hollingsworth et al., 2009). In this study, the miracle question was reflected by asking participants what they would change if they had an unlimited budget and resources to address issues around children being sentenced to long or life sentences. Lastly, the interview guide concluded by asking the participant to share anything they had not yet mentioned. The interview guide was adapted as interviews progressed and preliminary themes emerged through a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) and based on emerging analysis of quantitative data.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately before results were compared and contrasted to one another, and then merged for summarization and interpretation (see Figure 2). Quantitative data was cleaned and analyzed in SPSS Version 27 (IBM Corp, 2020). Qualitative data was analyzed in NVIVO 12 Plus (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020).

Quantitative

Preliminary Analyses. Data were reviewed and cleaned before they were analyzed in SPSS Version 27 (IBM Corp, 2020). First, data were reviewed to determine the degree of missingness and if they were missing at random. Listwise deletion was used

to address issues of missing data (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016), though there was very little missing data. Data was then screened to determine if they met the assumptions of the general linear multiple regression that corresponds with each research question (Cohen et al., 2002; Mertler & Reinhart, 2016). Univariate analysis was done to examine the individual variables. Continuous variables were analyzed to determine normality of residuals, through examinations of central tendency, identifying outliers, heteroskedasticity, skewness, and kurtosis. The WHOQOL Sum variable was severely negatively skewed and was initially cube-transformed for use at the ego-level analyses. However, the difference in findings between the original WHOQOL Sum and the transformed variable were not significantly different, so the original, untransformed variable was used in order to make the item easier to interpret (R. Rose, personal communication, April 12, 2023). In the alter-level data, the WHOQOL Sum was made binary in order to conduct a logistic regression. Frequencies of categorical variables were examined. Bivariate analyses were used to investigate if any statically significant associations existed, with both chi-squares and independent samples t-tests used depending on the variables. Each of the standardized scales were assessed for its psychometric properties, specifically Cronbach's alphas. The WHOQOL sum variable had a Chronbach's alpha of .951, Social Support Scale (SSS) had a Chronbach's alpha of .860, Social Undermining Scale (SUS) of .827, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) had a Chronbach's alpha of .831.

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to meet Aim 1 and the first research question in Aim 3 (see Table 2). The first Aim was to describe the lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood and were then

released, and was focused on determining the characteristics of this population generally and in terms of current quality of life. Aim 3 sought to explore the experience and role of relationships in this population. The first of the research questions under that umbrella was about both who is involved in the lives of this population after prison and what types of relationships these are.

Multiple Regression. Multiple linear regression models were used to examine the individual-level quantitative data in this study and were conducted in SPSS Version 27 (IBM Corps, 2020). Specifically, multiple regressions were used to answer the second question of Aim 2 (see Table 2).

There are no more than 12 predictors in any of these regression models, so that was used to determine the target sample size for the study. An a priori power analysis was conducted in G*Power using an alpha of .05, a power of .80, and a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$; Cohen, 1988), which indicated that 127 respondents were necessary for an adequate sample size. However, only 78 participants completed the survey, so multiple regression models were limited to seven predictors or less for the ego-centric data.

Logistic Regression. Aim 3 focused on the role of relationships in regards to current quality of life. Research question 2 used social support (SSS) and undermining (SUS) and relationship assessment (RAS) as the independent variables, with type of relationships (i.e., friend, family, partner), relationship length, alter incarceration history, and size of network as control variables. WHOQOL-BREF was the dependent variable. Originally, this was intended to be analyzed through a multiple regression, but the residuals of the WHOQOL-BREF sum variable were not normally distributed. To address

this challenge in the alter-level data, this item was made into a dummy-coded item, with the dividing line at an average score of four or above (out of five) or below four.

Random Intercept Multilevel Modeling. Multiple regression can be used to analyze egocentric data assuming multiple regression assumptions are met and observations are at the ego, or respondent (not alter) level (Perry et al., 2018). However, if an alter-level variable is the outcome variable, OLS cannot be used (Perry et al., 2018). Aggregating alter-level data to ego-level data means losing the ability to detect variability within each ego's alters, as it generally means finding means for alter-level data (Perry et al., 2018).

Multilevel modeling requires that data meet three assumptions: the dependent variable must be alter-level data, ego-level observations must be independent of one another, and ego networks cannot overlap (Perry et al., 2018). The fourth research question in Aim 3 of this dissertation used random intercept MLM. The research question considers if certain characteristics of network members are associated with more supportive, less undermining, and better relationship assessments, resulting in three models. MLM uses alter-level data and each of the alters is considered as the n . Participants were asked to nominate at least five alters. Therefore, my previous calculation of 127 participants needed to adequately power multiple regressions resulted in adequate power for MLMs, as the n for the alter-level data was 555 network members.

Qualitative

I recorded the interactions and took notes during the qualitative interviews. Once an interview was complete, I watched and listened to it while following along with the automatically-created Zoom transcription, which I edited while removing identifying

information. During the interview itself, immediately afterwards, and during the transcription process, I wrote memos, which allowed me to identify themes and reflect on both my own positionality and the interview. Memoing is considered a crucial piece of qualitative research, as it encourages reflection and analytic insight (Maxwell, 2013). Memos were kept in a research notebook for organization and later referral.

NVIVO qualitative data software was used to organize and analyze qualitative data. Open, axial coding was done to analyze the qualitative data. Data were analyzed to build and generate descriptive analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). The goal was to explore the role of relationships in the post-carceral lives of individuals who served at least ten years of life or long sentences that began during childhood and to consider multiple dimensions of quality of life. In addition to certain themes pulled from the interview guide (i.e., relationships, quality of life), I identified emergent codes that arose from the interviews themselves. Thematic analysis, which aims to identify patterns and themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), was done using Braun and Clark's (2006) process. The phases in their process include familiarizing oneself with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up findings, with prior phases revisited as needed (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). As described above, once qualitative data and quantitative data were analyzed separately, they were merged to compare and contrast findings (see Figure 2). Member checking occurred with people who served these types of sentences and others who have worked with this population throughout the data analysis process. I also brought up emerging themes in interviews as a form of member checking. Preliminary findings were presented to representatives at CFSY to generate more discussion and as an additional member checking step.

Chapter 5: Results

All results from the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods components of the study are detailed in this chapter. They are separated by Aim, with Aim 1 describing the lives of this population during and before incarceration, Aim 2 examining individual-level post-release lives and quality of life, and Aim 3 focusing on relationships as related to quality of life and relationship quality.

Aim 1: To Describe the Lives of This Population During and After Prison

In Prison

The 78 quantitative study participants had been incarcerated for an average of 26.3 (SD=6.5) years spanning 24 U.S. states and Washington, D.C. Over half (53.8%) of participants were incarcerated in prisons in the American South, and about a sixth were incarcerated in the Midwest (16.7%), Northeast (14.1%), or West (15.4%). The majority (65.4%) were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) or at least 50 years in prison. As children, most (71.8%) did not take a plea deal. The prisons where study participants were incarcerated were often quite far from family and friends. Fewer than a tenth (9.0%) of respondents were incarcerated less than an hour from loved ones, and about a third were incarcerated 1 to 3 hours (32.1%), 3 to 6 hours (30.8%), or over 6 hours (28.2%) from friends and family. The distance from loved ones was dictated by state Department of Corrections policy and state geographics. Those incarcerated in Michigan may be in prisons in the Upper Peninsula—an eight-hour drive from Detroit. After the D.C. prison closed, those incarcerated therein were sent to the federal system, which meant being incarcerated in private and federal prisons as far away as Colorado,

Louisiana, Indiana, and Kentucky, often moving from one far-away prison to the next every few years. (See Table 5 for more in-prison demographic information.)

Table 5: Life In Prison Descriptive Statistics

<i>Life in Prison (N = 78)</i>				
Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
Year Incarcerated			1992 (6.0)	1974-2004
Year Released			2018 (3.3)	2003-2022
Age When Incarcerated			16.1 (1.1)	12-17
Age When Released			42.4 (6.7)	25-60
# of Years in Prison			26.3 (6.5)	10-43
U.S. Region				
South	42	53.8%		
Midwest	13	16.7%		
Northeast	11	14.1%		
West	12	15.4%		
Original Sentence				
LWOP or ≥50 year min.	51	65.4%		
LWP or <49 year min.	27	34.6%		
Took Plea Deal	22	28.2%		
Distance from Loved Ones				
1 Hour or Less	7	9.0%		
1 to 3 Hours	25	32.1%		
3 to 6 Hours	24	30.8%		
Over 6 Hours	22	28.2%		
Visitation Frequency				
Weekly or More	6	7.7%		
Monthly or More	27	34.6%		
A Few Times Per Year	11	14.1%		
Yearly	22	28.2%		
Less Than Yearly	2	2.6%		
Never	11	14.1%		
Call Frequency				
Weekly or More	54	69.2%		
Monthly or More	18	23.1%		
Yearly or Less	4	5.2%		
Never	1	1.3%		
Solitary Confinement (N=77)				
Never	7	9.1%		
As a Child Only	10	13.0%		
As an Adult Only	18	23.4%		
As Both Child and Adult	42	54.5%		
Longest Period in Solitary (in months)			21.3 (24.1)	0-120
Total # Months in Solitary			47.6 (43.0)	1-168

Table 5 Continued

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
Program Participation	77	98.7%		
GED/High School	67	85.9%		
College Courses	51	65.4%		
Vocational Courses	62	79.5%		
Drug & Alcohol	51	65.4%		
Social Emotional	64	82.1%		
Other	21	26.9%		
# of Program Types (N=76)			4.2 (1.3)	1-6

Despite the distance between study participants and their loved ones, about a third (34.6%) received visits monthly and less than a tenth (7.7%) received visits weekly. Nearly half of study participants had visitors yearly or less: 28.2% had yearly visits, 2.6% had visits less than yearly and one in six (14.1%) never received visits at all. Visits varied greatly over time for many respondents, but especially for D.C. prisoners who were incarcerated in places as far as Kansas and Indiana. Czar², a qualitative interviewee who was incarcerated for 25 years, recalled being moved: “I’m getting visits two, three times a month down in Virginia. Then you send me to Kansas where now I get no visits and my communication got to be over the phone?!” Calls were more common than visits, with the majority of quantitative respondents (69.2%) having calls weekly or more, and a quarter (23.1%) having calls monthly or more often. Just one in twenty (5.2%) had phone calls yearly or less, and only one participant (1.3%) reported never having any phone calls. Alex, who was incarcerated for 22 years, explained that the “cost of communication” was a notable challenge, with rates “so high that no one got on the phone unless your family lived local to the prison, you’re going to spend \$20 on a 15 minute phone call.”

² This and all other names and participant-selected pseudonyms. Pseudonyms can be found along with basic demographics in Table 4.

Individuals incarcerated with life or long sentences are often excluded from participating in prison programming. Pickle, who was incarcerated for 27 years starting at age 16, noted: “as a lifer, the only way you get into schooling is if you have a warden or somebody like that that recommends you for it for their benefit.” This was a common refrain in the qualitative interviews, with many noting that they had to find ways to participate in programs. Often this meant tutoring for a class that they had never been permitted to join or creating curricula and programs that supported their fellow prisoners. Meemaw, who was incarcerated for 32 years starting at the age of 17, noted that she had “to be creative finding ways to get into the programs. I would volunteer as whatever position I could just to sit in on the classes or be in the program, to get the material just to learn.” Many simply were able to charm or “pester” (John) their way into programs that were, on paper, closed to them. Oftentimes those sentenced to life and long sentences were only permitted off of the waitlist when people with determinate, shorter sentences dropped or did not fill courses and groups.

Despite this incredibly common obstacle to programming, of the 78 quantitative survey participants, only one reported not participating in any programs during their incarceration. Survey participants participated in an average of 4.2 types of programs (of six possible types), with a majority engaging in GED or High School (85.9%), social emotional (82.1%), vocational (79.5%), college (65.4%), and drug and alcohol (65.4%) courses. This dedication to self-improvement and knowledge-building was made clear in the qualitative data. J, who had been incarcerated for 24 years, put it this way: “I told myself that if I was going to die in prison that I was going to die a different person.” Funk noted that “they’re not rehabilitating anybody, you have to do it yourself” and so, “I

promised myself that I was going to educate myself.” Drew, who was incarcerated for 23 years, described the “little box” of his prison cell and finally determining, “I’m not going to allow this to dictate who I am. *I’m* going to define who I am. And then after a while, I started realizing I was becoming a better person.” Day by day, little by little, Drew found ways to engage critically and kindly with himself and the world around him. Despite the barriers to self-improvement and growth, participants found a way.

Post-Release

First Day Out. Participants’ pathways to release differed widely by state and avenue to release (e.g., pardon, new sentence), with some exiting during a very brief window of opportunity and some learning, after decades in prison, that they would walk out of the prison gates in just a day or two. The first day out of prison, many (27.4%) had less than \$100, though about a third (36.9%) had between \$100 and \$299, and about a sixth (16.4%) had over a thousand dollars saved (see Table 6). The qualitative data revealed that stimulus checks from the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a boost for some, as incarcerated people were able to receive those checks. Respondents largely went to stay with family (42.1%) on their first day out of prison in more than a decade, and a sixth went to halfway houses (15.8%) or transitional housing programs (14.5%).

In the qualitative interviews, participants discussed the enormous, complex emotions they felt walking out of prison. Asm described leaving prison after 26 years, starting at age 17:

The first day was so emotionally overwhelming when I was walking out of the gate. I'm gonna be honest. I'm an optimistic person, but I was kinda a little pessimistic, as they say, don't climb so high that if you fall you can't land on your

feet. I was looking for someone to jump out and say, “Psych, go back in!”

Honestly, I swear to God, I was looking and I was walking out of the gate. You know, it was so hard, this battle for my freedom. But when I came out and embraced my mother, you had everyone there, my wife was there, all of my siblings were there, their husbands, wives, my nieces, nephews, you had so many people...I was so overwhelmed. And it was an emotional experience.

Table 6: Post-Release Descriptive Statistics

<i>Post-Release Life (N = 78)</i>				
Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
# of Months Since Release			42.0 (39.2)	2-231
Parole Status				
On Parole	49	62.8%		
Not On Parole	16	20.5%		
Previously On Parole	13	16.7%		
Parole Length (N=62)				
2 Years or Less	10	16.1%		
3 to 5 Years	11	17.7%		
6 to 10 Years	4	6.5%		
11 to 40 Years	4	6.5%		
Life	33	53.2%		
Money First Day Out (N=73)				
\$0-\$99	20	27.4%		
\$100-\$199	12	16.4%		
\$200-\$299	15	20.5%		
\$300-\$499	5	6.9%		
\$500-\$999	9	12.3%		
\$1,000-\$2,499	5	6.8%		
\$2,500 or more	7	9.6%		
Housing First Night (N=76)				
Halfway House	12	15.8%		
Family’s Home	32	42.1%		
Friend’s Home	7	9.2%		
Romantic Partner’s Home	6	7.9%		
Transitional Housing	11	14.5%		
Hotel	7	9.2%		
Immigration Prison	1	1.3%		

The feeling of disbelief about being free was a theme in the qualitative data. Mr.

Grateful's brothers brought clothes and shoes in the style he wore before he spent 24 years in a prison uniform:

I was grateful and I was feeling all those emotions: humility, gratitude, disbelief and wonder. But at the same time, it was not going to be real until it was real. So when I was putting on those clothes, that was when I accepted everything that had happened. And it crushed me. I was crying again.

For some, what Robert called the "emotional rollercoaster" of freedom was entangled in the suddenness of release. J, who went to prison when he was 17 and was incarcerated for 24 years, explained, "I went from having a life sentence on the 13th and on the 14th, I was in the street." J described his response to his precipitate pardon:

I can't understand, I was scared, I thought they were lying. When they gave me the paperwork, I was like, "Oh my god, no, no this ain't happening, it's a stunt. It's a lie. I can't believe it." I started crying. First and foremost, I called my family, they can't believe it. My attorney, she can't believe it. She was like, "What?!" I was like, "They granted me a pardon." She was like, "No, so when you coming home?" I said, "Tomorrow, somebody got to come and get me." and she was like, "What, tomorrow?" I was like, [laughs] "Yeah, they wanted to release me today."

The only reason J was not released the same day as his pardon was because he had to first solidify a place to stay. Suddenly, after decades in prison, he had less than 24 hours to prepare emotionally and logistically for his release. His story was not unique. Quite a few qualitative respondents described having just a few days' notice that they were going home, eliminating the opportunity to prepare in any meaningful way. For those who were

given several weeks or months to plan, the time was often described as “the hardest time of my life” (Albert), filled with sleeplessness, anxiety, and the unshakeable belief that “they’re gonna say no within these 14 days” (Scorpio) or that other incarcerated people would try to sabotage their long-awaited path to freedom.

