Article

"Free but Still Walking the Yard": Prisonization and the Problems of Reentry

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Abstract

This paper draws on nine months of ethnographic research living in a halfway house and interviews with former prisoners to theorize the embodied experience of reentry. I treat prison release as a sudden change in social position, in which people with deeply ingrained prison habits and dispositions confront new patterns of daily life in the outside world. This mismatch between embodiment and environment can create significant problems: triggering feelings of stress and anxiety, making it difficult to function in routine social situations, and amplifying exclusion from the labor market and other institutions. I use the concept of habitus to capture the interplay of structural determinism and individual agency in reentry transitions, drawing attention to both the lingering impact of prisonization and continued change and adaptation among former prisoners entering new social settings. The analysis sheds light on the complex challenges faced by the record numbers of Americans flowing out of prison each year.

Keywords

prisonization, reentry, habitus, mass imprisonment, invisible punishments

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Introduction

James Cole jumps from the car in a hurry. He hardly looks up on the way past, heading straight for a straggly patch of grass at the end of the halfway house driveway. He stands between the rusted blue dumpster and old grey picnic table, reaching for cigarettes in the pocket of worn jeans. Cigarette lit, he takes a long drag and stands there staring out. Then he turns and starts to walk. Feet hardly leave the ground. James ambles in a circle, a slow walk to nowhere in particular.

Bill Wright[1] looks over from a chair where we sit on the porch: "He just got home?"

A nod confirms and Bill laughs loudly: "Oh, he's still walkin' the yard. I remember that: you're free but still walkin' the yard. Don't wana be around nobody. You needa reevaluate the whooole situation when you get outta that mutha fucka."

I get in the car to leave, watching James's slow walk through the windshield. I put the keys in the ignition and fumble with the radio, trying not to stare. The slow walk looks totally out of place here: an aimless stroll around a small strip of usually unused grass. At a glance, Bill named it as ritual repeat of prison habit, familiar from his own experience being a freshly released prisoner struggling to make sense of the world outside.

This scene took place in the backyard of a small halfway house on a residential street, where I lived doing participant-observation and interviewing former prisoners. The project opens a window on the intimate ways prisonization can disrupt reentry. Prison rituals repeated after release are a reminder that people are changed in deep and lasting ways by twenty-four-hour-a-day, year-in-and-year-out prison environments. Crossing over to very different conditions outside, these changes linger not just in habits and routines, but in physical marks, like jailhouse tattoos (Phillips 2001) and missing teeth (Moran 2012), and basic traits, like aversion to small talk or sensitivity to intrusions in personal space (Caputo-Levine 2013). I theorize these lasting impacts by treating prisonization as a transformation of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977), in which the contingencies of life in prison are inscribed in the convict body as lasting dispositions, motor schemes, and bodily automatisms.

The burgeoning field of reentry research identifies an array of challenges facing those transitioning out of prison, including reconnecting with family (Martinez and Christian 2009), finding housing (Travis 2005), accessing health services (Thompson 2009), and gaining employment (Solomon et al. 2004). Former prisoners tend to enter disadvantaged neighborhoods were resources and opportunities are scarce (Clear 2007), and carry criminal records that trigger further "invisible punishments" (Travis 2005), formal barriers that

can mean exclusion from employment, voting, public and private housing, social welfare, and student loans (Chesney-Lind and Mauer 2002; Petersilia 2003). I contribute to this scholarship on the problems of reentry by theorizing prison release as a sudden movement between different social worlds. In the moment of release, taken-for-granted elements of the social environment change in an instant: from norms of personal space to the kinds of food consumed. Rigid routines are replaced by radical openness. This is the context in which released prisoners confront the challenges of reintegration—a sharp social transition that for many comes with intense feelings of stress and anxiety. The most immediate challenge in the period after release is getting used to the patterns of everyday life beyond prison walls.

Habitus and the Embodied Experience of Prisoner Reentry

Based on ethnographic research in an Illinois penitentiary, Clemmer (1940) developed the term *prisonization* to describe the conditioning effects of spending time in prison. He intended the concept to draw parallels to the way migrants are changed after entering a new society (Clemmer 1940): "as we use the term 'Americanization' to describe a greater or lesser degree of the immigrant's integration into the American scheme of life, we may use the term prisonization to indicate the taking on in greater or lesser degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (299). Clemmer (1940, 307) argued there are "universal" elements of prisonization that are "operative for all inmates," from the adoption of local language to the development of new habits of eating and sleeping. The tradition of empirical research established out of this work has focused especially on identifying factors that shape the degree to which different people become prisonized during incarceration, including the length of sentence (Wheeler 1961; Reisig and Lee 2010), the social roles they adopt (Garabedian 1963; Thomas and Foster 1972), their postrelease expectations (Zingraff 1975; Paterline and Peterson 1999), and the type of institution (Akers, Hayner, and Gruninger 1977; Mackenzie and Souryal 2006).

I use Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus to examine the impact of prisonization not during incarceration but in the period after release. For Bourdieu, social life leaves deep marks on individuals as they fit their practices to institutional expectations. Actions that are socially sanctioned—even informally with sideways stares or strange looks—tend to be phased out, while those that get rewarded are repeated over and over, becoming a set of unconscious habits and routines. As people adapt basic elements of embodiment (i.e., accent, posture, body language) to the often unwritten rules of different environments,

social knowledge becomes inscribed in the body as habitus, durable dispositions to think and act in particular ways. These imprints of experience remain with people and guide their practice as they enter new institutional arenas.

