Why Do We Put Prisoners to Work?

by

Mark James Dunn

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Degree:	**Master of Arts**
Title:	**Why Do We Put Prisoners to Work?**
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	Enda Brophy Supervisor Associate Professor, Communication
	Curt Griffiths Supervisor Professor, Criminology
	Jordan House Examiner Assistant Professor, Labour Studies Brock University

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Abstract

This project is a critique of the dominant discourse surrounding prison labour in Canada and the United States. Looking at the phenomenon through an interdisciplinary lens, this project fills the space between communication-focused scholarship that approaches incarceration from a media-criticism perspective or by critiquing the use of digital technology for carceral purposes, and the criminological body of work focused on prison work programs. In other words, this investigation explores the reality of working while incarcerated against the dominant discourse that supports and maintains the practice.

Stakeholders in the criminal justice systems in both Canada and the United States define four rationales for prison labour: it keeps prisoners out of trouble, teaches skills relevant to the workplace, eases the transition post-release, and that prisoners should be financially responsible for their own incarceration. These four justifications form the basis for modern prison labour programs, but the reality is more complicated. Using the interview as methodology, and taking a Marxist-Foucauldian approach to analysis, this thesis explores the lived experience of thirteen individuals who experienced incarceration in Canada and/or the United States to critique the rationales that are used to justify their labour which is often forced or coerced. This thesis supports scholars who argue that prison labour is modern slavery, but also acknowledges the potential benefits of robust skill training that centres the individual's needs over the maintenance and operation of the institution.

Keywords: prison labour; rehabilitation; punishment; prison abolition; work

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Chapter 1. Introduction

First premiering in October 2022, CBS's *Fire Country* is a small-town family drama set against the backdrop of California's wildfires and the incarcerated individuals who help fight them. The series opens as Bode Donovan, a former drug user convicted of armed robbery, pleads his case for early release in front of the California Board of Parole Hearings. Even with the attendance and support of the victim of his crime, the parole board denies his application and Bode's lawyer encourages him to join the California Conservation Camp program. He agrees and is sent back to his fictional hometown of Edgewater, California, to become an incarcerated firefighter.

Edgewater sits in a region constantly under threat of annihilation from wildfires. Fire crews, both career Cal Fire members and prisoners working at the "Three Rock Con Camp" are dispatched to fight or prevent fires, aide in search and rescue, and act as first responders. The "inmates" participating in the program do this for two reasons: time off their sentence, and the wages—$5 a day plus extra incentive pay when working on a fire. The show is a pleasant departure from the typical primetime representation of the "inmate" and approaches the subject with a reasonable amount of grace, but the firefighters at "Three Rock" are all designed to be sympathetic. Bode, for instance, is driven by a strong moral compass and, as one reviewer points out, he has "committed some felonies of the generally forgivable sort," making him easy to root for (Dowd, 2022, para. 5). Freddy, another prisoner/firefighter, was wrongfully convicted but was convinced by his public defender to take a plea deal. Rebecca, a prisoner/firefighter at Three Rock's sister camp, staffed by women, and a disbarred lawyer after a drunk driving incident, says she feels freer as an "inmate" firefighter than she ever did as a corporate lawyer and agrees to look at Freddy's case.

Episodes 8 and 9, *Bad Guy* and *No Good Deed*, centre around a serious car accident on a bridge in the forest. The driver at fault flees the scene and we find out that she had to choose between paying her rent or her car insurance, and having chosen rent, she panicked at the scene of the crash and took off. In episode 10, *Get Your Hopes Up,* the fire station itself is the site of the accident when a truck driver, working three jobs and still struggling to make ends meet, falls asleep at the wheel and crashes into the station. While these characters caused the accidents, they are also victims themselves.

As characters struggle to make ends meet and are forced to make choices that put themselves and others in harms way, perhaps the implication *Fire Country* is making is that capitalism is the real villain.

However, the show is still an example of problematic representation—so much so that the real Cal Fire director Joe Tyler has condemned the show's misrepresentation of Cal Fire and its Conservation Camp Program, as has the president of the union representing California's forest firefighters, who have tried, without success, to bar the show from using the Cal Fire name and branding (Dowd, 2022; Rogers, 2022; Williams, 2022). The real Cal Fire is under threat in a couple ways—climate change has increased the severity and frequency of serious wildfires, and the real equivalents to programs like *Fire Country*'s Three Rock are suffering from staffing issues as the best candidates for fire camps, "low-risk" prisoners with non-violent offences, are increasingly released early or diverted from incarceration in the first place (Rogers, 2022, para. 6-8). This is a real concern for California as historically, people incarcerated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation have averaged around 30% of the state's total forest firefighting workforce (Uenuma, 2022, para. 2).

Ultimately, *Fire Country* works because its incarcerated characters are sympathetic—Bode is constantly proving his moral worth as the distance between Bode the hometown hero and Bode the armed robber grows. All in all, the show is a charming take on the smalltown drama, staged before the backdrop of California's increasingly devastating wildfires and dwindling inmate firefighter program. *Fire Country*'s themes of forgiveness and the importance of second chances are carefully mediated to be palatable to a mainstream audience.

In reality, fighting forest fires as an "inmate" is much less glamourous than primetime television suggests, and incarcerated firefighters in California are "four times more likely to be injured by objects" and "eight times more likely to suffer injuries related to smoke inhalation" than career firefighters (Uenuma, 2022, para. 7). While there are benefits to programs that teach incarcerated people skills that they can apply on release, an overreliance on their significantly discounted labour—in Canada, the best a federal prisoner can hope to earn is $6.90 CAD/day before deductions and many American states pay their incarcerated workers nothing—blurs the line between exploitation and rehabilitation. Firefighting is just one example of prison labour, but it highlights many of

the problems with relying on an incarcerated workforce. The current study was born out of a desire to explore the lived experience of those workers.

In Canada and the United States, incarcerated workers make up a significant institutional workforce, handling everything from the laundry, cooking, cleaning, teaching support, maintenance, and even some light administrative tasks at most North American prisons. Prisoners are also put to work on other public projects, famously fighting forest fires in California, and some are hired by private companies. There is a growing body of research into contemporary prison labour, but there is much more scholarly work to be done, especially work that centres the incarcerated workers themselves. This is a major impetus for the current study.

UNICOR in the United States (also known as Federal Prison Industries) and its counterpart CORCAN, in Canada, hire incarcerated workers for the expressed purpose of teaching skills that can be transferred to real jobs on release (CORCAN, 2018; UNICOR, n.d.). This approach foregrounds employability as the dominant problem influencing recidivism and, in theory, solves it by teaching skills that can translate to jobs and presumably some form of financial and lifestyle stability on release. While there is evidence to suggest that these kinds of programs can have a positive impact, conflicting economic, organizational, and social barriers limit their success.

Those of us who have the privilege of freedom, who do not experience the arms of the criminal justice system as a regular part of our life, can often overlook the living conditions of people we do not know in places we know exist but not much else. It is easy to overlook the over-policing and disproportionate incarceration rates of racialized and marginalized communities when we do not belong to those communities. In Canada, 33% of adult admissions to federal custody are Indigenous while making up only roughly 5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2022). In the United States, Black men and women made up 38.4% of the federal prison population while making up only 13.6% of the country's population (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022, December 3). These statistics highlight a reality that is already well-known. The criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States dramatically and disproportionately incarcerate people of colour. This project takes an interdisciplinary lens to the phenomenon of prison labour, pulling from the broad fields of communication studies and criminology. There is already a wealth of scholarship exploring criminological themes through the lenses of technology

and media representation, not only from communication scholars, but from departments of political science, geography, American studies, sociology, and others. Notably, Brian Jefferson's (2020) *Digitize and Punish* explores the relationship between digital technology and criminal justice and the ongoing ramifications of this relationship on poor communities of colour. This project adds to the body of knowledge that bridges the gap between criminology and communication by exploring how the lived experience of working while incarcerated measures up against the dominant discourse supporting it.

For this project I conducted 16 interviews with 13 people who all had experienced incarceration in either Canada, the United States, or in one case, both. The purpose of the study was to explore the real lived experience of working while incarcerated. I started with the question, "why do we put prisoners to work?" and from there I established what we might consider to be the dominant discourse on prison labour. While there are many ways to evaluate the efficacy of correctional programming, I believe that the most effective way to understand how anything works is to ask the people involved directly.

The following chapter, Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodology, is an overview of the literature surrounding prison labour, situating this study within a much broader body of work. While this chapter is not an exhaustive or complete review of the literature on prison labour, it aspires to be as thorough as possible in exploring the most important scholarship on prison labour historically as well as the contemporary scholarship on the phenomenon. This section establishes a rationale for the study and details the methodology pursued and why this was the best way to investigate prison labour.

Chapter 3: Working While Incarcerated, takes the dominant discourse, as defined in the previous chapter, as a sort of container, or a roadmap, with which to understand the lived experience of the research participants. This chapter takes the stories shared by participants from across North America and compares their lived experience to the dominant rationales for their work. This chapter also explores the idea of prison labour as modern slavery, revealing the coercive methods used to secure a prisoner's labour, and the scope of education offered in Canadian and American institutions. In prisons across North America access to high school equivalency programming appears to be readily available, but anything beyond is much harder to access.

In Chapter 4: Further Discussion, I elaborate on the analysis from the previous chapter, discuss the limitations of the study, and explore some of the ways in which prison jobs programs can be beneficial to the participants, highlighting the positive elements of the South Fork Forest Camp in Oregon, and the Indiana Canine Assistance Network at the Indiana Women's Prison. This chapter discusses the positive elements of job programs and begins to sketch out a paradigm where jobs programs work for the people who are incarcerated, not the cost-saving interests of the criminal justice system. I finish this chapter with a brief overview of important work currently happening in Canada regarding prisoner advocacy and I sketch some avenues for future study.

In Canada, it costs roughly $112,202 per year to incarcerate one man, and twice as much per year to incarcerate one woman (Chan, Chuen, & McLeod, 2017, para. 15). On top of that, Stewart et al. (2019) found that recidivism in Canada can be as high as 38%. Specifically, the CSC-sponsored study on men released from federal custody in 2011-2012 showed that 38% of the study population reoffended within five years of release (2019). If we only consider this economically, this is not a good deal. Much more important than just the numbers, however, is the reality that these are people's lives. Even though incarcerated workers handle a significant amount of the maintenance and operations of the prisons that hold them, the system is still a significant burden on the state with weak results in terms of public safety. We must begin to address a fundamental question, are prisons necessary in the first place?

It's also important to note that language matters, especially when referencing marginalized groups. For this study, I tried my best to follow the lead of the Marshall Project ("nonprofit journalism about criminal justice"), avoiding labels like: "inmate," "convict," "felon," "offender," and "parolee" (Keller, 2015). Descriptors like "inmate" are not neutral, and people who have experienced incarceration argue that these terms are dehumanizing (Solomon, 2021). The Marshall Project's policy uses "people-first" language: "originally developed by people with disabilities, people-first language avoids turning one aspect of a person's life into an all-encompassing label" (2021). Following their lead, I try to focus on the person, not the crime, only using terms like "inmate" when it is a direct quote, and I try to use the word "prisoner," which is much less of a loaded term, sparingly. That being said, after sharing an earlier version of this project with one of the research participants, he wrote back: "inmate had no pejorative connotations where I was; the academic discussion here, if it's taking place over this, sounds overly

sensitive and out of touch. Prisoner is the more loaded term—suggestive of weakness, non-agency" (John, personal communication, January 8, 2023). Although I am in no position to disagree, I have still chosen to follow the Marshall Project's lead.

While *Fire Country* is set in a fictional California town, it is filmed in my hometown of Vancouver, BC, where our 2022 municipal election reflected a growing concern in the city towards public safety (CBC News, 2022; Daflos, 2022; Thibault, 2022a). The 2022 municipal election saw the party endorsed by the Vancouver Police Union win the mayor's seat, a majority on council, school board, and park's board (Thibault, 2022b). However, while the current study was conducted from Vancouver, and is thus influenced by its political and social context, the rising concern for public safety and the effects of economic forces are surely felt across Canada and the United States. This creates the need for research at the intersection of labour and incarceration. This study starts at the question, "why do we put prisoners to work?" and once the rationales and justifications are established, takes those rationales and compares them to the lived experience of people incarcerated across Canada and the United States. From there, the study suggests avenues for future investigation as well as ways in which prison labour can be changed to actually help the people who do the work, all while inspiring to a world where prisons are not necessary in the first place.

Finally, there is a tension in this work between the idea that people should not be caged and that prisons should be abolished, and the purely academic project of objectively exploring the phenomenon of prison labour. I do believe in prison abolition, but I also agree with abolitionists like Davis (2003), McLeod (2015), and Roberts (2019) that we cannot just throw open the doors to the prisons and move on. In the meantime, there is space for academic inquiry into the state of prison jobs programs, and refocusing prison labour towards real rehabilitation has the potential to positively impact people's lives. In refining this thesis, I hope to have somewhat resolved the tension, or at least acknowledged it in a way that satisfies the most cynical reader. Because although I do not believe that objectivity is possible, I do believe that we can strive for it, and that it is possible to treat any matter fairly. In this investigation of prison labour, this standard of fairness is the standard to which I have held myself.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Methodology

This research centres the lived experience of North American prisoners in a broader conversation about the nature of labour and punishment, and the role of these two concepts in Canadian and American corrections. The main question that guides this project is “why do we put prisoners to work?” and to do so, it is necessary to situate the work within a body of knowledge that not only covers the nature of crime and punishment, but the modern political economy of prisons, the relationship between race and incarceration, and current thoughts on criminal justice reform and abolition. This is not an exhaustive review, but it is helpful for my purposes in clarifying the dominant discourse on prison labour in Canada and the United States and situating this current study as a critique of that discourse within the broader body of literature. As well, because of the interdisciplinary nature of this project, and the fact that communication and criminology are already broad and overlapping disciplines, it helps to explore the ways other scholars have bridged the gap to better situate this project in that space.

A modern understanding of crime and punishment is built on a broad body of literature and scholarship that is often in conflict. For this project I adopt a Marxist-Foucauldian lens, supported by Georg Rusche & Otto Kirchheimer’s *Punishment and Social Structure* (originally published in 1939) as well as Michel Foucault’s history of incarceration and control, especially as outlined in *Discipline and Punish* (original French edition published in 1975). This is not to dismiss the important work of sociologists like Émile Durkheim, but to focus in on the relationship between incarceration and work within a capitalist economic system—a context that the dominant understanding of crime and criminal behaviour within sociology lacks. Once again, this overview is not exhaustive, and necessarily omits important work like Max Weber’s focus on the rationalization, professionalization, and bureaucratization of punishment (Garland, 1990), as well as the Chicago School sociologists and other scholars whose theories focus in on deviance and not punishment. Ultimately, a primary goal of the current investigation is to explore the connection between prison labour and the broader capitalist system and a Marxist-Foucauldian approach makes this relationship explicit.

Christoph Scherrer & Anil Shah (2017), and Robert Weiss (2001) update Rusche & Kirchheimer’s work with an understanding of the neoliberal turn Western countries

took starting in the 1970s, and the effect that changing economic policies had on incarceration. Benjamin Syroka (2019) takes a critical perspective on prison labour in the United States, while arguing that better conditions can lower recidivism rates. Mary Lacity, Joseph Rottman, & Erran Carmel (2014) explore the idea of "impact sourcing," or purposefully hiring marginalized groups—an interesting justification for hiring cheap captive workforces in the name of public good. Asatar Bair's (2007) economic analysis of American prisons makes the important connection between modern prison labour and slavery, a connection that becomes even more important once we explore the intersection of punishment and race.

In Canada and the United States, historically marginalized groups continue to be overrepresented in the prison system. In the United States, this history is well-documented by scholars including Michelle Alexander (2010), Douglas Blackmon (2009), and Alex Lichenstein (1996), who trace a history of racialized penal practices in the United States. In Canada, there is much less formal work done on incarceration and race, but El Jones (2022), and Michaela McGuire & Danielle Murdoch (2021) have done important work, specifically on the over-incarceration of Black and Indigenous women. Angela Davis (2003) also addresses incarceration's specific effect on women, as do Robin Levi & Ayelet Waldman (2017).

Because this project focuses on the economic side of crime and punishment, it is also important to mention the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) on the political economy of siting prisons in California. I also address the work of Jordan House (2018) on prisoner organizing. Prison reform and prison abolition are inherently important subjects in any critical investigation of incarceration, and Angela Davis' (2003) *Are Prisons Obsolete?* as well as Allegra McLeod (2015) and Dorothy Roberts (2019) help to create an outline for a process of decarceration—with the full abolition of prisons as the end goal. Here I also briefly describe restorative justice as part of an alternative paradigm to the current criminal justice system.

This scholarship helps identify and critique a broad North American prison-industrial complex that demands further study—highlighting the importance for work that centres the lived experience of people who have been incarcerated in North America. Much more than work, however, the concept of the prison-industrial complex refers to the "'iron triangle' between government bureaucracy, private industry, and

politics…which pushes for the expansion of the criminal justice system" (Elliott, 2011, p. 17). In other words, the intimate relationship between the private and public parties with a vested interest in the continual growth and privatization of the carceral system. Returning to Foucault (1997), his concepts of "subjugated knowledges" and "genealogy" help guide this research, as do the principles foundational to action research. The primary method of data gathering was through semi-structured interviews. The final section of this chapter outlines the methodology used in the research and sketches the rationale for why an ethnographic approach—the interview—best supports this work.

2.1. Communication Studies in Criminology

This project takes an interdisciplinary approach to prison labour and builds on a foundation already set by scholars exploring punishment and control in the digital age. For my purposes, this body of work can be separated in two main categories. The first includes scholarly projects that bridge the gap between communication studies and criminology by exploring the remediation of historic power dynamics by new technology. Scholarship in the second category explores how crime, punishment, and incarceration are portrayed in the media.

In *Carceral Capitalism*, Jackie Wang (2018) explores the relationship between capitalism and punishment, and how new technology perpetuates historic racist power structures. In discussing PredPol, a law enforcement software start-up, Wang argues that the use of data to legitimize policing and prisons is not just a function of better technology: "since the late nineteenth century, a data-driven approach to understanding crime has been used to perpetuate institutionalized antiblack violence and legitimize policing" (2018, p. 229). In *Digitize and Punish,* Brian Jefferson (2020) seems to agree: "our thesis is not that such tech companies cause racist law enforcement but that they capitalize on its legacy" (p. 9). Jefferson's book explores how the digitization of carceral governance, a partnership between governments, big tech, and researchers, remediates and perpetuates racist power structures (2020). Ruha Benjamin's (2019) edited volume, *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* contains essays that further explore the relationship between race, technology, and punishment.

Beyond the relationship between digital technology and punishment, other interdisciplinary investigations into crime and communication explore the relationship between the media and the prison. Stiernstedt & Kaun (2022) conceptualize a "prison-media complex" characterized by the prison labour that constructs and maintains media infrastructure, the relationship that is created when companies sell communication technologies to prisons for surveillance and control, and prisons themselves as sites of testing new surveillance technology (p. 2). This "prison-media complex" exists within a broader "prison-industrial complex"—the partnership between government and private industry that seeks to expand the prison system for its economic potential.

Further, critical analysis into the relationship between media and incarceration highlights the representation of prisoners on television and in film. Popular media shape public understanding of prisons and the people who are incarcerated within them, potentially influencing audiences' willingness to accept policy changes that purport to be in the interests of public safety (O'Sullivan, 2001). In that vein, Gillian Harkins (2020) explores media representations of "the pedophile" and how TV shows like *Law and Order: SVU, To Catch a Predator,* and others enlist the public in the hunt for the "virtual predator" and legitimize increased surveillance. Even those who have experienced incarceration firsthand are influenced by the sensationalized fiction of the TV-prison (Yousman, 2009; Yousman, 2013). As well, while incarcerated individuals are generally portrayed negatively (Yousman, 2013), even correctional staff are represented in the media in a negative light (Vickovic, Griffin & Fradella, 2013).

Although this is not an exhaustive exploration of the literature that extends into both criminology and communication studies, it helps to establish a precedent for the current investigation. Indeed, even the Marxist-Foucauldian approach foundational to the current project is rooted in the work of Michel Foucault and Frankfurt School—affiliated scholars Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer, all of whom are right at home in both communication and criminology departments today.

2.2. A History of Punishment and the Marxist Perspective

> The prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to

> transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection (Foucault, 1995, p. 272).

Foucault (1995) argues that punishment is about control, and from a Marxist perspective this can be seen as something imposed on the working class from the ruling class. In discussing the criminalization of "workers' illegalities" like machine breaking, forming associations, and even absenteeism, Foucault (1995) argues "a whole series of illegalities was inscribed in struggles in which those struggling knew that they were confronting both the law and the class that had imposed it" (p. 274). Individuals and groups are punished for deviating from social norms—from expressing values and interests that go against those of power, and for violating these dominant social norms when they are enshrined in law by the ruling class. Capitalism's emergence, and the bourgeois revolution in France, gives a key example: "it is against the background of the new laws of property, against the background, too, of unacceptable conscription that a peasant illegality developed in the last years of the Revolution" (Foucault, 1995, p. 275). This "peasant illegality" that Foucault describes is a key concept—it describes the emergence of the law as a tool of oppression against a lower social class. In post-Revolution France, as well as in North America today, those who are under surveillance, who commit crimes, and who are punished for crimes, tend to belong to a lower economic class.

Over time punishment shifted from a focus on the corporal, wherein punishment inflicted pain on the body, to the carceral, where punishment shifted to removing people from society, and warehousing them for arbitrary periods of time (Foucault, 1995). Punishment, once a public spectacle, was also hidden away and became a much more private affair. Of course, some elements of the spectacle still exist. In the courtroom, the OJ Simpson trial is perhaps the most famous. America's longest running reality TV series, *COPS*, first aired in 1989, is another example of crime and punishment as media spectacle. Serial killers also garner significant media attention. Film and television fictionalize stories of incarceration and punishment, giving a dramatized view of the inner workings of the prison and the criminal justice system. As well, true crime has emerged as a popular genre across media.

From a Marxist perspective, punishment is believed to be tied to economic conditions—to the system of production of the day. Rusche & Kirchheimer (2017) make the claim that "every system of production tends to discover punishments which

correspond to its productive relationships" (p.5). This is perhaps why in a feudal economic system punishment is focused specifically on the body. Corporal punishments, like torture, are employed against a population already existing in a state of unfreedom. Incarceration, or even forced labour, would not make sense in this setting. It takes a significant shift in mode of production to inspire incarceration as an option for punishment, and we start to see this happen in Western Europe in the sixteenth century with the rise of the house of correction. These places would target "vagabonds and beggars" with the intention of getting them off the street and later, of incorporating them into the capitalist workforce (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, p. 17). At the time, poor workers would sometimes turn to begging instead of working for low wages and the rate they could earn from begging became a sort of de facto minimum wage. In Rusche & Kirchheimer (2017): "[poor laws] sought to prevent the poor from withholding their labor power, as they used to do by begging in preference to working for low wages" (p. 41). The house of correction, as a solution to begging, took off in Holland, notably because of its highly developed capitalist system in comparison to the rest of Europe, and its small labour force (2017, p. 42). At this point a connection emerges between capitalism, incarceration, and the management of labour.

According to Rusche & Kirchheimer (2017), the house of correction, a precursor to the modern prison, was a tool for creating wage labourers in times of shortage. "Every effort was made to draw upon all the available labor reserves, not only to absorb them into economic activity but, further, to 'resocialize' them in such a way that in the future they would enter the labor market freely" (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, p. 42). In other words, the belief was that those imprisoned by the state for an unwillingness to work would learn industrious habits and vocational skills. They would not only be trained with the skills to work upon release but also with the desire to be a part of the labour force—to consent to participate in the economic system.

In short, crime and punishment as we know them today are products of a capitalist mode of production. As Rusche & Kirchheimer say, "the ruling classes left no means unexplored in order to overcome the condition of the labour market" (2017, p. 26). Imprisonment gained popularity as a dominant punishment as capitalism took over in Europe and incarcerated people were quickly used to fill positions that were not otherwise filled. For example, in its wars with France and Spain in the 18th century, England used incarcerated people as soldiers to fill its ranks. This was a desirable

proposition for many who had been convicted of crimes when their alternative was the gallows (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, p. 30). Ultimately, the history of punishment is far removed from any notion of rehabilitation for the perpetrator or reparation to the victim when a crime/harm has occurred. Foucault asks,

> What then, is the use of penal labour? Not profit; nor even the formation of a useful skill; but the constitution of a power relation, an empty economic form, a schema of individual submission and of adjustment to a production apparatus (1995, p. 243).

Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is perhaps the best overview of the history of punishment as it has changed in the Western world. Foucault (1995) highlights the changes in how punishment is meted out: moving from the body to the soul, changing focus towards surveillance, moving from the spectacle towards invisibility. Like Rusche & Kirchheimer, and building on their work, Foucault also writes about the Rasphuis of Amsterdam, one of the early houses of correction established in 1596. According to Foucault (1995) there were four benefits to this method of punishment:

1. the work done by the prisoners brought in money for the state,
2. the burden (on the state) to repay people victimized by vagabonds could be offloaded back onto the perpetrators of the crime,
3. incarceration creates a captive workforce that also drive wages down outside the house of correction walls,
4. incarcerating vagabonds allows the "real" poor to benefit from charity otherwise diverted to people simply uninterested in working (p. 121).

Prison labour programs today have evolved out of institutions like the Rasphuis of Amsterdam and operate under similar justifications.

The modern penitentiary is also deeply rooted in religion—inspired mostly by protestant sensibilities towards the value of work. Calvinists believed that the "duty of work is itself the true aim of life" (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, p. 42). Later, in the United States, the Auburn and Philadelphia models of the prison took hold based on similar religious philosophy. Both utilized isolation to varying degrees, believing that the prisoner needed time to think and that to reform themselves they needed to spend time meditating in communion with god (Foucault, 1995, p. 236). This rationale for solitary confinement is important and will be further addressed in this chapter's section on prison reform.

2.3. Modern Prison Labour

Contemporary political economists approach prison labour with Rusche & Kirchheimer and Foucault very much in mind. In their political economy of prison labour, Scherrer & Shah (2017) highlight what they call the "recommodification of prison labour" that happened during the West's neoliberal turn in the 1970s. Around this time we begin to see the rise of private prisons, primarily in the United States, and a re-emergence of a public discourse supporting the idea that prisoners should pay their way through their own incarceration—a concept called "self-financing" (Scherrer & Shah, 2017, p. 39-40). Like in Europe in the sixteenth century, labour market conditions, the discrimination against specific social (and racial) groups, and the management of the surplus labour force remain major factors influencing punishment. In the United States, LeBaron (2018) traces this back to the turn of the 20th century:

> Prison labour originated in the North as a political response to labour market instability and the widespread refusal of factory work, primarily amongst immigrants racialized as 'non-white', and in the South as a strategy to discipline, terrorize and exploit African-Americans in the wake of the 13th Amendment (p. 169).