Barriers to Reentry. Despite idiosyncrasies in individual paths to release, post-release needs and barriers identified in this study generally aligned with those of people returning from other jail or prison sentences (Gottschalk, 2015; Western, 2018). Barriers seem to have been more extreme for study participants simply because they went into prison as children compared to people who were adults before their incarceration, who, as Ralph explained, “have more exposure being an adult, more exposure.” For the most part, survey respondents indicated that they needed and received access to transportation (82.7%), identification documents (74.7%), housing (89.3%), employment (81.3%), health insurance (70.7%), access to food (89.3%), and clothing (93.2%; see Table 7). Identification documents are often considered the first priority for people coming home (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Qualitative interviewee Jackass explained:

You have guys every day that are released, that don't have family, and that are given \$20. That's it. And are just told, “Here's a bus ticket and \$20. Where do you want to go?” Well, how in the fuck do you expect anybody to succeed that doesn't have a birth certificate, a Social Security card? I mean, where to begin?

Without identification documents, it is nearly impossible to get a job, find a place to live, or do much of anything else. Junior, who was sentenced at the age of 12 to die in prison, described the role of identification documents in his reentry process:

I went to the bank, the lady was like, "You can't open account; you have no identification." I asked to talk to the branch manager. He came, sat me down in his office and I just told him the truth, you know, "I just got out of prison after 28 years. I'm trying to open a bank account. I'm just trying to get a job." He made exceptions for me and allowed me to open an account.

Junior was able to find a way to work around his lack of identification documents.

Having the bank account also helped him obtain an ID, which frustratingly and cyclically requires some form of identification.

Table 7: Post-Release Reentry Needs

Reentry Needs (N=75)

Need	Needed but Not Received		Needed and Received		Not Needed	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Transportation Access	12	16.0%	62	82.7%	1	1.3%
Prescription Meds (N=72)	6	8.3%	26	36.1%	40	55.6%
Enough Money	26	34.7%	45	60.0%	4	5.3%
ID Documents	12	16.0%	56	74.7%	7	9.3%
Housing	5	6.7%	67	89.3%	3	4.0%
Employment	13	17.3%	61	81.3%	1	1.3%
Health Insurance	21	28.0%	53	70.7%	1	1.3%
Physical Healthcare (N=73)	16	21.9%	41	56.2%	16	21.9%
Mental Healthcare	18	24.0%	23	30.7%	34	45.3%
Access to Food	2	2.7%	67	89.3%	6	8.0%
Clothing (N=74)	3	4.1%	69	93.2%	2	2.7%
Substance Use Treatment	4	5.3%	8	10.7%	63	84.0%

Employment was a top priority for most when they came home. Finding a job with a felony record is an uphill battle. Nikki, who was incarcerated for 10 years starting at age 15, recounted her job search in the early days of her freedom:

Nobody would hire me. Every time I went to try to put in an application, my background would pop up, and boom! It wouldn't just be my charges. It would be all the stuff I was actually charged with that would pop up nonstop. I went and

tried to get things removed and taken care of and I learned the hard way that that doesn't happen for my type of charges. It's gonna be there forever.

At the time of the survey, most respondents were employed full- (80.8%) or part-time (12.8%), and of those, two-thirds (66.7%) reported that they considered their salary to be a living wage (defined in the survey as “enough for you to pay for housing and other needs”). The qualitative data provided a more complete picture of employment in the first weeks and months post-release. Ralph, who was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole at the age of 16 and served 42 years of that sentence, worried about how aging would impact his ability to work and about “transitioning from one state system to another state system—from the prison system to the welfare system” if he was incarcerated much longer. He was ultimately released and faced major barriers:

I put in over 70 job applications. I had somewhere between 12, 13 interviews. I actually had somebody that I met at a place I interviewed that told me later on the reason I didn't get hired was my age, because I am 60. It just brought back the reality of ageism. Then you throw on top of that, you've got that X on your back, you're on supervision. There's a bunch of factors there that make it difficult to find meaningful or gainful employment that provides a livable wage.

Sunshine, who was incarcerated for 17 years, reported that her record put her in a similar position: “it always come up after I be done, rocked the interview and signed the paperwork and it come back and I can't get the job because I'm a convicted felon.” For many respondents, once they were able to secure a first job, they thrived, working their way to better (and better paying) jobs. Respondent Junior emphasizes this point: “I knew

that I couldn't survive off \$11 an hour, but I did 28 years in prison. I'm patient." That perspective and patience was a crucial tool in building a life post-prison.

Having enough money to survive and live comfortably was an enormous barrier for many participants. It was also worsened by the low or no pay that people received for work done during their incarceration. Robert noted that he was first paid four cents an hour, increased over decades to 75 cents per hour. The lack of a financial cushion upon release was further complicated by a financial barrier discussed in many qualitative interviews: having no credit. Top Flight, who was incarcerated for 30 years starting at age 16, described the cyclical nature of credit with other barriers to reentry:

If you've done a lot of time like me and you were locked up as a child, you don't exist to this world. I tried to start a credit union account first, and I had to go through so many things. They were like, "you don't exist." Normally what people would do, they present the ID and stuff and they'd get approved. But they wanted to see proof of residency, they wanted to see some tax forms or some voter registration or some type of insurance. And I'm explaining to them, I just came home. I'm in a transition home, so I don't have anything. I don't have a bill here. I don't have any tax forms. I didn't have a job. I've been waiting to get my insurance card, my medical insurance card. I just finally got that squared away where they're going to send a hard copy of my card to me to this address so I can have that too. So it was a lot of things that you have to do because you haven't done it before. It's like all of a sudden you just popped out the blue. So anybody with some long-term incarceration starting as a child, they gotta be taught, man, listen, for them, you don't exist.

Luckily, one of Top Flight's cousins added him to the cousin's credit card to help build credit, but it has been a slow process, which would have been even slower and more challenging without that social support. Scorpio was incarcerated for 31 years starting at the age of 15 and assumed she could use cash for everything, saying a reentry organization has been:

Teaching me, showing me the reasons why I need to establish credit 'cause I pay for everything with cash. And they're like, "you can't keep doing that." Yes I can. I will go and stand in the line for the post office to pay a bill an hour, you know, and get my little stamps and stuff instead of clicking online. 'Cause that sometimes it's a little confusing to me. So I leave that alone and I go stand in line at the post office. Or I go and do some old school stuff because that worked for me until someone shows me how to do this in this order.

Many participants in the qualitative component described very quickly building their credit and buying homes, even just a few years after their release.

The majority (89.3%) of survey respondents reported that they needed and obtained housing. The qualitative data clarify that this was often with family members and partners. For some, though, barriers to renting were wrapped up with their felony record, which usually included a homicide charge. Mark Grace, who was released after spending 23 years in prison starting at age 17, described how this played out for him:

I had the money for an apartment after a month or two, but it's hard to find someone that will rent to you when you're a convicted murderer who's on parole. Most of the big apartment complexes, you can't go there because, one, you have to pay an application fee. And then the person that you're talking to isn't who's

gonna make the final decision. Like, you'll talk to whoever the manager of that specific apartment complex is, but it's not up to them. They're sending it to wherever central is. They might be owned by someone in [large city] that owns a bunch of apartment complexes. And they're who's responsible for making the ultimate decision of who passes the background check and who they give an apartment to. So that's hard. It took me a while to find a landlord who was from the area—if I get to talk to the person who's gonna be responsible for it, then they're gonna give me that apartment. But if it's up to someone just reading who I am on a piece of paper, then no, you're not gonna want me there.

Finding loopholes in the systems around housing or (as Junior did above) with banking almost always meant connecting with another human being, rather than being a depersonalized applicant on paper. This was often even harder during COVID-19, when many things moved online.

For those with good credit scores or at least loved ones to support the process, owning a home was considered ideal. Albert was sentenced to death at the age of 17, though that was later changed to a life sentence. After 23 years, he was released, and now lives with his wife:

We live in a house. We have a HOA. Every house looks the same on the block. I love it because, to me, it's what a normal, law-abiding, tax-paying citizen—like, you get up. You go to work. You come home. You wind down. You have dinner. You water the grass. You do whatever it is and you're good to your neighbors or whatever. That's all I ever wanted even from before the time I got locked up when my childhood was all crazy and messed up.

For Albert, who is now HOA president, his house is a crucial piece of his post-release normalcy and success. This is integral to his wonder and joy at being able to have these opportunities. Albert noted that sometimes he would burst into joyful tears while doing yardwork, thinking to himself, “I'm watering the lawn. Who could believe this? I got a house. I got a lawn. I'm watering it!” Each of the pieces of post-release life complement and support one another, entwined during the early stages through when things start to come together, if they do.

Parole. Just as state policies differ when it comes to pathways to release for individuals who served long sentences starting in childhood, so do parole policies. About two-thirds of survey participants (62.8%) were on parole at the time of the survey, though about a fifth were never on parole (20.5%) or were no longer on parole (16.7%). For the 62 respondents who are or were on parole, the length of post-release supervision varied enormously. Over half (53.2%) were given lifelong parole, though some from other states had much shorter periods of supervision—a sixth of respondents (16.1%) had two or fewer years of parole following their release. One qualitative interviewee from Michigan was surprised to hear that other states had lifelong parole, asking, “if you can show that in two years, you haven't gotten in any trouble on parole, then why keep you any longer?” Qualitative data revealed idiosyncrasies in parole policy from state to state. A respondent in Florida or Oregon may have to wear an ankle monitor, be home for curfew, have daily contact with his parole officer (PO), and not be permitted to leave his home county. Another person in another state may have to simply call his parole officer (PO) every month or two. Some states even require people on parole to attend Alcoholics

Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous programs as a blanket policy, regardless of individual history of substance use.

Supervision requirements also depended on individual PO discretion. Multiple qualitative study respondents described having more than five POs even during a few years of supervision. With each new PO, the respondent was forced to adapt to new requirements. King, who came home after 22 years in prison just over two years before our interview, reported having 20 POs during that time, including a new one who is “taking [him] through the wringer” despite “two years without a dirty urine or a brush with the law and...[having] two jobs and a part time job.” His current PO insists on home visits and work visits multiple times each week, including home visits during King’s work shifts. King contemplated complaining to a parole supervisor, but ultimately he is beholden to this PO’s particular expectations. Although Mark Grace reportedly has a good relationship with his PO, he noted, “It’s scary that you have one person that has complete control over your life.” For those who had positive relationships with POs, they still had to put a lot of blind trust in the individual officer. Ted Black, who was in prison for 31 years, explained:

Every time I give [my PO] all the information, then prior to getting going, it's like a week away, I'm like, "Okay, where's my pass?" She's like, "Oh, I didn't have time to do it. Don't worry about it." [laughs] I'm like, “Wait, you said, I need a pass.” She says, “Well, I'm telling you, you can go. Go!”

Ted knew that technically he should have a pass and he could be penalized for not having one, but he has no other choice to trust his PO.

Although many qualitative study participants described positive relationships with individual POs—often because the parolee was far exceeding basic requirements of supervision, not seen as in need of support, and because the POs “were just like, ‘I got more difficult people to deal with than you’”—the mere fact of parole impeded basic freedoms. One qualitative study participant, Sharuka, described being on parole as having “the shackles ever-so-present on me in my life.” Another qualitative participant, El, explained that as long as he is on parole, he is “still tethered to the system.” Being on parole usually requires a person pay monthly fees, at least at first. Participants often noted that, despite parole being seen as what participant Sapio described as “a bigger cage” compared to prison, they would jump through whatever hoops were necessary to stay free. As qualitative participant Nikki put it: “I think parole is fine, accountability is good. I think the fashion ...[of] the parole board is actually wrong. It should be along the lines of social work versus full on law enforcement.” Nikki’s frustration with parole was that it acted as a system of control and punishment, rather than one of instrumental support. She suggested that individual POs address those under their supervision by asking questions like, “How are you doing? How are you doing mentally? Can I get you some help?” and to clarify, “I’m not gonna lock you up because you’re having problems. You can just talk to me.”

Aim 2: Examine the Relationship Between Individual Traits and Quality of Life

This section will provide the results from both a multiple regression with overall quality of life as the dependent variable and themes from the qualitative data regarding quality of life.

Overall Quality of Life

Quality of life was evaluated through four domains and the overall quality of life. Those domains included physical, psychological, relationship, and environmental quality of life. Respondents reported very high quality of life across all domains and the summed score (see Table 8).

Table 8: Quality of Life Domains

<i>Quality of Life</i> (N = 76)		
Variable	Mean (SD)	Range
Domain 1: Physical	16.7 (2.7)	8-20
Domain 2: Psychological	16.1 (3.2)	4-20
Domain 3: Relationships	14.8 (4.5)	4-20
Domain 4: Environmental	15.9 (3.3)	4-20
QOL Overall	104.5 (18.9)	33-130

Factors Associated with Quality of Life. Ego-level variables were examined alongside quality of life in two ways: through bivariate analyses and through a multiple regression. Some of the variables that had a statistically significant association with quality of life were not included in the regression simply due to power concerns.

Bivariate Analysis. A number of ego-level variables were associated with the overall quality of life variable (see Table 9). Receiving a living wage, attending religious services, being sentenced to JLWOP or at least 50 years, receiving more visits while in prison, having more contact with loved ones during incarceration, and being on parole were all associated with higher quality of life. Respondents who reported being in solitary only as children in an adult prison reported higher, statistically significant QOL scores than those who were only in solitary as adults, but there were no differences otherwise. Several reentry needs were associated with quality of life scores. Those who needed but did not receive enough money reported significantly lower QOL scores than those who

Table 9: Mean Differences by Quality of Life Sum

Mean Differences by QOL Sum (N=76)

		SIAS-PSA Scores			
		N	Mean (SD)	t/F(df)	p
Living Wage (N=64)	No	21	99.05 (17.81)	-2.20 (62)	.034*
	Yes	43	109.16 (16.14)		
Religious Services	No	37	99.05 (20.91)	-2.52 (74)	.014*
	Yes	39	109.69 (15.29)		
# Years in Prison Sentence	10-19	13	92.56 (25.83)	3.44 (2, 73)	.037*
	20-29	41	107.49 (15.92)		
	≥30	22	106.09 (17.34)		
Solitary	JLWOP or ≥50 Year Minimum	51	108.45 (16.51)	4.28 (2, 73)	.017*
	≤49 Year Min.	12	100.67 (16.25)		
	LWP	13	92.62 (18.89)		
In-Prison Visit Frequency	No	7	113.71 (9.79)	3.24 (3, 72)	.027*
	Only as Child	10	117.10 (9.46)		
	Only as Adult	18	97.39 (23.35)		
	As Child and Adult	41	103.00 (18.89)		
In-Prison Contact Frequency	Never	7	90.14 (34.65)	2.90 (3, 72)	.041*
	Less than Monthly	36	103.08 (16.93)		
	More than Monthly	27	107.00 (15.66)		
Parole	Weekly	6	118.67 (7.28)	5.98 (2, 73)	.004*
	Less than Monthly	5	78.60 (31.79)		
Money Needed	More than Monthly	18	03.67 (22.19)	9.72 (74)	<.001**
	Weekly	53	107.25 (14.27)		
MH Services Needed	No	27	96.63 (21.37)	-2.60 (74)	.013*
	Yes	49	108.86 (16.01)		
SUD Support Needed	Not Needed or Need Met	50	110.02 (13.22)	5.27 (2, 72)	.007*
	Needed, Not Met	26	93.92 (23.47)		
	Not Needed	34	109.97 (12.52)		
# of Unmet Needs	Need Met	23	106.39 (18.02)	13.59 (2, 72)	<.001**
	Needed, Not Met	18	93.39 (24.63)		
	Not Needed	63	104.89 (18.72)		
# of Unmet Needs	Need Met	8	117.38 (10.41)	4.814 (2, 73)	.011*
	Needed, Not Met	4	66.75 (30.12)		
	0	29	111.24 (13.50)		
	1-3	35	103.08 (16.48)		
	4-9	12	92.50 (29.11)		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

did not. Respondents who did not need mental healthcare support had higher QOL sum scores than those who needed those services but did not receive them. The same was true for those who had substance use needs. Lastly, higher number of unmet reentry needs was associated with lower quality of life scores.

Multiple Regression. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether respondent age, race, religious service attendance, sentence, years in prison, number of months since release, and number of unmet reentry needs were significant predictors of quality of life. The overall regression model was significant ($R^2 = .315$, $F(7, 68) = 4.472$, $p < .001$). Only three factors in the model were statistically significantly associated with overall quality of life: attend religious services, being incarcerated for 20 years or more, and number of unmet reentry needs (see Table 10).