People are conditioned by social experience of all kinds, but from a Bourdieusian perspective, we would expect the imprint of social life to be especially pronounced in prison, where all the rituals of human existence are conducted within the same "total institution" (Goffman 1961). Habits of work and sleep and play usually take place at different sites, but in prison, are all remade through unremitting exposure to a single institution. Prisoners spend day and night inside prisons that operate as instruments of "political anatomy" intended to reform the body (Foucault 1979), contained and restricted, counted and observed, fed and worked (Garland 2011). This experience leaves deep corporeal marks that people carry with them after release (Wahidin and Tate 2005; Moran 2012).

The concept of habitus is an important tool for examining how these changes in embodiment are experienced during reentry, a sudden social transition from inside to outside prison. Drawing on Bourdieu, I theorize this as a situation of mismatch between dispositions and expectations in which the usually comfortable fit between practice and social rules breaks down (Hardy 2008). Most often, people move in settings similar to those that formed their habitus, so understand intuitively what counts as appropriate practice—they carry this knowledge in their bodies. But because of the built-in lag between the time a habitus is forged and the moment it gets activated, there is always a chance that people confront situations quite different from those that formed their dispositions. Where this distance becomes too wide, the habitus will produce practices that are inappropriate or out of place. As Bourdieu (1977, 78) describes, "practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are objectively confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted." In this sense, there are parallels between reentry and other situations of rapid change in social position, such as working-class students entering elite universities (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009).

After release, former prisoners carry prisonized dispositions into social spaces that put very different demands on their practice. At a reentry employment program, Caputo-Levine (2013) found former prisoners struggling to shake traits developed navigating prison violence, such as hypersensitivity to intrusions on personal space and an unwillingness to smile or make small talk. Inside prison, these ways of presenting the body and engaging in social interaction provided a measure of safety, but on the outside, became a barrier to entering the labor market. Similarly, Phillips (2001) describes how tattooing fulfils important functions for prisoners: providing an artistic outlet in drab

and monotonous environments, connecting a person to groups and neighborhoods outside, and asserting individual identity in confronting institutions that replace names with numbers and clothes with uniforms. After release, these tattoos become lasting marks of prison history that can leave former prisoners branded dangerous or threatening. As she writes, "the irony that confronts many who are tattooed is that their material strategies for survival in one realm of life all but guarantee their failure in another" (Phillips 2001, 357).

Treating reentry as a situation of discrepancy between the prisonized habitus and social conditions helps explain the anxiety that often accompanies prison release. In the Boston Reentry Study, Western et al. (2015) found the material hardship experienced by newly released prisoners being reinforced by feelings of stress, including uncertainty using new technologies, discomfort in public space, and a general sense of alienation. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these experiences are produced by the distance between the prisons in which dispositions where formed and the patterns of social life outside. Away from the penal environments that mark their bodies, former prisoners experience an anxiety-inducing situation in which mundane elements of ritual, habit, and embodiment are out of place.

This analysis turns on the durable characteristics of habitus. Yet situations where the habitus is out of sync with social demands are especially likely to provoke efforts to change and adapt (Swartz 2002), and "dispositions may waste away or weaken through lack of use (linked to a change in social position or condition), or as a result of heightened consciousness associated with an effort of transformation, such as the correction of accents and manners" (Bourdieu 2000, 160). This is important given that desistance research shows some former prisoners re-narrating their identities and working to alter deeply ingrained habits of thought and action over long periods of time (Maruna 2001). In employment, Halushka (2016) finds released prisoners engaging reentry programs to try and cultivate a repertoire of dominant cultural capital, tailoring their dress and speech to strategically perform a version of the reformed self that corresponds with employer expectations. Similarly, Smiley and Middlemass (2016) find reentering prisoners using clothing as a tool of impression management to create an identity conducive to acceptance outside prison. Practices such as these and others are likely to produce further changes in the habitus and gradual adjustment. Because of this, we would expect the problems caused by prisonization to be most severe in the period immediately after release and ease over time.

This paper advances reentry scholarship by theorizing passages out of prison as a social process that begins with prisonization inside and continues as people confront novel conditions outside. I treat reentry as at core an unsettling experience of being shunted between different social and cultural

worlds—but also as an unstable state likely to prompt further adaptation and change. The analysis rests on a conceptualization of habitus as both a deeply ingrained set of dispositions *and* a generative system adaptable to new situations (Bourdieu 1990). To keep the discussion manageable, I have made pragmatic decisions to bracket important areas of research. I do not examine the way these processes are remade by the intervention of reentry programs that have become increasingly central to state management of former prisoners and the urban poor (McKim 2008; Miller 2014; Kaufman 2015). Nor do I analyze differences along race and gender lines (Pager 2008; Wacquant 2010; Leverentz 2010). I do not develop the implications of the analysis for the seventy-five-year tradition of theory and empirical research on prisonization. Rather, the presentation of findings is organized to explicate the contribution of habitus to the study of prison release and the problems of reentry by (1) drawing attention to the corporeal aftereffects of imprisonment, (2) placing these in the context of a rapid social transition and mismatch between habitus and social demands, and (3) tracing the openings for further change as former prisoners engage with the outside world. But to begin, I introduce the underlying research strategy.