Weiss (2001) discusses an interesting extension of the role of the prison in managing labour forces: "revisionists suggested a new penal function in the contemporary period: prisons appear to absorb surplus workers during economic downturns, acting as a social control over the "dangerous classes" (p. 263). Although the post-war period of Keynesian economics and strong labour unions saw the rise of a treatment model to deal with criminal deviance, and prison labour was effectively outlawed, this changed as Western governments adopted more neoliberal values (Scherrer & Shah, 2017; Syroka, 2019; Weiss, 2001). A post-Fordist conception of punishment once again sees prisoners as valuable, and what was once just the management of surplus populations becomes their commodification (Weiss, 2001, p. 277).

Another important calculus involves using prison labour towards public projects. This was the case with the chain gang, a practice that emerged after convict leasing was banned in the postbellum south where groups of prisoners were chained together and forced to toil on infrastructure projects like roads and railroads. Although the chain gang—simply put, the reappropriation of convict labour from private interests towards

public works projects (Blackmon, 2009, p. 352, Lichtenstein, 1996, p. 14)—did not last long (but did experience a revival in Arizona in the 1990s), using prison labour for public projects is very much still a reality today. California's incarcerated forest firefighters are well known and save the state around $80 million US dollars per year (Syroka, 2019, p. 411). In fact, the office of the Attorney General (under Kamala Harris) recommended against extending an early-release program for Californian prisoners because of how it would negatively affect staffing for the forest firefighter program (Syroka, 2019, p. 411). This situation is particularly frustrating because upon release, these men are immediately barred from working as career firefighters due to their criminal records; an example of the glaring contradiction between the justification of prison labour as skill-training and the reality.

Forest firefighting is a particularly unique form of prison labour that complicates notions of exploitation and rehabilitation. Interviewing incarcerated forest firefighters in California, Goodman (2012) found that "most women and men "doing time" in a fire camp think of grade work and firefighting as partially exploitive and partially something to appreciate as good, useful, or at least better than the alternative" (p. 368). What is perhaps most interesting in Goodman's (2012) analysis is that participants described the work as both valuable and exploitive simultaneously, and the contradiction perhaps reflects the broader experience of "learning to live with the contradictions of a state that simultaneously responsibilizes them for their deviancy while affording them progressively fewer opportunities to obtain stability" (p. 370). While an especially interesting example of prison labour, forest firefighting is a unique and complicated case, especially when evaluated alongside the institutional jobs in which prisoners more commonly find themselves.

In California, prison construction is often sold to small towns with the promise of free prison labour for the benefit of the community. Low security prisoners clean public spaces and make basic repairs in the community in which they are incarcerated (Gilmore, 2007, p. 151). Syroka (2019) suggests that work, when focused on rehabilitating the prisoner, is the best way to limit recidivism (p. 428). In other words, while the modern application of prison labour is problematic and rooted in capitalist exploitation of the working class, work and skills training may still be important elements of a rehabilitation program.

According to Lacity et al. (2014) impact sourcing is, “the practice of training and hiring marginalized individuals who normally would have few opportunities for good employment to provide information technology (IT), business process, or other digitally enabled services” (p. 914). Lacity et al. (2014) found that prison jobs programs generally tend to lower recidivism rates, but one UNICOR program in particular that trained prisoners to digitize patents had six positive results. According to participants interviewed, the program provided the best financial compensation; helped them develop business skills, good work habits, and self-efficacy; was a productive use of their time; and elevated their social status (Lacity et al., 2014, p. 925-926). This is an area that requires far more investigation because while it feels intuitive that better employment programs in prisons would increase people’s employability upon release (simply by addressing one of the most significant causes of crime—poverty), this is not well-documented in the literature. From a 2000 report (focusing on the Canadian perspective):

> Despite the empirical link between employment needs and recidivism, research on the effectiveness of offender employment interventions has not yielded conclusive results; some studies show that employment programs reduce recidivism, and others indicate that they have no effect (Gillis, Fabiano & Carpentier, 2000, p. 39).

Gillis, Fabiano & Carpentier (2000) go on to cite methodological difficulties as a primary cause of our lack of understanding regarding the efficacy of prison jobs programs. However, they also go on to argue, “we know ‘what works’ in the provision of effective programs and must work to apply these findings within an employment context” (p. 40). This suggests a complicated situation in which “we know what works” regarding prison jobs programs, but we are not doing it, and we struggle to prove the efficacy of the programs that are available. Another difficulty in the Canadian context is the barriers to research placed by the Correctional Service of Canada. These include, but are not limited to: the CSC’s review process for outside researchers (which can take anywhere from three to six months without any guarantee of success), a suspension of all research involving CSC staff or people incarcerated during the COVID pandemic, and a mandatory six week review period for the CSC before any presentation, publication, or dissemination of the findings (Krista, Partnership and Knowledge Mobilization Unit, Research Branch, Correctional Service Canada, personal communication, September 23, 2021; Commissioner’s Directives 009 Research; 2017). Overall, this is an area that

requires much further study, and perhaps more innovative thinking regarding trying and testing new programming.

It is also important to situate modern prison labour within a broader regime of unfree labour. LeBaron (2013) argues “the re-imposition of prison labour during neoliberalism has been one component of broader attempts to aggressively impose social and labour discipline fundamental to neoliberal regimes of accumulation” (p. 12-13). Prison labour then is just one example of the expansion of unfree labour across Canada and the United States. Coercion also links prison labour to other forms of unfree labour. In discussing the coercive tools that welfare administrators have over workfare workers, Hatton (2019) highlights what she calls “social coercion” that “impinges on workers as fundamentally social beings” (p. 916). Beyond the threat of removal of welfare benefits, administrators can also withhold Medicaid, SNAP benefits, and even access to homeless shelters if “participants” refuse to work (2019, p. 916). These tactics are especially effective at coercing compliance from workers with children. The coercive practices that force unfree labour help situate prison labour in a much broader scheme of exploitation.

Finally, in his exploration of prison labour in the United States, Asatar Bair (2004; 2007) makes the case that prison labour is a form of slavery. Bair (2007) outlines the economic, political, and cultural conditions for the existence of slavery in American prisons, arguing ultimately that,

> The power wielded by the prison authorities to compel the labor of the inmates, to even own their very labor-power, combines with the cultural processes of objectification, shame and dishonor of the inmates, and the economic processes of income incentives, state welfare and so on to form a particular relationship between the inmate and the warden—that of slave and master (p. 46).

Bair’s empirical study of prison factories across the United States provides important evidence that helps draw a through-line from antebellum slavery, through convict leasing, the chain gang, and the war on drugs, to modern prison labour. This idea is further explored in the next section.

2.4. Punishment and Race

The relationship between modern incarceration and the history of racism in the United States and Canada is perhaps the most important and well-developed of the carceral body of literature today. Where Marxist analysis of prison labour mostly neglects the influence of systemic racial discrimination on crime and punishment, scholars focusing on the postbellum south and how punishment changed after the Civil War explore how punishment was used to replace the role of slavery in southern economies. Perhaps most famously, Michelle Alexander's (2020) *The New Jim Crow* traces the history of oppression in the US from slavery through to the War on Drugs and the uneven policing of crime in communities of colour. Other scholars have focused in on the postbellum period, with a big focus on the convict lease—where private interests leased "convicts" from the state to perform forced manual labour—tracing exploitation through Jim Crow laws all the way to modern practices rooted in the same racism (Alexander, 2020; Blackmon, 2009; Hammad, 2019; Leung, 2018; Lichtenstein, 1996; Oshinsky, 1996). After slavery, southern plantation owners, mine owners, and companies building railways, roads, and other infrastructure were unwilling to pay market wages to their workers. In Southern states, prisoners would be leased out to companies for a small fee. This system, poorly regulated and deeply racist, combined with the black codes—laws that only applied to newly freed Black Americans (Alexander, 2020, p.35-36)—was used to justify the horrific treatment of Black workers. In fact, treatment was often worse for those leased to private businessmen than for enslaved people in the antebellum period, as the new owners had no economic interest in keeping the workers healthy. At the same time, vagrancy laws were established in nine southern states, "which essentially made it a criminal offense not to work and were applied selectively to blacks," baring a striking resemblance to similar laws passed in post-Industrial Revolution Europe during labour shortages (Alexander, 2020, p. 35).

As an example, we can see how crime and punishment were treated in Alabama at the turn of the twentieth century, where "sheriffs were financially motivated to arrest and convict as many people as possible, and simultaneously to feed them as little as they could get away with" (Blackmon, 2009, p. 65). The sheriffs were paid a certain sum per prisoner to keep them fed, and if they came under budget, they kept the surplus. In fact, the entire convict leasing system in the United States was entirely geared towards

maintaining free Black labour after the Civil War. Once again, from Blackmon (2009), “arrests surged and fell, not as acts of crime increased or receded, but in tandem to the varying needs of the buyers of labor” (p. 66). This history, while rooted in the American South, remains a crucial aspect to understanding the broader landscape of prison labour in North America today.

As well, as mentioned previously, work by Wang (2018), Jefferson (2020), and others explores how technological advances to incarceration, policing, and other systems of surveillance and control perpetuate the racist legacy of the criminal justice system today. Angwin et al. (2016) exposed significant issues with digital risk assessments for *ProPublica*, showing that Black defendants were scoring as much higher risk than white defendants, regardless of the severity of the crime. However, the impact of new technology on criminal justice is often heralded as a positive way to reduce human bias. But excitement over machine learning can perhaps cloud judgement, as Harrisburg University researchers were widely condemned after they claimed to have developed an algorithm that could predict future criminality, with no racial bias and 80% accuracy, based on just a photo of someone’s face (Coalition for Critical Technology, 2020). As Jefferson (2020) argues, “criminal justice data, like all data, are not merely collected; they are *produced* [emphasis original]” (p. 9). As well, advances in technology that purport to improve efficiencies in the criminal justice system and eliminate systemic racism are taking on an impossible task when they are built on past structures that unequally targeted people of colour.

In Canada, people of colour are also disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system and incarceration, especially Indigenous peoples. Scholars McGuire & Murdoch (2021) trace a historical through-line similar to the American context. The Canadian history starts from residential schools and day schools, moving through the sixties scoop, to modern day over-incarceration of Indigenous women using Woolford & Gacek’s (2016) concept of “genocidal carcerality.” This concept is defined as: “spaces enlisted towards the elimination of a targeted group, either for purposes of exterminating or transforming the group so that it no longer persists” (McGuire & Murdoch, 2021, p. 3). While the American carceral project is deeply rooted in the exploitation of Black labour, in Canada, there is an important case to be made that it is rooted in the displacement and assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

That being said, Crete (2017) critiques the role of specialized indigenous penal labour programs that are situated and justified within a "healing" framework. In Ontario, Warkworth prison's Fur and Shearling Programme, "targets indigenous prisoners for the purpose of producing 'authentic Aboriginal products' sold within tourist spaces (Crete, 2017, p. 971). Here, the commodification of an "authentic" Indigeneity is supported by a "healing paradigm" that purports to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in Canadian prisons (2017). Warkworth's program is one of several programs at various Canadian institutions that claim to be focused on Indigenous healing that appear to also manufacture goods for sale to the public.

Expanding outside of carceral spaces to the broader criminal justice system in Canada, even the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was founded as a colonial institution to protect settlers and displace Indigenous peoples (Lajtman, 2020, para. 2). Throughout the history of the Canadian state, the RCMP "enforced the segregation of Indigenous People, as they were the ones forcing the Indigenous to remain on the reserves" (2020, para. 7). Today the RCMP enforce a similar segregation by arresting a disproportionate number of Indigenous people across the country.

2.5. Women in Prison

While prison labour specifically, and the plight of North American prisoners more generally, remains an under-researched field, the struggles of incarcerated women are even further neglected. The feminist school of criminology, including but not limited to texts like Frances Heidensohn's (1968) *The deviance of women: a critique and an inquiry*; Carol Smart's (1977) *Women, Crime, and Criminology*; and Ngaire Naffine's (1987) *Female Crime* have criticized this neglect, and the profound failure to understand or try to explain how criminality, incarceration, and punishment affect women. In North America, women are the fastest growing prison demographic. The rate of increase since the 1980s in the United States is double that of men (Haney, 2010, p. 73). With this is mind, it is crucial to nuance the idea of prison labour—should women be treated the same way as men? Angela Davis (2003) argues that the dominant perspective on women who commit crime is fundamentally different:

> Women convicts were irrevocably fallen women, with no possibility of salvation. If male criminals were considered to be public individuals who

> had simply violated the social contract, female criminals were seen as having transgressed fundamental moral principles of womanhood (p. 70).

This fundamentally flawed understanding of female criminality implicitly influences how women who commit crimes are treated within the justice system. This treatment, including stories of sexual assault, forced abortions, and sterilization, are documented by editors Robin Levi & Ayelet Waldman (2017) in *Inside This Place, Not of it,* an important piece of work that highlights how crucial it is to foreground lived experience in research related to incarceration. The women who tell their stories in the book "describe sexual and physical abuse suffered inside the prison, and the daily indignities they face just trying to ensure they have enough toilet paper, soap, and menstrual pads" (Levi & Waldman, 2017, p. 16).

A case study comparing a women's prison in Hungary with a community-based program in California suggests that maybe there are important benefits to a labour-focused model, as seen in Hungary, versus a treatment-focused model, as seen in California (Haney, 2010). The study found that the women in the Hungarian prison developed a sense of community and purpose through work, and while they also seemed to base their sense of self-identity on their positions in the work hierarchy, they also developed a feeling of camaraderie with their peers (Haney, 2010). The women at the Community Prisoner Mother's Program in California, on the other hand, focused on addressing issues of low self-esteem, compulsions, and vice through what we might consider to be more therapeutic means, like group therapy ("communal confession"), meditation, yoga, and psychological exposure (Haney, 2010, p. 87). While prison labour in women's prisons shares a lot of similarities to men's prisons, women commit different crimes than men and have different needs. The solution, however, is not one that silos the study of female criminality off from the mainstream but is also not one that subordinates female deviance to the dominant study of crime committed by men. Heidensohn (1968) believed that part of the job of studying women and crime was catch up: "what seems to be needed in the study of female deviance is a crash programme of research which telescopes decades of comparable studies of males. First of all we do not even begin to have a 'natural history' of female deviance" (p. 171). More than half a century later, this approach would still be of great benefit.

Finally, reforms intended to create equality between incarcerated men and women often have the perverse effect of making the conditions in women's prisons

worse. Wardens and other decision makers in charge of women's prisons appear to focus on matching sanctions, but not programs (Davis, 2003, p. 76). This has resulted in decisions like one specific case where a warden refused to allow a woman sentenced to murder to attend her graduation at the University of Michigan because men sentenced to murder were not allowed to attend their graduation ceremonies (Davis, 2003, p. 76). As Davis (2003) says, "this is indeed a bizarre example of feminist demands for equality within the prison system" (p. 76). While much has changed since Frances Heidensohn's *The deviance of women* was published in 1968, the study of female deviance remains underdeveloped.

2.6. An Economic Case for Prison Construction

Where prisons are built and the decisions that factor into expanding the capacity to cage people are also important to explore—especially when those decisions do not appear related to crime rates. In California, prison-building boomed in the 1980s. Before 1964 California had built twelve prisons; since 1984, however, the state has completed construction on 23 new prisons (Gilmore, 2007, p. 7). Gilmore (2007) describes the boom in prison construction as the "prison fix:" a project in California that involves, for one, siting prisons in communities facing economic challenges. However, incarceration and prison construction as a solution to a region's economic problems is not localized just in California. In 2010 the Canadian government used similar arguments to support prison expansion, arguing that it would stimulate "the economies of host communities with jobs for workers and contracts for local businesses" (McElligott, 2017, p. 87).

In California, the plan for reinvigorating dying towns was promoted by the California Department of Corrections, "it promised both the short-term benefits associated with facility construction—jobs—and the long-term benefits derived from inserting a multimillion dollar allegedly recession-proof industry establishment into the local economy—growth" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 149). In the town of Corcoran, with a population of 22,078 in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a), the CDC touted many benefits to the city, but two stick out. First, in California, the state allocates tax revenue on a per capita basis and counties and towns count prisoners as part of their populations (Gilmore, 2007, p. 150). This same argument has been made in Canada as well, though it is more complicated as citizens are required to live in an area for at least six months before they are considered residents (McElligott, 2017, p. 98). However, in California

what is perhaps more interesting for the purposes of this research is that the prisons donate the labour of low security prisoners to the community, having them clean public spaces, renovating and repairing schools and other public property (Gilmore, 2007, p. 151).

Prisons are not designed simply to house criminals; they are complicated social structures and economic institutions. Their existence is rooted in economic systems, and their siting, development, and usage is a product of a political and economic calculus. Like Rusche & Kirchheimer, Gilmore foregrounds the role of the "surplus population"—wage labourers made obsolete by advances in technology and changing corporate and political priorities, and how the management of this population becomes the impetus for punishment and control. However, while the rhetoric of jobs is crucial for selling new prisons to communities, the correctional system's exploitation of prisoners as a captive labour force undercuts this rationale. From Gilmore (2007),

> In order to persuade COs [Correctional Officers] to live in a town earlier CDC [California Department of Corrections] transfers had spurned, Corcoran had to figure out ways to make the local atmosphere attractive, given the difficulty of developing retail and entertainment amenities. Some of the cosmetic problems could be solved inexpensively by exploiting prison labor. The obvious contradiction in using donated labor for public works in a town plagued by unemployment is underscored by the fact that at that time the CDC "valued" prisoner labor at $7/hour, thirty-five cents above the average Corcoran hourly wage (p. 166).

Ultimately, promises supporting the development of new prisons often fail to materialize once the prison is built. In Corcoran, CA, for instance, most of the new correctional officers that staffed the facilities commuted in from the towns they already lived in; only a small percentage of the staff were hired from within the town (Gilmore, 2007, p. 159). In Delano, CA, unemployment actually rose three percent (from 26 to 29%) in the decade after its first prison was built, contradicting one of the major reasons for building the prison in the first place—the spinoff jobs it would create in the local job market (Gilmore, 2007, p. 176).

In Canada, prison construction and expansion appear to be much more partisan endeavours. McElligott (2017) highlights the role of the ruling Conservative Party in promoting prison construction and expansion around the 2011 election (and the reality that ridings with prisons overwhelmingly elect conservative MPs). Similar to California,

the benefits to the local communities seem to have been dramatically oversold. In Canada, between 2005 and 2013, “while 25 prison towns had tenders for work in their area, in only eight did local companies win prison contracts” (2017, p. 102). Firms from bigger cities generally won contracts and McElligott (2017) argues that the impact on employment in the regions was likely low: “if outside construction companies do tend to rely largely on their own permanent workforce (rather than subcontracting or hiring locally), then prison town locals probably had little access to these construction jobs” (p. 103).

Gilmore’s (2007) comprehensive investigation of California’s “prison fix” helps establish evidence for a “prison industrial complex” in which prison labour is just one element. In *Are Prisons Obsolete,* Angela Davis (2003) establishes that “the term ‘prison industrial complex’ was introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations” (p. 84). Elliott (2011) describes it in more detail:

> Architectural and construction firms, Wall Street investment banks that handle prison bond issues and invest in private prisons, plumbing supply companies, companies that sell everything from bullet-resistant security cameras to padded cells to ‘body-orifice security scanners’ to a wide array of razor wire and other forms of ‘securityware’—all have a vested interest in prison expansion (Lynch, 2002, as cited by Elliott, 2011, p. 16).

In other words, beyond the privately-operated prisons across the United States, the prison-industrial complex also refers to the myriad of private interests that support the operations of the carceral system: building prisons, outfitting them, and supporting their continued operation. Most importantly, the prison-industrial complex refers to the intimate relationship between the private commercial enterprises that have a direct vested interested in the continued growth of the carceral system, and the politicians and government departments whose interests support the push for increased development and privatization. In California, the rationales behind prison construction and siting make the economic connection between crime and punishment abundantly clear.

2.7. Organizing

> Before considering the possibilities of the 2013 strike, it is perhaps necessary to first consider the question more broadly: do prison strikes work? The answer, in short, is sometimes (House, 2020, p. 255).

Because of the conditions of life in prison, rebellion is not uncommon. People who are incarcerated do not have extensive options for recourse when they are unhappy with their conditions. Official channels and complaints processes do not inspire a lot of trust or confidence, and prisoners can be retaliated against when they do complain. In fact, Gosselin (1982) argues that the two main reasons officers in Canadian prisons placed prisoners in administrative isolation (solitary confinement) was as an act of vengeance against the prisoner or to "disrupt attempts at prisoner organization" (p. 43). However, like the labour movement outside of prisons, incarcerated workers have attempted to organize themselves with some success. This suggests that prisoners feel like workers and are willing to agitate to be treated with respect. However, while their demands often mirror the demands of trade union workers generally—including fair pay and safe working conditions, for example—they have found much less success. This is not to dismiss the gains prisoner actions have won, as there have been significant successes, even in Canada. For instance, in 1934, incarcerated workers at the BC Penitentiary in New Westminster went on strike for wages—as they were not being paid for their work—and won (House, 2018, p. 11).

An example of the most successful attempt at unionizing for prisoners in Canada happened in the 1970s at the Guelph Beef Centre, an abattoir privately run but staffed in part by people incarcerated at the Guelph Correctional Centre. House (2018) argues that the reason this bid was successful (and established the union that represented those prisoners working in the abattoir for around fifteen years) was in part due to the fact that the prisoners were unionizing as workers, not as "inmates," and the union covered free workers as well. While the union was meant to protect worker rights at the abattoir, not prisoners' rights in the prison, the union nevertheless did manage to improve the lives of its incarcerated members (House, 2018, p. 10).

Incarcerated workers attempting to unionize, or gain any improvements in their compensation, working conditions, or overall treatment, find themselves often rebuked with the argument that they are not employed and therefore cannot be covered by Canadian or American laws that establish minimum wages or are designed to protect workers and their right to unionize. And while strikes have been effective historically, as Jordan House (2020) mentions, "prison strikes are risky endeavours. They can easily turn into riots with deadly consequences. They can likewise fail and leave strikers in a worse position than they were previously" (p. 255). Some strikes, like the Canadian

prison strike in October 2013, seem to simply peter out. After returning to work with the threat that the strike would resume if demands weren't met, "prisoners were tired of striking and it was unclear that any additional leverage could have been mustered by a second strike" (House, 2020, p. 253).

Conversely, the 1971 uprising at the New York State prison in Attica is famously remembered as the deadliest prison uprising in American history after almost forty people, mostly prisoners, were killed in an assault by state police (Kaba, 2011, p. 5). Because of brutal conditions and treatment by prison staff, prisoners at Attica began organizing (creating the Attica Liberation Faction or ALF) but they were ultimately sparked to action by the murder of prison activist George Jackson by correctional staff at San Quentin State Prison in California. They rioted, took hostages, and held the prison for four days until the New York state police's assault ended the standoff (2011, p. 9). The demands made by the ALF resulted in short term improvements to things like quality of food and access to medical care, but fifty years later, a lot of reforms have stalled, and the concerns of prisoners in 1971 are still concerns today (O'Neil-White, 2021).

While incarcerated workers in North America have never succeeded in gaining rights to match those of free workers, the arguments that are used to deny them these rights are tenuous. For example, in the case of *Jolivet v. Treasury Board, CSC,* it was argued that work for prisoners is rehabilitative, and therefore not legally an employment relationship (Rashid, 2017, p. 6). These cases highlight some of the bigger issues with prison labour; notably, that there is an oppressive relationship between employer and employee and there are few protections in these facilities to protect the interests of the workers. When they do fight back and agitate for better conditions, they're quashed by unsympathetic guards and unfavourable legal rulings capitalizing on conveniently worded statutes (Bennett v. Frank, 2005; Rashid, 2017).

2.8. Abolition or Reform

What is perhaps most interesting about prison reform—the intention to improve prison conditions without addressing the problems of the prison institution itself—is that many scholars suggest that reform has always been an element of incarceration (Alexander, 2020; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007). Reform is constitutive of the carceral system as prison itself is a punitive reform of harsher corporal punishments. John

Howard, who lived in 18th century Europe, is lauded for his focus on improving the conditions of prisoners but was also a proponent of solitary confinement. A Calvinist believing in the healing power of silent prayer, his influence lasted for centuries—and today this sort of confinement (when longer than fifteen days or used indefinitely) is considered torture by the United Nations (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p. 13).

What leads to reform? We might like to think that society realizes the error of its ways and people demand change. In the case of the convict lease, it is likely that the major factor was not moral outrage, or governments and corporations deciding to do the right thing but changing economics. Blackmon (2009) explains, in part, the death of the convict lease: “crude industrial enterprises to which slave labor lent itself so effectively for fifty years were being eclipsed by modern technologies and business strategies” (p. 365). In other sectors, like cotton production, prices fell and pests destroyed countless acres of crop. Prices for free labour fell, the economics of convict leases made less and less sense, and the state began to lose revenue— “as financial incentives for the states faded, political scandals and abuse outrages gained traction” (2009, p. 365-366). Without the economic imperative, all the negatives of the system came into view. As well, the executive branch of the United States government was also worried, heading into the Second World War, that they would have a tough time conscripting Black soldiers and sending them to fight wars in Europe and Asia if they were still treated so poorly in America (2009, p. 377).

Overall, reformist ideas around prison labour make recommendations that intend to improve the conditions of prisoners without dismantling the system itself. In 1955—and updated in 2015—the UN established “The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” which, among other things, recommended that:

- Institutional industries and farms be directly operated by the prison administration,
- Full normal wages for work be paid to administration,
- Safety and health protections for inmates should match those of free workers, and,
- Equitable wages be distributed to prisoners and their families, with a portion set aside in a savings account for the inmate, to be distributed upon release (Sliva & Samimi, 2018, p. 154).

These guidelines were designed to insure that “the interests of the prisoners and of their vocational training must not be subordinated to the purpose of making a financial profit from an industry in the institution” (United Nations General Assembly, 2016, as cited in Sliva & Samimi, 2018, p. 154). These guidelines are important in establishing a humane international standard for the use of prison labour; however it is unclear how much impact these standards have had. Other recommendations from the UN SMRs included that jobs should be “non-afflictive,” should provide a vocational benefit, and there should be choice when possible (Sliva & Samimi, 2018, p. 154).