Table 10: Multiple Regression for Quality of Life Sum

<i>Multiple regression model for QOL Sum (N=76)</i>					
Variable	<i>B</i>	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	95% CI
(Constant)	120.05	15.922		<.001	[88.279, 151.821]
Age	-.532	.414	-.168	.203	[-1.358, .293]
Black/AA (not Black/AA)	-7.919	4.055	-.205	.055	[-16.011, .173]
Attend Religious Services (Not Attend)	8.576	3.953	.228*	.034	[.688, 16.464]
LWOP or 50+ Year Sentence (LWP or ≤ 49 Year Min)	2.044	4.909	.051	.678	[-7.751, 11.839]
20 Years or More in Prison (≤ 19 Years)	15.560	7.314	.312*	.037	[.965, 30.155]
# Months Since Release	.006	.072	.010	.936	[-.137, .149]
# Unmet Reentry Needs	-2.741	.943	-.319*	.005	[-4.623, -.859]
Model Statistics					
R ²	.315				
F	4.472**				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Compared to those who did not attend religious services, those who did attend services reported higher overall quality of life ($\beta = .228, p = .034$). Compared with respondents who were incarcerated for 19 years or less, controlling for all other factors, respondents who were incarcerated for 20 years or more reported higher quality of life scores ($\beta = .312, p = .037$). Lastly, respondents who reported more unmet reentry needs also reported lower overall quality of life ($\beta = -.319, p = .005$). Respondent age, race (Black or not), sentence type, and number of months since release were not associated with the overall quality of life in the model.

The Experience of Quality of Life Post-Release

The high quality of life scores found in the quantitative data manifested in qualitative responses about post-release life for participants. Within the realm of quality of life, two main themes emerged from the qualitative data. Both are in vivo quotes: “my worst day out here is still better than my best day in prison” and “I’m not entitled to freedom.”

“My Worst Day Out Here is Still Better Than My Best Day in Prison.”

Repeatedly in the qualitative interviews, participants said something that was nearly word-for-word “my worst day out here is still better than my best day in prison.” Compared to the terror and near-constant threats of prison, being free was often considered with wide-eyed astonishment. After 39 years in prison, C was released in the middle of a global pandemic. Despite all that time in prison that spanned from the time he was 16 to the time he was 55, he said, “Ever since [his release date], I have been living one of the best lives you could ever live.” Qualitative interview participants detailed the dangers of being a child in prison, being fearful of sexual and physical assault especially

early in their incarceration. Respondents described having to act in certain ways that would protect them from the violence of prison, in particular when they came in as small or young-looking teenagers. Alejandro Fuentes described the milieu of the prisons where he was incarcerated for 25 years:

You had to fight over cheese, you had to fight over milk, the meat that you get on your tray, everything. ... I didn't have malice towards other people like that, but if [they] push me to that point, they had another monster waiting ... It was a way higher level of savagery.

Though he had not wanted to fight or engage in this “level of savagery,” Alejandro and others reported feeling they had to resort to violence in order to protect themselves from sexual and physical assault. Beyond the violence of prison was the bleak, concrete of the structures themselves. Ed, who spent 10 of his 15 years in prison in solitary confinement, explained how time passed differently in prison:

The world is moving on without you. Even at times, the rain don't feel the same, the snow don't feel the same, the sun don't feel the same. When I was in solitary confinement for 10 years, each year felt like two or three years at a time sometimes. And that prison inside of a prison really affected how I felt. Not seeing the sun, not seeing a lot, but not seeing trees, not seeing flowers, not seeing grass for a long time, it really affected me in ways that I didn't realize until I came home.

Respondents made the most of these often-torturous environments, by engaging in lifers and other groups coordinated by and for people who were incarcerated. Rafiq described his engagement with a lifers' group in which the men coordinated activities, brought in

guest speakers, and spearheaded fundraisers for the outside world, “just trying to do some positive. Because we decided, man, just because we're in prison doesn't mean we got to be what they said we're going to be, animals. We will be better than that.” For many respondents, compared to the cage of prison, the world of choices, autonomy, and a second chance had an almost magical quality.

Respondents described an immense level of appreciation of the small things in life since their release. As described in a previous section, Albert would become so overwhelmed by the joy of being able to water his lawn that he would burst into tears. George, a woman who was incarcerated for 32 years described her utter delight at being able to drop off her puppy with some friends for a few hours, laughing while she shouted out the window to them: “Did you ever think that I would be doing this? Can you believe it?” She reveled in the ability to do basic things like driving and working. As George explained:

It's comparable to someone getting a cancer diagnosis and going into remission. Being in prison with a life without parole sentence, every day you're learning how to die. Your dreams and what you think and what you want—you can't think down the road. There is no future. There is no future. So now it's like this expansive universe that is open to me. Unless I close a door, it's not closed to me. It's anything. So that's joyful. That is freedom. That is gift and miracles and God to me.

Respondents went from one extreme to another: from being in a literal cage to having a wide-open world that they could explore. Many respondents talked about finding joy through driving, sitting on the porch, being able to see the sky without bars intruding on

the view, and being able to be in nature. In other words, respondents described situations that reflected John's explanation: "every little daily thing that most people take for granted is, for me, like going to Disney World."

"I'm Not Entitled to Freedom." At the center of most interviews was an astonishing amount of gratitude, joy, and disbelief at being able to live as a "free person" and have the opportunity at another chance at life. Respondents saw their freedom as a privilege, not an entitlement. Junior, who served 27 years of a 40-year sentence that began when he was 12, described it this way:

I never got into the politics of whether or not I deserve to be free. My position was, you know, if I'm granted parole, I make parole, but I'm not going to say that I have a right to be free, because I understand that committing murder, it's terrible. People suffer, people hurt. It causes destruction amongst someone's family. So, I never commented on that, you know, I gave up the right to be free. I just feel like, you know, if it happens, it happens.

Troy, who was sentenced to life and came home after 17 years, agreed:

I'm not entitled to freedom. The choices I made at 14 are such that while I may be able to earn things and I feel like I've earned my freedom, I'm not entitled to it. If I get it, it's great, and I'm appreciative of it, but I'm not going to say that you're taking something that belongs to me away.

Respondents knew how precarious freedom was. One respondent had been reincarcerated after his release for what amounted to a clerical issue. He accepted that as he had his incarceration: a simple fact of his life.

The appreciation for freedom was made clearer by the fact that so many others remained behind bars with the same charges participants received decades before.

Participants could not ignore those left behind when considering their own quality of life.

Joe Johnson explained:

My well-being is great, but I did 24 years, so I guess it could be times when I might not be—I don't know. Because I'm just always trying to accomplish stuff and it might not be going fast as I want, and that might bother me, but then I might get a jail call and I think like, dang, this dude would love to be here, but I woke up looking at the trees up there in my window and the trees look really good.

Qualitative study participants continued to compare life in prison for themselves or others in their interpretation of their quality of life. Czar described his thinking:

I have plenty of hard mental health days out here on the street where things get overwhelming. ...The thing that helps me get over those mental hurdles is the fact that I know there's a lot of people in the position that I was once at that would love to be in a position where I am. I use that right there to motivate me, to keep me going.

Respondents may not be exactly where they want to be or have the same evaluation of quality of life that others may have. For the most part, they have learned to adapt and see the bright side of things to survive—both in prison and now out in the world.

Qualitative respondents remained largely optimistic in discussing their quality of life but there were clearly enormous struggles that some had. Bill Castle described a

division he had seen among people who came home after long sentences that began during childhood:

There's two kinds of people. There's the gazelle that excels effortlessly...I have no problems, everything is great, I can do this effortlessly. And then there's the rest of us that have to slog through everything. The gazelles, I would imagine, have not been affected to the level of everybody else that has gone through this. The problems that they experience are minor compared to the ones that everybody else experiences. I don't know if it's a factor of resiliency or what, but being in prison for the amount of time that I was in, to borrow from the French term, fucked me up.

For Bill, who was incarcerated for 23 years, the impact and trauma of incarceration continued to loom large in his life, creating and exacerbating issues that impeded his quality of life.

Aim 3: To Explore the Experience and Role of Relationships Post-Release

Seventy-three respondents who completed the quantitative survey included information about their social networks. This section will describe the descriptive and inferential statistics related to respondents' social networks.

Descriptive Statistics of Social Networks

Social Network Member Demographics. Univariate descriptive analyses were conducted for those social network members (N = 555). Network members (or alters) ranged in age from 0 to 95 years old, and were an average of 49.5 (SD = 16.5), but eighty percent of network members were between 31 and 69 years old. Just over half (53.7%)

were women. Over half (54.2%) of alters were Black and just over a quarter (28.6%) were White (see Table 11).

Table 11: Social Network Member Demographics

<i>Social network member demographics (N = 555)</i>				
Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean (SD)	Range
Age			50 (16.5)	0-95
Gender				
Man	257	46.3%		
Woman	298	53.7%		
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	294	54.2%		
White	155	28.6%		
Latine	53	9.8%		
Other	18	3.2%		
Multiple	14	2.6%		
Unknown	8	1.4%		
Relationship				
Mother	42	7.6%		
Father	22	4.0%		
Sister	41	7.4%		
Brother	51	9.3%		
Other Family	115	20.7%		
Spouse or Partner	52	9.4%		
Friend	163	29.4%		
Professional	28	5.1%		
Other	37	6.7%		
Relationship Length				
Entire life	214	39.6%		
Before prison	56	10.4%		
During prison	143	26.4%		
Since release	128	23.7%		
Employed	437	78.7%		
Never Incarcerated	399	72.4%		
SSS (N=348)			34.8 (6.1)	8-40
SUS (N=348)			6.4 (2.9)	5-25
RAS (N=348)			27.7 (3.6)	12-30

SSS: Social Support Scale; SUS: Social Undermining Scale; RAS: Relationship Assessment Scale.

Just under half of all network members were family members (49%), including mothers (7.6%), fathers (4.0%), sisters (7.4%), brothers (9.3%), and other family

members (20.7%). Other family members often included aunts, uncles, cousins, and children. Less than a tenth (9.4%) of network members were spouses or romantic partners and nearly a third (29.4%) were friends. Respondents had known two-fifths (39.6%) of alters their entire life, though about a quarter of relationships began during (26.4%) or after (23.7%) incarceration. The majority of alters was employed (78.7%) and had not been previously incarcerated (72.4%). That said, about a sixth (14.4%) of all network members had been incarcerated with the respondent.

Social Network Structure. Considering the number and proportion of respondents' network consisting of certain alter types (by relationship type, race, and relationship length, for instance) can be a useful, slightly different way to examine social networks. Table 12 presents much of the information above but considered from an individual network perspective, rather than taking all alters as a whole. Over half (56.3%) of respondents included their mother in their network, compared to less than a third (29.6%) of networks that included a father. Sisters were included in two-fifths (42.3%) of networks and brothers were included in almost half (49.3%) of networks. Over two-thirds (71.4%) included other family members in their networks, about the same as partners (71.8%). The majority (80.3%) of respondents had at least one friend in their network compared to about two-fifths (43.7%) with professional or other network members. The proportion of individual networks that were mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers was under a tenth, unsurprising given that most have only one mother and only one father, for instance. Partners (11.2%) and professionals (12.2%) make up just over a tenth of individual networks. Other family members made up a fifth (20.9%) of networks, and friends made up over a quarter (28.5%). A higher proportion of friends in a network was

associated with a higher QOL ($r [70] = .283, p = .017$) but a higher proportion of other family members in a network was associated with lower QOL ($r [69] = -.345, p = .003$).

Table 12: Respondents' Social Network Structure

Respondents' social network structure (N = 72)

Alter Characteristic	Percentage with At Least One	Proportion (SD)
Relationship Type		
Mom	56.3%	.082 (.086)
Dad	29.6%	.043 (.072)
Sister	42.3%	.073 (.109)
Brothers	49.3%	.088 (.112)
Other Family	71.4%	.209 (.193)
Partner	71.8%	.112 (.103)
Friend	80.3%	.285 (.221)
Professional or Other	43.7%	.122 (.201)
Race		
Black	73.6%	.514 (.413)
White	59.7%	.311 (.359)
Latine	30.6%	.090 (.168)
Other Race/Ethnicity	18.1%	.089 (.230)
Relationship Length		
Whole Life	90.0%	.400 (.234)
Pre-Prison	51.4%	.111 (.133)
During Prison	75.7%	.278 (.225)
After Prison	71.4%	.223 (.210)

Alter race was examined in the same way. About three-quarters (73.6%) of respondents had at least one Black network member compared to three-fifths (59.7%) having at least one White network member. About a third (30.6%) of networks included at least one Latine person. Black network members made up about half (51.4%) of networks, compared to White people making up a third (31.1%) and Latine people a tenth (8.9%). Having a higher proportion of Black alters was associated with lower QOL ($r [71] = -.338, p = .004$) and, conversely, a higher proportion of White alters was associated with a higher QOL ($r [71] = .323, p = .006$).

Likewise, looking at relationship length through numbers and proportions of networks was elucidating. The majority (90.0%) of respondents had at least one network member they knew their entire life, met during prison (75.7%), or after prison (71.4%), compared to just half of respondents including members they met before prison (51.4%). People known their entire lives made up two-fifths (40.0%) of networks, followed by those met in prison (27.8%), after prison (22.3%), and before prison (11.1%). Three-fifths (72.9%) of family members were known the respondents' entire life, with about a tenth of family members met before prison (7.1%), during prison (9.7%), or after (10.4%). Over half (53.8%) of partners were met after prison, a fifth before (21.2%) or during incarceration (19.2%), and just a twentieth (5.8%) the respondents' whole life. Over half (53.8%) of friends were met during incarceration, over a quarter after release (28.7%), a tenth pre-incarceration (12.5%), and a twentieth (5.0%) their whole life. Most professionals and others were first met during (35.0%) or after (43.3%) imprisonment, with about a tenth respondents' entire life (11.7%) or as a child prior to incarceration (10.0%). Having a higher proportion of alters met while the respondent was incarcerated was associated with higher quality of life ($r [69] = .316, p = .008$).

Alter-Level Factors and Participant Quality of Life

Overall quality of life was considered along with a number of alter-level characteristics. Due to non-normal residuals, overall quality of life was evaluated as a bivariate item, with average scores of 4 out of 5 or higher as higher quality of life and average scores less than 4 as lower quality of life. On the alter-level, alter gender, race, employment, incarceration history, relationship length with ego, and number of support types provided to ego were all associated with overall quality of life (See Table 13).

Table 13: Bivariate Analyses for Alter Characteristics & QOL

Bivariate Analyses for Alter Characteristics and Overall Quality of Life

	<4 average		>4 average		X^2	DF	<i>p</i>
	n	%	n	%			
Gender					.080	1	.777
Man	110	42.8%	147	57.2%			
Woman	124	41.6%	174	58.4%			
Race					21.92**	2	<.001
Black	147	50.0%	147	50.0%			
White	42	27.1%	113	72.9%			
Other	38	40.9%	55	59.1%			
Employment					4.596*	1	.032
Yes	177	40.5%	260	59.5%			
No	57	51.8%	53	48.2%			
Incarceration History					4.059*	1	.044
Yes	75	49.3%	77	50.7%			
No	159	39.8%	240	60.2%			
Relationship Length					12.339*	3	.006
Entire Life	92	43.0%	122	57.0%			
Pre-Prison	33	58.9%	23	41.1%			
During Prison	46	32.2%	97	67.8%			
Post-Prison	53	41.4%	75	58.6%			
Support					15.917**	3	<.001
No Support	35	60.3%	23	39.7%			
1 Type	114	46.0%	134	54.0%			
2 Types	46	34.3%	88	65.7%			
≥ 3 Types	39	33.9%	76	66.1%			
Relationship Type					7.510	5	.185
Parent	29	45.3%	35	54.7%			
Sibling	40	43.5%	52	56.5%			
Other Family	58	50.4%	57	49.6%			
Partner	19	36.5%	33	63.5%			
Friend	58	35.6%	105	64.4%			
Professional/Other	30	46.2%	35	53.8%			

A logistic regression was employed to consider how alter age, gender, race, employment, incarceration history, relationship type, relationship length, and number of types of support provided were associated with overall quality of life (Table 14).

Controlling for all variables in the model, six independent variables (alter is

White, alter is another race other than Black or White, alter employment, alter

incarceration history, and number of supports provided) were statistically significant. Controlling for all other model variables, for every year increase in alter age, the odds of a higher quality of life for respondents increased by 1.3%. Controlling for other factors, if the alter is White, the odds of a higher quality of life for respondents is 233% higher than those who identifies an alter as Black.

Table 14: Logistic Regression for Alter-Level Traits and QOL

Logistic regression model for alter-level traits and QOL Sum (N=525)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio
Age	.013	3.925	1	.048	1.013*
Gender	.147	.480	1	.488	1.159
Family Member (Not)	-.205	.673	1	.412	.814
Known Before Prison (Met During/After)	-.344	1.899	1	.168	.709
White (Black)	.845	12.292	1	<.001	2.329**
Other Race (Black)	.548	4.269	1	.039	1.730*
Currently Employed	.603	5.792	1	.016	1.827*
Was Incarcerated	-.642	6.953	1	.008	.526*
# of Supports Provided	.330	9.417	1	.002	1.391*
Model Statistics		<i>X</i> ²		<i>p</i>	
Likelihood Ratio Test		57.091**		<.001	

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .001

Alters of other races (not Black nor White) were associated with an 83% higher odds of improved quality of life for respondents than reporting having Black alters in their networks. For alters with an incarceration history, the odds of high quality of life for respondents are 47% lower than for respondents that reported having alters who were never incarcerated, controlling for other factors. Alter employment is associated with higher respondent quality of life: the odds of higher quality of life is 83% higher for those who reported alters with jobs than those who reported having alters without jobs. Lastly, there was a statistically significant relationship between the number of types of supports the alter provided to the respondent. Controlling for all other variables, for every

additional support type provided, the odds of a higher quality of life increased by 39% for respondents. The overall regression model was significant ($R^2 = .103$, $X^2(1, 9) = 57.091$, $p < .001$).

