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Gunda Wößner  
Elke Wienhausen-Knezevic  
Kira-Sophie Gauder

**“I WAS THROWN IN AT THE  
DEEP END ...”**

**PRISONER REENTRY:  
PATTERNS OF TRANSITION FROM  
PRISON TO COMMUNITY AMONG  
SEXUAL AND VIOLENT OFFENDERS**

research in brief



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Herausgegeben von Hans-Jörg Albrecht, Albin Eser und Ulrich Sieber

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## 1. Introduction

Transition management, integration planning, release management, reentry, transition from prison, resettlement (*Matt 2010; Matt 2012; Mears, Cochran & Siennick 2013; Petersilia 2004; Schreier 2012; Visher & Travis 2003*) – fancy terms for the passage from prison release back into community are all the rage. Projects and concepts of how this transition may succeed have mushroomed and have been given catchy names as well (particularly in Germany, “IdA”, “OASIS”, “Startklar”, “ISAB”, “Instar” or “ArJuS”, see *Roos & Weber 2009*; but occasionally also in Australia, e.g., “Link Out”<sup>1</sup>, or the USA, e.g., “GRIP”<sup>2</sup> or “RExO”<sup>3</sup>). This is a trend that can be observed on the local, national, European, and global levels (cf. *Hillmer, Matt & Williams 2012*). Release preparation and aftercare have proven to be an important (as well as trendy) concern of the criminal justice system worldwide.

Likewise, criminological research is increasingly concerned with the evaluation of aftercare programs (see *James et al. 2013*). What criminological research has shown and what has become common criminological knowledge is that the vast majority of released offenders look back on a difficult biography that has made it equally difficult for them to acquire skills and resources that could facilitate their successful reintegration and rehabilitation (cf., for example, *Mears et al. 2013*). Because many prisoners are not able to cope with life outside the prison walls, correctional systems have rightly set the goal to support the inmates with different interventions during imprisonment – that aim to prepare the inmate for a life in the community, and that flow into outpatient treatment or intervention.

Thus, release preparation begins during imprisonment. In Germany, for instance, the Prison Acts of the different German Federal States [Bundesländer] include this standard.<sup>4</sup> The aim is to analyze the structure of the social situation of the released offender<sup>5</sup> and to correct and improve it, if necessary. In addition, it is related to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/home/release/transition+programs/> [6 March 2015].

<sup>2</sup> <http://nicic.gov/tpcround2> [6 March 2015].

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.doleta.gov/RExO/eta\\_default.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/RExO/eta_default.cfm) [6 March 2015].

<sup>4</sup> According to the Hessian Prison Act (HStVollzG § 3 Abs. 3) imprisonment from its onset is to be oriented toward assisting the prisoner in transitioning into a life in freedom and with desistance from offending. Similarly worded principles can be found for example in the Prison Acts of the City of Hamburg (HmbStVollzG § 3 Abs. 1<sup>3</sup>), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (StVollzG M-V § 3 Abs. 2), or Saxony (SächsStVollzG § 3 Abs. 2).

<sup>5</sup> The Prison Act (StVollzG § 6 Abs. 1, Abs. 2) states that after the admission process, both personality and living conditions of the prisoner should be examined. Furthermore, the investigation should include all circumstances that are necessary both for a planned treatment of the prisoner during imprisonment and for prisoner reentry.

interventions that are meant to influence the inmates at an earlier point of time in order to develop and maintain skills and behavior patterns that are conducive to the process of reintegration.<sup>6</sup>

This approach is based on the theoretical assumption that external and internal factors are equally important for the process of resocialization. This is also true for sex offenders, who are part of the target group of the following considerations and analyses. We might even say that this is especially true for sex offenders: *Scoones, Willis & Grace* (2012) suggest that profound release planning of incarcerated child sexual abusers contributed to reductions in recidivism. The authors came to the conclusion that “without the external scaffolding that supports a prosocial life, recidivism risk might increase” (*Scoones et al.* 2012, p. 224). In *Willis & Grace’s* studies (2008; 2009), sex offenders who did not reoffend had been more thoroughly prepared for prison release than sex offenders who reoffended (either with or without sex offenses).

That said, release preparation is not a question of either this or that (*Hammerschick* 2012, p. 207). Released offenders face a thicket of challenges: not only must they deal with single tasks, they have to find accommodation and a workplace, or job training, they have to find their way through the jungle of the social welfare and healthcare system, and they have to avoid criminal peer influences (*Maruna & Immerigeon* 2004; *Petersilia* 2003; *Visher & Travis* 2003). Thus, they actually face not only the transition from prison back into community, but a whole set of transitions or multiple transitions. In this context, supportive social and family relations are considered to be two of the most important protective factors. As laid down in the social capital theory, social relationships may serve as resources and support in finding a new accommodation and a new job, or facilitate access to the health or social welfare system (see *Cochran* 2014).<sup>7</sup> Vice versa, correctional education and vocational training, skills-training and psychotherapeutic interventions, counseling services, as well as measures aiming to support the maintenance of social relationships, are expected to directly improve the chances of a successful prison release. In youth offenders, it is of particular importance to assess their competence (*Klein et al.* 2007): accomplishing a school exit exam or completing vocational training – sometimes only in the form of partial qualifications – come to the fore of the reintegration process (*Wirth* 2006). Release preparation interventions thus encompass correctional labor measures and vocational training, social trainings and therapeutic

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Lower Saxon Prison Act (NJVollzG § 2 Abs. 3), during imprisonment the prisoners’ interest in engaging in constructive cooperation and their ability to take individual responsibility should be promoted thus helping them to rehabilitate into a life in freedom.

<sup>7</sup> Naturally, these effects only take place if the social contacts are also of a protective and prosocial character.

as well as counseling interventions, and measures aimed at maintaining social ties with the outside world.

Directly prior to release, the designated transition management takes actions including job application training and the management of one's personal finances, to name just two. The focus is on reintegration into job, school, or training, that is, into the world of work (*Klein et al.* 2007, p. 453). Likewise, finding housing or a place in an aftercare facility can be equally important matters of release preparation.

Sexual and violent offenders are the main target group of psychotherapeutic correctional treatment interventions. Especially with regard to offenders for whom therapeutic – in Germany social-therapeutic – treatment was indicated, the process of introspection that had been initiated during imprisonment should not end upon release (*Goderbauer* 2008, p. 115). Only ongoing aftercare and transitional treatment stabilizes the therapeutic effects an offender might have attained during social therapy. Likewise, *Egg* (2010) emphasizes that no long-lasting treatment effect is to be expected if the interventions are limited just to in-patient correctional treatment without the guarantee of aftercare (see also *Egg & Niemz* 2013). This is particularly true of inmates who underwent social therapy<sup>8</sup>, since those are the offenders who are in need of treatment or who have – very often – been found to be difficult to treat (*Egg* 2010). Thus, there is also a particular need for a stepwise transition for social-therapeutically treated offenders. An important means of this stepwise reintegration is that of giving privileges. It is all the more surprising that over the last twenty years privileges granted to social therapy inmates have been constantly decreasing. In 1999, about half of the offenders released from social therapeutic correctional facilities were granted privileges. In 2006, this number amounted to only one fourth. Similarly, in 1997, one out of three social therapy inmates was granted day or weekend release; in 2009, only one out of seven received these privileges. With regard to work release, an important means for a stepwise reintegration, a comparable trend is to be observed: While in 1997, 13% of the inmates who were accommodated in a German social therapeutic facility were on work release, this number dramatically decreased to 3% in 2010 (*Egg & Niemz* 2013, p. 12).

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<sup>8</sup> In Germany, correctional treatment primarily takes place in social-therapeutic facilities. These facilities are either structurally independent prison units or separate wards inside a mainstream prison. Social-therapeutic treatment is an integrative treatment approach that encompasses vocational and educational training, as well as work opportunities inside prison, leisure therapy, psychotherapy, social work, and milieu therapy which is comparable to a therapeutic community. However, implementation differs among institutions.

More recent criminological research additionally focuses on desistance, on the life-course perspective and how changes over time are related to human agency (*Maruna* 2001; *Maruna & Immarigeon* 2004; *Sampson & Laub* 1993). In this context, successful reentry not only depends on whether the released offender meets social support and possibilities but also whether he is able to choose to act on these opportunities, or even whether he initiates a process of change. Self-efficacy, agency, and autonomy of action are important socioscientific key concepts within the framework of the desistance debate.

Thus, on the one hand it has been widely accepted that the transition from prison to community life is very crucial. However, “much remains unknown about the transition of ex-prisoners back into society” (*Mears et al.* 2013, p. 325). We therefore analyzed the experience of ex-prisoners in this reentry process. We wanted to know which themes/concepts and problems the ex-inmates are occupied with. Are there specific patterns of experienced transitions? The focus is on sexual and violent offenders, since these offense groups are viewed as being particularly challenging in terms of treatment and recidivism.

## 2. Study Design and Procedure

The analyses presented here are part of the long-term project “Sexual Offenders in the Social Therapeutic Institutions of the Free State of Saxony.” Within the framework of this longitudinal study, aside from other data collected, we conducted interviews with released sex and violent offenders about one year after their release from prisons in Saxony ( $t_3$ ). All subjects had served their sentences either completely in prison or partially in a social therapeutic ward.<sup>9</sup> The project consists of a main study focusing on adult prisoners, and of a sub-project including sex and violent offenders sentenced according to the Juvenile Court Act (see Figure 1).

During data collection  $t_2$ , the soon to be released subjects were asked whether we could contact them again for an interview about one year after release. If they agreed, their address at the time of release was taken down and their consent obtained to make inquiries by contacting fellow inmates or the registration office should they have moved by the time the contact was to take place. Contacting for this interview took place by mail, up to two reminders were sent out. Of the subjects participating in data collection  $t_2$ , i.e., directly before being released, eventually about 60% were participating in the third data collection. Consequently, between 2008 and 2013, we carried out 145 interviews with released subjects (35 adolescents, 110 adults). The interviews were conducted in conference rooms of a local hotel, on the premises of probation service or, in case of de novo imprisonment, in custody. They were recorded on an audio medium and later transcribed. Thus, we

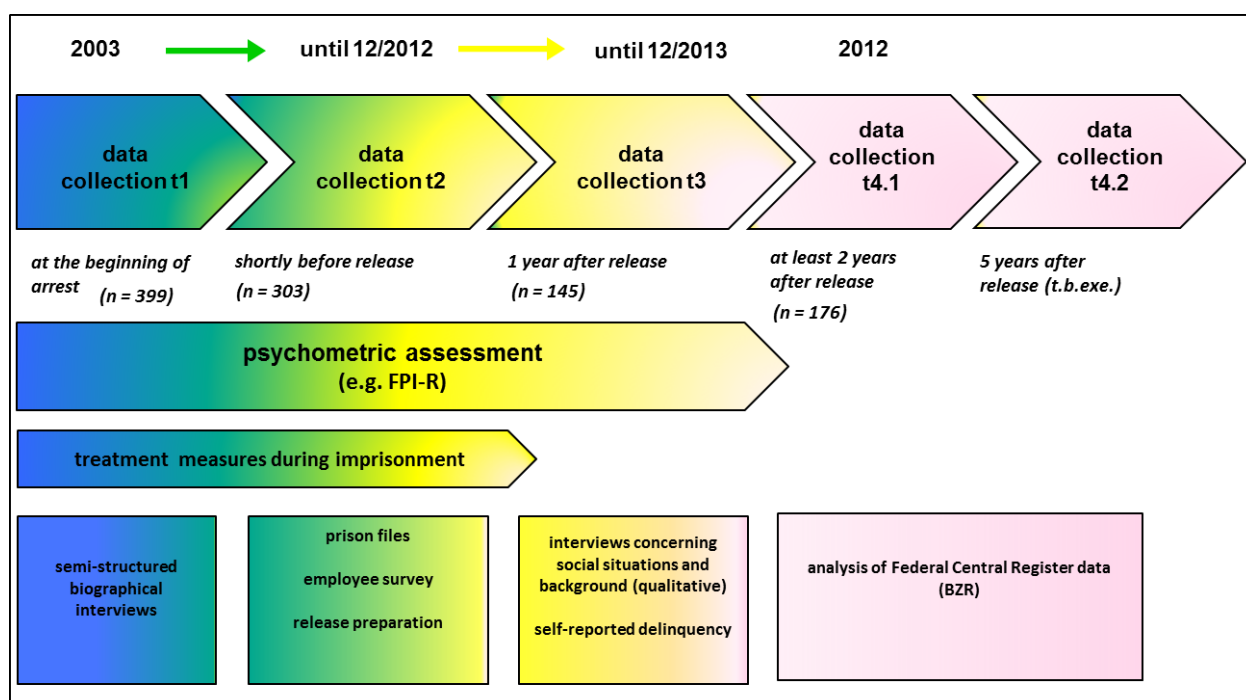
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<sup>9</sup> Participants in the social therapy program were released from social therapeutic wards. Dropouts from the social therapy program were released from regular prison.



had a comprehensive textual corpus at our disposal with which to evaluate the sequences relevant to the individual's perception of reentry. Out of these 145 interviews, 26 cases were selected and more thoroughly viewed in order to work out differences in the narratives. This selection followed the principle of maximum variation (*Glaser & Strauss 1979; Kleinig 1982; Merkens 2013*). Different from quantitative research approaches, the objective is not a representative illustration of the research area but instead is a depiction of the heterogeneity of the research area through the analysis of as contrasting cases as possible (*Kelle & Kluge 1999*).

