

*A Never-Ending Hall Pass*  
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Life in prison is not like having a hall pass where you escape to another world for a moment and forget your problems. Life in prison is not like a day at the beach or going out for drinks with friends or coworkers. It is a type of life where we should never imagine facing. The chance encounters that people have with incarcerated individuals such as interviews or seeing them through a documentary, doesn't give us the whole picture of what it's like living in a cell block with little to no sunlight, few social interactions, and the feeling of being watched 24/7. From all of this, we cannot say "Oh, I get it now" or "I understand what they're going through" because we have put ourselves fully in a prisoner's shoes. Spending one day taking a tour in the penitentiary system does not do the experience justice either because individuals who live in prisons change over time through living without. One incarcerated individual, Victor Hassine explains what "life without" truly means. He says that "life without" says a lot about a person. That the "prisoner is alive, but he lives without most, if not all, of the things that make life worth living" (Hassine, 2011, pg. 149). These incarcerated residents lose everything that they once loved and cherished. They morph themselves in a person that once was compelling and intriguing to someone who is hardly recognizable. Not just from physical appearances, but also their mentality capabilities change—usually for the worse. The prison life inside is excessively different from life outside the walls.

***Life of an Incarcerated Resident***

Of the life of a convicted individual, prison is seen to "restore order and certainty in a person's life" (Romero, 2018). This is based off a "rigid" schedule for these residents to adapt to because of the life that they had been given for their devious actions. The time they must wake up in the morning, to the time where they have to be back in their cells with the lights off are a few examples of this strict schedule. These individuals have a little bit of leeway with their freedom but also, they're set up in such a way that they often function like zombies. Some of these residences can leave their cellblock depending on the number of "brownie points" they have earned. Some of them don't have that extra benefit such as whether they have a high security watching over them, handcuffed or shackled everywhere, or confined separately from everyone else.

***Benefits in the Penitentiary system***

There are some benefits that each incarcerated resident can achieve such as getting a job. These jobs range from employment in "factories, janitorial, kitchen duties, laundry, and maintenance crews" (Romero, 2018). They can also get informed and join vocational and educational programs like achieving college credit, certifications, and licensure to enhance their career goals inside and eventually outside the prison. One prisoner from the Travis County Sheriff's Department in Texas discussed how having a job is a must have "privilege" because it "builds up self-esteem" (Smith & Ward, 1993). In the penal system, allowing confined individuals the opportunity to work allows lowers the costs to operate these systems and provides a necessary foundation of support for residents to (at least partially) take care of themselves.

Additionally, some penal systems allow residents to earn time off their sentence for hours worked such as a day off for every eight hours worked (Smith & Ward, 1993). It's not much, but it's enough to mentally motivate some incarcerated residents to continue to be sane and find balance in the life that they're living in.

### ***Diagnosis***

Although there are some positive aspects of staying in prison, life in prison can take out a big chunk out of one's life by consuming them in a never-ending spiral of knowing that you're trapped. Victor Hassine discusses how the "spice of life in the real world" is drawled out with lifelong confinement and the "human environment" of the prison is "stone cold, as if bodies, not persons, lived in those cages we call cells and many prisoners, sadly call home" (Hassine, 2011, pg. 149). Life in prison is a dark, lifeless ball of hopelessness and the only way to overcome it is by jumping in the passenger seat and seeing where the ride takes you.

In the penitentiary system, relationships are also very hard to form because of the lack of uncertainty and trust towards other resident's and officers. Many incarcerated residents have witnessed or endured an inappropriate sexual experience with other fellow residents or officers whether they consented to it or was forced upon them. Residents are seen as the "pawns of the prison world" because anyone could come inside and have their way with them whether they want to or not (Hassine, 2011, pg. 150).

From words and experience from a previous resident's exposure to the life in prison, "most regular officers aren't certain whether we are here because of insanity or criminality" (Romero, 2018). These incarcerated individuals are trapped in this penal system where they're forced to live their lives stuck in a cellblock with only one guard monitoring and patrolling the area and are surrounded to more than 120 other captives. From the prisoner's perspective, the tense environment that they call home could change drastically in a matter of seconds or minutes and could cause "distrust" and "bad communication" between the officers and other residents (Romero, 2018).

### ***Mental state and Prescription***

The mental state of incarcerated residents also yields a big impact of the livelihood of these individuals because of the hardships, struggles, and the loss that these people have had to face. The things that they once thought were pleasurable or exciting are now nonexistent or far off in a distant memory. As non-incarcerated folk, we have no idea of regarding the circuits and wires intercepting through these people's mind because life in prison isn't like a day at the beach collecting seashells or a one-day hall pass to live in a new identity. It's a darkness that only those who gone through it could understand. In many instances, their mental health suffers significantly and include conditions like depression, anxiety, loss of sanity and awareness, and loss of confidence. Residents who know they're incaved in these walls lose some hope and continue to feel alone or paranoid. Thoughts of harming themselves or others also occur in these people's mind from time to time where they see suicide as a last resort for breaking out of prison life.

From a Federal Sentencing Report written by Browne, Cambier, and Agha (2011), there are consequences of segregating inmates where they get new or “exacerbated” mental health disorders or illnesses. From their study, the long use of segregation increased the likelihood that residents and former residents will continue to reoffend and recidivate. Other mental concerns in these conditions occur in women’s prisons where most of these incarcerated women had prior traumatic events before getting charged and experienced more physical or emotional trauma while in prison. In the *Boston Globe*, Garcia (2021) notes, some states are creating more programs to place “future women in supportive settings that’ll address their past and their future plans and goals”. There are other many examples of improvement in these prison systems such as in juvenile penitentiary prisons. From a report in a Florida prison, juveniles who moved to adult penal facilities received “little or no education or counseling” while in juvenile detention facilities, they received “placement offer education and counseling” which allowed these young individuals a “secure and a safe environment” to come to terms to what they may have done or experienced (Kupchik, 2007).

### *Reflecting thoughts*

These educational and treatment programs are not all available in other states because of a lack of funding and overcrowding. Even released individuals have a hard time adjusting to the life around them because of the long terms that they had to endure for their sentence. There’s also little to no information or resources out there for these people to get the necessary help that they need; nor is there any knowledge or guidance for released individuals. Lots of prisons in the United States have very low funding such as penal systems in rural small-towns where post-release services are scant at best.

However, with enough resources provided for these prisons and better knowledge and understanding, I believe we can change how the penitentiary system is perceived and help these incarcerated victims to change their lives mentally and physically to overcome the demons that may haunt and pester them every day.

### Resources-

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*Boston Globe* <http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest->

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