Despite the UN Standard Minimum Rules, prison labour, and incarceration broadly, remain deeply problematic. For this reason, other scholars have suggested that the best solution to the current crisis surrounding incarceration is prison abolition. Thanks to her book, *Are Prisons Obsolete,* Angela Davis (2003) is perhaps the best-known prison abolitionist today. Reaching back to the earlier figures who wrote about the history of punishment and race in the United States, Dorothy Roberts (2019) argues that “prisons are part of a larger system that upholds a racial capitalist order” (p. 14). Conceiving of the prisons in this way, we see that they are just one element of a larger system in need of immediate change. Prison abolition is therefore both a destructive and creative process, and not simply a moment where we throw open the doors and allow the “criminals” to run free (McLeod, 2015). It must incorporate much broader social changes, including abolishing contemporary policing and surveillance (and other institutions that support/require the existence of prisons), to be replaced by new ways of relating with each other (Mariame Kaba as cited by Roberts, 2019, p. 43). In other words, “abolition may be understood instead as a gradual project of decarceration, in which radically different legal and institutional regulatory forms supplant criminal law enforcement” (McLeod, 2015, p. 1161). However, we must be careful here not to replace prison sentences with other forms of supervision and surveillance like probation/parole, or more punitive policing, because while these alternatives keep people out of prisons, they fail to address the systems that result in criminal sanctions in the first place (McLeod, 2015, p. 1161). In fact, “softer” approaches to crime can even have a net-widening effect, defined by Kent Roach (2022) as “any process in which offenders are subject to more intrusive sanctions than before” (para. 6). This can be counterintuitive, but removing the prison sentence as an option can prompt decision makers who might have otherwise used their discretion to let something go to instead make an arrest, lay a

charge, or sentence someone to community supervision. The result is that someone who otherwise would have been warned and released would now have criminal charges.

One alternative paradigm to the current legal system is restorative justice, an approach to crime that views it primarily as a breakdown of relationships rather than a violation of law (Zehr, 2015). One way of viewing restorative justice is to understand it as a shift in focus from punishment to harms and needs, obligations, and engagement (Zehr, 2015). According to the Government of Canada, restorative justice is "an approach to justice that seeks to repair harm by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm to communicate about and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime" (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety, 2018). In practice, restorative justice looks at the harms caused by the "crime," what needs arise out of them—first for those victimized, but also those who caused the harms, and the broader community that is inevitably affected—what obligations this places on the perpetrator of the harms, and how all parties can be engaged in the process of making things right (Elliott, 2011; Zehr, 2015). Restorative practices can solve the fundamental social problems current punitive models fail to adequately address: the needs of the victims of crime and the responsibility of the perpetrators of crime to make it right. However, it is worth mentioning that abolitionists like Roberts (2019) are critical of restorative justice practices that rely on the "criminal punishment system" and still expose people to police and state violence (p. 46).

Unfortunately, any real attempt at abolition would likely cause a significant negative reaction. However, if a significant paradigm shift away from the current penal system towards abolition were to occur, models of restorative justice that acknowledge that conflict will always occur, but that it can be resolved internally in strong communities, would likely be best suited to take its place. Michelle Alexander (2020) makes the point that even if America was to return to the rate of incarceration of the 1970s almost 80% of prisoners would need to be released: "prisons would have to be closed across America, an event that would likely inspire panic in rural communities that have become dependent on prisons for jobs an economic growth. Hundreds of thousands of people—many of them unionized—would lose their jobs" (p. 286). This is an enormous problem that proponents for abolition must address in a climate already unfavourable towards even minor variants of prison reform.

2.9. Why Do We Put Prisoners to Work?

In Canada, CORCAN is the branch of the CSC that handles its manufacturing and vocational training programs. First established in 1980, CORCAN continued a tradition of prison industries in Canada stretching back all the way to 1830s. While exploiting prison labour has always been vital for prison operations, in the early days of Canadian prisons, hard labour was considered punitive in itself (Correctional Service of Canada, 2022). Perhaps a little paradoxically, hard work was also believed to contribute to the rehabilitation of the individual and helped develop "habits necessary to successfully return to society" (2022, para. 5). The creation of CORCAN in 1980 marked an official departure, though one that had begun decades before, from seeing labour itself as punitive and a refocusing on the rehabilitative potential of work. Today, CORCAN's focus, at least rhetorically, remains rehabilitative in nature. From its website:

> CORCAN's focus is to assist offenders in becoming employment ready upon release, which in turn supports CSC's mission. This is done through on-the-job and third-party certified vocational training that focuses on our four business lines: Manufacturing, Textiles, Construction, and Services (2018, para. 6).

As well,

> The employment skills that offenders gain through CORCAN include both the soft and hard skills they need to enter the labour market. These include communication skills, teamwork skills, personal skills (dependability, time management, organizational), as well as the technical skills that come with certified and on-the-job training (2018, para. 8).

However, CORCAN is also critiqued for its role as a profit-driven enterprise (Kleuskens, 2015, 29-31), and this status begs an important question: how effective can CORCAN's rehabilitative programs be if they are subordinate to a profit-motive? Government discourse supporting prison labour in Canada remains focused on rehabilitating the individual while reducing the costs of their imprisonment (2015, p. 115). Kleuskens (2015) argues that this discourse "serves as a means by which the prison and its penal practices are injected with legitimacy and purpose, particularly as a means by which prison labour camps *produce* [emphasis original] workers that can be exploited in the capitalist system" (p. 115).

In the United States, UNICOR (formerly known as Federal Prison Industries, Inc.) was founded in 1934 and serves a similar function but expanded into far more industries. Like CORCAN, UNICOR's incarcerated employees work in manufacturing, textiles, construction, and services, but they also have programs in computer-aided design, data services, electronics, printing, and call centres (UNICOR, n.d.). Their mission statement is "to protect society and reduce crime by preparing inmates with job training and practical work skills for reentry success" (UNICOR, n.d., para. 3). UNICOR was founded in a climate of strong opposition to prison labour from organized labour and private industry and was careful "to avoid obtaining excessive market shares, which would negatively affect the private sector" (Syroka, 2019, p. 406). Unsurprisingly, UNICOR faces similar criticism to CORCAN. According to Syroka (2019), "many feels its once-worthwhile cause has been cast aside in pursuit of profit" (p. 407).

The fundamental question that this research aims to address is, "why do we put prisoners to work?" In order to do that, I have defined four main rationales. These rationales appear frequently in dominant discourse surrounding modern prison labour (including CORCAN and UNICOR's publicity), but are perhaps best summarized by Judge Richard Posner in *BENNETT v. FRANK* (2005), a United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, decision against awarding two Wisconsin prisoners the minimum wage for their work while incarcerated:

> People are not imprisoned for the purpose of enabling them to earn a living. The prison pays for their keep. If it puts them to work, it is to offset some of the cost of keeping them. Or to keep them out of mischief, or to ease their transition to the world outside, or to equip them with skills and habits that will make them less likely to return to crime outside (2005).

Judge Posner's statement is excellent for how concisely it outlines the four dominant rationales for prison labour. Simplified, for the purposes of this research, prison labour:

- Is rehabilitative, teaching prisoners skills that will help them succeed upon release,
- Keeps prisoners out of trouble,
- Eases the transition back to society, and
- Helps offset the cost of housing people.

These answers help to establish a list of rationales for the main question, “why do we put prisoners to work?” The research project at the heart of this study takes those answers and evaluates them against the lived experience of people who have been incarcerated in Canada and the United States. Speaking with individuals who have experienced the carceral system firsthand, it is clear that while there is some merit to each of the four rationales, prison labour overwhelmingly supports the maintenance and operations of the prison system itself. While the dominant discourse supporting the practice highlights the rehabilitative nature of work programs, this often appears to be more of a justification after the fact. Simply put, this project is a critique of the dominant discourse supporting prison labour in North America.

2.9.1. Subjugated Knowledges and Genealogy

Interviewing people who have been incarcerated, understanding them to be experts in this area, and using their lived experience as the background with which to evaluate the efficacy of prison labour programs is important for several reasons. These are voices that are not often heard, they do not have the same economic or political interests as those who operate carceral institutions, and a qualitative methodology allows us to go past raw numbers (like recidivism statistics) to address the real reasons why prison jobs programs either work, or do not work. To justify this approach, I turn back to Foucault (1997) and his concepts of “genealogy” and “subjugated knowledges.” As well, before proceeding, it is worth mentioning that Foucault himself was active in pushing for prison reform. Notably, inspired by the 1970 and 1971 hunger strikes of incarcerated members of the “Gauche prolétarienne”—a Maoist political movement—Foucault established the groupe d’information sur les prisons (GIP) to “collect and distribute descriptions of the intolerable prison conditions, given by prisoners themselves (*The GIP: Information gathering and active intolerance as a political strategy*, 2018, para. 2). Foucault’s own involvement in activism around incarceration undoubtedly shaped his theoretical approach.

Foucault (1997) defines subjugated knowledges as “blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship” (p. 7). He goes on to say:

> When I say “subjugated knowledges” I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity (1997, p. 7).

This gets to the heart of the project, which is foregrounding perspectives that are marginalized and oppressed. Beyond the fact that communities of colour, those experiencing poverty, and those battling mental illness already struggle to have their voices heard, the disproportionate incarceration of members belonging to these groups amplifies their marginalization. Employing Foucault’s concept of subjugated knowledges provides theoretical support for a project which aims to foreground the perspective of the formerly incarcerated in evaluating prison jobs programs.

Beyond this orientation to the production of knowledge, Foucault’s concept of the “genealogy” gives a roadmap for exploring the phenomenon of prison labour (and of course it helps that Foucault spent so much of his time exploring punishment himself). Foucault (1997) calls genealogy a “coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics” (p. 8). While Foucault’s definition implies an inherent praxis in the work, this is not a fundamental element of this project—though the intention for this project is that it will inspire further conversation, study, and change. As well, one of the underlying questions the research originally sought to address was the relationship between economics and prison labour. As many scholars have suggested, and as I have addressed here, prison labour can be seen as a kind of modern slavery. Foucault (1997) asks, “is power’s raison d’être and purpose essentially to serve the economy? Is it designed to establish, solidify, perpetuate, and reproduce relations that are characteristic of the economy and essential to its workings?” (p. 14). This relationship between power and economics is important to keep in mind as we delve further into an examination of prison labour practices.

2.9.2. Ethnographic Approaches: The Interview

Methodologies do not exist in a vacuum and are rooted in different worldviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) highlight the role of the researcher from a critical theory perspective: “rather than advocating neutrality, critical researchers emphasize action research, arguing that research should redress past oppression, bring problems to light,

and help minorities, the poor, the sidelined, and the silenced" (p. 25). When dealing with a social issue as fraught as incarceration, the researcher, in my view, must approach the topic with social justice in mind. This is not to say that the research begins with conclusions already drawn, but that it acknowledges that punishment and incarceration are systems of oppression and must be examined with this in mind. A researcher asking the right questions can find evidence for any conclusions; therefore, it is crucial that we start in a place of openness, that the positionality of the researcher is clear, and that the work is transparent throughout.

When I began the project, I wanted to focus on the lived experience of people who had been incarcerated for two main reasons. First, they have no incentive to lie about their experience to a researcher and have no formal barriers to access. People currently incarcerated, as well as staff of correctional institutions, are difficult to access due to the barriers put in place by the various bureaucracies across North America that handle incarceration. As well, correctional staff may feel pressure to lie to make their programs seem more effective. Second, the perspectives of marginalized groups, as mentioned in the previous section, are often overlooked. I felt that it was important in a discussion about prison labour to foreground the lived experience of people who have actually done the work.

When I began the interviews, I operated from a loose list of questions (see Appendix A), but the main focus was on work. I wanted to find out what my participants had done for work while they were incarcerated, what they had done to earn a living before they were incarcerated, and what they did to make a living since their release. While I had suspicions before I began the interviews, overall, I was hoping to gain a stronger understanding of the efficacy of prison jobs in supporting people post-release. I wondered if people's experience before incarceration influenced what jobs they were offered in prison, and if I could find anyone who, at the time of the interview, had a good job that they could attribute to skills learned or training received while they were in prison. Ultimately, though I had certain expectations about what I would hear, I knew I would also learn a lot of details that were unexpected and so I approached the investigation mostly out of curiosity, openness, and respect.

The interviews themselves were approached, as Berg (2001) says, as a conversation with a purpose. Participants were sought out primarily online through

Reddit, physical posters in Vancouver, BC, and through a graphic in *Cell Count,* a Canadian prisoner-focused magazine distributed by PASAN (see Appendix C). This method of sourcing participants relied on nonprobability sampling, foregrounding the importance of rich personal description over generalizability in the data. Because of the difficulty in approaching the subject population, and also because of the wide variety in experience of people who have been incarcerated in North America, I used a purposive sampling method. This "judgemental" way of sampling is often used in the early stages of research and relies on the researcher's "own knowledge and of the population and the purpose of the study" (Babbie & Roberts, 2018, p. 150). In this case, because of how dispersed and diverse the subject population is, I found that this approach, where the sample is chosen based primarily on my knowledge, rooted in prior research, was the best option.

Babbie and Roberts (2018) believe that snowball sampling is an appropriate method for sourcing participants when there are challenges in locating a special population; for instance, underhoused individuals, sex workers, and undocumented immigrants (p. 150). Snowball sampling can be especially fruitful because when participants refer the researcher to others within their networks, they are also tacitly lending their support to the research. This helps establish trust with new participants. This method was attempted without success in the project. However, because the goal was to pull from a diverse experience across North America (consider that even individual US states can have dramatically different systems of incarceration) this was not a significant drawback. In interviews I would often ask participants to share my contact information with friends and acquaintances they thought might be interested in sharing their stories. Only one person reached out, but we could not schedule an interview. All in all, between October 2021 and September 2022 I conducted sixteen interviews with thirteen participants across North America over the phone, Zoom, and in person in Vancouver, British Columbia. I transcribed all the interviews—over 20 hours of audio.

As with any project, and especially one with such a large scope, there are significant limitations. It has been mentioned earlier, but once again, generalizability is a concern with the sampling method chosen here. At the start of the research, I had hoped to focus further as I spoke with people, but I am afraid it in some ways it has felt as though the opposite has happened. Key subject areas emerged in conversation, though

not always in relation to prison labour specifically—more information can be found in the discussion. Building trust was an expected hurdle but did not appear to be too big of a problem. I expected to overcome this through techniques outlined in Walling (2010): assuring confidentiality, finding commonalities between myself and the participants, patience, and honesty. While I am certain that this helped, some participants had worked with researchers before, none were still involved in a "criminal" lifestyle (and therefore were not afraid of potential repercussions), and all could make the claim that they had been rehabilitated—whether or not incarceration played a role. In other words, the people who chose to respond to my requests for interviews proved to be of a certain category of "reformed criminal."

2.9.3. Ethnographic Approaches: The Analysis

The primary method of analysis in this project is a simple content analysis. Again, looking to Berg (2001), the analysis began with a systematic search for similarities and dissimilarities in "naturally occurring classes of things, persons, and events, and important characteristics of these items (p. 103). Strauss' (1987) open coding provided another roadmap to this analysis. One begins by taking notes and watching categories emerge, making connections between them, developing further questions, and making further comparisons (1987, pp. 62-63). This method is perhaps best suited to the early stages of research, which was perfect for this project; approaching qualitative research in this exploratory fashion helps in developing hypotheses and finding further avenues of investigation.

For the analysis, I used NVivo 12 to parse through the interviews and develop a coding system. I went through the interviews chronologically and began highlighting statements that reflected the four rationales for prison labour. Eventually I had defined 54 different categories, including 16 for specific institutional roles, but also various adjacent categories like:

- Guards and Staff
- Gangs
- Violence
- Policy or Policing Critique

- Drugs
- Stigma

This generative approach to categorizing the data allowed me to make connections between the experiences of my study participants without the limitations that a more rigid coding system would have placed. I believe this allowed for a much richer analysis of the data and has resulted in a project that approaches labour in a much more holistic way than otherwise would have been possible. Screenshots of all the categories can be found in Appendix B.

One final point to make about the methodology is that while action research is not a dominant part of this investigation, due to the subject matter and the methodologies that were being pursued, it is important to mention it here. Because although I did not explicitly pursue action research as a methodology, its principles nonetheless shine though the project. For example, earlier I mentioned Rubin & Rubin's (2005) interviewing philosophy that eschews neutrality as a guiding principle, to instead keep social justice in mind. There is perhaps no better site than the prison to explore the relationship between knowledge and power. When contemplating the importance of fighting hegemonic ideals, like the "tough on crime" mentality or the punitive ideology that supports incarceration, it is helpful to examine how Gaventa & Cornwall (2008) conceive of knowledge's role:

> Knowledge, as much as any resource, determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom. Through access to knowledge, and participation in its production, use, and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualization of the possible (p. 323).

Knowledge is power, and when investigating prison labour it is important to acknowledge the potential of knowledge to subvert hegemonic ideals and in a sense fight back against harmful and inhumane practices, like incarceration. Although action research is not a primary focus of the project, it permeates throughout, from the interviewing philosophy to the focus in the literature on prison abolition and prisoner organizing.

2.10. Conclusion

Beyond the perspectives, rationales, and justifications outlined above, there are other important considerations underlying this research. Fundamentally, I wanted to approach the work with an open mind. While my suspicions were aligned with scholars who framed modern prison labour as an extension of slavery, I wanted to explore the actual potential of prison jobs programs to improve the lives of the people involved. Some advocates for prison abolition argue that all efforts should be focused on abolition, and that improving conditions in prisons hurts the movement by removing the urgency with which it needs to change. I disagree with this mentality. We are talking about real people experiencing real oppression, and this perspective does not reflect the interests of people currently experiencing incarceration. One of my research participants provided this analogy:

> The conflict between prison abolition as a sole focus and abolition supplemented by humanitarian reforms can be likened to focusing solely on abolishing a danger causing serious injuries and working towards abolishing said danger while simultaneously rendering medical aid to people being injured (John, personal communication, January 8, 2023).

So, while I agree that abolition is the goal, we must also consider the people struggling with incarceration in the present and foreground their well-being.

My relationship with the subject matter has also been shaped by the time I spent working as a Federal Residence Worker at a halfway house in Vancouver, BC from December 2021—August 2022. There I met dozens of men transitioning out of federal prisons and learned firsthand about the struggles that they faced. While their experiences will not be found in this project, the conversations I had no doubt shaped my perspective on incarceration in Canada. Their suggestions for avenues of investigation proved invaluable, and the stories of their own experiences with programming, discrimination, and simply working in Canadian institutions were very much in line with the participants that I spoke to on the record.

Chapter 3. Working While Incarcerated

> There's corporate language for pretty much everything in jail. There's an analogy. Cause it's the same kind of things. It's just society in a more deprived state. That's all there is (John, interview, August 27, 2022).

The quotes in this section are pulled from sixteen interviews conducted over the phone, over Zoom, and in person from October 2021 to September 2022, with twelve men and one woman who all experienced incarceration in Canada and/or the United States. Participants were sourced through a post on the r/excons subreddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/excons), a small ad in the March 2022 issue of *Cell Count,* published and distributed by PASAN, and some posters placed strategically in Downtown Vancouver (see Appendix C). While most of the participants have been given fake names to protect their anonymity, either at their request or at my insistence in the case of participants still involved in some form of correctional supervision, Harley Tanner, Chad Emerson, and Kathryn Mason all requested that their experience be attributed to them. Each person I interviewed had a rich and unique experience, but when confronted with the criminal justice system, I found that there were a lot of similar experiences.

Some participants had a positive view of the work they did while incarcerated and left with a generally good feeling towards prison jobs programs. Others did not gain anything meaningful from their time in prison. Some had to fight for access to education, while others found access was not as much of a problem as financing. Because prisons across North America concentrate their educational programming on high school equivalency and seem to rarely offer much more, there were few participants who had experience with vocational programming or post-secondary level education.

This chapter is broken down into six main sections. The first four are related to the justifications for prison labour outlined in the literature review and, to recap, are:

- Work keeps people out of trouble,
- Work eases the transition to freedom,
- Work teaches skills for the real world, and
- Prisoners should pay their way.

While they are all important justifications to be nuanced, the main purpose these sections serve is to create a container for the interviews, to provide a structure with which to understand the stories. With over 20 hours of interviews, it's impossible to do justice to the experiences of all participants. In a sense, these four justifications can be understood as a sort of roadmap into the vast experience of the research participants. I have also addressed some of the reasons why prisoners might want to work throughout these four sections—the main rationales from their perspective often being money and having something to do.

After the four rationales, the following section, Structural Coercion, elaborates on the idea that prisoners should pay their way, broadening the idea to a critique of the institutional methods of coercion, or the ways in which the prison systems in Canada and the United States push prisoners to work. The final section of this chapter, Education in Prisons, explores the educational side of incarceration, the institutional programming—focused mainly on high school equivalency—vocational programming, and perhaps most interesting, the classes incarcerated people offer each other.

3.1. Work Keeps People Out of Trouble

Prisons can be violent institutions. The people incarcerated there are not only being held against their will, but also in some cases have been convicted of committing violent crimes. I heard examples from the Arkansas Department of Corrections of work being used as a tool to wear people out and keep them from fighting each other on the range—the communal area that individual cells open into. I learned of examples in Indiana of work being used as a carrot to promote good behaviour, or a privilege that can be taken away at any moment, and at FCI Florence in Colorado as a way for prisoners to remove themselves from the broader prison politics. These three examples structure this section.

Adult Day Care: Working on the Hoe Squad in Arkansas

The most blatant example of the distraction justification for prison labour in action may be the hoe squad in Arkansas. Men who spent time held in one of the Arkansas Department of Corrections' prisons up until the early 2000s might have spent time on the hoe squad, a mandatory work detail for those newly incarcerated and those classified at

a higher security level. Harley Tanner described the hoe squad as “punitive in nature. It’s just to keep you busy and wore out so you don’t fight in the barracks” (October 28, 2021). When I asked if it was for a purpose, like agriculture, or general maintenance, this is how he replied:

> Oh no. It's nothing as useful as that. It's literally just like chop the grass. It's just cut it, it's just weeds, and uh, and like overgrowth and stuff like that. It's literally just to keep you busy and to keep you working. It's not useful at all. In fact, the courts in Arkansas banned Arkansas from having inmates do it because, something about wind erosion, I didn't really understand all that. Because when you cut all the grass, the wind can blow through the ditch and it does something to the soil. I don't know about farming very well. But they're not even supposed to do it. But they do it anyway. It's just, cut grass. It's like a lawnmower, but with a hoe (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

However, this may be the best example of the efficacy of work programs. Harley went into detail about what happened when guys didn’t “catch out” or spend time outside for just a few days:

> If it rained for two weeks straight and hoe squad couldn't catch out—'cause you can't go out in the rain, especially in the thunder with them big metal hoes. Cause OSHA doesn't play…they don't cut the Arkansas Department of Corrections slack just because those are inmates. They don't care, they'll make ‘em pay a fine. And they don't want to pay a fine.
>
> So the class four—class three and four inmates—these are inmates who are generally causing problems. Troublesome. Don't have a lot to look forward to. Most of ‘em have a lot of time and don't get good time or anything like that so they're just there. When they don't catch out, and they ain't caught out for three or four days, there's fights every day. Several of them. And I don't mean just fist fights. I seen a dude get his whole back filleted open with a box cutter. Cut his whole—you could see his ribs. For telling a dude Merry Christmas. They just go nuts. They get stir crazy or something and all that energy gets pent up and they gotta release it somehow and they release it on each other (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

While Harley’s experience was the clearest example of how work can be used by institutions as a blunt tool to tire people out who might otherwise be violent, this approach does not address the underlying reasons why men might get into fights in the closed space of a prison in the first place. In other words, what is being implied by this rationale? One implication is that men who are incarcerated are inherently violent. However, this perspective does nothing to address the structural reasons why people might be violent in the prison setting. As well, prisoners in Arkansas are not paid for

institutional work (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021; ACLU, 2022). But violence is a constitutive element of the prison and this is used to justify work programs that simply keep people distracted without addressing the causes of the violence and tension.

Living on the Dog Dorm at the Indiana Women's Prison

The Indiana Department of Corrections is notable for its service dog training program facilitated by the Indiana Canine Assistance Network (Indiana Department of Corrections, n.d.). At the Indiana Women's Prison, this program is popular because it provides access to dogs, but it is also an opportunity to give back to the community. Because of its popularity, it can be used as a disciplinary tool by the institution—something that can be withheld as punishment. I spoke with Kathryn Mason who was not a participant in the program but did live for a time on the "dog dorm." She described the program and how it was successful:

> They have a dorm that has the Indiana Canine Assistance Network. Like, I don't know, it's like where the dog trainers all stay. And so, to be on that dorm you can't have been in any trouble. It's a privilege. Cause there's air conditioning because of the dogs and I don't know, you get to be around dogs which is also like a giant privilege…you can't—you can't have any write ups or be in trouble or anything.
>
> In every cell there is like a trainer, who's the dog trainer, and then someone that's not because the dog trainers have to have a bottom bunk and so they have to have someone on the top bunk. So the person on the top bunk isn't part of the dog program. (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

As well, while she was there, the program did seem to work to promote "good behaviour:"

> What's really neat about it is like, some of the women that would leave—it's a great incentive for good behaviour. Because like…there were some of the women that would get in small trouble and stuff. I can't remember if anyone got like, kicked out of the program while I was there. So nothing major that I can remember happened. But, I mean, it's definitely an incentive to do the right thing. And then it also like, for a lot of the lifers, it gives them hope. It, I don't know, it gives them something to live for (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

The dog dorm highlights this second facet of the "work keeps prisoners out of trouble" rationale. Programs that are in high demand can be used as a carrot by the

administration: a reward for good behaviour, or something to be removed as punishment. The next chapter discusses the Indiana Canine Assistance Network in more detail, including reasons why programs like it are successful and what we can learn from them.

FCI Florence and the Powerhouse: Good Jobs for Mormon Inmates

Certain jobs can also be sought out because those jobs keep people out of the politics of the institution. The powerhouse at FCI Florence, a federal institution in Florence, Colorado, is popular with prisoners who want to stay out of trouble because the small and consistent staffing discourages conflict. Those who prefer not to be involved in the larger institutional politics are attracted to the powerhouse because of the lack of racial tension and grey/black market hustles. In Alyd's words:

> I was in the powerhouse. It was like—and powerhouse is a fancy way to say boiler room. So, I would be really just literally checking—writing down numbers, walking around once an hour, looking at everything. But you spend a lot of time sitting.
>
> If you could find a way to find a job you wanted you could swap jobs. And there would always be a lot of guys who—a lot of Mormon guys who somehow ended up working there—like one or two ended up working there—and they would tell their friends. And then they'd want to be like "oh how can I get in over there?" And they wouldn't mind working it 'cause they got to sit around, they got to talk, and they got to, you know, there was nothing really bad. The worst thing you had to do was clean and it kept you out of the whole loop. Cause if you're—if you're in the powerhouse with three guys it's way easier to get along with three guys you have to be with for eight hours than like in a kitchen with everybody. You know what I mean? It's just—you could be—or if you worked in, like, metal shop, there's racial tension there. But with three guys—and on the night shift it's two guys. It's hard to have a racial divide when there's just two guys and there's really no one else to talk to (Alyd, interview, October 28, 2021).