*Figure 1 Embedding the survey: structure of the overall study*



During the qualitative interviews, on the base of a semi-narrative guideline, we interrogated the subjects in regard to their social situation (employment and housing situation, relationship status and social inclusion, leisure behavior) as well as to their experience of the social reintegration process. The interview also covered the rating of the supporting measures during and after imprisonment. In an open narrative impulse at the beginning of the interview, we encouraged the interviewees to tell us their reentry-story, making room for an explorative approach. Towards the end of the interview, the subjects were asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire about the self-reported delinquency since prison release.

### 3. Subjects

The most important characteristics of the investigated sample can be found in table 1. Out of 13 condemned sex offenders, 5 had been sentenced under the Juvenile Court Act and 13 (among them 6 adolescents) were imprisoned due to a violent offense.

The youngest participant was 20, the oldest was 68 years old. Six subjects had no prior conviction, the remaining 20 subjects had an average of 4,9 prior convictions for different offenses; one subject had already had 17 prior convictions.

*Table 1 Sample characteristics*

<b>Sample</b>				
<b>Participants</b>	26 in total	15 adults	11 juveniles/adolescents	
<b>Age (mean)</b>	34,2 years	41,5 years	24,2 years	
<b>Offense type</b>	13 violent offenders	13 sex offenders		
<b>Prison type</b>	8 regular prison	11 social therapy	7 social therapy dropout	
<b>Prior incarceration</b>	16 first-time incarcerated, average length of incarcerations of formerly incarcerated offenders n = 42,8 months			
<b>Detention period</b>	5,08 years (min. 1 year, max. 15 years)			
<b>Occupation</b>				
At the time of the offense	17 unemployed	6 employed	3 vocational training	
At the time of the interview	3 unemployed	7 employed	7 vocational training/occupational re-training	9 others*
<b>Relationship status</b>				
At the time of the offense	12 single	8 partnership	4 divorced/separated	
At the time of the interview	7 single	14 partnership	4 divorced/separated	

\* others: n/a, incarcerated, pensioner, voluntary years of social service (FSJ), parental leave

Five participants had no school leaving certificate, 12 had a (lower) secondary modern school qualification or a comparable diploma from a general educational polytechnic secondary school after 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Hauptschulabschluss), 7 had a secondary comprehensive school leaving certificate (mittlere Reife; one of whom had a diploma from a general educational polytechnic secondary school after 10<sup>th</sup> grade), 2 had a diploma from different special needs schools. 12 participants had completed an apprenticeship.

Additionally, in the appendix, table 2 provides information for each subject regarding the type of index offense, age group and prior convictions, detention period and self-reported delinquency.

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Grounded Theory

A qualitative approach was used since this research approach allows for the identification of the “inner experience” (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p. 12) of individuals; in our case, the identification of the themes/concepts and patterns of transition.

In a first step, the initial interview passages were given a narrative analysis with the method of open coding according to the Grounded Theory<sup>10</sup> paradigm. Thus, we identified relevant categories of the subjects’ transition experience. The analytic process included coding the entire interview with regard to recurrent references of the themes that were initially mentioned. We also identified and coded accounts in which the subjects referred to their prison release, the transition from prison to community, as well as support and assistant measures (e.g., correctional facility, probation service, family support). Following the open coding process, categories were refined and (inter)related with the method of axial coding. In addition, we used in-vivo codes to gather crucial terms originating from the subjects themselves. The initial concern was to identify the central topics of the transition by identifying the individual’s reentry experience and its relevant dimensions.

### 4.2 Narrative understanding

Narratives reveal how an individual understands his/her life and the world. The interviewees make sense to themselves of their experiences by how and what they tell (cf. Gibbs 2007, p. 56). Thus, we related the identified concepts and themes to the released offenders’ understanding and inner organization of the world, i.e., their endogenous dynamics. This understanding depends on the experiences the narrator has in the present and had in the past and on how he interprets them (how he sees the world, which beliefs he has developed). In narrative biographical texts, narrative understanding becomes evident as recurring explanations of life circumstances and developments in one’s own biography. Here, they function as patterns in the biography, as patterns for the interpretation of incidents in one’s own life and life trajectory. Through the analysis of interpretation patterns that which is relevant for the narrative of the person concerned is revealed (Oevermann et al. 1979; Wiedemann 1985).

Through the story as a construct of the narrator and not as an objectively true statement (Boothe 1993), we attempted to uncover how the subjective lived-in worlds of the subjects were interpreted during the transition from imprisonment to

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<sup>10</sup> The research logic of Grounded Theory is to generate theories ‘grounded’ in the data, i.e., to build theory from data (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p. 1).

freedom and how these interpretations differed – with the objective of arriving at underlying patterns.

In this analysis, we also determined the coarse structure of the individual case (a summary of those aspects of the body of textual materials which were relevant to the research question) and of the subsequent classification of the individual statements into the thereby gained narrative understanding (endogenic coherences). In this way, the significant dynamic of the topics thematized in the initial interview phase, as well as the individual’s experience of the transition, were to be illuminated in the context of the individual narrative understanding. This was a crucial methodological step aimed to find out whether the interpretations that had evolved were retained or had to be rejected (cf. *Lüders & Meuser 1997*).

Based on these methodological approaches, we constantly conducted comparative analyses on individual and case levels in order to identify patterns of experienced transitions. Furthermore, this approach allows for the critical inspection of the question of whether comprehensive patterns are really being found or whether such patterns are being identified at all costs in spite of lack of evidence.

### **4.3 Prisoner reentry viewed from the perspective of life-course research**

Criminological life-course research is concerned with the onset, the continuation, and the termination of deviant behavior. It also addresses questions of frequency, specialization and duration of delinquent behavior. Another issue is to examine the shifting of individual markers related to deviance in regard to different life phases (see *Mears et al. 2013*). In the analyses presented here, referring to life-course research, we focus on a clearly defined transition, namely on the transition from jail or prison to the community (prisoner reentry). We will focus on this limited transition in order to exactly determine an intersection of the potential trajectories, while taking into consideration that it is impossible to define a precise time-frame, since the onset and end of the transition are perceived very differently by the individuals concerned. Furthermore, the narratives are considered in the context of preceding experiences, in particular the prison term.

With this in mind, prisoner reentry is looked upon as a critical transition – just as entering a working life, job loss, homelessness, the loss of individuals close to oneself, or illness can be critical moments in the life of former inmates (*Mears et al. 2013*).<sup>11</sup> As already indicated, the transition concomitant with release from prison can occur together with other transitions, such as the entrance into a working life. The analysis of the perception of different transitions may serve as an impulse to address the question of which transition formats carry the risk of reinforcing criminogenic factors and which transition formats might entail protective features.

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<sup>11</sup> Criminological life-course research considers imprisonment itself as a critical life event (*Mears et al. 2013*).

Here, too, the rationale of narrative understanding applies: if we analyze transitions, they should not be considered as isolated or situational, but must be viewed in the context of intra-individual, endogenous causal relationships which develop out of living conditions, resources, and experiences of the earlier biography of the individual (Mayer 1990; see Sackmann & Wingens 2003, p. 21). That, too, plays a role in the way delinquents interpret situations and resources during and after their imprisonment. Since our aim is to establish a connection between the transition and the skills acquired during imprisonment, as well as the support experienced by the individual, we regard reentry as a processual transition (cf. Elder 1994). The latter is embedded both in measures preparing the delinquent for release and in the social reality of a life in freedom immediately after release.

## 5. Empirical Results

### 5.1 Key topics in experiencing reentry

The transition often was connected with **adaptive difficulties on an emotional level**. Experiencing fear, disorientation, feelings of uncertainty and alienation were different facets of this affective dimension of experiencing reentry.

[René: Also ich bin mit einem Gefühl rausgekommen, dass ich nicht wusste, wo es hingeht. (...) man geht mit so vielen Ängsten raus. Man weiß ja gar nicht, was auf einen zukommt. (...) Also belastend war eigentlich ohne eine Richtung rauszukommen und einfach nicht zu wissen, wo es hingeht, alles offen ...]<sup>12</sup>

René: Well, I got out with a feeling of not knowing where it'd lead me. [...] one leaves prison with so many anxieties. Without knowing what's ahead. [...] So what really was tough was to get out without any sense of direction, without knowing what to head for, with everything being open ...

[Christoph: ... also der erste Tag vielleicht, der zweite Tag, war ein bisschen komisch, wo ich entlassen worden bin halt, das war halt so alles unwirklich halt.]

Christoph: ... the first day maybe, the second day, was a little strange, when I was released, it was so unreal somehow.

[Ricardo: Ja, und das ist immer so, alles immer ganz schön befremdend gewesen. Das hatte teilweise auch ziemlich viel Angst gemacht.]

Ricardo: Yes, and it's always that way, everything being strange. To some extent it has led to a lot of fear.

Again and again, released offenders talked about a strange feeling when suddenly encountering so many unknown people. Initially, some retreated into their own four walls or only went out at night. At the same time, some study participants reported

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<sup>12</sup> According to applied transcription rules, punctuation does not always have to follow standard grammar rules, because it serves at times to illustrate the narrator's flow of speech.

the exact opposite behavior. They made an effort to be home “on time” in the evenings and did not want to be outside in the dark because they felt anxious and insecure. Both experiences show, however, how fundamentally adaptive difficulties on an emotional level can manifest in structures in everyday life.

It was revealed that sometimes the **experience of discrepancy** was another important topic; discrepancy between “inside and outside”, between projections of what life after prison would be like and the actual experience of it or between “theory and practice”.

[*Pascal*: Ja. Ja, am Anfang war eigentlich alles ganz gut. Also man kommt raus ist voller Zuversicht und Freude, ist total euphorisch und denkt, man kann die Welt einreißen. (...) Ja aber nach ein paar Wochen holt einem dann schon irgendwo ein Stück weit das Alltägliche wieder ein. (...) Also die Welt hier draußen hat mich echt enttäuscht so, als ich rausgekommen bin (...) Ich habe mir das einfach alles schöner vorgestellt. Du stehst hier draußen und hast, du musst dich ja um alles wieder selber kümmern plötzlich, was ja nicht das Schlimme ist, das macht ja Spaß, aber du hast kein Geld, du hast (...) Also es ist halt nicht so, wie man sich's vorstellt.]

*Pascal*: Yes. Yes, well, at the beginning everything was basically fine. One gets out full of confidence and joy, totally euphoric, feeling on top of the world. [...] Yeah, but after a couple of weeks the routine catches up with you. [...] The world out here really disappointed me when I got out [...] I had imagined everything would be better. You're out here and have, suddenly you have to take care of everything yourself again which really isn't so bad, it's actually fun, but you have no money, you have [...] Well, it's just not the way you had imagined.

