

Half Way to Freedom: The Role of Halfway Houses in Canada's Penal Landscape

by

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Abstract

Each year in Canada, roughly 6,500 individuals are released from federal prisons. Ex-prisoners face a range of challenges as they rejoin the community, including finding employment, reconnecting with family and friends, receiving care for physical and mental health issues, and navigating parole conditions. Not surprisingly, former prisoners tend to identify the weeks and months immediately following prison release as particularly overwhelming and daunting. The Parole Board of Canada often mandates that federal prisoners (i.e., those sentenced to a prison term of at least two years) spend the first six months of release at a community-based residential facility, commonly known as a halfway house. These transitional, NGO-operated institutions are officially tasked with providing reentry support (e.g., basic social services and rehabilitative programming), as well as ongoing supervision of individuals on conditional release. Despite their central role in ex-prisoner reintegration/supervision, little is known about how these penal institutions work and operate in ex-prisoners' lives, and the role they occupy in broader penal processes. I seek to fill this gap by examining the perceptions and experiences of halfway house residents and workers in a north-western Canadian city. My analysis focuses on how halfway houses workers seek to govern halfway house residents during the early stages of reentry, and how former prisoners, in turn, experience, navigate, and make meaning of their time at the halfway

house. I show that the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, perceptions of both halfway house residents and workers call for varied conceptualizations of halfway houses as penal sites. Specifically, I propose three ways to think through the role of halfway houses in Canada's penal system; those are (1) halfway houses as *liminal sites*; (2) halfway houses as *mobility-producing sites*; and (3) halfway houses as *open prisons*. These conceptualizations provide a more nuanced understanding of the different ways in which halfway houses impinge on ex-prisoners' lives in both repressive and productive ways. Drawing on studies of punishment and prisoner reentry, I reflect on what these conceptualizations reveal about the lived realities of ex-prisoners and workers of the Canadian penal state.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“You’re not in jail. You’re not out of jail. They’ve given you enough rope to hang yourself. It’s up to you whether you do it or not.” (*Fred, halfway house resident*)

“We are here for the clients and to try to help them, so I think that most of the people that work here feel that it’s kind of a conflict because we don’t want them to get suspended. We don’t want to get them in trouble. Yeah, there’s a lot of situations where you’re in conflict, “I don’t want to do this, but it’s the rules and I have to.” (*Mary, halfway house worker*)

Halfway houses are located at the intersection of *punishment* and *welfare*; the *state* and the *non-state*; the *prison* and the *community*. They present as penal-welfare institutions insofar as they are charged with the dual mandate of providing both support to and supervision of former prisoners on conditional release (CSC 2014). In Canada (as well as other countries, such as the U.S. and U.K.), the vast majority of halfway houses are operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that the government contracts and funds for the supervision of recently released prisoners. Given their state authorizations and supervision responsibilities, these NGO-run houses blur the boundary between the state and non-state. Insofar as halfway house residents live in the community, yet continue to be subject to a strict supervision regime—and therefore remain at constant risk of reimprisonment—halfway houses are spaces where the prison and community bleed into each other. Halfway house residents are, quite literally, “half way” between the prison and the open community. These characteristics render these institutions an intriguing penal site.

To date, halfway houses have received little empirical attention. A few studies (some are older, and some more contemporary) have shed light on their ‘effectiveness’ (as measured by residents’ reimprisonment rates), their economic benefits vis-à-vis imprisonment, and their fraught

relationship with the wider community (Bonta & Motiuk 1987; Hamilton & Campbell 2014; John Howard Society of Alberta 2001; Latessa & Allen 1982; Zeitoun 1978). However, few scholars have examined the perceptions and experiences of halfway house residents and workers to reveal what life and work inside these small-scale, transitional facilities look like. This has left a gap in extant scholarship in conceptualizing and understanding the role halfway houses play within broader penal processes.

Recently, work by American-based scholar Gail Caputo (2014) has started to fill this void. In her ethnographic exploration of a female halfway house (which she calls Alpha Omega House) in a north-eastern U.S. city, Caputo has documented the lived experiences of a group of female halfway house residents. Detailing the different security levels residents must “successfully” pass in order to be released from the halfway house, her work has focused on the ways women ex-prisoners navigate and negotiate the different rules, regulations, and daily routines of halfway house living. Caputo has described halfway houses as conflicted institutions charged with “rehabilitating” or treating people on the one hand, but experienced by those people, on the other hand, as largely punitive and oppressive. For her participants, life at Alpha Omega House was characterized by strict rules, restrictions, and constant staff reprimands for mostly petty things, such as talking too loudly, sleeping in front of the TV, or not being dressed appropriately. Caputo has also found that (the mandatory) rehabilitative programming provided by the halfway house offered little support or actual “treatment” of women’s psychological and practical needs; treatment at Alpha Omega House, she has written, “is poorly conceptualized, badly structured, and runs counter to the principles of effective intervention” (Caputo 2014: 158). Noteworthy too is the fact that residents were not permitted to search for and take up employment, or visit family and friends, until the very end of their residency. Thus, the impression one gets is that rather than reentering the community, the women in this study found themselves subject to yet another “total institution” (Goffman 1961)

following their time in prison. Applying a gendered analysis, Caputo (2014: 2) has ultimately concluded that halfway houses—which she says are supposed to be non-punitive—in effect resemble the prison environment; in her words, “rather than helping the women, the center [halfway house] reproduces in extreme form the patriarchal domination and oppression its residents have faced throughout their lives.”

During my first visit to a halfway house¹ in Edmonton, Alberta (the research location of this study), it was easy to notice that there were some obvious differences between that house and Alpha Omega House. Unlike in Caputo’s study, where residents spent most of their day together in the TV room (and indeed, were required to stay there as per staff instructions), there was no communal space at the Edmonton house I visited (and which later became one of my field sites). The staff member who initially toured me through the facility explained that the lack of common space was partially due to architectural restrictions, and partially the result of a conscious effort by halfway house staff to limit residents’ exposure to and interactions with each other. I did not see a single resident during that first visit (even though I got a full tour of the house). Another key difference from the halfway house in Caputo’s research was that the halfway house residents of my study were permitted — and indeed required as per halfway house rules— to look for employment, enroll in school, and/or attend treatment programs in the community within three to seven days after their arrival at the house. As a consequence, ex-prisoners in this study —unlike in Caputo’s research— tended to spend relatively little of their day at the halfway house facility, resulting in more limited contact with both staff and other residents.

¹ I first visited a halfway house in Edmonton in February 2014, while working on a different research project in the city. During this visit, I met with the team leader/program manager of the house to initiate contact and learn more about halfway houses in the city. My actual fieldwork did not start until May 2015 (see Chapter 2).

Given that halfway houses are operated by a variety of different organizations, the fact that they follow different regimes is, of course, not surprising. Nonetheless, these variations call for empirical investigation of how different halfway houses work and function, and provide opportunity for further conceptual explorations of the relationships between residents—as penal subjects— and halfway house workers, the ways ex-prisoners are governed within these houses, and, more broadly, the position halfway houses occupy in larger penal processes.

While some Canadian studies focused on the larger topic of prisoner reentry have made reference to halfway houses as a key institution in prisoner aftercare, they lack adequate theorization of these institutions as well as sufficient empirical insights into how they operate. Pollack (2008: 27), who conducted interviews with 68 female ex-prisoners across eight of Canada’s ten provinces, found that residents often felt judged by halfway house staff. In general, halfway house residency (which tends to comprise the first six months of release from prison) was described by the women in her study “as extremely overwhelming, in large part due to the various parole requirements they had to fulfill or risk being returned to the prison” (Pollack 2008: 25, 26). In addition, the fact that “halfway house staff in some areas were often not aware of community resources” meant that their capacity to offer post-release support—such as in the form of connecting ex-prisoners with important community and state services—was fairly limited (Pollack 2008: 25).

Melissa Munn and Chris Bruckert’s (2013) book, *On the Outside: From Lengthy Imprisonment to Lasting Freedom*, provides some more nuanced insights into the halfway house context. Seeking to bring ‘to life’ the success stories of formerly criminalized people, these Canadian scholars conducted in-depth interviews with 20 male former prisoners, who had been imprisoned for periods of 10 years or more and, at the time of the study, had been in the community charge-free for at least 5 years (Munn & Bruckert: 2013: 12). The men in this study “experienced the halfway

house as either liberating or confining—more often, they vacillated between these two emotions” (Munn & Bruckert 2013: 74). The authors’ data draw attention to their participants’ changing perceptions of the halfway house; while interviewees appeared to be generally accepting of halfway houses’ purpose and practices (e.g., constant monitoring, curfews), some of the men reported becoming increasingly frustrated with and resentful of these practices toward the end of their residency. In contrast to Pollack’s (2008) findings, participants in this study were however more positive about their interactions with staff, describing them overall as welcoming and helpful. To date, Munn and Bruckert’s (2013) research provides the most insights into halfway houses in Canada. However, one of the limitations of their as well as Pollack’s research is that it treats and studies halfway houses as a by-product of post-prison supervision (and parole in particular), rather than an empirical object in its own right. As a result, we have some (albeit still limited) insight into how ex-prisoners think about halfway houses, but lack a more nuanced understanding of how these institutions work and operate in ex-prisoners’ lives.

In terms of conceptualization, Canadian-based scholar Anke Allspach’s (2010: 729) description of halfway houses as “hybridized helping institutions” is noteworthy. Drawing on Pollack’s (2008) data set, Allspach’s empirical findings on female ex-prisoners’ experiences of halfway house living mostly replicate Pollack’s. Allspach’s contribution to the study of halfway houses lies in her provision of a more tangible conceptual definition of these facilities. She uses the term “hybridized helping institutions” to explain that while halfway houses are meant to facilitate reintegration (this claim will be revisited in Chapter 5), they primarily focus on ex-prisoner management and regulation, in effect presenting as spaces of transcarceral control (rather than as sites of help and support). Allspach’s conceptualization is important for two reasons. First, it highlights the continuity of penal control beyond prison walls, establishing the halfway houses as one important site within this broader context. Second, it draws attention to one of the pitfalls of these hybridized

penal sites—that is, despite (arguably) benevolent goals, the penal nature of halfway houses means that control, regulation, and risk management are ultimately prioritized over individual help and support. Allspach provides important insights into the halfway house context. However, for a deeper understanding of how these institutions function as spaces of (trans-)carceral control, it is important that scholars continue to study the specific ways in which penal control in prison is continued (but also potentially discontinued and/or re-configured) within the halfway house context. This requires further examination of both halfway house residents' experiences and halfway house workers' strategies of governance. In addition to presenting as spaces of (trans-)carceral control, it is also important that scholars keep in view that halfway houses may take a variety of different forms. Studying halfway houses solely through the lens of post-prison control—as previous researchers have done— may obscure the variegated ways in which halfway houses impinge on ex-prisoners' lives in both repressive and productive ways. In order to gain a rich understanding of these penal sites, it is therefore important that scholars pay attention not only to what halfway houses do, but also to the different meanings ex-prisoners attach to these institutions, and how they navigate this particular phase of their reentry.

This dissertation seeks to extend our understanding of halfway houses as penal sites. Drawing on in-depth interviews with halfway house workers and residents in the city of Edmonton, Alberta (Canada), it provides conceptual and empirical insights into the functions and workings of halfway houses in Canada's penal landscape. Specifically, I propose three novel ways of conceptualizing halfway houses; these are: (1) halfway houses as *liminal sites* (Chapter 3); (2) halfway houses as *mobility producing sites* (Chapter 4); and (3) halfway houses as *open prisons* (Chapter 5). Each of these conceptualizations is underpinned by empirical insights into the perceptions and experiences of halfway house residents and workers. Reflecting on what these different conceptualizations may tell us about prisoner reentry, this dissertation proceeds to suggest three approaches, or different

angles, through which we can think about prisoner reentry, namely (1) reentry as the *outcome of liminal workers' practices* (Chapter 3); (2) reentry as a *spatial-temporal process* (Chapter 4); and (3) reentry as *embedded within a broader critique of punishment and imprisonment* (Chapter 5).

In this chapter I give an overview of the extant relevant literature on punishment and prisoner reentry, and broadly outline the three article-style papers of this dissertation. Readers will note that each of these articles—which comprise Chapters 3, 4, and 5—are self-contained and therefore address different research problems and questions. Each, however, is concerned with illuminating the role, form, and function of halfway houses in Canada's penal landscape. In addition to scholarship on reentry, this dissertation draws on various other strands of literature, including research relating to front-line workers, mobility and carceral geography, and Nordic penality. Therefore, I propose that in addition to punishment scholars, my work may also be of interest to those studying occupational identity, communities, law and society, and comparative criminology.

A Note about Terminology

I recognize that language can be stigmatizing and dehumanizing. In my work, I strive to use language that is sensitive to and grounded in criminalized people's experiences and social realities. As such, I avoid the terms 'criminal' and 'offender', because these terms affix a stigmatizing identity to (ex-)prisoners as part of 'othering' them. While I try to refer to interviewees by their chosen pseudonym as much as possible, I do use the terms prisoner and ex-prisoners throughout this thesis. I prefer to use prisoner over inmate as the former is a more accurate description of people who are held in prison as compared to some other institution. The term 'criminal justice system' is also problematic, as I recognize that for many individuals, this system has little to do with justice. Indigenous people in particular face systemic racism and inequalities in Canada's

‘criminal justice system’, having led some people to argue that Canada’s ‘justice’ system should be described more accurately as an “injustice system” (Monchalin 2016; Rudin 2018).

I am also aware that the term reentry is not unproblematic. Wacquant (2010: 611), for example, has argued that to speak of reentry is inaccurate “[...] insofar as the vast majority of former convicts experience *not reentry but ongoing circulation between the two poles of a continuum of forced confinement*” (italicized by author). Bumiller (2013) too has explained that the term reentry is misplaced since the majority of ex-prisoners were not integrated into “mainstream” society prior to going to prison. While I recognize and largely share these concerns, I use the term reentry throughout this dissertation. I do this partially out of convenience, and partially because I would contend that, while laden with problematic assumptions, the term reentry also denotes a matter of fact (see also Travis 2000)—every person “reenters” the community after prison, regardless of their level of “integration” prior to their incarceration, or whether they remain under penal supervision while in the community. As such, I believe this term offers enough room and flexibility to fill it with different meanings based on (ex-)prisoners’ distinct experiences. I prefer to use reentry over rehabilitation, as the latter is the language used by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), and implies that criminalized people are in need of change and “rehabilitation” and must be “fixed” before they can be accepted back into the community.

The following section outlines my research objectives and guiding questions. Following, I situate my research within broader scholarship on prisoner reentry.

Research Context

While this dissertation focuses mostly on the role of halfway houses, my study developed from a broader interest in understanding how prisoner reentry unfolds or “happens” in a Canadian city.

While there is a fairly robust literature on prisoner reentry in the U.S., much less is known about the Canadian context. I see prisoner reentry primarily as a process that individuals must navigate. This process is significantly shaped by the practices and work carried out by the various organizations involved in prisoner reentry. Especially during the early stages of release, former prisoners are exposed to the influences of different state and non-state organizational forces; those include parole, halfway houses, community reentry organizations, and other treatment providers. These organizations impact on how ex-prisoners experience reentry as well as on how they think about themselves, their past, present, and future. Taking an organizational approach to the study of reentry is thus imperative if we want to capture ex-prisoners' social realities following incarceration.

Organizations moreover provide a "strategic site" for observing different reentry processes (see Marwell & McQuarrie 2013: 131). That is because organizations are not fixed entities or "things," but rather "agglomerations of interests, actors, and practices [...] (ibid.). An empirical focus on reentry-involved organizations enables us to examine the specific practices and governance strategies used by different organizations in particular settings at a particular point in time. Studying these organizations' specific practices (as well as the values and interests underlying these practices) is important given that, as McQuarrie and Marwell (2009: 247-248) have explained, organizational practices play an important role in the "production, reproduction, and arrangement of social relations [...] and individual outcomes and identities." Overall then, organizational research on reentry matters because it can reveal much about how reentry is practiced and organized, as well as how people's lives and social conditions are impacted by these organizations.

The Organizational Reality of Reentry

In recent years, various U.S.-based scholars have called attention to what Mijs (2016: 292) has referred to as the “organizational reality of prisoner reentry.” Departing from the traditional understanding that sees reentry as an individual process, Miller (2014: 307) has suggested that prisoner reentry should be understood—and studied—as a “social institution.” Reentry, in his words, denotes “a welfare-state criminal justice hybrid institution that activates the universe of human service actors, criminal justice agencies, and policy and program planners to assist former prisoners make the transition from prison to their home communities.” This conceptualization draws attention to the heterogeneity of actors that shape and structure reentry, and highlights the importance of empirically elaborating on how such actors seek to govern ex-prisoners as they return to the community.

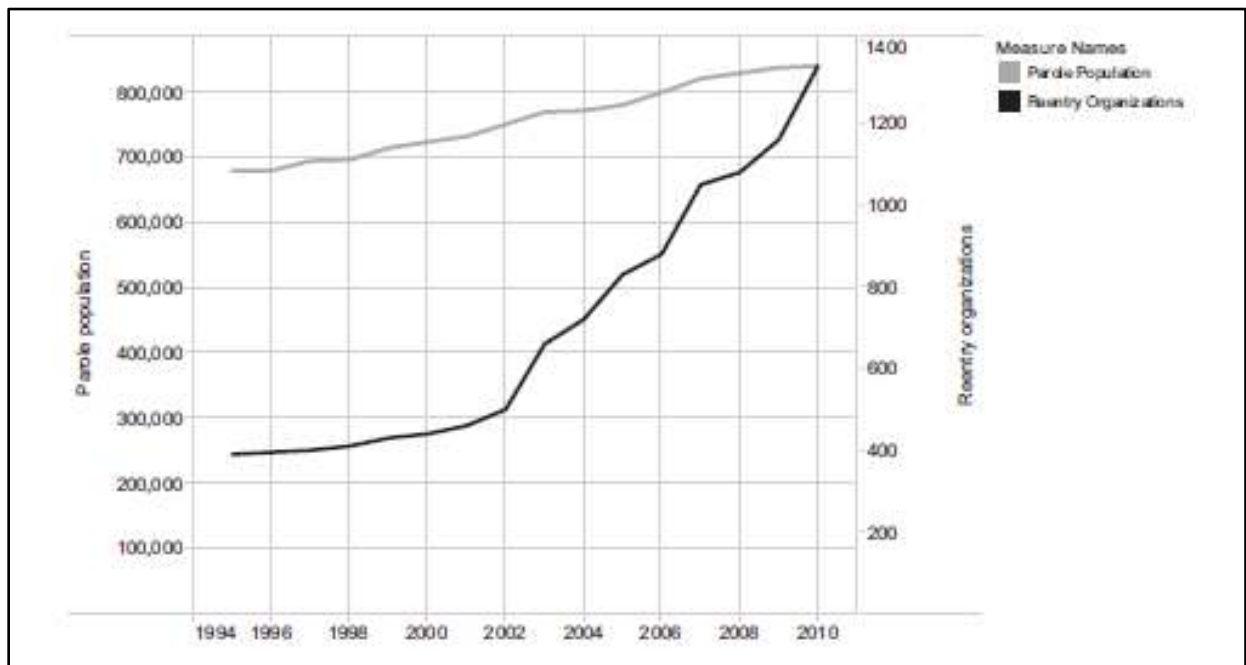
To date, the focus of existing research on the role of organizations in prisoner reentry has been primarily on the work of community prisoner reentry organizations and their approach to and conceptions of former prisoners (Halushka 2016; Kaufman 2015; Miller 2014; Mijs 2016). This particular focus can be explained by the fact that the number of these organizations in the U.S. (where most of this research has been conducted) has increased over the last 20 years. As shown in Figure 1, the number of reentry organizations has risen significantly since the early 2000s (Carson & Golinelli 2014; Mijs 2016),² accompanied by an equally significant rise in the number of people under post-prison supervision (i.e. parole).³ These organizations have taken a central

² Mijs (2016: 294) reports that the number of prisoner reentry organizations in the U.S. increased by 240%, from 390 in 1994 to 1,340 in 2010.

³ The U.S. parolee population too increased from just below 700,000 in 1994 to 840,000 in 2013 (Mijs 2016: 249).

role in providing reentry services, while often maintaining control over ex-prisoners' lives on behalf of the state (see also Thompkins 2010).

Figure 1: Number of reentry organizations and parole population in the U.S.; 1994-2010; Source: Mijs 2016.



While these existing studies (which will be outlined in more depth later) have provided rich insights into the work of reentry organizations, they provide only a partial account of the broader “organizational reality of prisoner reentry.” One of the “side-effects” of this research is that it gives the impression that the reentry organization is the prime site of ex-prisoner reintegration, when it is probably more accurate to think of this organizational force as only one component of a larger web of reentry-involved organizations. Thus, in order to get a fuller account of the organizational reality and governance structures of reentry, it is imperative that scholars extend their focus to the range of actors that, in different or similar ways, bear down on ex-prisoners' lives. Doing so will tell us not only about these different organizations, but will also shed light on the “relational interactions” (Trudeau 2008: 670; see also Marwell & McQuarrie 2013) that exist among these

different organizations. Rather than operating in silos, reentry organizations and halfway houses, for example, are linked both to each other, as well as to additional organizational structures of the penal state (e.g., parole). Paying attention to these relationships is an important aspect of understanding the different processes at play in prisoner reentry.

Research Questions

Against this backdrop, this dissertation seeks to add to and augment existing research on the organizational dimensions of prisoner reentry by examining two organizational forces: halfway houses and prisoner reentry organizations. The guiding questions of this study were:

(1) How do front-line workers at halfway houses and prisoner reentry organizations perceive and perform their role in ex-prisoner reintegration?

(2) How do ex-prisoners, in turn, experience and make use of these same organizations as they navigate their immediate post-prison lives? What place do halfway houses and prisoner reentry organizations occupy in their broader narratives of reentry and punishment?

It is well known that Canada deviates from the U.S. in various measures, including the size of the prisoner and ex-prisoner population (see further below). To the best of my knowledge, we lack quantitative data to show whether (and to what extent) the number of NGO-run reentry organizations in Canada has increased over the years. Nonetheless, in Canada, too, we find that the provision of reentry services primarily happens through the work of these NGO-operated agencies, such as the Elizabeth Fry, John Howard, and St. Leonard's Societies, as well as the

Salvation Army and other local organizations.⁴ These organizations present a stable feature of the urban landscape, providing reentry services (e.g., counselling, programming, material support), while frequently acting as an arm of the state in governing former prisoner populations. Many ex-prisoners access these agencies, either because they are required to do so as per their release conditions, or because they choose to access these organizations on their own terms (see further below). This reality calls for further research on the work carried out by these NGO-operated reentry organizations within the context of Canadian penalty. Specifically, while existing research has started to explore staff perspectives (see further below), ex-prisoners' experiences with these organizations—such as how former prisoners make use and attribute meaning to the space and work of the reentry organization—have received more limited attention.

As mentioned above, halfway houses are small-scale residential facilities that provide basic social services and rehabilitative programming, as well as ongoing supervision of people on conditional release. According to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC 2014), these institutions

“[...] provide a bridge between the institution and the community. They work on a system of gradual, supervised release. Many offer programming for residents. This may include life skills, substance abuse, employment and/or crisis counselling.”

Initially, I had planned to focus solely on the work of halfway houses. However, during preliminary conversations with halfway house staff, it quickly became apparent that halfway houses are connected to community prisoner reentry organizations—symbolically, logistically, and

⁴ Elizabeth Fry Societies, for example, work with criminalized women and girls, providing programs and support both inside and outside the prison. The first Elizabeth Fry Society was established in Vancouver in 1939. Today, there are 26 societies across Canada, providing reentry and in some cases halfway house services (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies 2016). John Howard Societies exist in all 10 provinces as well as the Northwest Territories.

criminologically.⁵ This is when I decided to include both halfway houses and reentry organizations in my research. These two sites are linked insofar as they often operate under the auspices of the same NGO. For example, both the Elizabeth Fry and John Howard Societies operate reentry organizations and halfway houses across Canada. The connections between these two sites also became apparent in later interviews when staff interviewees talked about how they viewed the role and purpose of halfway houses. One halfway house worker (named Kris), for example, stated that “I’d describe it [the halfway house] as like a resource centre, so kind of the middle man between them [residents] and community resources.” This understanding of the halfway house institution is noteworthy, not only because by calling it a “resource centre” this interviewee clearly negates the carceral nature of halfway houses—which is problematic for various reasons (see Chapter 5)—, but also because this understanding speaks to the inter-relationships between halfway houses and other organizations, such as community agencies. Halfway house staff spoke in-depth about their relationships with both community reentry organizations and parole (see Chapter 3). Similarly, staff interviewees at the two reentry organizations included in this study frequently referenced the work of other reentry-involved actors (e.g. halfway house workers) when talking about their own workplace roles and approach to dealing with ex-prisoners.

Borrowing from Marwell and McQuarrie’s (2013) approach, I therefore suggest that we can think of halfway houses and reentry organizations as two components of what can be described as a “prisoner reentry field.” As Marwell and McQuarrie (2013: 133) have explained, “[fields]

⁵ For example, halfway house staff told me in preliminary conversations that they actively encourage residents to seek out employment, counselling, and other services at various reentry organizations. Conversely, front-line workers at some of these organizations also explained that they sometimes visited residents at the halfway houses to provide support.

designate a set of inter-organizational relationships, sometimes collaborative, sometimes antagonistic, in a particular area of action.” This dissertation primarily examines the role of halfway houses within this “prisoner reentry field.” I decided to concentrate on halfway houses in an effort to provide nuanced conceptualizations of and empirical insights into these penal facilities. I show that the inter-organizational relationships that exist between halfway houses and other organizations (specifically parole and reentry organizations) impact on the ways halfway house workers view their work, as well as on the ways ex-prisoners experience reentry. While I focus on halfway houses, I make reference to other aspects of my data in Chapters 2 (Methods) and 6 (Conclusion) in an effort to provide a fuller account of my dissertation project.

In the following section, I provide an outline of penal developments in both the U.S.—where the bulk of reentry research has been conducted—and Canada in order to contextualize my study.

Prisoner Reentry—Development and Context

Over the last 15 years or so, there has been a proliferation of prisoner reentry research, especially in the U.S. Some scholars even say that reentry has become the “new buzzword” in academic criminology (Austin 2001). In light of U.S. incarceration rates and other carceral practices, the prominence of reentry research in American criminology (and correctional scholarship in particular) is hardly surprising. As is well documented, the U.S. has experienced a dramatic rise in imprisonment since the 1970s. Today, roughly 2.3 million people find themselves behind bars, compared to approximately 300,000 in the 1970s (Prison Policy Initiative 2017). In 2016, there were 582 prisoners per 100,000 adult residents. Attention has also been paid to the ways in which practices of post-prison supervision (i.e., parole) have led to an expansion of carceral power in the community. The rise of “mass incarceration” in the U.S. has been paralleled by an equally

significant increase in the number of individuals under community supervision (i.e., probation or parole)—a development commonly referred to as “mass supervision” (see McNeill & Beyens for European context 2013; see also Miller & Stuart 2017; Phelps 2017). Approximately 4.8 million adult residents (equivalent to 1 in 51 adults) are subject to community supervision in the U.S. (Herberman & Bonczar 2014); at year end 2015, 870,500 were on parole alone. The phenomenon of “mass supervision” is accompanied by concerns regarding high rates of ex-prisoner rearrest and reincarceration. According to the *National Institute of Justice* (2014), around 2/3 of former prisoners are rearrested within three years of release; the majority experience rearrest by the end of the first year. Based on these numbers, various U.S. scholars have noted that reentry, rather than unfolding as a smooth linear process, should be understood instead as one part of an ongoing cycle between incarceration and reentry (Blumstein & Beck 2005; Wacquant 2001, 2010). Wacquant (2001, 2010) has forcefully highlighted in much of his work how a majority of ex-prisoners in the U.S. cycle between the prison and the urban ghetto, rather than rejoining the community as permanent members. For them, he has explained, “reentry into society would be more accurately described as prelude to another entry into the prison” (Wacquant 2010: 611).

The rise of U.S. reentry scholarship, thus, has been fueled by the expansion of the U.S. carceral state and its attending consequences for ex-prisoners themselves, their families, communities, and the state. With a substantial and, until recently, steadily increasing number of individuals going in and out of prison, communities are increasingly tasked with the reintegration of former prisoners, most of whom lived at the margins of society prior to their incarceration. Not surprisingly, much of existing prisoner reentry research—in particular early scholarship—has focused on documenting the various challenges returning prisoners face upon release, with the goal of creating policy that serves to ease these challenges and limit reoffending (e.g., Petersilia 2003; Travis

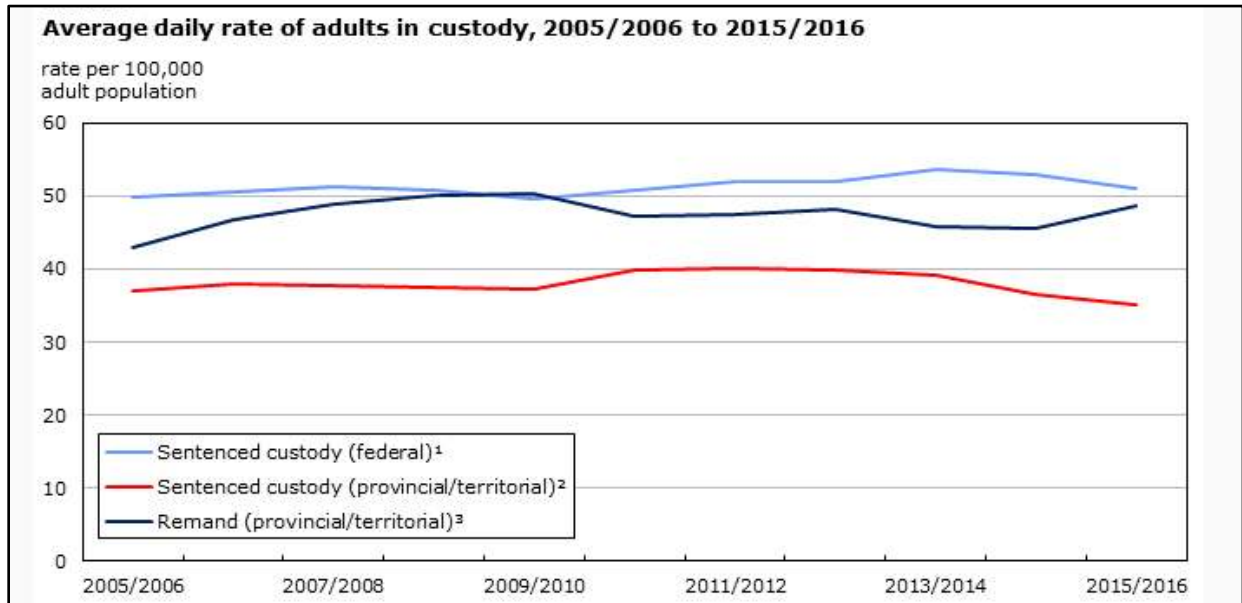
2000). Research conducted by the *Urban Institute* in particular has contributed much to this work (for an overview see Solomon, Visher, LaVigne, & Osborne 2006).

Imprisonment and Reentry in Canada

The Canadian criminal justice system has been described as a carceral outlier in terms of global incarceration trends. Compared to the U.S. as well as other western jurisdictions (e.g., U.K., New Zealand, Netherlands), Canada has exhibited a fairly stable imprisonment rate since the 1970s, currently lying at 114 per 100,000 residents. Looked at globally, Canada's incarceration rate can be described as moderate. While lower compared to rates in the U.S. or the U.K., Canada's imprisonment rate exceeds those of various European countries and regions, including France, Germany, and Scandinavia.

In Canada, individuals sentenced by the court to a prison term of at least two years serve time in federal penitentiaries, operated by the Correctional Service Canada (CSC), whereas those with a prison sentence of less than two years are held in provincial/territorial correctional centres. The latter are the responsibility of the respective ten provinces' and three territories' ministries. As Figure 2 demonstrates, sentenced custody rates for both federally and provincially incarcerated individuals have been relatively stable over the years.

Figure 2: Average daily rate of adults in custody, 2005/2006 to 2015/16. Source: Reitano 2017



Canada's prison system has traditionally been noted for its commitment to rehabilitation and its provision of gender appropriate support (e.g., Brodeur 2007; Doob & Webster 2006). Compared to the U.S., it has been argued that Canada has managed to avoid a "punitive turn" (e.g., Meyer & O'Malley 2005). Doob and Webster (2006), for example, have attributed Canada's stable imprisonment rates to a combination of "protective factors" (e.g., appointment instead of election of judges, sentencing guidelines) and absence of "risk factors" (e.g., legislative attempts to reduce incarceration of disadvantaged groups). Canadian policy-makers have traditionally called for restraint in the use of prison time (Webster & Doob 2015). More recently, however, various Canadian-based scholars have noted that since the passing of the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* in 2012 under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper of the Conservative Party, the Canadian state has adopted an increasingly punitive and regulatory approach to crime (Hermer & Mosher 2002; Moore & Hannah-Moffat 2005; Munn & Bruckert 2013; Ricciardelli 2014; Webster & Doob 2015). Examples of this new approach include the increase of existing and imposition of new

mandatory minimum penalties (e.g., for trafficking, molestation), and various limitations that have been placed on judges' ability to impose conditional sentences. In addition, the process of accelerated parole review⁶ has been abolished, and various restrictions have been made to the pardon process⁷ (now called record suspension). To date, however, these legislative reforms have not resulted in any discernible changes to Canada's incarceration rates (Doob & Webster 2016; Webster & Doob 2015).

Nonetheless, these legislative reforms are reflective of changes in penal ideology and values. Doob and Webster (2015: 312), for example, have noted that “the very notion of citizenship appears to be changing whereby ‘offender’ is increasingly seen as a permanent identity, distinct from ‘law-abiding citizens’.” This ideological shift is evidenced in both state rhetoric—i.e. increasing efforts to ‘other’ criminalized populations by differentiating them from ostensibly ‘law-abiding’ individuals—as well as concrete legislative changes that have made it harder for people to “shed a ‘criminal’ label” (ibid.). The criminal label has become stickier; law and order have trumped concerns over rehabilitation and second chances. Overall then, we find a penal field in Canada that is, in scale and scope, much more restrained than that of the U.S., yet one that has also faced punitive change. Borrowing from Goodman and Dawe (2016: 808), “[the] result is a penal field in Canada that is complex, variegated, full of struggle and conflict and, of course, distinctly

⁶ In 1992, accelerated parole reviews (APR) were introduced in Canada for most property offenders and other non-violent offenders serving their first federal sentence. APRs ensured that these offenders' cases were reviewed by the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) in advance, so that offenders would be granted parole as soon as possible, without the PBC having to hold a parole hearing. APRs also created a presumption in favour of parole insofar as the PBC was not to refuse parole unless it had reasonable grounds to believe that the offender would commit a violent offence prior to her/his warrant expiry date. APRs were eliminated through Bill C-53 and Bill C-59 (Abolition of Early Parole Act, 2011).

⁷ The pardon process has become more restrictive in various ways. Offenders have to wait longer before they can apply for record suspension, certain groups of offenders have been excluded from the ability to apply for record suspension, and application fees have been raised.

Canadian.” While clearly distinguished from the U.S. by its proportionately smaller population of prisoners and ex-prisoners, the Canadian penal field provides an interestingly complex, and to date understudied, context in which to inspect how prisoner reentry unfolds on the ground.

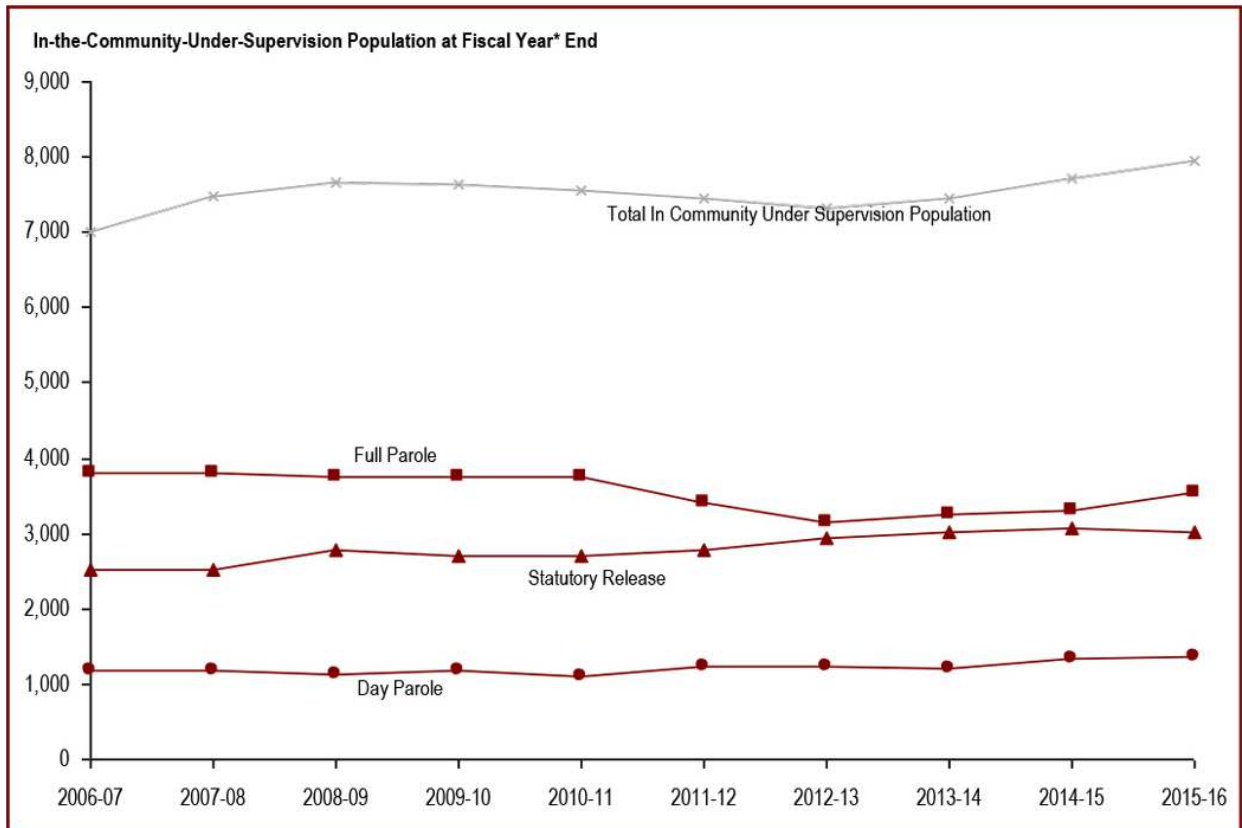
Conditional Release in Canada

Post-prison supervision plays an essential role in prisoner reentry. The figures presented here focus on federal ex-prisoners in Canada, since these are the ones released to a halfway house and thus of interest to this research. In 2015/2016, the rate of federal adult offenders under community supervision (for definition see below) was at 28 per 100,000 individuals (Reitano 2017). These people are subject to a number of conditions (e.g., curfews, treatment, residency requirements), violations of which may result in reincarceration. According to CSC, such conditions ensure a “gradual release” from prison to the community, “helping them [ex-prisoners] adjust to life beyond institutional walls” (see CSC 2017). For federal prisoners, all decisions regarding conditional release are determined by the Parole Board of Canada (PBC), based on information and assessment provided by the prison administration, prisoners’ institutional parole officers, and other actors.⁸. According to the PBC, the goal of post-prison supervision is to “contribute to public safety by helping offenders re-integrate into society as law-abiding citizens through a gradual, controlled, and supported release with conditions” (see PBC 2011). Public Safety Canada (2016) reports that prisoners released on parole have lower recidivism rates compared to those released on their statutory release date. The timed, controlled, and gradual release from prison, in conjunction with the provision of rehabilitative programming, appear to positively impact recidivism rates. While

⁸ In the provinces and territories, only Ontario and Quebec have their own parole authorities. The Parole Board of Canada handles decision from all other provinces and territories.

the PBC decides on the timing and nature of conditional release, CSC is responsible for carrying out the actual supervision regime. As such, NGO-run halfway houses contract with CSC for the supervision of federal ex-prisoners on conditional release, and NGO-employed halfway house staff regularly work together with CSC-employed parole officers. Figure 3 below provides information on the number of federal ex-prisoners under community supervision.