A Grounded View of Prisoner Reentry

Between 2012 and 2014, I spent the months of June through August each year living at a halfway house doing participant observation and interviewing former prisoners. The program has around fifteen male residents and is located in a residential neighborhood on the edge of an old factory district in an urban area of central Massachusetts. I was granted access by the director, who saw it as a way of promoting reintegration, connecting former prisoners with a university-educated outsider. My identity as a researcher was front and center from the outset. I worked to gain trust among the men organically, letting them see what I was about by being present and participating as fully as possible in the daily rounds: smoking cigarettes on the porch, sharing a bedroom with another resident, getting assigned a chore and dish night. Because my research was focused less on halfway houses or programs than more generally on reentry experiences, I snowballed out from these initial relationships to develop a broader network of connections with former prisoners in the surrounding neighborhood. The majority of interviews in the project, for example, were done with people not living in the house or part of any program.

During my first stay, I worked with Joe Badillo, a resident at the house, to become involved as an interviewer and coresearcher, and we did half of the first round of twenty-five life history interviews each.[2] The decision was

motivated in part by my reflection on research ethics and who would benefit from the project: bringing a former prisoner on board as an interviewer was a way to include a small element of community empowerment (see Blauner and Wellman 1973; Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Dodson 2005; Moore 1978). I helped Joe prepare for interviewing through a four-stage process: (1) I interviewed him, (2) he interviewed me, (3) I attended his first two interviews with other people, and (4) I listened to recordings of later interviews. After each of these stages, we talked about interview techniques and ways to improve. I paid Joe $70 for each interview he conducted and each interviewee $40 for their time. I was wary of the gains from the research accruing to me alone, and putting this money into the hands of participants provided more tangible and immediate benefits than any other method I could come up with (for a more complete discussion of the process, see Martin).

Coming into the project, many of my concerns were tied to my status as an outsider, and I assumed Joe Badillo would more easily be able to develop trust and legitimacy with interviewees. The results were surprising. Joe ultimately found it hard interviewing people whom he was too close with, and after an early awkward exchange about a painful personal experience, decided to stop interviewing close friends. There were also times that interviewees became frustrated because a question seemed basic or obvious—against the backdrop of shared experience, too much was taken-for-granted—where the same question from me elicited a lengthy response. These experiences gave me new appreciation for the position of empathetic outsider. The intimate details of a life history are sometimes better shared with strangers. Overall, the main difference was that I conducted the interviews in an open-ended, flexible way, where Joe more closely stuck to the interview script—so sometimes they became like structured surveys. At the same time, not only did Joe's interviews produce interesting data, in a more general way, his involvement as an ex-convict who has lived in the area his whole life brought legitimacy to the project and facilitated my ability to quickly develop a network of relationships with former prisoners in the neighborhood.

The life history interviews each lasted around three hours. Given the issues covered were often personal and shrouded in stigma, the goal was creating an informal and relaxed setting: not taking notes, sharing food and cigarettes, and avoiding reading questions from the script. These were ethnographic interviews done on park benches and tables, some even on the grass, sitting among others relaxing in the summer shade—often friends of participants. Interviews were treated as one element of more fluid, open-ended relationships. The participants I lived with in the halfway house I saw every day, and even where I met the person for the first time to conduct an interview, they were introduced by a friend, and my relationship to them was that of a

participant-observer with a personal (as close to organic as possible) connection to their community and social network. Returning to the site and doing follow-up interviews allowed for leveraging rapport developed over time to more directly examine themes and ideas emerging as the project progressed. In all, sixteen of the thirty-five people who completed life histories were reinterviewed during a subsequent phase of fieldwork: ten people were interviewed twice, five people three times, and Joe Badillo four times.

The first round of coding was organized around categories emerging from the data. To guard against the danger of artificially forcing things into predetermined groupings, I initially used codes that stayed as close as possible to the lived experience of participants. From there, I used theoretically derived codes to move from the specific to the general and raise the level of abstraction. For example, my first round of coding revealed connected themes in the narratives of imprisonment: the code *becoming comfortable* labeled instances of imprisonment becoming easier over time as people got used to the experience, and when many participants used the term *institutionalization* to describe adjusting to imprisonment so much that living outside became difficult—that term itself became a code. Finally, the code *little things* was used to describe habits and rituals that former prisoners learned in prison and reproduced outside. The goal in choosing theoretical concepts was capturing relationships between these specific codes, and I found that the three codes—becoming comfortable, institutionalization, and little things—tended to cluster together. This relationship became the basis for the theoretical code *prisonized habitus*.

There are limitations in using interview data to study the prisonization of the habitus. Most notably, the approach relies on respondents being consciously aware of the changes they underwent in prison. At the same time, the relaxed and open interview format was well suited for engaging participants in meaningful reflection on their experience. Take the long list of lasting prison habits gathered in interviews. A typical exchange went something like this: I would propose a concrete prison habit—wearing sandals in the shower, for example—and ask if the participant had any similar experiences. Before I could finish the train of thought, the person would be off and running, giving lists of concrete examples of similar prison quirks and habits. It was like tapping into an understanding just below the surface, something there but never really asked about, opened through the space of reflection created by an interview and an empathetic listener. The person would pause—lean back in a chair, say, or take a long drag on a cigarette—before talking me through all the little ways that prison time remained within them. These were long, detailed responses, imbued with the energy of a discovery in putting words to buried knowledge. It is to these experiences we now turn.