A second logistic regression model was conducted regarding respondents' top 5 social network members (Table 15). This includes a smaller portion of the alters (N=332). Like in the previous model, alter race, incarceration history, and number of supports was considered with high/low overall quality of life. Added to the model, however, were the Social Support Scale (SSS), Social Undermining Scale (SUS), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The only item that was not significantly associated with quality of life was the SUS. In this model, controlling for all other factors, increasing SSS sum scores were associated with an increased odds of higher quality of life, as were RAS sum scores. The overall regression model was also significant ($R^2 = .188$, $X^2(3, 6) = 69.189$, $p < .001$).

Table 15: Logistic Regression for Alter Relationships and QOL

Logistic regression model for alter relationships and QOL Sum (N=332)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio
Black	-.734	8.377	1	.004	.480*
Was Incarcerated	-.572	4.089	1	.043	.564*
# of Supports Provided	.344	6.348	1	.012	1.411*
Social Support	.087	10.456	1	.017	1.135*
Social Undermining	-.036	.302	1	.583	.965
Relationship Assessment	.126	5.685	1	.017	1.135*
Model Statistics		X^2		<i>p</i>	
Likelihood Ratio Test		69.189**		<.001	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Alter Characteristics and Relationship Quality

The social network analysis part of the study examined the relationship between alter and ego characteristics as associated with social support (SSS; Table 16), social undermining (SUS; Table 17), and relationship assessment (RAS, Table 18).

Social Support Scale. In the random intercept multilevel model, alter age, amount of types of social support, and when respondents met alters were all associated with increased Social Support Scale scores, indicating higher social support. The model as a whole, which included those items and the number of network members in respondents' networks, was statistically significant (see Table 16).

Table 16: Multilevel Regression for Social Support

Multilevel regression model for social support (N=348)

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Alter age	.046	.017	2.70*	.007
# of Network Members	.354	.223	1.59	.116
Social Support Type Sum	.821	.282	2.91*	.004
Met Before Prison (met during/after prison)	1.816	.571	3.18*	.002
Model Statistics	F		<i>p</i>	
Intercept	197.24**		< .001	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Social Undermining. In the random intercept multilevel model with Social Undermining Scale (SUS) as the DV, number of months since release was positively associated with social undermining, and having a friend was negatively associated with social undermining. The number of network members and number of social support types received were not associated with social undermining. The model overall was statistically significant (see Table 17).

Table 17: Multilevel Regression for Social Undermining

Multilevel regression model for social undermining (N=348)

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
# Months Since Release	.023	.008	2.88*	.005
# of Network Members	-.077	.104	-.74	.461
Social Support Type Sum	-.094	.131	-.724	.469
Friend (Not Friend)	-.706	.329	2.14*	.033
Model Statistics	F		<i>p</i>	
Intercept	44.673		< .001	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Relationship Assessment Scale. The random intercept multilevel model with the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) as its DV, and number of months since release, number of network members, amount of social support types received, and relationship length (known before prison or not) was statistically significant overall (see Table 18). As the number of months since release increased, relationship assessment scale decreased ($t(65) = -2.46, p = .017$), controlling for all other variables. Number of social network members was positively associated with RAS. Knowing an alter before incarceration was associated with lower RAS scores as well.

Table 18: Multilevel Regression for Relationship Assessment

Multilevel regression model for relationship assessment (N=348)

	Estimate	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
# Months Since Release	-.023	.009	-2.46*	.017
# of Network Members	.258	.125	2.06*	.043
Social Support Type Sum	.305	.170	1.79	.074
Known Pre-Prison (Met During/After Prison)	-.683	.340	-2.01*	.045
Model Statistics	F		<i>p</i>	
Intercept	560.09		< .001	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Experiencing Relationships

Qualitative respondents discussed their many different types of relationships and the myriad ways relationships changed from prior to prison to the prison visiting room to after the respondent came home. Relationship-focused qualitative themes are divided by type of relationship: family, friends, and romantic partners.

Family. For many who spent decades in prison, family was central to their quality of life while incarcerated and played an enormous role post-release. Four important family-related themes arose from the qualitative data, all of which are *in vivo* quotes: “I was the piece that was missing;” “I have to remind her constantly that I’m a grown man;” “they had to relearn me;” and “ain’t nothing here for you.”

“I was the Piece that Was Missing.” People were overwhelmingly delighted to be home and able to fully engage as part of the family again. For John, who served 34 years starting at the age of 16, he felt that his incarceration impacted his family “in ways that are probably worse than going to prison.” The harassment that followed John’s crime was so extreme that his family moved to a different county, forcing his siblings to change schools. Since his release, John has been able to repair some of those hurt feelings and noted that his “release has kind of brought the family together.” Strained family dynamics unrelated to John’s crime had created rifts, but those challenges seemed trivial once he returned and the entire family could be reunited. Rather than be divided by petty arguments, John’s family reportedly congregates more often than ever before now that he is home. Another respondent, Czar, came from a big, close-knit family. He explained it this way:

When I was in prison, I was the piece that was missing. I was the only one that was gone, that wasn't there. So now I'm home, the connection's complete. So, I got to make sure that the links with the little ones is as strong as the links with the big ones, so that's my thing now. It's like I get a do-over!

Though Czar missed a lot during his 25 years in prison, he sees his role as supporting the new generation of his family in ways he was unable to for the previous one. He welcomed the opportunity to do so while bringing his entire family back together.

“I Have to Remind Her Constantly that I’m a Grown Man.” People who were in prison for decades reported that their loved ones—and especially their parents—seemed to struggle to remember that respondents were no longer teenagers. Alex moved in with his mom and brother after 22 years in prison as a way to adapt to life as a free man but also as a way of “giving my mom lost time.” He planned to move out soon but in the meantime:

[My mom] doesn't let me do much. If I try to wash my clothes, she won't let me near the washing machine. So, I haven't even had that experience where I can do those things. I'll be working, and she'll come with the broom. [laughs] I have to remind her constantly that I'm a grown man.

For Alex, it has been an endearing and amusing quirk that he has been happy to accommodate, but his mother must accept that he is now an adult, who is simply different than the child who left her home for prison—a difference that is part of but connected to the next theme, “they had to relearn me.” Meredith’s mom visited frequently and was a “constant source of support” during her daughter’s 19-year imprisonment. Meredith had more complicated feelings about her relationship with her mother:

There's a part of me that almost felt guilty, I guess would be the word, for wanting to get on my own and wanting—I felt like did I owe it to my mom to just stay at home? But then it was like, no, that's not healthy either. It was almost like this guilt that I'm not spending all my time with her. I'm only seeing her a couple days a week and so it was like there was this feeling of guilt for living my own life and I had to kind of adjust that and remind myself... I'm 35 and a healthy relationship with my mom looks like this.

Meredith and her mom were able to talk through these challenges and update their understanding of one another to reflect a modern-day reality, but that was not the case for all study participants.

For other respondents, time has changed family members' memories, characteristics, and realities in ways that fundamentally altered relationships. Brian Groovy was surprised at how discordant his relationship became with his sister, with whom he was always close, receiving visits from her often during his 25-year incarceration: "Just when I got out, we always clashed where she was negative and I'm positive. Sometimes I tell her, 'Ain't no reason to be mad. What you mad for?'" What had seemed like a solid relationship became strained outside of the parameters of the prison walls, partially because Brian Groovy saw life so optimistically since he left prison. For Robert, the challenge has been an almost re-writing of family history. Since he has returned from being incarcerated for 27 years, during which time he did not speak frequently with his family:

I still hardly communicate with them. My mom does call me. She calls, she forgets how she raised us, like she don't think about how she raised us. She make

it seem like everything was peaches and cream and she was the best mother that could be. And that wasn't the case at all.

As of the time of our interview, he has not broached the dissention with his mom and did not plan to, as he saw only complications arising from a conversation. El, who was incarcerated for 31 years starting at age 15 talked about his reluctance to have some of those difficult conversations with family members who he believed had altered views of the past or maintained some “bitterness” and “resentment” for his crime’s impact on the whole family: “you be so elated to get out that you don’t even be trying to deal with that, honestly. You don’t even deal with it because it’s a lot of hurt there.” El found it easier to focus on the positive and the fact that he was now a free man, rather than harp on his childhood, crime, and subsequent incarceration, as traumatic as they were for him and his family.

Lastly, several participants discussed having a family member with dementia or another illness that changed relationship roles. Ralph, who was incarcerated for 42 years, had to step into a daily caretaker role with his father, who is struggling with mobility. His aging mother also required Ralph’s support. He explained:

She can’t do things like she used to. It’s part of my family duty. It’s been interesting. We’re getting along. That’s the best way to put it, I guess. We’re making it work. ... We leave spilled milk alone.

Despite their previously tumultuous and unsupportive relationship, Ralph dutifully fulfills his role as the only child caring for aging parents. The basic reality for him is that someone needs to do it and this is what their relationship has become. Rather than having the opportunity to ease into this reality as both he and his parents age, Ralph went from

living with them as a teenager with middle-aged parents to living with them as someone near typical retirement age with older parents.

“They Had to Relearn Me.” Time in the visiting room and communicating via phone, email, or letters was one thing, but living full-time with a family member after a long sentence was quite another. This extended beyond the previous theme of having family members understand that they were older. Respondents often did not feel their loved ones knew them in a variety of ways. For some respondents, it was a matter of family members trusting that the person their loved one had become in prison was the person they would be if and when released. When Sharuka returned after being incarcerated for 34 years, he noted that he was:

A stranger in the sense that, “How's he going to act? What is he going to do?” Because a lot of things were just theoretical. They knew about my accomplishments, ... that I made a serious transformation, but it's always, “What is he going to do when he get out?” A lot of people go to prison and find religion and politics and come home and find drugs, guns, and everything. I was a stranger in the sense that we missed out on family celebrations, missed out on those big events. It was like you knew a person, you know *of* them, but you don't really know them yet. That kind of strange duality there.

Learning and trusting that change was real and sustainable took time and patience as people reacclimated to the world.

Becoming reacquainted with loved ones after long periods of incarceration was made more challenging by participants' decision to omit certain traumatic realities of prison in their conversations with loved ones during incarceration. As Boricua put it: “my

family does not know the whole of it.” Much of this was done in an attempt to protect family members from the terror of prison. Over the course of his 23-year incarceration, Bill Castle explained:

I stopped trying to explain what it was like in there a long time ago. I quit trying to tell them what I went through on a daily basis. It was not doing anything good for them and they in turn tried to, they thought, help me out by calling the prison, which did not go well for me. I stopped talking to them about the bad stuff that happened. ... The truth of it, I gave them some glimpses of what my life had been like, and they couldn't understand it.

Loved ones doing what made things more dangerous for Bill and not being able to understand the realities of his environment grew the rift between them. Bryan Stevenson took a similar route during his 26 years in prison, noting that:

There's a vast, big part of that that they did miss out on. I mean, I never called home and complained about prison to them. I never cried about prison to them. I went in there and I did my time. And so they had to relearn me and get back to know me. So that in itself was, was a process.

What began as one of participants' only pathways to protect their loved ones while they were incarcerated created an additional layer of separation. This strategy simply deferred the truth for at least one participant who, when going before the parole board, was told by his lawyer that his sexual assault by another incarcerated man was going to be made public at the hearing. Previously the participant thought, “what they don't know won't hurt them” but he ultimately called his mom and little sister to tell them. They were supportive and understanding but he noted that, for himself or others, “there's a lot of

stuff that may or may have not have happened or is still kept inside that people are trying to process.” Family members may not be told about the trauma of prison, but that does not mean it does not exist or impact relationships.

“Ain’t Nothing Here for You.” One of the few things that was previously documented about people who were sentenced to life in prison as children is that they largely came from poverty (Nellis, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the qualitative data showed that many of the participants came from poor, under-resourced neighborhoods. Throughout their incarceration and as they came home, many of their families were “in that same condition,” as Brian Groovy put it. Brian explained that he had been his family’s primary breadwinner prior to his incarceration, doing odd jobs throughout elementary school and then selling drugs starting at the age of 13. Brian explained:

We lived in poverty. We didn’t have lights in the house, sometimes we didn’t have lights, sometimes we didn’t have a house. ... They were still doing the same, but they was poor when I went in. When I come home, they was still in that same situation. They wasn’t in a position to welcome me in. ... They just didn’t have the means to help me financially because of the condition that they was in. They was in that same condition when I come home.

Though Brian has been able to provide support for his family once again and rebuild positive relationships, when he first got out of prison after 22 years, his family was unable to assist him, leading him to lean on a reentry organization for services. Similarly, although Boobie had been incarcerated for 26 years, just two years after his release, Boobie was the one providing support to his sister: “She’s suffering and she’s not living

her best life, her kids are going through hell, every time she calls me it's about money. It's never a sober conversation. And I send it when I can."

After Marcus left prison following a 19-year bid, he went to a different state to stay with a sponsor he met while incarcerated. This meant moving away from his family:

They know, look, ain't nothing here for you. Ain't nothing here for you and if you come here, you can't say you going to have somebody going to take you to this job appointment. You can't say you going to have somebody going to buy you a brand new car. ... We want you to have good things. We believe that you will do good things but it's not here, Marcus. We're in a bad spot. We don't have what it takes. We don't have that time, we don't have the resources.

For Marcus, putting his faith in his sponsor to provide resources and connections was the only viable way he saw to succeed after his release. His family was still poor and still struggling, and, as much as they loved him, they could not support him. Sunshine spent 17 years in prison, after which she returned to an "inner city part of town where we are suppressed in here and we are scrambling for jobs that does not meet our potential or all we have to offer in life." Her family was similarly struggling and unable to provide support.

Friendships. Relationships with family members could be complicated for reasons described above, but friendships with people respondents were incarcerated alongside often helped meet emotional and instrumental support needs. Friendships seemed especially important for those who did not have adequate family support. After spending over 40 years in prison, as a condition of his parole, Ralph was required to relocate to a different state where he has some family. Relationships with family

members in his new state of residence were strained. Discussing his supportive networks of both friends he was incarcerated alongside and people working at a reentry organization, he noted ruefully, “it was like family. I miss them dearly.” Although Ralph made a friend at work, it is a new relationship and, comparatively, simply not the same. The new friend is “somebody that I can vent a little to about the family situation, but honestly, I don't [have anyone to talk to]. I left my support back in [state]. I had people there that we could talk about anything.” His community was in the state from which he was forcibly ejected.

Respondents also described what Alex called the “survivor’s guilt” of leaving friends behind in prison. Some laws prohibit people on parole from communicating with people who are currently incarcerated, creating a rift between those who were released and those left behind. Nikki, who was incarcerated for 10 years starting at age 15 and did not have a family support network, described leaving prison as “like I was losing somebody, like a death, because they were the only people I felt like understood or didn't judge me or knew what type of person I was because they actually took the time to look in.” Coming home had all of the logistical barriers to reentry but also meant that Nikki felt alone in the world, without the support she had grown to depend on and the people who knew her best.

For others who were not extracted from their prison family and friends, those friendships remained central. Idris, who was incarcerated for 35 years, explained:

My biggest support base is people who had their head on straight in there and we mutually agreed to be friends. And we came out, and we're still friends. We're like family. ... Every now and then, there's times when [my wife] don't get it. I mean,

she don't see it like somebody who's done, you know, 30, 40 plus years. And like I say, that's not a bad thing. It's not comparing. It's just that the way I'm processing something or the way they process something is just a little different from somebody who's never had to experience what we did.

The patterns of when and what U.S. state sent children to life in prison meant that a lot of people arrived in prison around the same time as other children and then spent decades living alongside one another. John verbalized a common sentiment, saying, “some of those guys were like brothers to me, because we did so long together.” Many who went in around the same time also came home around the same time, allowing for mutual aid and support post-prison as well. Sapio Scorpius described a friend who “rolled the whole bid” with him over his 28-year incarceration and got out of prison a few years before Sapio, driving him to job interviews and to work, talking about the newness of life on the outside, or “just let me sit and adjust while I’m rubbernecking and seeing everything I hadn’t seen.” One participant, King, mentioned a “quasi-support group” of friends he grew up with inside prison. Having someone with whom participants were already comfortable made it easier to have vulnerable conversations, without having to provide additional context, background, or explanation.

Romantic and Sexual Partners. Many people in the qualitative study reported being in happy, loving romantic relationships since returning home, but that is not to say that the path to that point was free of challenges. Three major themes emerged from the qualitative data in terms of romantic relationships, all of which are en vivo quotes: “you can't do that out here in a relationship”; “reckless eyeballing”; and “there was a difference from the visiting room to you’re in my house now.”

