Offender
Reentry
For all the wonderful boys in my life: Daniel, Zachary, and Evan
For my parents: Walter and Jane
—E. G.

For my daughter, Zalia, who fills my world with hope
—J. B. H.
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—E. G. and J. B. H.
THE STEREOTYPE OF OFFENDER REENTRY MIGHT LOOK SOME-
thing like the classic Coen brothers movie Raising Arizona. In the 1987
movie H. I. McDunnough, played by Nicolas Cage, is seen repeatedly
entering and returning to prison and having his mug shot taken again
and again. It appears that H. I. is a serial recidivist. Movie scenes like
this provide a powerful example to the audience that offender reentry is
not a successful endeavor and that prison serves merely as a pit stop in
the revolving door of justice. In 2011, just under 7 million offenders
were serving under some form of correctional supervision (i.e., prison,
jam, probation, and parole). Of that total, approximately 1.2 million of-
fenders were serving sentences in prison. Every day in the United States
1,600 adults (700,000 annually) leave federal and state prisons and re-
turn to society (Glaze and Parks, 2012). Thus, each day offenders are
attempting to successfully reintegrate back into their communities.
However, successful reentry is an evasive goal for many. P. A. Langan
and D. J. Levin (2002), in a 1994 study of recidivism rates tracked
300,000 prisoners in fifteen states. They reported that 67.5 percent of
offenders were rearrested within three years. Clearly, as the Hollywood
images have portrayed, prison may serve as a revolving door for many
offenders.

While successful reentry is an issue for prisoners, it is also a con-
cern for those serving probation or parole sentences. In 2011, 4.8 mil-
lion offenders were currently serving such sentences and represent the
majority (70 percent) of those being supervised in state and federal cor-
rectional systems (Maruschak and Parks, 2012). The Bureau of Justice
Statistics conducted several studies on offenders during the 1980s and
reported that recidivism rates, defined as rearrest within three years, to
be 43 percent for felony probationers and 62 percent for parolees (Beck
and Shipley, 1989; Langan and Cuniff, 1992). Correctional administrators walk a tightrope as they try to balance community safety and foster offender reentry success while facing cutbacks to their budgets. The cuts to the budgets of departments of corrections are a national problem (Scott-Hayward, 2009). In fact, the cuts have been so severe the Vera Institute of Justice labeled the problem as a “fiscal crisis in corrections” (Scott-Hayward, 2009, p. 1).

The public may tolerate approximately 5 million offenders serving sentences in the community, but if these offenders commit crimes, the community becomes outraged. In 2002, Elizabeth Smart was abducted from her bedroom in the middle of the night in Salt Lake City, Utah, and her case drew national media attention and scrutiny. The police focused their attention on Richard Ricci, a parolee, who had been hired as a handyman by the Smart family (Henetz, 2003). A media circus enveloped Ricci as he seemed to “fit” the profile. To the media and the public, Ricci was another example of a parolee who could not reintegrate successfully into society following his prison sentence and harmed an innocent community member. However, Ricci refused to confess to the crime, maintained his innocence, and ultimately died from a brain hemorrhage in jail a few weeks later. Ultimately, Smart was found nine months later alive in the custody of Brian Mitchell and Wanda Barzee (his wife)—her kidnappers.

Beyond protecting the public, correctional administrators are expected to ensure that those offenders returning to their communities will successfully reintegrate and assimilate back into society. However, offenders face many barriers. Research on offender reentry over the past thirty years has demonstrated that offenders’ ability to reintegrate successfully is hindered by numerous obstacles such as difficulty in obtaining employment, acquiring housing, and being admitted to higher education (Allender, 2004; Cowan and Fionda, 1994; Delgado, 2012; Harlow, 2003; Harris and Keller, 2005; Hunt, Bowers, and Miller, 1973; Nagin and Waldfogel, 1998; Paylor, 1995; Rodriguez and Brown, 2003; Starr, 2002; Whelan, 1973) along with serious social and medical problems (Petersilia, 2003). Newly released offenders encounter stigmatization (Bahn and Davis, 1991; Funk, 2004; Steffensmeier and Kramer, 1980; Tewksbury, 2005), lose social standing in their communities (Chiricos, Jackson, and Waldo, 1972), and are in need of social support (Cullen, 1994; La Vigne, Visher, and Castro, 2004; Lurigio, 1996) and substance abuse and mental health treatment (Petersilia, 2003). Thus, correctional administrators struggle to protect the public while at the same time promoting offender reentry success in the face of what seem like insurmountable obstacles with limited resources.
All too often, offender reentry is viewed as an afterthought by politicians and the public. The focus of the criminal justice system has been centered on punishment over the last several decades, specifically tough penalties for offenders due to the “get tough on crime” philosophy. This attention gap has left many ex-offenders struggling to successfully reintegrate back into society. The term *ex-offender*, as used in this text, is defined as an offender who has received and has completed any form of correctional punishment including a prison sentence, probation, parole, or any range of intermediate sanction (e.g., home confinement, work release, halfway house).