[*Tom*: ... weil es wurde mir eigentlich immer gesagt, ja da bekommen wir etwas hin und also ich bin wirklich mit einem richtig guten Gefühl so in die Freiheit gegangen und dachte, also da wird sich jetzt sicherlich etwas ergeben und arbeitsmäßig und so und dann kam aber gar nichts.]

*Tom*: ... because I had basically always been told that we'd get the ball rolling and so I went out into freedom with a real good feeling thinking that something would work out, work-wise etc. but then nothing happened.

[*David*: Ja, „nicht gerechnet“ kann man nicht sagen. Man wusste ja, dass man wieder von vorne anfangen muss. Aber dass es dann eben so schwer wird, und sich in die Länge zieht – oder so – das hat man eben nie richtig eingeplant.]

*David*: Yes, “not expected” isn't fair to say. It had been clear before that one needed to start all over. But that it would be that hard and drag on that long – or so – that had not really been taken into consideration at all.

[*Moritz*: Also schwierig war, dass sie das Leben hier draußen viel anders beschrieben haben. Die haben uns den Himmel versprochen und es ist doch bloß ein Haufen Scheiße.]

*Moritz*: Well, it was difficult that they had described life out here very differently. They promised us heaven but it's nothing but a load of bullshit.

As becomes apparent in the narratives, this experience of discrepancy often went hand in hand with a feeling of disappointment and disillusionment. Together with the experienced deviations between imagination and reality, another group of dimensions related to the transitioning experience, namely the **overextension and**,

**respectively, the insecurities with the requirements of everyday life.** Some released offenders seemed to be literally overwhelmed by everyday life; there was a lack of routine with everyday occurrences that had to be coped with in the first place.

[*Markus*: Da weiß ich noch, wie ich meine ersten Probleme hatte, hier, mit, mit, mit dem Fahrkartenautomaten hier. Dort. Weil ich ja eine Monatskarte mir kaufen wollte, und nicht so richtig wusste, wie ich das Ding bedienen tue, dort; halt. Und. Ja. Ja und dann habe ich, war ich in der Innenstadt halt, mir mein erstes Handy meines Lebens zugelegt, echt, mit 29 ½ Jahren. (...) Na ja. Und wie gesagt: Ein paar Mal verlaufen habe ich mich in der Innenstadt schon halt. (...) nervlich war es dann am Anfang, so gerade wenn du, wenn ich dann mit meiner Betreuerin, ich meine, die hat es ja auch bloß gut gemeint, wenn wir dann so die ersten Tage nur Rennereien hatten, dann – ne? – so und, auf mehrere Behörden dann – ne? – oder jetzt Arbeitsamt hier, wo du ja dann sonst wie lange rumstehst, dann, oder rumsitzt, und so. Ja und. Dort im Knast hattest du wenigstens noch irgendwelche Beschäftigung oder so in der Zeit; ne?]

*Markus*: I remember how I had my first problems with the ticket machine here. There. Because I wanted to buy a monthly pass and didn't know how to operate the thing there, well. And. Yes. Yes and then I was downtown buying my first cell phone, really, at the age of 29 ½ [...] Oh well. And, as I said before: I got lost a couple of times downtown. [...] Emotionally, at the beginning, just as you, as I, with my guardian, I mean, she only meant well, well, when, the first days, we only ran from pillar to post, then – right? – to several government authorities – right – or now in the job center here where you stand around for ages, then, or sit around and stuff like that. So. In the joint you at least had something to do or so in that time; right?

[*Hans*: ... gab es ja alles drinnen auch nicht und was ich auf jeden Fall krass fand so, das war, wo ich auf dem Einwohnermeldeamt mich angemeldet, das war, wo ich das allererste Mal mit jemanden Fremdes geredet hatte so, das war übelst, da ist mir übelster Schweiß ausgebrochen.]

*Hans*: ... well all of that didn't exist 'inside' and what was really the pits was that when I went to the registry office, that was when I first spoke to a someone I didn't know and that really sucked, I really broke out in a cold sweat.

[*Marius*: Und ansonsten die Probleme halt, das ist halt üblich, irgendwelche Automaten oder in Läden gehen so, oder abends weggehen.]

*Marius*: And apart from that, the problems, that's almost common; some kind of machines or going into shops or going out at night.

A very specific dimension of this category was the **overextension with anything official, governmental, and anything requiring correspondence.** Almost all released offenders, even those who managed well after a short time, were initially overwhelmed and at a loss with visits to government offices, demands from public authorities, written applications and forms which could not be avoided in existential areas such as housing, account management or job applications.

[*Idris*: Mit der Krankenkasse, das weiß auch kaum jemand, der rauskommt, hat man unheimliches Theater.]

*Idris*: Also, hardly anybody who gets out knows that it's a real drag with the health insurance.

[*Marius*: Ja es ging darum wegen Briefe so, also wenn man rauskommt hat man nicht so viele Ahnung, also ich habe prinzipiell keine Ahnung was mit Briefe wie Arbeitsamt oder irgendwelchen Beamten-Dingsda – da habe ich keine Ahnung so und da wünsche ich mir jemanden der mir da hilft. (...) Ich wohn nur in einer Einraumwohnung, (...) und dann so'n Mietkautionskonto machen, muss man auf der Bank und alles, das war schon schwierig.]

*Marius*: Yeah, well it was about letters so, once you get out you don't really know, well, in general, I'm really lost when it comes to letters from the job office or other red tape – I really don't know my way around there and I wish for someone who helps me with it. [...] I live in a one-room flat [...] and even then one has to open a special account held in the tenant's name at the bank and all of that, that was really tough.

[*Tom*: ... aber also einen Großteil haben eben meine Eltern übernommen, wenn ich die nicht gehabt hätte, auch mit schriftlichen Sachen wie zum Beispiel Bewerbungen und so weiter, (...) also ich habe mir ein Konto eingerichtet und so alles und auf einmal habe ich mich gewundert, dass keine Geldeingänge und -ausgänge oder Ausgänge besser gesagt nicht mehr funktionierten und ich wusste gar nicht so richtig wieso und weshalb ...]

*Tom*: ... well but, my parents assumed a large part – if I hadn't have them, for written things like, for example, job applications etc., [...] well, so I opened an account and all of that and suddenly I started wondering why the incoming and outgoing payments or rather the outgoing payments didn't work anymore and I didn't really know why that was ...

In this context, *Christoph* complained that “inside” these things were taken care of and one didn't have to do anything oneself.

[*Christoph*: ... okay, wenn sie es denen dann zeigen noch mal, es ist nicht gut wenn man denen das immer vorlegt, da kommt einer, quatscht ab, der schreibt das für den fertig und dann schickt er es ab, der Gefangene macht nichts drinnen! Der schreibt einen Antrag oder schreibt was drauf, seine Probleme oder was er braucht, was er gemacht haben will und der Sozialarbeiter macht das oder der Psychologe. Hier draußen muss ich zum Psychologen gehen oder zum Sozialarbeiter und ich muss es dann ausfüllen, ich muss das und das machen, ich muss dort und dort hingehen, das muss ich drinnen nicht, die kommen ja alle zu mir und da nehmen sie die Verantwortung und ja, das ist komplizierter als hier draußen.]

*Christoph*: ... okay, if they show them again – it's not good if they always provide them, someone comes in, chats a bit, finishes the paperwork and then puts it in the mail; the inmate doesn't do anything inside! He writes an application or writes something on it, his problems or whatever he needs, what he wants to be done and then the social worker does it or the psychologist. Out here I have to go to the psychologist or to the social worker and I have to fill it out, I have to do this and that, I have to go here and there, I don't have to do that inside, they all come to me and take the responsibility and yes, that's a lot more complicated out here.

In addition, the following concepts of reentry could be identified:

**Experiencing stigmatization.** Again and again, reentry went hand in hand with experiencing stigmatization. *René* was struck by the feeling that people “let you feel that you've been a jailbird or something of that sort” and *Moritz* said: “I'm an ex-con, then you don't get support.” There had always been the notion of still being under control, “... I have felt controlled in many situations, even though it wasn't appropriate,” *René* said.



[Lutz: Und du kommst aus dem Knast raus, hast nur die Klamotten, wo du am Arsch hast, und teilweise kommst du im Winter raus, und bist mit Sommerklamotten reingekommen. Dann kannst du mit der kurzen Hose im November zum Arbeitsamt laufen. Da schauen die dich an, wie wenn du von einem anderen Stern kommen würdest.]

Lutz: And you get out of jail, only having the clothes you're wearing and then you might get out in the winter after having been imprisoned wearing summer clothes. Then you have to go to the job agency in shorts in November. Then they'll look at you as if you were from a different planet.

[Tom: Ja speziell eben jetzt eben auch mit, speziell eben, dass die ganzen Situationen auf dem Arbeitsamt und so, also muss man ja eben vieles darlegen und sich offenbaren, also das ist schon zum Teil ziemlich belastend und gerade am Anfang ...]

Tom: Yes, especially now, well also with, well, especially, that all these situations in the job agency etc., well, one has to expose a lot, well, that's sometimes pretty irksome, especially at the beginning ...

*Dominik* shared that his search for an apartment had remained unsuccessful as long as the prison's social worker tried to help him with that. Only when a third, independent person had asked about that same apartment had he gotten it.

**Experiencing exclusion.** Experiencing exclusion could be fed from different sources as, for example, when the released offenders became aware that their inadequate handling of everyday procedures (see above) attracted the attention of their environment: "They seemed to be thinking that I was from Mars or so, some people." Similarly, the exclusion from the job market was connected with experiencing marginalization "actually, that's really the one thing that it really is that difficult to get some work," says *Tom*.

[René: Ich habe manchmal das Gefühl, weil ... (...) das sind 13 Jahre. Ich habe 13 Jahre gesessen. Das war 13 Jahre lang mein Leben. Man hat sich ja immer irgendwo ausgegrenzt gefühlt. Knast ist ja nun ... Man fühlt sich ja nicht integriert, sondern eher ausgegrenzt.]

René: I sometime feel, because [...] it was 13 years. I have been in for 13 years. That was my life for 13 years. One has always felt dropped somewhere. Well jail really is ... one doesn't feel integrated but rather sidelined.

*Christoph* talked about moving to a different city to his grandparents and how he, after a long prison term, felt excluded even within his family:

[*Christoph*: Dann bin nach xy, zu meinen Großeltern und zu meinem restlichen Familienanteil, ja, und dort lief es auch nicht so gut weil die Familie sich verändert hat, die haben mich nicht erkannt mehr, also, ja, die kennen mich nur als kleinen Jungen.]

*Christoph*: Then I moved to xy (name of the city) to my grandparents and to the rest of my family, yes, and there it didn't go so well because my family had changed, they didn't recognize me anymore, well, yes, they only know me as a little boy.

**A lack of gradual settling-in.** The lack of a gradual familiarization with a life in freedom was thematized as the central issue of a reentry that was experienced as being difficult.

[*Ricardo*: Das ist einfach ein Problem des Vollzuges, weil die – meiner Ansicht nach – teilweise mit Leuten, die ein bisschen länger sitzen, viel zu spät anfangen, die wieder an das andere Leben zu gewöhnen.]

*Ricardo*: But that is – I’d say – in my opinion also partially a problem of imprisonment. That’s simply a problem of imprisonment because they – in my opinion – in some cases, with people who are in a little longer, start way too late to attune them to the other life.

[*Pascal*: Also es gab auch keine Entlassungsvorbereitung in dem Sinne. (...) Also das war lächerlich, ne. Also du wurdest dann quasi dann vor die Tür gesetzt und das war’s, ne.]

*Pascal*: Well, there hadn’t been a preparation for release in that sense [...] well it was a joke, really. Basically, they threw you out and that was it, right.

[*Christoph*: Ja, gedanklich vorbereiten, aber die haben mich nicht eingegliedert oder so, die haben mich einfach quasi wie sie mich festgenommen haben, so haben sie mich wieder entlassen, von heute auf morgen.]

*Christoph*: Well mentally prepared, but they didn’t rehabilitate me or the like, they basically, well, just the way they imprisoned me, they released me again, from one day to another.