“You Can't Do That Out Here in a Relationship.” Unsurprisingly, the coping mechanisms, communication strategies, and trauma of prison have long tentacles that impact romantic relationships post-release. Eugene was incarcerated for 32 years starting at age 15 and explained how he had to learn to change his communication style during arguments with his wife:

When you've been through the emotional trauma that we've been through in prison for all those years, sometimes that comes out in a relationship out here, where we expect people out here to understand how we handle things in there is totally different than how you have to handle it out here. I'm not even talking about violently, I'm talking about just handling things differently out here, period, is totally different than when you in there. When you are in prison, if you trying to do things the right way, I know for me, I would just shut down. I just walk away and I got nothing to say. You can't do that out here in a relationship. That's not how things are done. I remember having an argument with my wife and I just got up and left, walked out the house, I'm going for a walk. To her, she didn't understand that.

What served Eugene well in prison and kept him safe—being avoidant—created physical and emotional distance between him and his wife. The two learned to adapt, but it took time to bridge their communication gaps and acknowledge how trauma continued to impact Eugene after exiting the prison gates. This is also an example of a coping mechanism that may simply not have worked for Eugene and his wife; it may have been a healthy, useful tool with another partner. Distinguishing between trauma responses and nuances of a specific relationship was sometimes challenging.

Czar, who was incarcerated for 25 years starting at the age of 17, explained that he felt like he was still navigating relationships the way he did when he was 17, despite currently being 45 years old:

For 25 years, I've been emotionally detached from relationships. I didn't have any type of physical relationships. I can call a person, a female, and talk to her on the phone for 15 minutes at the most, and then that's over. ... With dating, we got to go out, we got to do these things, and those things clash with the prison aspect of where as though you got to be on point at all the times in crowded rooms. You got to watch this place, you got to watch this because anything can happen, so you always on point. So now when I go out and I'm in crowds, I'm uncomfortable because it's too many people to watch, it's too many places to look. I can't keep an eye on everybody walking past.

Though respondents had said that they struggled to have family members (and especially parents) see them as full adults, Czar and other qualitative respondents noted that both acting like they were teenagers and being conditioned in prison were both major obstacles to romantic relationships. Trauma responses impact people's ability to be in certain spaces and, therefore, make many of the standard rituals of dating like going to new places together off-limits. Asm, who spent 26 years in prison starting when he was 17, provided his date as an example:

One day I was at the beach with my wife and our daughter ... and my wife was just in my face. I kept looking around, she got upset. She was like, "This is supposed to be about us. Why aren't you--?" I said, "Baby, listen, I love you. You are the most important thing in the world to me right there. Trust me, you get my

undivided attention. However, you have to understand that I've been living a certain way for 26 years. I've only been out three days. All these people, I'm not used to being around these people. So I'm just watching my surroundings. Don't personalize it." When I explained it to her, she kind of got it and understood it. What was supposed to be a pleasant date at the beach was re-traumatizing for Asm, but by talking it through, his wife began to understand. Another respondent, ZagLaw, described the physical toll of spending 27 years in prison starting at the age of 14:

I realized swiftly that I had erectile dysfunction. I think it all stems from the fact that you haven't had any physical contact or affection. It was almost like the neurons in my brain that shoot the chemicals and neurotransmitters just were not firing. That lasted almost an entire year.

This was almost the first thing he shared when discussing his life post-prison, as it was such a central piece of his struggle to feel “normal” and engage in relationships the way he wanted. The lack of physical contact and ability to let one’s guard down for decades impacted many of the participants’ post-prison relationships.

“Reckless Eyeballing”: Relationships in Prison. Some of the learned behaviors in prison extended past norms of communication and trauma responses to what was considered acceptable for interacting with romantic partners or any member of a different sex. If a romantic partner did visit, those interactions were limited to a few hours in the visiting room, with minimal physical contact—just a kiss and hug at the beginning and end of the visit and hand holding were permitted. In men’s prisons, any contact (even eye contact) with women working at the facility was often prohibited and punishable. Junior,

who spent 27 years in prison starting when he was just 12 years old, explained that in the state where he was incarcerated:

There was a time when [if] a female guard walked down the hallway, we had to turn around and face the wall. We couldn't even look at her, and if we looked at her, that was called reckless eyeballing, and they would lock you up [in solitary confinement] for it. That's how tough it was. It made everything that was supposed to be normal, abnormal.

Czar noted that “you're not really allowed to speak to the police [meaning guards] in jail,” and that that, along with his watchfulness described above, made him “afraid to say something to a woman for a long time when I came home.”

For some qualitative study respondents, romantic or sexual relationships were part of being incarcerated. Many of the women—including those who identify as heterosexual—reported being in romantic and/or sexual relationships during incarceration. Meredith, who was incarcerated for 19 years starting at the age of 16, described her experience:

It was so weird because of course never a thought before, but then you get there and it's just, it's an emotional thing for women because we're already in this place of loneliness and we're going through this trauma together and so what would naturally just be a friendship in most situations—you are restricted. You couldn't even look at a guy without an officer being like, "face the wall." We literally have to turn around and face the wall if the men were walking through. And so it becomes prohibited. So then you're just left with this, like, that's my only option

and I have all these desires raging and these hormones, well I have to channel them somewhere. And so it just seemed like that's the most normal thing to do. Women respondents described relationships with other incarcerated women that were healthy, consensual, and ebbed between friendships and more than friendships.

Men in the qualitative study did not openly discuss consensual sexual relationships with other incarcerated people, though some mentioned sexual relationships with prison employees and contractors. Pickle was incarcerated for 27 years starting when he was 16. He disclosed that he had experienced sexual assault by two female guards in separate incidents, and differentiated those experiences from several consensual sexual relationships with other women guards. When asked about power and consent in these relationships, Pickle explained:

They say that no matter what relationship it is, the staff member is taking advantage of you, because they're in a position of power. They're supposed to be morally correct, all that other stuff, which is bullshit. I don't care where you're at. You meet someone, you like them, and vice versa, yes, you're supposed to have a moral obligation to not become involved. You know what I say about that? Tell that to Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton. Tell that to any other person in an office setting who becomes involved with their boss or a supervisor who becomes involved with one of the people that work under them. All that is no different than what happens in prison with me and this lady. ... I had quite a few very healthy relationships, very loving, and very consensual on both sides. Some of which were initiated by the staff member. Some of it was initiated by me. I don't believe

that there cannot be consensual relationships. I don't believe that. We are human beings.

To Pickle, none of these “office relationships” were problematic, regardless of the power dynamics therein. His point of reference for appropriate boundaries, power dynamics, and relationship norms were established in prison over the course of several decades.

“There Was a Difference From the Visiting Room to You’re in My House.”

When people came home after spending many years in prison starting in childhood, they had to adapt to new norms and realities of a full-contact kind of relationship—one that was not confined to visiting rooms and time-constrained phone calls while surrounded by other incarcerated people. C, who had been incarcerated for almost 40 years, was delighted to be in a new romantic relationship and did not consider sex a top priority:

I had to tell her once that that isn't the most important thing to me. ... When you don't for a while, hey, so what? It is a key, and yes, we will definitely love to have it, but don't think that you have to. No. That's how I am. ... It's welcome. It's a pleasure and all that, but getting to know the person, their mind, their feelings, getting to know all of these things about them is more important and better than that because once you know that, then you can go above and beyond anything else and when you do, it'll become more intimate.

For other qualitative study participants, sex was a source of excitement and stress, as many had not had sex ever before or since they were teenagers. Respondents depended on romantic partners to be patient and to help them learn how to be good sexual partners. J was sent to prison for 24 years at the age of 17 and in the three months since he has been out has spoken openly with his partner:

I always convey it to my fiancée that if I'm... doing something that is not pleasurable to you, let me know. Help me out here, because I'm going to need the help. ... There's nothing wrong with these kinds of question. If anything, if you want to have this healthy conversation, you want to have really healthy sex, then you got to ask these questions. I don't know what actually arouses you, for me to pleasure you. Now, if it's something that I'm not used to doing then I'm going to let you know.

For J, communication with his fiancée has been crucial to the development of a happy sexual component of their relationship. For others, partners have been less forthcoming and interested in acting as a sort of teacher. Burger noted that after 26 years of having masturbation as his only sexual outlet, being able to meet his partner's sexual needs has been a source of stress:

You hear these stories from guys who've been married in prison, "If you can't please a woman, they're going to kick you out." I'm like, "What do I do?" That's even one of the big things out here for me now. I don't know because in my mind, it's about me. Let me just get up and go now. That's probably why I'm scared to get in a relationship because I don't know what to do. ... The girl who I've been with was like, "Oh, don't worry about it." When I hear them type of words, my mind automatically go back to the prison when I'm sitting in the bathroom masturbating by myself. Let me just get it and go. And I know that's not right. And had I ever sat down with somebody, a female, that said, "Hey, this is what I like, this what need to be done." I think this female genuinely doesn't know. I

should have that conversation if I want this to go somewhere. If not, then I'm just going to probably be lonely.

Despite being home for nearly four years, his concern about being able to please his partners sexually concerns Burger. Without an open, patient partner who knows what she likes and is willing to share, Burger worried how he would ever fulfill that part of his relationship. The fear of being kicked out may extend beyond simply having an ego bruised—it may impact one's housing security and other instrumental support needs.

In spite of the many obstacles that make romantic and sexual relationships complicated after a long incarceration, many respondents have found partners with whom they feel safe and supported. Rafiq opted to go to a halfway house for a few months before moving in with his partner, giving them a period of courtship outside of prison. After 27 years of prison, Rafiq knew “there was a difference from the visiting room to you're in my house now” and those several months of being free but living apart “gave us time to get to know each other before we made the jump to move in together. In a lot of ways, that saved our relationship because you don't know anybody until you live with them.” Easing into the relationship allowed them both to adapt to this change in steps, rather than all at once.

Being in a healthy adult relationship, maybe for the first time and often after a great deal of trauma, can be a learning process in and of itself. Meemaw, who came home after 32 years in prison, explained that “Sometimes I get a little flaky and question him, [even though] he's never given me a reason to. He gets frustrated with me, but he's patient and he understands where I've been and what I've gone through.” Her husband has gone beyond developing trust and now “makes sure I get to do the things that I didn't get to do

for so long. He makes that possible. Even though a lot of it he's done and it's no big deal to him, he acts like it is." El and his now wife first met in middle school and, for El, it was "love at first sight," even if that love took a 31-year hiatus during his imprisonment. El explained,

I credit her to this day. You helped me, you wheeled me up out of there because, man, listen, I was so destitute for love and emotions and affection. ...[since coming home] my family was there, they would support me, but I ain't know them, honestly. I didn't feel comfortable with them like I do with her.

Their adult relationship began again while he was incarcerated, but for El, his wife's emotional and instrumental support was most crucial after he came home.

Respondents' joy, gratitude, and astonishment at what their lives have become often tied into romantic relationships. Fiona was incarcerated for 25 years. She had what she categorized as an unhealthy relationship with a boy before she was incarcerated at 16, as well as some relationships with women in prison, but described her current relationship with a man who was also previously incarcerated as patently different:

I just never imagined having someone to build life with. ... Being with a man for the first time in my life was just like, I didn't know what love was. I didn't know what it looked like. I just knew what I saw on TV or what I read in a romance novel. I didn't know that it actually existed for me. What I do know is that we're building a beautiful life together.

Fiona noted that she is "still learning" how to be in that relationship but that she and her husband are "learning from one another." The most crucial component of a healthy relationship with good communication, according to the qualitative data, was having a

patient partner who would accompany and support respondents as they navigated relationships and the new free world.

For some respondents, letting down the walls they built up over the course of their incarceration enough to engage in a new romantic relationship was not worth the cost. Sakina was incarcerated for 42 years and described how he thought about engaging in a romantic relationship:

I came home with that same attitude that I didn't want to take and put a woman into a relationship with a person that had been locked up all his adult life and didn't have anything. I didn't want to be that burden on a young lady. And, then I was also cognizant of the fact that here in [state], the largest population that is returning back to prison is a result of relationships going bad. The women are the ones who are calling the parole officers when their relationship go bad and they're having their boyfriends and their husbands rearrested and put back in prison. The fear of losing his freedom paired with Sakina's doubt that he had enough to contribute to a romantic relationship has meant Sakina had not engaged in romantic relationships in the nearly five years since he has returned home.

Conclusion

For people returning from long periods of incarceration that began in childhood, the entire world is new, and relationships that were suddenly and unceremoniously disrupted must be rebuilt and reimagined, now as adults rather than teens and tweens. As El put it after 31 years of incarceration and being home for nearly four years, "I was in shock and I still am to an extent. Everything I expected and what my mind envisioned and hoped for for them 31 years, I haven't seen, touched, felt, or experienced because the

whole world is different.” In some ways, it is a long process of discovering what and how much a person does not yet know. Life post-release is nearly definitionally better than life in prison—people are free. Beyond that, barriers to reentry, social networks, and quality of life vary enormously.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to better understand the lives and experiences of people who have returned to the community following a life or long sentence that began during childhood, with special consideration of quality of life and relationships.

The dissertation had three main aims:

1. To describe the lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood and then released;
2. To examine the relationship between demographic and/or prison-related characteristics and quality of life; and
3. To explore the experience and role of relationships in the post-prison lives of people who served at least 10 years in prison beginning in childhood.

This chapter will highlight some of the findings and their implications.

Aim 1: Describe In-Prison and Post-Release Lives

This study revealed a lot about the in-prison and post-release realities and experiences of people who spent at least 10 years in prison starting in childhood. We will review the findings as related to life in prison (e.g., contact, visits, program participation, solitary confinement, trauma in prison, making a life inside) and post release (e.g., barriers to reentry, being on parole).

In-Prison

Though the 78 quantitative study participants were incarcerated in 24 states across the U.S., there were a number of similarities within the prison environment. Very few participants received visits weekly or more, despite entering the prison system as young as 12 years old. Almost half reported receiving visits yearly or less often, if ever. Phone calls were a common way to connect with loved ones, but the number and duration of

calls were limited, restricting communication to narrow windows. Unsurprisingly, for most respondents, contact with the outside world decreased over time, although the exact timing of when visits and contact dwindled was not made clearer by the qualitative or quantitative data. This is a concern, given that visits and contact during incarceration is sometimes used as a way to measure social support and has been associated with lower recidivism rates (Bales & Mears, 2008).

Being trapped in solitary confinement at some point during incarceration was the norm for participants: more than 90% spent some time in solitary. A solitary confinement cell measures at about six by nine feet—smaller than the size of a parking space—and people are usually held inside for 23 hours a day (Azzano, 2022). Over a tenth of respondents had spent at least five years in solitary at a single stretch, with two spending over eight years at one time. More than a tenth of participants reportedly spent over 10 years in solitary over the course of their incarceration, with one person in solitary for 14 years (over 5,000 days). For over two-thirds of participants, that included time in “the box” when they were children in adult prisons. For some this was done allegedly for their own protection, though the qualitative interviews revealed that that did not lessen the trauma of the isolation. Solitary confinement is used despite the enormity of evidence indicating that it is essentially torture, harming people’s mental health and quality of life (Clark, 2017; Giannetti, 2012), and is what the Southern Poverty Law Center (2019) called “inhumane, ineffective, and wasteful” (p. 5) at best. The effects of solitary are both troubling and predictable from a cumulative disadvantage theory lens, which tells us that disadvantages and trauma (like solitary) build on one another and cause harm (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009).

Respondents in the qualitative portion of this study also highlighted the ways that they needed to adapt to survive within the violent prison environment. Like in Parker and colleagues' (2005) study, respondents described an elevated amount of threats and violence earlier on during incarceration, which seemed to ebb as time went on and they got older and, frankly, larger. The trauma of incarceration was clearly illustrated in the qualitative interviews, aligning with both previous literature and cumulative disadvantage theory's axiom that social systems create and perpetuate inequality and trauma.

Despite the loneliness, terror of prison, and torturous nature of incarceration, people serving life and long prison sentences starting in childhood found ways to improve themselves and their communities. Many were part of lifers' groups that donated money to external groups and causes or improved visiting room environments and options within the institution. Even though many states have policies prohibiting people with life and indeterminate sentences from participating in programming (Council on Criminal Justice, 2023; Nellis, 2012; Taylor, 2023), all but one study respondent found a way. Excluding people with certain sentences from in-prison programming is nonsensical and cruel. Studies have shown the positive impact that in-prison programs can have on people both during and after incarceration, as well as improvements to the prison environment itself (Baranger et al., 2018; French & Gendreau, 2006). Withholding this opportunity from long-term prisoners hurts them during and after incarceration and misses an opportunity for a safer, more predictable prison environment (Baranger et al., 2018; Council on Criminal Justice, 2023; French & Gendreau, 2006). The qualitative data illustrated how common it is for people to be told they will die in prison one day and then be released the next, making it impossible to coordinate programming only in the last few

months before a person's release. By keeping the door to prison programming closed to those without a clear release date, departments of correction are only ensuring that some people leave prison without the opportunity to participate in any in-prison classes. If we assume these programs are useful for people coming home, this means that those refused entry are put at a further disadvantage.