Whereas the public may have not paid much attention to the struggles ex-offenders face during reentry (i.e., the process of reintegrating back into society following a punishment), researchers have not ignored this group, examining and identifying their needs and challenges. However, much of the focus on ex-offender reentry has revolved around *failure* rather than *success*. That is, an overwhelming amount of discussion surrounding offender reentry has mostly centered on examining recidivism rates as offenders reintegrate back into the community. Such discussions of offender reentry have been void of the identification of what factors could contribute to successful reentry and what makes for successful reentry. Also missing from the literature on offender reentry are the voices of ex-offenders—their own success stories about how they beat the odds—and perspectives of practitioners regarding the necessary ingredients to foster successful reentry for ex-offenders.

In this book, we seek to fill this gap by providing an overview of research on offender reentry and the inclusion of original research. In the rest of this chapter, we address historical and contemporary perspectives on offender reentry. In Chapter 2, we provide factors and profiles of successful transition and reintegration. The identification of the needs and challenges of ex-offenders during reentry to create opportunities for successful transitions is presented in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 explain how success may differ for ex-offenders in regard to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Chapters 6 and 7 provide original data with the inclusion of qualitative findings from interviews with twenty-one ex-offenders and nineteen community corrections officers (CCOs) in the state of Washington in 2012. In these interviews, ex-offenders and practitioners were asked to identify factors that foster successful reentry, to provide examples of successful reentry narratives, and to offer their opinions as to what needs to be done to increase reentry success. Ex-offenders were asked to provide their own accounts of their success and to explain, in their own words, what contributed to their success, and CCOs were asked to recall success stories of former clients that they had supervised.
In conclusion, Chapter 8 outlines current policies that have the potential to enhance offender reentry and new policy ideas are presented. Before getting to those viewpoints later in the book, we will define what is meant by the term reentry and to provide a detailed history of the policies and practices that have had an impact on offender reentry in the United States.

What Is Offender Reentry?

The term reentry may conjure up images of parolees from mainstream Hollywood movies who have attempted to “make it” outside the prison walls. In the 1994 film, The Shawshank Redemption, the main character Andy (played by Tim Robbins) was sentenced to a forty-year prison sentence for the murder of his wife, but later escapes from prison. One of his friends in the movie, Red (played by Morgan Freeman) is released on parole. Upon Andy’s escape, he exposes the corruption taking place at the prison where he was incarcerated. Both Andy and Red are able to slip into a comfortable postprison existence. On the other hand, in the 1999 thriller, Double Jeopardy, the main character Libby (played by Ashley Judd), who was falsely convicted of killing her husband, who was actually alive, struggles upon receiving parole and commits numerous parole infractions and new crimes in a quest to find where her husband is hiding and uncover her lost son’s whereabouts. In the 2006 film Sherrybaby, Maggie Gyllenhaal plays ex-offender Sherry Swanson, who struggles with postprison issues, including addiction and being reintroduced to her daughter. The film similarly shows the difficulties faced when ex-offenders return to society. With pop cultural images of offender reentry such as these, it is no wonder why most in society do not have a clear understanding of the real-world experience of reentry or a clear understanding of who the offenders are that are attempting to reintegrate back into society.