Figure 3: In-the-community-under-supervision population. Source: Public Safety Canada 2016



As shown in Figure 3, there are three forms of conditional release in Canada for federal offenders. Individuals are usually eligible for *full parole* after serving 1/3 of their sentence in custody. These people can establish their own residency in the community, but remain under the supervision of a parole officer. Prisoners are usually eligible for *day parole* six months prior to their full parole

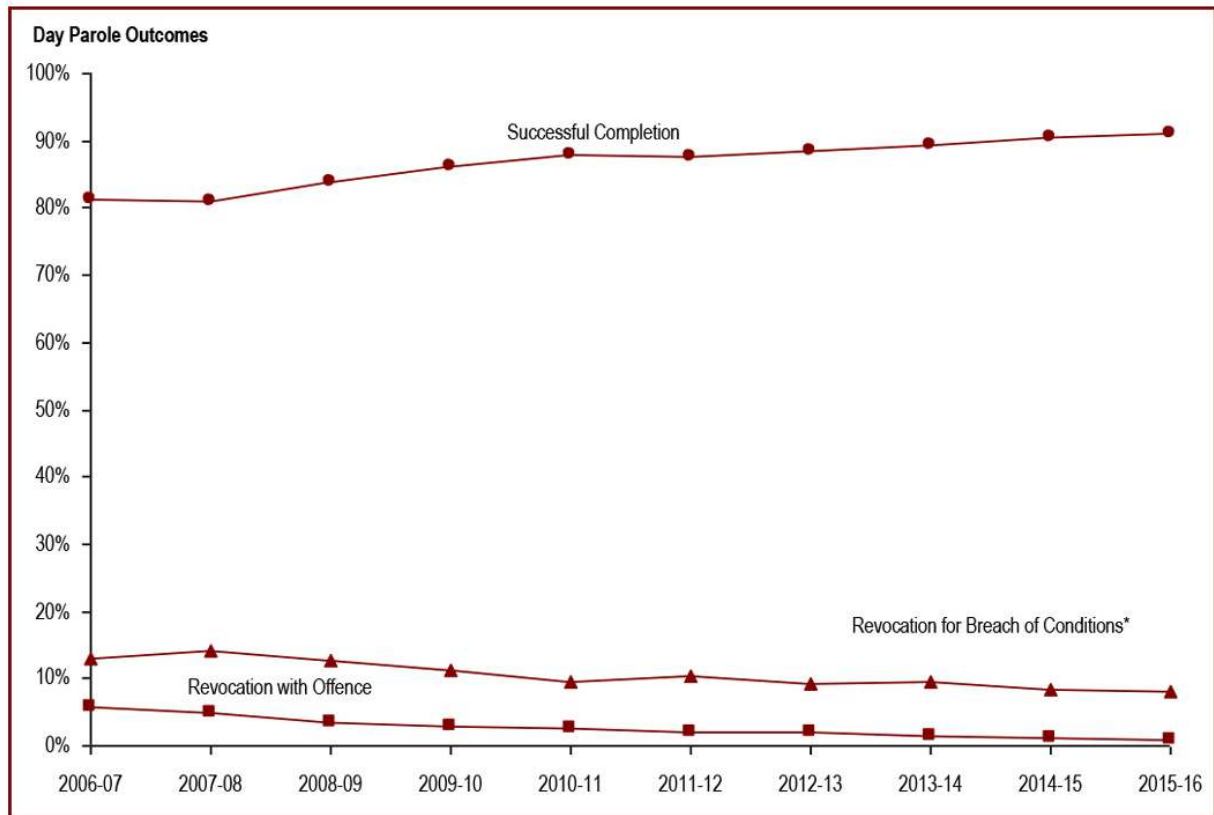
eligibility date. Day parolees are permitted to spend their day in the community (i.e., for purposes of work, training, and/or programming), but have to return nightly to a supervised residence (i.e., a halfway house). Halfway houses, therefore, are primarily geared toward day parolees, although it has been suggested that the release status of the halfway house population appears to be changing toward a greater proportion of residents on statutory release (see Bell & Trevethan 2004).

Parole approval rates in Canada are relatively high. According to official statistics, 75% of applications for day parole are approved (Government of Canada 2016). Prisoners whose applications for parole are denied are usually released on their *statutory release* date, i.e., after serving 2/3 of their prison sentence. Statutory release is a release by law; as such, offenders are almost always released after serving 2/3 of their sentence unless there is a substantial risk of serious reoffending, as decided by the PBC. Still, statutory release is considered a form of conditional release and as a result, these individuals, too, have conditions attached to their release, are supervised by a parole officer, and are subject to the same revocation regime as parolees. All ex-prisoners on conditional release are subject to supervision (by a parole officer) until their *warrant expiry date* (i.e., the date their criminal sentence officially ends, as imposed by the court at the time of sentencing).

It is worth noting that the majority of federal ex-prisoners on conditional release successfully complete⁹ day and full parole, at a rate of 91% and 88% respectively (Government of Canada 2016). Figure 4 includes the rates of successful completion for day parolees (i.e., those residing at a halfway houses following their release from prison) between 2005/2006 and 2015/2016.

⁹ Day parole and full parole are considered successful if they were completed without a return to prison for a breach of conditions or for a new offence (Public Safety Canada 2016).

Figure 4: Completion rates for federal day parole in Canada; 2006/07-2015/16. Source: Public Safety Canada 2016.



Among the population of federal releasees, those on statutory release have the lowest rate of successful completion at a rate of 63% (Public Safety Canada 2016). Around 30% of people released from prison on their statutory release date are reincarcerated for breach of conditions prior to their sentence expiry, while roughly 10% have their conditional release revoked due to the commission of a new offence. Breach of conditions presents the main reason for reincarceration for all federal ex-prisoners regardless of their particular status (i.e., day parole, full parole, conditional release).

Community supervision is defined by CSC as consisting of “three interrelated activities – supervision, programming and community involvement” (CSC 2007). This definition establishes post-prison supervision as an inherently hybrid practice, one that manages to seemingly combine

the logics and goals of care and control with ease. Community actors are described as a particularly important force in prisoner reentry, their involvement symbolizing according to CSC (2007), “the community’s willingness to accept back those offenders who reform themselves.” This study then interrogates how community actors—in this case, halfway house workers and reentry staff—view their role in prisoner reentry and engage with the responsibilities put on them.

With this context established, I now go on to situate my research in the extant literature on prisoner reentry. I provide an overview of existing studies focused on the barriers to reentry in order to draw out some of the lived realities of former prisoner as they reenter the community. Following, I highlight two specific research areas, namely (1) the role of NGOs in prisoner reentry; and (2) post-prison supervision. I explain how my study relates to and seeks to expand on these topics.

Prisoner Reentry—Overview of Existing Research

Much of early reentry research, especially that conducted by various leading U.S. criminologists (for example, Joan Petersilia (2003) and Jeremy Travis (2000)), was driven by practical concerns: How should the state and society manage the return of such an enormous number of prisoners back into U.S. communities? Much of their work thus focused on informing and creating policy and programs aimed at serving what was believed to be the “primary objective, for offender and criminal justice agency alike,” namely “to prevent the recurrence of antisocial behavior” (Travis 2000: 2). Driven by this goal, their work started by documenting the barriers to successful reintegration (and lack of reoffending), and considering ways to ease these barriers as well as limit rates of recidivism.

As a consequence, we now have a large body of research that examines the challenges of prisoner reentry. Specifically, much work has focused on discussing barriers to securing and retaining

formal employment (e.g., Richards & Jones 2004; Petersilia 2003; Western, Kling & Weiman, 2001). Scholars here have found that ex-prisoners face severe difficulties in (re-)establishing employment, primarily because of the stigma attached to having a criminal record (e.g., Harding 2003; O'Brien 2001; Pager 2003; Western, King, & Weiman 2001; Wheelock, Uggen & Hlavka 2011). If ex-prisoners are able to enter or (re-)enter the labor market, they are most often limited to low-paying and low-skilled jobs. Employment, it has been shown, reduces the risk of recidivism (e.g., Gillis & Nafekh 2005), while offering a number of material as well as non-material benefits, such as a sense of autonomy and self-worth.

In addition to employment, scholars have also highlighted the importance of family support for successful reentry (e.g., Dodge & Pogrebin 2001; O'Brien 2001). For example, Travis and Waul (2003) have pointed out that families can act as a “buffering agent” against the many difficulties returning prisoners encounter; for example, they may be able to offer a place to live, and/or provide important moral support to “go straight.” Many ex-prisoners, however, find it challenging to re-connect with family, partners or friends, and to build strong social ties upon release; as a consequence, social isolation is often felt (e.g., Brown & Ross 2010). Female ex-prisoners specifically tend to encounter difficulties in the process of regaining custody of their children. Dodge and Pogrebin (2001), for example, have reported how their participants (54 female ex-prisoners) had to prove to child service workers that they were “good” and “responsible” mothers which created an additional burden and compounded existing feelings of having failed normative conceptions of motherhood by virtue of their incarceration.

Other reentry challenges discussed in existing research include dealing with physical and mental illness as well as drug use, attempting to access health care (e.g., Hammett, Roberts & Kennedy 2001), finding housing, meeting basic needs (see also Richards & Jones 2004), and being

stigmatized and “othered.” In my study, getting ID was another barrier many ex-prisoner interviewees mentioned and which they found particularly inhibiting as ID is required for things such as signing a rental agreement, or opening a bank account.

Research on the challenges of reentry has provided critical insights into the various barriers individuals face as they reenter the community. It has also pointed to some of the shortcomings of both prison and community programs in helping former prisoners navigate release. This literature however has certain limitations. One limitation is that it accepts (without much reflection) a neoliberal, correctionalist notion of recidivism as the appropriate indicator of “successful” reintegration (see also Hallett 2012). By that I mean, reentry scholars have typically defined ‘successful’ reintegration in fairly narrow terms—i.e. lack of offending and formal employment—, overlooking that (re-)integration itself is a subjective state that can have different meanings to different people (see also Maidment 2006). Ex-prisoners are problematically conceived of in this research as people who are at risk of reoffending yet capable of “successful” reentry and a crime-free life if provided with the necessary help and intervention. Underlying this conception is the assumed benefit or value of state intervention, reentry programs, and the everyday regulation of criminalized populations. Research on the barriers of reentry however has largely failed to critically examine the role, purpose, and effects of such penal interventions and how they function in ex-prisoners’ lives. In other words, the relationship between prisoner reentry and broader processes of penal governance has been neglected.

More recently, a number of scholars have started to respond to these limitations by anchoring their research on prisoner reentry within the larger field of punishment and society. In doing so, they have adopted a broader approach to prisoner reentry, one that moves away from correctionalist questions with ameliorative aims (e.g., how to reduce recidivism; how to ensure public safety) and

focuses instead on questions of penal governance. This dissertation joins this growing (yet still limited) group of prisoner reentry scholars writing within the broader context of punishment and society. Below, I outline certain aspects of this scholarship.

The Role of NGOs in Prisoner Reentry

NGOs occupy a key role in prisoner reentry. Their practices and strategies of governance are varied, ranging from very ‘hands-on’ techniques of responsabilization and moral reform to more ‘hands-off’ approaches that stress the importance of welfare services and safe spaces for ex-prisoners.

On a macro level, the involvement of NGOs in prisoner reentry speaks to the responsabilization of non-state actors in the field of punishment. In the *Culture of Control*, Garland (2001) has discussed what he referred to as “responsibilization strategy.” Responsibilization, as a mode of governing crime, seeks “to spread responsibility for crime control onto agencies, organizations and individuals that operate outside the criminal justice system and to persuade them to act appropriately” (Garland 2001: 124-125). As he has further explained, it

[...] involves the central government seeking to act upon crime not in a direct fashion through state agencies (police, courts, prisons, social work, etc.) but instead by acting indirectly, seeking to activate action on the part of non-state agencies and organizations. [...] Its key phrases are terms such as 'partnership', 'inter-agency cooperation', 'the multi-agency approach', 'activating communities', creating 'active citizens', 'help for self-help' (Garland 1996: 452).

The message of responsabilization is that government alone is not responsible for dealing with crime and criminalized populations; other actors are called upon to recognize that they too share responsibility in this regard and that they must act accordingly. Community organizations in particular have been increasingly responsabilized to provide rehabilitative programs and services

to former prisoners previously supplied directly by the state (see also Tomczak 2016). This development has been referred to by Miller (2014: 327) as “carceral devolution,” defined as

“[...] a reformist shift in criminal justice and social welfare policy and practice where the state’s capacities to rehabilitate prisoners have been offloaded onto community-based actors and organizations.”

Importantly, responsabilization does not mean the simple ‘off-loading’ of state functions onto other actors; rather it presents a new form of state governance, referred to by Garland (1996) as “governing-at-a-distance.” In the context of prisoner reentry that means that while the state has downloaded key responsibilities to non-state actors, it has not relinquished its control over ex-prisoners' lives. Many individuals remain under correctional control long after their release from prison and are required, as per their release conditions, to participate in the rehabilitative programs provided by these organizations.

In recent years, various U.S.-based scholars have started to examine the work of prisoner reentry organizations. For example, Nicole Kaufman’s (2015) work has discussed how reentry organizations seek to “incorporate” ex-prisoners into the community. She finds that there are two broad groups of organizations. The first group, which she has referred to as “classic reentry organizations,” are those “specializing in the state’s preferred policy areas,” namely treatment and “economic incorporation” (Kaufmann 2015: 11). These organizations, according to Kaufman (2015: 12), subscribe to the philosophy that ex-prisoners have “the potential to be citizens” provided that they are willing to receive state-prescribed treatment, and ultimately change into “productive,” law abiding citizens. The second group is referred to as “broader incorporation reentry organizations,” and they differ from the first insofar as they “[engage] in a variety of activities and issues beyond those described in state policy.” Specifically, these organizations focus more on political and religious incorporation, and see ex-prisoners as deserving of

citizenship and inclusion. According to Kaufman (2015: 15), these differences show that “the work typically called reentry is not uniform, is institutionally patterned, and includes quite varied assumptions among NGOs about the nature of community and formerly incarcerated people's relationship to citizenship.”

Based on his study of a Chicago reentry organization, Miller (2014: 317) has argued that reentry should be understood as a “people changing institution” that “seeks to transform former prisoners into ‘productive citizens’ through programs that locate the inner life as the primary site of social policy intervention.” Staff at the reentry organization he studied worked to enhance ex-prisoners’ soft skills and personal characteristics. Given that reentry organizations have little to no control over the supply and demand of available jobs, they intervene instead “[...] in areas where they can have some impact, namely in the psychological disposition and as an extension, the ‘employability’ of the former prisoner” (Miller 2015: 314).

Halushka (2016), in his ethnographic study of a “Workforce Development Program” run by a reentry organization in a northeastern U.S. city, has made similar observations. Clients of this program received lessons in what Halushka calls “work wisdom,” which involved teaching participants a number of soft skills and cultural scripts that were believed to help former prisoners establish contact with employers. Such lessons included “teaching clients how to (1) disclose discrediting information and communicate remorse; (2) tailor their style of dress, speech, and bodily comportment to avoid evoking negative stereotypes; (3) negotiate the tacit norms of workplace culture; and (4) remain confident and resilient in the face of rejection” (Halushka 2016: 72). As Halushka (2016: 86) has explained, “lessons of work wisdom were meant to offer clients a short-term solution to this problem by providing former prisoners with the dramaturgical

resources to perform the role of a rehabilitated and respectable citizen during interactions with employers.”

These studies demonstrate the emphasis put on the remoralization and reconstitution of ex-prisoners’ selves and ways of thinking. In line with neoliberalist ideas, former prisoners are encouraged to see themselves as active subjects responsible for managing their own risks and making prudent choices that ensure a self-sufficient future. If they reoffend and/or are reincarcerated, they are labelled as blameworthy, and face further criminalization and exclusion (Mijs 2016). This individualistic focus is not unique to the work of reentry organizations, but rather symptomatic of modern forms of penal governance (see also Goodman 2012; Gowan & Whethstone 2012). As Nicholas Rose (2000: 201) has written,

The aim, once more, is responsabilization: to reconstruct self-reliance in those who are excluded. But responsabilization here takes a characteristic form. Within this new politics of conduct, the problems of problematic persons are reformulated as moral or ethical problems, that is to say, problems in the ways in which such persons conduct themselves and their existence.

Former prisoners are subjected to a “post incarceration moral order” that expects “inward focus on self-improvement’ (Rumpf 2014: 16).

An omission in these studies of reentry is that they have focused primarily on the reentry programs/classes of these organizations and as a result, have neglected other aspects of these organizations’ work. Specifically, reentry organizations—in addition to carrying out reentry programs (e.g., employment programs, soft skills classes) —provide a range of basic welfare services to ex-prisoners and the urban poor (e.g., clothing, food, bus tickets). Since reentry programs are often mandatory for ex-prisoners on conditional release, they have a more coercive feel to them, and it should not surprise that staff of these programs seek to influence ex-prisoners in direct ways. By contrast, ex-prisoners may access welfare services and other aspects of reentry

organizations on their own will. Thus, studying the full range of programs and services is important as it offers a more holistic view of their specific practices and governance strategies, as well as additional insights into ex-prisoners' experiences with these organizations and their reasons for accessing them. My project, which involved observational fieldwork at two prisoner reentry organizations, therefore adds to existing studies of reentry organizations by examining the meanings ex-prisoners attach to both the space and services of the reentry organization. Additionally, it provides insight into the ways reentry staff conceive of clients within the space of these organizations' drop-in rooms.

By examining both halfway house and reentry organizations—both run under the auspices of NGOs—my study, overall, seeks to broaden our knowledge of the varied practices of reentry-involved NGOs, including the ideology, values, and interests underlying these practices.

Front-Line Workers at the Interface of Care and Control

Some work in the broader field of punishment and penal control has also examined the relationships between state and non-state agencies. NGOs have been conceptualized as “junior partners” (Wolch 1999), insofar as they have been given responsibility but not control over service provision. This conceptualization however is problematic as it fails to provide a more nuanced explanation of how NGOs navigate their particular role within the broader context of responsabilization.

Some research has therefore started to problematize this “junior partner” view, suggesting that the relationship between non-state and state organizations is more complex and not as top-down, one-dimension as is often assumed. Trudeau (2008), for example, has put forth that while non-state agencies (in his case, government-funded, non-profit service providers) have limited control over

service delivery, they nonetheless find ways to circumvent what are perceived as limiting government regulations, such as by providing but not counting services to officially ineligible clients. His work as well as that of others (e.g., Hannah-Moffat & Maurutto 2012: 212), thus, has sought to clarify that “community agencies are not purely passive agents—they meaningfully and reciprocally affect penal processes.” This can go two ways. For example, in their study of specialized courts, Canadian-based scholars Quirouette, Hannah-Moffat, and Maurutto’s (2015: 379) have shown that non-state actors can resist punitive practices. As they have stated, “[although] community partners [in specialized courts] were compelled to undertake monitoring/reporting roles, therapeutic, social service professionals exercised professional discretion to resist or influence the court.” Other studies however have found that non-state agencies also contribute to the creation of new forms of control. For example, Castellano (2009: 441) has explained that the non-profit caseworkers in her study of jail-alternative programs employed various tactics to reject certain clients, such as by labelling them “not treatment amenable”.

Drawing on these scholars’ insights, this dissertation asks: How do halfway house workers perform their governing roles? How do they perceive their relationship and interactions with the Canadian state? These workers’ views and practices are of significance and interest insofar as halfway house staff operate in three ‘liminal’ contexts. First, halfway house workers occupy a liminal position, given their extensive supervision responsibilities yet limited decision-making power. Second, halfway house residents occupy a liminal position, insofar as they are no longer incarcerated but remain under penal control and regulation. And lastly, the halfway institution itself can be viewed as a liminal space given its transitional nature and position between the prison and the community. I therefore examine how liminality affects halfway house workers’ self-conceptions and ways of dealing with former prisoners.

The Role of Supervision in Prisoner Reentry

It has been widely acknowledged that carceral control extends beyond the boundaries of the prison, as a broad range of disciplinary institutions—what Foucault (1977) has referred to as a “carceral archipelago”—infuse techniques of regulation, surveillance, and correction through the social body. To date, however, relatively few studies have examined these institutions from a micro perspective. In 2015, Robinson noted that the topic of community supervision in particular continues to play a fairly marginal role in punishment and society scholarship. Specifically, while some studies have examined *practices* of parole, much less research has detailed the *sites* of regulation and confinement that exist beyond the prison. Halfway houses present a fruitful setting for examining practices of post-prison supervision within an institutional context.

Post-prison supervision is framed by the state as an important step in the pursuit of public safety (see CSC 2007). More critical criminologists however have clarified that parole rules, such as curfews, residency conditions, or having to report intimate relationships to one's parole officer, have the primary effect of controlling people's geographical mobility, sexuality, and other aspects of everyday life, while keeping former prisoners under the constant threat of reincarceration should they fail to comply with these conditions. Parole essentially widens the carceral net, keeping individuals entangled in a system of transcarceral control (Maidment 2006). These insights offer a critical counter image to official discourses.

In recent years, scholars have started to examine the ways parole functions as a technique “targeted governance” (Valverde 2003: 438) aimed at regulating parolees' lives and personhood (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat 2009; Werth 2013, 2012). Importantly, parole not only manages ex-prisoners' risk to reoffend; it also seeks to produce normative, governable subjects by expecting ex-prisoners to understand themselves and act in line with institutional narratives of risk, responsibility, and

ethical self-reformation (Bosworth 2007; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat 2009; Werth 2012). Penal techniques, as Bosworth (2007: 68) has noted, “[are] more than just a structure for dealing with those who break the law. [They are] also a primary means of creating accountable and thus governable and obedient citizens.” Parole, some scholars have added, simultaneously promotes autonomy and self-governance. As posited by Canadian-based scholars Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009: 533) in their analysis of how women parolees are constituted in official parole decisions, “women eligible for, and granted, parole must demonstrate ‘responsibility’ and a general capacity for self-governance, cooperate with correctional efforts to reintegrate and reform (i.e. normalize) them, and understand themselves within gendered institutional narratives of risk, responsibility and self-change.” The strength of Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat’s (2009: 538) analysis lies in their theorization of parole as a penal strategy that is both repressive and productive—repressive insofar as it increases surveillance, and productive insofar as it activates parolees’ capacity to self-change.

To date, only a select number of scholars have provided insights into how parolees experience parole governance (see Johnson 2015; Opsal 2015; Werth 2012). Their research has largely focused on how individuals respond to parole rules as well as how parole rules impact people’s everyday lives, such as their ability to find employment or reconnect with family and friends. Opsal’s (2015) research with female parolees found that parole conditions often complicate reentry for returning prisoners and conflict with the demands of everyday life as well as parolees’ own conceptions of what it means to “go straight” (Maruna 2001). Adding to these findings, Werth (2012), in his research with 24 parolees in the U.S., has suggested that parolees frequently disobey those parole rules that they perceive as unhelpful or hindering. As he has noted (Werth 2012: 340), “participants complied with those rules that they perceived essential, observing only those that

were part of their own construction of parole.” In an effort to negotiate the tension between adhering to one's parole conditions and violating them in an effort to serve one's own immediate needs, Werth (2012), moreover, has argued that parolees “engage selectively” with their parole conditions. Specifically, individuals in his study complied with those conditions they believed were necessary to avoid reincarceration, but violated those experienced as impeding their efforts to rebuild their lives. Werth’s (2012: 341) research shows that while parole presents a largely repressive force in people’s lives, parolees are also agents insofar as they “[construct] parole in a way that allowed the rules to become open to interpretation, alteration, and restructuring.”

Based on the understanding that “imprisonment is not the only painful sanction; community penalties can also be experienced as painful” (Durnescu 2011: 532), a growing number of scholars have started to examine the “pains” associated with community supervision. This research has mainly focused on probationers’ experiences (see e.g., Durnescu 2011; Hayes 2015), but it is nonetheless important for understanding parolees’ realities. Based on interviews with 43 probationers in Romania, Durnescu (2011), for example, has found that the practice of probation induces various “pains” among probationers, such as “deprivation of autonomy,” “deprivation of time,” and “life under a tremendous threat.” Adding to this research, McNeill’s (2018: 2) most recent work seeks to further “deepen our understanding of how people experience its [i.e., supervision’s] penal character.” Writing within the European context, he has suggested that we conceptualize people’s experiences of supervision as a ‘Malopticon’ (as opposed to a Panopticon). Rather than being hyper-visible, as research on penal supervision has generally suggested, people under supervision, he has explained, “suffer the pain of not being seen; at least not as they would recognize themselves” (McNeill 2018: 19). Subjects of the ‘Malopticon’ are seen badly and *as bad* (McNeill: 19; italicized by author).

My research seeks to join and add to this body of work by examining ex-prisoners' experiences of supervision within the institutional and organizational context of the halfway house. This context matters because halfway house residents face a number of institution-specific circumstances that impact on their experiences of supervision. For example, unlike non-halfway house parolees, they are exposed to the dual control of halfway house workers and parole officers. They are also forced to continue to share their living space (and in many cases bedrooms) with other residents over whom they have little control. These institutional realities can induce additional "pains," and they shape the penal character of post-prison supervision. In the case of Canada, the halfway house context takes added significance insofar as halfway houses are located in urban centres; as a result, for people from more rural areas, halfway house residency and supervision can be associated with prolonged dislocation from families and former social networks.

Ex-prisoners' experiences provide critical insights into the form, function, and workings of halfway houses. As such, they contribute to our understanding of the micro-workings of these penal sites, "the definitional boundaries of the category of 'punishment'" (Hannah-Moffat & Lynch 2012: 119), and the symbolic and operational connections between halfway houses and their "criminal justice adjacencies" (Lara-Millán & Van Cleve 2016) like the prison or the prisoner reentry organization.

Dissertation Structure and Overview

This dissertation takes as its starting point the idea that punishment is "braided" (see e.g., Hutchinson 2006: 443; Hannah-Moffat & Maurutto 2012). Punishment (or control) and rehabilitation (or treatment), as scholars have explained, braid and blend together in single penal practices and sites. This "braided" nature of punishment has been discussed in both macro and micro penal accounts. Most recently, Goodman, Page, and Phelps (2017: 1) have discussed various

examples from different eras of U.S. penal policy with the goal of showing how different penal logics and practices have always coexisted, been combined, and interconnected within wider penal fields marked by “struggle between actors with different types and amounts of power” (Goodman et al. 2017: 8). Other scholars have provided micro examinations of different penal institutions (e.g., specialized courts), that similarly show that “more reintegrative and preventative strategies such as rehabilitation, welfare, and treatment are often applied in conjunction with punitive elements that can be controlling and repressive” (Hannah-Moffat & Maurutto 2012: 202; see also Goddard 2012; Singh 2011).

In line with this, I view the halfway house as an example or manifestation of the “braided” nature of punishment. As such, my purpose is not to answer whether halfway houses are about punishment/control or rehabilitation/care. Like most penal sites and practices, they have elements of both. As Kolind et al. (2017:305) have noted, rehabilitation/punishment “is not a question of either/or, but of both/and.” Rather, I seek to explore how halfway houses’ “braided” nature plays out in practice and how it affects both the experiences of residents and workers within these penal sites. For example, in Chapter 3, I show how halfway house workers negotiate their role as careworkers and supervisors in relation to halfway house residents and parole officers. In Chapter 4, I discuss how despite the “pains” associated with halfway house living, ex-prisoners make strategic use of the ‘helping’ functions of these institution in an effort to work toward their own vision of reintegration. In Chapter 5, I first revisit the hybridized nature of halfway houses, and then proceed to suggest a new understanding of halfway houses as open prisons.

This dissertation then consists of six chapters. This first introductory chapter is followed by an outline of my methods (Chapter 2). Chapters 3 to 5 present three independent analytical papers (written in publishable format), each of which focuses on a distinct topic related to the issue of

halfway houses in Canada's penal landscape. Specifically, the three papers engage with the following topics:

Chapter 3. Intermediary Workers, Liminal Sites: Accepting and Deflecting Responsibility in the Halfway House Context

In this article, I examine the perspectives and practices of halfway house workers, focusing on how they talk about their position vis-à-vis halfway house residents as well as other criminal justice professionals. Studying their narratives contributes to providing nuanced local insights into the work of front-line staff involved in the care and supervision of former prisoners. I discuss the ways these NGO-employed workers understand and make meaning of their *intermediary* position, paying particular attention to how and in what instances they seek to accept and/or deflect responsibility for halfway house residents' reintegration and penal futures.

Chapter 4. "It's just a pit stop:" Halfway Houses and the Spatial-Temporal Dynamics of Prisoner Reentry

Drawing on the literature on mobilities and carceral geography, this article examines the ways ex-prisoners experience "reentry" via halfway houses. Specifically, I focus on the experiences of *newcomer* ex-prisoners, i.e., people who were paroled to a halfway house located in what for them is a new, urban environment. Conceptually, this article seeks to challenge the sedentary ontology of prisoner reentry, and proceeds to suggest that halfway houses produce different forms of mobility. I explore the ways newcomer and other ex-prisoners navigate (re-)entering their reentry neighbourhood and city, paying attention to the ways their pre-prison mobility histories as well as their conceptions of the future shape their perceptions of and experiences with halfway houses.

Chapter 5. Canada's 'Open Prisons': Rethinking the Role of Halfway Houses in Canadian Punishment

Building on studies of Nordic “penal exceptionalism” and open prisons, this article advances the argument that criminologists ought to study and conceive of halfway houses as a Canadian form of open prison rather than considering them as post-prison institutions. I demonstrate the similarities between Canadian halfway houses and Nordic open prisons, arguing that the term open prison better captures these houses’ workings and dynamics. Conceptually, this article invites scholars to use prisoner reentry research to develop a broader critique of the prison and penal system, by considering if and how halfway houses could present a more humane alternative to walled prisons.

In Chapter 6, the conclusion, I provide a summary of the empirical studies presented here. I revisit and further discuss the idea of the “prisoner reentry field.” In closing, I suggest avenues for future research and discuss the implications of my findings for policy and practice.

Chapter 2 Data and Methods

In this chapter, I outline the research data and methodology that forms the basis of this project. Chapters 3 to 5 (as mentioned above) focus on halfway houses; therefore, they only draw on certain aspects of my data, namely interviews with halfway house workers and residents. While these aspects are explained here in detail, I also use Chapter 2 to offer some notes about how this material fits into the larger study.

Research Overview

This project was conducted in the city of Edmonton, Alberta, an urban centre in north-western Canada with a population of roughly 930,000 people. Because much of existing Canadian research in the broad area of criminal justice has focused on the province of Ontario (e.g., Myers 2013, Pelvin 2017; but see Maidment 2006), I felt inclined to situate my study in a different, and to date less studied, geographical context that offered insight into different aspects of criminal justice (e.g., focus on Indigenous ex-prisoners). I had spent some time in Edmonton for another project prior to starting my fieldwork, which is when I became interested in and learnt more about the city's role as an 'institutional hub' for communities in northern Alberta. I started wondering how this dynamic would play out in the context of prisoner reentry (see Chapter 3).

I lived in Edmonton from March to mid-December 2015. I spent the first two months of my stay building relationships with the local halfway houses and two prisoner reentry organizations (see below), and starting preliminary conversations with staff at these organizations. My actual fieldwork began in mid-May 2015, upon approval of this study by the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board. Interviews with both front-line workers and former prisoners were

conducted between mid-May and mid-July 2015 and between mid-September and early December 2015 (I was out of the country for the month of August and thus not engaged in fieldwork). In June 2016, I returned to Edmonton for ten days to complete data collection. Participant observation was conducted at two prisoner reentry organizations, from early May to mid-June 2015 (roughly six weeks) at one organization, and from mid-September to early December 2015 (again roughly six weeks) at the other. Overall, this research consists of three components: (1) in-depth interviews; (2) observational data; and (3) document analysis.

Interview Data

My research is primarily based on in-depth interviews with former prisoners and front-line staff. Qualitative interviews enable scholars to study how individuals understand, experience, and make meaning of their social worlds by promoting “a deep listening between the researcher and the researched” (Hesse-Biber 2010: 456). I thus chose this method as a means to learn about the ways recently released prisoners talked about reentry and their experiences with halfway houses/reentry organizations, as well as how front-line workers at these organizations perceived and envisioned their day-to-day work and interactions with formerly incarcerated populations. Because of my prior involvement in other qualitative research projects, I felt prepared for and was comfortable with this method.

Until recently, research on prisoner reentry has focused primarily on ex-prisoners’ perspectives, while the perceptions of front-line workers have received less attention (but see recent U.S. studies outlined in Chapter 1). Specifically, while existing studies of ex-prisoners’ experiences of reentry have noted that their conceptions of reintegration, desistance, and/or success tend to deviate from those held by halfway house workers, parole officers, and other providers (e.g., Maidment 2006; Pollack 2008), they do not include the perspectives of these workers, making them limited in their

ability to provide more nuance into the suggested discrepancies between staff and ex-prisoner conceptions. Thus, it was important to me to include both ex-prisoners and front-line workers from the same organizations in my project so that I could compare and contrast their respective perceptions and views. Since ex-prisoner interviewees were aware of the fact that I was also interviewing staff (although they were of course informed that their responses would be kept confidential), it is possible that this knowledge may have shaped their responses, and perhaps made them more hesitant to disclose certain, more sensitive, information. However, since I did not ask them to disclose information related, for example, to their parole —such as whether they were in breach of any conditions or had committed a new offence since release— I do not believe that the involvement of staff in this study had a significant impact on the ways ex-prisoner interviewees chose to talk about their views and experiences. Although each of the three papers (Chapters 3 to 5) tends to focus just on one of these interviewee groups, I use Chapter 6 (the conclusion) to bring the ex-prisoner and staff perspectives into conversation with one another.

Former Prisoners

In total, I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 47 former prisoners¹⁰ (19 women; 28 men). With the exception of two interviewees, all 47 had been released from prison within the six months before the interview. My decision to concentrate on recently released prisoners (as opposed to more long term releasees, as done, for example, by Munn and Bruckert (2013)) was based on prior research that has shown that ex-prisoners tend to experience the immediate weeks and months following prison release as particularly overwhelming. For the

¹⁰ My initial target number was 40 people.

women in Pollack's study (2008: 25, 26), for example, these early months were described as very challenging "due to being unfamiliar with community resources" as well as "due to the various parole requirements they had to fulfill or risk being returned to the prison." Indeed, many interviewees in this study (especially those living at halfway houses) described similar feelings. Reflecting back on the day of her release, Cher, for example, who at the time of the interview had been out in the community for three months, explained, "I didn't eat a thing. I was nauseous. I was scared. I was timid, scared I was going to screw something up and go back." Similarly, Ricky talked about his emotional (as well as physical) response to reentry by stating that:

I think the main thing is just how very stressful it is to come out of prison. Yeah, it is so stressful. You know, your heart just pounds, and your solar plexus is just tight, too. You just don't know what to expect. You don't know how to do the things you need to do, you know, and it's very, very stressful.

At the same time, Cher, Ricky, and most other interviewees expressed feelings of freedom, relief, and happiness about their release. The early stages of reentry therefore provide a good timeframe in which to capture a range of feelings, emotions, and thoughts associated with reentry, at a time when people are still attuned to and therefore able to reflect on their prison experiences as well. In addition, individuals are most likely to frequent prisoner reentry organizations during the early months of release, either because they are required to participate in programming at these organizations as per their release conditions or because they decide to access these organizations on their own terms in a search for material and other forms of assistance. Indeed, my data suggest that these organizations are often the first point of contact for individuals upon return from prison, providing them with basic forms of support (e.g., clothing, hygiene kits, bus tickets).

Access and Recruitment

Ex-prisoner interviewees were recruited from local halfway houses and two prisoner reentry organizations. Naturally, this method of recruitment excludes those who are not accessing these services—a segment of the ex-prisoner population that is not only difficult to identify and recruit, but that may also experience different challenges and rely on different sources of support. However, since my goal was to learn about the ways ex-prisoners experienced and made use of halfway houses and reentry organizations in their immediate post-prison lives, it was clear that these organizations would provide my point of entry into the field.

Of the 47 interviewees, 27 were living at a halfway house at the time of the interview. I recruited those 27 people from four halfway house facilities¹¹. These facilities ranged in size from 8 to 35 beds. In order to gain access to these houses, I arranged meetings with the managers/ leaders of the respective houses, as well as the directors of the NGOs that were in charge of these facilities. During these meetings, I explained the purpose and goals of my study, and we discussed details of recruitment.

The specific methods of recruitment varied among the four houses. At two of the four facilities, recruitment took place face-to-face during house meetings scheduled by halfway house staff. Prior to my visit, staff informed residents that a researcher was coming to visit the house who was interested in hearing about their experiences of reentry. At these meetings, I was introduced by a staff member, and then proceeded to give a short (5 minutes at most) presentation to the residents

¹¹ There are a total of five halfway houses in Edmonton. I was able to successfully gain access to four of them. I was unable to establish contact with one.

about my research, myself, and why I was interested in talking to them. As part of my presentation I emphasized that I was not affiliated with the halfway house, CSC, PBC, or another government agency, and that participation in this study was completely voluntary and not required (or even expected) as per halfway house rules or release conditions. I also circulated copies of a 1-page sheet that included basic information about my study and my contact information. In total, I conducted five such visits. One of these visits was of limited success, as staff had forgotten to let residents know about my plan to meet with them; thus, most residents were not at the facility during my visit. Table 1 gives an overview of the number of residents present and recruited during these visits.

Table 1: Number of Residents Present and Recruited during Visits

<i>Visit</i> ¹²	<i>Residents Present</i>	<i>Residents Successfully Recruited and Interviewed</i>
Halfway House 1	7	4
Halfway House 1	6	1 ¹³
Halfway House 1	4	4
Halfway House 2	15	6 ¹⁴
Halfway House 2	4	2

¹² In order to maintain confidentiality, I do not provide specific information on each halfway house that I visited, such as the number of residents and the maximum number that could have been present at these meetings.

¹³ Three of the six people initially signed up for an interview. One person was reincarcerated prior to our scheduled interviewing meeting. The other person did not show up for the interview.

¹⁴ Initially, 7 people signed up. One person, after hearing more about the study and reviewing the consent form, decided not to go ahead with the interview. Two other people come up to me after the meeting who expressed interest but said they were too busy to find time to meet with me.

