

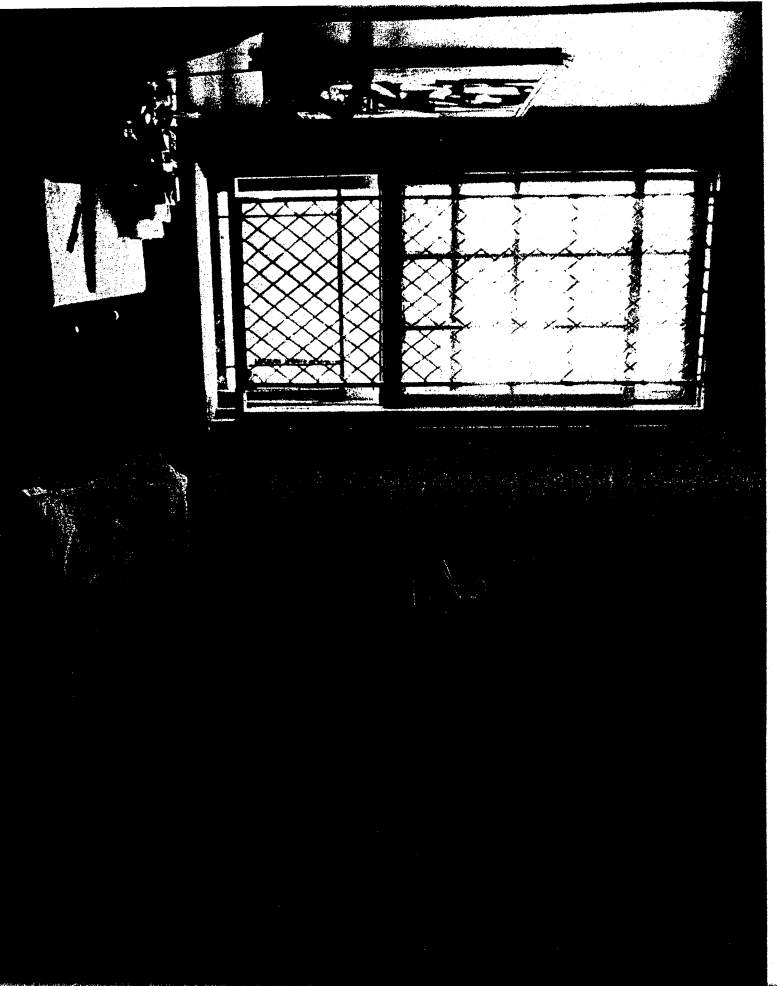
Interrupted Life

*Experiences of Incarcerated Women
in the United States*

Edited by

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Offender

A label usually applied to a person before he or she is convicted of and sentenced for a crime. *Offender* connotes that the person has *offended* family, community, and society. This term, used during court proceedings, before conviction, immediately effaces the person's human status. Preferred term: *person who is in conflict with the law*.

Convict

A label that connotes "once a convict always a convict." (A convict necessarily evolves into an *ex-convict*; see below.) In the United States, a person who is a "convict" no longer has access to person status. A "convict" has been "convicted" of a "crime." Convicts often become "prisoners" after a conviction. Persons convicted and sentenced to noncustodial sentences usually are not termed *convicts*. See *ex-convict*. Preferred terms: *incarcerated person, imprisoned person*.

Ex-con or
ex-convict

Dehumanizing label for people who have completed their sentences. Using this term suggests that once a person has been identified as a convict, he or she will always occupy that category, even after serving time. Preferred terms: *person on parole (or probation), formerly incarcerated person, person who has been in prison*.

Rehabilitation

A term that refers to the beneficial effects of imprisonment, counter to widespread knowledge that time in prison and most available prison programs do not restore people to good health or to useful life. People who have been incarcerated are generally responsible for "rehabilitating" themselves.

These women,
these men, *these*
children, and
these people

Terminology to describe people who have fallen from grace; "these" connotes the "other" identity of women and men who have been in conflict with the law and separates them from so-called upstanding citizens of society. Society also defines the children of incarcerated parents as "othered," at risk of criminal behavior because of the choices of their parents. Academics, policy makers, and service providers describe children in this situation as "these children," typically neglecting the impacts on young people of racism, poverty, poor education, and lack of community resources. Preferred terms: *children of incarcerated (or formerly incarcerated) parents, families of incarcerated (or formerly incarcerated) people, formerly incarcerated people, incarcerated people, people in conflict with the law*.

Glossary of Terms

Tina Reynolds

Not every essay in this volume avoids the language described here, but many of the authors share our commitment to the power and politics of words.

I developed this glossary of terms in opposition to the language that society has adopted to identify people who have been in conflict with the law. These examples of oppressive terminology show how language harms people, deepening their invisibility as human beings and undermining their eligibility for forgiveness and redemption. Derogatory, dehumanizing, and oppressive, this language is passed down to innocent family members, including children, further complicating the acceptance of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people into social circles and society.

Reentry

A broad term loosely used by government officials and academics to describe the process a formerly incarcerated person faces upon release from prison. The term does not refer to or embrace the complexities, challenges, and barriers a person faces upon release. *Reentry* does not appropriately address how the person who has been in conflict with the law is perceived by society. Most important, *reentry* does not acknowledge this truth: a person needs to know that she is welcomed and invited in order to reenter successfully.

Inmate

A label or definition attached to men, women, and children who are sentenced to jail or prison. Wholly dehumanizing, this label underscores the invisibility of the human being. It undermines the self-esteem and sense of self-worth of people as individuals, parents, and family members. Preferred terms: *incarcerated person, person in jail (or prison)*.