It would have been more helpful “if I had been eased before, for example going on pass etc., slowly approaching it,” *Christoph* continues.

**The significance of social support.** Another important factor in reentry was the opportunity for released offenders to draw on family contacts and support. When talking about their reentry experiences, such contacts often came up:

[*Markus*: Ich habe auch gleich am ersten Tag dann mit meiner Mutti telefoniert, dann.]

*Markus*: I phoned my mom the very first day, then.

[*Tom*: Ja, also wie gesagt, der Entlassungstag, wenn wir da mal beginnen wollen, da haben mich meine Eltern abgeholt und anschließend sind wir erst mal zu der Wohnung gefahren, die ich dann beziehen sollte und das ist die ehemalige Wohnung von meiner Oma, die ist zwei Jahre eher verstorben ...]

*Tom*: Yes, as I said, on my release date if that’s where we want to start, my parents picked me up and we first of all went to the flat I was to move into and that is the flat of my grandmother who had died two years earlier ...

[*Manfred*: Ich bin bei meiner Partnerin wieder eingezogen. Das war ja von vornherein alles schon geklärt, ...]

*Manfred*: I moved in with my partner again. That had all been clear beforehand, ...

If there was no functioning social family environment, other experiences of being supported could play an important role.

[*Ricardo*: Die sich wirklich bemüht haben, zu unterstützen, waren hier diese Vereine für entlassene Strafgefangene. Das waren eigentlich so die Einzigen, die sich eigentlich bemüht haben; muss ich jetzt klipp und klar so sagen; an Vereinen oder Ämtern oder Sonstiges. Die anderen haben einem eigentlich zum größten Teil nur Steine in den Weg gelegt, irgendwie. (...) Positiv: Bei meiner Haftentlassung ist eigentlich die Unterstützung, die ich gekriegt habe, von Freunden und von meiner Freundin.]

*Ricardo*: Who really made an effort to support, were the associations for released offenders. Those really were the only ones who really tried, I have to say; among associations, government offices or the like. The others have really only put obstacles in the way, somehow. [...] Positive: when I was released, the support I got was from my friends and from my girlfriend.

[*Idris*: Nach meiner Entlassung wurde ich als Erstes von meinem Gefängnispfarrer aufgefangen, in dem er mir am Anfang ein Zimmer gegeben hat, wo ich mich unentgeltlich aufhalten konnte. Sodass ich, sage ich mal, die ersten zwei, drei Monate keine Probleme hatte, auch wegen Miete und so weiter.]

*Idris*: Initially, after my release, I first was accommodated by my prison chaplain, who gave me a room for free. So that, in the first two or three months, I had no problems, also in regard to rent etc.

Released inmates who experienced neither private nor institutional support, reported this very vividly as being an important, negative aspect of the reentry experience:

[*Lutz*: Also ich muss sagen: Die ersten Wochen war der Gedanke, wieder reinzugehen, größer als die Freude, raus zu sein, weil du einfach von allen, wirklich von allen alleine gelassen wirst. (...) Das ist wie ein neugeborenes Kind. Wenn es auf die Welt kommt, hat es gar nichts. Wenn es nicht was kriegt von den Eltern, hat es nichts.]

*Lutz*: Well, I have to say: the first weeks, the thought of going back in was stronger than the joy of being out because you are being left alone by everyone, really everyone. [...] That's like a newborn child. Once it's been born, it doesn't have anything. If it doesn't get anything from the parents, it has nothing.

[*Ricardo*: Man ist eigentlich – auf Deutsch gesagt – ist man komplett auf sich alleine gestellt. (...) wenn Leute – also Strafgefangene – entlassen werden, die nun – sage ich mal – keine sozialen Bindungen mehr haben. Für die ist das ein Altraum.]

*Ricardo*: One really is – in plain language – completely on one's own [...] when people – I mean convicts – are released who, well, have no social connections anymore. For them it's a nightmare.

**Unpreparedness for a partner relationship.** Finally, some subjects also brought up the fact that it was only when they were released that they realized that they weren't prepared for a love or partner relationship.

[*Markus*: Wie gesagt: Auf Beziehung konnte man dort sich nicht so wirklich vorbereiten; ne? Gut. Ich hatte. Ich hatte nur meine, außerhalb des Programms, meine Beziehungen dort. Es waren drei verschiedene Persönlichkeiten einfach, mit, die auch alle ihre positiven und negativen Seiten so hatten. Und. Ja. Aber eben auf so was kann nicht wirklich vorbereiten, dort; ne?]

*Markus*: As I said: it wasn't really possible there to prepare oneself for entering a relationship, right? Good. I had. I mean I had only my, outside of the program, my relations there. It was three different personalities simply with, who all had their positive and negative sides etc. And. Yes. But you can't really prepare for something like that there, right?

[*Pascal*: Damit war ich nicht konfrontiert in Haft ja, Lieben, Beziehung. Das hat mich am meisten wieder runtergerissen.]

*Pascal*: In jail, I had not been confronted with, yes, love, relationship. That really got me down again the most.

In this context, the remark by *Manfred* shows that the individual inmate is too much in focus during the preparation for release:

[*Manfred*: Also ich war vorbereitet. Meine Freundin war nicht vorbereitet. (...) Na die wusste nicht, weil, die wusste, dass ich am (Datum) entlassen werde. Ich bin aber schon am (Datum) entlassen worden. Durch die Freistellungstage da, und da stand ich eben halt vor der Tür.]

*Manfred*: Well, I was prepared. My girlfriend was not prepared. [...] Well, she didn't know, because, she knew that I was released on [date], but I was released on [date] already. Due to several days of leave of absence and, well, there I was, in front of her door.

The objective of this first analysis step was to identify common topics of released prisoners experiencing reentry. Next, we will go beyond the mere account of important categories during reentry and will introduce different ways of experiencing that.

## 5.2 Ways of experiencing the reentry into freedom

In analysis of the empirical material and on the basis of a continuing process of comparison, it first became evident that all subjects shared a dimension of general assessment of the reentry process which clearly varied in form: (1) subjects experiencing the transition as truly positive, (2) those who experienced it as basically or relatively good and (3) those who experienced it as negative. We determined additional central structuring dimensions from the continuous and iterative comparisons of further statements made by the subjects, as they experienced the transitioning differently. We analyzed the problems and estimations occurring for some subjects but not for others, following the models of Grounded Theory and Sequence Pattern Analysis, and also observing the situational coherencies, context variables, strategies and consequences (*Corbin & Strauss 2008*) that were associated with it. Here, the comparative analysis of the narrative understanding played an important role.

In the attached illustration, the “spheric dimension pattern” (see Appendix), we developed the characteristics of the different comparative dimensions are depicted by means of form and color. Aspects marked in green illustrate resources; topics marked in blue are risk factors. The size of the circles alludes to the significance of the particular dimension. It became clear, for instance, that subjects who experienced their transitions as good or as relatively good, usually worked more actively on overcoming their problem areas. Another important aspect in this group was support by others (family, partner). Where this was not so distinct, as, for example, with *Stefan*, the aspects of activity and self-efficacy were even more important. If the blue and green shades are lighter, it points to a somewhat later entrance of the corresponding factors. *Stefan*, for example, didn't know his partner at the time of his release, but was in a relationship with her shortly thereafter. Similarly, *Bodo* could begin his job and professional retraining shortly after being released.

### 5.2.1 *The “ideal start”*

Subjects who remembered a **good transition** could in most cases look back on social support, or had a job at the time of prison release, or experienced helpful measures of release preparation and aftercare, and exhibited protective psychological features and functioning such as self-efficacy, a realistic attitude of expectations and were relatively undemanding. They said it was important to have a day structure and also took measures that facilitated the maintenance of keeping their day structured.

*Bodo*, who experienced the transition as good, profited from social support as well as, simultaneously, from the structure he experienced in form of support measures both during imprisonment and after release.

[*Bodo*: Ich habe immer gesagt – wenn man dann so hört: Da kommt jemand nach Hause, und der muss dann um seinen Platz kämpfen; ja? – ich hatte nie das Gefühl. Bei mir wurde der Stuhl nach hinten gezogen „setz dich hin. Das ist dein Platz“, bildlich gesprochen; ja? Der Platz war immer da. Ich habe das gesehen, bei meinen Schwiegereltern. Da war eigentlich bei der gesamten Familie also keiner, der mir da irgendwie große Schwierigkeiten gemacht hat; oder so. Das ist schon verrückt, obwohl ich ja – wie gesagt – zehn Jahre nicht da war. (...) Glücklicherweise hatte ich lange Zeit Ausführungen, und wenn Sie das mit „Vorbereitungen“ meinen, dann war die Vorbereitung ausreichend (...) Man hat keine Arbeit zum Beispiel – solche Sachen, ja? – und dann gibt eben so eine Maßnahme einen Fixpunkt, wo man drauf hinarbeiten kann: „Dann muss ich dann wieder da sein. Dann muss ich zu meiner Bewährungsstanz. Dann muss ich zum XY. Dann muss ich dahin“. Das sind Sachen – das braucht man einfach (...) Dann ist es schon von Vorteil, wenn man. Selbst, wenn man dafür nichts – also – davon nichts mit nach Hause nimmt, ist das immerhin noch was, wo man sagen kann: „Heute ist Montag. Heute muss ich 17 Uhr dort und dort sein.“]

*Bodo*: I have always said – if you hear: someone gets home and then has to fight for his place; really? – I never had that feeling. For me, the chair was ready “sit down, that’s your place,” literally speaking, right? The place has always been there. I’ve seen that, at my parents-in-law. In that whole family, there was basically no one who gave me any kind of trouble or the like. That’s pretty far out given that, as I mentioned, I hadn’t been there for 10 years. [...] Fortunately, I had had supervised day-release for a long time and if that’s what you mean by “preparations,” then the preparation was sufficient [...] One doesn’t have a job, for example – such things, right? – and then such a measure provides one with a fixed point you can work toward: “At that time I have to be back. At that time I have to be at my parole officer’s. At that time I have to be at X. At that time I have to be there.” Those are things – you simply need that [...] Then it’s really an advantage if one, even if one doesn’t take anything for it – I mean – from it back home, it at least is something where one can say “Today is Monday. Today I have to be here or there at 5pm.”

In *Bodo*’s reports, a high level of self-efficacy becomes evident in the form of fulfilling external obligations that provided him with stability and orientation. He assumed that he could master the difficulties which he undoubtedly regarded as significant and problematic in the reentry process, because he felt supported by the measure (“and then such a measure provides one with a fixed point you can work toward,” “Those are things – you simply need that”). In addition, his family was an

important resource of support. Overall, *Bodo* was realistic, but positive, did not demand much and thus mastered insecurities and setbacks because he could put up with a lot of things and was modest in his expectations while looking for ways out and for alternatives wherever possible.

It was similar for *Jakob*, for whom the helpful measure consisted of the step by step transition he experienced.

[*Jakob*: Ich habe es nicht so schwer gehabt – ne? – mit dem Eintritt, in Führungsstrichen, in die Gesellschaft wieder. Zumal ich fast zweieinhalb Jahre im offenen Vollzug war, und von daher eigentlich der Sache schon relativ nahe geführt worden bin. Ich habe jetzt nicht irgendwie große – ja, wie soll man das ausdrücken? – ja, ich war ich eigentlich noch in der Normalität. Ne? Also ich bin nicht so ganz aus dem gesellschaftlichen Miteinander draußen gewesen. (...) Und von daher war eigentlich der Start als solches nicht so schwer für mich. War alles absehbar, war relativ gut geplant, könnte ich mal so sagen. Und ja. Es war eine Perspektive da. Also ich bin nicht ins Nichts entlassen worden, hatte auch – was das soziale Umfeld betrifft – durch die Kinder und die Partnerin, da auch ein gewisses Gleichgewicht innerlich. Und von daher war es eigentlich relativ leicht, im Gegensatz zu der ersten Haftentlassung.]