Life Post-Release

Entering life outside meant entering an enormous, unknown world of possibilities. At first, though, it meant navigating the logistical challenges inherent to transitioning out of prison: obtaining identification documents, housing, employment, healthcare, basic needs (like food and clothing), enough money to survive and afford those items, and other needs (Gottschalk, 2015). Many of these needs were met by the time respondents completed the quantitative survey, but some persisted, with at least a fifth of respondents reportedly not having enough money, adequate health insurance, mental healthcare, and physical healthcare. Over half of people came home with less than \$300 in their pocket, which did not cover much for long. The “gate money” for people in the first 72 hours post-release is especially crucial, though some states provide up to \$200, many give less than \$20 if any money at all (Armstrong & Lewis, 2019). Many states have not increased the amount of “gate money” given since the 1970s and others take the funds directly from the person's accounts prior to their release (Armstrong & Lewis, 2019).

Barriers to reentry are far from unique for this population and have been well-established for decades. Over a half century ago, Irwin (1970) compared people returning from prison with those returning from the military and Peace Corps, noting that while the other two groups had been given extensive attention and support, there seemed to be an

almost willful resistance to examining (let alone addressing) reentry needs for people returning from a period of incarceration. Irwin (1970) determined that this discrepancy was related to stigma and societal beliefs about people who were previously incarcerated. That said, Peace Corps Volunteers receive health insurance for up to three months after their service, as well as a “readjustment allowance” of \$375 for each month in Peace Corps, adding up to \$9,000 after a typical two-year term (U.S. Peace Corps, n.d.). Most people leaving prison are given enough for a bus ticket if anything, compared to the average \$45,000 annually it costs to incarcerate a person for a life or long sentence (Rovner, 2020). Not allocating any money for people post-release seems incredibly questionable, given that we know reentry requires financial support and the enormous cost to re-incarcerate someone who recidivates (Armstrong & Lewis, 2019; Rovner, 2020).

Over fifty years after Irwin (1970) raised these concerns, programs offering universal basic income or similar readjustment allowances do not seem to exist for people coming home from incarceration. The one exception appears to be an universal basic income program only for people coming home from a period of incarceration in Gainesville, Florida, though they are no longer accepting new applications (Just Income GVN, n.d.). The state pays an exorbitant amount to incarcerate people, but generally very little if anything to support their reentry (Kuhn, 2021). Logistical reentry support is generally left to non-profit organizations that compete with one another for funding, operate on a small budget, and are sometimes seen as intentionally perpetuating structural violence against those returning home from incarceration (Kuhn, 2021; Miller & Stuart, 2017; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019).

Rather than receiving support to meet the quite predictable needs that follow decades of incarceration (Gottschalk, 2015), people are assigned a parole officer (PO). Ideally, the PO would assist in attaining these basic necessities and navigating post-release barriers (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019)—especially since positive relationships with POs are associated with better outcomes (Bares & Mowen, 2020; Blasko et al., 2015; Chamberlain et al., 2019; Skeem et al., 2009)—but that was not the reality in this study. Out of the 555 social network members listed by the 78 respondents, only a single parole officer was listed. In the qualitative interviews, respondents repeatedly noted that the best thing about their PO was that they left the respondent alone. When asked about services or any type of support parole provided, respondents most often said they had not received any support and worried that if they told their PO about an issue, the PO would weaponize it and use it against them. Feelings of “omniopicism” (Munn, 2011, p. 238) from being on parole greatly impacted respondents’ ability to feel completely free, many repeating that they felt always on the cusp of going back to prison even if they were doing everything they were supposed to do. The general consensus of fearing POs and not receiving any services or informational support from POs raises the question of what the PO is supposed to be doing. Qualitative respondent Nikki noted that POs should be more like social workers, a practice used in other countries that has had promising results (Raynor & Vanstone, 2016).

On top of those challenges, POs often changed every few months or so, making it hard to build positive relationships. With each new PO came a new street level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 1980) with discretionary authority over the parolee. Even with a “good” PO, being on parole meant restrictions that impacted relationships. For some participants,

parole meant not being able to stay the night with a new romantic partner, having to plan all trips even just to other counties weeks in advance, and having to explain to coworkers why a PO was coming to one's place of employment. Being on parole also added an additional layer of difficulty to the employment and housing search, as has been clearly illustrated in the literature (Pager et al., 2009). Like many things in the criminal legal system, this cannot be extracted from questions of race. Pager and colleagues (2009) found that people with criminal records have a significantly harder time finding employment than those who do not, and that this was exponentially more true for Black men than White. This reflects both CRT and cumulative disadvantage tenets.

Compared to prison, yes, parole is less intrusive and less traumatic, but it still interferes enormously with people's freedom and does so at a major cost to the public. Of course, the counterargument is that parole is designed to keep the community safe from people returning from prison, but this does not appear to generally be the case (Solomon et al., 2005) or to apply to this population. With a miniscule recidivism rate for people home from juvenile life sentences (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020; Louisiana Parole Project, 2023; Samples, 2021) and older people initially convicted of homicide (Prescott et al., 2020), this seems like an unnecessary level of control. Additionally, there has been no evidence that recidivism rates vary widely from state to state, even though parole policies do. With some parole supervision after juvenile life sentences lasting less than two years and some lasting for life, these restrictive parole policies are unjust and unequitable for those who happen to live in certain jurisdictions. It is a waste of resources to keep this group under the thumb of the criminal legal system in what appears to be an attempt at near-constant surveillance or panopticism.

Aim 2: Examine Demographic and Prison-Related Characteristics and Quality of Life

Under the second aim, the focus was on quality of life and the individual-level factors that were associated with changes in quality of life, examined through bivariate analysis and multiple regressions. The qualitative component of this dissertation provided rich, nuanced information about how respondents interpret quality of life and how they think about their quality of life since they left prison. This section provides an overview and discussion of those findings.

Quality of Life

Quality of life was the construct at the center of this study. Respondents overwhelmingly reported incredibly high quality of life in both the survey and the qualitative data. Across all domains of quality of life, respondents rated themselves as having an especially high quality of life. Respondents described how compared to prison, life on the outside was a dream—and was a dream that they had hoped for but never felt entitled to. This was the backdrop against which respondents thought about their quality of life. For some, though, the trauma of prison still impacted how they felt, thought, behaved, and interacted with others, noting that though some “gazelles” could gracefully traverse post-prison life, the rest of people coming home were slogging through as best they could. Though there is a lack of literature about the role of gratitude for people returning from a period of incarceration, there is a great deal of literature highlighting the positive relationship between gratitude and quality of life in other populations (Anand et al., 2021; Ramírez et al., 2014; Valikhani et al., 2019). It may be that, for some, prison was a near-monastic experience in which people were able to develop a fuller, more

meaningful sense of self and find gratitude even the darkest corners of prison. In comparison to the darkness of prison, the gratitude people felt may outweigh many of the harsh realities and challenges of life post-release.

The bivariate analyses revealed that multiple factors were associated with a change in quality of life both during incarceration (e.g., number of years in prison, sentence type, solitary confinement, visit frequency, communication frequency) and after release (e.g., receiving a living wage, attending religious services, amount of time since release, being on parole, not having financial needs met, mental health services needed but not received, substance use disorder support needed but not received, and number of unmet reentry needs). The multiple regression found that attending religious services, being incarcerated for 20 years or more, and the number of unmet reentry needs were all associated with changes in quality of life, even controlling for other factors.

During Incarceration. Some of the bivariate findings were expected, like that increased visits and communication with loved ones while incarcerated was associated with higher quality of life scores. This aligns with some prior research that showed better outcomes for people who received more frequent contact (Bales & Mears, 2008), and what life course theory tells us about social networks: that they matter and change over time. Though this association between contact and quality of life is positive, it is troublesome paired with the fact that respondents reported diminishing contact over the course of their incarceration.

Other results were more puzzling. More years in prison was associated with higher quality of life scores, as was sentence type, with people who served a LWOP or 50-year minimum sentence reporting higher quality of life scores than those who LWP or

less than a 49-year minimum. This could be related to the astonishment that was seen in the qualitative data regarding quality of life. For someone who thought they were going to die in prison, it may be, as qualitative respondent George said, like “getting a cancer diagnosis and going into remission.” Having another chance at freedom after thinking for decades it may never come, is no small thing.

Finally, the last finding regarding solitary and quality of life is befuddling. In this study, those who had been in solitary only as children reported higher quality of life scores than those who were in solitary only as adults. This may be related to simply the amount of time that has passed since being in solitary as a child, given that respondents were incarcerated for an average of 26 years, with most starting at or after the age of 16. That means that an average of 24 years of incarceration without any time in solitary had passed. Another possibility comes from a combination of two of the study’s theoretical lenses. One of the axioms of cumulative disadvantage theory is that a person’s perception of their experience matters (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009), and life course theory tells us that the timing of an event in a person’s life matters (Elder, 1998). It could be that, partially because of the person’s meaning making around their experience of solitary paired with the fact that solitary happened so long before study participation, it no longer impacted their quality of life. In their study of incarcerated adults, Maschi and colleagues (2011) found that subjective impressions of past trauma were associated with PTSD symptoms, even though objective measures of past trauma were not. One final possibility is related to the use of protective custody, which is simply a form of solitary confinement that often looks, feels, and functions exactly the same way as solitary confinement but is used to protect vulnerable people in the prison system, rather than to punish them (Matei, 2022).

Those who were in solitary confinement only as children may have experienced the protection of solitary from other types of violence. This aligns with the feared and actual physical and sexual abuse that qualitative respondents discussed, which had been amplified during the first few years of incarceration. Respondents who were in solitary only as children in the adult system may have been able to avoid some of the horrors and abuse that others could not.

After Release. There were a number of post-release factors that were associated with changes in quality of life as well. For instance, those who attended religious services had higher quality of life scores than those who did not, aligning with prior research in the general population (Panzini et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, participants who reported receiving what they considered a living wage had higher quality of life scores. This aligns with research that shows that a living wage is associated with increased quality of life and feelings of freedom (Yao et al., 2017). On the other side of that coin, those who reportedly did not have their financial needs met in the first six months after their release had lower quality of life scores. The same was true for participants who did not have mental health and substance use needs met. Additionally, people with more unmet reentry needs overall reported lower quality of life scores, an association that remained statistically significant in the regression as well. This is not surprising, but does have major policy and practice implications. There is also a need to research how reentry barriers impact well-being and quality of life, not just recidivism rates (Barrenger et al., 2021).

In the bivariate analyses, being out of prison longer was associated with a lower quality of life. This was not the case when controlling for other variables in the regression

model, but is nonetheless a curious finding. It may have to do with the fact that, at first, people are so astonished to be able to view the sky unimpeded by bars, decide to eat food beyond the Aramark brand, and simply get into a car and go anywhere they please (perhaps within county or state limits). The small joys of life like carpet under one's bare feet, being able to cuddle with a pet, or star gaze at night is something people everywhere should work to appreciate more. The bewilderment at these little, basic joys of life may simply wear off over time, explaining the decrease in quality of life scores. That said, the qualitative data did not reflect the decreasing quality of life over time finding from the quantitative data. Respondents who had been out for many years described finding joy in things most of us take for granted. This decrease in quality of life over time may also reflect the trauma of incarceration catching up to people. Especially with complex trauma that has been ignored (as a coping mechanism during incarceration, for instance), addressing the trauma or the cumulative disadvantages built up inside prison may take time (Haney, 2017).

Perhaps, then, it was as suggested in a member checking session with a group of CFSY employees—all but one of whom had been incarcerated for over 10 years starting in childhood. The thought was this: maybe when people first return home after these long, trauma-filled years in prison, they “don't know what they don't know.” Illustrating this same point, qualitative study participant El noted, “Everything I expected and what my mind envisioned and hoped for for them 31 years, I haven't seen, touched, felt, or experienced because the whole world is different.” This may cut both ways: people are astonished by the world and realize that the world of possibilities is even bigger than they thought. Perhaps time as an adult out of prison simply exposes people to all that life and

the world can be, so in comparison with that world of possibilities, people become less satisfied. In this line of thinking, it is not that the shininess of freedom wears off but that the world expands. Dreams may become larger and more complicated than they were able to be from the confines of a prison cell. This aligns with life course theory. If people did not have the opportunity often afforded when leaving one's childhood home for the first time, for instance, they may lack the opportunity to better understand the diversity of how people can choose to live their lives.

The other notable thing about these findings were that, when the length of imprisonment variable was made into a categorical variable, those who had been incarcerated for 20 to 29 years had a higher quality of life than those who had been incarcerated for less than 20 years or those who had been incarcerated for more than 30 years. There was no difference between those who were incarcerated for less than 20 years and those who were incarcerated for more than 30 years. Though age was not statistically significantly associated with a change in quality of life, this may relate to life course theory, in which people's quality of life changes over time. This also may be doubly true for individuals who missed certain traditional milestones and life events. Those who were incarcerated from 20 to 29 years may be in some sort of sweet spot in terms of their quality of life.

Another curious bivariate finding was that people on parole reported higher quality of life than those not on parole. This may also be connected to the perspective or definition of success. While on supervision, a person must meet parole requirements of success. Namely, having a job, not using drugs and alcohol, paying parole fees, and obtaining permission from the PO to travel. For those who must live their lives in

accordance with standards and regulations set by the parole department, respondents' view and definitions of doing well may be narrowed to those parole-defined parameters. In other words, just as dreams were bounded by the walls of prison, maybe those dreams struggle to expand within the "bigger cage" of parole. This finding also may be due to the small sample size or lack of representativeness of the data and not indicative of the population as a whole. It could be that another unexamined variable is the cause of this finding, not that parole somehow makes people have a higher quality of life. The qualitative data were clear that being on parole added stress, barriers, and restrictions on people's lives—not that it improved their lives or did much other than get in the way. The best thing anyone noted about being on parole was when they had a PO who did not bother them much. For all of these reasons, these findings that those on parole have a higher quality of life are anomalous and seem not to tell the full story.

Aim 3: Explore the Post-Prison Experience and Role of Relationships

The final aim focused on the social networks of people who were sentenced to life and long sentences as children and then released, the experience of those relationships, and how relationship characteristics played a role in quality of life, social support, social undermining, and relationship quality.

Social Networks

For people returning home from life and long sentences that began in childhood, their networks varied in terms of network composition (e.g., alter relationship type, age, gender, length of relationship) and the amount of support network members provide. In the social network level data, like with the quality of life related ego-level data, respondents were optimistic and reported being satisfied with the relationships of people

who surrounded them in their post-release lives. In a bivariate analysis, network member age, employment status, and the number of types of support network members were able to provide were all associated with higher quality of life for the respondent. Some of this is common sense: an employed person could offer more types of instrumental support, and respondents who received more support reported feeling more secure in their lives since prison. These findings highlight the importance of intentional, systemic, and individualized support for people coming home, which reflects the literature (Barrenger et al., 2021).

It is worth noting that alter (or social network member) incarceration history and alter race (specifically being Black) were both associated with lower quality of life scores for the respondent. This may relate to a phenomenon described as availability within social network analysis (Perry et al., 2018). Those who are available to the individual may not be the ones who are most able to offer appropriate, effective support. For instance, college students may be surrounded by mostly college students but a teaching assistant or professor may be better equipped to provide the informational support they need. Likewise, respondents may be more connected to people who were previously incarcerated alongside them—in particular if they do not have other supportive familial networks—but those who are also returning to the community around the same time may not have the ability to provide the necessary supports, as they are also navigating the same barriers.

Of course, that is not always the case, as was noted in the qualitative data. Those who have left prison a few years before certainly have crucial first-hand knowledge of the barriers to release. They may not have the ability to provide instrumental support like

financial or housing-related supports. This may also be related to the intersection of race and class. In the United States, a higher percentage of Black people are poor compared to White people (U.S. Census, 2020). Black people in respondents' networks may not have the means to provide instrumental support, as was reflected in the qualitative findings related to some family members. Having a higher proportion of Black alters in one's network was significantly associated with lower quality of life scores, and having a higher proportion of White alters was associated with higher quality of life scores. This may be illustrating both cumulative disadvantage and Critical Race theories in action, as disadvantage begets disadvantage and structural racism disproportionately negatively impacts Black and Brown people, creating and perpetuating inequity. Additionally, this may be related to social networks and social capital. Studies have shown positive relationships between social capital and quality of life (Nyqvist et al., 2012). Considering all of this together, it may be that Black people generally have less social capital because of structural racism and oppression (which aligns with CRT tenets) and so Black network members are associated with lower quality of life because those network members are less able to provide an array of emotional, social, or instrumental supports.