The Corporeal After-effects of Imprisonment

Jack Tarrant was arrested at nineteen dealing cocaine from a Vermont hotel room, and sentenced to five years under the state's mandatory minimum sentencing laws. This was a formative time: "I transitioned from a teenager to a man in there." I asked Jack to reflect on how he was changed by three years served before release on furlough. He referenced the movie *Shawshank Redemption*: "One of the inmates says, 'I'm an institutional man now.' That's really what it feels like." Jack explained what he meant by listing the habits and rituals he carried from prison and continued outside. He often ate standing up, one foot on a chair, reproducing his readiness among a crowd in the prison chow hall. People moving behind made him uneasy. When he took a shower, he always wore sandals—even at his mother's house. He continued to see inanimate objects as potential weapons—"like every piece of metal I would look at would be like, can I make that into a weapon?" Being around cars was now disorienting, crossing the road dangerous. More than once he was almost hit.

Jack Tarrant was not alone in feeling the lasting effects of imprisonment in intimate, everyday ways. Roy Jones stood patiently in front of doors, waiting for them to be opened. Henry Rivero continued to wash socks and underwear in the shower, get up early in the morning, and routinely write letters. He sometimes even put a spoon in his pocket after eating—so many times had he carried the one spoon he had inside from cell to chow hall and back. Guy Jordan felt awkward with people behind him, put paper on the toilet seat, and found himself taking staunch body postures without reason. He stood from the bench where we talked to demonstrate: no smile, feet firmly planted shoulder width apart, arms folded tightly across chest, hands tucked in armpits. "I would find myself doing the same mannerisms I had in jail," he said. "I'm on the street physically, but mentally, I'm still doing what I would be doing in there."

These habits and rituals are expressions of a prisonization of the habitus. They point to the way that prison experiences are "deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways" (Wacquant 2005, 316). As embodied social history, the habitus is durable and gives a stability to everyday practices, as dispositions developed in one social realm become second nature, repeated as people navigate new settings and situations. In the case of prisonization, routine practices adapted to the prison environment—from eating standing up to waking early each morning—are reproduced on the outside during reentry.

For some, this included being released with a lingering taste for prison food. "Taste" is central to the habitus (Bourdieu 1984)—the word names the

habitual and embodied nature of everyday preferences. Like the physical flavor of food touching the tongue, taste—whether for music or art or food—operates at the level of feeling and sensations, and even though it feels spontaneous (you just like something or you don't), it emerges from particular social experiences that become embodied. Valerie Adams, for example, has a lasting desire for the food she ate in prison:

> I still eat oodles of noodles. I still chef it up with my little summer sausage in it. I still do that. We used to do these things called Puerto Rican pop tarts, they call em. They are like, oodles of noodles you split em in half, and you put em in a toaster. You put mayonnaise on it and sprinkle the seasoning on it. I still do that. I still have like. . . . There's no reason for me to do it either. I have money. I can eat. Like you see me, I'm eating. But I still do that because it's just so embedded in me. You know, sometimes I'll be laying down and I'll be like ohhh. . . . We used to call em bacon sandwiches. But they're not: its BBQ corn chips, in bread with mayonnaise. I'll still eat those too. I crave it. Like I could be eating steak or eating something else, but I want. . . . It's weird.

Valerie's taste has been prisonized. Over time, the consumption of particular foods in prison was inscribed in the habitus as lasting dispositions—embodied likes and dislikes—that became stable. As conditions changed, tastes remained. For Valerie, not only is she no longer incarcerated, but she is now in a position of relative economic stability. At the time of the interview, she was living with her husband in a condo with a gym and a pool. As she puts it: "I have money. I can eat." And yet, she still seeks out jailhouse meals: packet noodles toasted and seasoned, sandwiches made from corn chips and mayonnaise. These were once creative ways of making the most of a limited diet. Now a long way from prison-based necessities, she just "craves" these foods.

A number of former prisoners described leaving with a ritual awareness of the physical space around them. Prisoners are forced to be hyper-aware of immediate surroundings to stay safe, and over time, this becomes an ingrained disposition people carry with them after release. The language used to describe this disposition often suggested a corporal alertness that gets activated automatically. As Henry Rivero said, "In prison you're always observing, always aware of your surroundings. What's going on, who's around. That stays with you forever. My five senses are always on point." Or Ricky Oliver: "You develop this instinct man. You develop some super instincts." These accounts describe a ritual attunement to physical space that works outside of conscious intention. Over time, the need to stay on guard has become a lasting disposition that works instinctually.

Like all former prisoners, the habitus of Henry and Ricky have been formed over a lifetime of experience in myriad social environments outside

prison. Crucially when considering their hypervigilance, this includes histories of immersion in street cultures that overlap and interpenetrate with the culture of prison (Wacquant 2001; Stuart and Miller 2017). It is therefore likely their ritual awareness did not start in prison, but was rather amplified there, and is also rooted in repetitive exposure to violent situations growing up and navigating the threats of life in the street. At the same time, they themselves experienced this trait as a hangover of imprisonment, and were clear and direct articulating this link in their interviews. For them, hypervigilance was a product of periods in prison where they were forced to be constantly on guard to remain safe.