At two of the houses, staff made my 1-page project description available to residents and let them know the date that I was visiting, so that people who were interested could meet with me that day to gain more information and, if interested after, proceed with an interview. I recruited ten interviewees through this method.

The other 20 (of the 47) ex-prisoner interviewees were recruited from two prisoner reentry organizations. Like the other 27, they had also recently been released from prison. Some of them had lived at a halfway house in the past, but were not residing in one at the time of the study. I recruited these 20 people in order to gain more insight into how ex-prisoners make use of and give meaning to the role of prisoner reentry organizations during the early stages of release. I secured access to the two prisoner reentry organizations by contacting the directors and arranging meetings with them and/or the program managers to discuss my research and the details of possible organizational involvement in the recruitment of interviewees.

Of the 20 interviewees, six people got in contact with me after seeing one of the study posters that I was permitted to leave at each of the reentry organizations; two people were referred by staff; the other 12 were recruited face-to-face during the time that I spent at the two organizations for purposes of observational research (5 were from one organization; 7 were from the other).

Interviews

I adopted a semi-structured, open-ended approach to interviewing ex-prisoners. I asked interviewees a broad set of questions regarding their time in prison, their experiences of reentry, and their plans for their future. The interview guide was divided into broad sections and themes, starting with some biographical data (e.g., age; highest level of education; race/ethnicity; current type of residence). Following this, I asked various questions about their involvement with and

experiences of the prison system. Here, I was mostly interested in their ideas of punishment and rehabilitation in prison, as well as how they believed prison had changed them (i.e., physically, mentally, and emotionally).

Based on existing studies of reentry, my interview guide was designed to capture three particular facets of reentry reflected in existing research: (1) reentry as a singular *event*; (2) reentry as a *process*; and (3) reentry as a *social institution* (Miller 2014). As an event, reentry takes place the day a person is released from prison. Reentry is thus a matter of fact—every prisoner released from custody reenters the community regardless of the amount of time spent in prison and whether they remain under penal supervision following release. Since limited attention has been paid to the day of release from prison (but see Maruna 2011; Richards & Jones 2004), I asked interviewees to describe the day of release from prison, including the kinds of emotions they remembered feeling that day. Anchored in the understanding that reentry is also a process (Visher & Travis 2003), I asked ex-prisoner interviewees various questions about the different challenges of reentry, how they defined reintegration, as well as how they navigated and dealt with different post-prison challenges (e.g., how they went about finding employment). I also prompted them to talk about their conceptions of the future. In order to gain insight into the organizational context of reentry, interviewees were then asked about their perceptions of and experiences with halfway houses, including what they believed the purpose of these houses was, what they thought of the rules and regulations of halfway house living, and how they kept in touch with family and friends while residing at a halfway house. I also asked about community supports, including how and why they accessed and made use of prisoner reentry and other organizations in the city, and the meaning they attributed to these organizations. Interviewees were also asked about their conceptions of freedom, and encouraged to offer policy and program suggestions that they believed would help former prisoners.

I used a fairly informal approach to interviews, and encouraged interviewees to share as much or as a little about their experiences as they wished. Generally, I followed the conversational trajectory put forth by the interviewee. This process was encouraged by the open-ended questions, which gave me the flexibility to request more details or clarification as themes emerged. My interviewees determined the time and location of their interview. Interviews with halfway house residents were all conducted at the halfway house where they were living, with the exception of two which I conducted on a bench in a large park in close proximity to their halfway house. Interviews with the other 20 ex-prisoners were mostly conducted in a private office at the organizations; but in some of these cases too, I also conducted interviews on park benches. I chose the location based on where interviewees said they felt most comfortable, while ensuring that the space was private enough to ensure confidentiality.

With the exception of two, all ex-prisoner interviews were audio-recorded. For the two interviewees who requested not to be recorded, I took detailed notes on my laptop, which interviewees had a chance to review and revise after. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms (chosen by the interviewees themselves) are used throughout this dissertation to protect interviewees' identities. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 180 minutes. Using NVIVO 10, interviews with halfway house residents were coded according to emergent themes using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This was followed by selective coding. Since the data derived from the interviews with the other 20 (non-halfway house resident) ex-prisoner interviewees play a lesser role in this dissertation, my analysis of these interviews concentrated on reading and coding the transcripts manually according to broad themes.

Ex-Prisoner Data

The 27 halfway house residents in this study (9 women; 18 men) ranged in age from 21 to 66, with an average age of 37. Five interviewees had been convicted of violent crimes such as second degree murder and assault; 17 had convictions for non-violent non-sexual crimes, such as drug trafficking, manufacturing, and possession; and five had been convicted of sex-related offenses, such as sexual assault. When asked about their race/ethnicity, 16 interviewees said they identified as white/Caucasian, ten as Indigenous, and one as ‘other’¹⁵. Interviewees’ highest level of education ranged from grade 9 to post-graduate education. Six interviewees were married/common law; 21 were single. 16 of the 27 interviewees had children. 19 of the 27 had a history of incarceration. At the time of the interview, all individuals were on conditional release (i.e., day parole, full parole or statutory release). Except for one person, all interviewees had been released from prison within the last six months at the time of the interview.

The other 20 non halfway house ex-prisoner interviewees (10 women and 10 men) ranged in age between 22 and 50, with a mean age of 38. 10 self-identified as Indigenous, and 10 as white. 14 of the 20 individuals had children. 5 were married/common law; the rest reported being single. Interviewees’ highest level of education ranged from grade 9 to grade 12. 15 of the 20 individuals had a history of incarceration. With the exception of one individual, all interviewees had been released from prison within the last six months at the time of the interview. Two had been released from federal prison, 15 from sentenced provincial custody, and three from remand custody. Interviewees had been convicted of/charged with violent crimes, such as simple assault, (n=2); non-violent non-sexual crimes, including drug trafficking and possession, home invasion, uttering

¹⁵ In order to protect this person’s confidentiality, I do not identify his self-identified race.

threats (n=17); and sex-related offences (n=1). In comparison to the 27 halfway house residents, the 20 non halfway house individuals lived in a variety of different kinds, often precarious and temporary, residences, including shelters and supportive/transitional housing facilities; some had their own apartments/houses, or lived with friends.

Edmonton has the second lowest rental vacancy rate in Canada following the city of Calgary (Alberta), and the fourth highest monthly rental costs (following Calgary, Toronto, and Vancouver) (EndPoverty 2018). Many of the 20 individuals recruited from the reentry organizations talked about challenges related to finding (affordable) housing. Reentry organization staff too often mentioned that housing was one of the biggest problems people in Edmonton were dealing with. While halfway house residency ensures that ex-prisoners are provided with basic housing and needs (e.g., bedding, towels), for the non-halfway house interviewees, their housing situations post prison were less certain, and often meant that they had to find temporary shelter immediately following release. Spider (recruited from a reentry organization) recounted his day of release from prison, saying that “[Had] a cigarette, had a few shots of beer, that was it. Went to shelter for a bed. That’s pretty much where I am now, the men’s shelter.” While all interviewees in this study faced various challenges, the 20 non halfway house interviewees definitely encountered more barriers in terms of meeting basic needs.

Conducting Research with Former Prisoners

While questions around access and ethics have been explored in the context of research inside prisons (e.g., Bosworth et al. 2005), there is a paucity of methodological and ethical reflections when it comes to research with former prisoners in the community (but see Watson & van der Meulen 2018). As my research aimed to uncover the perceptions, experiences, forms of meaning-making, and beliefs held by former prisoners, my plan from the outset was to prioritize their voices,

in recognition of their first-hand knowledge and experience of the penal system. During recruitment, residents would often ask “what” I was trying to find out, or wanted to know from them. My answer to this question generally included explaining that I was interested in learning from them and hearing about what they thought, rather than determining or verifying some ‘truth’. Some people also asked what I thought should be changed (about the prison and reentry system), and in response to that, I generally said that I believed that any policy or program must be grounded in (ex-)prisoners’ experiences, and that learning about their first-hand experiences is thus a key requirement if one wants to suggest and promote policy change. Overall, my impression was that ex-prisoners were fairly open to and willing to engage with this study, and I believe that my self-presentation as someone who was interested in learning from, rather than studying them (Spradley 1980), facilitated research participation.

Further insights into specific interviewees’ motivations for participation were often provided during the interview process. From the interview exchanges it appeared that these motivations could be multiple and also shaped in particular ways by specific experiences with the prison system and prisoner reentry providers. One male interviewee, for example, said that one of his treatment providers had recommended that he should try to work on building social relationships (especially with women) and he believed that talking to me presented a good opportunity to put this into practice. Some interviewees stated that they had never been involved in a research study, and were interested and curious in what it would be like to be involved in such an undertaking. Some of these as well as others also specifically stated that they wanted to share their experiences in the hope of affecting change in the penal system.

At every halfway house meeting, however, there were a fair number of residents who chose not sign up for an interview (see above). It is hard to say exactly what prompted potential interviewees

to decide for or against participation in this study. It is likely and understandable that some residents were suspicious and perhaps distrustful of me, fearing perhaps that I was part of the legal apparatus associated with parole or the government. The fact that I only had a few minutes to pitch my project meant that I was unable to build rapport or trust in any meaningful way with residents prior to inquiring about their interest in doing an interview. It also meant that residents themselves had relatively little time to form their own impressions of my project and me as a researcher and person, although residents would often ask more personal questions after my formal pitch (e.g., why had I come all the way from Toronto to Edmonton? How did I like Edmonton?), which allowed me to talk a little bit more about myself and my work. Nonetheless, my position as a white, formally educated woman, who was different from the residents on various markers, likely presented a barrier to access insofar as it might have increased suspicion that I was associated in some capacity with powerful forces of surveillance.

I also had the feeling that for some people, sitting down with me for an interview presented yet another scheduled commitment that would have meant giving up more of their (already relatively limited) leisure time in the community. For example, after I gave my 5-minute pitch at one of the houses, one of the residents shouted out, “Okay, so what do you want to know? You can ask us anything.” Upon explaining that I was doing one-on-one interviews (not focus groups, or group discussions), the resident said that they were too busy and couldn’t commit to a one-on-one meeting. Knowing that ex-prisoners on conditional release are already subject to a tight supervision regime, including regular meetings with halfway house workers, parole officers, and treatment providers, I wanted to be respectful of their ‘free’ time and never pressured people to participate. In the case of this exchange, I responded to the interjection by saying, “Okay, I understand. My contact information is on the sheet if you change your mind.” While the boredom and dull routines associated with imprisonment may enhance research participation, by offering

prisoners a “distraction from the tedium of prison life” (Majumder 2005: 6, as cited in Edens et al. 2011), the particular nature of halfway house residency might have discouraged participation to some extent. Halfway house residents were ‘free enough’ that research participation was unlikely to be a welcome distraction from their daily routines, yet they continued to be ‘too regulated’ by the penal system to feel inclined or willing to commit to another scheduled meeting.

Concerns around voluntariness and/or coercion of participation have been canvassed by scholars conducting research with current prisoners (see also Copes, Hochstetler, & Brown 2013). While such concerns are arguably lessened by the community context of prisoner reentry research, ex-prisoners nonetheless remain in a legally vulnerable and precarious position and are subject to the influences and control of halfway house staff and other penal actors. With that in mind, I tried to see non-participation not as failure on my part, but more optimistically perhaps, as evidence of ex-prisoners’ free choice and comfort to reject participation. I appreciated that halfway house staff (at least to my knowledge) never pressured residents into research participation, nor gave me their opinion on who they believed would be a good candidate for participation. The same applied to the staff at the two prisoner reentry organizations where recruitment of the non-halfway house ex-prisoner interviewees took place.

As Watson and van der Meulen (2018: 10/11) have stated, “[compared] to current prisoners who are living under the constant surveillance of correctional staff and in close proximity to others, and who may therefore fear repercussions for disclosing information [...], former prisoners in community-based settings might feel more comfortable engaging with researchers and be more inclined to disclose information.” While true to some extent, data collection for this study made me more mindful of other ethical issues involved in research with former prisoners. Specifically, I became more sensitized to the possibility that for ex-prisoners in particular, being asked to talk

about past and present experiences might be especially draining and emotionally impactful. While for current prisoners (especially those on remand or short sentences), the ability to share their life experiences and those with the penal system might be novel, former prisoners (especially those remaining under penal control) are constantly required to talk about their past, present, and future. For example, one of the first things incoming halfway house residents are asked to do is to complete a “crime cycle,” discussing issues such as potential triggers and past experiences leading up to their offending and drug use. They are also asked to share their goals for the future. Such conversations then continue later in regular meetings with halfway house staff and parole officers. While I did not ask interviewees to disclose risk factors or triggers—nor did I dig into people’s past lives—simply the act of sitting down with yet another person might feel draining, or even invoke negative emotions in some people. For example, one resident initially expressed interest in an interview, but when he met me again explained that he did not want to proceed as he was worried the interview could trigger bad memories. I thanked him for his interest and left the premises. Similarly, another interviewee (who did consent and complete the interview), said, in response to my question how prison might have changed him, that:

[...] it’s not good to bring up the old past because we’ve left it, right? It’s another day today, and the more I step forward each day the stronger I’ll get, but if I keep on thinking of the past, I think about it in my mind and I don’t really like that [...] It’s just that the past is the past. [...] I’ll never come back to jail or I’ll never do drug. I’ll never do pills or not drink. Go to work and support my family and myself. And that’s my goals, but to bring up the past, it’s just another kind of obstacle that I’d have to go over and put it away again, and I’ve already done that. But as for the interview, I will carry on with the interview. (Boo, halfway house resident)

My informal approach to interviewing meant that I was able to respond well to people’s conversational trajectories and requests. In this particular instance, I refrained from asking any more questions about this interviewee’s past, although later in the interview, he did discuss some issues about his time in prison, without being prompted.

A Note about Positionality

The researcher's identity markers and social position impact not only on their observations of the field, but also the data they produce (e.g., Adler & Adler 1987). A reflexive social science approach requires researchers to reflect on these issues and in an effort to do so, I have reflected on how my self-identification as a white, formally educated, cisgender female, heterosexual, able-bodied newcomer to Canada may have shaped my research interactions and data. I was clearly different from many of the ex-prisoner interviewees on various fronts, including gender, race, level of education, and age. Even when there were shared markers of race, gender, or age, I realized that those were not enough to bridge the social distance or power structures between researcher and researched. I sought to work against any negative impact of perceived differences on the interview dynamics by trying to indicate through body language and verbal cues that I was listening carefully, not passing judgment, and was always ready to follow interviewees' conversational paths.

As a white newcomer to Canada, I have noticed that I feel less implicated by a settler identity than many of my Canadian-born colleagues (although this research as well as more recent experiences have started to change that). Because my non-Anglophone, non-Francophone accent often identified me as a newcomer to Canada as well as Edmonton (and often led to questions about my national origin), I suspect that some interviewees at least saw me as a more neutral outsider than might have been the case for a white settler Canadian. My impression was that with respect to the topics of Canadian racism and the treatment of Indigenous people, in particular, my newcomer status may have been helpful. Certainly, many of the Indigenous ex-prisoner interviewees were willing to talk in-depth about their experiences of racism and discrimination in Edmonton and other Canadian cities, and I can only speculate that such a perception may have contributed to this

willingness. At the same time, I also believe it is likely that I was met with some suspicion, given that Indigenous people have long (mostly negative) experience of being the object of research by non-Indigenous scholars (see Walter 2016: 90). I also recognize that my position as a white newcomer poses a barrier insofar as it is difficult for me to fully understand Indigenous interviewees' experiences. As Martel and Brassard (2008: 341) have noted, "[...] as non-Aboriginal scholars, our 'redescription' of Aboriginal issues through Western eyes is inevitably distorted." I recognize that while conducting my research, I was an uninvited guest on Treaty 6 Territory.

Parenthood was another issue that frequently came up in interview exchanges. While completing data collection in June 2016, I was visibly pregnant with my second child. Most interviewees commented¹⁶ and/or asked questions about my pregnancy (e.g., whether I was expecting a boy or girl), and sometimes went on to talk about their own children. With both female and male interviewees, I was forthcoming about motherhood, mentioning—when appropriate—a few details here and there about my own family (e.g., my child's age, name, etc.). These moments provided for more personal exchanges, and I appreciated the opportunity to 'step out' of my researcher role for a few moments and reveal a little bit more about myself. At the same time, I recognize that my experiences of parenthood are different from many of the people I interviewed who had lost their children to state authorities. In all interview exchanges, I sought to treat interviewees with respect and dignity, and to remain aware of my social position.

¹⁶ For example, one male resident said he thought I was brave for doing this research while pregnant. Another male interviewee commented, half jokingly, that he hoped I was not going to go into labour while being in a room with him.

Because I moved to Edmonton for the sole reason of doing this research, I experienced the city primarily through a research lens. For the first four months, my family and I lived in an apartment in Edmonton's downtown in walking distance to many of the city's social service agencies as well as some of the city's halfway houses. These organizations are clustered in a small number of neighbourhoods just north of the downtown.¹⁷ While poverty can be found in pockets throughout the city, it is spatially concentrated in these few neighbourhoods. Poverty is also distinctly racialized, affecting Indigenous people at disproportionate rates (Edmonton Social Planning Council 2017). Because of my geographic location, I was mostly able to walk to my research sites and therefore was able to experience these different neighbourhoods by foot, which helped me contextualize both ex-prisoner and staff interviewees' narratives when they talked about specific areas or the names of organizations in downtown and 'north-central' Edmonton. The other four months, we rented a house from a university professor in a middle-class neighbourhood in walking distance to the University of Alberta, located in what is referred to as Edmonton's 'south side'¹⁸. The North Saskatchewan River runs through Edmonton, dividing the city into a 'north' and 'south' side. The latter is home to the University of Alberta, middle and upper class residential neighbourhoods, and a variety of shops, bars, cafes, and upscale restaurants. I spent much less time in downtown Edmonton during those four months, usually taking the Light Rail Transit to my research sites and leaving the area immediately after fieldwork was finished for the day. This more intermittent exposure to Edmonton's downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods heightened my awareness of the spatially concentrated, racialized nature of poverty in Edmonton. Experiencing

¹⁷ De Giorgi (2014) has referred to these kinds of neighbourhoods as "service ghettos," i.e., impoverished neighbourhoods with a high concentration of prisoner reentry and other nonprofit agencies that provide basic services to the urban poor.

¹⁸ The North Saskatchewan River runs through Edmonton, dividing the city into a "north" and "south" side.

the contrast between the ‘north’ and ‘south’ side helped me better understand why some of the ex-prisoners I interviewed voiced aversion to the ‘south side’, a place that they associated with more racism and hostility and a general feeling of non-belonging. Some interviewees stated that they didn’t even remember the last time they crossed the river to get to the ‘south side’. Only one of the 47 people I interviewed lived in Edmonton’s south. This interviewee, Cassandra (recruited from a prisoner reentry organization), talked in in-depth about her decision to move from the ‘north’ to the ‘south’ after her release from prison as part of her broader narrative of desistance.

In sum, it is difficult to say exactly how my field persona impacted on the data gathered, although I am certain it did (but see Damsa & Ugelvik 2017). Since fieldwork was primarily interview-based and did not involve building rapport with a smaller group of informants (as is typical of ethnographic studies), it is even more speculative to comment on its exact impact.

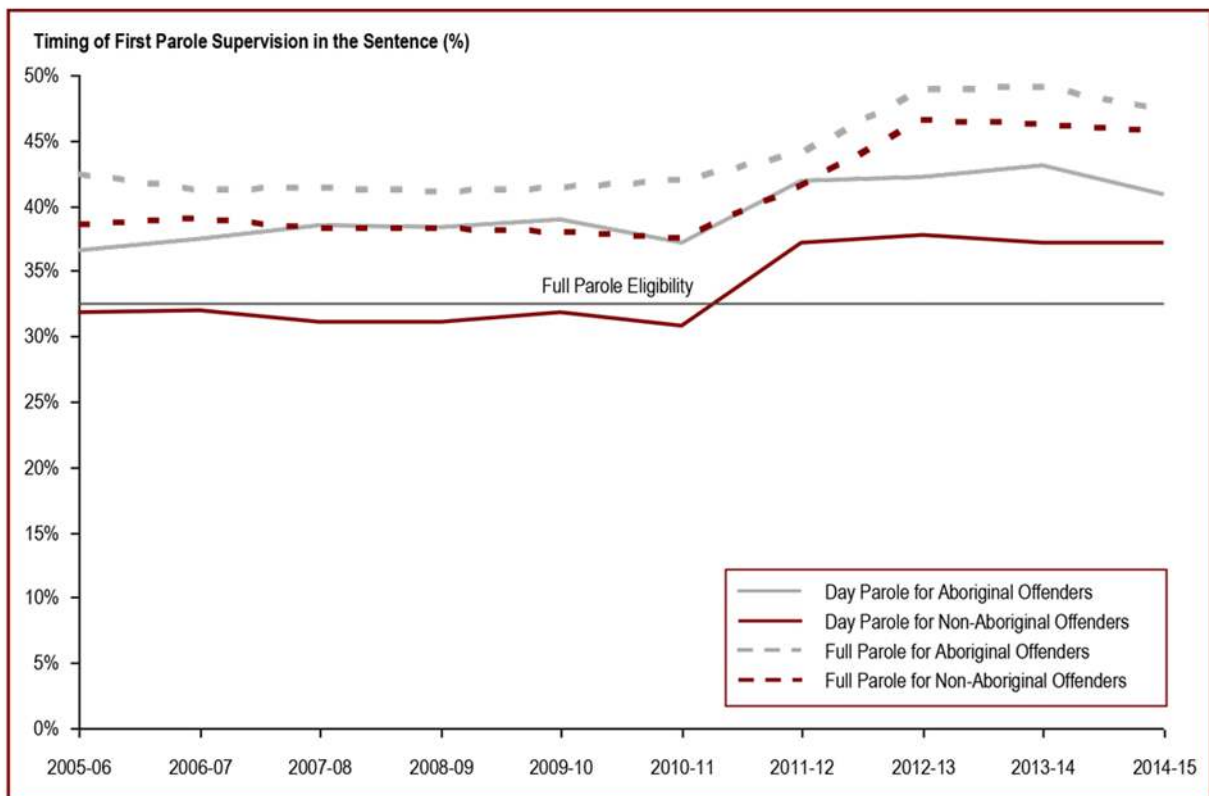
Indigenous Participation

Indigenous people account for 3.8% of the population in Canada. 16% of the Indigenous population lives in the province of Alberta, where they comprise 6% of the total provincial population. One in four of the Indigenous people (28%) living in Alberta reside in the city of Edmonton, where they make up 5% of the urban population. Edmonton has the second largest Indigenous population of all cities in Canada, following Winnipeg.

Indigenous people are overrepresented in all areas of criminal justice in Canada. They are more likely to be denied bail, spend more time in pre-trial detention, and, if convicted, are more likely to face incarceration (see Clark & Landau 2012). Indigenous adults in federal correctional services account for 28% of admissions to custody and 26% of admissions to community supervision. Overrepresentation is more pronounced for Indigenous females than males. In the federal correctional services, Indigenous females account for 31% of all female admissions to sentenced custody

(Indigenous males represented 23% of all equivalent male admissions). These patterns are even more pronounced at the provincial and territorial level where Indigenous females represent 38% of all female admissions to provincial and territorial sentenced custody and Indigenous males represented 26% of all equivalent male admissions. Particularly noteworthy for this dissertation is also that Indigenous offenders serve a higher proportion of their sentence before being released on parole. As shown in Figure 5, in 2014/15 the average proportions of time served before the first federal day parole supervision period and the first federal full parole supervision period were lower for non-Indigenous offenders than for Indigenous offenders (37.1% versus 40.9%, and 45.5% versus 47.2%, respectively).

Figure 5: Timing of first parole supervision in the sentence; Indigenous versus non-Indigenous offenders; Source: Public Safety Canada 2015



In *R. v. Gladue*, the Supreme Court of Canada noted the systemic discrimination experienced by Indigenous people in Canada's criminal justice system, saying that:

Not surprisingly, the excessive imprisonment of aboriginal people is only the tip of the iceberg insofar as the estrangement of the aboriginal peoples from the Canadian criminal justice system is concerned. Aboriginal people are overrepresented in virtually all aspects of the system. [...] there is widespread bias against aboriginal people within Canada, and [t]here is evidence that this widespread racism has translated into systematic discrimination in the criminal justice system.

As mentioned above, 20 of my 47 ex-prisoner interviewees self-identified as Indigenous. Indigenous participation in this research was incidental rather than scheduled since I did not intend to single out Indigenous interviewees, target a specific number of such interviewees in my study, or draw Indigenous-specific conclusions. Prior to starting this fieldwork, I did however reflect on Casellano's (2004: 99) note that "research under the control of outsiders of Aboriginal community has been instrumental in rationalizing colonialist perceptions of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control." Between March and May 2015, I sought input and guidance from some key individuals from Indigenous community organizations as well as Edmonton's Urban Aboriginal Affair Committee, and I continue to reflect on the question of how to conduct ethical Indigenous research in settler states. I also recognize the importance of Walter's (2016: 88) statement that

"[even] if the researcher is fully cognizant of Indigenous ethical dimensions, the outcome is not necessarily ethical research. If they do not understand their own social position and how this frames their research practice then a significant potential to do research harm remains."

It is my sincere hope that this study does not cause additional harm to or lead to further stigmatization of Indigenous people in Canada or elsewhere.

Front-Line Staff

In total, I conducted in-depth interviews with 26 staff at halfway houses and prisoner reentry organizations. These interviewees were also asked a broad set of questions, starting with biographical data, information about their education and work history, and what they found particularly rewarding/challenging about their current job. They were also asked to define ‘successful reintegration’, and explain what they believed were the major challenges of reentry and what they thought were important ways to keep people out of prison. Halfway house workers, specifically, were asked to reflect on the broader purpose of halfway houses, and to describe the daily routines and rules of halfway house living. These staff interviews not only provided important information about the inner workings of halfway houses, but they were also revealing of how staff perceived and understood halfway house rules, and how they saw their role in ensuring that residents were informed of them. For example, when I asked halfway house workers to tell me about the rules of the house, some would reply by saying that “there are just so many,” before proceeding to lay them out for me. Some of these interviewees also talked about what they did to ensure that residents would not get overwhelmed by the many rules that they were outlining. For example, Tina, a halfway house worker, explained:

I am aware that when they come back from the [prison] institution, their minds are like...they’re thinking about a whole lot of things, and they might not be able to process everything that I’m telling them, so I just talk to them about the basics when they first come in, and then as they settle, [...] then I slowly talk to them about the different rules and regulations. You know, maybe the first day I talk about what phase they’re on now [...]. And then I talk more about in-depth stuff later on, so then I do not overwhelm them.

Others, in contrast, described the rule regime as “basic” or “simple.” For example, Kris, staff at a different halfway house, described the halfway house rules and routines by saying that:

You get up. You work. You go to school. You volunteer. There’s got to be some sort of productive activity during the day. You come check in between 5 and 6, and you spend

your evenings with family, going to movies. You get some time for leisure and then you come back for curfew. I don't know, that's I guess, really basic...for me.

Staff interviewees were also asked about how they defined community, as well as about policy and program suggestions.

The interview guide was adjusted depending on people's type of work (i.e., halfway house versus reentry organization). Interviews ranged in length from 40 to 170 minutes. With the exception of two interviews conducted outside on a bench, all interviews were done in private offices of the organizations. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews with halfway house staff were coded using NVIVO 10. Since the interviews with front-line staff at reentry organizations play a comparatively minor role in this dissertation, my analysis of their interviews focused on reading and coding interview transcripts manually according to broad themes.

Halfway House Workers

15 of the 26 staff interviewees were working at one of the four halfway houses at the time of the study. Their workplace roles are explained in detail in Chapter 3. Interviewees were informed of my study by the managers/leaders of the four halfway houses. An information sheet about my project was available to them, and they were then able to sign-up for an interview, if interested.

At the time of the interview, the 15 interviewees (12 women; 3 men) had worked at the same halfway houses between six months and 22 years, and were thus able to share a range of experiences, including how they believed their work and occupational roles had changed over time. Interviewees shared similar educational backgrounds; most held a university degree in the social sciences, and many had completed a two-year diploma in correctional services (following their university degree) prior to starting their job. All participants identified as white or Caucasian.

Staff at Reentry Organizations

The other 11 (of the total of 26) staff interviewees worked with ex-prisoners through community services/programs. Six of these 11 were employed as front-line staff at the two prisoner reentry organizations where I conducted observational research (see below); 2 of them had additional managerial functions. Part of their job including running the organizations' drop-in program (where I spent some of my time), and providing front-line services (e.g., the provision of clothing, hygiene kits, bus tickets) as well as other forms of assistance (e.g., with resumes, job search, etc.) to "clients". These six interviewees ranged in age between 23 and 52 years, with a mean age of 34. Two of them self-identified as Indigenous; 4 as white/Caucasian. In addition to the formal interview, I had frequent informal conversations with these 6 staff interviewees as I saw them on a regular basis during observational fieldwork.

The remaining five staff interviewees worked for an agency/program that focused on offering help to individuals released from prison who were new to Edmonton. In the case of Canada, it is important to note that because halfway houses and rehabilitative services, more broadly, are largely only available in larger cities, a significant number of the ex-prisoner population who must access such services are doing so as newcomers to these urban settings (see Chapter 4). Thus, I interviewed these five workers to learn more about the challenges newcomer ex-prisoners face, as well as the kinds of services and programs available to them in the city of Edmonton.

To summarize, Table 2 is presented below to provide an overview of the number of staff interviewed at each site.

Table 2: Staff Interviewees

<i>Workplace</i> ¹⁹	<i>Number of interviewees</i>
Halfway House 1	3
Halfway House 2	1
Halfway House 3	4
Halfway House 4	7
Reentry Organization 1	4
Reentry Organization 2	2
Reentry Program for Newcomers	5

Overall, my impression was that staff were open to and interested in the research. Power differentials were clearly lessened in my interactions with staff. I shared various identity markers with many of them in terms of age, race, gender, and education. On a broad level, staff and I agreed that it was important to support ex-prisoners and treat them with respect and dignity. This common conception made it fairly easy to build rapport with these individuals and meant that I did not feel like I had to change my presentation in an effort to make my project more appealing to them.

Observational Data

To a more limited extent, this study also includes observational data. Ethnographers rely on participant observation as their primary source of data, while using interviews as a secondary tool to “‘fill in’ the biographical meanings of observed interactions” (Warren 2001). While my primary

¹⁹ In order to protect confidentiality, I do not provide the total number of employees for the different halfway houses.

method was interviewing, I used observations as a means to further understand and contextualize interviewees' narratives, and to get a better sense of the day-to-day business of prisoner reentry organizations.

Although the term 'prisoner reentry organization' is frequently used by scholars in this field without much explanation (Kaufmann 2015; Miller 2014; Mijs 2016), I find this term somewhat contentious and difficult to operationalize. What exactly constitutes a prisoner reentry organization, as opposed to, let's say, a social service agency that provides help to the urban poor? Is this term contingent on the organization's mandate, or the clientele they serve? Prior to starting my fieldwork, I visited a number of social service agencies in or in close proximity to Edmonton's downtown. These agencies provided a variety of services to the poor and homeless, including, for example, the provision of free clothing, meals, haircuts, employment help, work equipment (e.g., work boots), ID clinics, and mailboxes (i.e., where people without permanent addresses can have their mail sent). I was told during these visits that the majority of their clientele had recent histories of incarceration. Quirouette's (2016: 316) work has drawn attention to the multiple disadvantages that shape the lives of the poor and homeless (e.g., poverty, criminalization, discrimination, addiction, health/mental health, disabilities), leading to a variety of "complex needs" to which social service agencies must respond. While the agencies I visited provided services to many recently incarcerated people (and thus, they could technically be labelled 'reentry organizations'), the recent experience of prison was only one of many factors shaping their clients' lives, and—as some of interview data with former prisoners show (see below)—not always the most prominent factor. In planning out my fieldwork and deciding what to focus on, I often questioned whether my research was expanding from its primary goal of studying prisoner reentry to a broader focus on the experience of urban poverty. Ultimately, I decided to try to maintain the original goal by adopting a fairly narrow conception of 'prisoner reentry organization' as an organization whose

mandate focuses specifically on providing services and support to prisoners, former prisoners, and criminalized populations, and thereby to limit my observational fieldwork to the two agencies in the city with this explicit focus.

Each of these two organizations had a drop-in room open Mondays to Fridays. Coffee and/or snacks were available, and a number of other organization-specific services were provided (e.g., access to phone; access to computer; free clothing; bus tickets). The walls of these drop-in rooms were covered in billboards with information (posters, pamphlets, etc.) on things such as employment and housing resources, mental health services, child and family services, Indigenous events, and links to other community resources. In total, I spent two half days a week at each of these two organizations for a period of six weeks, resulting in around 50 hours of observations. As mentioned above, I did this to get a sense of how these drop-in programs operated as well as how individuals made use of them. While both of these organizations also offered various rehabilitative programs related to employment, parenting, soft skills, and financial planning, for example, I chose to limit my focus to their drop-in programs because there had already been some research (albeit not in Canada) on some of the specific programs provided by reentry organizations (e.g., Miller 2014).

I recorded my observations in field notes after each visit. Rather than taking field notes on specific interactions between people, or on the behaviors or characteristics of certain people, my notes remained less personalized. I would, for example, record the number of people present during my visit, the general activities of the day (e.g., on some days, for example, people engaged in craft activities), my own role in these activities (e.g., sometimes I was asked to help pack little packages of snacks), and any conversations that I had with staff (though without recording their names). This method, I found, proved to be most tangible as well as ethical. During my fieldwork, it became

obvious that many individuals accessed the two organizations for very short periods, often just grabbing a coffee, or making a quick phone call, and then leaving again. While I sought to introduce myself to all people present, and to tell them about myself and my study and get their consent, this was not always feasible due to the very brief periods of time that many people spent at the organization.

Document Analysis

In term of document analysis, I collected resident handbooks from each halfway house facility where interviews were conducted. These handbooks are between 11 and 22 pages in length. They contain information regarding rules and regulations as well as expectations regarding residents' employment, treatment, hygiene, and general behavior. Moreover, they include explanations of potential consequences should residents violate either their conditions of parole or any halfway house rules, regulations, and expectations.

Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation. While the three articles (Chapters 3 to 5) rely on these handbooks primarily as a method of triangulation, document analysis is also fruitful as a stand-alone method (Bowen 2009). That is because documents are socially constructed products; as such, they are open to different meanings and interpretations. As Bosworth (2007: 71) has noted in her analysis of prison admission handbooks, these kinds of handbooks “provide information about strategies of governance.” As she has added, “although [these handbooks] cannot show how penal philosophy and policies are actually implemented, they do represent an official articulation of rules, regulations and ethos.” Thus, while these handbooks play a rather limited role in this dissertation, they do reveal important information about official representations of rehabilitation, risk, and accountability present within the halfway house context.

Coding and Analysis

For the interviews with halfway house residents and staff, I employed an inductive approach to data analysis, letting the data guide my analysis (Charmaz 2006). Interviews were coded according to theme, starting with open followed by selective coding. Chapter 3 focuses on halfway house workers' conceptions of their workplace roles and the halfway house as an institution. Quotes revealed various forms of self-conception centred on categories such as "support person," "supervisor," and "intermediary." For Chapter 4, basic coding revealed ex-prisoners' negative perceptions of the halfway house neighbourhoods. Grouping these broadly as "neighbourhood context", I realized that these quotes were often followed by discussions about interviewees' ways of navigating their particular neighbourhood context. Accordingly, further coding was done for emerging sub-themes, using "in vivo codes," such "neighbourhood as test" and "neighbourhood as pit stop." Chapter 5 themes correspond to interview data that reveal prisoners' experiences of "freedom" and "confinement" in the halfway house context. Though I have reviewed transcripts multiple times, I continue to notice other themes that I hope to pursue in future research contributions beyond this dissertation.

Straddling the Line: Prisoner Reentry and/or Urban Poverty

As mentioned above, while conducting my fieldwork, I often found myself grappling with the question whether I was doing a study of prisoner reentry and/or urban poverty. Of course, these two topics are not mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary, both imprisonment and prisoner reentry have been described as a form of poverty governance (e.g., Miller 2014; Wacquant 2009). U.S. scholars in particular have highlighted the expansion of the penal state and concurrent retrenchment of the welfare state, often described as a "policy trade-off" (e.g., Beckett & Western 2001), whereby poor people are increasingly governed not by the maternal, but the punitive arm

of the state. Others have emphasized the ways in which the penal and welfare state together exert power over and regulate people's lives, leading to a "double regulation" of the urban poor (e.g., Soss, Fording, & Schram 2011). Nonetheless, the overlap that I saw in this study between punishment and urban poverty led to me to reflect on the questions of what it means to study 'prisoner reentry'.

In my conversations with the 20 ex-prisoners recruited from the two reentry organizations in particular, the trajectory of our exchange often expanded beyond the topics of incarceration and reentry. The narratives of these interviewees, I found, seldom described imprisonment as a discrete or life-altering experience, nor did these individuals think of themselves as being involved in a distinct process of 'reintegration' or desistance. By contrast, the prison and reentry process remained at the fore in all of my interviews with halfway house residents. While many people from both groups shared the experience of multiple incarceration as well as other forms of institutionalization (e.g., foster care), the meaning they attributed to their time in prison differed significantly. Specifically, many of the halfway house residents reflected on the impact federal prison (as opposed to provincial incarceration) had on them. Butterfly, for example, explained:

Well, I've been in and out of prison quite a bit, so there's nothing new, other than going to the pen²⁰. Going to the penitentiary is a lot different than provincial because in the penitentiary there's programs there to help you whereas in provincial I feel like I just did my time and then got out. Like, I didn't feel like I was being helped at all. I mean, they have schooling and stuff. I did my GED while I was in provincial, but I find it's just harder to want to get out and do good. There's no reason.

Butterfly then went on to talk about the impact federal prison had on her motivation to change:

I find that getting the federal bid changed me. How do I explain it? I don't know, I feel like I just chose to change because I had such a long sentence. I got a 6-year sentence, and it

²⁰ Pen refers to federal prison here.

was either I could've chose to do it all in the max, max out, or I could've chose to actually take the help that I was getting for free and come out on top.

Various scholars have noted that federal prisons offer more rehabilitative programming and better living conditions compared to provincial centres, and female ex-prisoners themselves have reported 'pleading up' in order to be sentenced to federal instead of provincial custody (Allspach 2010). Butterfly's first quote highlights this more rehabilitative environment of federal prisons, while her second quote draws attention to the particular nature of federal incarceration that encourages ex-prisoners to work toward early release by demonstrating 'good behavior' (e.g., attending programming, following institutional rules). Such behaviour is rewarded with a transfer to a prison of lower-security and ultimately release on (day) parole.

To provide a contrast, 30-year old Tegen, an Indigenous woman whom I recruited from one of the prisoner reentry organizations, narrated her experience of imprisonment and reentry as follows:

KM: You said you've been to prison three times. Can you tell me about your most recent stay?

Tegen: I've been more than 3 times. The last one was for shoplifting, I think I did 3 months for that. Some failures, some breaches. Going in is the scariest part. Coming out, you're just left alone there after being institutionalized. Your first time, it doesn't matter who you are, you're institutionalized. Just like a cold baby, needing their mother, when they take the shackles off you think you're free but it only lasts for so long.