Relationship assessment and social support were positively associated with higher quality of life scores for respondents. Paired with the qualitative findings, we know how complicated relationships for people coming home from long sentences can be and the importance of positive relationships on people's quality of life. Relationship length was one of the few things associated with higher relationship assessment and social support scale scores. Alters whose relationships with respondents began during or after prison were associated with better social support and relationship assessment scores compared

to relationships that had started prior to participants' incarceration. During the qualitative interviews, many respondents discussed being able to be more particular about with whom they engaged during and after their incarceration. In prison, this was seen as a survival technique. Befriending the "wrong" person could be dangerous, so people remained guarded. Network members who remain in respondents' lives beyond family members who they presumably knew since before incarceration are there because respondents have decided to have them in their lives. This also may relate to the way respondents noted they had changed over time and so were drawn to and wanted different things from relationships. This may have been related to developmental changes that happened and changes made based on the passage of time and their location for decades, aligning with life course theory.

Regardless of length of relationship or other factors, though, respondents reported that they have mostly very positive, supportive relationships. This may be related to the incredibly high quality of life scores and the overall delight and enthusiasm about simply no longer being incarcerated. In the qualitative part of the study, respondents sometimes discussed not wanting to broach challenging aspects of their relationships with loved ones, especially family members. Participants often did not want to dredge up past wounds, times they felt a loved one was misremembering the reality, or hurt feelings of abandonment during incarceration. This avoidance was often justified with comments about the futility of engaging in these discussions and the desire to move forward in a positive direction. Though avoidance may be a useful tactic short-term, it could also change over time or create unresolved tensions long-term. It was also sometimes difficult for respondents to determine what was normal in relationships, in particular in romantic

relationships. One respondent talked about marital problems he was having and determined they stemmed from his being socialized to prison norms for so long. However, an outsider may see those same challenges as the result of an inflexible partner. Without the experience of dating and being in multiple adult relationships before settling down, people coming home may have a poor gauge of what constitutes a healthy relationship and become inured to an unhealthy one. People coming home from long sentences may also interpret communication styles that a partner does not like as problematic, when it is more about the partner's preferences than what healthy communication looks like in a romantic relationship. Again, without having gone through typical life stages and having those social networks during those different phases (here romantic relationships), they are at a major disadvantage. This may create problems for a partnership long-term and also for those who are coming home and trying to develop a sense of self within the context of a relationship.

The qualitative data were unequivocal about one thing in all relationships: the need for patience on both sides. Whether with family and childhood friends who had to “relearn” respondents, teach them how to use technology, become accustomed to the outside world, navigate public transportation, or adapt to their new normal, patience was crucial. It was also needed when people newly home responded to the world in ways that seemed peculiar to their loved ones. These were sometimes trauma responses and sometimes the result of being socialized to a very distinct reality for decades, one with sometimes conflicting rules and expectations. In the qualitative interviews, respondents talked about being laughed at for not being able to use the self-checkout, operate a cell phone, or figure out seatbelts. Most often, these stories were recounted with a smile, but

sometimes the embarrassment of not knowing lingered and interfered with relationships. Likewise, with romantic and sexual relationships, partners who were discussed as trustworthy and supportive were those who were patient and nonjudgmental in helping respondents navigate courtship, sex, and intimacy. Rather than harangue the person for not being able to comfortably sleep in bed alongside their partner through the night, patience was needed to give the recently returned person time to settle into this new normal. The literature about romantic relationships following incarceration is lacking. The literature that does exist often cautions people coming home from engaging in romantic relationships before they are established in the community or highlights the undermining and problematic nature of those romantic relationships. There is little examining how people healthfully navigate those relationships from both sides and what challenges exist within these partnerships.

Aside from the support respondents received from their personal relationships, many discussed how important it was to have institutional support. A number of the qualitative respondents were incarcerated in Louisiana and talked about the Louisiana Parole Project, an organization that fights for release for people with long prison sentences in the state (Louisiana Parole Project, n.d.). In addition to that work, the Parole Project provides holistic reentry services to people who were incarcerated for at least 20 years. It was started by an individual who was sentenced to JLWOP himself and is largely staffed by people who were or could have been clients. From speaking to people who received their services, it seems like exactly the sort of program that needs to be replicated nationwide. The Parole Project provides housing, meets people at the prison gates, facilitates obtaining a driver's license, and offers an array of classes that cover

things like employment, financial literacy, social norms, technology, healthcare, and civic engagement (Louisiana Parole Project, n.d.). While other organizations provide some of these same crucial services, the Parole Project seemed to be the largest, most holistic, and the only (to my knowledge) that offered housing. By hiring people who have themselves come home from long or life sentences that started during childhood, the Parole Project is tapping into a wealth of knowledge and experience, while simultaneously valuing the lived experience of these individuals and allowing them to give back to a society they are eager to help repair.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had some notable limitations. The first limitation revolved around the representativeness of the data, which comes from a convenience sample. Given the sampling method (email) and the necessity of being connected to CFSY's network, this may have systematically excluded individuals with limited connections to resources and people. Further selection bias may have come from individuals who were doing well and wanted to participate to bolster the image of this population, those who were doing well but wanted to separate themselves from the experience of their incarceration, people who did not need additional support, or from those for whom study incentive amounts were significant. There is some evidence of those who are doing especially well-being over-represented in this sample, like in the very high education and employment rates. Additionally, since jurisdictions greatly vary across the country (Pfaff, 2017), this may not have been a homogenous sample. The small sample size (N=78) meant that the study was not adequately powered to run analyses with all relevant independent variables and precluded further investigation into regional differences.

Qualitative methodology may have been more appropriate than mixed methods for a study involving a population about whom so little is known. However, the data that were collected a decade ago included only univariate demographic statistics, and no bivariate or multivariate analyses, leaving an important gap in the literature (Nellis, 2012). Furthermore, conversations with CFSY made it clear that having quantitative data would be a helpful tool for their advocacy work, which was another way this study was collaborative (Shdaimah et al., 2011).

There were ongoing concerns about respondent burden. Initially, I planned to conduct this research with the returned juvenile lifers in Philadelphia but learned that two studies had occurred in the previous year with that group, leading to my connection with CFSY. Given the solemnity of the topic, the possibility of retraumatizing participants, and the ubiquity of trauma among people who were incarcerated, questions regarding trauma were minimized. Lastly, the burden of a long quantitative survey was taken into account, and the survey was considerably shortened to not be too overwhelming.

Other limitations went beyond those related to the sample and participant burden. There were sample size concerns for the ego-level quantitative analysis given the low response rate. For individuals who returned to the community long ago, recall bias may be a concern. This was a cross-sectional study, so the temporal order was not always clear. Within the quantitative data, the main dependent variable was a major concern. The WHOQOL-BREF was chosen mostly because it had been used in other studies with people who were previously incarcerated and because it offered a multidimensional approach to defining quality of life that included physical, psychological, relational, and environmental domains. Ideally, each of these domains would have been explored as

related to individual and social network level characteristics. The domains did not meet assumptions of multiple regressions nor of some bivariate tests, even with transformations, and so were excluded. A larger sample size could have provided an opportunity to better understand quality of life holistically through those four domains. Additionally, the main quality of life variable used in this study was summed from all 26 WHOQOL-BREF items. Doing that lost some detail, as did using four out of five average score as the cut-point for the logistic regression in Aim 3. This decision was made because of the non-normality of the residuals in the alter-level data's quality of life sum. In the ego-level data, the quality of life sum variable was cube-transformed, which made it difficult to interpret the results from a practical standpoint. These data analysis decisions were made because of the small sample and the heavily skewed quality of life sum variable. It appears that a different, more nuanced quality of life measure may have been more appropriate for this population. There were ceiling effect concerns about that variable as well as the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and Social Support Scale (SSS).

Though there were important limitations to consider in this study, there were also a number of strengths. This was a novel study in a number of ways. First, it was, to my knowledge, the first national study to examine the post-prison lives of people sentenced to life and long sentences as children. The methodology of this study was also innovative and appropriate. A mixed methods approach was crucial to understand this population in a more holistic, nuanced way than a quantitative or qualitative design could do alone. Though the quantitative sample was small, the qualitative sample was quite large (N=46), resulting in a trove of rich qualitative data. The social network design provided the

opportunity to collect data that went beyond individual-level variables and examined the networks to which respondents returned following their incarceration. This aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of this study and also social work's value of considering people as they exist in and relate to the world. My experience as a social worker, with social work values, and experience working with hundreds of people returning to the community following their incarceration was also a strength. Last but certainly not least, the collaborations within this study were a major strength, from study creation through dissemination. The findings from this dissertation were and will continue to be shared with CFSY, and used in their advocacy efforts to end the practice of condemning children to spend decades of their lives behind bars.

Implications

Implications for Future Research

This study has some important implications for future research. First, it indicates a need to differently evaluate quality of life for people returning from life and long sentences that started in childhood. Quality of life must be evaluated using a measure that considers its nuanced components. Given the fact that the WHOQOL-BREF had been used with other people who had returned from incarceration but was impeded in this study by a possible ceiling effect, this may mean one of two things. The first is that a larger study with more respondents is needed to capture the broader experience of life after juvenile life sentences. With a larger sample, perhaps there would be more variation in quality of life experiences and reports. The other possibility is that it is the measure itself that is the problem. If so, perhaps a different, even population-specific measure is needed to fully and substantially evaluate quality of life for people returning following

life and long sentences. Either way, evaluating quality of life in a more nuanced way is crucial. Quality of life must also be considered as it changes over time. Future studies should continue to engage in qualitative and quantitative data collection about how definitions and experiences of quality of life change as people in this population adjust to life outside of prison.

Given the ubiquity of solitary confinement, studies should also evaluate the use and efficacy of solitary confinement for children and adults in adult prisons. Alternatives must be explored, along with the impact that spending month after month or year after year in solitary has on people sentenced to die in prison as children. Studies comparing solitary policy across states with this population could also help to highlight alternatives to solitary that could be adopted by other states.

This study showed that experiences of parole differed enormously from one state to the next and from one person to another. We know so little about people who have come home following life and long sentences that began in childhood, yet one of the few things that seems clear is that the recidivism rate is astonishingly low (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020; Louisiana Parole Project, 2023; Samples, 2021). It would behoove researchers, advocates, and policy makers for studies to explore recidivism rates across states alongside parole supervision requirements. It costs a great deal to continue to supervise people for the rest of their life as we do in multiple U.S. states. Understanding the cost of that supervision would also be useful in determining the necessity of any supervision at all—be it lifelong or several years.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Many crucial policy and practices implications stem from this study. They can best be considered under three umbrellas: before incarceration, during incarceration, and after release. In the qualitative interviews, respondents repeatedly brought up the poverty in which they grew up and the dearth of programs and activities available to them in impoverished neighborhoods. Especially in cities, there is a need for places where children and teenagers can congregate for free and without being policed.

This study has many implications for policy and practice in prisons themselves. Since the vast majority of people will be released at some point, including people sentenced to life or long indeterminate sentences, it is nonsensical to exclude this group of people from engaging in prison programming. According to the qualitative data, this is often justified by juvenile lifers' lack of a release date and the lack of available programs in prisons themselves. Policies should create more programs and not bar those with life and indeterminate sentences from entering. Social workers and others dedicated to justice should facilitate programs.

Given how commonplace solitary is and how it has been shown time and time again to be detrimental to people's quality of life and psychological health (Haney, 2018), it must finally be eliminated. Especially for children and young adults who are still developing, the use of solitary seems particularly indefensible and cruel. It is a practice that the U.S. should end. Unlock the Box (n.d.) has spearheaded a national campaign to end long-term solitary confinement and support the end to that practice in individual states. Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement have also been engaged in advocacy to end the use of solitary for years (SWASC, n.d.).

In that same vein, it is important to consider the psychological needs of people who are incarcerated, regardless of the amount of time they have spent in solitary. Mental health services should be moved to the same area as the medical department to help minimize stigma. In order to be fully taken advantage of, the use of these services must be made confidential and not shared with the parole board. Any sessions must be confidential as well. If incarcerated people believe that they cannot speak openly about their quality of life while in prison without potentially jeopardizing their chance at parole or in-prison privileges, needs will continue to go unmet and services will continue to be underutilized.

While people are in prison, policies around their physical placement need to prioritize preparing people to return home following their sentence. Relationships with loved ones are inevitably strained when a person is in prison hours away. For poor people with limited transportation, several hours may be an insurmountable distance. People incarcerated in the Washington, D.C. system must be moved to a more local Maryland or Virginia prison system, rather than being shipped from one federal prison facility to another as they have been for twenty years (Gathright, 2022). There is no justification for sending anyone, let alone children, across the country to sit in a cage thousands of miles away from everyone and everything they have ever known. Communication and visits with loved ones should not be a privilege but should be a right.

The way we think about children in adult prison should change as well. Children should not be sent to adult prisons and the waiver process should not be so easy for prosecutors. There is no evidence of a rehabilitative advantage to keeping people with long sentences starting in childhood in prison for many decades. Instead, there should be

a potential for case review at regular intervals. There have been various calls for case review to occur after 20 years (Nellis, 2021; Radnor, 2023), or even 10 years (Fettig & Zeidman, 2022). With wildly low recidivism rates for people sentenced to die in prison as children as well as the enormous price tag attached to incarceration and the terror people go through in prison, this seems quite reasonable.

By the time a person goes before a parole board or has their sentence reconsidered, logistical reentry needs should already begin to be addressed. For so many returning home, many needs were ignored for several days, weeks, or months as people obtained identification documents needed to do essentially anything. These inevitable barriers to reentry must be addressed ahead of release. For those who have money in their prison accounts, those funds should be made available when they walk out the gate. Currently, in many states, people have to wait weeks to receive those often crucial funds. Likewise, medical care and insurance as well as housing should be coordinated prior to release. Telling people that they will die in prison and then expecting them to have clear post-release home plans is simply absurd. The state should support this process, rather than leaving it up to the question of whether individuals happen to have adequate support systems to assist in their reentry process.

The implications of this study, like reentry needs, carry over to life post-release. Given the association with the number of unmet needs and quality of life, as well as common sense, policies and procedures must be in place to support people after they leave prison. These needs are well-documented and unsurprising, making them easy to plan for and inexcusable to avoid. Unsurprisingly, this also requires money. For people leaving prison after a life or long sentence that began during childhood, not having

financial needs met was associated with worsened quality of life. The state has already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to incarcerate these individuals. Providing them a few thousand dollars as a readjustment allowance, though probably not politically popular, could mean keeping them out of prison permanently and giving them a fresh opportunity at a life beyond prison walls. Programs like the Louisiana Parole Project that can provide housing alongside nonjudgmental support services and training should be replicated to attend to each person holistically.

People sentenced to life or long sentences starting in childhood often have complex trauma histories stemming from their childhoods (Nellis, 2012). This is compounded by the inevitably traumatizing experience of being incarcerated for many decades. People coming home should be offered therapeutic services and trainings to help them identify the effects of trauma and adapt tools to address that within themselves. This may be done through a peer model like a sponsor but should additionally include trained social workers and other professionals equipped to provide nonjudgmental, confidential services. This means social workers and others in helping professions must be trained to understand the effect of long-term incarceration and avenues to address the specific challenges that accompany those experiences.

Additional therapeutic sessions and trainings should be offered to those who have come home after long and life sentences in regards to healthy romantic and sexual relationships. So many respondents noted not knowing what constituted a healthy relationship. Some were inured to their current situations because it was the first relationship of their adult lives. Having trainings and open spaces where people can

discuss sex, pleasure, communication, and partnership would mean people would not have to only depend on their partners to provide that training.

Finally, this dissertation has implications for parole. The qualitative data were clear about the fact that parole impeded healthy relationship building with family and potential partners. Individual POs often saw people returning from juvenile life sentences as ideal parolees, as they did not ask for anything and did not cause trouble. This is not an adequate reason to keep this group of people on parole, especially since parole was so often described as another form of carceral control—a “bigger cage” and “shackles.” If parole does exist, then individual POs should not change so often and they should also actually provide support. Out of the 555 individuals listed in respondents’ support networks, only a single person was a parole officer. This despite multiple people saying they had generally positive relationships with their POs. Restrictions should at the very least encourage positive relationship development with loved ones, not prohibit it.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to explore the post-release lives of people who had been sentenced to life and long prison sentences and then released, focusing especially on quality of life and the role of relationships. People who have come back to the community from life and long prison sentences report incredibly high quality of life and positive relationships. This should be celebrated, but the enormity of their struggles and the amount of trauma they have been through cannot be ignored. After essentially locking children in prison and throwing away the key for decades, we can and should do more than the bare minimum to support them in the world beyond the prison gates. We must not leave them to navigate the systemic and individual challenges of life after prison on

their own. Instead, we should do what we should have done when they were struggling tweens and teens: treat them as if they are our own family, providing support, empathy, and love.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Quantitative Survey

Adults Released After Long/Life Prison Sentences that Began in Childhood Quantitative Survey Questions

Inclusion Criteria

(Note: these will be on their own page. If participants answer yes to the first and no to the second, they will be taken to the survey. If they do not answer in this way, they will be taken to a closing page and thanked for their interest.)