Interviewing Roy Jones in a downtown public park where he once dealt heroin, I watched up close how this ritual alertness is exercised in practice. As Roy talked me through the skills needed to be a successful street hustler, he used the word "awareness." I interjected to ask what he meant by the term. "Have you noticed what I've been doing while we talk?" He replied. As he said he's been "constantly watching" and recounted the details of people coming and going in the area around, it dawned on me that Roy had been in motion the whole time: standing to talk, moving from the front to behind the bench, sometimes with a foot-up, at others resting folded arms on the back. All this movement hadn't struck me as odd or unusual. These were not the jumpy actions of a person anxious about their surroundings. There was an ease, a naturalness to the way Roy set up lines of vision covering the whole park. It could have been the prison yard.

Practices emerge as people respond to the sanctions and rewards of particular social fields, and the habitus should be thought of as a "spring that needs a trigger" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 135). In this situation, Roy Jones practices ritual awareness in a public park that is a concrete case of street culture, an urban space hosting the underground economy. If Roy has similar experiences repeatedly over time, hypervigilance will be sustained as a lasting disposition, just as it will gradually fade if he finds a social position in which physical safety becomes taken-for-granted. As Bourdieu (1992) describes, the habitus is "an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (133).

Perhaps the most common enduring prison trait described by participants was a fixation on cleanliness. Ricky Oliver practiced this in the room next door to mine in the halfway house: bed made with sheets tucked tight, cosmetics lined neatly on the shelf with labels forward, sneakers arranged in neat rows. Ricky explained his cleanliness as a lasting effect of time spent in prison, and when I asked why, pointed to the functions of cleaning under conditions of confinement:

> Shit, what do you think? Two men in a 6 by 8 cell. Shit. There's gotta be some cleanliness man (laughing). Absolutely. That's important. I cant live with somebody who's not gona be clean. Too much clutter, dirtiness. You develop OCD in jail. You develop OCD in jail. If you don't have it, you'll develop it. Wash your hands all the time. Brush your teeth 5 or 6 times a day. Wipe the toilet down. It just gives you something to do while you're in your cell 22 hours day. What else is there to do but clean and fix your books? Unfix your books, fix em again. Unfix your sneakers and fix em again. That's how you kill time.

Ricky describes rituals of cleaning as adaptations to imprisonment that alleviate boredom and maximize space in shared cells. Over time, these rituals become an element of prisonization, inscribed in the habitus as lasting dispositions that remain after release. On the outside, the constant vigilance can appear strange or over the top. As Ricky put it, "you develop OCD in jail." At the same time, being neat and clean also gets rewarded in many social settings outside prison—including in the halfway house. The house was kept spotless. The toilets were shiny white. Beds got made every morning. Shared spaces, like the living room, were consistently clutter-free. Despite this, there was constant conflict over a perceived lack of cleanliness. At the weekly house meeting, outside the opening "check-ins"—the brief report from each person about their week—a large chunk was dedicated to residents grumbling about the need for others to be more vigilant keeping the place tidy. The attention paid to tidiness is produced by the interaction between shared prison dispositions and the sanctions and rewards of the particular situation: a halfway house emphasizing individual responsibility and clean living.

It may seem innocuous to show people leaving prison with traits of cleanliness and ritual awareness or cravings for prison food. Yet tracing these mundane changes in embodiment is important to show the holistic impact of adaptation to imprisonment. And while there may be specific situations where prison traits are rewarded and reinforced outside, much more often, they act as stigmatizing marks of an outsider status. Enduring prison dispositions are symptoms of social dislocation rooted in the distance between the formative environment and new institutions encountered by former prisoners. The rapid movement across the physical boundary of the prison—through the cell door and out the prison gate—is also movement across a social boundary to a world where taken-for-granted habits and rituals are suddenly out of place. The anxiety provoked by this transition is at the core of the reentry experience.

Reentry as Sudden Social Transition: "Culture Shock" and the Mismatch of Habitus and Field

When Joe Badillo talked me through what it's like getting out, he went back to the very first release two decades earlier: "Ain't nothing like the first time," he said. "All them feelings are new." Joe was a twenty-two-year-old fresh from five years inside. He checked-in with parole and walked slowly through downtown with a friend. The friend lit a joint and they smoked together. Joe grew anxious. People came at him bustling and crowding, females talked on the sidewalk. Arriving back at the family home, emotions bubbled over: "I burst out crying the minute I walked in my room and seen the bed." Even the family home in which Joe was raised appeared strange and unfamiliar. In narrating the experience, he described a particular detail as especially upsetting—the horrible taste of a once-delicious home cooked meal:

> It was like a dream. Like I was floating in the air when I walked in my house. I was nervous. I was nervous man. Then I ate food: a home cooked meal that tasted horrible to me. It just tasted horrible. I wanted that jail food man. I wanted my meal that I made at night, on that day. Let's say it was a Wednesday, in prison if I made clam sauce with pasta—I wanted that meal on Wednesday. So when I had, lets say I, I don't remember what I had, but lets say I came home and I had prime rib or something. You know prime ribs is delicious! But it didn't taste good to me. You know what I mean? It just didn't taste good man. I wasn't used to that taste. It just wasn't what made me feel good. I wanted my meal that I had in prison.

A basic element of Joe's bodily experience, the taste for food, was transformed by five years incarcerated. Now in a new setting, eating a meal he once loved evoked disgust, intensifying feelings of stress and anxiety. This lasting mark of imprisonment on embodied taste signals a mismatch between habitus and social environment. In most situations, people move in settings similar to those that formed their habitus, so social life unfolds in an easy and intuitive way. As Bourdieu and Wacquant describe, "when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted" (1992, 127). The reentering prisoner, in contrast, transitions to a social world in which everyday habits and dispositions are discordant with the basic conditions of life.