When asked to talk about her "pre-prison" life, Tegen added:

I was a renegade. Runaway. Group homes. I left there when I was almost 6 and never went back, although I wish I had. But it was just another system after those experiences - jail, there were scary parts going in and out, but after a life of living that, it was just another gig.

Similarly to Tegen, for whom reentry was essentially a "prelude to another entry into the prison" (Wacquant 2010: 611), Mira (also recruited from a reentry organization) explained:

It's a vicious cycle because it always ends up the same. I know with the AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] philosophy it's jails, institutions and death, so what happens with me is I drink, I black out, I end up in jail, I come out, I go to treatment, I get a job, home, vehicle, I get drunk, I black out, I go to jail. So it's a cycle. It's getting worse because I'm getting scars, my mouth is all banged up, my health is not good.

While my interview questions around people's 'pre-prison lives' and 'post-prison challenges' corresponded with the ways that halfway house residents narrated their past, future, and present, these questions (and the underlying conceptualization) proved less useful or appropriate for the other 20 ex-prisoners. One reason for this is that the challenges they experienced (e.g., drug use, poverty) in most cases did not begin at the point of their release, but rather, they were more long-standing. More importantly though, it was because the prison, and as a result 'reentry', are not seen as distinct life phases, as a 'before' and 'after'. Rather, the prison is conceived of as 'just' another form of state institutionalization against people's will. Similarly to Tegen, David (recruited from a prisoner reentry organization) embedded his account of the prison within the broader context of past institutionalization:

I just remember I was crying in there [prison] when I had the cell to myself because I couldn't believe it that I was locked in this room and that I couldn't do anything about it. Yeah, it was pretty bad, but there were instances too where it reminded me...because I was in an orphanage when I was a kid, and some of the jail stuff reminded [me?] of that. It was a very painful time for me in the orphanage, maybe the worst in my life other than when I went to jail for those assaults, but a lot of it reminded me of that, and I kind of reverted back to the way I was just to kind of survive. But I just remember, the powerlessness of being locked up and you can't do anything about it. That's one of the worst feelings I can ever have is powerlessness and hopelessness, and that's all that is in jail.[...] Yeah, it was just, you know, the guard and nuns were really mean to us in the orphanage. Like they were mean, cruel, and the guards here were the same. You know, I mean...only lately I've kind of realized that way of my life. In my head, I've been imprisoned.

Together, these interviewees' quotes provide grounds for further explorations of the ways incarceration and other penal practices shape how individuals talk about and envision reentry. While halfway house interviewees commonly narrated their experience of reentry as one of

change, desistance, recovery, hope, and ‘never going back to prison’, the other 20 interviewees were far less likely to use this kind of terminology and engage in this kind of meaning-making of their time in the community.

The blurred boundary between reentry and urban poverty also became apparent in interviews with reentry organization staff. While it is commonly argued that NGOs have been co-opted by the penal state by taking on punitive functions, my data point to a different and possibly changing nature of these organizations. Sally, a staff member who had worked at the same reentry organizations for over 20 years, said that in the past:

It was guys coming out of prison where they would have to come to us, and we had programs they’d have to come to, so they were coming...their parole officer kind of made them come to us, much more than the walk-ins. In my head, that’s how it worked. We were more of a parole office in that way.

When asked to describe the more current purpose of the organization, Sally replied:

A safe place, because they’re usually coming from the [shelter], and they’ll tell you right out, it’s not a safe place for them. They know nobody [here] will say “Do this, do that, get out of here”, whatever. They can kind of sit and have a coffee and not feel that they’re going to be told to leave. So it’s a safe place. They know no one will harass them...we’re not on them, you know what I mean? There’s no one going to bug you.

To illuminate this point, a staff member during one of my visits to one of the reentry organizations described a group of clients as “the breakfast club,” referring to their frequent presence for a morning snack at the organization. Reentry staff often went to great lengths to emphasize their lack of both control and moral superiority over clients. Similarly to Sally, another reentry worker, Lauren, described her work as follows:

I mean, it’s client centred definitely. I’m not there to tell them [clients] what they need to work on, or even if I think it’s in their best interest. I’m going to support them regardless as

long as it's legal, and so they'll know, you know, tell us their problems and stuff, and we'll try and focus on what's most...like, sort of a Band-Aid solution.

Lauren made clear that rather than trying to “incorporate” ex-prisoners into society through employment programs, soft skills training, and other programming (although this is also one of the organizations’ mandates), front-line staff resorted to a ‘hands-off’ approach (i.e., by letting clients use the space, hang out there, warm up, etc.), which they believed was not only better suited to their clientele’s particular needs, but also differentiated them from other agencies (like parole, but also shelters), which seek to regulate ex-prisoners in a much more direct mode through responsabilization techniques.

Several of the ex-prisoners that I interviewed also said they accessed these reentry organizations for material help, coffee, and positive recognition, for example, what Casper described as “a happy hello” that “helps you start off the day.” Restless, who had been federally and provincially incarcerated, described frequenting the reentry organization as part of:

[...] trying to do things the legit way. What normal people would do. Go to [name of reentry organization] when you get out of jail. So I go there, and they have different resources for housing. [Name of reentry organizations] helps me out with the coffee and that. The violence can end with just a cup a coffee in the morning. You wake up bitchy and confused, you're not awake, but you have that cup of coffee, relax, have a cigarette, and you can plan out your day.

In sum, the data highlight the complex nature of prisoner reentry as process that is imbued with different meanings. While this dissertation focuses on the halfway house aspect of prisoner reentry, the broader research points to the importance of taking a capacious approach to the study of prisoner reentry. All of the former prisoners interviewed “reentered” the community, yet the meaning they attributed to this process varied significantly. Moreover, my data demonstrate the importance of looking beyond reentry programming, and extending the focus to other reentry

spaces (e.g., drop-in rooms of reentry organizations), looking at the particular strategies of governance that arise within those spaces.

Chapter 3

Intermediary Actors, Liminal Sites: Accepting and Deflecting Responsibility within the Halfway House Context

Abstract

This article examines the narratives of halfway house workers in a north-western Canadian city. It seeks to fill a gap in research on penal governance and prisoner reentry by examining the ways halfway house workers understand, enact, and give meaning to their governing role as supporters and social control agents of ex-prisoners. Additionally, it provides insight into the halfway house context and more specifically, the ways halfway houses are produced as liminal or transitional spaces, as evinced in halfway house workers' narratives of rehabilitation and supervision. Halfway house workers are responsabilized by the Canadian state to support and supervise former prisoners, but ultimately they are not invested with the authority to make decisions regarding halfway house residents' legal future. I demonstrate how halfway house workers capitalize on this intermediary position, using meso-level complications and struggle to carve out a space in which they feel empowered to carry out multiple (and sometimes conflicting) agendas in their everyday interactions with halfway house residents.

Keywords: prisoner reentry, rehabilitation, penal governance, halfway houses

Introduction

In Canada, federal prisoners²¹ are typically eligible for supervised release—i.e., parole— after serving 1/3 of their sentence. The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) regularly applies residency conditions to a person’s parole release that require them to live in a community residential facility, or halfway house²², for a certain period of time—typically six months—following release (Bell & Trevethan, 2004). According to the Canadian government, such residency requirements are intended to enhance public safety, and to facilitate prisoners’ reentry into the community through ongoing supervision and rehabilitative programming (CSC 2014). As noted by Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009: 546) in their study of parole in Canada, halfway houses in particular are described by the Canadian government as settings that will “allow the paroled subject to gradually establish herself in the community” while residing in a safe, structured, and controlled environment. This article examines the narratives of halfway house workers in a north-western Canadian city, focusing on how these workers understand, enact, and give meaning to their governing role as supporters and social control agents of former prisoners.

Canadian halfway houses are run by a variety of different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that the Canadian government funds for the management of ex-prisoners. The contractual agreements between the government and NGOs stipulate that the halfway house workers employed by these NGOs perform many tasks and carry a variety of responsibilities that, I argue,

²¹In Canada, individuals sentenced to two years or more serve time in federal custody, managed by the Correctional Service of Canada, whereas those sentenced to terms less than two years serve their sentences in provincial/territorial facilities.

²² In Canada, the terms community-based residential facility and halfway house are used interchangeably.

closely resemble those of parole officers; they are tasked to provide rehabilitative support to halfway house residents, to monitor their behaviours and activities—both at the halfway house and in the community— and to report any infractions (i.e., violations of parole but also, as I discuss in greater detail below, other rules imposed by the halfway house) to the state. Halfway houses as residential settings also, it can be argued, share at least some of the organizational features of prisons, such as being staffed on a 24-hour basis, or using different security levels to classify residents. To the extent that halfway house workers and the settings that they work in share some similarities with state-employed criminal justice workers and prisons respectively, both may be understood as operating as an arm of the penal state or as an extension of the prison system (Allspach 2010). Yet, as my data will show, halfway house workers tend to resist these kinds of comparisons, often going to great lengths to distance themselves from state criminal justice actors and halfway houses from prisons. Thus, along with exploring how halfway house workers imagine themselves as distinct from other criminal justice actors, I am also interested in how they position the halfway house setting in relation to the prison on the one hand and the wider community on the other.

In addressing these issues, I draw upon and seek to expand existing scholarship on penal governance and prisoner reentry. Numerous scholars have analyzed how the involvement of NGOs in penal practices has contributed to producing a penal system that, in the words of Beckett and Murakawa (2012: 222), “has become not only larger, but also more legally hybrid and institutionally variegated.” Beckett and Murakawa (2012) use the term “shadow carceral state” to draw attention to the plurality of policies, discourses, practices, and actors that together make up the penal system. This article responds to the call to scholars made by Beckett and Murakawa and others (e.g., Valverde 2012) to empirically study the penal system as it unfolds in its complexity. Specifically, by analyzing the narratives of halfway house workers, I bring more focus to the

perceptions and everyday practices of the diversity of actors involved in the governance of criminalized populations. Halfway house workers' narratives, I suggest, provide grounded insights into the hybrid and variegated character of the penal system by showing, more concretely, how it can contain within its broad reach non-state workers who often understand themselves as working progressively and/or benevolently outside of, or even against, a more repressive and punitive state (Singh, 2011). This article explores these understandings, while also paying attention to the ways in which halfway house workers' descriptions of their roles and the halfway house phenomenon itself also reveal accompanying tensions, contradictions, and, more optimistically perhaps, evidence of albeit limited alternative visions, or even resistance, within the constraints of state ideology and power.

In so doing, this article also joins a growing (but still limited) body of scholarship in the field of prisoner reentry that examines how NGOs govern ex-prisoners. This work has provided rich insights into how NGO workers conceive of former prisoners and seek to reconfigure their behaviors, identity, and social relationships (Kaufman 2015; McKim 2014; Miller 2014; Mijs 2016). It has yet to explore how these workers conceive of themselves, their workplace roles, and the settings in which they work. In addition to understanding how non-state actors come to participate in the production of a hybridized, variegated penal state, this article also sheds further light on how non-state actors conceive of and seek to govern ex-prisoners post release. To my knowledge, the perspectives and practices of halfway house workers in Canada and elsewhere have not received any scholarly attention (for research on/with halfway house residents in Canada and the U.S. see Allspach (2010) and Caputo (2014) respectively). Halfway house staff act on ex-prisoners during a particularly critical time—the first six months following release, which ex-prisoners have described as particularly difficult (Pollack 2008). Research has also shown that the

majority of those who eventually return to prison do so within the first six months of release (e.g., Petersilia 2003). Halfway house staff's perceptions and practices thus warrant scholarly attention.

Halfway house workers are charged by the Canadian state with the hybrid task of providing rehabilitative support and supervision to former prisoners. They also occupy an intermediary role. By this I mean, halfway house workers are responsabilized by the government to support and supervise ex-prisoners, but ultimately they are not invested with the authority to make decisions regarding halfway house residents' legal future. I demonstrate how halfway house workers capitalize on their intermediary position, using meso-level complications and struggle to carve out a space in which they feel empowered to carry out multiple (and sometimes conflicting) agendas in their everyday interactions with halfway house residents.

This article proceeds as follows: I begin by reviewing some of the relevant literature on prisoner reentry. Next, I describe the role of halfway houses in Canada's penal system, drawing out, where applicable, differences to the U.S. context, which is where the bulk of reentry research has been situated. With this context established, I then outline the methodology of the larger study from which halfway house workers' narratives are drawn and say a little more about the context of my research engagement with these workers. Interviewees' narratives are then examined as I seek to illuminate how they talked about themselves, their work, and the halfway house as a setting. I conclude this paper by outlining the significance of halfway house workers' narratives for the broader study of prisoner reentry.

Reentry and the Governance of Former Prisoners

Prisoner reentry has been traditionally conceptualized as “the process of leaving prison and returning to free society” (Visher & Travis 2003: 89; see also Petersilia 2003). Defining reentry as an individual process focuses attention on the various socio-economic and practical challenges of reentry, which include finding and retaining legal employment, securing housing, reconnecting with family and friends, and receiving help for addictions and physical and mental health issues (e.g., Arditti & Few 2006; Hammett & Kennedy 2003; Pager 2003; Petersilia 2003).

More recently, scholars have highlighted that ex-prisoners’ trajectories of reentry are significantly influenced by the practices and work carried out by the various actors and organizations involved in the care and governance of formerly incarcerated individuals (Kaufman 2015; Miller 2014; Mijs 2016). While much of the work on NGOs’ involvement in penal practices has remained at a macro and/or analytical level, a small, but increasing, number of scholars have started to examine how NGOs work in the lives of those returning from confinement (Kaufman 2015; McKim 2008; 2014; Mijs 2016; Miller 2014; see also Singh 2011). This scholarship has mainly focused on how NGO workers conceive of/constitute ex-prisoners. On one hand, ex-prisoners, it has been shown, are framed as deficient, broken, and in need of help insofar as their past (i.e., their initial offending and incarceration) is explained by their broader marginalization; on the other hand, they are conceived of as responsible and accountable for their future behavior, success, and social outcomes. Mijs (2016: 299), in his ethnographic examination of a U.S. reentry organization, has found that “clients’ lives are divided into a period to come, an agentic future, that is driven by the choices they make, as distinct from their structural past leading up to their incarceration.” If a person is reincarcerated, this can then be attributed to personal failure at proper self-management and self-care. Such neoliberalized assumptions about ex-prisoners’ lives also come to the fore in

McKim's work (2014: 435) on (non-state) residential addiction treatment programs for women in the U.S.; treatment staff in her research viewed female ex-prisoners' addictions and social marginalization as indicative of "women's weak selves."

Organizational narratives of choice and responsibility also shape actual practice; as Nielsen and Kolind (2016: 134) have noted, "the responses towards [ex-prisoners'] diverse problems tend to sort and represent them through a certain institutional understanding of what kind of person the institution is dealing with." The framing of ex-prisoners as responsabilized subjects means that NGO workers tend to emphasize self-transformation when dealing with ex-prisoners. As explained by Singh (2011: 270), "[voluntary] programs target individual will and seek to create active citizens by re-shaping the desires of subjects." Former prisoners are told that in order to see positive changes in their lives, they must change themselves. Self-transformation, as imagined by NGO workers, includes things such as changing one's outward appearance in ways that signify to others, and potential employers in particular, independence, cultural capital, and responsibility (McKim 2014), or engaging in rehabilitative programming that, by enhancing soft skills and personal characteristics, is imagined to make ex-prisoners more employable (Kaufman 2015; Miller 2014). Talking about and admitting to one's past wrongdoings is also believed to promote the development of a new self-image as distinct from one's old, criminal self (see Maruna 2001). As a "social institution" focused on self-change, Miller (2014: 417) has argued that "reentry can be viewed as a 'people changing institution' that seeks to transform former prisoners into 'productive citizens' through programs that locate the inner life as the primary site of social policy intervention."

Although not focused on the NGO sector, Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat's (2009) work on parole conditions in Canada as well as Werth's (2013) study of parole officers in California are

particularly insightful for my research, as these authors show, more concretely, how ex-prisoners on parole in particular are constructed in official parole conditions and by parole officers respectively. Focusing on how female parolees are constituted within parole decision narratives, Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009) have argued that parolees are constructed as “fractured subjects”—they are constructed in some ways as incapable of taking care of themselves, thus requiring the supervision and structure ostensibly provided by parole officers, halfway house staff, and other treatment providers, while, in other ways, they are responsabilized to manage their own risks, change their behaviours, and care for themselves. Parole conditions, these scholars have argued (2009: 533), thus fulfil a dual function; “they help prepare women prisoners for ‘freedom’ by mobilizing particular techniques of self-governance, while simultaneously operating as modes of surveillance that police the boundaries of acceptable conduct.”

Werth’s (2013) findings align with Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat’s research. Parole officers in his study framed parolees as responsible for their own conduct, while conceiving them as inherently dangerous, risky, and prone to crime and violence. Conceptualizing parolees as threatening, Werth (2013: 223) has argued, goes hand in hand with the privileging of a “surveillance, control-oriented approach to parole supervision” that is focused on regulating and monitoring parolees’ lives. However, rather than completely abandoning rehabilitative efforts, parole officers resort to a “tough love” approach, whereby “exercising regulatory surveillance is seen as the most effective way to encourage and facilitate reformation” (2013: 236). Parole officers are therefore able to combine control and rehabilitative practices into what they think is a logical, effective approach to governing parolees.

Ex-prisoners’ experiences of reentry are clearly shaped by various state actors (e.g., parole officers) and non-state organizations (e.g., reentry organizations, halfway houses), making it

important to study the everyday practices and perspectives of these actors, including how they imagine themselves as being different from/similar to others in similar roles. In this Canadian case study, I thus explore the perspectives and practices of halfway house workers, focusing on how they perceive and position themselves not only vis-à-vis the residents but also vis-à-vis other criminal justice professions and the prison on the one hand, and varied constructions of the community on the other. Addressing prisoner reentry from the angle of those who are appointed to carry it out is essential for shedding light on how prisoner reentry unfolds in the lives of former prisoners. It invites scholars to apprehend prisoner re-entry not just as an individual process (Miller 2014) but as an outcome of these various actors' everyday practices. In what follows, I provide further context on the halfway house system in Canada.

Halfway Houses in the Canadian Context

Canadian halfway houses were developed by different NGOs in the 1950s. In the early 1970s, the Solicitor General of Canada²³ appointed a national task force to investigate and report, for the first time, on the role and state of halfway houses in Canada's criminal justice system. In the resulting report (Report of the Task Force on Community-Based Residential Centres, 1973), halfway houses were described as serving three broad purposes, namely "to divert persons entirely from the criminal justice system and incarceration; to short-cut the length of incarceration; and to provide temporary relief from incarceration" (ix). Halfway houses, thus, developed as part of a broader movement toward using community-based (rather than institutional) programs and interventions in the punishment, rehabilitation, and management of offenders.

²³ The position of Solicitor General was abolished in 2005. Previously, the Solicitor General's department was responsible for the administration of the prison system and other security-related matters.

Non-state actors have played a substantial role in the development and operation of Canadian halfway houses from the beginning. The first halfway house for ex-prisoners—Beverley Lodge in Toronto—was established by the Anglican Church in 1954, and various other houses opened in the 1960s under the auspices of different, mostly religious, organizations (e.g., St. Leonard’s Society, Salvation Army). NGOs in contemporary Canada continue to play the dominant role in the operation of halfway houses. As of 2015/2016, there were 150 NGO-run halfway house facilities for federal ex-prisoners serving part of their sentence in the community under supervision. These houses, according to the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC), “work on a system of gradual, supervised release” and provide “a bridge between the institution and the community” (CSC, 2014) as criminological research has shown that “conditional release is more effective in promoting a prisoner’s successful reintegration into society as a law-abiding citizen than would be his/her sudden freedom—at sentence expiry—without any assistance or supervision” (Doob, Webster, & Manson 2014: 305; Andrews & Bonta 2010).

Halfway houses in contemporary Canada range in capacity from four to 80 beds and tend to be located in urban centres, mostly around low-income residential neighbourhoods (Allspach 2010; Bell & Trevethan 2004). Most are female or male only facilities, although there are some mixed-gender houses (for a critique of the latter, see Maidment, 2006). In addition to the 150 NGO-run halfway house institutions, there remain a small number of government-run facilities referred to as community-correctional centres. These centres, which also house individuals on supervised/conditional release, have been described as more security focused than NGO-run facilities (Bell & Trevethan 2004; Office of the Correctional Investigator 2014). The research for this article focuses on NGO-run halfway houses only.

Halfway house residents are typically required to be physically present at the halfway house overnight (for at least six consecutive hours). In addition, they must report to the halfway house, in person or over the phone, by 6 pm daily—a curfew set by CSC. If a resident fails to comply, halfway house workers are required, as per their contracts with the Canadian government, to report such lack of compliance either to the parole officer of the resident or to what is called the National Monitoring Centre (NMC)—a centralized operational centre, located in Ottawa, that oversees all halfway house and other community operations across Canada. While halfway house workers advise parole officers regarding residents’ progress (in terms of employment, treatment, and general behavior at the halfway house), the ultimate supervision authority lies with the Canadian government. Halfway house workers, as such, cannot revoke a person’s parole and return them to prison.

Halfway houses combine state rules (i.e., parole conditions) with their own rule regime. Beyond the state-required daily 6 pm report, halfway houses exercise considerable autonomy in terms of imposing additional rules (including other curfews; see further later). For example, all four halfway houses included in this study required that residents call-in (or leave a voicemail) whenever they changed their location in the community (e.g., left work to get coffee). Although these additional halfway house rules are not government mandated, resident violations of such rules must still be reported to the parole officer, and can potentially lead to a revocation of parole for the halfway house resident, for example, if these violations are thought to suggest “deteriorating behavior”. Because halfway house workers are required to report any and all resident infractions of state as well as additional halfway house rules to the government (in the form of parole officers and/or the NMC), the additional rules imposed by halfway houses serve to increase the number of regulations that must be followed by residents and therefore also the number of possible infractions or breaches that could lead residents being returned to custody. The fact that only part of the supervision regime

is regulated by the government, while the rest is constructed autonomously by usually NGO-run halfway houses, makes halfway houses a particularly fruitful site for studying how non-state workers operate under and negotiate the constraints imposed by the state, and how they seek to govern ex-prisoners. Given halfway houses' state authorization and supervision responsibilities, it might be appropriate to characterize them as quasi-state (rather than non-state) organizations.

This overview of the involvement of NGOs (or quasi-state institutions) in Canada's halfway house system, on the one side, speaks to, and confirms, the work conducted by some U.S. prisoner reentry scholars, who have argued that NGOs have been increasingly responsabilized by the state to both care for and control ex-prisoners, such as by monitoring and enforcing their parole conditions (e.g., Kaufman 2015; Phelps 2011). Scholars have referred to this development as "carceral devolution," defined by Miller (2014: 308) as a "set of interrelated policies that transfer carceral authority—in this case the authority to rehabilitate and supervise prisoners—from federal and state-based institutions to local ones." Indeed, as shown above, NGOs in Canada have taken a growing responsibility in the supervision of ex-prisoners by housing and supervising individuals on conditional/supervised release. On the other side, and this is mentioned less often, the history of Canadian halfway houses also demonstrates that the involvement of NGOs is a long-standing criminal justice practice, and that these organizations have always been involved, or even played an initiating role, in the care and punishment of ex-prisoners, albeit in different ways and contexts (Hannah-Moffat 2000; Singh 2011). In what follows, I outline my methodology, providing more insight into the working realities of halfway house staff.

Methods

This article draws upon a larger qualitative research project that I conducted in the city of Edmonton, Canada from May 2015 to June 2016. The larger project involved in-depth interviews

with 26 front-line workers at four halfway houses and three social service agencies focused on providing services to ex-prisoners, interviews with 47 recently released prisoners, and ethnographic observations conducted in the drop-in rooms of two social service agencies. In addition, I conducted a textual analysis of the “resident handbooks” that are given by halfway house workers to incoming residents upon their initial arrival at the halfway house. For purposes of this paper, I draw from the interviews conducted with 15 front-line workers²⁴ at four male and female only halfway house facilities in Edmonton.

The key work activities of the interviewees included meeting with residents on a regular basis (interviewees had a case load of two to five residents), writing updates and reports on residents’ progress related to their employment, treatment, and general behavior at the halfway house to be shared with residents’ parole officers, and reporting any resident infractions to the parole officer or the NMC, as explained earlier. While halfway house workers are not allowed to physically search or detain residents (any resident can walk out of the front door), they are nonetheless authorized (and required, as per their contractual agreements) to conduct (hourly) resident counts (both during the day and at night), regular and random room searches, and urine analyses. Three of my interviewees had additional managerial functions (i.e., they were in charge of scheduling, resident intake, etc.) as well the above-described tasks. Halfway houses are staffed on a 24-hour basis, with staff typically working 8-hour shifts. Some interviewees worked day shifts, some night shifts, some both.

²⁴ 15 of the 26 front-line staff were halfway house workers. As such, this article focuses on these 15 staff in an effort to provide an in-depth account of their perspectives and the halfway house context.

At the time of the interviews, the 15 participants described here had worked at the same halfway houses between six months and 22 years, and were thus able to share a range of experiences, including how they believed their work and occupational role had changed over time. Interviewees shared similar educational backgrounds; most held a university degree in the social sciences, and many had completed a two-year diploma in correctional services (following their university degree) prior to starting their job. Twelve participants identified as female, three as male. All participants identified as white or Caucasian, which stands in contrast to the over-representation of prisoners and ex-prisoners of Indigenous descent in Canada and Edmonton, and other Canadian Prairie cities, in particular. For example, at the Edmonton Institution for Women—one of Canada’s six federal prisons for women, more specifically—56% of prisoners are Aboriginal.

Halfway house workers were interviewed between May and December 2015. Each interview took place in a private office at the halfway house; all interviews were voice recorded and ranged from 45 to 170 minutes in length. I asked participants broad and general questions about their initial decision to work at a halfway house, their daily work activities, how they viewed their role in facilitating prisoner reintegration, and more specifically how they linked the rules and routines of the halfway house to the goal of resident reintegration. A semi-structured interview guide that could be adjusted to participants' experiences was used. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Staff interviews were coded (open and selective coding) using NVIVO (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The findings are organized into three themes; halfway house workers vis-à-vis parole; the halfway house vis-à-vis the prison; and the halfway house vis-à-vis the community.

Halfway House Workers vis-à-vis Parole

According to Michèle Lamont (2000), individuals and social groups frequently perform what she calls “boundary work,” meaning that they construct similarities and differences between

themselves and others. People engage in “boundary work” in an effort to justify their own position and create a positive sense of self (Lamont 2000). Parole officers and halfway house staff are the two key figures responsible for the front-line management of ex-prisoners on parole. They often work together, jointly deciding on issues such as residents’ leisure privileges, curfew extensions, and rehabilitative programming. While the staff in my study recognized the similarities between their work duties and those of parole officers, much of our conversation was dominated by interviewees’ thoughts on the ways they believed they were different from parole officers. Below, I describe the ways interviewees drew “boundaries” between themselves and parole officers in ways that allowed them to present themselves as better positioned to carry out the dual mandate of ex-prisoner support and supervision.

“They come to you with all their problems”: Halfway House staff as support workers

I came into this field wanting to be a support person because I think these guys [residents] don’t get that. I think a lot of people have given up on them, so I like to operate as a support person, and I think that’s what makes the difference as opposed to having just someone controlling and supervising you all the time. (Kathleen)

Like Kathleen, all my interviewees explained that they were initially drawn to work in a halfway house because they wanted to help and support individuals, who they believed faced various practical and socio-economic challenges after their incarceration (e.g., financial hardship, difficulty finding employment) as well as general societal stigma in the community. Because halfway houses are small-scale facilities and staffed on a 24-hour basis, interviewees reported that they had more frequent contact with individual residents than parole officers and other treatment providers (e.g., counsellors), whose interactions with residents tend to be more limited; parole

officers, for example, typically meet with their parolees on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Halfway house workers, by contrast, are involved with residents' day-to-day activities as they do things such as giving residents their medications, providing them with food money, and approving their sign-out when they wish to leave the halfway house for daily activities, such as work, programming, and leisure activities.

According to staff, frequent contact—even if just in the form of approving a resident's sign-out or handing out medications—provided them with opportunities for greater trust and rapport and therefore ultimately more of a role in residents' eventual reintegration. Rachel explained:

When they [residents] finally get out [of the halfway house], and show that they actually have a chance of a positive life, you feel like you have had a part in that, because you do see them [residents] pretty much every single day, and they come to you with all of their problems, so I think that is the best thing about this job. You know, being involved with vulnerable people that actually need the extra support, because a lot of people are against criminals being let out and really don't give them a chance, because they really don't get to know them.

As Rachel's narrative indicates, she considers herself as someone residents would more easily trust and confide in ("they come to you with all their problems"). Interviewees specifically made a clear distinction between how they believed residents related to them as halfway house workers versus parole officers. As Jessica said, "there are some POs [parole officers] that do take that time to get to know their clients one-on-one, but they're few and far between." She believed parole officers were more detached from residents' lives and primarily concerned with rule compliance:

I like being able to work one-on-one with the clients. I don't want to be a parole officer that sits by their desk making sure that they [residents] are following their conditions, and just checking boxes and writing reports.

Jessica valued her perceived ability to support residents through the development of a personal and trusting relationship. When I asked staff how they referred to their job position, they frequently said “support worker,” even though their official job title, as stated in the “resident handbooks,” is “caseworker.” Some interviewees, in describing how they felt about their role, also invoked a language of parental/maternal care:

[...] sometimes I almost feel like it's [residents] a big teenage kid and you're almost a parent and you're telling them [residents] what to do in order not to get in trouble, and you help them see it and understand it. “Call us when you get there”, you know. “Give us a call. If you have any troubles, give us a call. If you have police contact, please give us a call.”
(Susan)

Halfway house residents were viewed by workers as deserving and in need of help, support and respectful, compassionate, and nurturing treatment, which staff saw key to gaining trust and building rapport with residents. As a “parent,” Susan, who worked at a male halfway house, felt her job involved protection and guidance (“If you have any troubles, give us a call.”) through ongoing contact, care, and gentle discipline. Because staff have direct access to residents and spend much time with them, interviewees believed they were particularly well positioned to offer this kind of parental guidance. The theme of parental care is developed by Baker (2013) in a study of a U.S. drug treatment program. Within the organization of the drug court, Baker (2013: 50) positions the judge as the father, the drug court client as the child, and the case manager as the mother:

The case managers, like mothers, are actively involved in the day-to-day activities of the client. They manage schedules and they oversee the physical and mental health of the client. It is hoped that the clients will confide in the case manager because they trust the case manager cares about them and knows them individually. (Baker, 2013: 50)

Baker's finding is consistent with some of the relational dynamics between halfway house staff and residents, as well as between halfway house staff and parole officers, I observed, as outlined further below.

“When things are off we can tell”: Resident supervision

Consistent with staff's dual mandate, interviewees all recognized the role of monitoring, supervising, and ultimately reporting on compliance with parole conditions as part of their daily work. Because of their frequent contact with residents, staff believed they were particularly well positioned to carry out these tasks. In their view, they had more knowledge of residents' lives and potential risk factors than parole officers, making them more capable of judging whether residents were actively engaged in their post-release plans and genuinely committed to “going straight” (Maruna 2000). As Michelle said, “You know, we're pretty good at determining whether someone is off, because we watch them so often.” There are good reasons for Michelle's belief insofar as halfway house workers (unlike parole officers) have direct access to residents and their belongings through hourly counts and regular room searches.

In practice, staff used various techniques of “governing up-close” (Werth 2013) in order to supervise residents. In addition to counts and room searches, for example, they required that residents call-in every time they changed their location in the community. For Jessica, these kinds of measures meant that:

We [halfway house workers] can better assess them [residents] and the risk they may pose to the community because we see them on a daily basis; and when things are off we can tell. We pick up on that, right?

Max went even further to share how he thought of himself as being a well-informed “advocate” for residents vis-a-vis their parole officers:

[...] because often parole officers don’t see their guys too often. How is that PO [parole officer] going to know if this person is having a problem, if they’re falling into a crime cycle or getting stressed out, and then they use [drugs]. The PO is not going to know.

The above narratives show that interviewees positioned themselves as experts in both supporting residents and assessing and managing their needs and risks on the grounds that they knew residents best. Distinguishing themselves from parole officers allows halfway house staff to justify their position, and to create a positive sense of self as workers who are particularly well positioned to carry out the dual mandate of support and supervision. In addition to crafting this positive self-conception, it should also be noted that staff’s reasons for why they feel well suited to supervise residents provide them with a narrative for why they should enjoy power over residents’ lives and why their actions, particularly those of control and supervision, are justified.

“We don’t issue the warrants”: Limited power, more Support

Despite talking extensively about how their occupational role was one of support (rather than punishment), my interviewees also recognized that their role of observing, monitoring, and reporting to parole officers and the NMC placed them in what Julie described as a “middleman role.” As shown in her excerpt below, it was precisely this “middleman role” that workers invoked in their interviews, explaining what enabled them to adopt what they believed was a more supportive role in relation to residents:

It’s [the role as halfway house worker] a bit of a middleman role, I guess you could call it, because the guy also has a parole officer who is going to call all the shots, so it kind of enables the case. We’re going to be more supportive because if anything, you know, legal wise or whatever has to happen, it’s the parole officer that’s going to do it all. We don’t have the ability to issue warrants, so in a way we can be that support person, and the parole officer is looking over saying, “Okay, well, the way I see it, we got to do a suspension,” so

I guess that is nice in a way, that the case worker can be somewhat more supportive; it's like the good cop, bad cop thing. "Like, we want to help you out, but your PO says blah, blah, that you've got to go back to jail for this, or you need to go to a program for this," and, you know, it kind of enables you to sort of empathize with the guy while still, you know, sort of enforcing the rules that this is what we have to do.

Halfway house workers and parole officers are portrayed in the "resident handbooks" previously mentioned as a united front that coordinates their actions. In practice, however, halfway house workers' power is more limited since they lack the authority to decide how residents should be dealt with in the event of non-compliance. The fact that halfway house staff have less power than parole officers in dealing with residents' behavior was experienced by my interviewees as mostly liberating. Interviewees emphasized how their limited authority allowed them to take a more supportive role, as they could defer the responsibility for sending residents back to prison to the parole officer. Doris explained how her inability to return residents to prison enabled her to build rapport and "a healthy relationship" with residents in ways parole officers cannot:

If we had staff who were like "You're going to go to jail," like their rapport with the guys alone would severely decrease. Our residents' anxiety would skyrocket. We would probably see recidivism rates like crazy, and our program success would go down because, I mean, it's just not a healthy relationship to have, so we can take on a lot more of a supportive role, and we leave the actual "You're going back to jail" talk to the correctional service staff like the parole officer or the program staff because it's not our call to make. It's not our job. Our job is supervision, supporting, documenting, and risk management.

Doris and other interviewees repeatedly told me that their role was to "support," "monitor," and "report," not to punish. These tasks were considered non-punitive, since other decisions, such as whether a resident should be returned to prison, were seen as out of their control. As Tina said:

I mean, we don't issue the warrants. We call the National Monitoring Centre, and if they [residents] exhibit signs of abuse, or if we have suspicions of whatever, that they're breaking their conditions, we tell them what we observed. Like, I won't say they're drunk. I'll say, "They're slurring their words. They're swaying. They don't make sense when they talk," or something like that, something that indicates to me that they might be under

the influence of something, so then I tell the National Monitoring Centre, and it's up to them whether they issue warrants.

Similar to Baker's (2013) conception of the judge in the drug treatment court, within the halfway house context the parole officer is the authoritarian father who has the authority to make key decisions, such as when and how to punish.

Some staff did experience their limited power as restrictive. These interviewees shared how calling a resident's parole officer or the NMC was difficult for them, especially if they had built rapport with a resident, and/or believed that imprisonment was not the right response. Kathleen, for example, talked about the constraints of her position, explaining that:

[Calling the NMC is] never a good feeling, especially when you know somebody has been doing fairly well, and sometimes I wish things can be a little different. Like, for example, if a guy were to be, you know, going through something stressful and, say, he slips up and has a beer, well, that means an automatic suspension because he's violated his condition. Is he a risk to the community and to the house? Probably not. It's probably something that could be dealt with, but the supervision part doesn't allow for that, so I think that can be kind of disappointing sometimes. Like I say, it can be hard for sure.

Mary, too, described certain aspects, such as calling state authorities, but also added that such decisions are:

[...] totally out of my hands, and that, obviously, breaks your heart. If it was my decision, it wouldn't be that way, especially with the guys who have addictions because, you know, you slip up once. Now you're going back to jail for two years. You know, maybe he didn't commit a crime, but if you have an addiction, you used and now you go to jail, so that can be hard, for sure, to deal with, but it's part of the job, unfortunately.

Despite these distancing practices, all of the halfway house workers interviewed said they would always follow their contractual obligations and report any resident infractions to the authorities.

Existing studies have shed light on the ways non-state actors try to contest their limited authority or “junior partner” position (Trudeau 2008) in order to distance themselves from state ideology and practices (see Hannah-Moffat & Maurutto 2012; Quirouette, Hannah-Moffat, & Maurutto 2015). While the lack of active resistance among staff in this study in itself may not be surprising, when viewed within the context of how they think of themselves in relation to state-employed criminal justice actors, their lack of power takes on added significance. My data suggest that rather than contesting their limited power, or seeing it as disadvantageous, staff believed their limited power was a benefit or resource in their daily work with halfway house residents. It was precisely their frequent contact with residents, combined with their limited power to return residents to prison, which staff believed enabled them to act in a more supportive and rehabilitative capacity compared to state-employed parole officers. Their intermediary position enabled them to adopt what they conceived of as a supportive role, and to rationalize the task of supervision as a non-punitive act.

My interviewees capitalized on their intermediary role, or as staff called it “middleman role,” to position themselves as working in a primarily supportive capacity, and to carve out a position in which they feel empowered to carry out their dual mandate as supporters and social control agents of former prisoners. Within the broader context of the variegated penal state (Beckett & Murakawa 2012), halfway house workers’ intermediary position then helps us understand how the penal system can contain within its broad reach halfway house staff and other non-state workers, who, as my data show, tend to understand themselves as working progressively or benevolently outside of or even against a more repressive penal system. My data suggest that despite being part of the penal system, their intermediary position allows them to adopt a narrative that helps them to envision themselves as working in what is perceived as a particularly supportive capacity. Through

their limited power they are able to maintain their image as supporter and caring nurturer, even though, as further outlined below, their work contributes to the production of a carceral state.

The Halfway House vis-à-vis the Prison

In this section, I explore in more depth how halfway house workers envision their role in helping residents make the transition from prison to community living, and the role halfway houses play in prisoner reintegration. I show how halfway house workers produce the halfway house as a place of transition situated between the prison and the community.

The halfway house as a “trial run”

When I asked Julie, staff member at a male halfway house, to tell me about a resident’s first day at the halfway house, she replied: “We [staff] say to them [residents] all, “You’re not an inmate anymore. You’re a resident. You live here. This is your home.” Julie relied on binaries of inmate/resident and prison/home to distinguish halfway house from prison living. When I asked her to say a little more about the purpose of halfway houses, Julie however added:

The halfway house is sort of like a trial run, I guess, of being out in the community, see how well you [residents] do.

In a similar vein, Tarry noted:

A halfway house is where people are half way through their sentence but still need support, so they still need to serve their sentence out, but they’re given the opportunity to prove themselves in the community [...]. They’re able to carry on a normal life, so they’re able to show the community that they can be in the community.