*Jakob*: For me, it wasn't as hard – right? With the entry, in quotation marks, back into society. The more so as I had been in an open prison for almost two and a half years and thus had been introduced to the topic quite well. I don't really have big – well, how to put that? – yes, well, I have basically still been in a normal situation, right? I mean, I wasn't really completely away from social interaction outside. [...] And that's why the start itself wasn't so tough for me. It all was foreseeable, was relatively well-planned, I can say. And yes. There was a perspective. So I wasn't released into the void, also had – in regard to the social environment – through the kids and my partner, a certain inner equilibrium. So it actually was relatively easy, compared to my first release from prison.

In prison itself, however, he did not want to be told anything anymore, because he “knew exactly, where it should go from there and (he) didn't need to be ‘educated’ again.” “Man, ...” he said, “I was over thirty already. What do you expect to happen then? Had to listen to that airy-fairy rubbish there, right? Here in the group and yes.” He claimed that everyone is responsible for himself and should know what he wants. One has to reflect upon it while in the joint. However, *Jakob* showed little insight into the wrongness of his deed(s) and displayed no sense of guilt.

*Tom* could count on his parents' support; all in all, a low expectation level became evident. He was able to adapt to the reality he found in freedom quite quickly. His job search, which unfortunately remained unsuccessful for a long time, had high priority for him. In spite of not having work, *Tom* saw to creating a daily structure by visiting a fitness studio thus compensating for the missing integration into the world of performance.

*Marius* boiled it down to this essence:

[*Marius*: Also ich kann meinen Start ins neue Leben sehen wie man will so, ich hatte es ideal mit Arbeit, Wohnung. Das Problem ist halt, wenn man das hat und arbeitslos wird, kommt man halt dann in Schwierigkeiten. Ja, so. Also ich kann/ Jedem Gefangenen wünsche ich so

‘ne Entlassung, ist einfach so, also ich war/ Ich bin am Mittwoch entlassen worden und am Montag habe ich angefangen mit Arbeit. (...) Das ist halt so, so ein perfekter Übergang so – weiß ich – man wird am Montag entlassen und nächsten Montag fängt man an, da hat man die ganze Woche Zeit, die ganzen Ämtergänge und die Anmeldungen und alles zu machen und Montag geht’s los! Ideal! (...) Also man braucht jemanden zum Reden, man braucht Arbeit und man braucht ‘ne Wohnung! ... Definitiv! (...) Also sie sind so – wie sagt man – so Stützpfeiler, so, das ist wichtig! Ohne Spaß! ... Und vielleicht noch, wenn ich jetzt Familie als Unterstützung habe, vielleicht noch extra psychologische Betreuung oder sozial oder soziale Dienste, ganz wichtig.]

*Marius*: I can look at my start into my new life in any way, right, it was ideal with a job, an apartment. Well the problem is, if you have that and lose your job, well then you get into trouble. Yeah, right. Well, I wish for such a release for every convict, that’s just the way it is, well, I was released on Wednesday and on Monday I started working. [...] That’s just the way it is, a perfect transition that way – I know – one gets released on Monday and the following Monday one starts, then you have all week to go to government offices, take care of the registrations and on Monday you get started! Ideal! [...] Well you definitely need someone to talk to, you need work and an apartment! ... Definitely! [...] Well that’s like – how do you say that – like buttresses, that’s important! No kidding! ... And maybe also, if I have family as support, maybe on top also psychological support or social or social services, very important.

*Martin*’s positive experience of the transition went hand in hand with support by his family. Yet he also had allowed himself time “to settle in,” to slowly transition into life again. His autonomy of action reflects itself in the description of the smooth transition, especially of the apprenticeship begun in confinement which he continued after his release. Thus he describes his active efforts to get integrated into the world of work and emphasized his experience of a gapless transition by stating that “the next day [...] I just went on working”:

[*Martin*: Ja, zu allererst bin ich erst mal zurück zu meinen Eltern gezogen halt. In der Lehre war ich bereits schon drin seit zwei, drei Monaten und die habe ich dann quasi so fortgesetzt und eigentlich so langsam wieder so ein bisschen ins Leben eingestiegen, sage ich mal so, nach der Entlassung und so mit den täglichen Aufgaben, die man ja draußen so hat halt begonnen und halt die auch bis jetzt gemeistert. Ja, genau (...) Na ja, ich habe so geguckt, was ich so für alte Kontakte habe, die eben versucht zu erreichen. Habe ich natürlich auch hingekriegt und mich dann so mit den Leuten dann noch mal wieder getroffen halt und, was weiß ich, so gewisse Unternehmungen halt gemacht. Was weiß ich, in die Diskothek oder mal in die Bar gehen oder was man halt so draußen macht halt, ne? Und, ja, ja.]

*Martin*: Well, first I, uh, moved back in with my parents. I had already been doing my apprenticeship for two, three months and I just continued it and really, slowly I started returning into everyday life, that’s how I’d put it, after the release etc. I began dealing with the daily demands that simply exist out there and well, so far I’ve mastered them. Yes, exactly [...] Well, I checked my old contacts and tried to reach them. Naturally, I managed to do that and met up with those people again and well and, I don’t know, did stuff together. I don’t know, go to a club or in a bar or whatever else one does out there, right? And yes, yes.

This sequence illustrates how he experiences himself as self-effectual in regard to his integration into a social network, which can be interpreted as a helpful resource in the context of transition.

### 5.2.2 *The “quite good” transition*

The **basically good transition experience** could be identified as a second experience format since many subjects qualified and relativized the positive experience while at the same time not calling it negative. *Manfred*, for example, reported that his release had basically been pretty good. He said he had moved in right away with his partner, who had supported him in everything, that he was happy that he had a wife and children and good contact with his family but that it had taken him two to three months to really arrive. Thus he had almost exclusively focused on his family during the transition period. It was only after a settling-in period that he sought work which proved to be difficult because he would have had to show his criminal record. He said that he was completely satisfied with the follow-up: “Well, I’m really content, yes. Can’t really say anything else.” *Manfred* said in regard to the parole officer:

[*Manfred*: Ich denk mal, wenn ich irgendwas hätte, was jetzt, wo ich nicht zurechtkomme, würde sie mir auch helfen. (...) Bis jetzt gab es das nicht. Sie hat ja auch schon angeboten, wenn irgendwas ist, wenn ich irgendwo Schwierigkeiten hab oder so, soll ich mich melden. Aber es war jetzt eigentlich noch nicht so, was ich nicht selber hätte klären können. Konnte ich bisher alles selber klären.]

*Manfred*: I think that if there was something, anything I didn’t manage, she would also help me. [...] So far, that hasn’t been the case. She in fact has offered already that if there was anything, if I had difficulties or the like anywhere, I should contact her. But so far it hasn’t really been the case that there was anything that I couldn’t take care of myself. So far I could straighten it all out myself.

Here, the significance of the possibility to fall back on support measures within the social environment becomes evident. That he does not make use of it and his awareness of “managing himself” emphasized the experience of self-efficacy.

*Stefan*, too, qualified his good release. During the transition itself he had worried whether he would find an apartment and had felt abandoned by the correctional facility. He said that he had wished to get “a few tips on the way” from the pen. *Stefan* reported that he “still had the prisoner’s life in mind” which had made it difficult for him to adapt to his altered roles in working life. He was skeptical toward the parole officer but said that he in general had difficulties in building trusting relationships with others. *Stefan* distinguished himself by a high degree of seeking autonomy; he put emphasis on acting independently and consequently found it difficult to accept help.

*Markus* qualified the positive aspects of his reentry due to the difficulties he experienced at the beginning; mostly small insecurities in daily life requiring time to get oriented. He said he overcame such situations by facing them, by being capable of acknowledging problems to himself, by seeking help actively and then also accepting it. In making these steps, he had profited both from the prison’s support measures and from the parole officer. Aside from the day-to-day hassles, setbacks and his alcohol problem also had a limiting effect. *Markus* spoke of support from



his mother and sister, but the really influencing support measures by third parties came from “buddies” he knew from prison.

*Robert’s* review was only moderately positive because he had to cope with many different aspects during transition:

[*Robert*: Also das Letzte ging eigentlich Schlag auf Schlag das halbe Jahr. Die Ausbildung ging los, dann gleich ins Freigängerhaus rüber und dann halt gleich die Entlassung mit dazu mit dem (Datum) halt. Was natürlich ein bisschen, wo die Unterstützung von der Anstalt her ein kleines bisschen versagt hat, von der kurzen Zeit her gesehen war das halt mit der Wohnung, weil da hatten sie mich schon ein bisschen allein stehen lassen (...) Da habe ich dann kurzfristig, ich war ja früh um 4 losgemacht, bis abends um 8, in der Hinsicht und hatte aber nebenbei trotzdem noch das mit der Wohnung gemacht. Dann noch extra die ganzen Schreiben, die Anträge halt gemacht und so. Das war schon manchmal ganz schön stressig dann. (...) Aber habe es trotzdem noch hingekriegt. (...) Ich habe Schwierigkeiten gehabt schon, was so manchmal mit dem Amt und so gewesen ist, (...). Da gab es halt schon ein paar Schwierigkeiten dann. Aber das hat man irgendwann auch im Griff.]

*Robert*: Well the last basically went step by step for a half year. The training started, then over into the house for day-release prisoners, and well then, right away the release on top of that, on [date]. That’s of course a little, where the support from the pen failed a little bit, looking at the short time that was, well, with the apartment, because there they had somewhat left me alone [...] I then, on short notice, took off at 4am until 8 at night and nevertheless, on top of that, managed the apartment problem. On top of that I did all that correspondence, the applications etc. That really was pretty stressful at times [...] But I still managed anyway [...] I’ve had some problems, sure, what’s happened with the administrative office etc. [...]. Well yeah, there were a few difficulties then. But at some point one has a handle on that too.

The lack of support from the correctional facility was partially compensated for by the mother’s involvement. *Robert* describes his reentry experience as a time in which he had to overcome many obstacles but which also led him to master such difficult challenges partially himself.

*Pascal* regarded the transition as rather positive because it first went well but he soon was overwhelmed. He said that then, when there were problems, he started to smoke weed again and he realized that he was not yet emotionally stable and secure.

[*Pascal*: Ja. Ja, am Anfang war eigentlich alles ganz gut. Also man kommt raus ist voller Zuversicht und Freude, ist total euphorisch und denkt, man kann die Welt einreißen. ... Ja aber nach ein paar Wochen holt einem dann schon irgendwo ein Stück weit das Alltägliche wieder ein. Man hat Probleme mit Ämtern, Probleme mit anderen Leuten, Probleme mit sich selbst wieder. Also ... die Welt hier draußen ... ja, ... nimmt einen quasi so ein Stück weit zurück. Und man kommt gleich wieder in alte Verhaltensmuster und so. Also die Ansicht, die Einstellung verändert sich wieder. (...) Also die Welt hier draußen hat mich echt enttäuscht so, als ich rausgekommen bin. Ich habe mir das einfach alles schöner vorgestellt. Du stehst hier draußen und hast, du musst dich ja um alles wieder selber kümmern plötzlich, was ja nicht das Schlimme ist, das macht ja Spaß, aber du hast kein Geld, du hast ... nur irgendwelchen Stress so innerlich, immer irgendwelchen Druck ja, du kannst gar nicht richtig abschalten. Ja, das hat mich halt dann nach und nach wieder so in alte Verhaltensmuster reingetrieben. Dann Stress mit der Freundin. Meine Oma ist gestorben und so. Ja, das war alles ziemlich heftig. Und ... ja, dann habe ich auch ab und zu mal wieder angefangen zu kiffen

quasi und ... das hat das natürlich auch noch gefördert, dass ich da wieder ein Stück weit in alte Verhaltensmuster gerutscht bin.]

*Pascal*: Yes. Yes, at the beginning, everything was quite good. Well you get out full of confidence and joy, totally euphoric thinking that you're going to conquer the world. ... Yeah, but after a couple of weeks, everyday life catches up with you to some extent. One has problems with agencies, problems with other people, problems with oneself. Well ... the world out here ... virtually sets one back a ways. And one falls right back into old behavior patterns and the like. That is, the perspective, the outlook changes again. [...] Now, the world out here really disappointed me when I got out. I had simply imagined everything would be better. You are out here and have, well you have to take care of everything yourself again suddenly, which isn't the worst, that's actually fun, but you don't have money, you have ... only stress somewhat, internally that is, always some pressure yes, you can't really relax. Yes, well and that, little by little, made me drift into old behavior patterns again. Then stress with the girlfriend. My grandma died etc. Yes, that was all pretty rough. And ... yes, well then I started smoking weed again every now and then and ... that boosted that even more, that I to some extent fell back into old behavior patterns.