Elaborating on the racial tension:

> I mean, on the powerhouse, you'd have like—I remember our overnight shift there was a Black guy and the other guy was a white guy, Aryan, and they got along just fine because it was just the two of them. There's no—and when you're there you've got to sort it out for eight hours. So there's no sense in holding those grudges. That was the real thing (Alyd, interview, October 28, 2021).

In the American system, race appears to play a key role in stratifying the incarcerated population. Social groups are not only racially defined but associating with people of a different race can be dangerous. However, racial tension did not appear to be prominent in Arkansas and is also much less prevalent in Canadian institutions. The FCI Florence powerhouse is a great example of a job people can take to avoid potential violent situations. There are few options for black or grey market side hustles, there are never more than three incarcerated staff on at any time, and there are regular schedules, creating a strong incentive for keeping the peace.

3.2. Work Eases the Transition to Freedom

Work programs are defended as a rehabilitative element of incarceration because they can help ease a person's transition back into society. While certain elements of prison jobs may help with this transition, most work seems to primarily support the operations of the institution. As well, what would likely be most helpful in easing the post-release transition, as Cyrus, who spent time in both private and government-run American institutions said, would be re-entry programs:

> I feel like they should've had re-entry programs. Meaning—yeah, this is what—in this class we're going to show you how to get your driver's license, your birth certificate, your credit score—everything cleared up. Cause you're about to rejoin society (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

Nevertheless, there are examples of how work programs can be said to help ease the transition, and examples of how prison work programs entirely miss the point. In this section I discuss the presence of counter-productive programming and share some anecdotes about leaving prison.

Correctional staff in many institutions appear to have a somewhat lackadaisical approach to their role as teachers, bosses, and even role models. In the US federal system, for instance, Kevin, who spent time at FCI Marianna and FCI Yazzu, and also in the Maryland state system, outlined the negative lessons he noticed the people around him were learning:

> That was a real big insight for me when I was in prison. I'm just like what? You can't just show up to work when you want to! What the hell? Like, that's how some guys are with their jobs and their bosses let them for years like that. Just show up when they felt like it. Or, you know,

> just sit down and not help people like if you're working at a desk or something. Or charge people for every little thing. Like, it's not preparing them. These jobs aren't preparing them at all.
>
> They're—even if they were like somewhat employable going into prison, after five, six years of that they're not going to be employable. It's sad to say, as an ex-con, I don't know that I would want to hire an ex-con unless I thoroughly investigated what—you know, because your average ex-con has got a mentality, you know, like it's unfortunate because like it's the mentality that you need to have to survive in prison but unfortunately it doesn't fit the world (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Even the best jobs programming can be totally meaningless for people released from prison without support. When they are not granted day/full parole, federal prisoners in Canada are automatically released on their Statutory Release Date (SRD). Statutory release in Canada happens after two thirds of the sentence is served and is mandatory unless the Parole Board of Canada decides that for the "protection of society," a prisoner should be detained until their sentence ends at their warrant expiry date (WED) (Government of Canada, 2019). The province of British Columbia has a similar Earned Remission Date (ERD) and people can earn an early release equal to up to one third of their total sentence with good behaviour. I spoke with two men, one with experience in British Columbia provincial prisons, and one with 19 years of experience in federal institutions in Canada (including every maximum-security facility in the country). Their experience of release and immediate recidivism was similar. John, in Vancouver, was released at the height of COVID restrictions and almost immediately committed another crime explicitly to be sent back. He said this:

> So I go straight on the street. I ended up—I went to my probation officer downtown. I was at the—yeah—I was at the Main Street court place or whatever—I mean, not the court. It's next to the court, part of the same complex. So I go to probation and I figured they'd have—they'd send me to some halfway house but no, that's just a federal thing. If you're provincial they just kick you to the street. So they recommend—no they sent me to wait in line at the Union Gospel Mission and I went there and it was shit.
>
> It wasn't the bunks. I mean, they did have like twenty of us in the room with bunkbeds. The problem more was the showers were really shitty and I didn't want to shower there. I figured I'd rather go back to North Fraser because of all the COVID—because nothing was open. I couldn't like, go hang out at the mall. The malls were closed (John, interview, August 27, 2022).

While John's following offence was a deliberate action in order to be sent back to prison, Ryland, first incarcerated and released in the 1980s in Toronto had a different perspective. He had no interest in returning to prison, but he did have to find a way to make a living and having been jailed at sixteen, and a crown ward in Ontario from around the age of six, he left prison without any support in 1987:

> They didn't have support back in them days. You just got—you got released with your money and they said alright, good luck, we'll see you when you fuck up again.
>
> I got released, took a bus back to Toronto from Montreal, got there and stayed at a friend's place overnight. Went out the next day and thought, what the fuck am I gonna do now? So you know what? I went back to crime.
>
> Yeah, what it is is when you walk out the fucking door and all you've got is a pocket full of money and nobody waiting for you course you know what you're going back to, the dope. You're going back to what you know (Ryland, interview, June 21, 2022).

While neither of these experiences are rooted in work, they nonetheless show the significant lack of actual transitionary programming. Even people who are released on parole to halfway houses can struggle to be financially responsible with full-time jobs and their living expenses covered. In Vancouver:

> I have seen guys who have fulltime jobs at Belkin House, they pack their stuff up, they take it downstairs, and then the next morning I see them in the shelter line. Like, you've been working for six, seven months! Where the hell did the money go? You knew you were going to get released on this date! Why would you not save some money? Why didn't you put something away? Now look at you, you're waiting for a shelter bed (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

Work programs might be used as a justification to ease the transition back to freedom but in practice there is very little they can do when people are released without support. As well, even when people are transitioned through halfway houses, some still find themselves broke when they leave. In British Columbia, when there are programs, apathy and institutional barriers can emerge to limit access:

> But the thing is they don't—there's no push, like, they don't—I mean, you could easily have like, you know, a pamphlet or something that educates guys on what opportunities they have but no one's really pushing that. It seems like even functioning in the system like, they—there's a real—they really discourage trying to keep inmates informed. It seems like the entire system prefers ignorance. So like, they don't

> even tell you the basics of like, what you do. (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

This experience of having to fight to access programming was shared by other participants. In Ontario, one institution cut several full-time positions by amalgamating roles, essentially removing opportunities for guys to work. When Dalton asked the program manager what their rationale was, he got this response:

> The answer that we normally get back is that, you know, this is no different than on the street, and they're preparing us for the road, and there's, you know, you have to—it's a competitive market and you have to present yourself as best as you can. (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

And this is how he replied when I asked him if he thought that was true:

> I do. I do. Because I do—like when I had put that proposal forward that I did, I had prepared a resume for myself. Just as I would as if I was on the road. And I explained all of the different courses that I'd taken and programs that I'd taken since I'd been in and all the different qualifications that I had and my post-secondary education and the different institutional jobs that I'd had. Which mostly, all of the jobs that I'd had had been like committee, or like over in Warkworth I was the newcomer guide. So I did orientation, showed everybody around the institution and explained the ongoings of the jail and all that. So yeah. I do believe, because I know myself that you see the kind of guys that end up getting the rep jobs and all that are the guys that, you know, prove themselves and show themselves and have more assertive communication and more drive (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

In the interviews I conducted, the overwhelming experience I found was that people are not adequately prepared to smoothly transition back to regular society, and in some cases they learn lessons that are counter-productive and can harm them in real world job situations. Even if job programs are successful to teach the skills required to gain and hold employment on the outside, for people released on full parole, at their SRD without a residency condition, or who are held until their WED (and the equivalents in the United States), shelter, clothing, and access to food, water, and healthcare are all immediate concerns.

Without family and/or friends support, the formerly incarcerated can try to rely on overburdened non-profits for support or go back to doing exactly what put them in prison in the first place. As well, it is interesting to mention that criminal charges themselves can bar the most qualified candidates from work as soon as they are released. Kevin

had been working as a tutor in the American federal system while incarcerated, effectively working as the GED teacher, and found the job posted when he was released:

> I couldn't get a job teaching at the Maryland prison and I'm like, but why? I've already taught in a Maryland prison. I've been teaching for the last three years in a prison. What do you mean I can't teach here? Well because of your charge. What do you mean my charge? My charge was seventeen years ago. Like, what the hell does that have to do with who I am now? And so that's the policy (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Ironically, Kevin's experience teaching prisoners was worthless as soon as he no longer was one.

While there are some positive elements of prison work that help with the transition post-release, there is little evidence to suggest that this is a conscious effort from the criminal system and not just a justification after the fact. The next section expands on this idea by focusing on the actual skills learned through work that can help with that transition.

3.3. Work Teaches Skills for the Real World

Do programs in prisons teach people skills that they can apply at similar jobs once they are released? This is an important rationale to nuance, especially considering the often-conflicting interests behind prison jobs programs. This section breaks down the rationales into soft skills and hard skills. The first thing that should be mentioned, however, is access. Like one college-educated, "white-collar criminal," participant in the US said:

> They had discontinued UNICOR at this location. You know, the funding for it has gone away. And a lot of guys need that, you know, they need HVAC, or they need to be a driver, or something in that sort because I have a college degree and it was not always easy for me to find a job. So, and I have a white-collar case, so it's nonviolent. Depending on the type of background check it might show up it might not. But I still had trouble finding a job. So I can't even imagine what it's like if you're a former drug dealer and you want a job.
>
> I didn't have any idea what would happen post. I really didn't have any idea. Because I have a very unorthodox background anyways. I mean, just taking companies public the way I did, not a lot of people do that. I was interested in—if they had had HVAC, if they'd had some sort of

> program I would've learned blue collars skills just like anybody else. Being an electrician? Yep. Let's do it. They didn't have anything. There was nothing 'til I got to the last place and even that was very little. I offered to teach classes but there's just—there was just nothing to do (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

Unfortunately, this is echoed by people with experience in other American and Canadian institutions. Programs differ from facility to facility, and like Kevin, sometimes people can be moved from a facility with excellent programming to one without due to circumstance:

> So, the reason why it didn't work out was because while I was in Marianna there was a hurricane, Hurricane Michael. It developed quickly into a category 5 hurricane and they didn't have time to evacuate us, so they just kept us in the prison even though there was a mandatory evacuation order. And the problem was Hurricane Michael destroyed the prison while we were in it. I mean, it completely ripped the roofs off. The eye of the storm went over the prison. So it destroyed the prison. It's still not 100% and this is like—that was in 2018. They still haven't rebuilt it.
>
> So it was really bad. So I had to leave that prison and go to another prison which was basically like an emergency evacuation prison where they—it was a huge new prison in Mississippi that nobody wanted to go to, so they constantly were sending refugee populations there. So when the hurricane destroyed the Puerto Rico prison, Hurricane Maria, they put all the Puerto Rican guys there. So for us they put us all in Yazzu, well Yazzu Prison, because it constantly had these refugee populations going through it, they had pretty much no vocational program except for that culinary arts program (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Of course, once that first hurdle of access was cleared, there were participants who did learn hard skills that helped them transition back into regular society.

Hard Skills

From all the interviews, culinary programs appeared to be most commonly available. Some learned skills, but also made personal connections on work release programs that gave them somewhere to start on release. In Oregon, the forest firefighting program is robust and participants come out of it with certification that they can use once they are out if they want to continue in the forest fire prevention sector. As Michael, who spent a couple years in the Oregon prison system said:

> So they basically set you up with a job if you want it after you get out to go to the department of forestry or other programs around the state who fight fires. And if you tell them you were at the South Fork program it's like an immediate hire. It's a highly sought after program even

> though you were in prison they still—if you tell another company that you were there it's like a guaranteed hire cause they know that your training's good and all that stuff (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

This is not the case with other jobs in prison—especially institutional roles. As well, California, a state with a prison forest firefighting program that saves the state millions of dollars each year on labour costs, bars people with felony convictions from serving as firefighters on release (Sibilla, 2021).

Many participants had experience working in the kitchen, where the biggest job perk appears to be the potential to run a side hustle. Hustles are a vital way for incarcerated people to earn extra money when they are not getting support from family and friends on the outside. The kitchen appears to be the most common site for these hustles because it provides the most access to products that can be resold. Incarcerated individuals with outside support, for instance, can pay kitchen workers extra for things like eggs or nice produce—the good vegetables often do not make into the regular meals and can end up in salads made on the range for the wealthier prisoners.

Kitchen jobs are not necessarily connected to any culinary school programming and often do not have much educational or vocational value. Kevin, Cyrus, and Kathryn all took culinary programming while incarcerated because it was available, but none of the three spent time working in the kitchen. At the Indiana Women's Prison Kathryn discussed her motivation for taking the program:

> I knew that I wanted to go to law school. So I just wanted to do something that would help me get a job like, while I'm going to school. And so like, I don't know, I thought I'd be a waitress or something. Which is what I did. I started out being a waitress and then I was a bartender (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

In Kathryn's case, the culinary program did help her transition into work on the outside, giving her the certifications necessary to work in a restaurant in Indiana. Cyrus ended up taking a job in a café on release, and Kevin only took his institution's culinary program for something to do.

Now, there are institutions with strong vocational programming. Before Hurricane Michael ripped the roof off FCI Marianna (FL) in October 2018, it was an example of an institution that seemed to have robust vocational programming:

> There's a whole other piece of education too that will interest you that they do in the federal system. They have trades. So once you get your high school diploma—it's a prerequisite to—the prison I was at had welding, electrician, HVAC, uh I wanna say there was... oh, I think there was something like carpentry.
>
> So there's like trades, and actually those were really quite—I think that's a really good thing. You know, now during COVID it was severely curtailed, if not completely—oh and culinary, because I actually did the culinary. So they do have like trades, but you have to already have your high school diploma to do that. So there's a small percentage of guys who are taking the high school classes just because they want to take a trade. Not just because of the good time thing (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

It is important to mention that these were vocational programs, not specifically work programs. Programs focused on work that provide on-the-job training also have other benefits. In Arkansas, Harley spent a few months on a work release in the community at a metal shop. In his experience:

> Basically what I did to start out was just to sweep the floor, because I had no idea what I was doing. But I what I ended up doing was—they built massive iron bulkheads that they said they went on boats, but I don't know where the hell they went on a boat. They're just this big wall of iron. And I'd have to just flip it over and grind down the welds, just smooth the welds out. You couldn't have like, the raise where they welded it couldn't—they couldn't sell it like that. So I'd smooth it out with the grinder. A really heavy grinder and then, and yeah, they'd wash it down and paint it or whatever they did with it and then send it on. That's mostly what I did there (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

One of the benefits of work release was, as Harley puts it, "it was just normal people doing normal stuff" (Interview, October 28, 2021). In other words, no manipulation, no violence, and no stigma. When he was released Harley went back to the shop, which was in his hometown, and ended up working there for about a year before getting a Pell Grant, going to the local community college, and learning how to fix computers. While learning hard skills was not a key part of his work release, the connections he made at the shop did help him establish himself once he left the prison and allowed him the stability to pursue college courses.

Anthony spent time in state prisons in California and echoed a similar sentiment to what has already been said—lots of programming but not enough access:

> There's computer lit—which is pretty much your basic introduction to computers. And they have a CRT class, which is computer related technologies, which is probably the next class up from the computer lit. Teaches you word, excel, powerpoint, and all that good stuff.
>
> And then as far as trades, they have vocational electrical, small engines, masonry, carpentry—Jesus, I mean, anything and everything. Any type of thing they have. Printing. Printing is probably not too much popular anymore since everything's going digital, but yeah, they have HVAC, which is air conditioning and heating, masonry, carpentry, small engines, plumbing—they build small houses here for I guess the homeless outside. They've got those tiny homes, stuff that they're building out there for the homeless (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

Anthony's experience did show that these programs can be successful. Although he struggled to access programming during his most recent sentence, he shared this story about leaving prison after he finished his first bit in the 1990s:

> The last job that I had while I was on the street I obtained through a vocation class in prison. I took a printing class—even though the class itself was a trade on printing, I worked at a printing company doing—at first doing what I was taught in the vocation, and eventually went up to—I was a project manager for a printing company. But I've always done some type of—in prison I've always done some type of clerical job.
>
> I've always been a clerk for—pretty much a secretary for whatever. But that's not all I was doing. This last time for work out there I was working at a printing company that I obtained through the certificates that I got in prison. But at the time that I was arrested I wasn't working in the same area. I had went from working in the camera department and all that stuff to an office, I ended up being a project manager for the company (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

All in all, there is evidence to suggest that jobs programs, work release, and vocational training can increase the employability of people who have experienced incarceration, helping them find work on release and successfully transition back to regular life. This is effective through strong vocational programming teaching relevant and transferrable skills and networking—work release programs that give people the opportunity to demonstrate their work ethic and build connections that can help them find employment. On paper this is positive, but there are huge accessibility issues. In Canada, programming has been dramatically scaled back since the tough-on-crime turn in 2011. Long waitlists in Canada and the United States also limit access to programming. But there is much more to employment that the hard skills necessary to do a job.

Soft Skills: You Have to Meet Them Where They're At

> You have to meet them where they're at. And you don't even know if these guys have a fifth-grade education (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

Some of the most interesting stories from prisons across North America emerged when I asked about soft skills. For clarity, the examples I gave of soft skills during interviews included things like people skills, interpersonal communication, leadership, and critical thinking. Cyrus told me this story:

> One day I was—it was after chow, and a Mexican guy with kinda bad teeth came up to me and he wanted to talk to me but quietly. Sometimes when someone calls you over quietly that means they wanna take you in a cell and fight you. Those are the dangerous people, when guys go like this, or when someone says,
>
> "Hey man."
>
> "Oh yeah what's up?"
>
> He wanted me to teach him how to read. And so I asked my family, they sent me some hooked on phonics books 'cause I didn't—I know how to read but I don't know how to teach someone to read. But we just started at c-ah-t. Cat. So I would love to teach people soft skills. People skills (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

Everyone I spoke to agreed that soft skills are an area that needs to be addressed. From Kevin's experience in the federal system in the United States:

> One of the things I did do is I worked with something we called the mock job fair. And so what it is, is 100% about teaching soft skills and we do it every year and some of the education staff, they organize it, and I volunteered for it, and what it is is, they bring in employers from the community and they had like, a guy from the fire department, they had somebody from a florist, they had a truck driving company—so they bring in some employers to you know, volunteer their time. They come in to interview the inmates, and then the inmates, the ones that wanna participate. The inmates that want to do it, have to dress up, you know, we tell them how you should dress, how you should look, and then they have to fill out a fake application and then they have to go and interview with that person. And it's like a real job.
>
> Technically, we only let people do it that are like 6 months or less getting out, but technically it's not a real job interview, because they can't offer you a job while you're still in prison. But honestly, a lot of them ended up getting jobs out of it once they got out because they impressed the job interviewer so much, and they had a connection. But as you can imagine it's more about teaching them soft skills.

> You would see how bad their soft skills were. They, you know, they slouched back in the chair during the interview and just acted like they were bored and they didn't want to be there.
>
> When they did the job fair you could see the guys didn't have a lot of really basic soft skills like how to sit correctly in a chair, how to greet someone.
>
> You know, the little unspoken cues as to when you should elaborate on a question or when you should shut up, or when the meeting is actually over. Like no one—they just never had been in these situations at all. Some of them had never actually had a job. So it was both like to give them some exposure to those kind of things but also a way to diagnose what the problems were. Because of security reasons they had them asking questions across glass walls, so the staff could walk up and down and see what was going on in there. And then the person that gave the interview would do a debrief with the person where they would stop being that job interview and tell them, you know, when I asked you this you did this, and that wasn't good. You know they did a meta thing at the end.
>
> I think it was a really valuable thing in the end. And again, you were really right to key in on the soft skills, 'cause that was the biggest problem. That was the biggest problem. It wasn't their record or anything like that it was just, they don't know how to interact, you know. And I feel like, you know, we're generally talking about guys who come from a certain socioeconomic background where the, you know, the culture of power they never had access to that and they don't really know the codes you have to switch into. (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

The experience of learning soft skills was different across the study. For instance, contrary to a story told earlier in this chapter about the counter-productive lessons guys can learn in some institutions, Harley described the things that you learn "no matter what" when you are a prisoner of the Arkansas Department of Corrections:

> If nothing else, then learning to be on time, like getting used to getting up early and going to work. And that type of stuff. You get those no matter what. You know. Then, and even if they're not trying to teach you skills or lessons or anything you're going to inevitably learn something beneficial no matter what you're doing. Even if it is just sitting in the barracks, you're gonna learn something cause you're around so many different people and seeing so many different points of view. I don't want to make it sound like it's like they're just trying to dog everybody and it's just like slave-driving and like just, just like working everybody to death. That's not what they do. But they do keep people busy (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

In Oregon, Michael described working on the fire line as a forest firefighter and learning leadership skills:

> Someone was there to keep an eye on us but I was in charge of the crew to where I was making decisions on where to cut the fire line or I'd have to go up and try to get an idea to try to know where the fire was going. To watch the weather, keep the crew informed on that, that would definitely be like the leadership skill and all that stuff (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

Kathryn mentioned life skills, arguing that, "the problem isn't what they're doing in there, it's what they're not doing when you get out:"

> But for like, women in general, I mean like, I don't know, all the education stuff is great and so important, but if these women don't have the tools to stay out of jail and prison themselves then it's irrelevant.
>
> I used to look at the recent bookings all the time after I got out, to see like if people I knew were back in jail. And I mean, even when I looked at them after seeing something on the news recently. There's almost always someone I met who's still in there.
>
> And so like, they need like… life skills. And like, I don't know, a lot of like coping skills. And just, I don't know, cause really like, the problem isn't what they're doing in there, it's what they're not doing when you get out (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

In the state system in California, Anthony argued that not much of anything is being taught, and communication skills are a huge area that could be improved:

> So, here, I've noticed there's a lot of—there's a lot of guys that don't have people skills. They can't speak, they get flustered, they, you know, if a woman comes up and talks to them they have, you know, they have no concept of talking to a lady other than whistling or whatever the hell they used to do out there. But, you know, I have a celly, I have a guy that I live with and he has a hard time talking to people and, you know, I've talked to him about as far as what he needs to do, or how he needs to go about it. He's just not sure of himself. So there's a lot of people that don't have the communication skills that they need. I mean, they can communicate in prison, because that's all they've known, but as far as them to get out, you know, like I said, the rehabilitation part here, on the state's behalf, isn't much at all man. They—you're pretty much just left to do it on your own. So they don't—there's not much teaching going on here (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

For a lot of people who end up incarcerated, the socialization gaps are much deeper than just a lack of soft skills necessary for working with other people. From Matthew's experience in federal Canadian prisons:

> I do think they should teach that. Basic life skills. I do believe they should teach that. Fortunately for me I have a best friend, support person, whatever you want to call her, that doesn't let me go do stupid

> things right? I've never had a savings account, I've never had a mutual fund, I've never had RESP, I have all of that right now, right? And that's not to brag, that's just saying that if I can do it anyone else in the place can do it, right?
>
> I wasn't making $40-50 an hour. I had a $20 an hour job. But I was able to put away quite a bit of money. And even with this part time job, I still try to be financially responsible. I don't try—I don't throw money, and that's just something I learned myself. I had no one teaching me that. Except for my friend. And in the beginning I was given a credit card from Hudson Bay. In the past I would've blown that the first day. I still have that credit card now. And I pay it off every month. I just think it's something that they should teach you. And it's very unfortunate that I had to learn it at the age of almost 50. Right? Yeah.
>
> I definitely think that is something they should—all basic life skills. Every program should teach that (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

When I asked what should be done this is how he replied:

> Take drugs out of the system. First and foremost. The biggest thing. Teach people how to live. Basic life skills. When I was released I didn't know how to cook for myself. I didn't know how to open a bank account. A savings account. All that kind of stuff. I just kind of winged it and luckily I have friends in my corner that I can talk to.
>
> Take drugs out of the system, basic life skills. I mean the basic. Cause a lot of guys don't have that. Unfortunately a lot of guys grew up in families that are either addicted, or foster homes, or foster homes that aren't really foster homes, they're just there for money, right? These guys don't really have a chance. Unless they can learn these basic fundamental skills. How do you expect a person to succeed if they don't know how to succeed (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022)?

Of course, the next big hurdle is getting people to buy into programming. Alyd outlined his experience with drug programming and learning soft skills in the American federal system that help him today as a project manager in tech:

> I was always kind of meticulous about my time, like what I'm gonna do. Like what am I gonna do next week? But I was never meticulous about what am I going to do with my day? And I think—I just think those kind of skills that I developed in there are the same things I use now. I think they actually help me with my job as a project manager. Like, I have a list of everything I'm going to do today. And I'm going to hit every one of my items. And I know that if each item is a really complex task then I can break it down to 20 subtasks. And I picked a lot of that up in prison.
>
> Like, how am I going to fill my entire day? Like, from when I wake up to doing my job, to after work I'm going to go to the chapel and I'm going to hang out with these guys and we're going to watch movies for

> these two hours, and I'm gonna go to bed here. So like, just managing your day. And I think a lot of that is just coping mechanisms. I don't think it's anything you learn. I think it's just something that you get stuck with, or you just kind of develop. Because, you know, of your need to comprehend what's going on (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) seems to be the foundational psychology behind a lot of the non-work-related programming in North American prisons, especially the main programming stream in Canada. According to Dalton:

> I don't know your familiarization with CBT, but it's more or less just your actions are influenced by your feelings and your feelings are influenced by your thoughts, you know, so it's trying to teach you to rethink and rephrase different situations to change the outcome of your actions (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

Public Safety Canada (2022) has a similar description of CBT:

> Cognitive-behavioural therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that helps people to understand that thoughts influence behaviour. As the words suggest, cognitive-behavioural interventions focus on the way people think (i.e., “cognitive”) and behave (i.e., “behavioural”), and are based on the premise that what we think will affect how we behave (para. 3).

As well, the American federal system also has substance use programming based on the principles of CBT:

> There's a lot of corny aspects to it because it's a cognitive behavioural therapy type of program. It's not like a 12-step program. It's more of like, we'll change the way you're thinking. What are the seven thinking errors?
>
> Like, it gets more into that, so it is kind of corny like that. But at the same time it drives a lot of the accountability. So like, these guys who're in the drug program, they're keeping each other accountable for doing little things like, are you gonna walk on the sidewalk or are you gonna walk through the rocks? Like, these are all things that like, no one's reinforced—like anybody who's—well most people who've been to prison—I was kind of old, like I knew better but I was doing it for profitary reasons—a lot of these guys are like circumstances or whatever. But like, they never had that lesson like, hey this is why you wouldn't walk through the grass. This is why you would use the sidewalk. Or this is why you'd walk down the block to go to the crosswalk, you wouldn't just cross in the middle of the intersection.
>
> And like, those are just like some core skills, or core thinkings that you just do not—you don't get in American life anymore. I don't think. Just cause you see a lot of young guys just don't have it. People, you know, just—it’s just really beneficial, that drugs program. I think it should be

> more inclusive to other people. I think it would help a lot of people out. Even older people I think could still get something from it (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

Back in Canada, Matthew spoke about the programming he completed while doing federal time in British Columbia:

> I got very lucky and I got into a program within five months. I don't know how, but I got in right away. I did everything I could to make sure I learned every program, every step to come to a better place. And I did that. I excelled in the program. I did very well. Which is another first. And I use all of those tools today. If I get in a jam, I call someone. I use my comeback statements. I say stop. I never though stop would work. But it seems to work for me, right? Even if I have to say stop four, five, six times. It works for me. Because now I'm not reacting right away to whatever might tempt me. I'm thinking about it. Okay, wait a minute, is this worth it? If I do this, what's going to happen? If I do this and I go back to jail? Okay. Let's go back to is this worth it? And yeah. I attribute my success to all that (Matthew, interview, July 15, 2022).