As indicated in Julie and Tarry’s narratives, residents were imagined as emerging from prison for a “trial run.” Conceptualizing halfway house residency as a “trial run” troubles the idea of “home” associated in dominant discourse with notions of stability, comfort, security, and belonging. For

staff interviewees, halfway house residency provided recently released prisoners with an opportunity to demonstrate that they were both capable and deserving of living in the community. The halfway house, staff explained, provided an opportune setting, as Tony put it, “to test the waters” as halfway house residents were allegedly given just enough freedom for halfway house workers to gauge or “test” whether they were ready for life on the outside as evidenced by residents’ ability to comply with their parole conditions as well as with the additional rules set by the halfway house institution itself.

Upon passing the stage of “Orientation,” which refers to the first two to three days residents must spend entirely at the halfway house facility, residents are permitted to spend most of their day in the community, but have to return to the facility at certain curfews, and also call in every time they change their location in the community. My interviewees explained how, in their view, negotiating both the freedoms and restrictions of the halfway house context presented residents with one of the major challenges of reentry given that residents had just emerged from the highly regulated prison environment where their lives were over-regimented. Charles, who worked at a male halfway house, explained:

Guys always have a harder time on community release than they do with the [prison] institution, because in an institution you can do your programming, you do whatever the work duty is, and then you go back to your cell. When you’re out in the community, you know, going to work, doing your programming, at the same you got to get your time in with your family and friends, and you got to be back for the curfew, and you’ve got all your changes of location, so it kind of mixes. Community -- there’s responsibility with that. Yeah, I think that’s the biggest part guys struggle with, is trying to mix the two together.

Successfully managing both this newfound freedom and continued supervision, staff said, demonstrated residents’ maturity and responsibility. Residents’ parole conditions and halfway house rules were described in this context as opportunities for residents to prove themselves worthy in the first instance of the greater freedoms, privileges, and trust found in the halfway house

setting, and then ultimately of being supported on a longer-term trajectory toward full freedom.

Max explained the relevance of halfway house rules as follows:

Let them [residents] know that it [the halfway house] isn't just going to be a free ride. You do have to build a little bit of credibility and take some steps before you start getting those more liberal curfews and more privileges.

The “level system” in particular presented a tool for staff to “test” whether residents were ready for more relaxed curfews and rules. Residents entered the halfway house at the “Orientation” level, and as they made progress in their employment and treatment, they moved up, ending at level 5. Residents’ curfews are gradually relaxed and their leisure privileges extended as they progress on the level system. The following quote exemplifies how staff use the level system as a tool to test whether residents had “earned” more freedom:

I use the level system kind of as my reward system. When my guys are doing well and, you know, they're working and I feel they've kind of earned that freedom, I'm more than happy to move them up to a higher level. If there's problems or they're being, I think, deceitful, then I mean, we would limit their passes. (Kathleen)

Kathleen’s excerpt is illustrative of how staff use their power and discretion in dealing with residents. While staff do not have the authority to return residents to prison, their ability to create and enforce regulations such as the level system creates further possibilities for infractions and charges that could ultimately lead to a person’s reincarceration in the event of continuous disobedience.

Conceptualizing halfway house residency as a “trial phase” means that incarceration is always the default if residents do not abide by the rules of their parole and the halfway house institution. Indeed, for people deemed not ‘ready’ to be on the outside, reincarceration was perceived by the staff I interviewed in most cases as an appropriate outcome (although there were some variations; see below). Various interviewees pointed out the importance of the default of re-incarceration for

the larger objective of resident accountability and public safety. Others believed that imprisonment was appropriate in response to residents' non-compliance because they believed it could fulfil a positive function in people's lives. Tina said:

I realize that after all these years of working they [residents] aren't ready to be out. Something is triggering them. They feel insecure about themselves, or, you know, have low self-esteem. They still can't deal with their recovery. Whatever it is, they need to be back in [prison] for their own sake.

As Tina's statement suggests, reimprisonment was perceived as a proper and positive response by interviewees insofar as it was seen as a way to 'protect' residents from themselves. Tina mentioned that she had worked with several residents who experienced frequent reincarceration and were later returned to the same halfway house, emphasizing how she and the other staff at the halfway house would always be welcoming to and supportive of returning residents who were ready to change their lives, even if it took them various attempts.

Interviewees embraced the idea that full reintegration of residents was possible, if those residents were able and willing to follow their parole conditions and halfway house rules. While living at the halfway house, however, residents were thought of by staff interviewees as being in a place of transition; in the words of Stanley Cohen (1979: 345), they were conceived of as being "half-way out"—as individuals "who can be released from the institution but are not yet 'ready' for the open community." To interviewees, halfway house residency provides ex-prisoners with a limited time to prove their worthiness of being in the community; -it is the deciding point for whether parolees should remain in the community or be referred back to prison. Conceptualizing residents as "half-way out" people troubles the dominant notion of prisoner reentry traditionally defined by scholars such as Jeremy Travis (2000:4) as the move "from a state of imprisonment to a state of liberty." Halfway house residents, as envisioned by staff, were released from prison to a new location where

they experience a “legal and civil purgatory” (Gottschalk 2011)—an intermediate or provisional state during which they have to prove that they are worthy of full release.

Van Gennep (1960) used the term liminality (derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold) to denote the linear progression from childhood to adulthood, and in this regard theorized three stages of passage; separation from the previous life (pre-liminal), transition (liminal), and reintegration into a new life (post-liminal). While residing at the halfway house, residents were conceived of as being in a liminal state between imprisonment and full freedom—in the words of Turner (1969:81; Turner, 1967), they were “betwixt and between”—with the potential to graduate from the liminal to the post-liminal phase (i.e., living in their own residence, completing parole). The framing of the halfway house as a “trial run” or liminal space shaped the ways in which staff interviewees understood the meaning and importance of residents’ parole conditions and halfway house rules. Rules and regulations, as further outlined below, were perceived by staff interviewees as fulfilling both a repressive and productive function (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat 2009) insofar as they allowed staff to “test” whether residents were capable of being compliant, while at the same time, these rules were conceived of as a strategy to prepare residents for their post-liminal lives by molding and forming them into what staff perceived to be “productive” and “pro-social” citizens in the absence of any rules or regulations.

Of course, not all residents transition from the halfway house to the post-liminal stage. Research has consistently drawn attention to the high rates of recidivism and reincarceration among parolees, often for technical violations (e.g., Petersilia 2003; Wacquant, 2009). Individuals who experience frequent incarceration may often return to the liminal space of the halfway house, rather than transitioning to a new, post-liminal life. My conversation with Tina, described above, is illustrative of this repeated liminality (see also Moran 2013a).

The halfway house as a “buffer zone”

[Halfway house living is] prep time. It's like putting a cake in the oven. The halfway house is kind of where the client bakes, where he ferments, where he kind of changes his ways, if he can, so when he comes out of that, out of that buffer zone, society is more willing to accept him back, or he's able to assimilate more. (Steve)

A recurrent theme in the staff interviews was the idea that residents needed to be molded and formed before they could be ‘released’ from the halfway house. Halfway houses, in this regard, were viewed by halfway house workers as places of potential change and personal transformation. Steve’s narrative above is premised on the notion that prison fails to adequately prepare prisoners for release. Like an unbaked cake, individuals exit from prison somewhat messy and unformed. According to Steve and other interviewees, halfway houses, and the work done by staff within them, have the ability to form residents and make them more attractive and presentable to a wider society. As is apparent in the above quote, Steve believed that the time spent in a halfway house could improve residents’ lives in ways that imprisonment could not. For staff, halfway house rules in particular played a key role in the reforming of residents.

Halfway house living is clearly characterized by many rules and regulations. Residents have to abide by their parole conditions, which often regulate major aspects of their lives. Parole conditions may, for example, determine whom they are allowed to associate with and/or the kinds of job opportunities they are permitted to pursue. In addition, the halfway house as an institution can impose other rules and regulations. In the halfway houses sampled for this study, the latter, which are written down in the “resident handbooks” previously mentioned, included regulations around clothing, visitation, cleaning, and wake-up times. These rules were often very detailed, mandating, for example, the precise number of jobs residents were required to apply for per week, or exactly how little clothing constituted “indecent.” In addition, various curfews at certain times during the day by which residents had to return to the halfway house organized their daily lives.

Curfews and other rules were seen by staff interviewees not only as a way to keep residents “accountable” (i.e. knowing who is where at what time), but also as a strategy used to mold them into active and, what interviewees described as “productive” citizens. Consistent with prior research (Miller 2014), by “productive” citizens staff in my study meant self-sufficient actors who seek out pro-social relationships, are gainfully employed, and who are able to live law-abiding lives. Honesty, cooperation with staff, and a willingness to embrace and work toward the possibility of self-transformation were the kinds of behaviors and attitudes staff explained they wanted to see in residents and when these were not evident to staff they could question the value of the halfway house experience. Doris described her own role as follows:

We’re here for you [the resident] to become a pro-social member of the community, to build support, to have employment. And if they’re [residents] not doing those things, then it’s not really productive to even be here, right?

As exemplified by Doris’s statement, halfway house staff felt as if they shared the responsibility for working to help residents begin to lead “productive” lives in this sense. To ensure that residents’ activities were “productive” and “pro-social,” staff emphasize that they kept close watch on those activities, making use of their authority to deny residents access to the community if they did not consider the community activities to be consistent with achieving these goals:

So before they [residents] leave the property staff have to initial their sign-out sheet, so we would kind of be questioning them. “Why are you going there for eight hours? What is your purpose?” And if they didn’t have any clue what they’re doing, they’re just going to hang out, we wouldn’t allow them to. It has to be productive. Like, if you’re going shopping for Christmas presents for the afternoon, great, but the whole day, it’s unrealistic. (Jessica)

Susan explained in more detail how she thought halfway house rules would help residents to lead productive lives upon being discharged from the halfway house:

You’ve got to be back for 10:00, you know, so it’s the accountability piece for our guys, I think, which again puts the stability in their mind. They know, “Yeah, I can do this. So if

I could make it work in the halfway house for 16 months and abide by curfews and do this, why can't I be successful on my own and make sure I pay rent and do this and do that?" It's no difference. You're just doing something that you've got to do. You're mandated to be in a residency. You're mandated to be back home at 10:00 or they're going to call the police, "So when I'm out on my own I have to pay my rent or I'm going to be homeless," or "I have to work or I won't have food," so... yeah.

As Susan's quote shows, halfway house rules were imagined to prepare residents for 'successful' lives defined in terms of reliably paying rent and engaging in paid employment. Since these rules were considered common sense, and a good preparation to re-building one's life, non-compliance, to interviewees, signified residents' inability to live valuable lives once they left the halfway house. Consistent with prior research (Mijs 2016), while staff recognized the different challenges that led to residents' offending (i.e., addictions, financial hardship), they ultimately considered residents agents in their own future, who had to take charge of their own pathway to success defined as community reintegration and social outcomes. The halfway house was conceived of by staff as a "hook for change" (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph 2002)—a space of transition that provided the structure and rules that staff believed were necessary for successful reintegration.

Staff's narratives revealed ambivalence in how they envisioned the role of the prison in relation to the halfway house. On one hand, the prison was thought of as an appropriate place for those unable or unwilling to live in the community as "productive," law-abiding citizens, while on the other hand, staff believed that prison had failed to prepare residents for release. Prison was envisioned by interviewees as both a place that had failed residents as well as an appropriate, and potentially positive, place for those who had failed to live up the standards of the halfway house. This ambivalent conception of the prison, I suggest, may result from staff's hybrid position as both supporters and social control agents of ex-prisoners, as well as from their intermediary or liminal role. In order to envision themselves as resident supporters, halfway house staff must conceive of residents as being in need of help, assistance, and intervention. Their self-conception as supporters

is premised on the idea that prison fails to rehabilitate and prepare prisoners for release. However, in order to make sense of their position as responsabilized quasi-criminal justice agents, the prison must also be envisioned as a place that can fulfil a positive function in people's lives and contribute to the public good.

“Consequences” and pastoral power

Residents must follow the conditions set by the PBC as well as the rules imposed by the halfway house institution. While residents cannot be sent back to prison for disregarding halfway house rules, any rule violations are reported to their parole officer, and may be read by the parole officer as signs of “deteriorating behaviour,” which could ultimately result in parole revocation. In most cases, however, violation of halfway house rules led to, what staff and “resident handbooks” refer to as, consequences.” Consequences include getting a verbal warning, being refused leisure passes, and having other privileges taken away.

According to Foucault (2004), people who exercise what he calls “pastoral power” feel responsibility and devotion toward those in their care. Pastoral power stresses the Christian aim of salvation and corresponding individual sacrifice for others. It is also an individualized form of power, requiring that those who exercise it have intimate knowledge of their subjects (see also Hannah-Moffat 2000). Foucault's conception of pastoral power is particularly useful in understanding how staff in this study rationalized acts of control toward residents.

“Consequences,” according to staff interviewees, were justified because they served rehabilitative goals insofar as they were perceived as ways to discipline and teach residents and to help them lead “productive” lives. Susan explained the “consequence” system as follows:

That's just a tap on the finger, really, is what happens. It's like a kid. That's what I'm saying. It's almost like a parent penalizing a child and teaching them right from wrong: "This is how you act in the real world. You can't do certain things. Well, you can't do certain things here [at the halfway house]; and if you do, there's a consequence," and that's what we usually impose, consequences.

Like Kathleen above, Susan invoked a language of parentalism to describe her relationship with residents. Consistent with Foucault's conception of pastoral power, interviewees said that they enforced rules in order to nurture residents in their care. Because halfway house workers feel they have intimate knowledge of residents (see above), they believe they are particularly well suited to impose "consequences" on the grounds that they know best what residents need to graduate successfully from the halfway house.

The Halfway House vis-à-vis the Community

In this final section, I discuss how halfway house staff positioned themselves and the halfway house in relation to the wider community. My data suggest that halfway house workers conceive of themselves as providing an important service to the wider community and the public good by contributing to public safety and the production of compliant, well-integrated citizens.

While interviewees did not cite public safety as one of their reasons for working at a halfway house, they all recognized, and accepted, that it was central to their mandate. As Steve explained:

Part of my mandate with helping the client out is protecting the public. The last thing I want is a camera shoved in my face on the nightly news saying, "You had an opportunity to send this client back to jail when he was using cocaine" and "He was doing this, and you didn't, and he went and killed somebody." That's the last thing I want.

As Steve's narrative suggests, residents were framed by staff interviewees as always at risk of reverting to criminal behavior. This is consistent with research by Werth (2013: 226), who noted in his study that parole officers in the U.S. "conceive of/constitute parolees as precarious subjects

who are potentially dangerous, troublesome, and unlikely to change.” Staff in my study believed that their work immediately contributed to public safety by monitoring residents’ conduct and reporting any apparently risky behavior to the authorities. The framing of residents as risky subjects allowed staff to justify their role as social control agents who, by supervising and reporting on residents’ non-compliance, could contribute to a resident’s reincarceration and prolonged involvement with the criminal justice system (see also Werth 2013).

In addition to working toward public safety, interviewees also believed that their work contributed to producing socially engaged, active, and productive citizens. Steve explained to me that the public wanted to see “a final product,” by which he meant a reintegrated, compliant resident, but that most people would not be willing to actually provide the kind of help necessary for ex-prisoners to become people who, as Max put it, “you would be comfortable being in your community.” Given that every prisoner is eventually released from prison back into the community, staff interviewees believed their work was socially necessary, albeit somewhat socially tainted. In their own eyes, there was stigma associated with their profession insofar as they believed they were doing a job that most people would refuse to do. The framing of halfway house residency as a “trial phase” meant that interviewees self-identified as workers who contribute to the common good by “testing” people’s worthiness to be in the community and by forming residents into law-abiding, productive citizen.

While interviewees talked about the importance of protecting the public from potentially dangerous residents, they also saw their job as sheltering and protecting residents from the risks and dangers of the wider community. They talked about halfway houses as ideally a “safe” place for residents. Halfway houses were perceived by staff as “safe” spaces for residents because they were believed to help residents deal with some of the immediate challenges of release, such as

finding housing, and because of the structure they provided, which staff believed helped residents to refrain from crime and the harmful elements of their past (e.g., addictions). Within the structured and supervised space of the halfway house, people's risk could be better managed, while in the community staff felt residents were prone to re-offending. In this manner, the wider community outside the halfway house was perceived as more dangerous, and provided a contrast to the "structured" and "safe" space of the halfway house (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat 2009).

In practical terms, residents who staff believed did not have the right mind-set (i.e., who were not committed to their rehabilitation) or who had not yet established a pathway toward a "productive" life (i.e., those who did not have employment and would thus be craving money and drugs) were given more limited privileges for unsupervised activities in the community. This juxtaposition of facilitating residents' reentry into the community versus protecting them from it was described by Julie:

Often they [residents] are coming out of that routine from jail where some of them do quite well because of that routine, and we do want to keep that, you know, in place as long as we can because we do find that so often that while they're here [at the halfway house], the guys do fairly well. You know, a lot of them are really likeable people when they're in a controlled, structured setting, but then you put them back, say, in their communities where they come from. We have one guy who is itching to go up north, I think, to his reserve or something, but you know, I mean, his entire family has got problems and addiction issues and poverty, and you know, it's like "ugh, if you go back there, the chances are that you will fail".

Staff invoked different conceptions of "community." The halfway house, according to interviewees, was there to prepare residents to become members of a community conceived as productive, crime-, and problem-free. However, the ideal community envisioned by staff interviewees was not the community where halfway houses are located (i.e., mostly in poor, often racialized neighbourhoods), nor where many residents are initially from. This was especially salient in Edmonton where a sizable number of residents had grown up in First-Nation

communities around Edmonton or further north. As a result, as Julie notes in the above excerpt, breaking the bonds to these allegedly ‘bad’ communities was seen by white settler halfway house workers as a positive step towards rehabilitation. Halfway houses were believed to provide the help and structure ostensibly necessary for ex-prisoners to successfully graduate from the liminal space of the halfway house. Residents' post-liminal lives and choices (Van Gennep 1960), by contrast, were often seen as less certain and, as suggested by Julie, could easily put residents at risk of returning to the pre-liminal prison stage.

Interviewees' narratives revealed ambivalence in terms of how they envisioned the wider community and their role in this regard. They believed their role involved both protecting the community (since residents were perceived of as inherently risky), and preparing residents for a less than accepting, sometimes problematically stigmatizing, community. Staff interviewees' imagined community of reentry was both idealized (i.e., viewed as a place residents had to prove themselves worthy of) and problematized (i.e., viewed as a place that is not accepting of former prisoners).

Concluding Remarks

A growing number of scholars are interested in the hybridization of contemporary forms of punishment, such as drug treatment courts (Baker 2013; Moore 2011), residential drug treatment facilities (McKim 2014; Gowan & Whethstone 2012), and prisoner reentry organizations (Miller 2014; Mijs 2016; see also Haney 2010). This research provides evidence of how criminal justice interventions often blend seemingly benevolent forms of therapy and treatment with practices of punishment and social control (Goodman, Page & Phelps 2017; Hannah-Moffat and Maurutto 2012; Moore 2007). A smaller number of scholars demonstrate how non-state actors within these organizations seek to reform criminalized subjects. This article aims to augment this body of work

by asking two new questions, notably: How do non-state actors conceive of their occupational roles within such contexts/organizations? And, how do they position themselves in relation to the penal state?

I argue that halfway house workers' intermediary position provides a particularly fruitful ground for investigating how such employees think about their work in relation to that of state-employed criminal justice actors and the penal state. On the one hand, staff's limited power and inability to decide on how to deal with residents in the event of non-compliance were perceived as restrictive, difficult, and emotionally taxing. But my data also show halfway house staff use their limited power to their benefit. Interviewees frequently distinguished themselves from parole officers, capitalizing on their limited power in ways that allow them to maintain a self-conception as resident supporters.

In interviewees' narratives, the halfway house was envisioned as a liminal space between imprisonment and freedom, and halfway house residents were positioned within this space as liminal subjects, who have the potential to graduate to the post-liminal integration phase, but are always at risk of falling back to the pre-liminal prison stage if they fail to abide by the rules and expectations of the halfway house. Indeed, if staff believed residents were not engaged in their post-release plans. Rehabilitation, as suggested by staff's narratives, was conceived more as a 'privilege of the state' than 'a right of the citizen' (Crewe 2011: 517; Rotman 1990: 8) as halfway house residents had to earn their freedom and prove their worthiness to be in the community. My interviews here demonstrate the precarious, unstable nature of prisoner reentry.

While it is unclear to what extent the 15 halfway house workers included in this study are representative of halfway house workers across Canada, this Edmonton case study, by relying on in-depth interviews, provides an important starting point for more extensive research into this

critical category of front-line workers. In addition to future research with halfway house workers, it would be informative to expand this analysis by exploring how parole officers, in turn, conceive of and position themselves in relation to halfway house workers.

Analytically, I suggest apprehending prisoner reentry not just as an individual process but, more concretely, as an outcome of these liminal workers' practices involved in prisoner reentry. Since these different organizations shape ex-prisoners' trajectories of reentry (e.g., Muijs 2016), studying these workers' practices is crucial to understanding how reentry unfolds in the life of formerly incarcerated people. By investigating how halfway house workers and other criminal justice actors act and give meaning to their actions, scholars will gain a better understanding of the complex realities of prisoner reentry.

Chapter 4

“It’s Just a Pit Stop”: Halfway Houses and the Spatial-Temporal Dynamics of Prisoner (Re)-Entry

Abstract

To date, prisoner reentry has been treated as a generic process—that is, people ‘reenter’, without much specification regarding the time and/or place when they reenter ‘what’. Drawing on in-depth interviews with halfway house residents in a north-western Canadian city, this article seeks to unpack the concept of prisoner reentry by exploring its spatial-temporal dimensions. I conceptualize prisoner reentry as a temporally fragmented sometimes piecemeal process that may occur not only across time (as previous scholars have suggested), but also across different locales, i.e., neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and/or provinces. I do this by analyzing prisoner reentry through the lens of mobility, arguing that prison release produces different types of mobility. Particular attention is paid to the ways post-prison supervision (and the halfway house context in particular) works to im/mobilize previously incarcerated populations. I conclude this paper by highlighting the importance, for academics and practitioners, of paying closer attention to ex-prisoners’ conceptions of their future, including when and where they imagine that they will enact different aspects of their reentry.

Keywords: prisoner reentry, halfway houses, neighbourhoods, mobilities, work, space.

Introduction

Scholars in the field of prisoner reentry generally agree that rather than a singular event (i.e., the day of release from prison), prisoner reentry constitutes a *process* that is marked by various practical and socio-economic challenges for the returning prisoner, such as finding employment and housing, reuniting with family, and dealing with parole (e.g., Maruna, Immarigeon, & LeBel 2004; Petersilia 2003; Visher & Travis 2003). To date, researchers have used the term *process* to highlight the temporal dimensions of reentry, noting that reentry often unfolds over a significant amount of time. For example, according to Visher and Travis (2003: 89), reentry consists of a “post release transition” (i.e., the time immediately after prison) as well as a “post release integration” stage (i.e., the weeks and months after prison). While scholars have clarified that reentry is a long-term endeavor (rather than a short-term stint), the spatial dynamics of this process have received much less attention. To date, space and place have played a role in studies of reentry only insofar as scholars have noted that reentry is spatially concentrated to certain neighbourhoods (e.g., Lynch & Sabol 2001)²⁵. This research has provided critical information about the spatial *outcome* of prison release (i.e., where former prisoners settle), but has less to say about the spatial *processes* of prison return, and how ex-prisoners *relate* to the spaces they reenter. These issues are not only of conceptual but also practical relevance, insofar as they may offer important insights into where, how, and why ex-prisoners access reentry and other support services.

In this article, I seek to advance the concept of prisoner reentry as *process* by further examining its spatial-temporal dynamics. I do this by foregrounding the narratives of 27 ex-prisoners who at

²⁵ This research has been exclusively conducted in the U.S. The limitations of this research are explained further below.

the time of the research were living at a correctional halfway house in the city of Edmonton, Alberta (Canada). Specifically, I discuss how these people experienced and situated themselves in relation to different spaces, including the halfway house neighbourhood and the larger city of Edmonton. Conceptually, I analyze reentry through the lens of mobility, which I argue provides a useful tool for unpacking how this process unfolds over time *and* space. An important difference between this research and existing U.S. based studies of prisoner reentry (outlined further below) is that a significant number of interviewees had not lived in Edmonton prior to their incarceration and later release to an Edmonton halfway house; as a result, they (re-)entered the city of Edmonton as newcomers, rather than returnees. In the interviews, these individuals talked about how they felt toward and envisioned their time in Edmonton; they reflected on their previous place(s) of residence; and they shared their plans for the future, which often involved planned moves away from Edmonton. Drawing on interviewees' narratives, I show that the neighbourhood context—the focus of existing reentry studies—is an insufficient lens through which to examine these interviewees' trajectories of reentry. For these individuals, reentry is not something that happens 'all at once' in one particular place. Rather, it is a temporally fragmented, sometimes piecemeal process that occurs across different locales, including different neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and in some cases even provinces.

I begin this article by providing further insight into the Canadian carceral context and the role of mobility. Following, I outline existing scholarship on the neighbourhood context of reentry. This scholarship already points to some important spatial dynamics of reentry, but is limited insofar as it has largely ignored ex-prisoners' experiences and ways of navigating different reentry spaces. Responding to these limitations, I suggest incorporating a mobilities approach into the study of reentry, and highlight its usefulness for making sense of interviewees' narratives in this study and potential benefits for broader reentry research. I then outline my methodology, providing further

insight into the geographic and socio-economic context of Edmonton. In the findings section, I detail ex-prisoners' perceptions and experiences, paying attention to the ways their mobility histories as well as the local context of Edmonton shaped their experiences of reentry and halfway house living, in addition to their conceptions of the future. I conclude by suggesting other avenues a research agenda on mobilities in prisoner reentry could follow beyond the focus of this paper, as well as examining policy suggestions arising from this study.

Mobility in the Context of Canadian Carcerality

Movement and dislocation are embedded features of Canada's penal system. Across Canada, there are 43 federal prison²⁶ facilities, including four healing lodges/centres for Indigenous offenders²⁷. With the exception of these healing lodges/centres, these prisons are all situated in (or in close proximity to) Canada's urban cities. As a result, people from rural areas, or from provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador where there is no federal prison institution, may experience significant dislocation from their families and home communities while incarcerated. The small number of Canadian-based researchers who have drawn attention to this have tended to focus on its implications for people's experiences while incarcerated, rather than upon their release. Landau (2006: 199–200), for example, in her research with Inuit prisoners in Nunavut, found that her prisoner interviewees experienced feelings of marginalization, distance, as well as cultural and linguistic dislocation from their home communities and families while incarcerated in the city of

²⁶ Federal prisons hold individuals with a prison sentence of two years or more. In contrast, provincial/territorial prisons house those sentenced to two years less a day. Because federal prisoners are those released to a halfway house following release, I focus on federal prisons here.

²⁷ These healing lodges are defined by the Correctional Service of Canada as “correctional institutions where we [i.e., CSC] use Aboriginal values, traditions and beliefs to design services and programs for offenders” (CSC 2016).

Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. Focusing on female prisoners, Shantz, Kilty, and Frigon's (2009: 95) study has drawn attention to gender-based vulnerability, noting that "women's institutional experiences are often marked by isolation from family, friends, and society, as they are often imprisoned farther away from their home communities than are men. The isolation and solitary existence that women experience because of their imprisonment not only limits their ability to stay connected to families and friends but also hinders their ability to cope in social settings." These few studies encourage scholars to attend to the ways in which the penal system may lead to forced residential mobility as well as feelings of actual (geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic) dislocation.

Experiences of geographic dislocation often continue post release, especially for federal prisoners in Canada who are regularly released to an urban halfway house as a condition of their release from prison. However, the extent to which post-prison supervision may produce an additional experience of forced mobility and dislocation, and the implications of this for how reentry is experienced by returning prisoners, has yet to be examined. Canadian halfway houses are small-scale residential facilities that provide temporary housing, basic services, and ongoing supervision of federal ex-prisoners on conditional release. Specifically, individuals released on day parole²⁸ are usually required, as per the Parole Board of Canada (PBC), to reside at a halfway house for a period of six months or more before being allowed to establish their own residency. Given that all existing halfway houses are located in a limited number of larger cities, residents from rural backgrounds may experience prolonged dislocation from their home communities while residing

²⁸ Individuals are eligible for day parole six months prior to their full parole eligibility date, that is after having served 1/3 of their sentence in prison.

at a halfway house. More specifically in terms of this study, because there are no halfway houses north of Edmonton, people from northern Alberta and possibly the Northwest Territories, who are paroled to a halfway house following their incarceration, may be mandated to move to Edmonton for that period—a requirement which may result in prolonged dislocation from families and former social networks.

This prolonged separation carries particular significance given that once released, individuals are expected to find work, connect with health and treatment providers, and begin the process of reintegration. The question then arises: How does reentry unfold for people who are being released into a new city? What does this process mean to them? How do they relate to their new ‘reentry city’? Where do they imagine themselves going following completion of their sentence?

My data suggest that specifically those interviewees who were new to Edmonton thought of their stay there as temporary but in spite of this worked to make strategic use of the city’s employment opportunities (which were perceived as favorable when compared to most other Canadian cities). Doing so was an effort to prepare for planned moves back to their home communities, where they imagined they would then focus on other aspects of reintegration, such as family reunification. This finding encourages us to unpack, more precisely, ‘what’ people are reentering, at ‘what point of time,’ and ‘where,’ and to conceptualize prisoner reentry then as a fragmented process, that unfolds not only over time, but also across different spaces.

The Community Context of Prisoner Reentry

Existing research on the neighbourhood context of prisoner reentry has focused almost exclusively on the situation in the United States. This work has been primarily concerned with mapping the geographic distribution of released prisoners in U.S. urban centres, finding that prisoner reentry

tends to be concentrated to a relatively few—primarily poor, racially segregated, and crime-ridden—neighbourhoods within American cities (and often particular city blocks within those neighbourhoods) (e.g., Clear, Waring and Scully 2005; Lynch & Sabol 2001; LaVigne and Parthasarathy 2005; Morenoff & Harding 2014). This research has found that the majority of U.S. prisoners either return to their pre-prison neighbourhoods, or settle in a nearby, similarly disadvantaged neighbourhood. Based on this knowledge, some scholars have examined the effects of this spatial distribution on the social fabric, cohesion, and resources of high-concentration reentry neighbourhoods (e.g., Clear, Rose and Ryder 2001; Sampson and Loeffler 2010); others have looked at the ways that returning prisoners themselves frame and experience their particular neighbourhood context (see Leverentz 2010). For example, Leverentz (2010), studying female ex-prisoners in Chicago, has found that while most of the women she interviewed would prefer to have moved to a new (and ideally more economically and socially diverse) neighbourhood post release, structural constraints, such as limited income, housing options, and resources, meant that they had little choice but to return to their pre-prison neighbourhoods. Thus, rather than changing their external circumstances, her participants focused on reframing their old neighbourhoods as a neutral, or even positive, force by constructing narratives that posited that the particular neighbourhood where one returns is either irrelevant because “drugs are everywhere,” or that returning to one’s pre-prison neighbourhood can actually be advantageous as it offers “comfort in familiarity,” as well as an opportunity to help and inspire others. Leverentz’ (2010) argument is that despite being faced with continued structural disadvantage, female ex-prisoners manage to construct their neighbourhood context in ways that are consistent with their self-conception as desisters.

Of interest to me is the fact that, overall, these studies on the community context of prisoner reentry give the impression that by and large ex-prisoners are a *spatially fixed* population with *limited*

mobility, insofar as they tend to either return to their pre-prison neighbourhoods following release, or settle in a nearby neighbourhood (within the same city). Harding, Morenoff, and Herbert's (2013) study of parolees' residential trajectories post incarceration (in Michigan) however, provides somewhat of a counter-image to previous studies that suggest that ex-prisoners return to former or proximate neighbourhoods after prison, as only 41% of their sample returned to their pre-prison neighbourhood following their time in custody. Pre-prison neighbourhood is defined in this study as within half a mile of people's pre-prison address²⁹ (Harding et al. 2013: 221). These authors suggest that former prisoners may be more mobile than previously assumed, as “[n]ot only are the majority of former prisoners not returning to their pre-prison neighbourhoods, many live quite far from their pre-prison neighbourhoods” (Harding et al. 2013: 221). In addition, they argue that “a considerable amount of residential mobility is generated by intermediate sanctions” (Harding et al. 2013: 220). By intermediate sanctions, these authors primarily refer to short spells in prison, treatment, or correctional centres as a result of violations of parole (or other technical) rules. Intermediate sanctions, they note, not only remove former prisoners from their neighbourhoods, thereby creating residential instability; their research has also found that rather than returning to their pre-sanction neighbourhood, a significant number of parolees move to a new neighbourhood following completion of their intermediate sanction. Based on these findings, Harding et al. (2013) conclude that a notable number of former prisoners, in fact, enter their post-prison (and post-sanction) neighbourhoods as newcomers, rather than returnees—a situation which they speculate, could either hinder ex-prisoners' desistance and reintegration efforts (due to the

²⁹ It is noteworthy that different scholars have used different measures or definitions of neighbourhood. While Harding et al. (2013) define “pre-prison neighbourhood” as within half a mile of a person's previous address, most other studies (e.g., LaVigne and Parthasarathy 2005) refer to specific neighbourhoods as defined by the larger municipality. In addition, what constitutes spatial mobility versus immobility is rarely defined in these studies.

lack of family supports and other social resources and supports) or promote desistance (by removing ex-prisoners from possibly criminogenic ‘old places and old faces’).³⁰

Harding et al.’s research (2013: 221) is noteworthy because it brings the concepts of mobility and movement into discussions of prisoner reentry, and encourages scholars to consider the ways in which various factors including the penal system itself (in the case of sanctions) may affect people's mobility and residential trajectories post incarceration. One omission of their research however is that it is unable to capture the meanings ex-prisoners attach to their geographic surroundings, and the process of either returning to their old address or settling in a new place. While some individuals, for example, may consider moving to a new residence half a mile away from their previous one as being very mobile, and such moves may impact on their daily lives in various ways, for others, such relocation may carry little significance. Following, I therefore proceed to propose that a mobilities approach is a useful tool that helps us draw attention to ex-prisoners’ distinct experiences of reentry and possible relocation after prison.

‘Mobilizing’ Prisoner Reentry Research

Although the “mobility turn”—the study of how people, goods, and technologies move (Urry & Sheller 2006) — has captured the imaginations of researchers studying an array of topics (e.g., work, travel), its possible contributions to analyses of the phenomenon of prisoner reentry have yet to be examined. While prison “seems inherently spatially ‘fixed’, and prisoners in turn

³⁰The latter assumption in particular has been corroborated by various studies, such as Kirk's (2009) on post-prison residences in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Here, Kirk found that compared with parolees who returned to their former place of residence, parolees who were displaced by the residential destruction and forced to settle elsewhere after prison (within New Orleans) had a substantially lower risk of reincarceration.

immobile by virtue of their imprisonment” (Moran, Piacentini, & Pallot 2012: 449), the process of prisoner reentry would logically be associated with mobility. After all, individuals returning from prison regain autonomy of movement and a range of freedoms either not available or restricted during their incarceration. Notably, they are able to work and access services and programs in the community, as well as visit with family and friends—all of these activities require people to move and be mobile. At the same time, ex-prisoners’ mobility and movements are often restricted. For example, Opsal’s (2015: 194) study of female parolees in the U.S. has shown that parole rules limit women’s day-to-day movements, such as by mandating that they “report to their parole officer for a check-in, report to their case manager, attend a counseling session, or participate in other group or individual programming” at specific times/days of the week—things that Opsal has found greatly impeded these women’s work schedules and other commitments. Although mobility and movement (or the lack thereof) are clearly important aspect of reentry, these concepts have yet to be incorporated within scholarly examinations of reentry.

Existing prisoner reentry scholarship more particularly, I argue, is characterized by a sedentarist ontology. According to Sheller and Urry (2006: 208), “[sedentarism] treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness.” Prisoner reentry research can be described as sedentarist for different reasons. First, the argument that ex-prisoners mostly return to their pre-prison neighbourhoods is sedentarist in assuming that these people all had a fixed and stable spatial ‘home’ or ‘community’ in the first place; in other words, it assumes that individuals were sedentary prior to their incarceration. In Canada, high rates of both internal and international migration make this claim problematic.³¹ Second, existing reentry research is

³¹ In 2014/2015, Statistics Canada (2016) reported 283,300 inter-provincial migrants, or a rate of 8 per thousand.

sedentarist, insofar as it treats neighbourhoods as the primary site of reentry (i.e., as the place where people ‘reenter’ the labor market, ‘reconnect’ with family, etc.), ignoring that reentry may in fact unfold across other spaces and locales, and that (as this article proceeds to show) different aspects of a person’s reentry may be enacted in different spaces. Lastly, the sedentarist ontology of prisoner reentry is apparent in its lack of attention to ex-prisoners’ own conceptions of place, mobility, and movement. Do former prisoners conceive of themselves as mobile agents and/or immobile subjects? What kinds of identities are made mobile in the context of prisoner reentry? This article seeks to challenge these particular sedentarist features of existing reentry research by looking at reentry through a mobilities lens.

Mobility is a useful framework through which to examine reentry as rather than focusing on the outcome, mobility is concerned with the *process* of movement, or the “journey from point to point” (Turner & Peters 2017: 97). In the carceral context, this includes examining, for example, how individuals move *to* and *from* prison institutions (see also Moran, Piacentini, & Pallot 2012). Adding to such processes of “horizontal mobility,” (Turner & Peters 2017), scholars have also started to examine forms of “vertical mobility,” such as how people move *within* different penal systems and institutions (ibid.). Importantly, these scholars have pointed out that mobility does not refer to “abstract macro-movement along a path or line: it is the minute, intimate, embodied, power-filled ways and methods of moving [...]” (Turner & Peters 2017: 97). A mobility framework overall then enables us to explore the spatial dynamics of reentry without over-focusing on the role of specific, often hard-to-define spatial areas (e.g. neighbourhoods). It draws our attention to ex-prisoners’ own conceptions of place and space and the ways these conceptions may be shaped in important ways by the penal regime.

In using mobility as a framework, Moran et al.'s (2012) work on prisoner transport in Russia is particularly insightful. These scholars have sought to bring together the literature on mobility and the literature on carceral geography. They have criticized the mobilities literature for what they claim is an underdeveloped analysis of power, insofar as mobility scholars frequently highlight connections among mobility, autonomy, and freedom, rather than how movements may be involuntary, coerced, or disciplined. Conversely, they have criticized the carceral geographies literature for having failed to pay attention to mobility, urging scholars writing in this area to explore mobility in the carceral context. For example, they have called for work on how prisoners move to and from or between different penal institutions, also referred to as "horizontal mobility" (Peters & Turner 2017). Moran et al. (2012) then helpfully draw attention to how, why, in what ways the operation of power works to im/mobilize incarcerated peoples.

Drawing on the literature on mobilities (for an overview of this literature, see Sheller & Urry 2006) and carceral geography (e.g., Moran 2015; Moran, Piacentini, & Pallot 2012), this article then examines the ways ex-prisoners experience reentry and post-prison supervision via halfway houses that are located in what for some interviewees is a new, urban environment. My data suggest that halfway house living is often experienced as a form of "disciplined mobility" (Moran et al. 2012), engendering feelings of isolation, loneliness, and dislocation. At the same time, interviewees' narratives in this study reveal that they worked hard to maximize access to the material supports provided by the halfway house in navigating a new, urban environment, and they did so in ways that allowed them to work toward their own vision of reintegration. The argument brought forth here is that the present focus on the reentry neighbourhood context should be expanded in an effort to capture the spatial complexities of prisoner reentry.