In the days and weeks after release, this can create difficulties navigating routine social situations, and uncertainty over the basic unwritten rules governing everyday interaction. A number of participants described the experience of leaving prison as a "culture shock"—that is, entry to a world where social rules

are suddenly unfamiliar and hard to judge. This shock could be crippling for those leaving long stretches. Louie Bell, for example, described being totally disoriented after release from a twelve-year sentence:

> You ever have those nightmares where you're trying to scream and trying to wake up but you can't? I didn't know which way to go. I didn't know what to say to anybody. All I wanted to do was ball up, just ball up in a corner and hide. I didn't know what to do. . . . People out here, people are disrespectful. It's not like that in prison. You know not to cross certain lines. Out here people didn't have to live by those codes. So it was culture shock. The way I was living in there, I couldn't live out here like that, because the rules are different out here. I didn't know what the rules were, or how to go about them. All I wanted to do was just hide.

Just as a fit between habitus and conditions produces feelings of comfort, a mismatch creates stress and anxiety—typical among those leaving prison. This was especially pronounced for Matt Carmine, who moved in with his parents after spending almost four years at the local county jail. But rather than being happy about release, Matt arrived at the house filled with anxiety, and remembers telling his dad he felt like throwing up: "I was shaking I swear to God. I was so scared." I asked him to explain the fear: "it almost like the fear of the unknown again. Now all it did was flip [from the earlier fear entering prison]. Because there I had no responsibilities, I didn't have to pay bills, I didn't have to worry about where I was going to live, I was fed three times a day. I didn't have to deal with society. That's what they call institutionalized." Barely able to leave the house for an overwhelming feeling something bad would happen, Matt lasted a week before deciding to leave his parent's for a halfway house:

> I'm uncomfortable and still skittish, so I said, "I'm going to go and be with people who understand me." Because this house takes parolees from jail. So I'm going to be with people, maybe even someone I've seen in jail, I'm going to be with somebody in the same mentality where I was . . .

> I paid, I got in, and I never felt so relieved, the first time I felt relieved since I got out. Because I'm a little structured, I still got that, I need that secure like jail feeling almost, where I don't have free will on everything. Because I don't know how to handle it, I don't know how to live my life yet. I've got to learn how to walk, talk and breathe again.

Matt Carmine left prison deeply attuned to a regimented prison environment. The mismatch between his prisonized habitus and the radical openness of the

broader society disrupted his ability to cope, to the point he decided to return to the prison-like space of a halfway house. Like many participants, he articulated these dynamics using the term "institutionalization"—the concept was used again and again by former prisoners reflecting on their experience, both in interviews and everyday settings. At one level, the term *institutionalization* names the process of getting used to prison over time, and could even be used as a synonym for prisonization. More specifically, though, to be institutionalized names a stage in that process of adaptation where a person is so used to incarceration he or she is no longer able to navigate routine situations in the world beyond. As Eddie Winfield put it, "You're institutionalized when you cannot function on the outside, when the only time you can function is behind the wall."

Problems navigating social settings outside prison can be amplified when former prisoners experience the lasting marks of imprisonment on their body as a source of stigma (Moran 2012). Take Henry Rivero. In 2010, Henry decided to move cities and start over. When we interviewed, he had been out of prison almost three years, longer than at any other time in his adult life. But his inability to gain work was a perpetual problem. He hadn't had a stable job since being released, lived in a halfway house, and earned $500 a month: $300 in welfare and $200 food stamps. When Henry talked about his problems in the labor market, he pointed not only to the formal exclusion that resulted from his criminal record but the way he was judged by the jailhouse tattoos scrawled across hands, neck and forearms: "either my record makes it a problem, or just the way I look like my tattoos, just the way I am, like a person will look at me and I don't got that trustworthy look. They'll look at me and be like ohhhh, I would just rather not deal with them."

Along with problems gaining employment, other participants described difficulty navigating social service agencies. Joe Badillo, for example, experienced bouts of anxiety when dealing with officials and bureaucrats, making even a routine trip to the doctor problematic:

> It's a weird transition man: coming from prison into society again. I felt awkward going into office buildings, seeing professional people. I got nervous around professional people. So I kept myself around people I could identify with—people using drugs and selling drugs. If I had to go to a doctor's appointment, I didn't really know how to . . . I was shy going up to the reception desk, and saying: "Hey, listen, I'm here for my appointment." I was real nervous about doing that. I was real nervous answering questions like doctors would ask me. Anything like that I was real kind of jittery.

Anxiety dealing with potential employers and social service professionals intensifies processes of social exclusion among reentering prisoners. Some responded to these experiences with social withdrawal. In the halfway house, this was common enough that residents had a name for the practice: "isolating." James Rose, for example, three months out from an eight-year stretch, barely left his bedroom. In group situations—and there were many in the house—he almost never spoke. On one summer's day we grilled hot dogs and hamburgers on the barbeque outside, James came down just long enough to fill a plate—then retired to his room. Sitting on the porch smoking cigarettes, a concerned friend asked why he was being such a "hermit." James replied with a huff, like the answer was obvious: "eight years in a prison cell might have something to do with that." For James, the room—by analogy to the cell—came with the comfort of the familiar.