Reentry is most commonly referred to as the transition of offenders from state and federal prisons to community supervision (e.g., parole) (Hughes and Wilson, 2004). This definition suggests that the only individuals who are attempting to reintegrate back into society are those who have served their full prison term sentence or those released early from prison via parole. However, reentry occurs for many types of offenders besides those on parole. J. Travis notes, reentry is a nearly universal experience for criminal defendants, not just returning prisoners. . . . Everyone who is arrested, charged with a crime, and then released from custody moves from a state of imprisonment to a state of liberty. Everyone who is released on bail, placed on probation
after a period of pretrial detention, sentenced to weekend jail, or released to a drug treatment facility experienced a form of reentry. (2001, p. 26)

Thus, offenders can also be sentenced to probation, and probationers make up another group that is attempting to reintegrate back into society after the commission of a crime (Travis, 2001). After all, probationers have to abide by conditions of their probation sentence, which can include obtaining legal employment, obtaining educational or vocational training, and participating in substance abuse treatment. Yet other examples of offenders attempting to reenter society would include those who had gone through work release programs, halfway houses, and day-reporting centers.

Work release programs can be described as community-based treatment correctional programs where offenders reside, after serving most of their prison sentences, to assist them in reintegrating back into society (Elmer and Cohen, 1978). These programs allow certain offenders to serve the remainder of their sentences in the community under close supervision (Turner and Petersilia, 1996). Offenders can also be directly sentenced to a work release program in lieu of serving a jail sentence first. At the work release program, offenders participate in programming, search for employment, and begin to reestablish family connections. The offender is required to abide by the work release program rules (e.g., curfew and drug/alcohol testing) while participating in the program. These programs help facilitate the successful transition of offenders into their communities. For example, offenders receive referrals for services (e.g., clothing, education, licensing) and are required to seek employment (Turner and Petersilia, 1996).

Similar to those in work release facilities, offenders serve some, or all, of their sentence in a community-based residential treatment program known as a halfway house. By being directly sentenced to a halfway house, offenders are diverted from serving time in the local jail. Utilizing this type of sentence, judges can alleviate the overcrowding in local jails by ordering offenders to participate in a program that may assist them in transitioning into their communities (Latessa and Smith, 2011). Much of the programming found in a halfway house may not be found in jails due to budgetary restrictions and the diverse populations that jails serve. The time served in the halfway house can be anywhere from one month to several months, and residents are required to obtain legal employment, find housing, and participate in programs (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous). Additionally, halfway houses may be used as a bridge between prison and reintegration. The use of halfway houses for prisoners prior to release assists in alleviating overcrowding conditions at the prison as well as fostering successful transition for the offender.
from prison to the community. Thus, some offenders are not directly released on parole and sent into the community, but rather these offenders are released to a halfway house for a range of time that can be as long as eighteen months. After demonstrating the ability to abide by curfew and find adequate housing and legal employment, these offenders are then released in their communities.

Another example of offenders attempting to reintegrate into society outside the scope of parole are those offenders serving in day-reporting centers. Typically, offenders serving these sentences include persons over the age of eighteen; persons charged with a crime who are incarcerated or facing incarceration; pretrial detainees, sentenced offenders, and postsentence violators; and misdemeanants and felons (Latessa and Smith, 2011). The offenders are supervised by a probation officer and are required to report to the center on a daily basis. At the day-reporting centers, the offender will also be required to participate in programming such as mental health counseling, education programs, social skills training, and substance abuse treatment. Participants in day-reporting center programs are monitored for drug and alcohol use. Since pretrial detainees can be included as participants in day-reporting center programs, the time served in these programs for offenders can range from less than one week for offenders who have not gone to trial to as much as one year for those offenders who have been formally sentenced to a day-reporting center as punishment.

In sum, a wide range of offenders are attempting to reenter society. Some of these offenders serve long sentences postrelease, while others serve short sentences. The term offender reentry as used in this book refers to the postrelease experience of any offender who completed any sentence in the correctional system (i.e., prison, probation, parole, or any form of intermediate sanction) and is transitioning back into the community. Given the wide range of offenders reintegrating back into society and the various resources that may be available to assist these offenders, offenders face an uphill battle in the bid to successfully reenter their communities. To better understand offender reentry in the present day, we need to examine how reentry was viewed in the past and the policies that have an impact on the ability of offenders to successfully reintegrate back into their communities after serving a short- or long-term correctional sentence.

**Historical Underpinnings**

To understand the evolution of the offender reentry movement in the United States, one must examine the influence of early writings of
criminologists. Early criminologists viewed criminality as being due to biology or atavistic traits. One of the most influential early theorists was Cesare Lombroso who in 1876 published *L’Homme Criminel* (The Criminal Man). In this book, Lombroso presents results of his research whereby he examined the physical characteristics of male Italian prisoners and compared them to male Italian soldiers. He claimed that criminals are born as criminals and appear distinctly different from noncriminals as they have various atavistic traits such as twisted noses, broad shoulders, excessive moles, long arms, or an extra finger or toe.