Research Site and Methods

This article is based on a larger project that I conducted in the city of Edmonton, Alberta over the course of nine months (May to December 2015) and in June 2016. With a population of roughly 930,000 inhabitants, Edmonton is Canada's northernmost large city. Because of its geographic location, and its road, rail, and transportation links, Edmonton is commonly referred to as the "gateway to the North." The city acts as an 'institutional hub' for surrounding communities, including smaller (reserve) communities in northern Alberta as well as the Northwest Territories. Indeed, many state services in Canada (e.g., health care, education) are currently only accessible through movement to urban centres, especially for northern Indigenous populations. Edmonton can also be described as a 'correctional hub,' as it is home to three federal prisons (including the only federal prison for female offenders in Canada's Prairie Region), and two provincial facilities.

The city is also marked by a mobile population. As a major centre for the oil and gas industry, both Edmonton and the other large Albertan city of Calgary have experienced the fastest growing economies of all large cities in Canada for the last seven years (Rieger 2017). Edmonton's economy is shaped by the fact that it is the largest city close to the region around Fort McMurray, known as the Oil Sand zone and referred to by some as "Canada's economic engine" (see Cresswell, Dorow, & Roseman 2016: 1794). The latter has attracted tens of thousands of workers from within the province of Alberta, as well as other parts of Canada (especially Eastern Canada) and the globe. Some of these labor migrants work for fixed periods at fly-in work camps in the region, but have their permanent base in Edmonton. Edmonton has one of the highest intraprovincial migration rates of all large cities in Canada (Sergeie 2016). As I describe in more detail below, interviewees often had extensive mobility histories prior to being imprisoned. Interviewees who were already living in Edmonton prior to serving their sentence (but who were

not initially from Edmonton), mostly explained that it was work, or the search for work, which brought them to the city in the first place.

This article is based on in-depth interviews with 27 halfway houses residents³², nine of whom self-identified as female, 18 as male. They ranged in age from 21 to 66, with an average age of 37. Five interviewees had been convicted of violent crimes such as second degree murder and assault; 17 of non-violent non-sexual crimes, such as drug trafficking, manufacturing, and possession; and five had been convicted of sex-related offenses, such as sexual assault. When asked about their race/ethnicity, 16 interviewees said they identified as white/Caucasian, one as Asian, and ten as Indigenous. Among the latter, some referred to the blanket denominator of “Aboriginal” or “Native,” while others used more specific Indigenous belonging via self-identification with Indigenous nations³³. In Canada, individuals of Indigenous descent are grossly overrepresented in all areas of criminal justice and especially in the prison system. Indigenous people make up 4% of Canada's general population, but account for 23% of the federal prison population. The incarceration rate for Indigenous adults is estimated to be ten times higher than the incarceration rate of non-Indigenous adults. This situation is particularly salient in Canada’s Prairie regions (i.e., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba), where Indigenous prisoners make up more than 50% of the population in some prisons. As mentioned, this article pays attention to the ways interviewees’ pre-prison mobility histories shaped the ways they related to and thought of their halfway house

³² These 27 individuals were recruited from four different halfway houses.

³³ In this study, this included reference to the following Indigenous nations: Cree, Métis, Stoney, and Mi'kmaq.

neighbourhood and the city of Edmonton. In order to provide a basis for thinking about these people's "relational situatedness" (Barkaskas 2018) to these different spaces, I organize interviewees into three broad groups: *returnees*, *newcomers*, and *migrators*.

Returnees—The group of *returnees* includes those who lived in Edmonton prior to their incarceration and therefore *re*-entered their pre-prison city. Ten of the 27 halfway house residents belonged to this group. Notably however, only three of these ten had lived in Edmonton since their birth or childhood, while the other seven had moved to the city (either from other cities or towns within Alberta or from out of province) later in their adult lives, mostly because they believed Edmonton and Alberta promised more and better paying opportunities for work.

Newcomers – The group of *newcomers* includes those who had never lived in Edmonton prior to being incarcerated and subsequently released to a halfway house in the city; thus, they entered, rather than *re*entered, the city of Edmonton. Of the 27 interviewees, 12 can be labelled *newcomers*. Among these 12, nine had lived all or most of their lives in one place, either in another Albertan city/town, or a city/town from out of province. The other three (of the total of 12 newcomers) had also never lived in Edmonton prior to their incarceration, but in comparison to the "sedentarist newcomers," their pre-prison lives were characterized by much more mobility and movement, as they had lived in a variety of different cities (and often provinces) prior to their sentence and incarceration.

Migrators – The remaining five can be classified as *migrators*. These individuals had lived in Edmonton at some point in their lives, but not immediately prior to their incarceration; in other words, they were somewhat familiar with the city, but had previously lived in other cities/town (all within the province of Alberta). Characteristic of this group was that, like some of the "mobile newcomers" mentioned above, they also had very mobile lives prior to being incarcerated, having

lived in various cities across Alberta. As 22-year old Dwight³⁴, for example, described his adult life, “I’ve worked pretty much in every town that had a rig. I just bounced town to town to town and do rotations.”

These categories are clearly ideal types, and there is some overlap between them. For example, many of those that I classify as *returnees* had lived in various places in addition to Edmonton. Moreover, because some *returnees* had family members living outside of Edmonton or the province of Alberta, they shared the same challenge of family separation as the *newcomer* group. In addition, all three groups included individuals who led very mobile lives prior to going to prison and who, as a consequence, often did not intend to remain in Edmonton following completion of their sentence, even in the case where Edmonton was their most recent place of residence. Nonetheless, I argue that grouping these interviewees in terms of their position as *returnees*, *newcomers*, or *migrators* is useful insofar as it challenges the more homogenizing and sedentarist assumptions about the ex-prisoner population evident in previous research.

In what follows, I discuss interviewees’ perceptions and experiences of reentry into the urban geography of Edmonton, as well as the perceived role of halfway houses in this process.

“Right in the Ghetto” – Navigating the Neighbourhood Context

All four halfway houses included in this study were located in impoverished, high-crime pockets of the city. In one way or another, all interviewees talked about the halfway house neighbourhood

³⁴ Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect interviewees’ identities.

in a negative way, explaining that they made efforts to spend as little time there as possible. For example, DC, aged early 20s, described the halfway house surrounding area as:

Ghetto as fuck; three weeks before I got here somebody got stabbed up right behind this halfway house in the alley and died. Like, I'll be walking and there's homeless people everywhere, people just shooting up with the needle, bright as day, just sitting there on the corner you know, whatever they don't give a fuck, and like people always panhandling for change, and like it just drives me crazy, it's like yeah, this is where you're going to put somebody who just got out of jail, eh, right in the ghetto.

Rif Raf, a middle-aged *migrator*, who had spent much of his life in Edmonton but previously lived in other places, more explicitly reflected on the lack of safety he thought was characteristic of the halfway house neighbourhood:

Rif Raf: I don't like the unsafety of this place, the unsafety in two ways, one is we don't know who lives here; we hardly get to see any of the other guys. [...] Plus [name of halfway house] is situated in what we call the [name of neighborhood]. And [name of neighborhood] in Edmonton is described by the RCMP as the highest crime rate area in the city and we're right in the middle of it. So, I mean we don't walk around scared but we're very aware of our surroundings, when we should be walking out in the alley or not.

KM: Would you walk around here at night?

Rif Raf: I wouldn't. And it's not that I can't defend myself because I certainly can, however I don't need to put myself in that position. If I can't get done before dark what I need to get done I'll wait til the next day because the ugliness comes out here at night.

Rif Raf's narrative also evinces that the halfway house institution itself was not experienced as a 'safe haven' or refuge from what Rif Raf described as the "ugliness of the street;" rather, the space of the halfway house itself was also associated with feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and uneasiness, engendered by Rif Raf's perceived lack of control over this space and the people he had to share it with. For Rif Raf then, the move from the prison to the halfway house had double significance, insofar as it produced mobility, while prolonging feelings of uncertainty and risk.

While all interviewees voiced discomfort about the halfway house surroundings, interviewees who were *newcomers* to Edmonton—and in particular those who had spent most of their lives in smaller, more rural communities—were especially vocal about the immediate neighbourhood context. As Casey, a man in his 60s who spent all of his life in a small to mid-sized community around four hours north of Edmonton, said:

The surroundings are a little different for me because I come from a town, and this doesn't happen. You know what I mean? You know, the sirens and the murders and all the shit that goes on. You know, pick up a paper and it's almost disgusting to read that paper. You know, all the stuff and the crime that's going on in Edmonton. I'm like, oh man, it's bad. But where I come from, we never had that – small town boy, you know. You know, that's what I get. I have to get used to that.

Casey and other individuals explained that they tried to avoid going out into the surrounding neighbourhood as much as possible. The daily regime imposed by the halfway house—which requires that residents spend their day at work or looking for work (referred to as “productive activity requirements”), attend rehabilitative programs (e.g., AA/NA meetings), and that only allows unsupervised leisure time once residents have fulfilled their ‘productive activity requirements’—meant that much of residents’ day was indeed spent in other parts of the city. Residents walked, took public transit or used their own vehicles to get to work, AA/NA meetings, and other programming, all of which took place in mostly different areas of Edmonton.

Constructing Narratives

In addition to physically avoiding the halfway house neighbourhood, the individuals I spoke with frequently shared two distinct narratives relating to the surroundings. Since all interviewees believed they would be able to settle in a different and likely safer neighbourhood if not at the halfway house, they sought to make sense of their environment by negotiating it within the broader context of their position as penal subjects. Specifically, in comparison to Leverentz's (2010)

participants, who, she has argued, had to find long-term solutions in the form of internal narratives to negotiate the fact that they were unable to relocate to a new neighbourhood, my interviewees appeared to negotiate their particular neighbourhood context by constructing it, firstly, as a temporary place and, secondly, as part of their punishment.

Mobility as a “Pit Stop”

For many, a central way of dealing with the halfway house surroundings was to construct it as a temporary place in their lives. As Ricky described it, “it’s just a pit stop, yeah.” Ricky, a *newcomer* who had spent all his life in a small community roughly five hours north of Edmonton, talked about the first time he left the halfway house, explaining that “by the time I got back I was just shaking like a leaf on a tree. I was just so anxious and nervous, right?” In response to being asked what made him anxious, he explained that it was “all the cars driving by and people walking around the noise and everything. I just wasn’t used to any of that.” Prison release in and of itself can lead to feelings of dislocation and over-stimulation among releasees, regardless of the particular geographies that they are released into. My data suggest that these kinds of feelings can be particularly pronounced for individuals from more rural areas who are being released into urban areas, and must now deal not only with the various challenges of reentry (e.g., work, parole), but more generally life in both a new and urban setting. For the *newcomer* interviewees, this included things such as learning how to use public transit (which some newcomers said they consciously avoided because they were worried about getting lost and not making it back for curfew), and locating grocery stores and other services around the city. Interviewees, as further explained below, all stated that they hoped, and in fact believed they would be able to move to a safer community following completion of their sentence. Later in the interview, Ricky, for example, went on to explain that he was planning on moving back to his home community as soon as his

warrant expired. Unlike Leverentz' (2010) participants, who largely thought of themselves as immobile subjects, my interviewees conceived of themselves as largely mobile agents (at least in terms of their long-term mobility), who would be able to move again after they had successfully completed parole and were permitted to leave the city.

Mobility as a “Test”

Moreover, many interviewees also constructed the halfway house neighbourhood as a “test.” That is, they believed halfway house workers and the PBC—who ultimately decide on ex-prisoners' release from the halfway house—“put [them] right in the ghetto” (DC) to test whether they could resist the presence of drugs and crime. The ability to refrain from these behaviors in an area where these were rife, they believed, would signal to the authorities that they were finally ready for life in the community, having earned through this final step their complete freedom. In other words, the halfway house neighbourhood was perceived, quite purposefully, as a state measure geared at sorting former prisoners into those who had reformed (and were thus deserving of being ultimately released from the halfway house) and those still in need of reincarceration and further state intervention, as evidenced by their inability to refrain from continued drug use and/or offending.

As Dwight explained:

All these halfway houses are right down in the ghetto, so it's like, a test you could say for us not to use [drugs], and at the same time it's more likely that you're going to use because it's right there, like just at the halfway house down there, you walk up to the front and there's rig waters³⁵ everywhere.

Because halfway houses were perceived as temporary and part of interviewees' broader continuum of punishment, and because interviewees believed they would be able to move to a safer and better

³⁵ Rigs are needles used to shoot heroin.

community following halfway house residency, they maintained a psychosocial distance from and tried to minimize their physical engagement with the halfway house surroundings. Unlike Leverentz' (2010) participants then, interviewees did not have to bring their lack of agency—their inability to move to a better neighbourhood—in harmony with their self-conception as desister. Ex-prisoner interviewees in this research were able to dislike their immediate neighbourhood, and view it as a negative force in their reentry, while still conceiving of themselves as desisters, who would be able to improve their external surroundings following completion of their sentence.

In the following section, I explain in more detail how interviewees experienced the city of Edmonton, as well as the move from prison to the halfway house. Interviewees often made clear distinctions between the undesirable neighbourhood of the halfway house and the city as a whole; the latter being more valued for its perceived economic and other positive opportunities. Despite the challenges imposed by the context in which the residents worked on (re)building themselves, many found ways to navigate the city, and to make use of it in ways that enabled their future plans.

Disciplined Mobility and Colonial Violence

Prison release conditions that mandate that ex-prisoners reside at a halfway house for a certain period of time following their incarceration contribute to residential mobility, insofar as rather than returning to their previous place of residence, individuals may be required to settle and begin the process of reentry in a new city, often far away from their families. For the group of interviewee *newcomers* in particular, halfway house living was often associated with feelings of separation from families and former social networks. Such feelings were compounded by the fact that many people had already experienced very limited contact with their families (i.e., in the form of visits) during their incarceration. When I asked *newcomer* Mike, who self-identified as Indigenous and

whose family lived in a small community out of province, what stood out to him most about his time in prison, he stated:

I think what got to me the most, I think, is being displaced from [another Prairie province] to Alberta. It was just they said, “Well, we’re not putting you out in the [prison] population here,” so I got displaced to [a medium security prison in Alberta] first, and then [to another medium security prison in Alberta]. This is so isolated out here. This is so cold. There’s no family, no visits, no nothing out there at all, and just...being treated like an animal is not fun.

For Mike, being released to a halfway house in Edmonton meant that he was unable to visit with his family, including his children and parents, even after his release from prison. As per his release conditions (set by the PBC), he was not permitted to leave the city, and the long distance between Edmonton and his family’s home made it difficult for them to visit him. As he explained, “to be placed in a halfway house, ordered there, forced to live there, it can be hurtful and disappointing.” Similarly, *newcomer* Cher, who I interviewed three months into her stay at the halfway house, characterized her time in Edmonton thus far as “lonely, because I don’t know anybody here.” Like Mike, Cher had lived out of province prior to her federal incarceration in Alberta, from where she was released to an Edmonton halfway house.

Mike’s description of halfway house residency in particular must also be framed by Canada’s history of colonialism. Canada’s history of colonialism involved forced spatial dislocation as large numbers of Indigenous people were removed from communities into reserves and/or placed into ‘Canadian’ institutions for their alleged benefit. The institutions known as residential schools, for example, were intended to inculcate the dominant white settler value system on Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families and communities. This policy of relocation and assimilation destroyed thousands of Indigenous lives, devastated families, and threatened the survival of Indigenous languages and cultures. Comack et al. (2013) have explained that

colonialism is a story of the forced institutionalization of Indigenous people. In this context, Canadian-based Indigenous scholar and activist Cindy Blackstock (2007) has posed the question whether residential schools have really closed or “just [morphed] into the child welfare system,” while others have started to refer to Canada’s prisons as the “new residential schools” (MacDonald 2016). Mike’s perceptions of halfway house living then highlights the importance of paying attention to the, to date, understudied institution of non-Indigenous settler halfway houses as yet another form of institutionalization that can result in separation and prolonged dislocation for Indigenous people following their time in prison.

Drawing on Moran et al. (2012), halfway house residency for these individuals then produced “disciplined mobility,” as mobility and relocation in this context were experienced as largely forced or involuntary, engendering feelings of dislocation, separation, and loneliness. Prisoners, for the most part, are unable to choose the city to which they are released. Even when halfway houses exist in people’s home communities, space may not be available and/or there may be restrictions against a person’s return to their home community. Halfway houses then have a dual function in people’s lives. They have a productive effect insofar as they enable prisoners to serve a significant portion of their sentence in the community, yet they are repressive insofar as halfway house residency produces additional challenges and possible pains of separation, which, as Mike added later in the interview, are felt even more intensely once a person is out of prison but still physically removed from their family.

Everyday Mobility and Limited Freedom

Notably, the experience of “disciplined mobility” was not unique to the group of *newcomers*. Interviewees whose families or partners lived in Edmonton also described ongoing feelings of painful separation. Butterfly, for example, explained that she felt as if she lived in a “part-time

relationship” with her long-term partner. Returning to the halfway house for nightly curfew was experienced as disappointing and painful, and Butterfly talked with excitement about the possibility of leaving the halfway house in the near future and moving in with this significant other. As she explained, “you know, I have a home. I pay rent. I help pay bills. You know, the halfway house isn’t my home.” Butterfly felt the contradiction between having secured her own residence in Edmonton and yet being required to live under penal control in another residence in that same city. For her, too, the halfway house presented a form of “disciplined mobility,” insofar as it required constant movement between her home and the halfway house institution. This form of everyday “disciplined mobility” serves as a constant reminder of ex-prisoners’ status as penal subjects, whose freedom is intermittent, granted piecemeal, and always precarious.

These sentiments were echoed by Mike, when—in response to his described feelings of separation and dislocation—I asked whether it would be useful or better if halfway houses were located closer to people’s families and home communities. Mike explained:

No. I don’t think that would help, no. If you want a halfway house, the city is where it’s at, you know what I mean? To have a halfway house in the country, there’s no sense. You want to go home. The carrot is still there. You understand? The whole idea of a halfway house is to have a carrot placed in front you, you know, and you’re dangling that carrot in front of you, and it’s on the top of your head, and you’re chasing that. You know, at the end of the day you’re not going to get that carrot, and that’s the disappointment, so it doesn’t matter where a halfway house is. You want to go home. You want to be with family. You want to be able to be free out there.

Similarly to Butterfly, his description of the halfway house as “dangling a carrot” highlights the precarious status of halfway house residents, who are always at risk of reincarceration if they do not succeed in proving to halfway house workers and parole officers that they are worthy of reintegration. Mike therefore believed that even if he were held at a halfway house closer to this family, feelings of dislocation and separation would not completely subside.

In the next section, I move on to explain how interviewees made sense of this “disciplined mobility.” My data suggest that mobility in the halfway house context was perceived as a form of economic necessity as well as a compromise in working toward interviewees’ post-punishment futures.

Mobility as Economic Necessity

Halfway house residents are required to secure employment, or enroll in school or training programs, almost immediately after release, unless there are health concerns or other issues that would prevent them from doing so. Of the 27 interviewees, 19 were employed at the time of the interview (working mostly in construction and service sector jobs); four were actively looking for work (and explained that finding employment had been one of their biggest challenges of reentry); and four were unable to work for various reasons (e.g., health challenges). The 19 interviewees who were employed talked about their ability to find employment with ease. Bill, who I talked to one month into his stay at the halfway house—and who at the time was working in construction—reflected on his first two weeks at the halfway house saying that, “I didn’t do nothing the first week, and then I went, starting looking for a job on Wednesday, and I had a job on Thursday, so I started Monday.” While the different halfway house neighborhoods offered little economic opportunity, Edmonton, as a city, was described by interviewees (males and females alike) as a place with many high wage jobs available and thus as a favorable place to (re-)enter for former prisoners, who carry the additional burden of having a criminal record. This positive perception of the city’s labour market was shared by all interviewees who had been able to secure employment. *Returnee* Boo, for example, described the economic situation in Edmonton as follows:

There's tons of jobs here. Edmonton is booming right now. You know, you go downtown, you see all these buildings coming up, construction everywhere. Not hard to get a job. You just got to find it.

Unlike in Caputo's (2014) study of a female halfway house in the U.S., rent was not deducted from residents' wages with the result that residence in a halfway house meant access to free housing. In addition to basic housing, residents received financial help for purchasing food and other items (the amount is reduced once they have secured work). Housing is highly significant in helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society, and lack of stable housing has been associated with increased recidivism (e.g., LeBel 2017). Interviewees all emphasized that halfway houses were useful insofar as they provided a free place to live, and thus the ability to save one's income, rather than spend it all on rent, food, and other basic necessities. Daniel, who at the time of the interview was still looking for work, explained the benefits of halfway house living as follows:

You have food. You have lodging. Everything is free. You get a job. You put your money in the bank. You know, nothing goes out of your account; you don't pay for anything. That's the good thing about it. I like that.

Similarly, when I asked *migrator* DC how he would describe the purpose of halfway houses, he replied:

I think the purpose, well, what I'm using it for is to get money in the bank. I mean, I'll probably be buying this truck next week so I'll be established by the time I'm ready to leave this place and still got like 5 months of money in the bank, you know, that's money right there. I don't know, for me myself, I don't really feel that I need to be monitored, I don't think I would be somebody worth monitoring.

Various people stated that while they would prefer to live somewhere else, especially closer to family, the possibility of work made Edmonton more attractive. As Rif Raf said:

I would rather live in the province of BC [British Columbia] geographically wise but employment wise, there's no, there's no comparison, this is and this will be probably for a few more years the place to be you know.

Fred made this point even clearer when he reflected on his decision to stay in Edmonton, even though, as he explains, he in fact had the choice of whether he wanted to be released to a halfway house in Edmonton or in his home community closer to his mother:

So it's like, well, I could've went back to the halfway house [in his home community], and that would've been solely now just to see mom, or stay out here [in Edmonton] where there's work, and I had talked to mom about it, and she said, "No, stay out here [in Edmonton]. There's work out here, and the time will come... you know, go out here [Edmonton] working." Either travel back there [his home community] or send her some money and plane ticket. She can come out here or whatever, so, yeah, it's better than going where there's no work, and, yeah, the first thing, I'll get everyone back in trouble, just sitting around nothing to do, no work, no money, so I made the choice to stay here.

Newcomer Fred's preference and decision to be released to a halfway house in Edmonton presents a conscious and strategic choice. On the one hand, entering Edmonton, for Fred, meant navigating a new city, as well as enduring prolonged distance from his mother and other family members. On the other hand, Edmonton was perceived as an opportune setting to find work more easily. Fred's narrative reveals that he places priority on his economic reintegration (i.e., finding a relatively well paying job), which he believed would not only facilitate desistance in the short-run, but also make him more mobile in the long-run, thereby allowing him to then focus on other aspects of his reentry, such as reconnecting with his mother by flying out to his home community, or having the ability to buy her a plane ticket.

In this last section, I explain how work—in combination with material support provided by the halfway house—also increased people's "imagined" mobility. Their "imagined" post-punishment mobility was enabled by the fact that they had accumulated some savings that they planned to use to rebuild their lives after completion of their sentence. This was particularly important for *newcomer* residents who often planned to return to their home communities for this purpose. In this final section, I turn to how interviewees talked about their future, focusing in particular on

where they imagined relocating following their time in Edmonton. I provide examples from all three groups, and explain how the halfway house fits into their conceptions of the future.

Homeward Bound – Post-Punishment Plans and “Imagined Mobility”

Among the *returnee* group, those who had spent all or most of their lives in Edmonton planned to remain in the city post-halfway house residency. For them, Edmonton was “home,” and they sought to live close to family. *Returnee* Boo, who grew up on a reserve in northern Alberta, but spent most of his adult life in Edmonton, stated his feelings about the city as follows:

I’ve lived in Edmonton most of my life, so this is my home city. Like you know, E-town has always been my city. Like, you know, I know a lot of people here. I know thousands of people, and, you know, a lot of them struggle. A lot of them are good people. I can go downtown, and every block, I’ll see somebody I know, you know, and I always shake hands, hug, talk for a while.

On the other hand, the more “mobile *returnees*”—i.e., those who lived in Edmonton immediately prior to their confinement, but had also lived and worked in various other cities/provinces throughout their adult lives—tended to imagine their post-punishment futures as continuously mobile. 30-year old Sydney Shaw told me that he planned to move back to his family, who lived roughly 3,000 km east from Edmonton, but that his goal was also “to be back up north flying in and flying out”—i.e., working on the oil rigs in northern Alberta. As he explained:

I fly from there to go to work for my 9 days then I come back for my 5 days off and that's what my goal is. And I had that opportunity once, twice, that second time I had was, kind of just a waiting game before I got sentenced but I've had the opportunity once and I squandered that and I really don't want to squander my third chance at this. I don't, I do not want to disappoint myself, I don't want to disappoint my family and my friends. I just want to be able to make a living for myself. I want to be able to make a life for myself.

Sydney Shaw's narrative of how he imagines his future (and his work in particular) is certainly not unique; inter-provincial migration (especially for reasons of work) has long been a part of many Canadians' lives, and Alberta in particular—where Sydney Shaw sees himself working long term—has for many years been the Canadian province that welcomes the most in-migrants. However, when examined within the context of prisoner reentry, Sydney Shaw's narrative takes on a different significance. Narratives like his first of all challenge the sedentary ontology of prisoner reentry, as well as demonstrate the importance for reentry scholars to move beyond the neighbourhood context as the primary site of reentry. Moreover, the concept of reentry itself can be described as a form of movement—as a process that unfolds not only over time (Visser & Travis 2003) but importantly, also across different spaces. Sydney Shaw's economic reintegration is imagined as continuously mobile (i.e., working in Alberta, but flying in and out), whereas other aspects of the reentry process (i.e., reconnecting and not disappointing his family) are imagined to take place in a different space and place.

Post-halfway house plans among the *newcomers* differed. While some interviewees, such as Ricky who was mentioned earlier, planned to return to their home communities at the earliest date possible, others had no immediate plans to return either to their last place of residence, or a different city where they had lived previously. Bill, for example, while stating that for him “Ontario is home” because he had lived there for many years during his adult life, explained that he would not return there. As he said, “No. There's no work back there, so I'm better off staying out here. I think so. More money, more work.” Eventually, Bill explained that he wanted to live with his daughter, who lived in a smaller city in Alberta, even though he was apprehensive about the more limited opportunities for work there.

The *migrator* group was similar to the “mobile *returnees*” insofar as Edmonton was mostly thought of as a temporary stepping stone in planning toward one’s long-term future and move away from Edmonton. Willis, who identified as Indigenous, said that he planned to return to a small community in northern Alberta, where he had spent much of his early and adult life, and where his children still resided. He described his future plans as follows:

Well I've never been much of a city person. I did live in the city before but everything that is about me is back in [his home community], that's my home, you know I grew up there ever since I was a kid I lived on the reserve, everyone knows me so, you know I missed home. I'm waiting until October and then I'm going, I'm going home. ...I don't have to, thank god, I don't have to pay rent here. I'm trying to save, I want to get back up there and to have money. I want to go home, I just miss home, I miss my family [...].

Willis’ narrative again highlights the material benefits of halfway house living, while also drawing attention (like Mike’s narrative above) to feelings of displacement and lack of belonging and attachment to the city of Edmonton. Writing about “myths about Aboriginals in cities,” Peters (2004: 5) has made the point that “[migration] back to rural and reserve communities may represent, not a failure to adjust to city life, as early research on Aboriginal urbanisation suggests (Friederes 1974), but an attempt to maintain vital and purposeful community relationships.” Willis’ narrative demonstrates the ways in which he has already made strategic use of what he imagines will be limited time in Edmonton, and seeks to capitalize on both the material supports of the halfway house and the perceived favorable economic situation in the city to work toward his own vision of reintegration. His plans, again, can be understood by thinking about reentry through the lens of mobility. He conceives of himself as a mobile agent, able to navigate different spaces and situations. While his economic reintegration takes place in Edmonton, he imagines his social reintegration to take place at a later point in a different space. Indeed, his planned return to his community is not seen as a failure to navigate Edmonton life, but proof of his ability to adjust and successfully navigate the early stage of reentry in the city. While halfway houses, for some,

present a form of “disciplined mobility,” my data suggest that they also “enable” mobility, and that ex-prisoners make strategic use of them in an effort to further their ideas for the future.

Conclusion: Prisoner Reentry, Mobility, and Space

As Goodman (2012: 437) has noted in his study of California’s prison fire camps, rehabilitation is often treated as “a black box that, if working, necessarily outputs low(er) recidivism rates.” The idea of the “black box” captures what I would argue is a key limitation of current conceptualizations of prisoner reentry. Reentry, to date, has been treated as a generic process—that is, people ‘reenter,’ without much specification regarding the time and/or place when they reenter ‘what’. My data highlight the importance of further unpacking the concept of reentry by paying closer attention to its spatial-temporal dimensions, and to the ways in which ex-prisoners may imagine and strategically organize their ‘reentry process’ in ways that unfold not only over time but also across different spaces. As such, I conceptualize reentry as a temporally fragmented sometimes piecemeal process that may occur across different locales, such as neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and/or provinces. In addition, the data presented here have certain implications for thinking about the role and location of halfway houses, the neighbourhood context for reentry, and practical supports for former prisoners.

Similarly to others (e.g., Maidment 2006), my findings first highlight the subpar environments ex-prisoners are often released to. Like Leverentz (2010), I have described ex-prisoners’ discomfort with these environments, and the ways in which these neighbourhoods are believed to hinder, rather than facilitate reintegration. My results advance this literature by introducing alternative narratives used by ex-prisoners in their effort to deal with their geographical and spatial realities. Contrary to Leverentz (2010), halfway house residents in this study did not feel compelled to change the ways they thought about their new immediate neighbourhood. Rather, they were able

to maintain a psychological distance from the geography surrounding the halfway houses, as they conceived of themselves as mobile agents, who would likely be able to relocate to what they perceived to be a safer community following halfway house residency and completion of their sentence. The ability to maintain a psychological distance from the halfway house neighbourhood, indeed, was seen by them as evidence of their desistance. They also constructed spending time in these neighbourhoods as part of their punishment and, more specifically, as a “test” devised by halfway house workers and parole officers to gauge whether they were able to withstand the presence of drugs and crimes in their new milieu.

Harding et al. (2013) have shown that engagement with the penal system may lead to residential instability and mobility. This article provides some qualitative insights into how ex-prisoners who enter a new community experience the process of reentry. Halfway houses, I have argued, engender mobility and dislocation. For people from rural areas, small towns or cities in other provinces, being paroled to a halfway house may mean living far away from one’s family for a certain period of time, in addition to navigating a completely new environment. While *newcomer* ex-prisoners faced various challenges, their narratives clearly demonstrate their ability to adapt to a new urban geography; even when their time in Edmonton was imagined to be temporary, they strategically sought to use that time to improve their economic reintegration and place themselves in a position that would enable them to the return and rebuild their lives in their home communities.

My findings also highlight the importance of concrete material supports (e.g., free accommodation) that halfway houses secure for former prisoners. While halfway houses, to date, have been discussed through the lens of post-prison control (e.g., Allspach 2010; Caputo 2014), interviewees extensively talked about the material benefits provided by these houses. That is not to say that residents in this study did not also experience them as controlling and regulatory. The

point is to draw attention to the ways in which interviewees sought to make use of penal structures to further their own vision of reintegration. As I have shown, halfway houses were perceived by various interviewees as rendering them *temporarily immobile yet mobile* in the long-run.

On a practical level, my findings highlight the importance of paying attention to ex-prisoners' conceptions of their futures, including when and where they imagine they will enact different aspects of their reentry (e.g., economic versus social reintegration). On a practical level, interviewees' narratives highlight the importance of both targeted reentry support located in the city into which they are released, as well as follow-up support and coordinated services across cities and provinces, informed by ex-prisoners' own conceptions of their future.

On a more conceptual level, I argue that there is further potential for a mobilities approach to extend and deepen empirical examinations of the spatial-temporal context of prisoner reentry. Specifically, in addition to investigating forms of "horizontal mobility" (i.e., movements between spaces), Peters and Turner (2017), in their study of a prison convict ship, have urged scholars to also study "vertical mobility," that is how people's movements unfold within penal spaces. In this regard, the halfway house provides a setting to study how ex-prisoners' movements are shaped within the halfway house context, as well as how these forms of "vertical mobility," are related to, enable, and/or limit "horizontal mobility," such as the move from the halfway house back to one's own place of residency.

Chapter 5

Canada's 'Open Prisons': Rethinking the Role of Halfway Houses in Canadian Punishment

Abstract

This article brings together scholarship on prison abolition and prisoner reentry, by analyzing the role, form, and function of halfway houses (often referred to as reentry centres) in contemporary Canadian punishment. Building on studies of Nordic “penal exceptionalism” (Pratt 2008a) and open prisons, I argue that rather than within the currently emphasized context of prisoner reentry, criminologists ought to study and conceive of halfway houses as a Canadian form of open prison. Thinking of halfway houses as open prisons (rather than reentry centres or post-prison institutions) is not only more reflective of these houses’ workings and dynamics, but is also more productive. Conceptually, it invites scholars to use prisoner reentry research to develop a broader critique of the prison and penal system, while in more practical terms, it places greater focus on how, within the broader context of decarceration and prison abolition, halfway houses present a real existing alternative to walled prisons.

Keywords: Open prisons, halfway houses, prisoner reentry, decarceration, confinement.

The most difficult and urgent challenge today is that of creatively exploring new terrains of justice, where the prison no longer serves as our major anchor (Davis 2003: 21).

Introduction

This article seeks to bring into conversation two carceral institutions from two different national contexts, namely *Canadian halfway houses* and *Nordic open prisons*.³⁶ Despite their structural and ideological similarities (as this paper goes on to show), these two institutions have been conceptualized in disparate ways and have elicited different research. While the former tend to be labelled as *defective treatment institutions* (e.g., Allspach 2008), the latter are viewed as representing examples of *humane (even exceptional) prisons* (e.g., Fransen 2017) —they are the “trademark” of Nordic “penal exceptionalism” (Shammas 2015; Smith 2012). In this paper, I re-conceptualize the halfway house institution as a Canadian form of open prison, and then go on to discuss the implications of such a re-conceptualization for penal scholarship and practice. Specifically, this paper proceeds in four steps. The first section describes the development of Canadian halfway houses and establishes these facilities as, intrinsically, hybridized sites. I go on to outline what is the currently emphasized conceptualization of halfway houses in research and explain the limitations of this conceptualization. Here, I also point out the conceptual advantages of using the term open prison in lieu of halfway house. The second section proceeds by giving further context to the development and principles of the Nordic open prison. In the third section, I move on to reveal some of the similarities between Canadian halfway houses and Nordic open prisons. I suggest that the term open prison captures particularly well halfway houses’ specific

³⁶ The Nordic countries include Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland.

workings and dynamics, as well as ex-prisoners' experiences of freedom and confinement within these facilities. I conclude this third section by arguing that the term open prison is not only more reflective of halfway houses' workings, but is also more productive. Conceptually, it positions halfway houses in opposition to walled prisons, thereby re-directing attention from the post-prison stage to how halfway houses could present a real existing alternative to closed or walled prisons. Against this backdrop, the final section then reflects on the question of how halfway houses—once seen as prisons—could actually serve to reduce the total carceral footprint.

This article is the result of interviews with halfway house residents and, to a more limited extent, halfway house staff. Specifically, I conducted in-depth interviews with 27 halfway house residents (nine females; 18 males), who I recruited from four halfway house facilities in a north-western Canadian city. These individuals ranged in age from 21 to 66, with an average age of 37. Five interviewees had been convicted of violent crimes, such as second degree murder and assault; 17 of non-violent non-sexual crimes, such as drug trafficking, manufacturing, and possession; and five of sex-related offenses, such as sexual assault. When asked about their race/ethnicity, 16 interviewees said they identified as white/Caucasian, one as Asian, and ten as Indigenous. I asked resident interviewees a broad range of questions about their time in prison, their experiences with halfway houses and nonprofit agencies, the challenges of reentry and how they navigated these challenges, and about their conceptions of rehabilitation, freedom, and punishment (among other things).³⁷ I also conducted interviews with 15 halfway house workers (12 females, 3 males), that I recruited from the same four halfway house facilities. These workers were asked various

³⁷ Each interview was voice recorded, conducted in a private space (either people's rooms or a private office at the halfway house), and ranged in length from 45 to 180 minutes.

questions about their workplace roles as well as how they imagined their role in ex-prisoner reintegration.³⁸ While I did not conduct observational fieldwork at these houses, I was toured through them by staff and spent time there on interview days; thus, I got a fairly good sense of their spatial layout and facilities. The third section of this article also makes reference to “resident handbooks.” These are short booklets that are given by halfway house workers to incoming residents upon their initial arrival at the halfway house. These handbooks, which were collected from each halfway house facility where interviews were conducted, contain information on halfway house rules and regulations, as well as on staff expectations regarding residents' employment, treatment, hygiene, and general behavior. They also include detailed explanation of potential consequences should residents violate either their conditions of parole or any halfway house rules.

Conceptualizing Halfway Houses

Canadian halfway houses are small-scale residential facilities officially tasked with the dual mandate of providing temporary housing and rehabilitative services (e.g., counselling, material support), as well as ongoing supervision of federal ex-prisoners on conditional release³⁹ (CSC 2014). These houses present the last ‘institutional stop’ before an offender is officially permitted to establish their own residency in the community. During their halfway house residency, ex-prisoners usually spend their day in the community, for ‘productive’ purposes, such as work, schooling, or programming, but are required to return to the facility for the night (usually between

³⁸ Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees to protect their identity.

³⁹ Conditional release refers to release on day parole, full parole, or statutory release.

10 p.m. and 6 a.m.). If residents fail to abide by these curfews (or any other conditions of their release), they may face re-incarceration. In this section, I provide further insight into the development of Canadian halfway houses and offer an overview of existing studies of these facilities.

Halfway Houses—Hybridized Penal Projects

Canadian halfway houses date back to the 1950s. They were first defined in the 1973 report of the *Task Force on Community-Based Residential Centres* (Task Force 1973: ix), a group appointed by the *Solicitor General of Canada* in 1972 to investigate the state of Canadian halfway houses, as:

[...] a wide variety of residential services for many kinds of persons in need. These include the physically and mentally handicapped, the elderly and disturbed or delinquent children, as well as offenders. They stand between some form of institutionalization and complete integration into community, providing a service to those moving from a dependent status such as “patient” or “inmate”, to a less dependent one such as “dischargee” or “parolee”. They differ from institutions in that they tend to be smaller, more informal and to provide easier access to the community. They differ from boarding houses and hostels in that those responsible for their administration, perceive of themselves as offering something in addition to room and/or board. This extra programme may range all the way from assistance in obtaining employment to intensive group counselling or a complete alternative life-style.

The *Task Force* explained that halfway houses presented “largely a private sector thrust” (Task Force 1973: ix), as they were initially developed, run, and governed by different private (mostly religious) actors (e.g., Salvation Army, St. Leonard's Society). Based on the recognition that inmates of closed institutions experienced institutionalization (Goffman 1961) or “prisonisation” (Clemmer 1940), these transitional facilities were meant to “bridge the gap” between the (closed) institution and the (open) community (Apte 1968: 9), by providing temporary residence, assistance, and structure to people “in need” (see also Pearce 1970; Raush & Raush 1968; Zeitoun 1979).