When former prisoners use the term "culture shock" to narrate the experience of reentry, they point to the stress of moving suddenly into unfamiliar social terrains. As they carry a prisonized habitus into new environments, there is a breakdown in the usually comfortable fit between intuitive practice and social expectations, creating unsettling situations in which ordinary interaction appears as a puzzle. This layers with other sources of disadvantage to create pressure toward isolation and withdrawal. When former prisoners try to gain work or access social services, for example, they may experience the physical marks of imprisonment as a source of stigma that amplifies the formal barriers created by their criminal record. The lingering impact of prisonization is therefore central to the challenges of reentry, as powerful institutional drivers of exclusion—like criminal records (Pager 2008)—are experienced as part of rapid and anxiety-inducing changes in social location.

Adapting to the World Outside: Agency and Change in Life after Prison

Peter Tennant moved into the halfway house fresh from eighteen months served at the county jail. On my first night living there, we sat next to each other on the couch for the weekly house meeting. Peter was nervous and withdrawn. When it came time for him to speak, he announced quietly and matter-of-factly the reverberating affect effects of imprisonment: "I'm still lost," he said. "I can hear doors slamming and people shouting over the speakers." Peter spent a lot of time alone in his bedroom. At the nightly dinners we shared as a group, he appeared anxious and rarely spoke. But as time passed there was an unmistakable change in his demeanor. He became more

talkative and outgoing. We walked the neighborhood in the evenings, chatting about life. He got a job laboring with a temp agency and earned the money to buy new clothes. We went to watch the city baseball team play at a local stadium with another resident. In those first weeks out, Peter grew visibly more comfortable navigating the routine social situations of daily life outside prison.

This experience is a reminder that the impact of prisonization is likely to be most powerful immediately after release, when the mismatch between habitus and environment is most pronounced, and to ease over time as people change and adapt. When participants described lingering prison habits and rituals in interviews, they typically looked back on the past to name quirks or idiosyncrasies that stood out in memory because in hindsight they appear strange. These were often described in the past tense (i.e., "I used to . . . "), and presented as signs of a tumultuous period following release from prison. Notice the way that Eddie Winfield, for example, places a clear timeframe around his description of notable prison habits and the experience of institutionalization:

> My first couple of years home, I was always in the shower with my underwear and socks and T-shirt. I used to wash them in the shower. It was just a habit. Certain foods you eat. My first two years, I ate packs of tuna fish sardines, Ramen noodles soups, shit like that. Because that's what you do. Maybe my first six months home, I was still on that schedule for sleep, dropping out at 9.45 for the night, that type of stuff. First couple of years home I still had the habits. Or you'll be still thinking about the cats that are locked up. Like man, they be getting ready to come out for rec right now, they had lunch, got locked backup, they'll be out at 1 o'clock. You're conditioned. For a while I was institutionalized.

Eddie's habit of washing clothes in the shower was a hangover from prisons where chances to use the laundry were rare. He did the same thing for a while after getting out, but eliminated the practice over time. The same goes for eating prison food and sleeping on the prison schedule—these habits were repeated for a while, then phased out. His experience is a reminder that former prisoners continue to modify their practice after release. When prisoners shift from inside to outside, there is a period in which dispositions no longer fit social expectations, but this situation is especially likely to provoke change: when the habitus produces practices that are inappropriate or out of place, people become more conscious of social rules and are likely to adjust their behavior (Swartz 2002). For James, prison habits were odd or dysfunctional examples of a time in the past when he was "institutionalized."

In the halfway house, I observed informal and everyday ways in which people worked to shed prison-based dispositions and readjust to the world outside. Ty Kelley, for example, had a practice of sleeping on the living room couch. It seemed a strange place to rest: the room was in a very public area of the halfway house, framed along one wall by a large archway that opens out into the dining area and kitchen. Other residents often grumbled and complained at the sight of his sleeping body splayed on the couch. In our interview, I asked Ty why he chose not to sleep in his bedroom: "Because of the space." He said. "When I'm in there it feels like I'm still crammed up in a cell. I'm trying to get that memory, or that feeling off me. Trying to shake it off me."

Ty slept in the living room to break down lingering feelings of enclosure. Walking the neighborhood was another way he worked to expand the range of space in which he felt comfortable. It was rare to see him at the halfway house after 7.30 a.m., and he typically remained outside until the compulsory house dinner each weeknight evening. For Ty, walking the neighborhood was a practice aimed at becoming relaxed again moving in the radical openness of social settings outside prison: "I'm used to my radius being—this whole street would be how big the prison would be. So just picture, you've got all that extra radius. That's a lot of radius. That's all I'm adjusting now, I'm adjusting to life now. So that's why I be out and about."

Just as people learn and adapt the experience of imprisonment—transforming the habitus in the process—they change again after release as they respond to the dictates of new social fields. This can be seen, for example, in the way former prisoners practice new styles of dress, speech and body language to try to enter the labor market (Caputo-Levine 2013; Halushka 2016; Smiley and Middlemass 2016). While it is difficult to judge the long-term effect of these practices (Halushka 2016), I was able to observe some participants create basic changes in their ability to navigate social institutions outside prison. Take Joe Badillo. In the four years since Joe was last released from prison, I have watched him become increasingly outgoing and comfortable in professional settings. In an interview, he described new-found confidence in engaging with medical practitioners as he dealt with serious health problems: "I go in there and I'm not intimidated, whereas as before I would be timid, just in and out." For Joe, this ever-improving ability to deal with institutional gatekeepers was produced by social competence practiced in addiction recovery:

> Being in recovery has helped me grow, like people skills and being around people, as far as like speaking in front of people in meetings, and going around to speak to different organizations. So I learn to. . . . See, when you go in recovery, it's not just about putting down drugs. You work recovery into the whole aspect of your life. The whole aspect.