CBT programming can be really beneficial for teaching the kinds of soft skills mentioned in this section. However, the biggest hurdle with any prison programming is getting buy-in from the participants. Without establishing a foundation of trust, there is little encouraging people who are incarcerated to believe that CBT is an effective toolbox they can use. Back to Dalton:

> So, I got a letter from somebody years ago and it was a doctor and actually I wish I'd known who it was because I'd like to reach out to the guy. And it was somebody who was writing guys in jail about CBT and he wrote me this letter saying, you know, what if I told you that you never have to suffer anxiety or anger or sadness ever again and that you had complete mastery over your own emotions and control and all this and that and whatever? And I am willing to work with you if you'll allow me to send you workbooks that you send back to me and this and that and I can help you achieve all this and that and I was like, this guy's a fucking weirdo what angle has he got? And I didn't even respond.
>
> But after I read a book about CBT and started to learn about it now I realize what he was saying, right? But you have to believe in it and buy into it. And I would say two of us, me and a buddy that I was in the program with, were just like wow, you know what, fuck. Why couldn't somebody have told me this when I was younger? And that's what I tell people, like why don't they teach this fucking shit in school? Like why are they teaching geography? Fuck geography! Like if you could stop somebody from doing something horrific or teach somebody how to handle themselves or control themselves or deal with, you know, emotions without turning to negative fucking coping mechanisms you'd be able to save a lot of fucking human costs rights?

> But you have to—you have to buy into it. Like, that's the problem, you know. And I would say two of us out of my program did (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

All told, while hard skills like those taught in vocational programs are vital in that they can give people the skills they need to get good, well-paying jobs on release (often in high-demand sectors that one participant described as “felon-friendly”), a focus on hard skills neglects the huge gaps in soft skills that many people take for granted every day. It is one thing to be able to frame or wire a house, but talking to people, staying in control of one’s emotions when encountering setbacks, and resolving disagreements in a healthy way are so fundamental to everyday life and appear to be major gaps for the kinds of people we imprison. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is popular across North American prisons, and can be successful at teaching soft skills, but programs struggle to get buy-in from the participants.

3.4. Prisoners Should Pay Their Way

The final rationale to address is the belief that prisoners should pay the costs of their own imprisonment. Simply put, people who are incarcerated did something bad, deserve to be punished, and the taxpayer should not be the one to foot the bill. When then-Canadian Public Safety Minister Vic Toews brought in sweeping changes to the Correctional Service of Canada in 2011 he said, “all of these measures build on our record of holding criminals to account and putting the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens first” (Mills, 2012, para. 8). As well, in their “you use it – you pay for it” (Mills, 2012, para. 16) plan for phone use, the federal government offloaded $1.7 million dollars per year in telephone-related costs onto those incarcerated and their families. A punitive, tough-on-crime approach to the costs of incarceration is evident in Canada as well as in the United States. In this section, I break down the rationale, discussing community projects, institutional work, the Canadian experience post-2011, and the halfway house.

Community Projects

When the California Department of Corrections (and Rehabilitation) is looking to site a new prison one of points they use to sell it to the community is access to free, low-security prisoner labour for community projects (Gilmore, 2007). Although Gilmore highlights the problems with this approach to prison labour, there are examples of ways

in which putting incarcerated people in the community can be a crucial element of rehabilitation and the transition back to regular life. For instance, firefighting programs have significant benefits to the self-esteem and self-confidence of the incarcerated firefighters. At FCI El Reno in Oklahoma, the program was diverse (bucking the trend of a lot of American prisons that self-segregate based on race), and for Chad Emerson it provided a sense of community:

> Being a part of the fire department and going and fighting fires and learning that new skill and helping the community helped give some of my suffering meaning and it was, you know, obviously there's a fraternity there amongst the people that I fought fires with and with the local firemen that we fought with. It was a profoundly positive experience. And it's the only male fire department in the US federal system.
>
> My first time ever going over to the local—the El Reno fire department, you know where the local guys are—I was very nervous and I thought for sure that they're gonna think like man, who are these guys, you know, and here they are trying to do this, do that, like I thought they were gonna think it was just some fluff thing. They couldn't have been nicer or more supportive and then over the years I got to know several of them, you know, over longer periods of time and, you know, some real friendships and so on and it was great. They were—they were extremely supportive. They were big fans of our department. Most of our guys worked really hard. We all worked out, we were all very physically fit. We studied hard. I actually taught the firefighter 1 course for four years there while I was there. And, you know, we learned it inside and out so that we could be the best that we could be for the department that we're working with (Chad Emerson, interview, October 28, 2021).

In Oregon the incarcerated firefighters take it just as seriously:

> Our crew consisted of one forester and he wasn't a, like a correction officer, he actually worked for the department of forestry, and we had ten guys on our crew and we would go out—they would train you to run like a chainsaw if you're interested in that. Or, if you just wanna use regular hand tools. And when you were out on the fire there—you didn't have the feeling that you were an inmate. Just the way that they involved you in everything too. You would go down to the meetings every day. You would go eat with everybody else, you would shower with everybody else. When you're out on the crew you had like a walkie-talkie, you could go and talk to the other firefighters to get the information that was needed and just the whole atmosphere was—it was all positive and then coming back every day there would be part of the community out there holding signs saying thank you (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

Forest firefighting programs across the United States take a lot of flak for paying less than minimum wage, dangerous work conditions, and the significant barriers to a career post-release (Lowe, 2021; Sibilla, 2021). However, they also seem to provide the most profound experiences to the people who participate in them. They provide a sense of purpose, a sense of responsibility, and an opportunity to give back to the community. Similarly, in Indiana, prisoners train support animals for the Indiana Canine Assistance Network. Kathryn lived on the "dog dorm" but did not participate in the program herself. She shared her experience watching her bunkmate in the program, and then another, more "famous" prisoner at the same facility:

> I don't think there's like a graduation for the inmates, but there's a graduation for the dogs…It's one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Cause like, the people that the dogs are going to talk about like, I don't know, how much it's gonna help them and how it's gonna change their life (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

Another person incarcerated with her had come from an abusive household and as a teenager had been convicted of a heinous crime. She had spent decades in prison at this point and was a participant in the support-dog training program:

> But she, with the dog program, one of the dogs went to her victim's mom. And so, like, I got to see that and it was just something else. Cause like, I mean, she—by the time I met her—she was like 13 when she committed her crime and like when I met her she was like in her late 30s, maybe early 40s, so like, she's like been in prison like for basically her whole life. Far longer than she's been out. And so, I don't know, it was really, just neat to see that her victim's mom was able to, I don't know, like forgive her. But also, like, she was helping her by training a dog. I don't know, it's just. It's really neat (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

Stories like these hint at a different paradigm for criminal justice, a restorative approach that prioritizes healing before punishment. People who are incarcerated are given the opportunity to make amends, sometimes even directly to the people that their actions harmed—this is explored further in the next chapter.

Community-focused job programs do not need to be victim-focused or as intense as fighting forest fires to be successful. But not all programs are necessarily successful. Programs like one at FCI Florence simply take guys out of the camp for clean-up projects, reminiscent of Gilmore's (2007) critique in *Golden Gulags*. From Alyd's experience:

> The closest we got to the community would be, there would be our maintenance crews had like service projects, where they would go out there, because like in that part of Colorado, like right outside of Florence near—in that area there's like, there's a couple state prisons. There's like a county. There's like, that whole town is dedicated—that whole area is dedicated to like, prisons and stuff like that. There's like—ours is like the crown jewel, but there's all kinds of stuff. So they'd always be like, hey we want to go to this county jail and we want to paint a mural.
>
> So they would do that, or there would be those kind of community projects, but never anything manufacturing or digging ditches or picking up stuff. It was always just like artistic or it would be maintenance. Like, hey we're gonna go out into Cannon City and we're going to clean up the little part that was down there. They had people who were camping in the park and then they threw them all out of the park, I think it was homeless people, and then they wanted to clean that park. But no one in the city wanted to pay to clean the park up. So then it was like, alright well of all these prisons around here who's going to do this. And I think that's—we ended up—there were people in our camp who—but that was more like community sign up project. Who wants to go out there and paint murals and clean up trash and stuff like that (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

In Ontario, Warkworth had a shop that would take old municipal buses, refurbish them, and sell them back to the cities and towns around Ontario. Shops like this one can provide meaningful work, access to certification, and money to spend on canteen. Canteens—more often referred to as commissaries in American institutions—are like little convenience stores within prisons in Canada and the United States where prisoners can purchase food, hygiene products, and often clothing. This is different across North America, but generally, as prisoners are not allowed to have actual currency, they have money put on their canteen account in two ways—they work for it, or friends and family on the outside add money to it. Having a job can allow prisoners to not only pay for their own canteen, but even send money to family. Dalton described the shops at Warkworth and what they meant to him:

> There were guys who got their welding tickets in Warkworth, there were guys who got their painting certification, there were guys who got their, like, red seal carpentry ticket, like, there were actually guys who were earning trades.
>
> And so they actually were bringing in old municipality buses into Warkworth and then completely refurbishing them and then selling them back to municipalities as like, used-new. But from top to bottom they had this huge automotive shop, that had its own paint booth that was huge. The carpentry shop was huge, they had two CNC machines, a huge panel saw, all kinds of everything else you could ever think of. The

> metal shop had all the presses and everything you could ever imagine. All the steal beds for all the prisons were manufactured in CORCAN.
>
> And yeah, you could actually not only learn a trade, but like I said, I didn't have to rely on my family and friends to get any money to myself. I was fully self-sufficient. I was able to pay for my own canteen, pay for my phone calls. I was actually paying for the PFVs that are tagged in with my family members' lifestyles. Sending money home to my family—that was a big one too. A lot of people, they worked in CORCAN because, you know, they have a wife and children at home they wanted to send money to (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

It can do a whole world of good when people in prison are given the opportunity to actually give back to the community. Training support dogs, refurbishing municipal buses, and defending communities at risk from wildfires can have profound impacts on participants in these programs. They can teach real skills, but they also give people an opportunity to give back. As well, the income can help the workers support themselves while incarcerated, support families on the outside, and make restitution payments when necessary.

Institutional Work

The vast majority of jobs in prisons in Canada and the United States are institutional jobs. In other words, prisoners are doing jobs that support the operations of the prison itself. These jobs vary from doing laundry, cooking meals, cleaning and general maintenance, to administrative roles, like "clerking" for prison staff. While these positions might not directly fit the rationale on an individual level, this labour saves institutions millions of dollars every year on labour costs. In 2004, people held in American prisons provided services estimated at $9 billion USD (Bair, 2004, p. 194). As well, in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas, the majority of prisoners are not paid at all for the work that they do, and for the rest, they are paid minuscule wages—hourly wages that often add up to less than a dollar per day (ACLU, 2022, pp. 57-58). John describes his experience in the provincial system in British Columbia:

> I mean, there's lots of jobs. I can tell you about the jobs because I was offered—when I went to FRCC I was offered work because they like guys who are kind of stable. So they try to induce you to work. The jobs, like, if you're not on a work unit—well there's a couple different types of work units. Like the kitchen unit obviously just does kitchen stuff. But they have this one unit which I was actually on for a bit which is like, grounds

> maintenance. The maintenance unit. And that's janitorial work. And they have guys that work in the laundry who just fold laundry. That's the most basic work. Then they have guys who like, and there's a couple guys, and these are the guys with the most responsibility. They're kinda the most stable, kinda reliable inmates, and they kinda wander around and clean the facilities. And obviously in order to get that you have to have a certain reputation with the guards that you're a stable guy. Doesn't mean you're a bad guy. You can be a good inmate and be good status with the other inmates and still have a job like that, but it's just- only certain guys are allowed to do that (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

All the jobs offered at Fraser Regional Correctional Centre support the prison operations in one way or another. John's experience also hints at the "work keeps people out of trouble" rationale. Cleaning is a common job for guys while they are incarcerated, with several participants mentioning time spent as range or unit cleaners. John added:

> On the units you have a couple guys who do the inmates—or who do the unit cleaning. That's actually guys—every unit has that. You don't have to be on a work unit to work. You can clean the unit. But they're kind of, like, coveted positions. Like, and they're kind of like decided by the inmates themselves. So you'd have to ask permission to clean the unit from the inmate hierarchy. I mean, technically you just go to the guards for that role, but obviously if they don't want you there you're not gonna work a unit cleaning cause you kind of have to be trusted by the other inmates to go around the unit to clean stuff.
>
> So that's a good job, but again, you're only getting paid like a dollar an hour or something. I mean, they kind of kick it up I think, to like a dollar fifty (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

Some jobs in the prison, like cleaning up after a violent incident, are also offloaded onto the prison population. Also from John:

> There's bio cleaning, which is like, feces and blood. Some guys are on that and they get like an extra five bucks a week. And if there's ever an incident, like, basically, you know, when some guy gets attacked in his cell there's usually a lot of blood so they'll send a couple guys in hazmat suits to clean that up (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

PPE (personal protective equipment) for hazardous jobs in prison can be a luxury. Jones (2022) shares a similar experience of hazardous cleaning in Dartmouth, NS:

> When there's protests in seg, people flood the range by blocking up their toilets. It gets so bad at Burnside the nurses won't come on the range to give out medication. Then they pay a couple of guys with chocolate bars to clean it up, no hazard suits or anything, just gloves (p. 20).

In prisons across North America, cleaning, maintenance, and even dangerous work is offloaded onto the people who are incarcerated within them.

Prisons also seem to make full use of the skills that people arrive with when assigning jobs. At FCI Florence, the federal prison in Colorado, people who were already experienced tradesmen at the minimum-security camp would be hired for around $0.25/hour to do maintenance around the facility and the neighbouring medium security institution:

> So like, if there's something backed up in one of the other complexes, they'd give 'em a little golf cart and they'd go over there. They were literally like maintenance crews, you know, like electrical or plumbing maintenance crews. They give 'em a little golf cart, all their tools, they keep their workshop over by the outside of the camp. There would be all the—where the processing, where they brought in all the food, and then there would be the powerhouse where we worked the boiler rooms.
>
> And then there was the metal shop, the wood shop, plumbing and electrical, all was—HVAC—were all the in the back. So there would be all these little warehouses in the back of our camp. And these guys just got out every day and, you know, go to the different facilities. So if the penitentiary needed new metal work they'd go do it. Or if they needed to go paint a wall, or they needed to change up the lights they'd go out there and they get all the parts they'd need. They had a lot of autonomy to go anywhere on the complex they needed to go (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

In North America prisoners handle the cleaning, cooking, laundry, and maintenance in many institutions. They also work a lot of administrative jobs. For instance, clerking can be popular with prisoners because it puts them behind a desk. For Harley in Arkansas:

> The account room, that was my first clerk job. The job was to file cut slips they called 'em. When, like, an inmate would get moved from one barracks to another barracks or even just from one bed to another bed, before they could move 'em they had to have a cut slip wrote up. So there was a paper trail showing that they went from one bed or barracks to another. And that's what I did. I wrote the cut slips and filed something to do with the times and dates. I don't really remember what that was very well but that was 20 years ago. We had a typewriter and a really old computer running windows 98. No, it was 95 at first. Yeah, that's—it was really nothing. I sat there a lot and typed a lot (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

Harley explained that while it was a good job to have while inside, it was not the kind of job that existed outside of the prison walls. Good jobs like clerk positions are often used

as rewards—as a sort of carrot in the prison management toolbox. They can also be used as a sort of test and people who have experience in a “position of trust” can highlight that when applying for parole. In California, Anthony had much more recent experience as a counsellor’s clerk:

> Well, usually on a non-covid type program, I would be in charge of assessing new arrivals, people that are coming in from different prisons or institutions that, once they get here, they get placed on orientation. I myself would go up to that inmate and, you know, find out his information, find out where he came from, find out what his last two [institutions] are. That way I could assign him to his correct counsellor. But I get all his information, I would ask what it is that he needs or is looking for as far as program-wise. Try to give him any information as to what goes on in the prison, where the various groups are.
>
> I'm pretty much—I’m just a liaison between the staff and him I guess. The inmate. As far as just basic information, nothing personal, nothing private. Nothing that has anything to do with his caseload or anything like that (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

Anthony’s experience highlights the extent to which the administration work that sustains the prison is offloaded onto the incarcerated population. In Canada, federal prisons all have Inmate Committees—a small political body that represents the broader prison population. Dalton had spent time on the Inmate Committee at Bath in Ontario. These committees manage the commissary and take their share of the profits into what’s called an “Inmate Welfare Fund” which the committee members use for the benefit of the prisoners. Dalton oversaw a healthy IWF, which brought along its own issues, as the institution would rely on the Inmate Committee to purchase items for the prison that, absent a healthy IWF, the institution would be providing. While institutions like Bath might fight with the committee on who pays for what for the prisoners, when issues arise, the administration keeps the committee in the loop—something that does not appear to be the case in most prisons. Dalton described how it works:

> Every year they will put out things saying that they're going to have elections. Whoever's interested submit their names. Now obviously there's some criteria in order to be eligible to be an inmate committee member. So you can't have any STG, which is security threat group. So anybody who's a member of any kind of registered gang—if they're a gang member they're automatically excluded—which I extremely disagree with, but they say that it's because people in gangs and stuff like that can have undue influence on populations and stuff like that. So they don't want, you know, you have to be correctional plan compliant, charge free for a certain period of time. There's a whole commissioner's directive.

> It's commissioner's directive 083. Inmate Committees. And it explains about the elections and the positions and the election process. So yeah, so they'll put that out so interested parties get vetted and whoever's eligible then they'll have a ballot and then they'll do any election. And the election is—there's scrutineers. There'll be an inmate scrutineer and a staff member. And in the institution they'll do it generally over a lockdown period like shortly after a count period where everybody's in their cell so they can make sure that everybody gets an opportunity to vote. And it's all done confidentially, you know. You fold your thing up and you stick it in the box yourself and the counts are all tallied in front by an inmate and staff member and it's generally a one-year term and normally you're allowed to have two consecutive terms but then again it's up to the warden's discretion for somebody to have more than two. And once you're elected there's the committee chairperson, and then there's a vice chair and then there's the secretary treasurer. And the secretary treasurer normally is responsible for all the paperwork, all the finances, if there's notices to prep the notices and stuff like that. To write up the agendas for the meetings that we have. We meet regularly with administration, like depending on who the administration is, so like, our—the AWI, who's like the head of all programming and stuff, and the programs manager, the committee, and then my direct supervisor who's a social programs officer. We all meet at least every two months. And we prepare an agenda ahead of time and give it to them, right. And then we have a meeting just to resolve different issues that we have throughout the institution and then the canteen, so all canteens in Canada are inmate owned and operated (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

Institutional work is a vital element of modern prison operations. Bodies like Canada's Inmate Committees can try to protect their constituents' best interests, but they also offload some of the management of the prison back onto the prison population. Clerking roles can offload administrative duties onto the prisoners themselves and cooking and cleaning are also often handled by those who are incarcerated. Overall, Canadian and American prisons save millions of dollars each year paying prisoners insultingly low sums to ensure the smooth operation of their own imprisonment (ACLU, 2022; Mills, 2012).

Vic Toews' "Five Point Fuck You Plan" for Canadian Inmates

When I asked Matthew what men learn when incarcerated in Canadian federal prisons, he brought up the punitive turn in Canadian corrections in 2011:

> They're learning how to commit crime better. They're learning from the guy that's robbed 10 banks. He's telling them, don't do this, do this, I did this and this is how I got away—well if I do this it's going to be stuck up there for a bit right? Just in case I need to use that. And learn how

> to become a better criminal. I'm definitely not learning anything positive.
>
> Harper messed it—again, messed it up. There used to be community colleges that would offer programming. There used to be CORCAN…where they learn trades. Steel, steel something or other. Construction. Forklift. All these other trades that people can use when they get out.
>
> And those are very beneficial trades, right? If you have a—I'm just going to use forklift for example—well you could probably get a job at any grocery store, any warehouse, any wherever starting at $24 an hour. That's better than minimum wage. And if you're in a halfway house, you can put away quite a bit of money (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

In 2012 the Canadian government passed bill C-10, The *Safe Streets and Communities Act* (2011). This heralded a punitive turn in Canadian criminal justice (Holden, 2018; Newell, 2013). Like Matthew, Dalton experienced the punitive turn firsthand and described it:

> This was basically part of like a five point fuck you plan from Vic Toews and Stephen Harper. So it was standardized purchasing, the elimination of CORCAN pay, the closing of the farms, the room and board deductions, and you use it you pay for it, Vic Toews said, phones (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

The *Safe Streets and Communities Act* changed quite a bit for Canadian prisons. Established in 1981, the maximum amount an incarcerated worker could earn was set at 15% of the federal minimum wage, or $6.90 per day (Chan, Chuen, & McLeod, 2017, para. 22). This factored in room and board deductions at the time, but Bill C-10 allowed for a new 22% deduction for room and board, and an 8% deduction for phone use (you use it—you pay for it), ironically charged to all workers, regardless of actual use (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022; Mills, 2017).

The elimination of CORCAN incentive pay decimated the program. This incentive, it turns out, was a huge driver for participation and once it was removed, people left in droves. Pay was one reason for the exodus, but the lack of respect was also a factor. Dalton outlined his experience, incarcerated in Ontario at the time:

> Okay, so, prior to the elimination, what you had was a lot of people down in CORCAN who took pride in their work. So, because of the fact that a lot of people left after the elimination of incentive pay, I've had discussions with some of the shop bosses because I'd actually left and because they—before it was a privilege to work in CORCAN and they

> would only take a certain select group of people. You know, people that they could trust to be around tools and equipment. People who could operate machinery—'cause I was running a CNC machine and I was actually writing programs for the CNC machine and, you know, there was this huge shop and three shop bosses who spent most of the time in their offices. In their air-conditioned offices on the computer. And to tell you the truth, everything was manufactured, built by inmates. The machinery was run by inmates. Panel saws, CNC machines.
>
> And Warkworth had a carpentry shop, a finishing shop, a metal shop. They had an automotive shop and then they had a native—like the pathways shop—where they make—oh sorry, and a paint shop.
>
> And they had a pathways shop where they made moccasins and masks and dreamcatchers and stuff like that. But it was great. I loved going to work. I ran the machine. I enjoyed it, I took pride in my work, and the shop boss that I was talking with, he was from the finishing shop. And I actually worked in the finishing shop before I moved on to the cabinet shop and this guy was like, very anal. Like, everything had to be fucking perfect. Like, the laminate couldn't have a scratch on it. The edging had to be done perfect, like everything. So unfortunately after all the skilled workers left because we got pissed off that they took the incentive out, they really started to hire people that you never ever would've seen or trusted in CORCAN beforehand (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

For Dalton, his experience in CORCAN before Bill C10 passed was positive:

> I actually loved my job in CORCAN. Because as I say, I did have a full-time job prior to coming into prison, so I do have that work ethic. I do like to pass my time working. I loved being down there all day. It really—it ate up my time really good. I was able to earn a little pocket money and didn't have to rely on my family or friends to send me any money for anything and—just so you know, at that point in time the most amount of money that you could earn in a two-week period was $207 dollars. And in order to get that $207 you would have to be on A level pay, you would've had to have worked all 10 days without missing one, and you would've also had to report about four or five overtime shifts. In order to obtain the $207. $69 of which you would get to spend on canteen. The rest would go into your savings account (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

Clearly, there is potential value in the training that programs like these can provide. Unfortunately, the current state of labour in North American prisons sees low wages, poor conditions, and a focus on cost saving over rehabilitation. Institutional work is foundational to the modern carceral state, with one Louisiana sheriff calling it a "necessary evil to keep the doors open" (ACLU, 2022, p. 37). Arguing against releasing "good" prisoners early, he said: "In addition to the bad ones, and I call these bad, in addition to them, they're releasing some good ones that we use every day to wash cars,

to change oil in our cars, to cook in the kitchens, to do all that where we save money" (Rosenberg, 2017, para. 5). Beyond the classic trope of prisoners stamping license plates, institutional upkeep appears to be the real site of exploitation.

Parole and the Halfway House

In the United States, people leaving prison are often required to pay for the privilege of early release, extending the exploitation of prison outside the institutional walls. Back in the 1990s Matthew was on parole from a prison in Georgia where a missed payment means arrest and reincarceration:

> I think back then it was like $20 a month that I had to pay. My brother was in there a little bit later and because my mom would not pay for him, he would always get sent back. So I think they still do that. This was only about six years ago. So they still do the, when you're on probation you pay every month (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

I asked what he thought that people would do if they could not find the money to pay, but did not want to go back to prison:

> Commit another crime. I did that before. I had a $500 payment that I had to make. I couldn't make it, so I stole $500 dollars. And I guess, other people probably did the same thing. By all means, if you can't pay for it you've gotta find a way to get your money. And what do criminals do? Commit crimes. Unless they have a significant other or parent, or a—anyone else that can pay for them. Yeah, you're pretty much left to commit a crime (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

Kathryn felt similarly about women released on parole in Indiana:

> The only way they've ever made any like even decent money is by selling drugs and so like you take them away from everything but then you put them right back out in this big scary world and then like, how are they supposed to make money? Like, it's hard to get a job, especially if you don't have a car and like, you—you're worrying about how to pay all your fees and stuff. And so people just get wrapped back up into the same thing (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

Kevin was on parole in the United States when we spoke, had been out in the community for just over three months, and received a call from his parole officer while we were doing the interview. Because of the nature of his crime, he had to have extra supervision, including an ankle monitor for the first three months, which his PO had not put him on originally:

> One of the things they say is that when you get out for the first 90 days they put you on a global positioning system. It's this huge black thing that they wrap around your ankle that you have to wear at all times. You have to keep it charged so they can monitor your curfews and basically have you under their thumb. And you have to pay like $110 a month for it. For the privilege of wearing it. And they didn't—he didn't put me on it. My probation officer didn't put me on it and it's been more than 90 days and now he's like oh I've gotta put you on GPS for 90 days.
>
> I'm like the whole purpose of it is when you first get out of prison to monitor you and I've already—not only have I already been out for 90 days, but he trusted me enough to let me go fly to Florida and then drive my car back from Florida and like, without any monitoring at all, and now you're going to like put me on this big brother shit. It's just like, I don't know. It's frustrating as hell man.
>
> I gotta pay for it. I gotta, you know, basically be home by seven o'clock every night and I can't leave the house until 7 o'clock the next day. You know, and to be honest with you Mark, the worst thing is it's just like this big ol' like scarlet letter on you, you know. Everyone can see it. They know, ooh yeah look at that, you know. It's really hard to hide. It's huge. So, very bad news. Very very bad news. But you were here to witness it (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Not only is the financial impact frustrating, but as Kevin mentioned, the size of the ankle monitor and the stigma of what it implies can add unnecessary layers of difficulty to the post-prison transition.