The early examples of what are now called halfway houses—referred to then as “post-release centres”—provided basic shelter, food, and some “low-key” programming (such as in the form of individual or group counselling) to recently released prisoners who mostly self-selected (rather than being mandated, as is the case today) to reside there after leaving prison (Task Force 1973: 14). Their work was often guided by ‘Christ-like missions,’ focused on salvation, reform, and redemption (see also Hannah-Moffat 2001). Control and restraint were also integral aspects of these houses’ operation. Residents were subjected to various house rules (e.g., abstinence from alcohol, curfews), set autonomously by the individual halfway house, as well as other disciplinary and pastoral mechanisms. While the Canadian state was not involved in enforcing compliance of these rules (and rule violations therefore did not result in a person’s reimprisonment), residents did face punishments and could be expelled (to the streets) for violating house rules. These early halfway houses, thus, were hybridized projects from the very start. Control, paternalism, and moral reform (backed up by force), were central aspects of their intentions and operations, and likely shaped the experiences of residents within these facilities.

These early houses formed the basis of today’s network of state-sponsored halfway houses. In contemporary Canada, these institutions, now officially referred to as community-based residential facilities, continue to fulfil a hybrid function (see above). Specifically, one of their main purposes is the supervision of federal ex-prisoners on day parole (and other forms of conditional release). Day parole has been a release option for federally sentenced prisoners since the passing of the *Parole Act* in 1958. The most important changes initiated by this legislation included the creation of the National Parole Board, the integration of the concepts of reform and rehabilitation into the

law as statutory considerations in the grant of parole,⁴⁰ and the introduction of various types of conditional release, including full parole (then called “ordinary parole”) and day parole. Initially, day parolees spent the day in the community (for purposes of work and/or training) and then returned to the prison for the night (Report of the Standing Senate Committee 1974: 18). Private agencies (such as the Salvation Army) have long been involved in state punishment.

While they were initially charged solely with the supervision of full or “ordinary” parolees (i.e., by acting as parole officers and supervising parolees in the community), these agencies were later (starting in the 1970s) responsabilized and authorized by the Canadian state to also provide residential services (in the form of halfway houses) to day parolees. Privately run halfway houses, thus, took over the prison's place and function in imprisoning day parolees' bodies at night and releasing them again in the morning. Today, there are 150 NGO-run halfway houses across Canada funded by the Canadian federal government.⁴¹ Halfway houses' enmeshment in the wider system of state punishment led to a *widening* of NGO-employed halfway house workers' supervision responsibilities (rather than a re-invention or complete re-development of their responsibilities). Today, these workers continue to enforce a number of specific halfway house rules⁴² (set independently by each facility). In addition, they are now authorized (and required as per their contractual agreements with the state) to report any resident infractions to the state, and regularly report to state-employed parole officers on issues such as residents' progress (e.g., in terms of work, their rehabilitation, etc.) and possible “risk factors” believed to suggest reoffending. Overall,

⁴⁰ Prior to this legislation, conditional release decisions were based on clemency.

⁴¹ In addition to these NGO-run facilities, there exist a small number of state-run halfway houses, referred to as community correctional centres.

⁴² In this study, these rules regulated issues around clothing, hygiene, cleanliness, etc.

the early (hybridized) halfway houses helped to create the contemporary (still hybridized) system of federal, state-sponsored halfway houses.

Halfway Houses: Defective Treatment Institutions?

Existing studies of halfway houses (of which there are relatively few) have conceptualized these houses as reentry (or post-prison) institutions, arguing that while they are *meant* to help and support ex-prisoners, they are instead (in practice) characterized by forms of ex-prisoner control, discipline and surveillance. For example, American-based scholar Gail Caputo (2014) has suggested that halfway houses present conflicted institutions that while tasked with treatment, are experienced by residents (in her study, a group of 20 female residents) as largely punitive and oppressive. Halfway houses, as Caputo (2014: 227) has argued, perpetuate “oppression and domination in the name of reintegration and reformation,” ultimately doing little to help reintegrate former prisoners into the community:

“Though their placement at Alpha Omega House [the halfway house] is intended to help facilitate women’s reentry to society, the group of women in this study return to their communities with the stigma of a felony label, poorly treated substance abuse, mental and physical illness, weakened relationships of importance, and disconnection from mainstream opportunities” (Caputo 2014: 227).

In addition to Caputo, a limited number of Canadian-based studies have similarly problematized halfway houses’ limited success in facilitating reentry (see Allspach 2010; Pollack 2008). Rather than providing post-prison support (i.e., the ostensible goal of halfway houses that ultimately remains untroubled by these scholars), halfway houses, these studies have said, focus on ex-prisoner regulation, essentially extending the penal gaze and keeping ex-prisoners entangled in a web of post-prison restraint and control. As argued by both Allspach (2010) and Pollack (2008), halfway house staff mainly take on control and surveillance functions as they focus on tasks such

as enforcing curfews, conducting drug analyses, and monitoring residents' conduct—practices that their female ex-prisoner interviewees felt were intrusive, controlling, and infantilizing. Underlying these studies is the conception that halfway houses present as *defective treatment (post-prison) institutions*.

In my study, resident interviewees tended to narrate their halfway house experience in much a similar fashion (although they also mentioned more positive aspects of their residency; see below). For example, when I asked resident Dwight “what it’s like to live at a halfway house,” he said:

It’s sort of like jail I guess, except you’re in a house, in a home again. They [staff] check up on you every hour, they piss test you randomly, sometimes every day.

While aspects of my findings parallel those produced by Allspach, Caputo, and Pollack, I suggest that the conclusions scholars have drawn from these findings are limited. Existing studies of halfway houses fail to fully address and account for the, intrinsically, hybridized nature of halfway houses. Essentially these studies have singled out, or honed in only on the (ostensibly) benign intentions of these facilities. As a consequence, they tend to neglect that control and disciplinary logics are deeply intertwined with these houses’ more benign intention to offer help and support to former prisoners. Rules and surveillance are (and have always been) part of these houses’ composition and achievements. It should thus not surprise that halfway house workers in their everyday work focus (to a large extent) on control, as well as that residents themselves tend to experience these institutions much like jail—as regulatory, controlling, and punitive. Halfway houses’ alleged *defectiveness* (in acting as helping institutions) should not be seen as “the result of good intentions gone wrong” (Platt 1977: xvii). If anything, these institutions have always—albeit in different ways and to different degrees—combined hybridized logics and operations. By conceptualizing halfway houses as post-prison *treatment institutions* (albeit defective ones),

existing studies essentially dichotomize and contrast care/rehabilitation and control/punishment. In doing so, these studies manufacture surprise regarding halfway houses' controlling nature, when in reality control is part and parcel of these houses' daily operations and, on a more ideological level, deeply connected to ideas of help and support.

Moreover, I suggest that existing studies of halfway houses have yet to problematize and challenge halfway houses' position within the larger system of state punishment. The terminology of halfway house is overly restrictive, as it suggests that halfway houses must occupy a particular place in the justice system—that is, at the 'back-end' of the correctional system. The term halfway house, in other words, conceptually limits scholars' understanding (and therefore their research) to how these houses work and function as *post-prison* (rather than prison) facilities. Fundamentally, the currently emphasized conception of halfway houses as reentry or 'back-end' institutions presupposes that there is a 'front end' and a 'back end' to the penal system—a coherent structure and temporal order—and that penal institutions, such as the halfway house, must occupy a particular place in that system. However, it is probably more accurate to describe the penal system, and the process of reentry in particular, as unstable and fragmentary rather than smooth and coherent (see also Rubin & Phelps 2017). For example, studies (e.g., Petersilia 2003) have consistently shown that ex-prisoners frequently experience reincarceration (especially during the early stages of release), and therefore may be returned to custody and released to a halfway house multiple times, rather than moving smoothly from one point on the continuum of incarceration to the next. Rather than as post-prison institutions located at the 'back-end' of a coherent correctional system halfway houses, I suggest, should be understood as part of an assemblage or network of state/state-sponsored penal institutions that in varying ways, seek to punish, control, and correct offenders. Such a conceptualization allows us to move beyond a critique of halfway houses as mere centres of reentry, and study them without preconception of their supposed place and function

in the criminal justice system. It places focus on what these halfway houses actually are—I argue a Canadian form of open prison—as well as what they *could* be, namely an alternative to walled prisons.

In the next section, I thus go on to contextualize Nordic open prisons by providing insight into how they operate as well as how they have been conceptualized in existing research.

Open Prisons—Benevolent and Humane?

Examples of open prisons⁴³ have been documented in a number of countries, including the U.K. (Jones & Cornes 1918), India (Hill 2008), and Spain (Cid 2005), but the Nordic societies have received the most attention for their “extensive use” (Smith 2012: 39) of these facilities, probably because these countries are viewed, more generally, as frontrunners in penal policy (Pratt & Eriksson 2013). Nordic penal systems have been described as presenting an exception to the “punitive turn” characteristic of western penality (Garland 2001), most evident in the United States (Lacey 2008; Simon 2007; Tonry 2004), but traceable also elsewhere (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, Netherlands).⁴⁴ According to Pratt (2008a; see also 2008b), Nordic societies are “exceptional” on two counts. First, they exhibit comparatively low rates of incarceration⁴⁵; and second, they detain

⁴³ Note that there are differences between jurisdictions in terms of how ‘open prisons’ function and what exactly ‘open prison’ living means.

⁴⁴ There is an exhaustive literature on the development toward mass incarceration in the U.S. (e.g., Garland 2001; Gottschalk 2015). Scholars have argued that Canada, in comparison, has managed to avoid a “punitive turn,” as evidenced by its relatively stable incarceration rate (Doob & Webster 2016; Doob & Webster 2006), but even in Canada, the use of imprisonment is widespread (at a rate of 114 per 100,000 inhabitants) and higher than in many other countries (see further below).

⁴⁵ The imprisonment rate in the Nordic countries ranges from 53 (Sweden) to 74 (Norway) per 100,000 of the national population. This stands in stark contrast to the United States with a prison rate of 666 per 100,000 of the total population, or England and Wales at 146 per 100,000 inhabitants. Even more “moderate” states, such as Canada and Germany, imprison more people, at 114 and 76 per 100,000 inhabitants respectively.

people under unusually favourable and humane prison conditions.⁴⁶ Open prisons are seen as the staple of Nordic countries' humane prison system. These prisons are defined by Nordic scholars as "lower-security [institutions] with limited outer-perimeter control, a more trusting attitude toward inmates among staff, and greater opportunities for autonomy, freedom of movement and leave to outside society for inmates than more typical prisons" (Shammas 2014: 105; see also Shammas 2015; Smith 2012).

Nordic open prisons came into existence in the late 1940s.⁴⁷ According to Fransen's (2017: 84) historical account of open prisons in Denmark, these facilities can be understood as both the product of ideological struggle *and* a practical response to "the more mundane and acute problems faced at the end of Second World War." In the wake of World War II, penal and non-penal actors (such as the Danish resistance movement) alike struggled to set "new tones" against the previous "totalitarian regimes' contempt for humanity" (Fransen 2017: 84). In 1946, the principle of "normalization" was enshrined as a standard for the Danish prison service. This principle says that imprisonment should be organized "in such a way that it [comes] to resemble life outside prison as much as possible so that the prisoner in prison was neither physically nor mentally degraded" (Fransen 2017: 85). The open prison, with its more liberal regime, appeared to reflect these ideological values. At the same time, Fransen (2017) highlights that the establishment of open prisons was also a practical (and somewhat necessary) solution in response to the relatively large

⁴⁶ For a critique of Pratt (2008a), see Mathiesen (2012; 2006), and also Wacquant (2002: 388), who criticized the "Americanocentrism of research on the carceral world," arguing that the United States should be described as an exceptional case when comparing penal systems.

⁴⁷ There is a lack of information on the development of Nordic open prisons. Explanations here are based on Fransen's (2017) account of open prisons. However, there may be significant differences between Nordic countries that are not accounted for here.

number of convicted World War II collaborators who exceeded the capacity of existing prison spaces. Penal camps and open prisons were created in order to deal with these people. Because there was political consensus that collaborators' sentences "should promote the prisoners' adaptation to society" (Fransen 2017: 84), these open prisons not only fulfilled a practical need (i.e., creating additional prison spaces), but they were also believed to be superior to closed prisons with regard to their ability to reintegrate offenders more easily.

Indeed, prisons have traditionally been theorized as walled and secluded spaces characterized by a rigid, pervasive, and "total" character, where prisoners are dispossessed of agency, autonomy, freedom, and material wealth (Goffman 1961; Skyes 1958). In his seminal work *Asylums*, Goffman (1961: 11) conceptualized the prison as a "total institution," defined as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable length of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." Goffman and other early prison sociologists (e.g., Clemmer 1940) drew attention to the ways in which imprisonment destabilized prisoners' pre-prison lives, identities, and beliefs. While the conceptualization of the prison as a "total institution" has been criticized—for example, Farrington (1992: 7) has argued that prisons should be understood as "not-so-total" (rather than "total") because they interact with the wider community in various ways—the predominant reality of the prison remains one of closed walls, containment, and tight security. Indeed, as Frois (2016: 316) has noted in her study of Portuguese men's prisons, "[by] its very nature and function, prison is a place where the value of security assumes a central role" (see also Drake 2012), and the prisons' architecture—i.e., its "high walls, fences, barbed wire, guards (in some cases with arms), a rigorous system of controlling the access of persons and goods"—is revealing of the prison's enclosed nature. Open prisons (also often referred to as "prisons without bars" or "prisons without walls") therefore appear different or even "exceptional" because they deviate so clearly from the

closed regime and nature usually expected from or associated with a “prison.” Their anomalous position is highlighted in Jones and Cornes’ (1918: 1) historical account, where they say that:

[historically] prisons have always been places in which criminals could be securely confined and this ‘containment’ function has continued to predominate in spite of the gradual emergence of other aims for imprisonment, such as deterrence and rehabilitation. [...] The open prison thus begins to appear like a contradiction in terms; a denial of the essential nature of the institution of which it purports to be merely a variant.

Open prisons are regularly compared to and discussed vis-à-vis research on closed or walled prisons. From this angle, open prisons not only seem more inclusive and humane than walled prisons (especially those in the U.S. where the bulk of prison research is located), but they are also naturally conceived of as an alternative to walled prisons.

Nordic countries’ prison regimes continue to be bound by the principle of “normalization,” “meaning that life behind bars reflects life outside to as great an extent as possible” (Smith 2012: 40; but also see Smith (2012) for an analysis of how this principle has come under attack in recent years). Prisoners, it is said, should serve their time in open prisons, unless security concerns dictate otherwise. The two key features of open prisons are first, their fairly liberal regime, and second, their focus on rehabilitation. Open prison, it is commonly highlighted, tend to provide more “meaningful” rehabilitative supports, through various programs, employment opportunities (inside the confines of the prison and in the community), and material comfort, —they act as “socialization machines” (Shammas 2015). For example, at Bastøy prison (Norway’s most famous open prisons), prisoners live in self-organized cottages, have access to health services and a library, and can engage in different kinds of work and programs. Importantly, these services are provided by the community, not by the prison itself. Underlying this policy, referred to as the principle of “importation”, is that prisoners are deserving of receiving the same kind and quality of welfare services provided to ordinary citizens. These “prisons without walls” (Shammas 2015) clearly

stand in stark contrast to prison life in closed Anglo-American institutions; they also deviate from walled prisons on an ideological level. Not surprisingly, Nordic open prisons have appealed to penal scholars—especially to those “looking in” from the Anglo-American world (Ugelvik & Dullum 2012)—because conceptually, they present a different type of prison and more broadly, an alternative and seemingly more benevolent and benign way of how societies choose to punish and incarcerate those who break the law. Indeed, various Anglophone newspaper outlets have referred to Bastøy as “the world’s nicest prison” (Sutter 2012), and “the Norwegian prison where inmates are treated like people” (The Guardian 2013).

The fact that Canadian halfway houses and Nordic open prisons have elicited both different conceptualization and different research is perhaps not surprising. Studying halfway houses through the lens of reentry/reintegration (as existing studies have done) privileges the currently emphasized focus on the alleged tension between care/treatment and control/punishment within the context of *prisoner reentry* and *post-prison* supervision. By contrast, research on open prisons has been aligned more closely with other *prison* research (see above), and has therefore highlighted obvious differences between open and closed facilities. Some Nordic scholars have also offered a more critical view of how open prisons function (e.g., Shamma 2015; Shamma 2014; Neuman 2012). These scholars have challenged the notion that open prisons are ‘free’ and seemingly devoid of penal power. Shamma (2014: 111), for example, introduced the term “pains of freedom”—building on Sykes’ (1958) seminal work on the “pains of incarceration”—to describe the distinct pains felt by inmates of an open prison in Norway. His participants, for example, felt “confusion,” resulting from being in a place that “did not look like or have the feel of a prison,” but that nonetheless produced “very ‘prison-like’ effects” in the event that prisoners violated institutional rules, such as curfews. Rule infractions in open prisons regularly result in disciplinary actions, such as a ‘strike’ on a prisoner’s record, or, in the worst case, transfer to a closed prison institution

(Shammas 2015; Shammas 2014). To enforce compliance, prison officials conduct regular counts, randomly drug test prisoners, and impose nightly curfews. The closed prison always looms in the background, as prisoners are faced with the constant threat of being sent to more secure facilities. Not surprisingly, prisoners in Shammas' (2015) study regularly experienced "anxiety," because they were keenly aware that minor mistakes (e.g., violating a curfew) could easily result in institutional repercussions. Similarly, Scandinavia-based scholar Neuman (2012) has described open prison living as a form of "imprisoning of the soul," wherein prisoners' legal future is experienced as uncertain and unpredictable.

In the next section, I describe the similarities I see between Nordic open prisons and Canadian halfway houses. More specifically, I ask: What features of the halfway house and residents' experiences would come to the fore if we looked at these facilities through the lens and conceptualization of the open prison? And what is the value of conceptualizing halfway houses as open prisons?

Halfway Houses—Canada's Open Prisons

Nordic open prisons are regularly noted for their small size. As Shammas (2015: 3) has put it, in comparison with "[...] the carceral behemoths of North America," Nordic open prisons seem "almost comically petite" (Shammas 2015: 3); in Norway, for example, the smallest open prison holds 12 people. Nordic prisons' small size is not only viewed as an element of Scandinavian "penal exceptionalism;" studies have also shown that smaller prisons (fewer than 50 prisoners) produce better relationships between prisoners and prison officers, as well as improved prison officer satisfaction (see Johnsen, Granheim, & Helgesen 2011). Canadian halfway houses too present small-scale facilities, ranging in capacity from four to 80 beds.

There were no guards, bars, or fences surrounding the four halfway houses included in this study, and the various cameras attached to the four facilities were only visible upon close observation. Indeed, when I asked halfway house workers to tell me about the relationship between the halfway house and the neighbourhood, many replied that they thought that the community, including police patrolling the area, was not even aware of its existence. As Doris, a worker at a male halfway house, explained:

[...] like, sometimes we'll get police officers... or if we call, like, the fire department to pick up some of our sharps [sharp items, e.g., knives] and that kind of stuff. They're just kind of, like, "What is this building? What do you do here?" [...] I've even had two police officers say that they spent, like, hours outside of our building running plates and every single plate comes up with a criminal record. Well, of course it does because we're a halfway house, and they just kind of laugh. Yeah, you wasted a little bit of time, but, yeah, so, I mean, there is some awareness that we're a halfway house, but I would say the greater community probably doesn't realize, yeah.

Because halfway houses are conceived of as *post-prison* institutions, their apparent permeability and porousness might not surprise, or stand out, as the term halfway house is normally associated with more openness, inclusiveness, and familiarity than the term prison. If halfway houses however, were conceived of and recognized as (open) prisons, their "non-prison" look, the lack of outer-perimeter control, and their integration within the neighbourhood would likely receive more attention, as these are commonly noted for being unique or "exceptional" features of the open prison. Despite the paucity of bars, gates, and other physical security structures, halfway houses, similar to Nordic open prisons, rely on various other security measures such as cameras, but also curfews and call-ins, that perform control and surveillance functions. In effect, these halfway houses, as discussed in the next section, operate as carceral sites.

Carceral Sites

It is important to note that while scholars have argued that halfway houses extend carceral control (similar to other forms of post-prison supervision, such as parole), this conceptualization does not fully capture halfway houses' composition as carceral sites. Halfway houses not only extend control (like parole), they also present examples of *institutional* control and confinement. The term open prison helps to conceptualize halfway houses as examples of *institutional* confinement. It highlights that rather than relocating from the prison to the open community, ex-prisoners move from one confining site (i.e., the prison) to another confining site (i.e., the halfway house), and as such, they must adjust to and navigate new forms of institutional living with potentially new threats, issues, and relationships to deal with (e.g., institutional culture, roommates). This point was made clear by Mike who said:

I think the hardest part for me is having roommates. You know, there's just something unsettling about having to share a room with another man, especially when I went through a residential school experience of being raped and molested. They force a person on you, and you don't know what that person is doing while you're gone to work, you know, going through your stuff, or is he going to be leaving drugs in your room.

That halfway houses present and are experienced as carceral *sites* (rather than “merely” *practices* of control) was also voiced by Pink, another resident.

KM: If you had to describe to somebody what a halfway house is, what would you say?

Pink: It feels like a group home [...]. Like, staff always being there, always having to live with somebody. Yeah, I think that's what it would feel like.

Other residents also highlighted the carceral nature of halfway houses, but placed greater emphasis on what they perceived as a conflict or dilemma between freedom and confinement—an inherent aspect of the halfway house institution and ex-prisoners' status and position as “half way” citizens.

As Gunrunner said, as a halfway house resident, you are essentially a “citizen by day” and “prisoner by night,” oscillating continuously between these two status.

You know, you’re still in prison, the fence is just further out. You are expected to go to work, conduct yourself in a normal manner, and yet you have the curfew you have to be in by, and you have to act like a prisoner and sort of kowtow to whoever is in charge of supervising you, so basically you’re a prisoner by night and a public citizen by day, and it’s such...the existence is almost bipolar. You still owe the government some time. They still want their pound of flesh, so you’re here for that pound of flesh to be served to them, and you have that freedom during the day, but then you’re a prisoner at night, and that duality, I think, is hard for some people to reconcile.

To re-state my argument, interviewees’ perceptions of the halfway house as carceral should not be used as a basis to conclude that halfway houses are defective treatment institutions, but rather as an opportunity to re-conceptualize the role of halfway houses and to think of them, more concretely, as open prisons and hence (as outlined below), a possible alternative to closed or walled prisons. The terminology of open prison captures particularly well the ways halfway houses, similar to Nordic open prisons, mobilize freedom yet contain ex-prisoners’ bodies through various prison-like techniques of control and surveillance.

Freedom and Normalization

Since interviewees had been released from more closed prisons within the last six months, comparisons between halfway house and prison living loomed large. Compared to prisoners’ in walled prisons, halfway house residents enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom and material comfort. At all four houses, residents lived in self-contained suites, with usually two to three people sharing a bathroom, kitchen, and a small living area, furnished with a sofa, table, and TV. They had access to shared laundry facilities, and received financial support (in the form of gift cards for select grocery stores) to purchase their own food and prepare their own meals. Residents could

receive visitors on a daily basis and, depending on their “level” (see below), were able to apply for weekend passes so they could spend time with family, children, and friends away from the halfway house. These kinds of concrete freedoms were perceived by interviewees as particularly liberating vis-à-vis their previous experiences in more closed prisons. Taylor, for example, said:

Well, it’s [the halfway house] still part of the [prison] system, but we don’t look at the staff here as guards. I mean, nobody wears uniforms. Everybody calls you by your first name. You are treated like everybody else is treated out in the community. Yeah, I mean, it’s a far cry from sitting inside the pen, a far cry. You know, we’re able to have all these things that you can have at your home, like with the TV and go out grocery shopping, being able to purchase what we want. Whatever we want to eat that night, we can do that, right?

As described here by Taylor, concrete freedoms often carried a symbolic value (see also Sexton 2015). For example, the ability to shop for one’s food not only provided residents with more choices and nourishing food, but was also seen as a form of regaining (at least some aspects of) their independence and individuality. Interestingly, the (compared to the closed prison) fairly liberal regime of the halfway house was often attributed to what residents thought was the well intentioned mission guiding these NGO-run halfway houses. For example, while Gunrunner (see above) problematized the carceral nature of halfway houses, he spoke much more positively about the intentions and demeanor of NGO-employed staff.

Does it make a difference that they’re [halfway houses] not a government entity? Most likely. You know, they can have a different mission statement and live up to it. At least that’s been my experience here. They absolutely seem...they want people to succeed here. They give respect to people, and they get it.

Boo too explained that if halfway houses were run by the state, they “would be very strict. It would be like a minimum security halfway house. The rules would be different. You wouldn’t be able to smoke on the property.” Interviewees highlighted the significance of a variety of differences that

they noticed between state-run prisons and NGO-run halfway houses. The fact that halfway house staff refer to residents by their first name was emphasized as particularly significant.

Two of the four houses in this study offered an in-house rehabilitation program that covered a range of topics, from budgeting, employment help, and building self-esteem, to anger management. The two other facilities did not offer such programming, but required that residents attend two Alcoholic/Narcotics Anonymous meetings per week in the community (regardless of whether they had a drug/alcohol addiction). Staff at all facilities believed it was particularly important that residents connected or got involved with available programs and agencies in the community, which they thought promised the most long-term support, and would help residents make “pro-social” connections. Overall, halfway houses, if looked at through the lens of the open prison, arguably bring to life the principles of “normalization” and “importation.” Indeed, halfway house workers invoked the precise definition of “normalization” when they described halfway house residency by saying that, “for our residents here, I mean, it’s not normal life, but we try to make it as normal as possible” (Doris).

Penal Control and ‘Soft’ Power

A question commonly asked about the Nordic model is: How do prisons without walls work and function as places of confinement? This question is equally important in the halfway house context, but has not received academic attention. Shammass (2015: 3) has explained that open prisons are “uniquely suited to disciplining and controlling prison populations, crucially, by giving inmates something to lose and then threatening to take it away.” As he has said, “this is perhaps the fundamental disciplinary innovation of the open prison: it corrects, in some sense, because many inmates learn to desire to be corrected.” Similar to Nordic open prisons, halfway houses rely on a

system of rewards and punishments/consequences—if residents comply, their freedoms are gradually expanded, while non-compliance is penalized by taking away a resident's mobility, privileges, and freedoms. Halfway house staff have at their disposal a range of disciplinary and control mechanisms, similar to those of prison officers in Nordic open prisons. They conduct hourly counts (both during the day and night) to ensure that all residents are accounted for, that illicit activities are not taking place, and that residents are alive⁴⁸. Drug and alcohol consumption are strictly forbidden, and residents can be required to take random drug tests. Halfway house staff also collect residents' bank statements, and regularly conduct unannounced searches of residents' belongings and rooms. Various curfews are in place; specifically, all residents must show up to be counted between 5 and 6 pm daily, and return to the halfway house for the night by either 8 or 10 pm, depending on their “level” (exceptions can be made, such as for employment). Residents are also required to call in (or leave a voice mail) every time they change their location in the community (e.g., leave work to get a coffee). Not surprisingly, residents in this study reported that they made it a priority to purchase a cell phone as soon as they arrived at the halfway house. From the residents' perspective, having a cell phone is a necessary requirement to make use of their freedom, given that pay phones are few and far between. From the staff's perspective, cell phone technology enables the control of residents' movements without actually watching them; residents are expected to be reachable by phone, and may be penalized (e.g., by having leisure privileges taken away) if staff try to contact them and they fail to answer.

⁴⁸ Staff interviewees in this study talked about many instances of drug overdose among halfway house residents and even deaths.

In addition to these control mechanisms, halfway house workers, similar to prison officers in Nordic open prisons, “maintain a toolbox of disciplinary instruments to establish incentives for behavior deemed worthy and disincentives of assumedly disruptive behavior” (Shammas 2015: 8). At all four facilities, residents had to pass different “Levels.” Incoming residents start out in what is called “Orientation.” Lasting two to five days (but possibly longer), the orientation period allows residents to be out in the community for two to three hours per day, but otherwise requires them to stay at the halfway house. Following “Orientation,” there are three “Levels.” As residents move up the “Levels,” their curfews are extended (from 8 to 10 pm), and they are able to apply for weekend passes and other privileges. As is noted in all resident handbooks, level changes are not automatic, but are decided individually based on “your behavior, your mental health, your needs for access to the community, your progress in treatment or obtaining employment, and the restrictions placed on your conditional release” (Halfway house 1, handbook), among other things. If residents demonstrate progress (e.g., by securing work, participating in programming), their “level” is increased and thus, they gain more freedoms (e.g., ability to apply for weekend passes), while rule infractions, including small things, like failing to do one’s chores, may result in the decrease in one’s “level,” as well as other “consequences” (e.g., verbal warning). As Cher, a halfway house resident, said, “The more you obey the rules, the more freedom they’ll [staff] give you.” These findings speak to Crewe’s (2011) theorizing of penal power in less secure environments as “softer” (enforced via techniques of neo-paternalism rather than physical force) yet “tighter” (because prisoners feel at constant risk of punishment). Freedom, for halfway house residents, is granted piecemeal, and is precarious, unstable, and often temporary (see also Shammas 2014). If a resident repeatedly fails to abide by the rules, their behavior may constitute “deteriorating behavior” which, in the worst case, can lead to a person’s reincarceration.

In this section, I used the open prison as a hook to think through the workings of Canadian halfway houses. Rather than Nordic open prisons being an anomaly (as is often suggested), I argued that Canadian halfway houses present and should be understood as a Canadian form of open prison. If halfway houses are conceived of as *post-prison* institutions, it is easy to critique them on the grounds that they are too control-oriented and not rehabilitative enough. However, if we call and treat halfway house as open prisons, they could, as I argue below, be considered as a potentially more humane or at least less brutal form of imprisonment. In the final section, I thus move on to explain why the term open prison is not only more reflective of halfway houses' workings, but is also more productive. I highlight the importance of wedding prisoner reentry with prison abolition/decarceration scholarship.

Halfway Houses: A More Benevolent Prison?

In the last 15 years or so, there has been a surge of academic research on “prisoner reentry”—most notably in the U.S.— in response to the record number of individuals being released from American prisons (e.g., Austin 2001; Petersilia 2003; Travis 2000). This research has largely focused on documenting (ex-)prisoners' barriers to reentry, and on using these research findings to propose and develop reentry/reintegrative supports and programs (e.g., employment help, transitional housing) intended to facilitate reentry, limit reoffending, and neutralize the negative effects of the prison. Such reentry initiatives have been viewed as a departure from the punitive and get-tough policies salient in the U.S. context. As Gottschalk (2015: 97), however, has rightly cautioned, “[...] defending reentry, treatment, and rehabilitation programs in terms of their potential to reduce recidivism rates, [...] and cut the prison population is an extremely risky and ultimately self-defeating strategy.” Reentry, she has argued, is not “a path out of the carceral state.” Indeed, prisoner reentry policies and programs (including things such as more ‘rehabilitative’ or

treatment oriented halfway houses) neither address the extensive use of incarceration (in the U.S. but also most other western countries, including Canada), nor challenge the harmful conditions and effects of imprisonment. Reentry scholars committed to working toward a more just and restrained penal system must therefore move beyond reentry, and use the knowledge gained from reentry research to inform and challenge broader punitive structures, specifically the widespread use of imprisonment. This applies to the U.S. context as well as to Canada, where the use of prisons is lower but still extensive, and a range of other problems prevail (e.g., over-incarceration of Indigenous and Black people, high rates of prison violence, over-use of segregation). In line with Byrd (2016: 1), I argue that prisoner reentry scholarship “must be grounded in a politics of abolition if it is to undermine the conditions that make possible mass incarceration.” This paper has sought to make prisoner reentry research accessible for a critique of the larger prison system by re-conceptualizing the halfway house institution. I argue that once we see halfway houses as open prisons, we can move on to exploring their potential to *replace* walled prisons.

Seeing the halfway house as an alternative to walled prisons is, of course, not without its own share of problems. Foucault (2009: 15-17) has not only cautioned us about thinking of open prisons and similar penal sites as “alternatives” to prison—for the term “alternative” takes for granted that people should be punished in one way or another—but has also emphasized that these more open “alternatives” have generally resulted in more control and enmeshment, not less. As he has explained:

“It seems to me that they are not so much alternatives as quite simply attempts to ensure through different kinds of mechanisms and set-ups the functions that up to then have been those of prisons themselves. [...] All these alternatives to the old forms of incarceration have as their function the aim of disseminating as far as possible all those forms of power that belonged to the prison, to spread them as a cancerous growth beyond the prison walls.”

Foundational abolitionists (e.g., Mathiesen 1974, 1986; Scull 1977), too, have argued that community “alternatives,” including halfway houses, consolidate—rather than dismantle or tear down—the prison system. As Thomas Mathiesen (1986: 81) has noted, “so-called 'alternatives' to prison [...] contained very great dangers, in so far as they easily would imply the creation of new prison-like structures with functions similar to those of the prison proper” (see also Cohen 1979: 343). Scholars have also challenged the seemingly benign intentions of prison “alternatives.” For example, Tony Platt’s (1977: xvii) book *The Child Savers* has shown that rather than humanizing the criminal justice system, the child saver movement “helped to create a system that subjected more and more juveniles to arbitrary and degrading punishment.” These actors, he has said, were not driven by benign intentions; rather, they “promoted correctional programs requiring longer terms of imprisonment, long hours of labor and militaristic discipline” (Platt 1977: 176).

There are however other studies that have produced more nuanced (and hopeful) results. In her research on U.S. probation, Phelps (2013), for example, has found that while some U.S. states saw a strong positive (or net-widening) relationship between the expansion of probation and imprisonment rates, other states witnessed a strong negative (or alternative) relationship; in those states, probation did *not* lead to net-widening and more incarceration. Phelps (2013: 72) therefore finds that “probation paradoxically exerts both a prison alternative and a net-widening effect.” Additionally, she argues that “probation reforms—when combined with other efforts—can be critical for reversing the course of mass incarceration” (Phelps 2013: 73). Such efforts include concrete penal reforms and legislative changes geared toward reducing people’s enmeshment in the criminal justice system. Phelps’s findings show that while community alternatives can lead to net-widening, this is not the only outcome.

There is value in exploring if and how halfway houses could reduce the total carceral footprint. The principles of “normalization” and “importation” underlying the halfway house context, I suggest, provide impulses that could lead to new penal logics around the treatment of criminalized individuals. Because of their fairly liberal regime and location in the community, halfway houses as open prisons are more naturally geared toward release and inclusion. These houses (if used as prisons) could ensure that prisoners are put in close proximity to welfare services, employment opportunities, and social supports, thereby helping to establish locally centred solutions to people’s problems and needs (see also Simon 2016). In so doing, these open prisons might then create spaces for criminal justice actors (such as halfway house staff) to also produce new ways of thinking about prisoners — as people who are deserving of participation and inclusion in the community and who have a place in society. It has been shown that prison environments shape prison officers’ orientations toward and treatment of prisoners (see e.g., Liebling, assisted by Arnold 2005). Halfway houses as open prisons might therefore encourage the production of more humane and egalitarian views of prisoners, and could ultimately lead to the creation of larger penal cultures that not only sustain these open prisons but also lead to the abolition (or at least reduction) of closed prisons.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Based on in-depth interviews with halfway house workers and residents, the goal of this dissertation was to shed light on the role, function, and workings of halfway houses in Canada's contemporary penal landscape. In 2012, Hannah-Moffat and Lynch posited that extant studies of punishment and society were "limited in their ability to explain on-the-ground punitive practices, particularly in contexts that challenge traditional understandings of the penal realm" (Hannah-Moffat & Lynch 2012: 199). I hope that this dissertation has served to complement more macro analyses of the "carceral archipelago" by expanding knowledge regarding the on-the-ground practices of Canadian halfway houses. While it would be easy to propose that halfway houses are simply sites of 'transcarceral control', this would be an incomplete account. What this dissertation has sought to show is that halfway houses are complex carceral sites that are imbued by residents and workers alike with multifaceted meanings. Based on interviewees' narratives, I suggested three conceptualizations of halfway houses, namely (1) halfway houses as '*liminal*' sites (Chapter 3); (2) halfway houses as '*mobility producing*' sites (Chapter 4); and (3) halfway houses as '*open prisons*' (Chapter 5). These theorizations were then used to reflect more broadly on the nature of prisoner reentry, by proposing to conceptualize prisoner reentry as the *outcome of liminal workers' practices* (Chapter 3), and as a *spatial-temporal process* (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, I highlighted the importance of reentry as *embedded within a broader critique of punishment*.

In this final chapter, I present a number of concluding remarks. I revisit the key arguments presented in the three stand-alone articles, and point out some broader implications. Where applicable, I bring the ex-prisoner and staff perspectives in conversation with each other. I then

revisit the concept of the “prisoner reentry field” that was mentioned in the introduction and that I argued shaped processes of reentry. I also note the limitations of this research.

Summary and Broader Implications

Below, I summarize each chapter, point out broader implications, and suggest avenues for future research.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 focused on how halfway house workers conceived of themselves and their workplace roles, particularly in relation to those held by parole officers. Drawing attention to halfway house workers’ *intermediary* position, I discussed how and in what instances staff interviewees sought to accept versus deflect responsibility for ex-prisoners’ reintegration and transformation. Interviewees accepted their responsibility as careworkers and supervisors—often positioning themselves as superior to parole officers in carrying out these tasks—yet deflected responsibility for residents’ penal futures. This deflection, of course, was largely involuntary, as halfway house staff do not have the power to decide on residents’ penal futures. At the same time, staff’s limited power appeared to have a productive function, insofar as it allowed these workers to maintain their self-image and self-presentation toward residents as caring supporters. In other words, although their [...] possible actions are limited because of their position in the field” (Pager 2013: 3), they manage to frame their limited authority in a positive light. To date, the relationship between state and non-state agencies in post-prison practices has been largely approached from a top-down perspective, describing this relationship essentially as one whereby the state ‘offloads’ its responsibilities onto non-state actors. In sum then, Chapter 3 provides a basis for further examinations into how this ‘offloaded responsibility’ is carried out in practice by non-state halfway

house workers, and the ways in which these front-line staff attribute meaning to their (limited) responsibility and *intermediary* or liminal position.

Chapter 3 also discussed how halfway house workers envisioned the role of the halfway house in prisoner reentry. Here, I conceptualized the halfway house as a *liminal space* at the intersection of the prison and the community. These three institutions or locales—the halfway house, the prison, and the community—interact to structure the environment in which halfway house workers perform their governing role as both supporters and control agents of ex-prisoners on conditional release.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 sought to deconstruct prisoner reentry as a process by highlighting its *spatial-temporal* dynamics. It focused on how resident interviewees experienced and talked about both their (re)entry neighbourhoods as well as the larger urban geography of Edmonton, and provided insight into how these individuals imagined their post-punishment futures. I suggested that there is a value in approaching prisoner reentry through the lens of mobilities, as prison release and halfway house residency in particular produce different forms of mobility. By conceptualizing prisoner reentry as a *spatial-temporal process*, this chapter also sought to challenge existing (largely U.S.) based studies on prisoner reentry which to date have either neglected questions around space, or focused solely on the neighbourhood context of prisoner reentry.