For Joe, the field of addiction recovery provides a social space to engage in specific practices—participating in twelve-step meetings, for example, and meeting with social service providers to promote recovery—that over time have given him confidence to engage in a broader range of situations. These practices helped to develop his social competence outside prison and create a transformation in the "whole aspect" of his life. There has been an embodied element to this change that involved erasing or overwriting the inscription of incarceration from the visible body (Moran 2014). When we met, Joe had a large jailhouse tattoo scrawled across his left bicep: the name of a local gang stamped in graffiti-style block lettering. In prison the tattoo brought status and protection, but as he attempted to build a new life as a drug and alcohol counselor, he decided to have the image removed: "I wana get the tattoo covered because it's not who I am today. It's sending out the wrong message." And so he replaced the prison inscribed mark of street gang affiliation with the face of a female religious figure, the bunched cloth of her hooded cloak removing the words from view. Just as prisonization involved a process of physical inscription, Joe's body continues to change and adapt as he builds a new life in the world beyond.

Prisonization, Reentry, and the Tensions of Reform

This article contributes to scholarship on the problems of reentry by theorizing the embodied experience of prison release. Existing research shows that people leaving prison face a range of hurdles large and small: from mundane practical tasks like getting a photo ID and opening a bank account, to those bigger and more difficult, like rebuilding family relationships (Martinez 2009), finding a place to live (Fontaine and Biess 2012), and gaining employment (Visher, Debus-Sherrill, and Yahner 2011). I show how these challenges are confronted in the context of a rapid and anxiety-inducing social transition. In the days and weeks after release, simply getting used to the basic routines of social interaction in new environments can be a major obstacle. Former prisoners do not respond to these problems passively, but continue to learn and modify their practice—and gradually reshape the habitus—as they face the demands of the world outside. This suggests the impact of prisonization will be most detrimental in the period immediately after getting out. This is a crucial, transitional phase in which many have a strong desire to turn their lives around at the same time as facing a range of dangers and risks (Nelson, Deess, and Allen 1999).

Prisoner reentry is a useful empirical case for examining theories of practice organized around the concept of habitus. Bourdieu intended the term *habitus* to transcend the binary of structural determinism and individual

agency by incorporating both in the same concept: on the one hand, habitus is a product of social history; on the other, it is adaptable and capable of improvisation in new situations. Some have argued that Bourdieu did not overcome this opposition but rather moved back and forth between the two poles at different times in his work (Burawoy 2012). Others argue that the concept consistently slides toward determinism (King 2000). My research shows an integrative conception of habitus providing insight into reentry as a multifaceted social process: prison conditions stamp the body of people after they leave, but these effects are unstable and open to change in response to new conditions. This supports the use of habitus as a conceptual tool for examining the interplay of structure and agency in other empirical contexts.

There are tensions in advancing proposals for reform based on this analysis. On the one hand, it provides some support for reentry interventions, such as employment readiness training, that aim to teach new ways of thinking and acting to those with prison histories. But in following through from analysis to proposals for change, it is important to remember that the struggle of former prisoners to overcome the lasting impact of prisonization is one challenge in a broader structural predicament. Those leaving prison typically return to a relatively small number of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods (Clear 2007), communities wracked by racist policing, public sector breakdown, and economic abandonment (Beckett and Western 2001; Bobo and Thompson 2010; Parenti 2000). The institutional barriers facing those with criminal records combine with racial stigma to create a castelike system of social exclusion (Alexander 2010; Martin 2013; Pager 2008).

In the absence of change in these larger structural conditions, programs that rely on personal or individual transformation not only offer little hope of broad success but threaten to further extend social control at a time of already unprecedented levels of punitive state intervention. In many places, reentry programs ostensibly designed to support people leaving prison have become vehicles of carceral devolution (Miller 2014) that transfer penal authority and surveillance from prison into neighborhoods already saturated with criminal justice control (Wacquant 2010). In New Jersey, for example, the extensive network of halfway houses are less transitional spaces that support reentry, then a network of quasi-prisons outside the walls (Dolnick 2012). Those developing programs to support rocky transitions out walk a fine line between providing much needed assistance, and expanding carceral control at a historical moment of mass imprisonment.

The challenge for scholars observing these developments is showing the power of penal institutions to determine and transform lives, without losing sight of the continued possibilities for individual agency. The former prisoners in this research were not resigned to structural barriers. As a group they

were full of optimism and confidence. They were survivors well versed in innovating to make use of what is available and near at hand, no matter the circumstances. They inhabit a world of reentry where people are imagining alternative futures and scrambling to turn their lives around. Just as reentry programs create new frontiers of carceral expansion, those within carve out spaces of creativity and vision, struggle and hard work, learning and self-transformation. Even under the hard edge of mass incarceration, there remain openings for the exercise of human freedom.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. All participant names in this paper are pseudonyms.
2. Health issues and personal disruptions prevented Joe participating as a co-researcher in later rounds of interviewing, but he remained a friend and key source of support throughout the project.

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