A mandatory stay at a halfway house is a common transitory step from the prison and work is an important element. In Canada, people on parole can be released with a condition that they maintain employment. In the United States, it can be a condition of residency at the house. Alyd, incarcerated in Arizona post-prison, wanted to study computer programming to better set himself up for once he was allowed to leave:

> Once you get to the halfway house—the most important thing that happens at the halfway house is like, we gotta get you a job. Like, when I presented my plan, like I'm going to go back to school for this. I'm going to go back to school for software engineering, this is the program I've found. This is the community program I've found. This is how I'm going to fund it. They were like, no no you still have to have a job. Like I had to fight with the administration in order for them to say like, well look I need to be preparing for school I can't be working at, you know, driving a truck. Like, we've gotta come to some kind of agreement.
>
> Typical. And I won that, because I was able to use my family to bring in a lawyer and we were able to kind of get that escalated, but most guys they get into the halfway house and it's literally like, we have a list of jobs that we can get you. So in Phoenix it's like, we can get you—you

> can be a truck driver—you can go work lawn—you can work lawn maintenance, we've got this other maintenance job. Like there's 10-15 different things they can get you into and that's what they want. From your first week in there they want you out by the second week getting one of these jobs. So for the first week the initial programming is like, alright what've you done, let's talk to you. This is how you're going to behave when you go out there and you do your job interview. This is what you're going to say to this predetermined job and then you're going to get the job and you're going to start working. And then—cause the—they're incentivized, cause the halfway house isn't federally run. It's run by a private institution. They're incentivized to convert everyone who comes in there into a—someone who has a job. Cause that's success. So your past drug screens, or your non-failed drug screens and people who have work proves that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

Cyrus, who did his halfway house time in Florida, had a similar experience being coerced into work. He told me about the challenges of finding a job, but also of having conflicting interests with the halfway house he was at:

> It's difficult, you know, unless your family gives you a car you're going to the bus stop and you're a felon going on job interviews. I mean, it's not easy. I mean, I don't even know. I had to get a referral to a friend of the family in order to get a job. The halfway house found me a job. Thanks halfway house! You wanna know what the job was? I would go to the convention centre at 10:00-11:00 at night and work 'til six in the morning. Well, what's interesting is I'd found a job already, but the halfway house said that that job's not good enough, we don't trust that, you know all that thing.
>
> It's like okay okay. But you think it's okay for me to go to this huge convention centre, and we would vacuum the rugs, with other felons in the middle of the night unsupervised? That's okay. But the job that I found from nine to five you said it's not good enough. Okay. Well, you know that they're getting a kickback. They're essentially a labour placement at that point. And how am I supposed to go find a job during the day from nine to five when I'm working from 10PM to 6AM every day at the convention centre? Well it starts to get pretty hard doesn't it?
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> And you're kicking back some of the money you make to the halfway house to pay for you to live there and all that stuff. They'll pack you a lunch or something (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

While the halfway house can be a vital institution in the transition from prison back to regular life, like many other elements of the criminal justice system, it is another potential site of corruption and abuse. Both in Canada and the United States halfway houses are contracted out to non-profits and private companies. As well, the financial

burdens placed on people on parole across the United States add unnecessary pressure that can drive people back to the lifestyle that led to charges in the first place.

Overall, the “prisoners should pay their way” rationale seems to apply mostly in the administration of the prison itself. Prisoners are tasked with handling the cooking, cleaning, general maintenance, and many of the administrative tasks of running the institutions that hold them. In some situations, people work on projects beyond the prison walls, like art projects, community maintenance, fighting forest fires, training support animals, and refurbishing city buses. Finally, people in American prisons are often required to finance their own parole, a system that clearly works to the detriment of those individuals, as well as incentivizing recidivism. While there are benefits to some of these programs, the desire to further financially burden those under the care of the criminal justice system is entirely punitive and often counter-productive when considering another goal of incarceration—public safety.

3.5. Structural Coercion

Across the United States explicitly mandatory work is common, while in Canada, work is coerced in slightly more subtle ways. In the United States, according to the ACLU, “in state and federal prisons, incarcerated people who refuse to work may be placed in disciplinary or administrative segregation” (2022, p. 48). This section is about the ways that the carceral systems in Canada and the US coerce prisoners into working. Workers may be incentivised by nothing more than access to the world beyond their prison cell, they may be forced to work as a condition of early release or future parole, they may be punished with solitary confinement for refusing to work, or they may simply find that working allows for a more peaceful prison stay. One of the simplest ways to encourage work exploits the fact that for many people in prison work is simply a way to get out of the cell. Cyrus said this about his time in remand (pre-trial) at a private facility in the federal system in the United States:

> Some guys will—it pushes you to go, “okay, I'm just gonna go work because at least I can get out of here. At least I can leave this tiny area.” I mean, imagine, I don't know how big your apartment is, or your house, but imagine living in there with 28 people. It's unbelievable how excruciating it is. The lights never completely go off, you can't sleep. You know, the toilet—because they don't want anything to get stuck in the toilet—it’s more like a jet engine. That's how powerful and loud it is.

> And the TV's on and you don't control the TV. You can change the channel, but you can't turn it off and on. They control that from outside (Cyrus, interview, October 23, 2021).

In this example, elements of the prison that are constitutive of the institution itself push people to work. This is sometimes incidental but is also used deliberately in prisons in Canada to get people working. For instance,

> Now in Warkworth they used lockdown intimidation to force people to go to work. So in Warkworth, if you don't have a job, your cell door stays shut all day between 8:00 in the morning and 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon unless you're going for meal. During mealtimes it's open, but for the rest of the day you're locked in your cell. So they use the job position as a motivator—or being locked in your cell all day as a motivator to try to drive people towards working. Especially in CORCAN. You don't want to be locked in your cell all day. They'll just go down to CORCAN and just drink coffee, you know (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

Stories like this one lend legitimacy to the modern slavery argument often made about prison labour today (Davis, 2003; Bair, 2007). Furthermore, Canadian prisoners serving life sentences must maintain employment to be "correctional plan compliant." Those serving a life sentence who are not correctional plan compliant are not eligible for parole and can be barred from other amenities inside the prison and perks like private family visits (PFVs):

> So we all have what is called your correctional plan and if you are a lifer, or a DO, anybody serving an indeterminate sentence, you have to maintain employment. Like that's a part of your correctional program is to maintain employment. So you do need some job of sorts, right?
>
> Not just parole, but you have to be correctional plan compliant to participate in PFVs [private family visits] or quiet time. And to participate in different group-based activities and stuff like that. Yeah, you have to be correctional plan compliant in order to receive certain pay levels, cause there's different pay levels right? So you have to be rated a certain amount of accountability and motivation to be eligible for each pay level (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022).

Depending on where someone is held, it can be really difficult to access higher education, with correctional staff actively trying to talk people out of pursuing post-secondary coursework, funnelling people towards work programs, and simply not providing access to all the available options. Also from Dalton's experience:

> They don't advertise it either. And to tell you the truth, I don't know, obviously we have to have a proctor—an invigilator from here so when

> we're taking our exams the guidance counsellor would be the one to monitor us. And I don't know if it's because the guidance counsellor here doesn't want to do it, but I had to pretty much demand that he allow me to take the courses here and everybody else I know that went to him after me, I had to instruct them, like—don't let him talk you out of it. Tell him, I would like these courses can I please get an application. Because it seems like he gives the same spiel anytime anybody approaches him, you know? Oh those courses, you know, they're not, you know, don't mean nothing anyways. And we have AutoCAD here and you should probably take it through CORCAN it's a lot better and we have computer programs here that you can take…and you can't really go far with them.
>
> I've heard him say that exact thing probably three or four times. And you have to, like, bug him and finally use your assertive communication. Like, no I really want to take the course can you give me an application. It almost seems like he tries to talk people out of doing it (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

In some institutions refusal to work elicits an even more punitive response. Chad described his treatment after refusing to work while living at FCI El Reno, a federal prison in Oklahoma:

> So like when I was at the dairy it was—I was working on cattle crawlers, cattle gates, big thing equipment, things like that. They—I worked at the USDA for a year—just over a year actually, almost two. The US department of agriculture which was across the street. So I actually had a work pass, I got to leave the prison everyday and I'd go over there and work. And that was fantastic. It wasn't any particular program, like I wasn't supposed to learn anything, I was just supposed to work. But thankfully my bosses and the people that were over there were extremely supportive and I ended up learning an awful lot. And that contract ended and they tried to force me to work at the farm and I declined 'em and because I declined them they actually threw me in the hole and I ended up in basically—lock yourself in a bathroom with some random person from craigslist for, you know, 24 hours a day.
>
> And you can't control the lights or anything. It's—it's pretty rough. But that's what happened when I turned them down on work. When I said I wanted to do something different they threw me in the hole.
>
> But yeah, so you have to have a job. You have to. Any time anybody ever tried to buck that system they ended up in the SHU. If they bucked it long enough they ended up getting shipped to other places. But it was an absolute forced thing not a choice (Chad Emerson, interview, October 28, 2021).

Similar to how people serving life sentences in Canadian prisons need to be "correctional plan compliant" by maintaining employment, people doing reduced

sentences in California have a work requirement attached to their sentence. When I asked Anthony about whether they had a choice to work, he said:

> No, you have a choice. You can—now, the guys that are getting half time, I mean, if you don't work you're not going to get your day for day. So that means, I mean, that's an incentive. When you're just sitting here doing nothing, I mean, there's a lot of guys—don't get me wrong, there's a lot of guys that don't want to do anything. They're just going to sit in their cell and they're not going to do shit. Doesn't matter what you tell them. They're not going to do anything. But I mean, there's—the money isn't the incentive, it's the getting out and about and being able to get a free shower or get outside of your cell—it's incentive enough for these guys (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

In the provincial system in British Columbia Correctional Officers prefer people who are working and have ways of encouraging participation, but the main driver can be peace:

> If the authorities want you to be—to feel the pressure, they can definitely apply the pressure in extralegal means. And that affects, you know, labour. That's why a lot of guys go to work—because they're trying to escape a lot of problems. Like, you know, the work units are basically—if you're on a work unit, from my understanding. Just from people I've talked to. You're kind of left alone. Like, once you've agreed to work with them in that sense, they're content to like—they don't disrupt the work units in the same way they would other units. And basically yeah—work guys get better details and stuff (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

Both in Canada and the United States, jobs are intimately tied into the needs of the institution and any rehabilitative goals are secondary. Promotions and transfers for prisoners are susceptible to the whims of the guards and staff. In Ontario:

> So like, let's say, you know, a position's opening up, for instance—my roommate that I used to live with—he was working in the kitchen. Excellent employee. A position opened up where a guy was going to be leaving, like, where the works department is, the engineering department. And the actual instructor that was there was his boss from over in Warkworth, he had moved over here. So he wanted to hire him.
>
> So literally he was—the guy got out and he was doing the job for a week and a half as a formality before he eventually got hired. Then he got called in front of the work board and they said, you know, we called the kitchen and you're a really good worker. We don't want to take you away from there. So what we're going to do is we're going to hire somebody else for that position and just keep you in the kitchen. And he was like, so if I was a shitty worker I'd get a good job? I'm trying to better myself here. But unfortunately that's what happens. When you go to CORCAN or the kitchen, they would rather hire somebody else for a better position as opposed to hiring twice. Because if you go there they have

> to do the work for the job transfer from CORCAN to whatever you want. And then they also have to find somebody to fill your position (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

And what is perhaps most frustrating is how the different arms of the institution work in competition. In some cases, work assignments can get in the way of actual progress towards parole. Also from Dalton,

> It's very unfortunate. But you do end up getting kind of stuck there. And if you want to advance to a position of trust—'cause there's a number of positions of trust that open up—you're almost stuck, you know. There's a guy that lives down here near me and he's been complaining recently about the same thing. So he works in the kitchen, actually in the SJP side, and he was trying to get a number of other jobs. He had full support from his case management team. They actually asked him that they would like to see him obtain a position of trust so they can monitor him in it for a short period of time before he can cascade to a minimum-security setting.
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> And, you don't receive a response back. You put in all these applications, you never hear back about why you didn't get the position or not, you just, you know, end up finding out somebody else got hired (Dalton, interview, August 19, 2022).

Back to the provincial system in British Columbia, John summed it up really succinctly:

> You know, one of the things that's interesting with your kind of area of focus with the substance of like work is that it's—it's a lot about deprivation right? Like they can make guys in prison work because they can deprive them of basic necessities. Or even basic luxuries. And so like a pop tart suddenly has a lot of value. So you know, guys are willing to work for a dollar fifty an hour because there's not a whole lot else to do and there's no other way to get basic stuff (John, interview, August 27, 2022).

The carceral system in the United States takes a lot of criticism for its role in perpetuating the structures of slavery with prison labour (Alexander, 2020; Davis, 2003). In Canada there is much less critique, but the same issues are prevalent. While institutions like Warkworth in Ontario give prisoners the option not to work, they make that option as monotonous as possible. In addition to coercive and exploitative hiring practices, across North America prisoners are also often forced into educational programming, primarily high school equivalency, in a very similar way. But, once one gets past the GED hurdle, access to post-secondary education or vocational training is sporadic and institution specific. The next section expands on education in Canadian and American prisons.

3.6. Education in Prisons

In North American prisons, it appears as though enough of the people who are incarcerated have not completed high school to make high school equivalency programming the dominant educational paradigm. However, because of the importance that institutions place on getting the certificate, the actual learning takes a back seat. For instance, in British Columbia, John made extra canteen money by doing other guys' homework:

> I wasn't trying to make it a serious hustle. To be honest, I wasn't interested in canteen that much. Like, some guys, they're really canteen orientated. They really care about canteen. I'm, you know, when I was living outside of prison I was very unmaterialistic, so it didn't bother me to not have any canteen, but you know, I like canteen. So like, when some guys, like, approached me with like—hey can you do some homework for me? And these were guys I knew and I kind of got along with. These weren't just random people—if it was a random guy I would've told him I'm not interested. But I kind of knew these guys and it helps to build a relationship (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

Kevin, who did time in the federal system in the United States, worked as a tutor. He had been a high school teacher prior to his charges and once staff realized how experienced he was, they quickly offloaded the job onto him. In his words:

> I think probably from what I can tell more than half of the classes were actually taught by inmates, the teacher basically did nothing. And you know, I'm not saying that's necessarily a bad system, it's just clearly they have some policy that says that inmates can't be full-fledged teachers, you know, only like tutors. But, inmates probably are better people who'd make good teachers anyway, because they understand where the inmates are coming from and they don't have any authority to send you into solitary or something, which like, obviously a staff member could do that. They could mace you if they wanted to (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Similarly in California:

> Even the education, even the classes—the school classes, other than the vocs, the vocational parts of it, they don't teach. They sit in their chairs and they pass out packets and let them do what they want. There's no teaching going on. There's groups…the groups are all ran for the most part by the inmates. So they're not learning anything, other than, you know, if they happen to get somebody that knows anything, or something comes in and then the knowledge will be passed down but, I mean, as far as soft skills, nothing's being taught which means unless they're either picking it up second hand or just through wanting to learn,

> there's nothing—there's very little being taught here (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

A big incentive that encourages GED participation for people incarcerated in the United States is the reduced sentence, or "good time" often connected to taking classes:

> 90% of the education that happens, at least in the federal system, and probably in the state too, is GED, general equivalence diploma, which is basically guys who—so if you don't have your high school diploma, they require you, in order to get your, okay let me explain this right—
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> So the federal prison system has no parole anymore. They got rid of parole. There's no good—good, you know, like early release where you go in front of a committee and you argue why you should be released. That doesn't happen in the feds anymore except with people who were convicted before 1987. So like, way older offences. But now the federal system works on a goodtime system. That's what they call it.
>
> What do they call it... it's got an official name but the inmates call it goodtime. And what that is is that you get, for every month that you serve, you get a certain, you know, number of days off your sentence. The maximum you can get off is 15% of your sentence. So everybody wants to get that 15% because, you know, depending on how long your sentence is that could be years. So what the feds say is oh if you don't have your high school diploma you have to be either in our education system earning your high school diploma and making progress towards it or you will not earn goodtime (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

In institutions that have courses that are not related to GED programming, they are often taught by prisoners and can be on topics as varied as real estate, drumming, and even a class Alyd taught at FCI Florence on fantasy baseball:

> The only programs that were—that we had were inmate-led programs. So, like, my electrician friend was encouraged to teach a class about basic, you know, electrical work. There were guys who were former truck drivers who'd gotten felonies who would teach, you know, they would teach you a class about "maybe this is something you should look into." But there was no formal education other than the GED program. If you did not have a GED there was like a formalized program where you go in and you meet with a guy and they make time on your schedule, get you out of work. But if you had a GED or if you had a high school diploma there was nothing that wasn't inmate-led that we got provided.
>
> Like, there was a guy who taught a class on bitcoin, and then there was a guy who taught, like an inmate, and there was another inmate who led a class on, a guy—a white collar crime guy, he led one on accounting, house accounting, and accounting for small business. I mean, everything else was all inmate-led stuff.

> I ran a class on, actually on fantasy baseball…it went great. We had a lot of people who were not baseball fans and they'd never done it before in their lives. And, like I had done it when I was a kid and my brother had gotten me into it years ago so it was like, not only do we get to play, but we got to play and we got to keep our stats and we'd read the Bill James stuff and we'd talk about that and we'd get into arguments. So it was like, there just weren't a lot of baseball fans so it was a good way to make baseball fans (Alyd, interview, October 29, 2021).

At FCI Florence they had two classrooms that were dedicated to GED programming, but when they were not in use, the guys taught their own classes or watched movies. The scheduling and what was offered was entirely self-organized and coordinated by the prisoner in charge of the library. In Arkansas they had a self-directed program, a bit more formalized, where people could do their own research into a subject of their choosing:

> They called it a vo-tech. You could take a class and you would get a card at the end of that class saying that you had completed 1660 hours of research into a particular subject. It doesn't translate to anything when you get out. It's not like experience. You can't like, transfer the credits to get credits from a college. It's not useful in any way. It's just, you get the education, you know what I mean? The information you get (Harley Tanner, interview, October 28, 2021).

Other institutions provide limited access to external colleges for people to do correspondence courses. This was the case at Indiana Women's Prison, as well as in the state system in California, Georgia, and in the federal prisons in Ontario. These courses are generally self-financed by the participants. In California,

> Yeah, but the thing is, it's paid for by themselves, or their family has to pay for it. But it's all through correspondence. There are a few colleges… there's probably a shitload of colleges that do correspondence but I'm not too sure exactly which ones they were that they used. Here, there's two different ones that are available for your associate's.
>
> The AA, the associate's degree, is very popular here. It got to a point where it was so popular that it was hard to get into and it was hard to get your available classes because the school that offers the correspondence class, it's an actual school, so they have their students and then whatever is left on the open books I believe is probably for us. So, trying to get into classes, and that's just this facility—and that community college, they deal with all the prisons in California and there's 33 of them. So, I mean, the amount of inmates I'm sure are trying to get into these classes is outrageous (Anthony, interview, February 3, 2022).

My only participant with experience in the federal systems in both Canada and the United States as well as the state prison system in Georgia got his degree in hotel management during his stint in Georgia:

> I took a course. I took hotel management because my family is in that business right? And it ended up costing my mom around $3000. But it was via correspondence. They would send me my books, I'd read, I'd take—write a written test, I'd send it to them, they'd grade it and send it back. And actually I got my degree and it's not doing me a lot of good up here but I still got my degree (Matthew, interview, July 15, 2022).

In British Columbia, the provincial system mostly offered high school equivalency programming, but John did take some higher-level coursework. From his experience:

> It's just like, the GED, the dogwood thing. I think they probably have post-secondary stuff but I don't know if there's a big appetite for it. I remember when I was at FRCC they had a math, they had some like calculus and stuff. You could learn stuff like that. I mean, they have the potential to teach you basically whatever you would want to learn in terms of like, academic basics, but I don't think they have, like, a policy of—they don't have like a constant stream of it. So like, basically like the only consistent education is the GED program, and then if you want to do some more you could potentially push for some more, they might have some resources there. But depending on the facility there's also a limitation on what they have.
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> I was doing some English Lit stuff and I remember the textbook I had was like, from the seventies. So—it was pretty good though. I remember Al Purdy and some local Canadian poets were on it (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

When I asked about which educational programs are promoted by the staff, or if there is any sense that the prisons encourage guys to access higher learning, he gave me this critique of the system:

> There's no awareness of it. Like, you know, their focus—the extent that they—first of all, in remand you can't really do a lot of education because of the security restrictions. You can't do like, training for tickets and stuff, which is what they would do for most of those guys. Because realistically they're not setting their sights—they don't want to send these guys to UBC, they want to send them out into the labour force on construction sites. Which is what I'm doing right now, oddly enough, I'm working in the construction industry because it's inmate friendly. It's, you know, again, it's the economics of it. They look the other way on criminal records in the construction industry because there's a need for labour and because, you know, the sort of work that's done is suited to the stereotype of the people who go to jail right? You know, it's muscle work (John, interview, July 25, 2022).

While I did not get the chance to speak to anyone incarcerated in the Washington state system, I did hear this second hand from Matthew:

> And to be in Washington State right now, my friend is actually able to go to community college for free. Which I think is a wonderful thing. She was going to do the transfer to come back up here, but she wants to hold off, she wants to get her paralegal degree down there. Because you get it paid for, why not? She's taking full advantage of it and I commend her for that. Because when I was down there, I actually had to pay for it. I did a hotel restaurant management, and well actually my mom paid for it. But yeah, it wasn't free. I think that's an advantage that any prison can offer. If a person can go back to school and actually get some sort of degree to better themselves, make it more possible for them to get a job, not return back to prison. I thought that was the whole goal of corrections, right (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022)?

Education can be a vital element of a robust rehabilitation program, but in North American institutions it is limited to high school equivalency classes, limited pay-for-access post-secondary degrees, a patchwork of vocational programming, and prisoner-led hobby courses. As well, the people I spoke with were all generally open to any sort of programming that was available to them. Many would have taken up a trade had they had access, and some were actively pursuing associate and bachelor's degrees from inside the prisons that held them. Institutional inertia, demoralized prisoners, and defeatist staff combine into systems that do little more than put their charges into a holding pattern, perpetuating the revolving door prison model, when there are certainly better ways to break the cycle.

3.7. Conclusion

This project is a critique of the dominant discourse surrounding prison labour—but in another sense it is an evaluation of prison jobs programs, taking the dominant discourse that supports prison labour and nuancing it against the lived experience of people who have spent time in Canadian and American institutions. In some cases, the experience of the people I spoke to supports the notion that prison labour can be an effective tool to prevent violence by distracting people and wearing them out. As well, work can be rehabilitative in two ways: if it teaches hard and soft skills that can be applied in the real world, and if it helps ease the transition back to regular society. Most importantly, this chapter addressed how these rationales fall flat against the logics of the prison institution and are perhaps more accurately understood as weak justifications

after-the-fact. I also discussed the rationale that prisoners should financially support their own punishment, the structural coercion that exists, and how educational programming fits into the picture. All in all, there is evidence to partially support the four rationales for prison labour established at the start of the chapter—that work keeps people out of trouble, eases the transition to freedom, teaches skills for the real world, and that prisoners should pay their way—but as this chapter shows, the wider picture is much more complicated.

The biggest challenge I found in compiling these stories was choosing what to include and what to cut. With over twenty hours of audio and the perspectives of thirteen people, omitting anything felt wrong. We spoke about so much more than work programs. For instance, one of the details I found interesting was the cost of ramen at different institutions (which can be anywhere from $0.50 to a couple dollars). We spoke about the different conditions in private prisons in the United States versus public ones. I spoke to people about their charges, their addictions, their families, their stories of overcoming obstacles and making lives for themselves. The prison is a total institution, it takes over the management of every aspect of life for those who are incarcerated and it is incredibly difficult to hone in on just one element of it—in this case, work.

In the next chapter I nuance the findings here, discuss the limitations of this investigation, and propose some suggestions for how to make prison labour work, reluctantly, as we aspire to a world without the need for prisons in the first place. While the underlying philosophy behind the current investigation is that prisons should be abolished, nonetheless, in a world where prisons do exist, they can be sites of healing and rehabilitation. The next chapter explores ways that prison work can be improved to be more consistent with its goals and provide better outcomes for people as they transition back to society.

Chapter 4. Further Discussion

> You would have to spend all of 10 seconds, if you did the same kind of interview with guys in prison, like current inmates, to figure out that they really want—they want real jobs, they want to be successful. They're not like turning their back on the world, like saying fuck the world, you know. They act like they do, they get a tattoo that says fuck the world on their forehead, but they don't necessarily believe it. They just feel like it's pre-emptive. Like if I reject society's values, society can't judge me. But I wish I could be in society (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

As Chapter 2 established, the exploitation of incarcerated people across North America is a well-documented phenomenon (Alexander, 2020; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Jones, 2022). This paper builds on the growing critique of prison labour in Canadian and American jails, highlighting the lived experience of people who have faced the oppressive weight of criminal justice in North America. In this chapter I briefly discuss the limitations of the study, summarize my findings from the last chapter, and explore the bigger takeaways from this project. In other words, taking its existence for granted, how can we improve prison jobs programs to emphasize rehabilitation—making them programs that can actually change the lives of the people who have to take them? I finish the chapter with a brief discussion of avenues for future research including a summary of two scholars currently working in the carceral space in Canada.

The four rationales that I argue define the dominant discourse on prison labour in Canada and the United States served as a container for this research, something against which to balance the stories shared by the people I interviewed. While the justifications each have some merit, they fundamentally exist as little more than rationalizations after-the-fact because prison labour across Canada and the United States overwhelmingly supports the maintenance and operation of the institutions themselves. Of course, states like California use prisoners for more than just institutional jobs; incarcerated workers in California make up 30% of the state's forest firefighters and save the state around $80 million USD each year (Lurie, 2015). However, this extension of prison work into the community still serves the same purpose—reducing labour costs for the state. Incarcerated workers handle the cooking, cleaning, laundry, general maintenance, and even some of the administration at most institutions across North America.