Post-Prison Supervision and Hidden Punishment

Chapter 4 discussed the role of halfway houses within the particular geography of Edmonton and Alberta. Like state-run prisons, halfway houses are located in Canada's urban centres. In 2013, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) published an article with the title "Lack of halfway

house hurting N.W.T. prisoners.” This article addressed the lack of halfway houses in northern Canada, making the point that:

A lack of a halfway house anywhere in the Northwest Territories is hurting prisoners in their attempts to integrate back into society after time in prison. Offenders either have to go down south to stay in a halfway house, or remain in jail until they are granted full parole. [...] "It's a different culture. It's a completely different setting, to have to learn to live in Edmonton," Pintarics [executive director of the healing drum society] says.

This article echoed the sentiment of various ex-prisoners interviewees in this study who recognized the value of halfway houses as stepping stones, but also drew attention to the hypocrisy of ‘community reintegration’ into a new place. Some halfway house workers shared similar thoughts and recognized the hardship of being “shipped out” to an Edmonton halfway house, far away from one’s family and home community. As Susan, worker at a male halfway house, said,

We need more of them [halfway houses] and I don’t understand why the guys have to come to Alberta. Ya, you committed a crime, ya your life is messed up, but mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, anyone that will give you a possible chance to succeed when you get out, because you did a certain crime they want to ship you out. Who has the right to say “We’re sending you to Alberta because you belong there in a halfway house?” I have guys here crying on the phone “I wanna see my family, I wanna go home, they send me all the way here.” And you call this rehabilitation; it’s not rehabilitation, you’re still penalizing them.

Beyond the recognition that halfway house residency can be very ‘painful,’ this quote also shows that experiences of punishment are variable, that punishment may take on different (more punitive) meanings for certain people, and that experiences of punishment may certainly extend beyond what is prescribed and intended by law. The experience of forced or “disciplined mobility” within the halfway house context thus highlights one of the more covert or hidden aspects of post-prison supervision. A similar point can be made regarding residents’ experiences of the halfway house neighbourhoods. Beyond representing an arguably negative force in residents’ reintegration (as was often said by staff), the halfway house neighbourhood took on added meaning for these

residents, insofar as it was viewed, more deeply, as part of their state punishment. Having to navigate new (and possibly unsafe) neighbourhoods is certainly not part of the formal penal and control regime, yet these aspects of post-prison supervision may be experienced by former prisoners themselves as an aspect of their punishment. My findings therefore draw attention to the covert nature of post-prison control (see also Kaufman, Kaiser, & Rumpf 2016). Complementing Lori Sexton's (2015) work, these findings highlight the difference between supervision "on the books" and supervision "in action."

While halfway house living can produce "pains" among former prisoners, Chapter 4 also suggested that supervision can be productive. My data demonstrate that ex-prisoners honed in on those aspects of the halfway house experience that they thought were useful and helpful to them in planning ahead for their futures (i.e., free housing and basic material support). Based on these insights, one can conclude that the perceived helpfulness of the halfway house may arguably mediate the "pains" associated with supervision and halfway house residency. In the eyes of resident interviewees, the legitimacy of the halfway house as an institution is dependent on the concrete forms of support provided. Additionally, the temporality of halfway house living (and post-prison supervision more generally) is another factor that appeared to mediate the "painful" aspects of halfway house supervision. The short-term nature of halfway house residency, in conjunction with residents' belief in their ability to regain control and relocate to different communities (if so desired), appeared to reduce some of their "pains."

Future Research

Methodologically, this study could be expanded in two ways to further elaborate on the spatial-temporal context of prisoner reentry. First, it would be useful to conduct follow-up interviews with halfway house residents to see if and how their post-punishment plans actually materialize. Such

research could also be used to expand examinations of reentry to more rural and remote areas. Second, research on the spatial-temporal dynamics of prisoner reentry could be expanded by examining the day-to-day movements of ex-prisoners. A number of questions have yet to be researched, such as “how do ex-prisoners navigate cities and urban spaces in their day-to-day lives? And what kinds of meaning are attached to different spaces as people navigate their immediate post-prison lives?”

In the future, I would also like to expand my research to other ‘gateway cities’ that, in a fashion similar to Edmonton, act as ‘institutional hubs’ for both more proximate surrounding communities as well as more geographically distant communities, e.g. northern communities. Such research would be able to discern possible similarities and differences across different sites, and enable further insight into the (unique) experiences of newcomer ex-prisoners.

Beyond Chapter 4, my data suggest that this particular population indeed deserves further scholarly attention, as the challenges faced by this group were not only the subject of conversations with halfway house residents and workers, but also surfaced in various interviews with front-line staff at prisoner reentry organizations. As Sally, staff at one of the reentry organizations, said,

Yeah, they’ll [clients] come in and they’ll say, “I’m an Inuit, and I don’t know where to...you know, that’s what I am, and I don’t know where to go. I’m from a tiny little village.” We just had a guy. He was talking with us like we should know his Uncle Joe, because he’s from such a small village, and I’m just looking at him. Wow, that’s tough. He just got released to a huge city.

KM: What kinds of other challenges do you think these people face?

Sally: Oh, they’re so lost down here, and they get into drugs so fast. And they’ll come in and say, “I don’t know what to do. I don’t know where to go. I don’t know how to work the streets.” Some of them don’t read or write, so, like, if I was them, I’d be scared, so I can see how they would be vulnerable to get into situations that are not good.

Glen Coulthard (2014) has written about the historic and ongoing displacement and dispossession faced by Indigenous people in both cities and land-based contexts. Sally's narrative highlights the continued importance of critically examining how Indigenous people encounter, experience, and engage with the deeply classed and racialized urban geographies of Canadian cities, and the ways in which reentry workers' (colonial) attitudes toward these people may shape their experiences of reentry and how they relate to the spaces they reenter. Conceptually, this requires us to take seriously an "Indigenous intersectionality" approach that foregrounds anti-colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, nationhood, and Indigenous experiences (see Clark 2016), and that seeks to disrupt colonial logics.

Chapter 5

Various penal scholars have described North American prisons as human warehouses that process and physically sequester—rather than treat and rehabilitate—large numbers of people, mostly from poor, marginalized, and racialized communities (Irwin 2005; Wacquant 2001). These scholars agree that prisons fail to deal with and redress the various issues and disadvantages faced by the majority of imprisoned populations, such as poverty, addictions, mental illness, and interpersonal violence. Rather than places for rehabilitation, prisons, in short, produce tremendous "pains," despair, and waste (Sykes 1958), yet their use continues to be extensive. Recognizing the prison's harmful conditions and effects, various prison scholars have proposed ways to create a more just and humane penal system, ranging on a spectrum from more reformist, piecemeal solutions (e.g., enhancing rehabilitative programs) to the abolition of prisons and all other forms of carceral punishment (Davis 2003; Mathiesen 1974). Against this backdrop, Chapter 5 explored Canadian halfway houses as a form of open prison and an alternative to walled prisons. The article suggested

that rather than seeing halfway houses as defective treatment institutions, perhaps we could view them as more humane (or at least less brutal) prisons.

I argued that existing studies of halfway houses have been limited by the presumption and/or reinforcement of the notion that halfway houses have a defined place in the criminal justice system (i.e. at the “back-end”) and as a result, a defined purpose (i.e., rehabilitation/reentry). I suggested that halfway houses should be recognized as open prisons as this terminology better captures halfway houses' contemporary role, purpose, and workings, and specifically the ways in which halfway houses—similarly to Nordic open prisons—confine and control residents' movements, activities, and choices via a mixture of curfews, rules, and “softer” (Crewe 2011) forms of penal power.

In future research, it would be particularly interesting to study other forms of more ‘open’ custody in the Canadian context. This could include examining both minimum-security prisons (also often referred to as ‘camps’) as well as CSC-run halfway houses. The latter in particular might offer interesting insights into the differences between CSC and NGO- run houses (i.e., in terms of culture, management, rules, etc.), and the impact of NGO-employed halfway houses workers’ intermediary position on service delivery.

In their most recent book on Scandinavian penal systems, Peter Scharff Smith and Thomas Ugelvik (2017: 5) have asked the questions: “Is such a thing as a humane prison even possible? And if it is, is there any reason to believe that it is a uniquely Scandinavian phenomenon?” The argument put forth in Chapter 5 indeed prompts the question: What exactly does Nordic “penal exceptionalism” mean in the context of global or comparative criminology? Are Nordic open prisons really “exceptional” or “unusual” prisons (Shammas 2014: 120), and if so what exactly makes them “exceptional” in comparison to other open, less secure penal institutions in other

countries? Further comparative research is necessary here to draw out similarities as well as differences in how (open) prisons and other penal sites work, function, and confine in different penal and cultural contexts. What exactly makes something a prison? What makes a prison a humane prison? Why are some prisons experienced as more humane than others? Answering these questions requires further study of what “braided punishment” means to people, how it plays out on the ground, and what aspects of “braided” punishment we might embrace to work toward a more just prison and penal system.

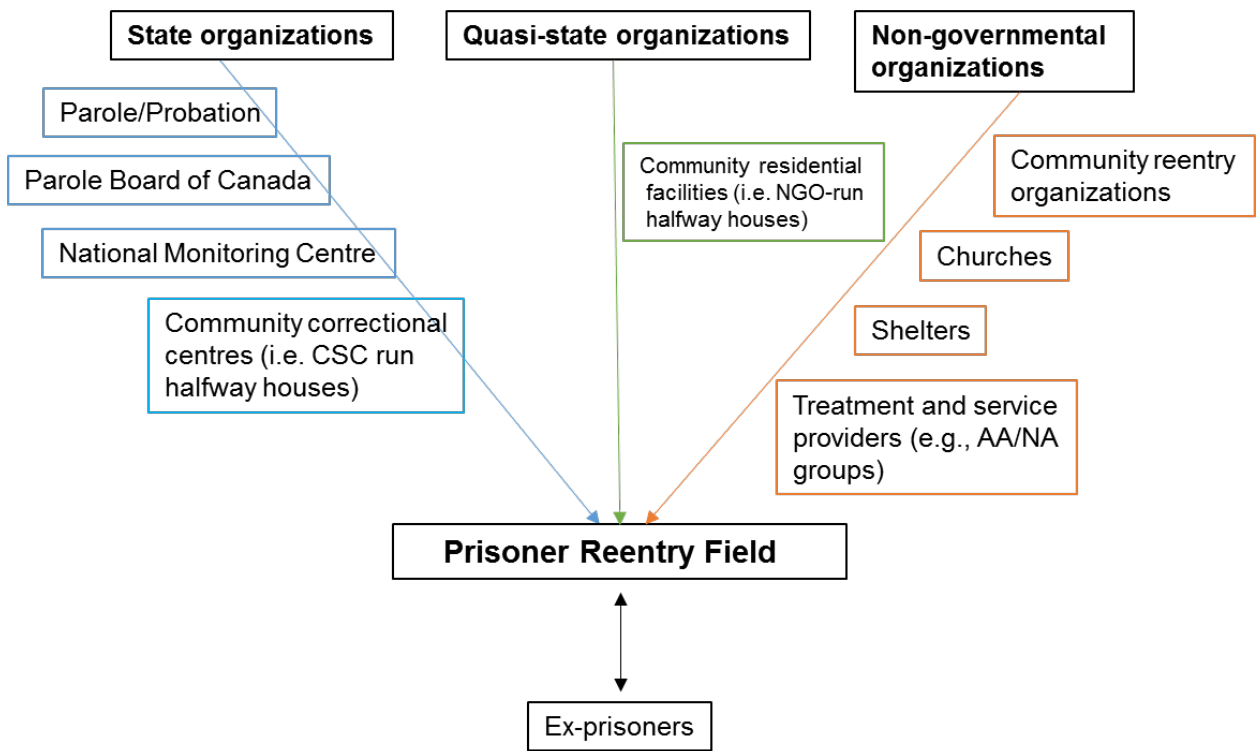
Situating NGOs within a Prisoner Reentry Field

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizing, Page (2013: 2; online edition) has defined field as “a semi-autonomous, relatively bounded sphere of action in which people, groups, and organizations struggle with and against each other.” As Marwell and McQuarrie (2013: 133) have further explained, fields “designate a set of interorganizational relationships, sometimes collaborative, sometimes antagonistic, in a particular area of action.” Based on my research, I suggest that we understand halfway houses and prisoner reentry organizations as two components of a prisoner reentry field⁴⁹. These two organizations interact both with each other as well as in relationship to other organizational forces. As Figure 4 shows, the prisoner reentry field consists of a variety of state-organizations, quasi-state organizations, and non-governmental organizations. I categorize NGO-run halfway houses as quasi-state organizations given their state authorizations and

⁴⁹ I recognize that the concept of field has, as Shamma (2017: 59) has said, various “competitors,” such as the concepts of system, assemblage, and apparatus. Conceptually differentiating these concepts from each other, and analyzing their respective strengths and inadequacies, would go beyond the scope of this thesis. I use the concept of field because of the relational configurations highlighted by this approach. Below, I also describe why it is superior to conceptualizations of reentry as an institution (Miller 2014).

supervision responsibilities which extend much beyond those of community reentry organizations. I do not suggest that Figure 4 offers a complete account of the organizations that constitute the prisoner reentry field. Rather, it offers a starting point for mapping out both the broad contours and specific actors of this field.

Table 3: Prisoner Reentry Field⁵⁰



As Chapter 3 showed, the inter-organizational relationships between halfway houses and parole impacted on halfway house workers’ self-conception. My data also suggest that inter-

⁵⁰ Based off Marwell & McQuarrie’s (2013) mapping of the welfare field.

organizational relationships, such as those between halfway house workers and parole officers, influence ex-prisoners' experiences. For example, for some halfway house resident interviewees, the shared responsibility between halfway house workers and parole officers led to heightened feelings of uncertainty and risk. Resident interviewees were aware of the fact that halfway house staff and parole officers shared information about them, and they expressed concern over possible misunderstandings (intentional or unintentional) during these transmissions. As Cher, one of the halfway house interviewees, explained:

I, personally, myself, I'll connect with my parole officer before I'll connect with the staff here, because they like to twist things around, or they don't understand it and they pass the message on differently than how I meant to say, it right.

KM: So it feels like the safer route talking to your PO [parole officer]?

Cher: Yeah, because say, if I was to tell you something and you're staff at the halfway house, and then you said it to my PO, but it came across differently? I'd just rather him hear it from me so he knows what I...you know? I like to cover all my bases because I don't want to go back.

As evinced in this quote, while halfway house staff perceive their own limited authority (or “middleman” role) in a largely positive light, this same intermediary position may make them less likely to be perceived by residents as supportive and trustworthy agents. That is because for halfway house residents, the threat of reimprisonment always looms large. The involvement of different agents (state and non (or quasi) state) in residents' supervision and reentry—while being perceived by some ex-prisoner interviewees as separate sources of support—ultimately creates a more intricate web of control with increased potential for punishment. In this context, various residents voiced concern about the fact that they can be returned to prison for what is referred to as “deteriorating behavior” or “the suspicion of being suspicious.” As Fred said, “What is suspicion of being suspicious? They can use that at any time to throw you back into jail.” When ex-prisoners are supervised, judged, and corrected by various agents, the potential for

miscommunication or misunderstanding is arguably heightened, and, as resident interviewees suggest, may lead to a sense of increased risk. The two-directional arrow (prisoner reentry field – ex-prisoner) indicates that inter-organizational relationships not only impact on ex-prisoners, but that ex-prisoners’ experiences may also feed back into the prisoner reentry system, and potentially lead to changes in reentry practices (see also Marwell & McQuarrie 2013).

In future research, it would be particularly useful to study the perspectives of parole officers, as well as other organizations (e.g., state-run halfway houses) to produce deeper insight into these organizations’ work and positioning. Robert Werth’s (2013) research with parole agents in California already provides some important findings regarding parole officers’ perceptions of their occupational role. Werth (2013) has argued that the hybrid components of parole—i.e. control and social work—“coalesce into a coherent project for agents” (Werth 2013: 237). Because the parole officers in his study adhered to the idea that regulatory surveillance was the best way to promote parolee reformation, they were able to integrate the different elements of parole into one unified practice. One omission of existing research on parole officers is that it has focused on how parole officers perceive and perform their role in relation to their ‘clients’, but not in relation to other reentry actors. Methodologically, interrogating these inter-organizational relationships could take the form of qualitative research with parole officers, ethnographic fieldwork, or focus groups research including a variety of different actors.

Below, I point out two other reasons for taking a field approach to the study of reentry.

Shared Assumptions

First, I suggest that the idea of a prisoner reentry field may be useful in capturing the values, assumptions, and beliefs that bound different reentry actors and organizations. Page (2013: 9) has

suggested that the penal field has various attending sub-fields, “[...] such as the fields of imprisonment, policing, probation and parole.” One of the limitations of this more fragmented approach to conceptualizing reentry-involved organizations and actors is that it neglects not only the inter-relationships between different reentry forces such as parole and halfway houses, but also the shared principles and assumptions underlying and shaping the work of these actors. Based on previous studies (e.g., Miller 2014; Mijs 2016; Rumpf 2014) and the data presented in this research, one of such beliefs is that ex-prisoners must perform as ‘good’ ex-prisoners and show that they are worthy of reentry. Such beliefs are intermittently challenged by reentry organization staff when they highlight the narrative of “hands-off” and seek to clearly distinguish themselves from the more paternalistic and responsabilizing approach taken by halfway house workers and parole. The idea of the prisoner reentry field thus encourages us to attend to the shared culture and beliefs of different reentry actors as well as the ways in which this culture affects reentry practices.

Neighbouring Fields

Second, it is important to note that fields stand in relationship to and interact with neighbouring fields (Page 2016). The prisoner reentry field, for example, interacts with the welfare field, as well as other aspects of the penal field, such as the field of imprisonment. For example, halfway house workers in this study described their various interactions with the prison services, including the struggle and tension that could arise from these interactions. As Steve, staff at a male halfway house, explained:

The biggest thing that we have is sometimes the community and the [prison] institution, one doesn't know what the other is doing [...]...so sometimes I'll get a call at 4:00 on Friday from the parole officer saying, “By the way, first thing Monday morning, you're getting ‘Joe Blow’ from Winnipeg is coming. We can't find a place for him.” So I have three days to prep, [...] so in a perfect world I would like to have at least 6-month lead in. The reality is that sometimes the institution isn't on the same page as the community,

and a lot of it has to do with, “Ah, the community will deal with it. Why should I prep them?”

In sum, approaching the study of prisoner reentry precisely from the angle of these different reentry-involved workers’ perceptions, practices, and interactions among each other is essential if we are to move beyond an understanding of prisoner reentry as a “social institution” (Miller 2014) and focus on the specific relationships and relational interactions that shape prisoner reentry practices.

Study Limitations

This research has various limitations. The findings presented here are not representative and cannot be generalized to ex-prisoners or halfway house workers as a group. This is because of my fairly small sample and because of the particular geography of Edmonton and the city’s role as an ‘institutional’ and ‘correctional hub.’ The province of Alberta has a large land mass but relatively few urban centres. Because of the concentration of social, welfare, health, and also prison services in these urban centres, mobility and movement shape many people’s lives in this province, and clearly affect the penal trajectories of prisoners and ex-prisoners. The findings presented in Chapter 4 in particular, may therefore be of limited applicability to halfway house populations in more urbanized provinces with a higher concentration of cities. For example, in southern Ontario, we find a much greater number of cities that provide halfway house services, meaning that the halfway house population there is primarily from the local area. Issues of mobility may play a lesser (or at least different) role in these more urbanized contexts. The findings presented in Chapter 4 however may be applicable to cities such as Winnipeg (Manitoba), Thunder Bay (Ontario), or St. John’s (Newfoundland and Labrador) which, as described above, share many similarities with Edmonton’s geography. Beyond the Canadian context, I would speculate that the

findings presented in Chapter 4 might be more relevant for understanding the workings of punishment and post-prison supervision in less urbanized countries and regions (e.g., Scandinavia), but less applicable to more urbanized countries with a smaller land mass, such as many countries in continental Europe. Overall, my goal was to provide grounded insights into interviewees' perceptions and experiences against the specific backdrop of Edmonton's urban geography. I take comfort in the fact that the ex-prisoners in this study presented a fairly diverse sample in terms of offending, experiences with the penal system, and pre-prison mobility histories; thus, a variety of different experiences are illuminated. Further research across Canada however is necessary to make more general claims.

In addition to the urban geography of Edmonton, there are some other specific aspects of my research context that must be taken into account. Perhaps the most salient is Edmonton's economic situation which is notably different from other 'gateway cities', such as Thunder Bay and Winnipeg. Edmonton's comparatively good economic situation meant that employment was perceived by most interviewees as less of a challenge than might have been the case had they been released to other cities outside of Alberta. Because of the specific racial composition of my sample, my research also does not capture or speak to the experiences of other racialized groups that are also over-represented in Canada's penal system (e.g., Black people in Ontario prisons). To reiterate, I also do not intend to make generalized claims regarding the experiences of Indigenous people in Edmonton, Alberta, or Canada.

It is important to note that the description and analysis of the halfway houses presented in Chapter 5 are specific to the four facilities included in this study, and should not be generalized to the workings of other halfway houses in Canada. That is because halfway houses are, as mentioned in Chapter 1, operated by different NGOs and as such, there may be important differences in things

such as halfway house mission statements and management. In this study, the similarities among the four houses in terms of their mission and governance structures were more salient than some of what I felt were fairly minor differences. Nonetheless, it is important to extend halfway house research to other cities in order to discern both local nuance and broader trends across halfway houses.

One limitation to the interview approach I took with the halfway house workers is that I am very limited in my ability to comment on halfway house workers' actual practices. My research discusses workers' self-conceptions, motivations, and beliefs, but is unable to comment on how these motivations or beliefs manifested in practice. A more ethnographic approach could be useful here, as it would allow the researcher, for example, to observe a rule-breaking incident and how staff dealt and formulated a response to that incident. Workers' actual response could then be used to either support or discredit their stated motivations and general approach.

One omission in this dissertation is that I pay little attention to the gendered experiences of halfway house living and reentry. This is partially due to my limited number of interviewees, and partially because my overall goal was to focus on the experiences that spanned my mixed gender sample. Taking a closer look at the gendered experiences of female halfway house residents would be an important area of research, particularly in light of the fact that there exist some halfway houses in Canada that house both male and female ex-prisoners. This situation has been of concern to some feminist scholars (see Maidment 2006), but it has yet to receive scholarly attention.

Closing Remarks

In terms of policy, the three empirical chapters raise various questions: Would it be beneficial if halfway house workers were given more extensive power to decide on residents' legal futures? Should halfway houses be concentrated in urban centres or should efforts go toward expanding the halfway house system to more rural areas? In this final section, I reflect on some of these questions.

Halfway house workers' narratives presented in Chapter 3 suggest that enhanced power/authority could potentially result in more individualized decisions in response to ex-prisoners' technical violations (e.g., consumption of alcohol). That is because halfway house workers indeed see and likely get to know residents better than their parole officers and as result, they may be more likely and able to distinguish between what Robinson and McNeill (2008: 434) have referred to as "formal compliance" and "substantive compliance." The former "denotes technically meets the minimum specified requirements of the order" (e.g., parole), while the latter "implies the active engagement and co-operation of the offender with the requirements of his or her order" (ibid.). Staff interviewees recognized that there were instances where a resident was actively involved in his/her reintegration (e.g., they found work; attended programs), but then "slips up and has a beer" (see Kathleen, page 95), which can result in this person's immediate return to prison. In other words, they believed that ex-prisoners could comply "substantively" even in the event of periodic "formal" non-compliance. Since the data suggest that workers were more concerned about ensuring "substantive" rather than "formal" compliance, it is possible that granting halfway house workers more authority could have a positive impact on residents' penal futures.

The second question—where halfway houses should be located—requires us to go back to and reflect on the purpose of halfway houses and post-prison supervision. If we understand the purpose of halfway houses as a 'stepping stone' in getting ex-prisoners (re-)established through gainful

employment, then indeed it makes sense to place former prisoners in settings where they are more likely to find work for the duration of their halfway house residency. As Chapter 4 described, halfway house residency, despite being ‘painful’, was largely perceived by interviewees as a somewhat legitimate penal intervention, precisely because it offered them the opportunity to work and capitalize on the material benefits provided by the halfway house. That being said, the current lack of halfway houses in northern Canada and more rural areas means that ex-prisoners often do not have a choice over their reentry city. This lack of agency and the potential feelings of dispossession and displacement resulting from this lack of control must be taken seriously, especially in the context of ongoing colonial violence and the systematic inequalities faced by the Indigenous populations.

In closing, I hope that this dissertation offers new insights into the role, function, and workings of halfway houses in Canada’s penal landscape. The halfway house presents an intriguing penal site on both a conceptual and practical level. Studying these institutions from the bottom-up offers critical insights into on-the-ground penal practices. These insights provide a basis for rethinking, challenging, and disrupting carceral logics. Ex-prisoners’ narratives show that numbers such as recidivism and parole revocation rates tell us little about the lived experiences of former prisoners, the multifaceted meanings they attach to reentry and halfway houses, and their conceptions of the future. I situated the halfway house institution within what can be described as a prisoner reentry field that I suggested acts upon ex-prisoners in distinct ways. I therefore suggest that the path forward for future reentry researchers is to engage seriously with the organizations that make up this field and the inter-organizational dimensions that shape and produce specific practices of reentry.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ex-Prisoner Interview Guide

- I. I'd like to start with some demographic information:
 - a. What is your age?
 - b. Where were you born? If not in Canada, when did you come to Canada?
 - c. What do you tell people when they ask what your ethnicity is?
 - d. What is your highest level of education? What is your desired level of education?
 - e. Do you have a partner or spouse? What about children (how many, what ages)?
 - f. Where do you currently live (halfway house, shelter, apartment)? Who do you live with?

- II. If you don't mind, I'll continue with some questions about your experiences with the criminal justice system:
 - a. What was your most recent committed offense?
 - b. How long were you incarcerated for? Was this your first prison term or had you been to prison before?
 - c. When were you released from prison? Are you currently on parole? When will you be done with parole? When did your parole end?
 - d. When you think about your time in prison, what stands out to you the most?
 - e. Did you have a job while you were in prison or do any training? Any schooling? Did you attend any prison programs?
 - f. Do you think prisons are primarily about punishment or rehabilitation?

- c. How do you remember the first weeks and months after coming out of prison? What was most challenging during the initial period of release? Now that you've been out for a while, do you experience different challenges?
 - d. What does reintegration or rehabilitation mean to you? How do you define "successful" reintegration?
 - e. Research has shown that around 2/3 of people coming out of prison are re-incarcerated within the first three years after release because of a new charge or a parole violation. What do you think are the main reasons why people return to prison? What do you think keeps people out of jail?
 - f. Which parole conditions do you think people have the most trouble complying with and why?
- VII. One of the goals of this study is to learn more about halfway houses – what people think about them and how they experience them:
- a. What do you think is the purpose of halfway houses?
 - b. How long have you lived at a halfway house? How long will you be staying there?
 - c. When were you living at a halfway house and for how long?
 - d. Did you know you would be spending time at a halfway house when I went to prison?
 - e. What stands out to you the most about halfway house living?
 - f. How would you summarize your experience of living at a halfway house. Looking back, what stands out to you the most?
 - g. What does/did a "typical" day at the halfway house look like? Probe: daily routines, rules and restrictions, social life among residents. How do/did you spend most of your time at the halfway house?
 - h. How do/did you keep in touch with family or friends? What about your children?

- i. What are the similarities and differences between prisons and halfway houses?
 - j. What do you think are the advantages of living at a halfway house away from your home community? What are possible disadvantages?
 - k. After you leave the halfway house, where do you intend to live and why? Do you intend to return to your home community or stay in Edmonton?
 - l. Where did you go after leaving the halfway house? Did you stay in Edmonton or move somewhere else?
 - m. How do you remember the day you left the halfway house? How did you spend that day?
- VIII. What does freedom mean to you? Have your experiences with the criminal justice system changed the way you think about freedom?
- IX. Earlier we talked about the various challenges of re-entry. I am interested in how people cope with and navigate those challenges:
- a. Probe: Different challenges and how respondents deal with them: How do you go about finding a job, looking for housing, getting around the city, etc.? How do you plan your finances?
 - i. Probe: How strategies of navigation have changed since coming out of prison
 - b. Outside of the halfway house, who are you in contact with most frequently? Do you think it helps having family live close by when coming out of prison?
 - c. Who do you rely on for support? Probe:
 - i. Informal sources of support (family, friends, community, etc.)
 - ii. Formal sources of support (halfway house, parole officer, community services, etc.)

- d. What do you think is the role of religion and/or religious support services in supporting rehabilitation?
 - e. What do you think are the most important personal skills to have in prison? What are the most important personal skills to have in society?
- X. What do you have planned for the future?
- a. What are your plans for the next six to twelve months?
 - b. Where do you see yourself in five years?
 - c. If you could live anywhere in Canada or the world, where would that be and why?
- XI. To conclude, what do you think should be done to better support people after incarceration? Can you think of any policy suggestions? (Probe: local, provincial/territorial, national level)
- XII. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about? Is there anything that you feel I should have asked you to understand your situation better.

Appendix B: Staff Interview Guide

I. I'd like to start with some questions about your person and your work:

- a. What is your age?
- b. Where were you born? If not in Canada, when did you come to Canada?
- c. What do you tell people when they ask what your ethnicity is?
- d. What's your educational background? What kind of training did you do?
- e. Would you mind telling me a little bit about your work? What does your job involve? What does a "typical" work day look like for you?
- f. How do you see your role in supporting people after incarceration?
- g. Have you always wanted to work together with ex-prisoners? How long have you been working in this field?
- h. Do you work with women or men or both? (Probe: general differences in working with female and male ex-prisoners)
- i. What do you find most rewarding about working with ex-prisoners? What do you find most challenging?

II. How would you define reintegration or rehabilitation? When would you consider a person to be "successfully" rehabilitated?

III. What do you think are the major challenges people face after incarceration? Why do you think those challenges exist? Do you think female and male ex-prisoners experience different challenges? If so, why do you think that is?

IV. Research has shown that around 2/3 of people coming out of prison are re-incarcerated within the first three years of release either because of a new charge or a technical violation. What do you think keeps people out of prison?

V. What do you think are the most important personal skills to have in society? If there was one advice you would give to someone coming out of prison, what would that be and why?

VI. I am particularly interested in learning about the role of halfway houses in prisoner reintegration:

- a. In your opinion, what is the purpose of halfway houses?
- b. Can you tell me a little bit about what happens inside a halfway house? Probe: daily routines, rules, social life, resident and staff interactions
- c. Are there any major differences between female and male halfway houses?
- d. What do you think are the advantages and/or disadvantages for ex-prisoners to live at a halfway house away from their home community?
- e. Do you think halfway houses should be extended to more remote regions? Why?

VII. Canada is said to be less punitive in comparison to the U.S. and more focused on rehabilitation. Would you agree with that? Can you think of any recent legal or policy changes that you think have influenced the reintegration of ex-prisoners, either positively or negatively? Any changes that have influenced your work with ex-prisoners?

VIII. What does community mean to you?

IX. To conclude, I'd be interested in any policy suggestions you may have:

a. What do you think could or should be done to better support people during the reintegration process? Probe: legal and policy changes; local/provincial/territorial/national level

b. If you could come up with a new reintegration program, what would it look like?

X. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Appendix C: Ex-Prisoner Consent Form



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If you have any questions about this study as you read this information and consent form, please feel free to ask me. If questions come up later, please contact me at 587-709-1629. Concerns may also be presented to the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto by email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or by phone (416-946-3273).

Invitation and Study Description

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Ms. Katharina Maier, doctoral student at the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto. This study is designed to investigate two broader issues, namely how recently released inmates experience halfway house living and navigate reintegration, and how staff at halfway houses and other community agencies believe ex-inmates should be supported through the reintegration process.

Risks and Benefits

The topics I will ask you about are associated with risk of upset and discomfort. You might feel uncomfortable when asked about a particular topic, and it is possible that you might experience some discomfort when describing your past experiences. Please know that any time you may request to skip answering a particular question or choose not to discuss a particular topic. I will provide you with a resource sheet listing available counselling and mental health support services here in Edmonton.

There is the risk that I could face external pressure to disclose your data (e.g., if my data was subpoenaed). Should such a situation arise, my plan would be to resist disclosure and contact legal counsel and institutional supports.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, immediately ending the interview. In case you wish to withdraw your participation, you can ask me to destroy your data. In case you decide at a later point that you would like your data to be destroyed, you can contact me by e-mail or phone and ask me to destroy your data. In that case, you will have to tell me your pseudonym (see below); I am unable to destroy your data if you do not remember your pseudonym. It is impossible to withdraw your data once results have been published or otherwise disseminated.

Direct benefits may include the satisfaction that some participants enjoy when given the opportunity to share a bit of their experiences with an attentive listener.

Confidentiality

You can choose whether you would like to be audio recorded or whether you prefer that I take notes manually as we speak. The audio files will be stored on a special disk drive in a locked cabinet at my home. The audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed. Unless you direct me otherwise, the written transcriptions (which will contain no information identifying you, so there will be no way for someone reading them to know who you are) will be retained indefinitely. Because this research is part of my doctoral thesis, the insights gained from this study will be of great interest for my future work. If you don't want to be audio recorded, I will take notes instead as we speak. I will type the notes on my personal laptop. At the end of the interview, you will have the chance to review and make revisions to my notes. The notes will be encrypted and stored on a special disk drive in a locked cabinet at my home. The notes will not contain any identifying information.

Your name will not be put on any publications or reports that result from this study. Instead, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym that I will use for any publications and reports. I must inform you that I have to contact the police and/or appropriate emergency services if you tell me about a plan to cause serious harm to yourself or to somebody else. Besides these instances, the information that you provide is completely confidential with me. It will not be given to other people or institutions, including halfway houses, parole officers, welfare office, the police, or the courts.

Time Involvement

It is anticipated that most interviews will last about one to one and a half hours. In some cases, interviews may be considerably longer, but if at any time you become fatigued and want to take a break for any reason, please simply tell me. After taking a break if it is not possible or desirable to continue the interview today, I may be able to return on a different day.

Compensation

In gratitude for your donation of your time and energy, you will be given a small payment of \$15 in the form of a gift card. Please note that if you choose to begin the interview but later withdraw at any time, you will still be offered the same compensation.

Follow-up interviews

I am interested in how people's experiences change over time. At the end of this interview, I will ask you whether you would be interested in meeting for two follow-up interviews to talk about what has happened in your life since we last met. If you are interested, I will ask you for your contact information (phone or e-mail, whatever you prefer) so that I can get in touch with you in around three months to set up an interview time. You can also contact me if you prefer not to share your contact information. Participation in this interview does not require that you participate in any follow-up interviews. You can withdraw your participation at any time, and I will ask for your consent every time we meet for an interview. I will keep a linking code between your contact information and individual-level data for the duration of your participation. The linking code will be destroyed after the third interview or whenever you should decide to withdraw from the study.

Receiving a Copy of Study Results

Some study participants may wish to read published results of this research project. If this is the case, please let me know, and your email address and/or mailing address will be collected on a special card and will be stored separately from the rest of the study information. I am asking you to consider receiving these publications electronically as email attachments; however, if you do not have an email address or lack convenient access to the Internet or simply prefer for whatever reason to get paper copies, please let me know and I will gladly mail them to you at my expense. I also want to inform you that the linking code between individual-level data and your contact information will be destroyed as soon as possible after the final interview (or whenever you decide to withdraw from the study) so there will be no linking code between individual-level data and contact information thereafter.

Consent

Do you agree to be interviewed? If you agree, please let me know now and I will make a note about your consent (but not using your real name).

Do you agree to be audio recorded? If you agree, please let me know now and I will make a note about your consent (but not using your real name).

Again, if you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now. If something comes up after the completion of the interview, please contact me at the contact information listed just below (you may take a blank copy of this form, if you wish). You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto by email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or by phone (416-946-3273).

Researcher:

Katharina Helen Maier
Contact Info

Supervisor:

Professor Rosemary Gartner
Contact Info

Appendix D: Staff Consent Form



Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies University of Toronto

Canadiana Gallery: 14 Queen's Park Crescent West
Toronto, Ontario • Canada M5S 3K9
T: 587.709.1629 katharina.maier@mail.utoronto.ca

If you have any questions about this study as you read this information and consent form, please feel free to ask me. If questions come up later, please contact me at 587-709-1629. Concerns may also be presented to the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto by email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or by phone (416-946-3273).

Invitation and Study Description

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Ms. Katharina Maier, doctoral student at the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto. This study is designed to investigate two broader issues, namely how ex-prisoners experience halfway house living and navigate the re-entry process, and how staff at halfway houses and community agencies believe ex-prisoners should be supported through the re-entry process.

Risks and Benefits

The risks of participating in this study are very minimal. Should you feel uncomfortable when asked about a particular topic, please know that any time you may request to skip answering a particular question or choose not to discuss a particular topic. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, immediately ending the interview. In case you wish to withdraw your participation you can ask me to destroy your data. It is impossible to withdraw your data once results have been published or otherwise disseminated.

Direct benefits include the satisfaction that some participants enjoy when given the opportunity to share a bit of their experiences and thoughts with an attentive listener.

Confidentiality

You can choose whether you would like to be audio recorded or whether you prefer that I take notes manually as we speak. The audio files will be stored on a special disk drive in a locked cabinet at my home and later in a locked office at the University of Toronto. The audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed. Unless you direct me otherwise, the written transcriptions (which will contain no information identifying you, so there will be no way for someone reading them to know who you are) will be retained indefinitely. Because this research is part of my doctoral thesis, the insights gained from this study will be of great interest for my future work. If you don't want to be audiorecorded, I will take notes instead as we speak. I will type the notes on my personal laptop. At the end of the interview, you will have the chance to review and make revisions to my notes. The notes will be encrypted and stored on a special disk drive in a locked cabinet at my home and later in a locked office at the University of Toronto. The notes will not contain any identifying information.

Your name will not be put on any of the data I collect. Instead, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym that I will use for any publications and reports that result from this study. The name of your employer or the agency you are working for will also not be named in any publications and reports.

Time Involvement

It is anticipated that most interviews will last about one hour. In some cases, interviews may be considerably longer, but if at any time you become fatigued and want to take a break for any reason, please simply tell me. After taking a break if it is not possible or desirable to continue the interview today, I may be able to return on a different day.

Receiving a Copy of Study Results

Some study participants may wish to read published results of this research project. If this is the case, please let me know, and your email address and/or mailing address will be collected on a special card and will be stored separately from the rest of the study information. I am asking you to consider receiving these publications electronically as email attachments; however, if you do not have an email address or lack convenient access to the Internet or simply prefer for whatever reason to get paper copies, please let me know and I will gladly mail them to you at my expense.

Consent

Do you agree to be interviewed? If you agree, please let me know now and I will make a note about your consent (but not using your real name).

Do you agree to be audio recorded? If you agree, please let me know now and I will make a note about your consent (but not using your real name).

Again, if you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now. If something comes up after the completion of the interview, please contact me at the contact information listed just below (you may take a blank copy of this form, if you wish). You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto by email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or by phone (416-946-3273).

Researcher:

Katharina Helen Maier
Contact Info

Supervisor:

Professor Rosemary Gartner
Contact Info