While these claims seem laughable by current research standards, interestingly discussion still resonates in today’s culture around the appearance of offenders. Much of the dialogue regarding the appearance of offenders can be viewed in some of the most notorious or current captivating cases in the criminal justice system. For instance, many in society are flabbergasted that men, defined as handsome by many in the media, such as Ted Bundy (infamous Northwest serial killer) and Scott Peterson (husband living in the suburbs of California who killed his wife and unborn child) could commit homicide. Additionally, the media presented the 2011 Florida trial coverage of Casey Anthony as a pretty yet wild (as depicted by images of her partying that were posted on her Facebook page) mother who is a pathological liar and may have killed her daughter (Hightower, 2011). In yet another example, Amanda Knox, a University of Washington student who was studying abroad in Italy was convicted in 2009 of killing her roommate. Throughout her Italian trial and subsequent appeals, Amanda was referred to as “Foxy Knoxy” by the press in the United States and Europe (her murder conviction was overturned in 2011) (Johnson, 2009). The past and current discussion regarding the physical appearance of the aforementioned criminal defendants in the media and by the public provides a more recent example of Lombroso’s proposition that offenders are somehow supposed to look different (i.e., perhaps unattractive) from nonoffenders. Lombroso’s claims that criminals are born, not made, influenced the focus of the nascent correctional system in the United States during the 1800s. That is, as the thinking of the times went, if offenders are plagued by biological deficits, the main focus of corrections should be on punishment, specifically incarceration, rather than rehabilitation. Thus, reentry of offenders into the community after serving their sentences was not a concern of correctional administrators or encouraged by the public.

With the inception of the Walnut Street Jail in 1790 in Philadelphia and subsequent jails and prisons that opened in the late 1700s and early 1800s in the United States, the primary goal of their use was punishment with rehabilitation being a secondary goal. After all, if as Lombroso proposed, individuals were biologically determined to commit
crime, efforts to reform them were futile. However, as more jails and prisons opened, the idea that offenders may need assistance, as opposed to just incarceration, and support upon release was on the minds of some. John Augustus, considered the Father of Probation, as he coined the term *probation* and developed the first probation program in 1841 in Boston, was one of the first reformers to push for rehabilitation for offenders (Latessa and Smith, 2011). Augustus believed that one of the objects of the law was to reform criminals (Dressler, 1962). He recognized that incarcerated offenders had needs (e.g., alcohol addiction) that were not being addressed in the jails. Using his own money, he bailed out first-time offenders (e.g., those who had committed petty crimes or displayed public intoxication) from jail and persuaded the court to release the offenders to his custody. While the offenders were in Augustus’s care, they were rehabilitated and obtained legal employment. He then would return them to court and demonstrate that they were now reformed. At the time, he was considered by many to be a fanatic or just a fool. Unfortunately, Augustus was ahead of the times as the chief concern of the public and correctional administrators was not on rehabilitation of the offender but rather on punishment of the offender.

The ideological shift of the focus in offender corrections from strictly punishment to rehabilitation originated from the 1870 National Prison Association meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio (Latessa and Smith, 2011). At this historic meeting, reformers laid out seven principles of corrections including one with a focus on reforming or rehabilitating the offenders. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, progressive reformers began lobbying for the importance of rehabilitation and urging its implementation within the correctional system (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982). During this period, the time was ripe for rehabilitation to be considered a viable focus of corrections by both correctional administrators and the public. With growing social awareness by the public following the Civil War, massive prison overcrowding, and the shifting view on offending behavior by criminologists, the time was “right” for a change in corrections (Latessa and Smith, 2011). For instance, criminologists were moving away from solely biological explanations of criminality and began proposing that the environmental factors (e.g., neighborhood, peers) and strains played a role in the onset and shaping of criminality (see Agnew, 1992; Merton, 1938; Shaw and McKay, 1938; Sutherland, 1947b). From the 1940s through the 1970s, discourse on the nature of the location of criminal behavior in biology, personality, and environment occurred in criminology. There was a movement away from the location of criminal behavior in biological and personality factors, and a movement toward utilitarian, free will models of criminal behavior and