*Pascal* experienced the release from social therapy as an expulsion, he simply “got the gate [...] no release preparations in that sense” had taken place. However, he said that he felt supported by his mother.

Subjects who said they had a **relatively positive experience of transition** initially felt overextended. They were anxious. They did not feel supported by the correctional facility or did not evaluate the release preparation measures as helpful. If there were resources the subjects could gradually cope with the initial stressors. Important resources were social support and individual coping strategies that had to be internalized in order to be “retrievable” when necessary. It was crucial that the ex-prisoners were able to acknowledge that a certain phase of adjusting was necessary which was also associated with an inner psychological tension that had to be tolerated and endured. In comparison with subjects who experienced a good transition, subjects who had only a relatively positive transition experience perceived an accumulation of problems.

### 5.2.3 *The “damn hard” transition*

By contrast, *Ricardo* can report positive things only about the social support he experienced:

[*Ricardo*: Positiv: Bei meiner Haftentlassung ist eigentlich die Unterstützung, die ich gekriegt habe, von Freunden und von meiner Freundin. Das ist auch positiv. Was ist noch positiv? Ja. (Seufzt). Positiv. Positive Dinge gibt es eigentlich weniger zu berichten; wie gesagt. Bis auf die Unterstützung eigentlich, die ich jetzt von Freunden, und von meiner Freundin bekommen habe.]

*Ricardo*: Positive about my release really is the support that I got from friends and from my girlfriend. That's positive too. What else is positive? Yes. (Sighs). Actually, as I said before, there are fewer and fewer positive things to share. Except for the support that I've got from my friends, from my girlfriend.

Other than that, he described his reentry experience as follows:

[*Ricardo*: Wie wenn man geboren wird, und dann noch mal mit 30 Jahren in die Welt geschmissen wird. Das ist eigentlich so die Sache am Anfang, die relativ schwer ist; die verflucht schwer ist. (...) Du hast wirklich ein Problem, zurechtzukommen, mit der Umwelt.]

*Ricardo*: As if one is being born and then thrown into the world once again at the age of 30. That's basically the thing at the beginning, that's really hard, that's damned hard. [...] You've really got a problem getting along with your environment.

For *Ricardo*, the reentry was connected with fears and a feeling of foreignness, he partly also was “a little depressive, at the beginning.”

[*Ricardo*: Dass man nicht, wenn man entlassen wird, alleine ist; ja? Und hier draußen wird man noch mit ganz anderen Dingen konfrontiert; sage ich mal. Das ist aber – sage ich mal – nach meiner Ansicht auch ein Teil Problem des Vollzuges. Das ist einfach ein Problem des Vollzuges, weil die – meiner Ansicht nach – teilweise mit Leuten, die ein bisschen länger sitzen, viel zu spät anfangen, die wieder an das andere Leben zu gewöhnen. Man ist eigentlich – auf Deutsch gesagt – ist man komplett auf sich alleine gestellt. (...) Aber den Menschen einfach vor die Tür zu setzen, und zu sagen: „Hier kümmer dich. Hier hast du deinen Krepel“, gibt dir gleich schon die Adresse von einem Obdachlosenheim mit. Und das war es. Also da gehe ich kaputt.]

*Ricardo*: That one isn't, when being released, alone, right? And out here one is being confronted again with totally different things, I'd say. But that is – I'd say – in my opinion also partially a problem of imprisonment. That's simply a problem of imprisonment because they – in my opinion – in some cases, with people who are in a little longer, start way too late to attune them to the other life. One basically is – in plain language – one is completely on one's own. [...] But to just throw a person out saying “there, take care of yourself. Here's your stuff,” right along with the address of a homeless shelter. And that was it. Well, then I go to pieces.

In general, *Ricardo* commented on many things negatively and skeptically, but especially in regard to authorities and in parts also to measures he had experienced during imprisonment. He also criticized the probation service. In his account, he made himself out to be someone with an attitude of distinct expectations. All in all, he came across as not very active, describing himself as avoiding conflict and being in a victim role.

*René*, too, speaks about fears and, beyond that, describes himself as having been rather disoriented and insecure at the time of his release although theoretically, he had been prepared quite well.

[*René*: Also ich bin mit einem Gefühl raus gekommen, dass ich nicht wusste, wo es hin geht. (...) ... ich wusste dann auch manchmal gar nicht so, wie so ..., wusste ich dann, was angemessen und was nicht angemessen ist. Und man ist ziemlich so in seinen ... Es fehlt eben so ein bisschen dann ein natürlicher Umgang mit den ganzen Sachen. Ich wusste nicht, wann ich mal richtig zeigen konnte, wann ich sauer bin, wenn irgendwas nicht geklappt hat oder wenn ich mal wie ein Deckchen da sitzen musste oder so was, keine Ahnung. (...) ... man geht mit so vielen Ängsten raus. Man weiß ja gar nicht, was auf einen zukommt. Man sieht bloß eben halt, was man alles braucht und man weiß nicht, wie man es erreicht. Also ich bin mit vier Pappkartons entlassen worden. Klamotten drinnen, ein bisschen Überbrückungsgeld

und das war's. Und wenn man dann niemanden hat, dann ist das beschissen. (...) Also belastend war eigentlich ohne eine Richtung rauszukommen und einfach nicht zu wissen, wo es hingeht, alles offen ...]

*René:* Well I got out with the feeling that I had no clue what to head for. [...] ... I sometimes didn't quite know how, well, how ... knew what was appropriate and what wasn't. And one pretty much is in one's ... Well, what's lacking is a natural approach to all of that stuff. I didn't know when I could possibly show when I was really angry, when something didn't work out or when I had to hold still like a doll or the like, no clue [...] ... one gets out with so many fears. One doesn't know what's ahead. One just sees, well, all that you need without knowing how to get it. Well I was released with four cardboard boxes. Clothes inside, a little transitional allowance and that was it. And if you don't have anyone then, that's really shitty. [...] So what really was stressful was to get out without any sense of direction, to simply not know what to head for, everything wide open ...

In addition to that, *René* strongly felt marginalized, he said he “has always felt excluded somehow”. He said that he also had known that the correctional facility wanted to help him but that it did not feel that way. In his narrations, he came across as basically reflective but insecure.

*David* experienced the transition as difficult because he saw himself confronted with many obstacles and one needed to start completely from scratch. After release, he was in a relationship with a former co-prisoner, and even though this strengthened him, he also experienced quite a bit of control.

[*David:* Ja, „nicht gerechnet“ kann man nicht sagen. Man wusste ja, dass man wieder von vorne anfangen muss. Aber dass es dann eben so schwer wird, und sich in die Länge zieht – oder so – das hat man eben nie richtig eingeplant; oder so was. (...) Gerade, wenn es auf, wie so eine Art Blitzentlassung, oder so was – ne? – wenn man da rausfinden muss, wo man unterkommt. (...) Das hatte sich plötzlich noch mal vorgezogen gehabt, weil: Sonst wäre ja meine Entlassung im Januar erst gewesen. (...) Ja, also zum Anfang war es schwer, eine Wohnung zu kriegen; gerade hier in xy, weil kleinere Wohnungen, die Hartz-IV-gerecht sind, sehr schwer zu finden sind. Die Meisten sind besetzt, wird keine frei. (...) Arbeit findet man keine, sobald man sagt, dass man einen Schwerbehindertenausweis hat; dann „Nein danke, kein Bedarf“. Da habe ich vom Arbeitsamt hier so eine Maßnahme aufgezwungen bekommen, dient zur Wiedereingliederung von schwerbehinderten Menschen. Und das habe ich aber abgebrochen, im September. Nun habe ich eine, dadurch eine Sanktion ...]

*David:* Yes, “not expected” isn't fair to say. It had been clear before that one needed to start over. But that it would be that hard and drag on that long – or so – that had not really been taken into consideration at all. [...] Especially if it is, like a sudden release, or something like that – right? – when one has to find out where to stay. [...] Suddenly that had moved once again to an earlier time, because: otherwise my release would have been only in January. [...] Yes, well at the beginning it was difficult to get a flat; especially here in xy (name of the city), because smaller flats, that match an unemployment benefit income, are really hard to find. Most are taken, no one leaves, none is becoming available. [...] You don't find work, as soon as you tell them that you hold a disabled person's pass, then “No thanks, no need.” Then the job agency forced such a measure on me, aiming at the reintegration of severely disabled individuals. But I dropped out, in September. Now I have a, because of that they imposed a sanction on me ...

It is discernable that this group with a clearly **negative transition experience** was overextended with everyday life both practically and emotionally. They tended to externalization and were less active. They also exhibited a more negative basic attitude transferring to a condescending attitude towards all kinds of supportive measures. Subjects seen as belonging to this subgroup perceived a more intense stigmatization problem as compared to other subjects and were happy to embrace their own victim role. They reported more frequently on setbacks that they were hardly able to cope with due to limited coping skills. Finally, these subjects reported diminished social support in comparison to the subjects of the other two patterns of transition.

#### 5.2.4 Other transition formats

Beyond that, individual **specific experience formats** were discernable such as the “sudden complete crash”, “the unreflected transition paralleled by a hedonistic satisfaction of needs and self-aggrandizement” or the “Odyssey”. For *Malte*, the **complete crash** was associated with a massive substance abuse problem. *Malte* backslid right after being released, looked back on several drug addiction treatments, and did have a flat but was unable to furnish it. He only slept there, hung out with other addicts on the streets, started to show deviant behavior patterns again and withdrew from any measures. *Malte* had abandoned social therapy and complained about a lack of adequate measures while at the same time not wanting to take part in any. Besides, he said that he was not afraid of imprisonment. He referred to it as part of his identity, so to speak, to be imprisoned. He said he had not come across anything else, he had been locked-up ever since he was a child.

*Moritz* pursued a **hedonistic life-style** and reported that he went shopping right after being released. He said he dived right into his “desired style” which consisted of consuming a lot, no matter whether it was clothes, alcohol, buying a car, getting married on a grand scale or home furnishings. He reached his financial limits right away but did not reflect on it, his expectations were and remained high and unrealistic from the beginning. He assumed an air of being strong and influential and only made negative comments on measures for reintegration; they “had not managed” to treat him in the “soci” [social therapy] or to prepare him for release.

[*Moritz*: Am (...) (Datum) bin ich entlassen worden und bin auch gleich nach xy gekommen. ... Am (Datum) waren wir dann shoppen. (...) Und na die Freiheiten. Dann kommt man wieder an Zeug ran, was man im Knast nicht hatte, Bier, Alkohol so was. Na und da ging dann halt auch mein Überbrückungsgeld drauf. Vom (Datum) bis (Datum) haben wir nur Party gefeiert, durchgehend mit 1,8 (...) Seitdem halt 4 Jobs gehabt in der Laufzeit, wegen den Führungsaufgaben, ist wegen den Auflagen, dass ich da mich aufhalte bzw. dass ich die einhalte. ... Und finanziell gesehen, ist schon schwieriger. (...) Also ich habe mich gleich in einem ... Stil, diesen Wunschstil, habe ich mich halt gleich reingelebt und habe den auch gleich von Anfang durchgezogen. (...) Keine Ahnung. Also ich will keine 1-Zimmer-Wohnung. (...).]

*Moritz*: I was released on [date] and went to xy (name of the city) right away. ... On [date] we went shopping. [...] And well all those liberties. Then you have access again to the stuff you didn't have in jail, beer, alcohol and the like. And, well, that's

where also my transitional allowance went. From [date] until [date] we partied non-stop, continuously with 1,8 [...] Since then had 4 jobs during that period, because of that supervision of conduct, because of the conditions, that I stay there, I mean that I stick to them. ... Looking at the finances, that’s no doubt more difficult. [...] I, well, I dived right into this ... style, this desired style, well, I found my way into it right away and pulled it off from the very start.[...] I don’t know. Well, I don’t want a one-room studio. [...].