1. Were you incarcerated for at least 10 consecutive years (in a row) starting when you were 17 or younger? (Yes/No)
2. Are you currently incarcerated? (Yes/No)

Demographic Ego-Level Questions

These questions will ask you about your identity and demographics.

3. What is your age in years? _____
4. Do you identify as Hispanic, Latine, or of Spanish-origin? (Y/N)
5. What is your race? (Select all that apply)
 1. Black or African American
 2. Asian
 3. Native American or American Indian
 4. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 5. White
 6. Other: Please specify: _____
 7. Prefer not to say
6. What is your gender?

Definitions: **Cisgender:** People identify with their sex assigned at birth.
Transgender: People do not identify with their sex assigned at birth.

 1. Cisgender man
 2. Cisgender woman
 3. Transgender man
 4. Transgender woman
 5. Non-binary
 6. Prefer to self-describe: Please specify: _____
 7. Prefer not to say
7. What is your sexual orientation?

1. Straight/heterosexual
 2. Gay or lesbian
 3. Bisexual
 4. Other (please specify): _____
 5. Prefer not to say
8. What is your current relationship status? (Select all that apply)
1. Single
 2. Dating
 3. Friends with benefits or casual sex partner(s)
 4. Committed/serious relationship
 5. Married
 6. Separated
 7. Divorced
 8. Widowed
 9. Prefer to self-describe (please specify): _____
 10. Prefer not to say
9. Do you have any children?
1. Yes
 2. No
10. If yes, are those children from:
1. Before incarceration
 2. Since release from incarceration
 3. Both
 4. Prefer not to say
11. What is the highest grade in school or year of college that you completed and got credit for?
1. Some high school
 2. High school diploma/GED
 3. Some college
 4. Vocational training
 5. 2-year associate degree
 6. 4-year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB)
 7. Professional/Graduate degree
 8. Doctorate degree
 9. Other (please specify): _____
12. Which of the following best describes your employment situation most of the time during the past 6 months?
1. Full-time paid job (35 hours/week or more)
 2. Part-time paid job
 3. Unemployed, not looking for work
 4. Unemployed, looking for work

5. Student/in vocational training
13. If employed, do you consider your salary to be a living wage? (In other words, is this enough for you to pay for housing and other needs?) (Yes/No/Don't know)
14. If employed, what kind of employment is it? (Fill in the blank)
15. Where do you currently live?
 1. Own home/apartment
 2. Family's home/apartment
 3. Partner's home/apartment
 4. Friend's home/apartment
 5. Rooming house/single room/SRO
 6. Halfway house
 7. Recovery housing
 8. Homeless/Street/Couchsurfing/Hotel/Motel
 9. Other: Please specify: _____
 10. Prefer not to say
16. How would you describe the place you live now?
 1. Large city
 2. Suburb near a large city
 3. Small city or town
 4. Rural area
17. What is your current religion, if any?
 1. Protestant or Christian
 2. Catholic
 3. Muslim
 4. Buddhist
 5. Hindu
 6. Jewish
 7. Agnostic
 8. Atheist
 9. Other (please specify): _____
 10. Nothing in particular
18. Do you attend religious services? (Yes/No)
 1. If yes, how often?
 1. Weekly or more
 2. Several times per month
 3. Monthly
 4. Several times per year
 5. Yearly
 6. Never
 7. Prefer not to say

19. Are you on parole? (Y/N/I was but am not anymore)
 1. If so, for how long (in years, or write "life" if lifelong parole)? _____
 2. If so, in the past month, how many contacts have you had with your parole officer? ____

Prison/Criminal Justice Related

This section of the survey will ask about some of your experiences during incarceration.

1. How old were you when you were incarcerated for the long or life sentence you received as a child? _____ years old
2. In what state were you sentenced for the long or life sentence you received as a child? [List states]
3. In what year were you incarcerated for the long or life sentence you received as a child? _____
4. When were you released from prison for the long or life sentence you received as a child? ____ (month) ____ (year)
5. What was the sentence you received as a child?
 1. Juvenile life without the possibility of parole (JLWOP)
 2. Juvenile life with the possibility of parole (JLWP)
 3. Other: (Please specify min and max if applicable): _____
6. What was the original charge you received? (with options provided from CFSY and a write-in option)
7. Did you take a plea deal? (Y/N)
8. Were you resentenced after serving some of the life or long sentence you received as a child? (Y/N)
 1. If yes, what was the new sentence you received? _____
9. Think about the prison where you were incarcerated the longest. About how many hours' drive was that from where most of your friends and family were living?
 1. Less than 1 hour
 2. Over 1 hour but less than 3
 3. Over 3 hours but less than 6
 4. Six hours or more
 5. Other (please specify): _____
10. In the last half of your sentence, did you usually get visits from friends and/or family:

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
3. Yearly
4. Never
5. Other (please specify): _____
6. Prefer not to say

11. In the last half of your sentence, did you usually have phone calls with friends and/or family:

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
3. Yearly
4. Never
5. Other (please specify): _____
6. Prefer not to say

12. In the last half of your sentence, did you usually receive letters from friends and/or family:

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
3. Yearly
4. Never
5. Other (please specify): _____
6. Prefer not to say

13. In the last half of your sentence, did you usually receive e-mails or online correspondence with friends and/or family:

1. Weekly
2. Monthly
3. Yearly
4. Never
5. Other (please specify): _____
6. Prefer not to say

14. Did the amount of contact you had with friends and/or family change over time during your incarceration? (Y/N)

1. If yes, did it:
 1. Increase
 2. Decrease
 3. Prefer not to say

15. Did you participate in programming in prison? (Y/N)

1. If yes, what kind of programming? (Select all that apply)
 1. High school/GED
 2. College courses
 3. Vocational

4. Drug and alcohol
 5. Social emotional (e.g., anger management, Choice is Yours)
 6. Other (please specify): _____
2. If no, why didn't you participate?
 1. Chose not to
 2. Excluded because of sentence
 3. Other (please specify): _____
16. What best describes your living situation during most of your incarceration?
1. Open dorm
 2. Dorm with cubicles
 3. Unit with cells
 4. Area not originally intended as housing (such as a gym, classroom, or day room)
 5. Solitary confinement
 6. Other (please specify): _____
 7. Prefer not to say
17. How many people did you share the dorm, cubicle, or cell with? _____
18. Were you ever in solitary confinement? (no, yes as a child in adult prison, yes as an adult in adult prison, and yes both as a child and adult in adult prison)
1. If so, what was the longest period of time that you were in solitary confinement? ____ years ____ months ____ weeks ____ days
 2. If so, for about how long total over the course of your entire incarceration? ____ years ____ months ____ weeks ____ days

Life Before Prison

In this section, questions are focused on your life before your incarceration.

1. What was the highest grade you had completed before going to prison for the life or long sentence that started during childhood? _____
2. Were you enrolled in school at the time of that arrest? (Yes/No)
 1. If no, why not?
 1. Expelled
 2. Suspended
 3. Dropped out
 4. Other (please specify): _____
 5. Prefer not to say
3. Had you been arrested before you were incarcerated for this life or long sentence as a child? (Y/N)
 1. If yes, how old were you when you were first arrested? _____
4. How would you describe the place you lived before that arrest?

1. Large city
 2. Suburb near a large city
 3. Small city or town
 4. Rural area
5. At the time of the arrest that led to your life or long imprisonment, where were you living most of the time?
1. With both parents
 2. With one parent
 3. With grandparent(s)
 4. With family friend or other family
 5. With partner
 6. With friend
 7. Group home or institution
 8. Homeless/Street/Couchsurfing
 9. Other: Please specify: _____
 10. Prefer not to say

Life After Prison

This part of the survey will ask a bit about your life since you were released from a life or long sentence started during childhood.

1. On the night you left prison, where did you stay?
 1. Halfway house
 2. Family's home
 3. Friend's home
 4. Romantic partner's home (girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, fiancée)
 5. Other (please specify): _____
 6. Prefer not to say

2. On the day you left prison, how did you get from prison to the place you were staying?
 1. Family
 2. Friend
 3. Romantic partner (girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, fiancée)
 4. Lawyer
 5. Prison transportation
 6. Other professional
 7. Public transportation
 8. Other (please specify): _____
 9. Prefer not to say

3. On the day you left prison, about how much money did you have? _____

4. In the first 3 months after you left prison, to what extent did you have or meet these needs? (1: I needed this; 2: Need was met; 3: N/A)
 - a. Access to food
 - b. Access to clothing
 - c. Access to transportation
 - d. Prescription medication
 - e. Access to enough money for survival
 - f. Identification documents
 - g. Housing
 - h. Employment
 - i. Health insurance
 - j. Physical health care
 - k. Mental health care
 - l. Substance use treatment

Quality of Life

This section will ask you about your quality of life.

1. How would you rate your quality of life?
(1-5, very poor to very good)
2. How satisfied are you with your health?
(1-5, very dissatisfied to very satisfied)

The following questions ask about how much you have experienced certain things in the last two weeks. (1-5, not at all to an extreme amount)

3. To what extent do you feel that physical pain prevents you from doing what you need to do?
4. How much do you need any medical treatment to function in your daily life?
5. How much do you enjoy life?
6. To what extent do you feel your life to be meaningful?

The following questions use a 5-point Likert scale: 1 not at all to 5 extremely

7. How well are you able to concentrate?
8. How safe do you feel in your daily life?
9. How healthy is your physical environment?

The following questions ask about how completely you experience or were able to do certain things in the last two weeks. (1-5, not at all to completely)

10. Do you have enough energy for everyday life?
11. Are you able to accept your bodily appearance?
12. Have you enough money to meet your needs?
13. How available to you is the information that you need in your day-to-day life?
14. To what extent do you have the opportunity for leisure activities?

This question uses this scale: 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good).

15. How well are you able to get around?

The following questions ask you to say how good or satisfied you have felt about various aspects of your life over the last two weeks. (1-5, very dissatisfied to very satisfied)

16. How satisfied are you with your sleep?
17. How satisfied are you with your ability to perform your daily living activities?
18. How satisfied are you with your capacity for work?
19. How satisfied are you with yourself?
20. How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?
21. How satisfied are you with your sex life?
22. How satisfied are you with the support you get from your friends?
23. How satisfied are you with the conditions of your living place?
24. How satisfied are you with your access to health services?
25. How satisfied are you with transportation?

The following question refers to how often you have felt or experienced certain things in the last two weeks. (1-5, never to always)

26. How often do you have negative feelings, i.e. blue mood, despair, depression?

Networks/Relationships

This section of the survey will ask you about your social networks and relationships.

Think of the people who were involved with your reentry process and life since you were released from prison following your long-term or life sentence imposed during childhood. These could be people who you have interacted with or talked to in person, over email, phone, text, or online. Include people in your personal life, your parole officer, and people involved through a reentry program.

Remember that all responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

1. Who has been most important in your life since your release from prison? Include up to 10 people. Please include personal relationships, parole officers and/or agency professionals. Feel free to use nicknames or initials, as long as you can identify them in follow up questions.

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Person 3: _____

Person 4: _____

Person 5: _____

Person 6: _____

Person 7: _____

Person 8: _____

Person 9: _____

Person 10: _____

2. What is each person's gender? (Man, Woman, Non-binary, I don't know)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

3. What is each person's age (more or less)?

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

4. What is each person's race/ethnicity? (Black/African American, Latine, White, Asian, Other, Don't know)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

5. How would you describe your relationship with each person? (Mom, Dad, Sister/Brother, Other family member, Husband/wife, Significant other/boyfriend/girlfriend, Friend, Parole Officer, Program/organization/agency professional, other (Please describe))

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____

Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

6. How long have you known each person? (Entire life, Before prison, During prison, Since release)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

7. For people you knew while you were incarcerated, did you communicate with them during incarceration? Select all that apply. (No, Visits, Phone, Letters, E-mail/Online, Incarcerated together)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

8. Are these individuals employed? (Y/N/Don't know)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

9. Have these individuals been incarcerated? (Yes, No, Don't know, Currently Incarcerated)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

10. Do/did these individuals provide reentry support for you after prison? (No, housing, money, social service supports (for example, drug and alcohol, therapy), employment help, other support)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____
Person 6: _____
Person 7: _____
Person 8: _____
Person 9: _____
Person 10: _____

11. Who is most important to you or with whom do you spend the most time?
(Choose up to 5, and put the most important person at top.)

Person 1: _____
Person 2: _____
Person 3: _____
Person 4: _____
Person 5: _____

This section will ask about the 5 people who are most important to you.

Social Support Scale: 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal)

1. How much does each person...
 - Provide you with encouragement?
 - Provide you with useful information?
 - Say things that raise your self-confidence?
 - Listen to you when you need to talk?
 - Show that he/she cares about you as a person?
 - Understand the way you think and feel about things?
 - Provide you with direct help, that is, do or give you things you need?

How much do you talk with him or her when you are upset, nervous, or depressed about something?

2. Of the up to 10 people you mentioned earlier, is there anyone else who provides support in your life? (Y/N)

If yes, please select who. (Give list).

Then give Social Support Scale questions again for that/those person(s).

3. Are there any parole officers or reentry professionals who provide support? (Y/N)

If yes, please answer Social Support Scale questions for that person(s).

Social Undermining Scale: 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal)

4. How much does each person...

Act in an unpleasant or angry manner toward you?

Make your life difficult?

Show he or she dislikes you?

Make you feel unwanted?

Criticize you?

5. If you have not already included your parole officer in this list of up to 5 people, please indicate Social Undermining Scale responses for parole officer too.

Relationship Assessment Scale (5-point Likert scale, 1 (Poorly) to 5 (Extremely well))

6. For each of those 5 individuals...

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

How good is your relationship compared to most?

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

How much do you care about this person?

How many problems are there in your relationship?

Open-Ended Wrap Up Question

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your incarceration or reentry?
(Open long-form response section)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

If you would like to participate in an interview about your experience, please click [here](#).

Interview participants will receive an additional \$50 for their time.

Appendix 2.

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide

(These will be asked to anyone who opts to participate in the qualitative interview, which will occur via Zoom or phone at a later date and time than the quantitative survey. Before we begin, I will go over the letter of explanation and receive verbal consent for the respondent to participate and be recorded.)

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I want to ask you about your experiences of navigating and adjusting to the world after you left prison. Participation is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time. If there's anything you don't want to talk about, that's okay—just let me know.

General:

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
 - a. Probe for: How would your loved ones describe you? What do you enjoy?

Reentry Process:

2. Can you tell me a bit about what returning from prison looked like for you?
 - a. Probe for: How long have you been home? Who was involved? What did your first days look like? What were you most looking forward to?
3. Do you think reentry is different for people coming home from life or long sentences that started when they were children compared to sentences that started when they were adults? Why or why not? Probe for specific examples of some differences/similarities (not just why, but what?)

Quality of Life:

4. Has your quality of life changed since being out of prison? If so, how?
 - a. Probe for: How would you describe quality of life? What are the most important pieces of your life when it comes to your well-being and quality of life? How is your quality of life different than it was when you were in prison (assuming it is)? Has that changed during different stages of reentry?

Relationships:

5. Tell me about your relationships with friends, family, and other loved ones since coming home.
 - a. Probe for: Have those relationships been what you expected? Do your relationships look or feel different in the community compared to in prison? Are these with new people or with people you met before/during incarceration?
6. Have you reconnected with your social network? If so, can you tell me what has made reconnecting easier?
 - a. Probe for: New relationships vs. old? Have both? Look different?
7. Have you encountered any barriers that have prevented you from reconnecting with

people who are important in your life? Can you tell me about that?

8. Tell me about your current relationships with family members. Have these relationships and roles changed over time? If so, how?
9. Tell me about your current relationships with friends. Have these relationships and roles changed over time? If so, how?
10. Tell me about your romantic relationships since prison. Have these relationships and roles changed over time? If so, how?
11. Have you experienced any changing power dynamics in your relationships since you've returned from prison? Can you talk about that? What does that look like?
 - a. Probe for: Challenges, intimate partner relationships, reciprocal relationships, what relationships look like with people who are providing support.
12. It seems like spending that many years in prison would mean relationships change and some people are no longer in your life. Can you talk about if and how you experienced loss and changes?
 - a. Probe for: Delayed grief, ambiguous loss/reunification.
13. Are you still connected with people who are currently incarcerated? What do those relationships look like and mean to you?

Formal Relationships:

14. Tell me about your relationships with your PO and/or other people working in a professional capacity. What do those relationships look like?
15. Are you connected to any non-profits or organizations that do advocacy or other types of work with people previously incarcerated?

Advice:

16. What advice would you have for other people who are coming home after a long or life sentence that started when they were children?
 - a. Probe for: Advice specific to navigating relationships post-release?

Miracle Question:

17. If you had an unlimited budget to use to address issues around children being sentenced to long or life sentences, what would you change?
 - a. Probe for: What policies and practices have you seen that need to be changed? Changes around incarceration and release.

General:

18. Is there anything else you would like to share that I didn't already ask?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I greatly appreciate it.

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