Criticism of modern prison labour often draws connections to America's history of slavery, and some institutions work overtime to earn this critique. Angola (formally known as Louisiana State Penitentiary), for example, operates a farm where those incarcerated earn as little as $0.02 per hour as they "plant and harvest corn, soybeans, and cotton, while armed guards look on from horseback" (Syroka, 2019, p. 411). Angola is the site of a former plantation, as is Mississippi State Penitentiary, also known as Parchman Farm (Benns, 2015, para. 7). Where these institutions are sited and the work that prisoners are doing connect modern prisoners—overwhelmingly Black—to America's history of slavery and provide evidence for those who make the claim that slavery never ended in the United States (Alexander, 2020; Davis, 2003).

However, across the United States and Canada there is also evidence to support Foucault's (1995) assertion that penal labour's use is not profit (or skill-building), "but the constitution of a power relation, an empty economic form, a schema of individual submission and of adjustment to a production apparatus" (p. 243). Because even in states like Mississippi and Louisiana, incarceration is extremely costly. For example, Louisiana's Department of Corrections spent over $587 million USD in the 2021 fiscal year, with only $32 million of that categorized as "self-generated" (House Fiscal Division of the Louisiana House of Representatives, 2022, March 21, p. 10). Though, to be fair, Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the United States (Syroka, 2019, p. 428; Widra & Herring, 2021). The financial reality of incarceration poses an important question beyond the scope of this study—who benefits? Because it certainly is not the people incarcerated in Louisiana, elsewhere in the United States, or in Canada.

4.1. Limitations

One weakness of ethnographic research is that it cannot be generalized, and because this paper discusses both Canada's prison system and the largest prison system in the world, the United States, the findings outlined in this study are also limited by its enormous geographical scope. I spoke with 13 people with experience in both the Canadian and American federal systems, the provincial system in British Columbia, and the state systems in Arkansas, California, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, and Oregon. As well, some American participants had experience with both government-run and private-run prisons. While these experiences cannot be generalized into a neat quantitative report, they do much more. The stories shared with me over the phone, the internet, and

in person describe dangerous and paradoxical places that operate according to their own logics quite different from that of regular society.

It is well known that people of colour in Canada and the United States experience the criminal justice system differently from white people. In December 2022, Black men and women made up 38.4% of the federal prison population in the United States (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022, December 3) while making up roughly 13.6% of the general population (United States Census Bureau, 2021b). In Canada, Indigenous people are disproportionately incarcerated at rates as high as 33% of all adult admissions to federal custody while making up only around 5% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2022). I mention this to highlight that the greatest limitation of this study is that most of the participants were white. As well, twelve out of thirteen participants presented as male, though one participant is now in the process of transitioning genders. This is an important detail to mention in the study, not to devalue the participation of the people I spoke with, but to highlight an important blind spot in the research, mirroring a much larger problem in criminology argued to be in part due to "the pervasiveness of the belief in the relative insignificance of female criminality" (Smart, 1977, p. 1). In the case of this study, better care should have been taken to seek out spaces where people of colour and people who are not male who have a history of incarceration congregate. This remains a crucial site for further study.

The sampling method used is another limiting aspect of the study. I began by sourcing participation on the r/excons subreddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/excons) in October 2021, then followed up with a small ad in the March 2022 issue of Cell Count, published and distributed by PASAN in Toronto, and finally fixed some posters strategically around Downtown Vancouver at the suggestion of someone on parole living at the CRF (Community Residential Facility, or halfway house) that I was working for at the time (these materials can be found in Appendix C). As a brief aside, from December 2021 to August 2022 I was employed as a Residential Worker at a CRF in Vancouver and spoke with a number of men transitioning from federal prison about my research. Because of the nature of the job, the potential conflict of interest, the lack of support from the organization that employed me, and the lack of support from the Correctional Service of Canada, I did not conduct any formal interviews. To be clear, the Correctional Service of Canada did offer an avenue for approval but the timeline was too long for a master's-level thesis and there was no guarantee of success. As well, the non-profit organization

that employed me was supportive of the research if I could secure approval from the CSC. However, off-the-record, the stories the men at the halfway house shared with me certainly shaped my perspective. Seeing the state of community corrections firsthand and working with parole officers, VPD officers, and other stakeholders directly has also shaped this critique.

As well, this investigation unfortunately neglects the experience of people who are serving life sentences without the chance of parole. In Canada and the United States, there are incarcerated workers who will likely never leave the prison walls. The work they do cannot be justified by the rationales that suggest that prison labour eases the transition out and teaches skills applicable on the outside.

While the study is far from perfect—and certainly none are—there is a wealth of information contained in these transcripts and this study only scratches the surface. The data gleaned from these interviews highlights the lived experience of men and women incarcerated across North America and while their stories are all unique, the similarities that emerged help paint a picture of carceral systems in dire need of change. Until prisons across North America are abolished, it remains crucial to ensure that they function for the public good which means foregrounding the interests of the people incarcerated.

4.2. Further Discussion

First, it is important to review the actual purpose of prison labour. In this study, the four dominant rationales for prison labour are defined as:

- Work keeps people out of trouble,
- Work eases the transition to freedom,
- Work teaches skills for the real world, and
- Prisoners should pay their way.

The previous chapter nuanced these rationales, finding that there is little merit in the first three but that the fourth may be the ideological pillar supporting the entire system of institutional labour across North America. Overall, prison labour programs do not appear to have the prisoner's rehabilitation in mind, and when jobs teach prisoners skills for the

real world, or skills with the intention of easing the transition out of the prison, this appears incidental—in other words, it is not the main focus of the job. Incarcerated people are overwhelmingly employed in the maintenance and operation of the institutions that hold them, and their work naturally supports the logics of the prison, and of the criminal justice system more broadly before their own rehabilitation.

All of this is to say that rehabilitation cannot be a primary goal of the criminal justice system while punishment dominates. While recidivism rates do not show the whole picture, a CSC study in Canada found that “for the 2011-2012 cohort, almost 38% of all federal offenders reoffended within five years of release” (Stewart et al, 2019). In the United States, as many as two thirds of people released from state and federal prison return to prison within three years (Syroka, 2019, p. 420). So why are recidivism rates so high? Syroka (2019) argues, “the majority of inmates have little to no savings, a history of drug abuse, and slim job prospects due to their prior convictions” (p. 420). All three of these issues can be addressed with more robust and focused job programming.

Two of the participants in this study, Ryland and Matthew, had been incarcerated multiple times, and both their experiences were shaped in part by substance use, a lack of support, and financial difficulties. After his first federal sentence in the 1980s, Ryland was released, still a teenager, right at his WED (Warrant Expiry Date), meaning no parole/probation or any sort of transitionary steps:

> When you walk out the fucking door and all you've got is a pocket full of money and nobody waiting for you course you know what you're going back to, the dope. You're going back to what you know (Ryland, interview, June 21, 2022).

And while substance use is a big challenge, both Ryland and Matthew overcame addiction on their own while incarcerated. Again according to Ryland:

> I was sitting in jail in remand. I said fuck it, why do I want to drink? And it was hard at first, but now—it’s hard, like I said to my parole officer, it's harder for me not to be violent than for me not to be drunk (Ryland, interview, June 21, 2022).

Matthew had a similar moment:

> I was sitting in a cell. I was about to smoke some heroin. I looked at it and felt horrible. And I said, you know, what the fuck am I doing? I flushed the heroin. I threw the paraphernalia away. And I've never thrown the drugs. I always keep it in my pocket for just in case. This

> was the first time I ever threw it away and I was done. And right now I'm about three and a half years clean. Before I could never get thirty days sober. And it's a wonderful thing. I love it. My family trusts me again, my parole officer trusts me. If I say I'm going to this place, they don't question me. And I've never had that in my life before and I love it. And I feed off of it right? Every time they tell me I'm doing a wonderful job that makes me want to do even better (Matthew, interview, July 15, 2022).

While substance use is beyond the scope of this research, it would be negligent to ignore it entirely in any study into incarceration considering the enormous overlap between addiction and crime. As well, substance use can be a significant barrier to successful reintegration. According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 48% of federally incarcerated Canadians "experience problems with drugs (other than alcohol)," while just over half report experiencing problems with alcohol (Weekes & Thomas, 2004, p. 2).

Another element of rehabilitation that is entirely overlooked is simply believing in the potential of people to change. Ryland shared his experience with release and the lack of support:

> No. They didn't have support back in them days. You just got—you got released with your money and they said alright, good luck, we'll see you when you fuck up again (Ryland, interview, June 21, 2022).

This attitude from correctional and law enforcement staff risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of the impact this kind of treatment can have on the recipient's self-image, and self-identity, it can further isolate the individual into what some criminologists call a "deviant identity" (Tierney, 2009, p. 96). Proponents of labelling theory believe that "deviance is *constituted* [emphasis original] or created, by the labellers rather than the labelled" (2009, p. 92). In other words, statements like "we'll see you when you fuck up again" further entrench an outsider-identity in the people we incarcerate, creating an effect opposite the goals of corrections, the interests of society, and the interests of the individuals we incarcerate. Matthew also experienced that kind of attitude from correctional staff and discussed how demotivating it was when parole officers wrote him off before his release:

> If they don't give you supportive statements—if you come in and ask them for something, if they're not supportive in whatever the request is, if you feel dejected you're going to be dejected. You're going to be that way. If you feel like there's no hope you're going to feel hopeless.

> And if you have no hope then why bother, right? If my parole officer's not gonna make out a plan for me, and I know they're supposed to make a plan, a release plan. Then that kind of tells me everything I need to know about how that parole officer feels about me. In the past they've never made a plan for me. They'd just release me. I've even had a parole officer say to my face, your old parole officer set you up for failure. I was released from a halfway—or from an institution, no halfway house after serving two sentences back to back. What do you think I'm going to do? (Matthew, interview, July 28, 2022).

Stories like Matthew and Ryland's highlight the broader issues facing rehabilitation in Canada. No matter how effective work programs are, the institutional inertia and pessimistic staff, the substance use and unaddressed mental health needs, and the conflicting interests of the criminal justice system, those incarcerated in it, and society, create a situation where bringing actual positive change is incredibly difficult.

The previous chapter addressed the dominant discourse on prison labour by exploring the lived experience of people who have been incarcerated in Canada and the United States, but there is much more to incarceration than work. Any approach to reform in both countries needs to address the root causes of crime, including problematic substance use, unaddressed mental health concerns, and poverty. Also, as Ryland and Matthew both experienced, we need to change the way that the people who work on behalf of the criminal justice system treat the people under their care, especially the most marginalized. It is perhaps notable that Ryland and Matthew are not white, and while most of the participants in this study detailed stories of negative experiences with correctional staff, Ryland and Matthew were the only two that mentioned this level of antagonism. Although fixing prison labour will not fix the criminal justice system, based on the experiences of the study participants, there are a number of changes that should be made.

4.3. Recommendations

There is a tension in this investigation between the evidence that supports the notion that prison labour is a modern form of slavery, and as such, is an institution that cannot be reformed, and the desire to improve the conditions and outcomes of people who are incarcerated. To support the argument that prison labour is a form of slavery, I cited Bair (2007), who argues that,

> The power wielded by the prison authorities to compel the labor of the inmates, to even own their very labor-power, combines with the cultural processes of objectification, shame and dishonor of the inmates, and the economic processes of income incentives, state welfare and so on to form a particular relationship between the inmate and the warden—that of slave and master (p. 46).

In my limited sample I have found evidence to support this assessment. Notably, in the ways in which people who are incarcerated are coerced into working, sometimes with the threat of solitary confinement if they refuse. In prisons where work is not explicitly mandatory or coerced, the bleak economic conditions faced by prisoners without outside support can also push them towards work.

However, work can be a beneficial component of incarceration. Most prisoners will be released, and if they can gain hard skills, soft skills, education and/or work experience while incarcerated this will improve their chances of leading successful lives and lower their likelihood of recidivism. This section highlights the elements of prison labour that can be beneficial for the individual. Roles highlighted here were not coerced, they were free of the stigma present in other institutional roles and what Bair (2007) calls the "cultural processes of objectification, shame and dishonor" (p. 46) of incarceration. That being said, no prison jobs are fairly compensated. Ultimately, so long as prisons exist, they must operate with the improvement of the prisoner as a primary goal—coerced labour cannot be factor.

In the discussions I had with people who had experienced incarceration across North America the most profound experiences seemed to come from forest firefighting, training support dogs, and from teaching other prisoners. If programs are to be successful they can start by taking the lead from Oregon's South Fork Forest Camp:

> When you were out on the fire there—you didn't have the feeling that you were an inmate. Just the way that they involved you in everything to, you would go down to the meetings every day. You would go eat with everybody else, you would shower with everybody else. When you're out on the crew you had like a walkie-talkie, you could go and talk to the other firefighters to get the information that was needed and just the whole atmosphere was—it was all positive and then coming back every day there would be part of the community out there holding signs saying thank you (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

Stigma is a huge barrier to successful reintegration for people post-incarceration in part due to its use by the criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States to further

punish people who have been charged or convicted of crimes. Examples of policies that increase post-release stigma include chunky ankle monitors (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021), sex offender registries, online searchable databases that list people's charges (for example, Court Services Online in British Columbia), and the simple fact that criminal charges can get in the way of employment, housing, education, and government support. Successful programs can begin by eliminating that stigma and welcoming incarcerated workers without prejudice.

The South Fork Forest Camp is minimum security, meaning there are no fences around the property—the people incarcerated there are trusted to remain on site. As well, the recidivism rate for those who spend time at South Fork is significantly lower than the state average of around 33%—for guys who spend six months at South Forks, the recidivism rate is 20%, for those who spend two years there, the recidivism rate is roughly 12% (Evanson, 2020). This is in part because South Fork is very specific with who it takes, accepting only people classified as very low risk minimum custody, excluding anyone with violent charges, attempted escape, and/or arson charges (Oregon Government, n.d.; Tillamook Headlight Herald, 2009). Most importantly, South Fork provides things that other prison jobs programs do not: real applicable skills and certifications, trust, freedom, and a sense of community. As well, according to Michael, because South Fork is highly sought after and the training is good, it can almost guarantee a job on release with the Department of Forestry or other organizations around the state that fight fires (interview, October 29, 2021).

In Oklahoma, at FCI El Reno, Chad Emerson shared a similar experience of working on the fire crew. El Reno only has two full-time firefighters and the rest are volunteers who are required to maintain a primary job. According to Chad, who took the position both as a volunteer and later as one of the full-time firefighters,

> Fire crew was great. So if you read, and I would strongly recommend that someone who wants to study prison, if you read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning,* he talks about how a person's suffering—like we all suffer through life, like it's just a part of the human condition, right?
>
> But when a person finds meaning to that suffering it no longer is suffering, right? That suffering has a purpose. And you know, I had two young boys, so I would try and focus on that. But really and truly being a part of the fire department and going and fighting fires and learning that new skill and helping the community helped give some of my

> suffering meaning and it was, you know, obviously there's a fraternity there amongst the people that I fought fires with and with the local firemen that we fought with. It was a profoundly positive experience (Chad Emerson, interview, October 28, 2021).

It is also important to note that both Chad and Michael had young kids at the time. When I asked Michael what happened to get him to take things seriously in prison, he said:

> When my kids came to see me. And they asked me like, so why are you here? And I was completely honest with my kids and it was kind of like a breaking point.
>
> I was probably in prison for maybe two and a half or three months and I had that conversation with them and that's when I was…something clicked in my head to where I told myself that I was completely done with getting high, completely done with hanging out with that bad crowd. I was just—I was done with it (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

Not all prisoners have children to motivate them to be better, and not all programs can put people into communities where every day coming home from work "there would be part of the community out there holding signs saying thank you" (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021). However, there are elements of this program that need to be highlighted and considered for other job programs. First, the most successful programs will give participants the opportunity to give back to the community in a real and tangible way. Building a connection with the community has enormous advantages for those incarcerated. At South Fork and El Reno, this is evident from the community support for the incarcerated firefighters and the support and fraternity they got from their non-incarcerated colleagues.

At the Indiana Women's Prison, incarcerated women train support dogs for the Indiana Canine Assistance Network. When the dogs are fully trained and are ready to go to work themselves, the institution holds a graduation ceremony for them. I mentioned this story in the last chapter, where Kathryn shared her experience watching a woman who had been in prison for most of her life hand over the support dog that she trained for the mother of the victim of her offence:

> It was really, just neat to see that her victim's mom was able to, I don't know, like forgive her. But also, like, she was helping her by training a dog. I don't know, it's just—it's really neat (Kathryn Mason, interview, November 22, 2021).

This graduation ceremony might sound like a small thing, but it ritualizes a crucial part of justice—restitution. Incarceration itself does very little to change people's lives and in many ways the carceral systems in North America today are not that far from the Auburn and Philadelphia models used in the 19th century that emphasized isolation and silent prayer (Foucault, 1995, p. 236). These systems put the entire onus of rehabilitation on the individual, who was placed in a state of extreme deprivation. What the ICAN program demonstrates, however, is how programming that connects people who are incarcerated to the community can have a positive impact.

Eliminating the stigma that people who are or have been incarcerated face in the community is crucial for reintegration. In other words, there needs to be a clear and supportive pathway for people who have done wrong to make up for it and be welcomed back. In Oregon, according to Michael, it has gotten a lot easier for people leaving the prison system to find work:

> Down here in Oregon I can say that they've gotten really lenient on the felon thing. So it's actually been a lot easier than I thought it was gonna be to get a job and all that stuff after my release. And there's a lot of programs out, down here to help us too (Michael, interview, October 29, 2021).

Harley Tanner also had a lot of success on a work release while incarcerated in Arkansas. He described his coworkers at a metal shop in Blytheville, Arkansas:

> It was different because they just wanted to do their job and go home. They weren't trying to get over or manipulate. It was different. But it was fine. They weren't rude or like prejudicial or judgmental or none of that stuff. They just wanted to do their job, wanted some help (Harley Tanner, October 28, 2021).

Harley's experience on work release directly translated to a job. When he left the prison, he went back to the same shop, conveniently in his hometown, and was hired. Now, work release programs can be problematic for how they compensate participants and the exploitative nature of hiring prisoners, but they have potential to be successful when they teach real skills in a positive environment. The ability to hire people on release is also incredibly helpful in easing the transition out of prison.

On the flip side, people can get really good experience while incarcerated that does not translate to a job. Kevin, a high school teacher before his charges, discussed how rewarding he found teaching the guys incarcerated with him:

> When you do get somebody who really, just seeing a guy who truly, the whole world gave up on him and you've seen him give up on himself, and you can somehow help him to believe in himself that he can do it. Then he does it, oh we have a big graduation ceremony and everything. You know, my band always played at the graduation ceremony, you know. It gets you man. You know. You hear the stories of these guys man, and you're like, you were on the prison pipeline from day one man, no wonder. Of course you didn't get your high school diploma. DUH. And then to see how much of a big deal it is to them, it's just so much better than teaching regular students in high school, you know, who are just so entitled and so whatever/whatever. And I still love, I wish I could teach, I wish I could teach regular school. I mean, I love teaching. It was my calling (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Of course, going back to teaching high school is out of the question, but when Kevin saw a job posting for a teacher at the Maryland prison—the last one that had held him—he applied but was not qualified because of his charges. This was a job that he had done while employed as a prison "tutor." In his words,

> I was a much better teacher than the teachers, than the staff there. And so they quickly were just like, "oh, just go ahead and run the class. I'm just gonna sit in my office on my fat ass and surf the internet and look at guns. You go ahead and you teach the class." So I was actually a full-fledged teacher, although I was called a tutor (Kevin, interview, October 27, 2021).

Along similar lines, in the last chapter I mentioned Cyrus' experience teaching a fellow prisoner how to read in English, having Hooked on Phonics books sent in by his family, and how rewarding he found helping the English-as-a-second-language prisoners while he was incarcerated.

These stories highlight what can work in prison jobs, but the emphasis needs to be on the rehabilitation, the support, and the growth of those who are incarcerated. This can be done by teaching real skills that can be directly applied, like at South Fork Forest Camp. This goal can also be supported by connecting people back to the community, like the South Fork Forest Camp, the Indiana Canine Assistance Network at Indiana Women's Prison, and through the experience of teaching, like Kevin and Cyrus experienced in the US federal system. Another element of work that helps people transition is networking. Harley's experience on work release allowed him to make connections and get hired on at the metal shop as soon as he was released. The mock job fair that Kevin mentioned in the last chapter also allowed participants to make connections in the community that led to jobs post-release.

There is so much more to reintegration and rehabilitation than work—but in North America people leaving prison need financially stability immediately on release. People released into the community with no money and no support do not have the tools required to succeed, and many are also experiencing the huge additional barrier of problematic substance use. Current reforms like Washington's *Real Labor, Real Wages Act* promise to guarantee incarcerated workers the minimum wage, which is a step in the right direction (Cabahug, 2023; *Real Labor, Real Wages Act,* 2023). If people leaving prison in Canada and the United States can return to a community that supports them, with real marketable skills, and even a way to earn a living immediately, we will likely see a significant reduction in recidivism statistics.

4.4. Avenues for Future Research

This research can go in many directions, but most importantly I hope that it follows the lead of the people who are most affected by the system itself. I believe that it is our role, those of us with the privilege of exploring our curiosities in academia, to lend our voices and our skills to the people who need them the most. I hope that the current study adds to the growing body of work in Canada and the United States that shines a light on the harms caused by our criminal "justice" systems. Here I highlight two scholars doing important work relating to prison abolition and worker organizing in Canada before discussing further avenues for inquiry.

To start, academia can follow the lead of Dr. El Jones (2022) whose book *Abolitionist Intimacies* explores the abolitionist movement in Canada, combining stories from incarcerated people and their families with poetry and a thoroughly researched critique of incarceration in Canada—especially of how our carceral system perpetuates anti-Black racism and the ideologies of colonization. Jones' use of personal stories gathered from years of advocacy demonstrates how our work can be used to amplify marginalized voices, and how important it is to care about the communities we study. In the pursuit of objectivity, academic research can be sterile and uncaring, and Jones carves a path that is warm, caring and foregrounds the lived experience of those experiencing the harsh reality of criminal justice in Canada.

Dr. Jordan House's work is more directly tied into labour. For instance, House's (2020) dissertation explores instances of prisoner/worker organizing in Canadian

institutions. As is well-known in the labour movement, the working class only gains concessions from capital through struggle. This is especially true for those working while incarcerated. House (2020) cites the example of the BC Pen “strike-turned-riot” in 1934 which resulted in pay for federal prisoners in Canada, and since then has remained a “subject of near-constant contestation” (p. 196). House (2020) also details the first instance of incarcerated workers’ unionizing at the Guelph Beef Centre—an abattoir hiring both incarcerated and non-incarcerated workers—in the 1970s.

In the current study, the participants I asked about organizing could not describe any instances of striking, or collective organizing for better conditions. This is an important area for future study, especially considering the potential of a study rooted in Marx’s idea of “workers’ inquiry.” In *La Revue Socialist* (1880, English transcription from 1997), Marx said that the workers alone “can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes form which they suffer and that only they, and not saviors sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills which they are prey” (Marx, 1880). While there are clear parallels between Marx’s concept of a workers’ inquiry and this study, I would not consider the participants I spoke with workers in the same sense that Marx uses. In other words, while I spoke to people incarcerated about work, the identity of “worker” was subordinate to the forced identity of “inmate.” A more faithful workers’ inquiry specific to incarcerated people at a site in North America would be an excellent future study.

Another area that desperately requires more attention is the experience of women who work while incarcerated. Haney’s (2010) comparison of a women’s prison in Hungary and a community-based program in California found interesting differences between the experiences of the women at each institution. While the Hungarian institution’s work-dominant programming created more of a sense of community between the workers, the therapeutic approach at the California facility appeared to further individualize those held there (Haney, 2010). However, crucial similarities emerged that are entirely overlooked when we prioritize male criminality; notably, “both KFB and Visions inmates struggled with their roles as mothers and with legal obstacles to parenting. They received abysmal medical care and lost the most basic reproductive rights. They all grappled with the pain and loss of incarceration” (2010, p. 93). All of this is to say that much more work needs to be done.

Fundamentally, I hope that this study opens the door to much more research that foregrounds the lived experience of people held in custody in Canada and the United States. Most importantly, I hope that this research and studies like it help support the case for decarceration across the world. We take the existence of prisons for granted, but I believe that we can aspire to a world without humans in cages, and that we are overdue to start building that world.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

> We gotta make a change
> It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes
> Let's change the way we eat
> Let's change the way we live
> And let's change the way we treat each other
> You see, the old way wasn't workin'
> So it's on us to do what we gotta do
> To survive (2pac, 1998).

I asked one participant if there was anything that the last institution that held him had done really well and he said, “believe it or not there is—I fucking hate giving credit where credit is due” (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022). This is exactly my feeling regarding the criminal justice systems in North America. One of the most difficult parts of the research has been acknowledging the positive aspects of incarceration in North America, of which there are few. I asked each participant at the end of the interview if they felt rehabilitated and the answers were varied. Some of the people I spoke to needed a break from the path that their life was taking, and incarceration was a wake-up call. This is not to suggest that prison is the only way, far from it, but these are the few cases where incarceration seems to have served its intended function. Others I spoke to had their lives ruined by prison; and for some, prison, surveillance, and the criminal justice system have just been a regular part of their lives since childhood.

For this study I conducted 16 interviews with 13 people who all experienced incarceration in Canadian and/or American prisons. We spoke over the phone, online over Zoom, and in person in Vancouver. Through a series of semi-structured, conversational interviews, I sought out to develop the beginnings of an understanding of the lived experience of working while incarcerated. While the discussions we had covered much more than simply the nature of work, the experiences contained in this study help illuminate the reality of prison jobs programs. This, of course, is not a comprehensive study, but the experiences detailed here help identify some of the cracks in the system and issues that can be immediately improved.

Returning to a critique on the dominant discourse of prison labour, there is some evidence that prison labour does keep people out of trouble, that it teaches skills for the real world, and helps ease the transition back to society. However, as much evidence as

there may be supporting these rationales, prison labour overwhelmingly supports the maintenance and operation of the prison system itself. In other words, the rationale that prisoners should pay their way—especially as legislated by bill C-10, the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* passed in Canada in 2012—appears to be the dominant rationale for prison labour.

While this study has its limitations, it does reinforce the growing body of knowledge supporting drastic changes, especially prison abolition, to the criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States (ACLU, 2022; Davis, 2003; Jones, 2022; McLeod, 2015; Roberts, 2019). Bair (2007) argues explicitly that prison labour in the United States is best understood as modern slavery and there is a lot of evidence to support this claim. Work in most states is mandatory, and refusal can elicit significant repercussions. Chad, for instance, was thrown in segregation for refusing to work. In his words,

> They tried to force me to work at the farm and I declined 'em and because I declined 'em they actually threw me in the hole and I ended up in basically—lock yourself in a bathroom with some random person from craigslist for, you know, 24 hours a day (Chad Emerson, interview, October 28, 2021).