*Christoph*, by contrast, spoke of an **odyssey** after his release. While there clearly were many unsteady trajectories among the other released prisoners, *Christoph*’s transition very much resembled an odyssey in which he strayed from one place to another trying to gain a foothold somewhere. On the one hand, he expected others to reintegrate him and only became active when he got an external stimulus, while on the other hand, he rebelled against heteronomy.

### 5.3 Specific experience formats of subgroups

In analysis of the material on the level of concepts and experience formats, we also explored the question of whether there were subgroup-specific experience formats or topics which concerned the subjects during reentry. For that purpose, we contrasted adolescents with adults, violent with sexual offenders as well as prisoners who were exclusively in regular imprisonment with those who were in a social therapy program. It also became evident that there were further differences, observable on the level of the criminal offense type.

A subgroup-specific aspect is also demonstrated in the **stigmatization problem** which is typical of and more distinguishable with **sexual offenders**.

[*Bodo*: Es gibt auch Situationen, wo jemand unschön reagiert, aber nicht aufgrund dessen, dass ich inhaftiert war, sondern aufgrund dessen, weswegen ich inhaftiert war; ja?]

*Bodo*: There are situations where someone reacts unpleasantly but not because of the fact that I was in jail but because of why I was in jail; right?

[*Stefan*: Ich habe aber trotzdem mit der Angst gelebt – irgendwie – dass es trotzdem rauskommt – ne? – obwohl es, wie gesagt, nur eine sexuelle Nötigung ist; ne? Aber das ist halt ein Sexualdelikt; ja? Ich selber persönlich habe damit selber noch zu kämpfen – ne?]

*Stefan*: Nevertheless I have lived with the fear – somehow – that it would come to light anyway – right? – even though it was, as I said, only a sexual assault, right? But that’s nevertheless a sexual offense, right? I still have to struggle with that myself – right?

[*Manfred*: Gebäudereinigung hab ich gemacht und die haben die Anfangszeit noch kein Führungszeugnis verlangt, aber dadurch, weil sie dann das Führungszeugnis verlangt haben und weil das ja eben halt drin steht meine Strafe, bin ich wieder entlassen worden (...) Sobald die das Führungszeugnis in der Hand hatten, da brauchte ich gar nicht mehr kommen. Da haben sie mich dann gleich wieder ... entlassen.]

*Manfred*: I worked in building cleaning and at the beginning they didn’t ask for a criminal record but because, because they then asked for the criminal record and be-

cause that shows my offense, I was fired [...] As soon as they had the criminal record in hand, I was out of the game. Then they fired me again ... right away.

[*David*: Und wenn irgendwie mal – was weiß ich – man sieht ja oder liest halt mal bei Stellenangeboten, dass ein Führungszeugnis oder so was verlangt wird, da melde ich mich dort erst gar nicht.]

*David*: And if somehow, somewhere – what do I know – one sees or, well, reads in job ads that they require a criminal record or the like, then I don't even apply.

Violent offenders confirm this problem of sexual offenders by clearly distancing themselves from them:

[*Jakob*: ... da fragen die schon mal: „Hey, warst du schon mal im Knast?“ oder so. Dann sage ich: „Selbstverständlich. Du nicht?“ oder was. Ist doch heute überhaupt keine Schande. Es ist mir auch nicht peinlich. Ich bin ja kein Sexualstraftäter oder irgendwie so was.]

*Jakob*: ... well, could be that they ask “Hey, have you ever been to jail?” or the like. Then I say: “Of course. Haven't you?” or something like that. Nowadays that's nothing to be ashamed of. I don't even find it embarrassing. After all, I'm not a sex offender or something like that.

[*Markus*: Ja, weil ich auch weiß, dass, dass eben einige meiner Kumpels, oder der größte Teil von meinen Kumpels, hier, eben, die ich habe, sind mehr so Körperverletzung und so was. Deswegen gesessen und da habe ich auch keinen Bock; da. Und die sind auch, gerade auf so Sexualstraftäter nicht so gut zu sprechen, halt.]

*Markus*: Yes, well, because I know that some of my buddies, or the majority of my buddies here, well, they're in more because of bodily harm or things like that. That's why we were in and that doesn't bother me. And they also want to have nothing to do with the sex offenders ... well ...

Another subgroup-specific aspect related to the fact that several **adolescent released offenders** could be identified who displayed very **high expectations**. Such distinct expectations could only be attributed to subjects of the adolescent subgroup. While in this group, also, the attitude prevailed that one managed with the situations, that one was content with what one had, at the same time there was not a single person in the adult group who showed comparably high expectations as individual adolescent released convicts.

[*Moritz*: Also ich habe mich gleich in einem ... Stil, diesen Wunschstil, habe ich mich halt gleich reingelebt und habe den auch gleich von Anfang durchgezogen. (...) Keine Ahnung. Also ich will keine 1-Zimmer-Wohnung. (...) Eine 2-Raum-Wohnung, ganz normal, Wohnzimmer, Schlafzimmer getrennt. Weil ich mag das nicht unbedingt, Leute bei mir einladen und dann müssen sie sich auf mein Bett setzen.]

*Moritz*: I, well, I dived right into this ... style, this desired style, well, I found my way into it right away and pulled it off from the very start. [...] I don't know. Well, I don't want a one-room studio. [...] A two-room flat, nothing special, living room, bedroom separate. Because I don't necessarily like that, to invite people over and then they have to sit on my bed.

*Dominik*, too, shows similar expectations:

[*Dominik*: Nach der Entlassung ging es mir sehr gut. Ich habe alles gehabt: Wohnung, Essen, Klamotten – alles gehabt. (...) Dann ging's los mit dem Rechnen: Das kann ich mir nicht kaufen, dann ist das Geld alle ...]

*Dominik:* I felt great after the release. I had everything: a flat, food, clothes – had everything. [...] Then ‘doing the math’ started: I can’t buy that, then the money’s gone ...

It emerged during the interview that his expectations in regard to home furnishing and renovation were too high. He said that the job as a shop assistant which he had had after his release had become too boring for him, that he had started to call in sick.

For *Sandro*, with whom we conducted the interview in prison, i.e., after he was imprisoned again, money, too, soon became an issue. He said he had begun stealing because the money just didn’t last. But he also confessed that he did not only steal out of “greed, financial difficulties,” but also because of being bored, also to go to the gambling hall. He, too, complained about not having had a transition:

[*Sandro:* Na ja, man hätte eben so sechs bis acht Wochen in so ein betreutes Wohnen gehen müssen oder länger noch. Und da hätten die eben geguckt, ob ich überhaupt wohnfähig bin, ob ich meine Ämterwege alles mache, ob ich eben zuverlässig bin, ob ich hier Ordnung halten kann in meiner Wohnung und so.]

*Sandro:* Well, you know, one should have gone to supervised living for six to eight weeks, or even longer. Then they would have checked whether I was capable of living by myself at all, whether I was reliable, whether I can keep my flat in order etc.

*Christoph’s* expectations became more evident in the area of support. He criticized that “they” did not reintegrate him. He viewed different institutions as a kind of service point which were supposed to do something for him.

Furthermore, based on the descriptive data, it could be observed that the **social therapy dropouts** more often spoke of **new offenses (which, in part, remained in the dark)** since the release or else that they were more serious. An (adolescent) social therapy dropout was once again imprisoned because of a relevant sexual offense. Also, specific to age group, here, the pattern could be observed that among the **adolescent released offenders**, almost all subjects talked about new offenses, which was a lot less common among the adults.

## 6. Summary

In recent years, a fundamental paradigm shift took place in reintegration research: theory and practice have realized which challenges offenders face upon their release. Former convicts have very few chances to establish themselves in the job market, are sometimes actively excluded, often do not receive the health care needed for their physical and psychological ailments (such as, for example, drug dependency); even homelessness can become a problem, and the loss of social contacts – all of this and more complicates reintegration (*Mears et al.* 2013). The reentries depicted here do not claim to account for longer-term desistance or a de novo reoffending. The focus of the portrayed analyses is on the experience of the transition itself. The reentry is also to be understood as a “transition” as life-course



research views it, probably influencing trajectories either leading to recidivism or to desistance. The analyses presented here have brought to light several interesting features of the transition experience. Future research projects can contribute to a better understanding of the significance these different transitions might have for different trajectories in the sense of life-course research, in showing the possibility that the transition experience will affect further offending trajectories (*Mears et al.* 2013, p. 325).<sup>13</sup>

The narratives made clear that the reentry management initially mentioned did not become apparent in most cases. Subjects do or do not experience release preparations in prison, are released and then another institution – usually probation service – takes care of them (or doesn't). Interdependent reentry management beginning in prison and accompanying the offender into his or her release could normally only be seen when individuals such as prison chaplains or members of volunteer organizations were involved.

Most subjects reporting a positive transitioning experience could rely on social support, had a job at the time of their release, experienced the measures before and after release as helpful, and showed protective psychological features such as experiencing self-efficacy, or a realistic level of expectations, respectively, of contentment.

For subjects who experienced the transition only as restrictedly positive, the transition from imprisonment into freedom at first was loaded with the experience of overextension and fears as well as with feelings of insecurity. They rated the support of the correctional facility as less helpful than subjects did who reported a good transitioning experience. If there were corresponding resources such as support, the subjects, after a settling-in period, were able to cope with the experienced stressors. Here, an important resource was the availability of individual coping strategies, which, however, had to be internalized and applicable sufficiently to be available in critical situations. Also of significance and belonging to the available coping strategies was the question of whether or not the released prisoners could allow themselves a settling-in period, which naturally went hand in hand with an internal mental tension which had to be endured. Released prisoners with only a “relatively good” transition perceived more problem areas compared to those who experienced a positive transition.

At the center of the narratives in the group of released prisoners who experienced a negative and difficult transition, there was often a feeling of being overextended by everyday life tasks that stretched them emotionally, a tendency to externalization

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<sup>13</sup> For example, a current dissertation project at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law decisively examines the reintegration processes of young released prisoners from a life-course and action-theoretical perspective, cf. [http://www.mpicc.de/ww/de/pub/forschung/forschungsarbeit/kriminologie/junge\\_haftentlassene.htm](http://www.mpicc.de/ww/de/pub/forschung/forschungsarbeit/kriminologie/junge_haftentlassene.htm).

and the handing over of responsibility as well as a fundamentally more “negative” worldview which could, for example, have affected the criticism of different support measures. They experienced setbacks more frequently but also lacked the corresponding coping strategies to overcome them. Consequently, jobs, if there were any, were often abandoned because they were overwhelming or were not appealing.

These results show how important it is to conduct a genuine analysis of the structure of the social environment awaiting the released prisoner (see above) in order to act upon the situation in an optimizing or corrective way. Clearly, the immediate situation the released prisoner faces is a critical determinant for their transitioning experience and thus for their behavior during the reintegration process. The second branch of the release preparation, namely, the long-term development of skills and behavior patterns conducive to resocialization during the entire prison term (in the sense of “rehabilitation”) is of equal importance because here it is necessary to develop strategies that can be applied when being confronted with problem areas after imprisonment. A stronger orientation and trial in real-life problem areas and situations is essential, however. In this process, another objective should be to try to change harmful and dysfunctional beliefs and cognitions of the subjects in the long term by associating accordingly in prison and by considering individual biographical and personality-related psychological patterns. In this context, the experience gained in therapeutic relationships could be of decisive importance, for one thing has become clear: how reentry is experienced, is closely linked to the released prisoner’s narrative understanding and his interpretive pattern, which must be considered during release preparations. Thus, whether a released prisoner is able to generalize the therapeutic processes of change achieved during imprisonment in the reentry process, also largely depends on endogenic causalities. Nevertheless, a generalization of the skills acquired during imprisonment is impeded if the treatment takes place exclusively in an institution completely isolated from the natural social environment, in which life has little to do with life outside of the prison walls, where it appears artificial, and is structured and predictable (*Epps 1994*). For inmates looking back on a long prison term, a strategy of gradually increasing non-custodial measures is vital. At any rate, those aspects aggravating reentry must be taken seriously and the objective must be to neutralize these risk factors. To these belong the step by step familiarization with the demands of everyday life, as well as questions of how it is possible to deal with the likely experience of being stigmatized and excluded. Everything facilitating the confrontation with reality should be addressed. In doing so, it is important to consider the subgroup-specific experience formats such as, for example, the more severe experience of being stigmatized that sexual offenders experience.