At Warkworth in Ontario, guys are locked in their cells all day and only let out for meals, unless they have a job (Dalton, interview, September 18, 2022). Considering how much of the day-to-day prison operations are handled by the incarcerated population, and how much this saves on labour costs, it is perhaps no wonder that the institutions have to coerce participation.

Since the first houses of correction emerged in Europe in the sixteenth century, punishment and labour have been intricately connected. The Rasphuis of Amsterdam contained people who otherwise would not work, incorporating them into the new capitalist labour force both through forced labour, and with the intention of "resocializing" them into entering the workforce freely (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, p. 42). In North America a similar critique is often made, but in today's criminal justice system, the work that is coerced most often supports the operation and maintenance of the correctional system itself, with a fraction supporting other government endeavours like fighting forest fires and producing furniture for government buildings, and a smaller fraction supporting private interests (Bair, 2007).

In a world where prisons exist, the work that incarcerated people do must be entirely divorced from the financial motivations of the system itself and focused entirely on the rehabilitation of the individual. Jobs need to teach real transferable skills, be appropriately compensated, and give people a chance to give back to the community. Programs like forest firefighting can be successful when they follow the lead of sites like South Fork in Oregon, a camp jointly operated by the Oregon Department of Corrections and the Department of Forestry, and not states like California, whose reliance on incarcerated firefighters creates a conflict of interest that puts the economic interest of the state ahead of the rehabilitation of the individual (Syroka, 2019). If we want to see a real reduction in recidivism, we need to actually address the reasons why people commit crime in the first place. We need to change the practices that further threaten successful reintegration and refocus rehabilitation to be supportive and healing.

Prison jobs can be positive, but the first thing that needs to change is that they cannot be coerced. If one of the goals of prison labour is to ease the transition back to society, in the real-world work is incentivized with wages—and this would be a good place to start. This has traditionally been opposed on the grounds that fair wages for incarcerated workers would remove the incentive to hire them in the first place (Syroka, 2019, p. 409). Under a restorative paradigm that prioritizes the incarcerated individual's rehabilitation, and consequently the well-being and safety of the community, this would not be a concern. In other words, the economic incentive should not take precedence in matters as important as justice and public safety.

Prison labour is the focus of this investigation, but it touches on an idea that is much more fundamental than simply the work that people do while incarcerated. At the heart of this research is the fundamental belief that people should not be caged. Our criminal justice systems are working overtime to handle social issues that should be addressed in the community. This project aspires to a world where prisons are not necessary, even where police are not necessary—not one where people are not harmed, but one where the paradigm of justice is reframed away from the state and towards a world where justice means taking responsibility, making things right, and repairing relationships. In other words, this project aspires to a criminal justice system built on the principles of restorative justice, where "we address the harms and needs of those harmed, hold those causing harm accountable to 'put right' those harms, and involve both parties as well as relevant communities in this process" (Zehr, 2015, p. 35).

This world is possible, but it requires a significant reframing of our understanding of justice and punishment. It also requires those of us who have the privilege of limited interaction with the criminal justice system to step up and amplify the voices of those who do not.

But the work continues, and as we aspire to a utopian world without prisons, I wanted to end on one final thank you to everyone who helped make this project possible. First, I wanted to give one more big thank you to my supervisors Dr. Enda Brophy and Dr. Curt Griffiths, all my friends and colleagues in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University, and my friends and family, who were so helpful and supportive throughout the entire process. Most importantly, I wanted to thank all the people I had the pleasure of meeting because of their interest in supporting the project. I owe a significant debt of gratitude to everyone who participated in the study. People who gave up their time and their expertise because they believed in supporting research into incarceration because it might make the experience better for others who find themselves on the wrong side of the law. One of my biggest concerns throughout the process of researching, writing, and editing this thesis was honouring their time and their experience and I sincerely hope I did them justice.

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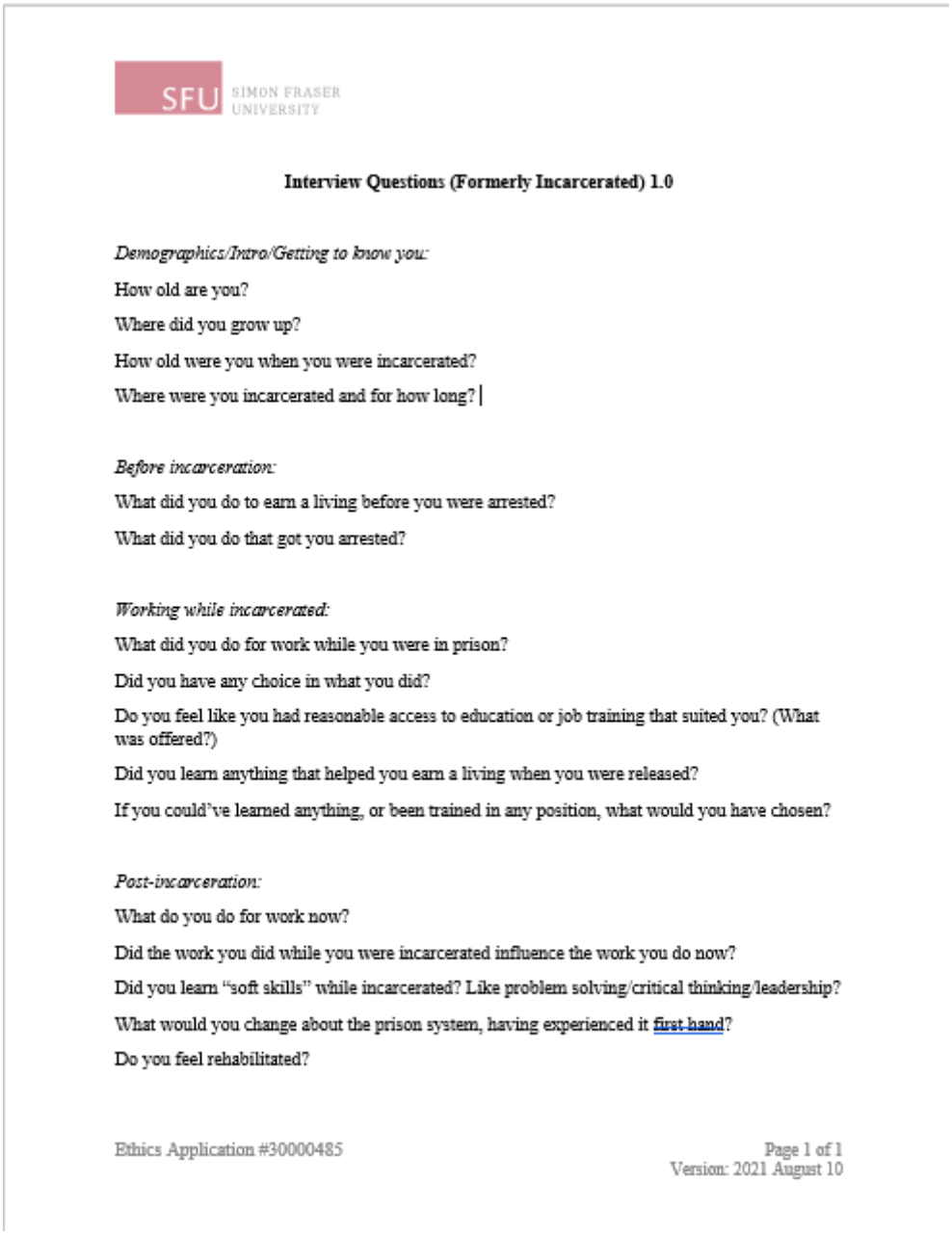
Appendix A.

Interview Questions



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Interview Questions (Formerly Incarcerated) 1.0

Demographics/Intro/Getting to know you:

How old are you?

Where did you grow up?

How old were you when you were incarcerated?

Where were you incarcerated and for how long?

Before incarceration:

What did you do to earn a living before you were arrested?

What did you do that got you arrested?

Working while incarcerated:

What did you do for work while you were in prison?

Did you have any choice in what you did?

Do you feel like you had reasonable access to education or job training that suited you? (What was offered?)

Did you learn anything that helped you earn a living when you were released?

If you could've learned anything, or been trained in any position, what would you have chosen?

Post-incarceration:

What do you do for work now?

Did the work you did while you were incarcerated influence the work you do now?

Did you learn "soft skills" while incarcerated? Like problem solving/critical thinking/leadership?

What would you change about the prison system, having experienced it first-hand?

Do you feel rehabilitated?

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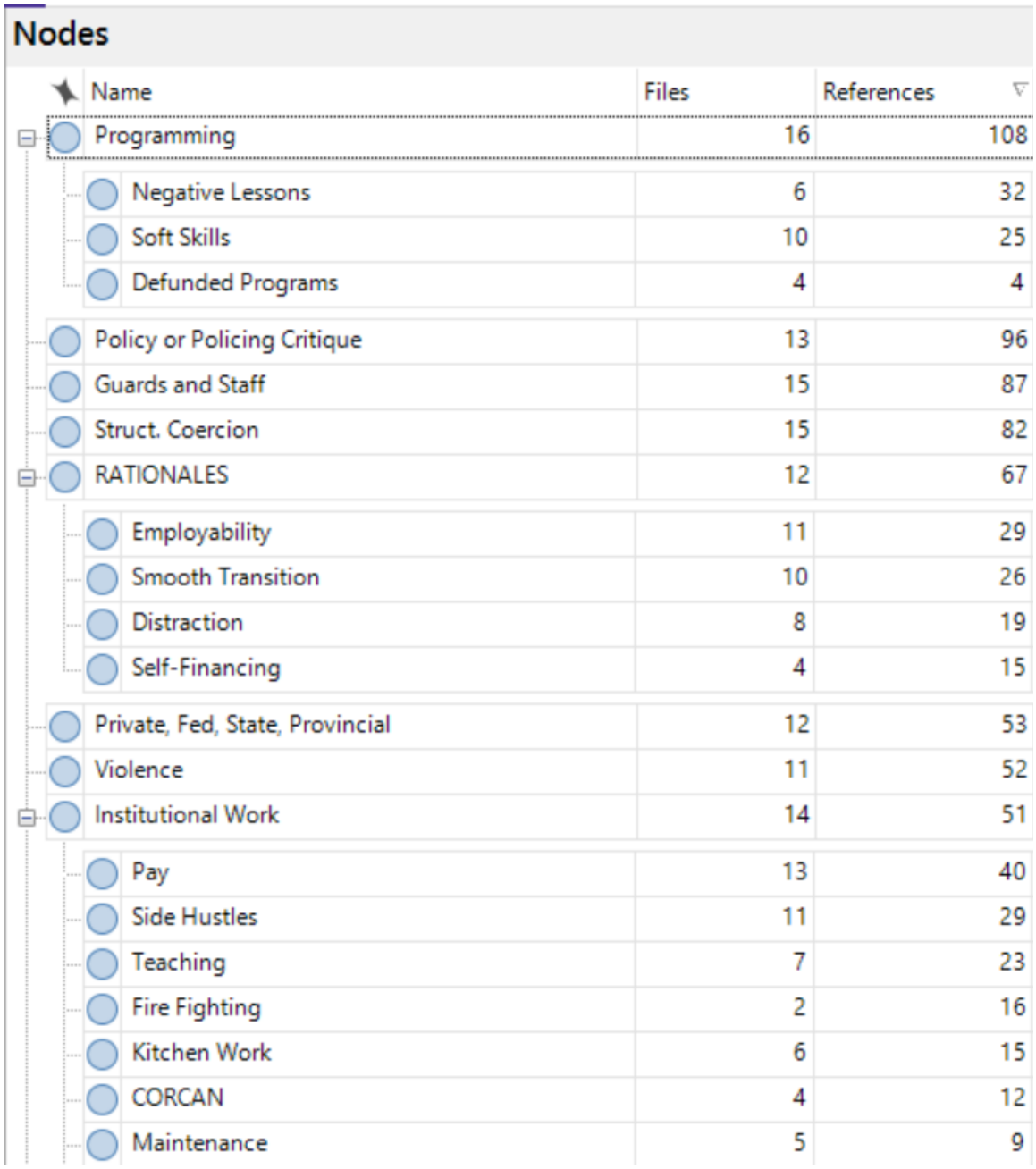
Figure A1. Screenshot of Interview Questions

Appendix B.

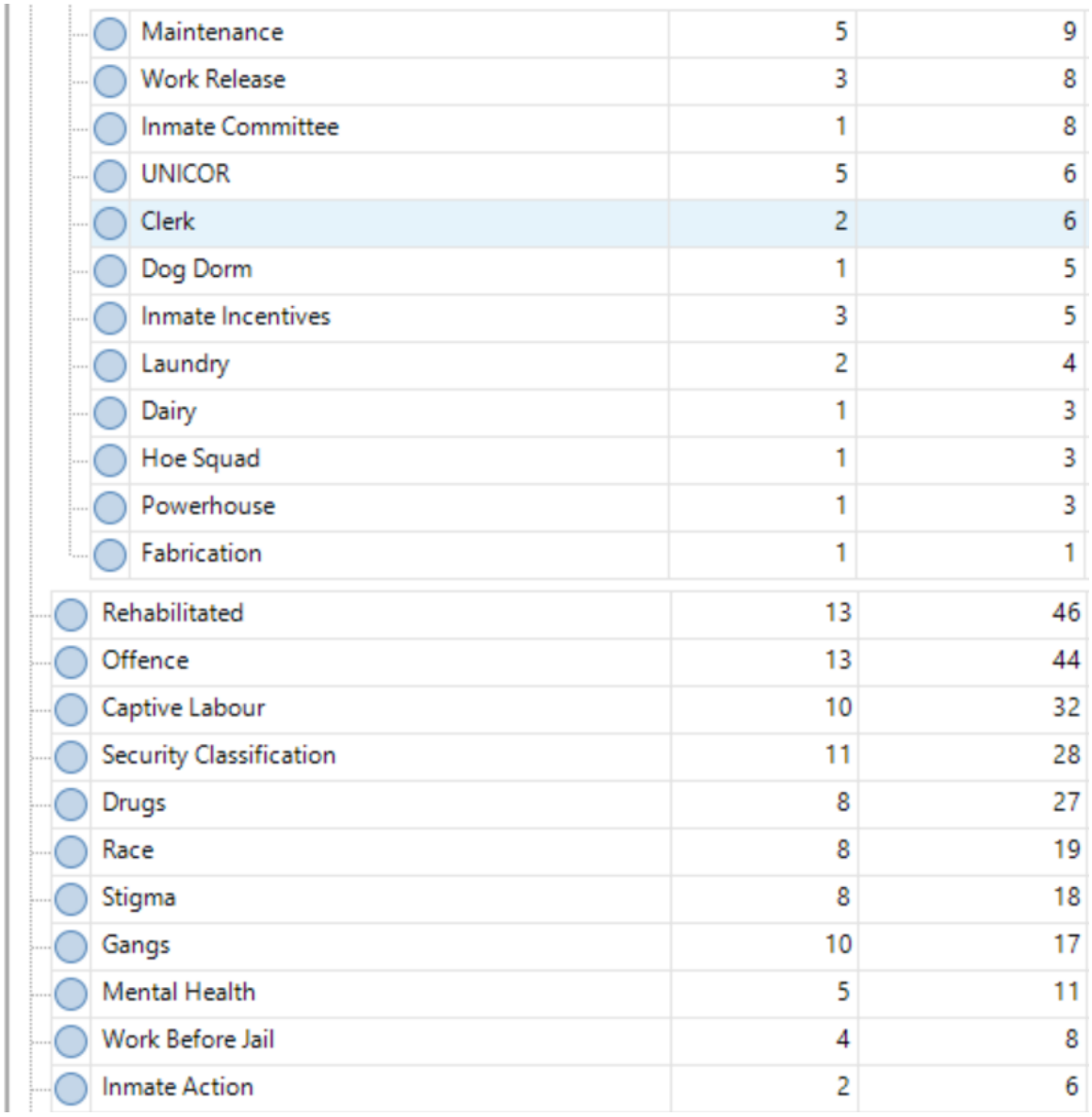
Coding Categories (NVivo 12)



Nodes

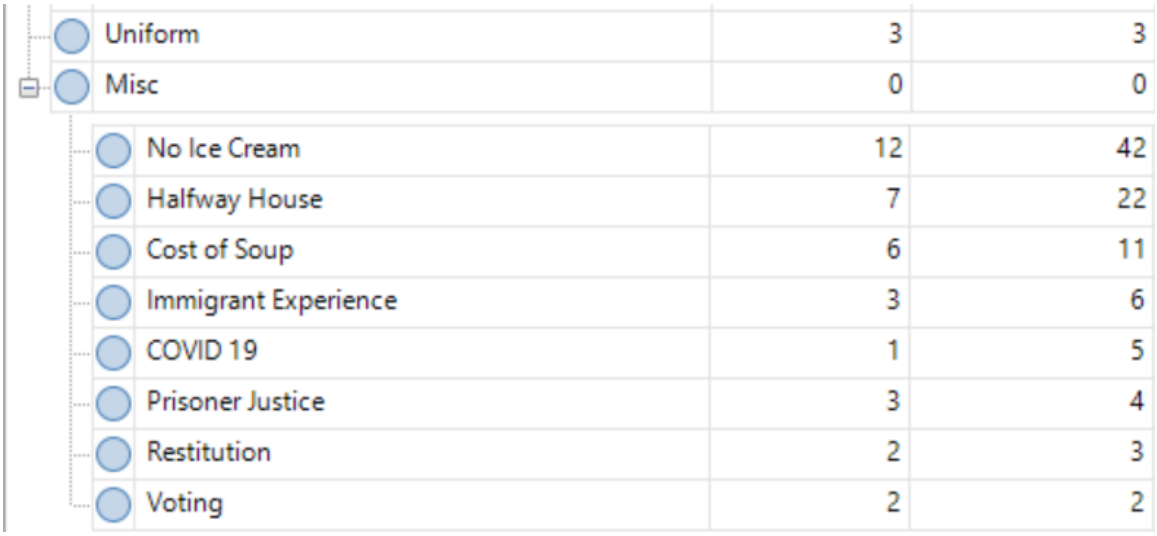
Name	Files	References
Programming	16	108
Negative Lessons	6	32
Soft Skills	10	25
Defunded Programs	4	4
Policy or Policing Critique	13	96
Guards and Staff	15	87
Struct. Coercion	15	82
RATIONALES	12	67
Employability	11	29
Smooth Transition	10	26
Distraction	8	19
Self-Financing	4	15
Private, Fed, State, Provincial	12	53
Violence	11	52
Institutional Work	14	51
Pay	13	40
Side Hustles	11	29
Teaching	7	23
Fire Fighting	2	16
Kitchen Work	6	15
CORCAN	4	12
Maintenance	5	9

Figure B1. Screenshot of NVivo 12 Coding Categories 1



Maintenance	5	9
Work Release	3	8
Inmate Committee	1	8
UNICOR	5	6
Clerk	2	6
Dog Dorm	1	5
Inmate Incentives	3	5
Laundry	2	4
Dairy	1	3
Hoe Squad	1	3
Powerhouse	1	3
Fabrication	1	1
Rehabilitated	13	46
Offence	13	44
Captive Labour	10	32
Security Classification	11	28
Drugs	8	27
Race	8	19
Stigma	8	18
Gangs	10	17
Mental Health	5	11
Work Before Jail	4	8
Inmate Action	2	6

Figure B2. Screenshot of NVivo 12 Coding Categories 2



Uniform	3	3
Misc	0	0
No Ice Cream	12	42
Halfway House	7	22
Cost of Soup	6	11
Immigrant Experience	3	6
COVID 19	1	5
Prisoner Justice	3	4
Restitution	2	3
Voting	2	2

Figure B3. Screenshot of NVivo 12 Coding Categories 3

Appendix C.

Promotional Materials

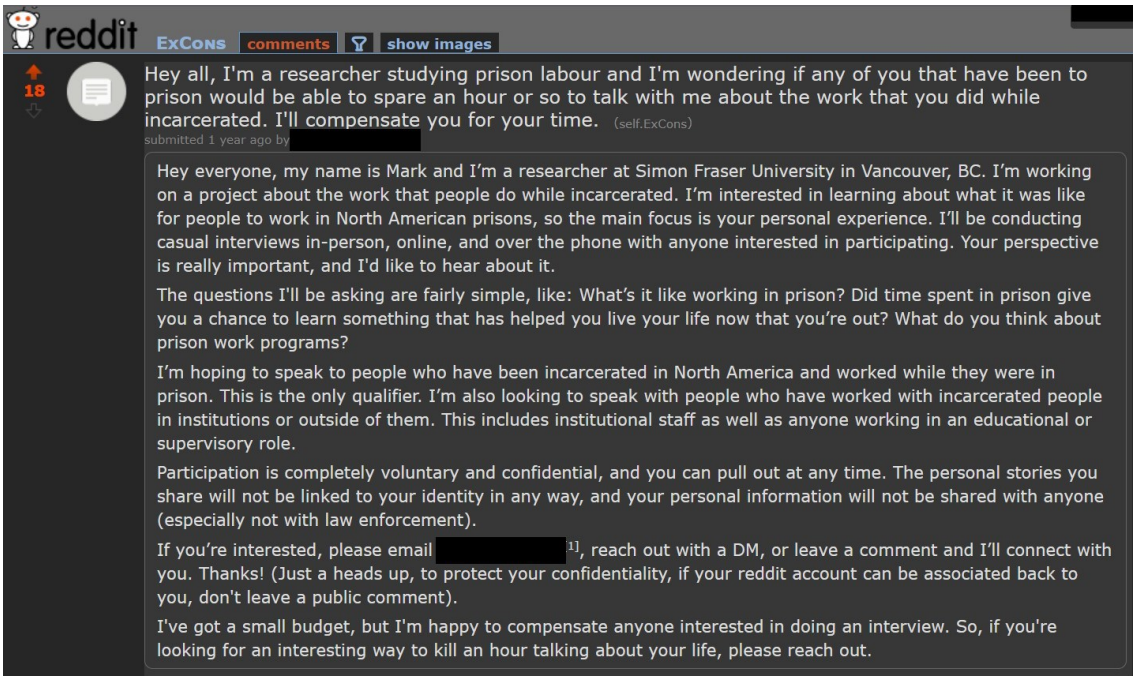


Figure C1. Screenshot of Reddit post seeking participants

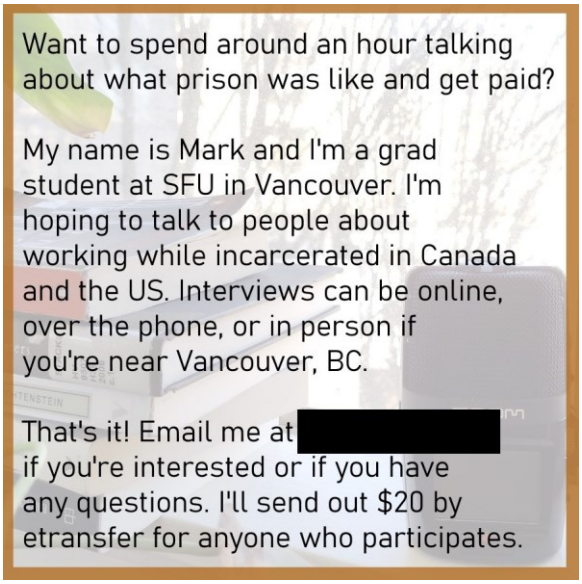


Figure C2. Screenshot of ad displayed in the March 2022 issue of PASAN

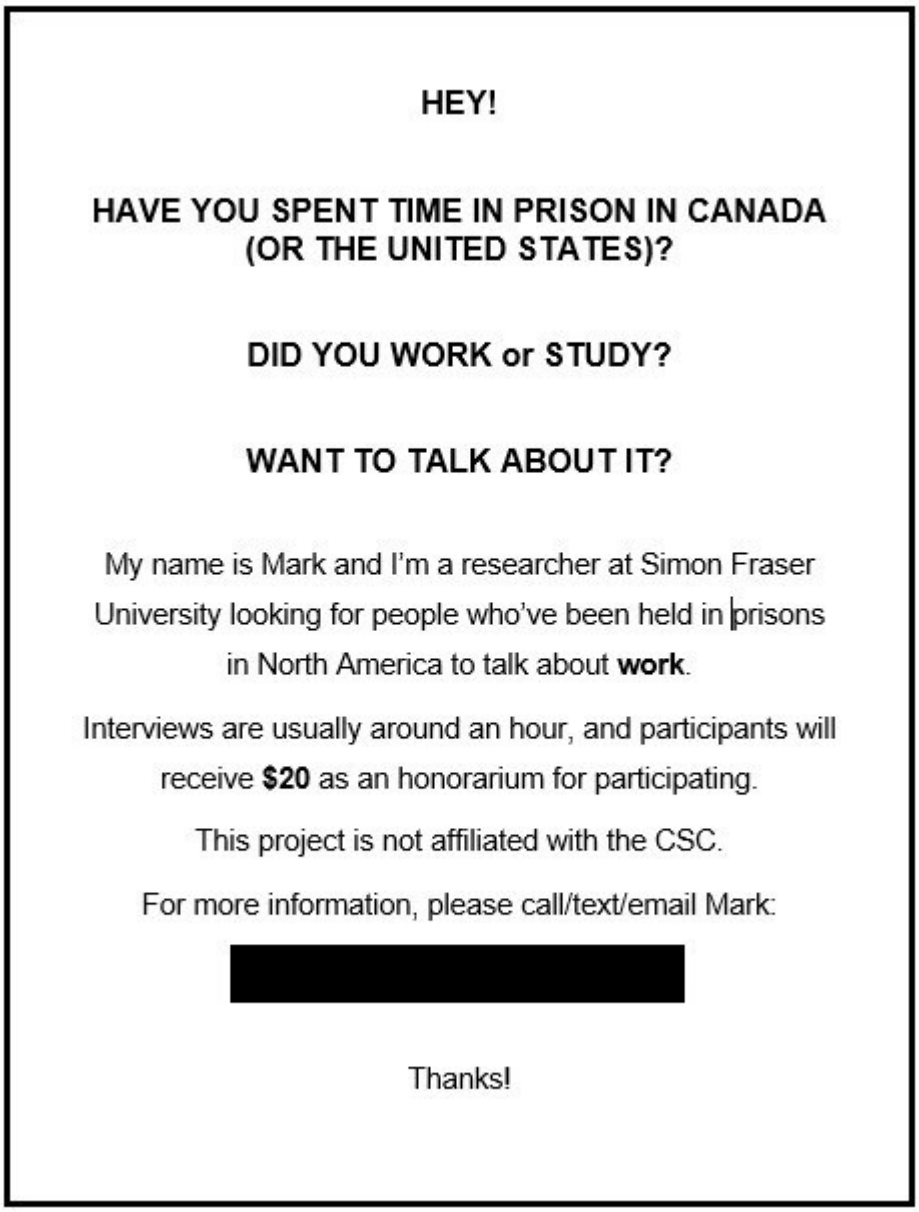


Figure C3. Promotional material posted strategically in Vancouver in the Summer, 2022.