While the interpretive patterns are of importance in the interpretation of the transition experience, they can also provide important hints as to how imprisonment still has development potential in reaching difficult subjects. One cannot rely on simply pointing to the subjective experience of typical difficult prisoners. Instead, it is cru-

cial to ask oneself what can be done during imprisonment and, later, in aftercare, to better reach these prisoners. One of the central tasks of imprisonment is to find answers to such questions if genuinely successful transition management and successful resocialization are to be accomplished. These are the individuals that the penal system has to deal with. Almost 60 years after *Sykes* (1958) pointed out the *pains of imprisonment* it is still true that the experiences most prisoners make in prison and shortly prior to release are dysfunctional with regard to the postprison adjustment. In this context it is crucial whether the releasees are able to maintain and/or establish a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy, agency. But – as could be shown – these are not exclusive parameters for successfully experienced transition processes.

Other German studies such as the one by *Bereswill, Koesling and Neuber* (2007) establish that adolescents, especially, feel overextended when transitioning into freedom, and do not feel sufficiently supported by the authorities responsible for reentry management. The challenges that need to be mastered can then quickly turn into an experience of overextension and thus trigger a downward spiral within the reintegration trajectory (*Bereswill* 2010). As *Bereswill et al.* had already shown in 2007, overcoming transition challenges depends on prior biographical experiences and the handling of biographical crises connected with them. Moreover, imprisonment is for the most part a painful and scarring life experience which more often than not impedes the completion of various developmental tasks on the pathway to adulthood (*Greve & Hosser* 1996), resulting in a lack of the resources necessary for coping with these problems.

These adaptive difficulties, which occur especially within the first six months after release, can quite often have an effect conducive to recidivism (*Matt* 2011). This is where transition management should begin because “transition management is there to prevent this through a timely and sufficient adaptation to the environment outside the prison walls” (*Klein et al.* 2007, p. 459). In this sense, a gradual adaptation to the, in parts very demanding, tasks such as finding and maintaining an employment relationship in freedom, can lower this risk.

The transition is not a simple, but rather a highly complex process. The “transition population” is heterogeneous and requires specific interventions. Released prisoners may largely differ in their “pre-prison” features and also in the experiences they had during imprisonment (*Visher & Travis* 2003) and, naturally, they face greatly differing social constellations upon their release.

The characteristic features of sexual offenders, particularly, clearly illustrate the need for action in regard to the preparation for stigmatizing situations. The media’s public scandalization of sexual offenses has impeded the integration of sexual offenders more than ever before. That also became clear in the narratives of the interviewees, who clearly saw themselves as limited in their options for action both based on having a prison background and also because of the specific stigmatiza-

tion they experienced as sex offenders. Of course, these restrictions that confronted the released offenders should always be viewed against the backdrop of individual coping strategies.

Furthermore, it is of interest that subjects who have experienced the transition as good, have also reported crimes which had not been detected or reported. This underlines once more the significance of the concept of “temporary desistance” and that desistance has to be understood as a continuous process (cf. *Piquero* 2004, p. 105).

In the penal system of Saxony, which was the focus of this data analyses, some gaps in reentry management have been recognized and, consequently, corresponding measures have been implemented. For example, since that time there have been some developments in the penal system aimed at eliminating these deficiencies. Among them is the implementation of “continuous support”<sup>14</sup>, the cooperation agreement with the regional directorate of the Federal Employment Agency, in effect since April 2014, which puts occupational reintegration on a more solid foundation, as well as the institutionalization of socio-therapeutic aftercare- and re-socialization research by the institute of the same name. Within the project “Heimspiel” [“home match”] and in accordance with § 19 of the Saxonian Youth Prison Act (SächsJStVollzG) the registered Association for Social Judicature Dresden (<http://www.vsr-dresden.de>) provides juvenile offenders with the opportunity to spend the final months of their youth custody in a housing project with the support of social workers. An effort is also being made to deal with the fact that there are particularly needy target groups who, due to their multiple addictions, also face multiple challenges and thus require special support. Starting in the summer of 2014, for example, it will be possible in the Zeithain juvenile detention center to treat substance abusing prisoners in a therapy ward especially established for their needs.

Even such measures will neither immediately nor in the long run provide a cure-all for all released prisoners; we can only hope that they lay the foundation for a genuine transition management truly deserving of this name.

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<sup>14</sup> In this context, continuous support means a close collaboration and data exchange between the social services of the juvenile detention centers, the probation service, and the juvenile legal support agency, to place the enforcement and reintegration planning on a firmer foundation, and to optimally prepare for reintegration.

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## Appendix

*Table 2 Overview of characteristics concerning offense type and penal system*

Participant <sup>15</sup>	Offense type	Age group*	Prison type**	Self-reported delinquency***
Markus	sexual abuse and manslaughter	Adult	ST	0
Gerd	sexual abuse	Adult	RP	0
Tom	homicide	Adult	ST	1
Jakob	robbery	Adult	RP	0
Idris	murder	Adult	RP	1
Dominik	sexual abuse	J/A	ST dropout	2
Bodo	rape	Adult	ST	0
Ricardo	rape	Adult	ST	0
David	sexual abuse	Adult	ST dropout	2
René	murder	Adult	ST	1
Martin	manslaughter	J/A	ST	3
Marius	murder	Adult	ST	3
Jens	murder	Adult	ST dropout	0
Christoph	murder	J/A	ST dropout	10
Robert	sexual abuse	J/A	ST	1
Stefan	sexual assault	Adult	RP	0
Moritz	sexual abuse	J/A	ST	9
Lutz	sexual abuse	Adult	ST dropout	1
Cosmo	distribution of pornography	J/A	RP	0
Thorsten	sexual abuse	J/A	ST	4
Hans	assault	J/A	RP	0
Sandro	assault	J/A	RP	7
Benedikt	robbery and assault	J/A	ST dropout	5
Pascal	assault	J/A	ST	4
Malte	assault	Adult	ST dropout	9
Manfred	sexual abuse	Adult	RP	0

\* at the time of their incarceration; J/A = juvenile/adolescent

\*\* RP = Regular Prison, ST = Social Therapy

\*\*\* self-reported delinquency. The number shows different types of offenses, without providing information about the frequency or seriousness of the crime.

<sup>15</sup> The names of the subjects were changed and are not the real names of the study participants.

**Spheric dimension pattern:**

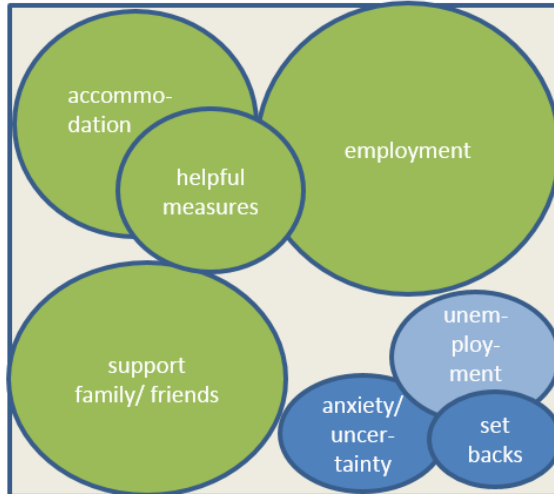
Patterns of transition

ideal start

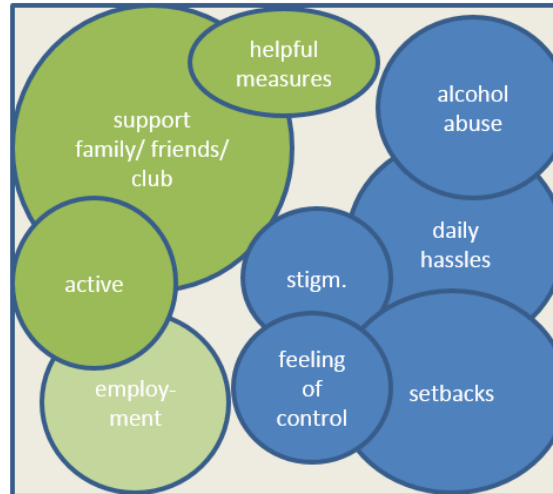
quite good

damn hard

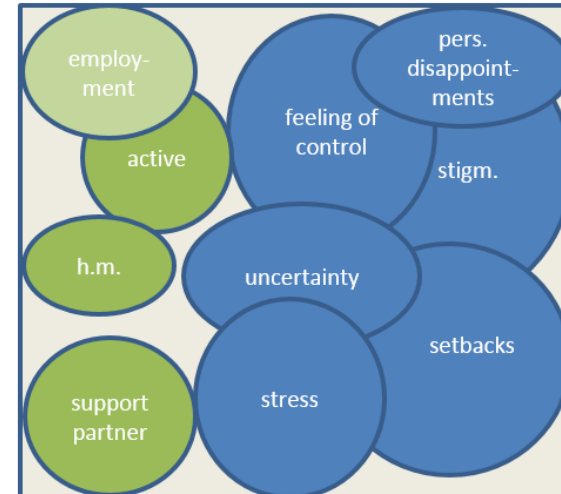
Marius



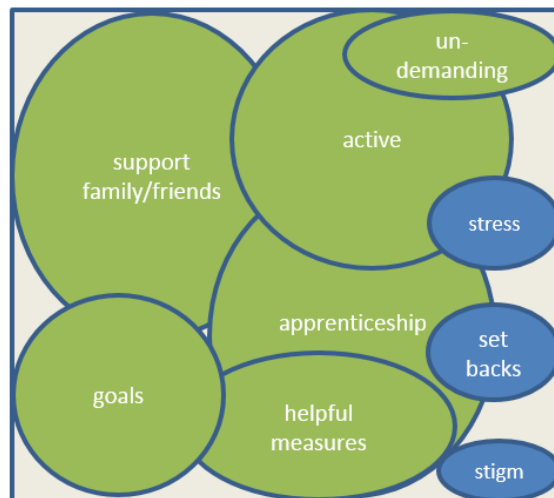
Markus



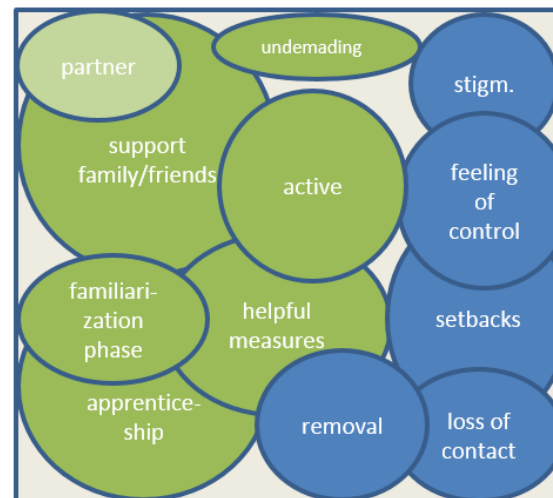
René



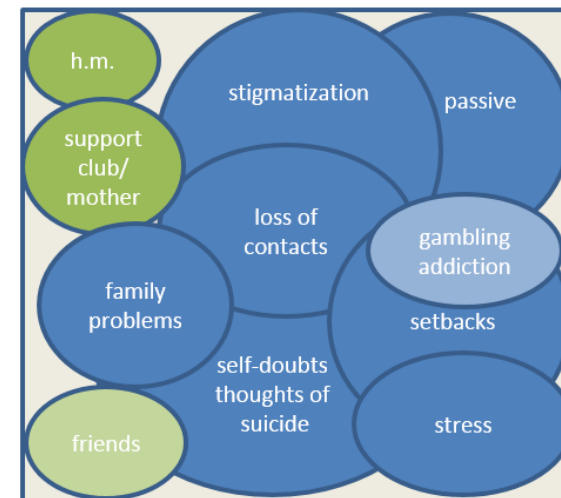
Martin



Robert



Thorsten



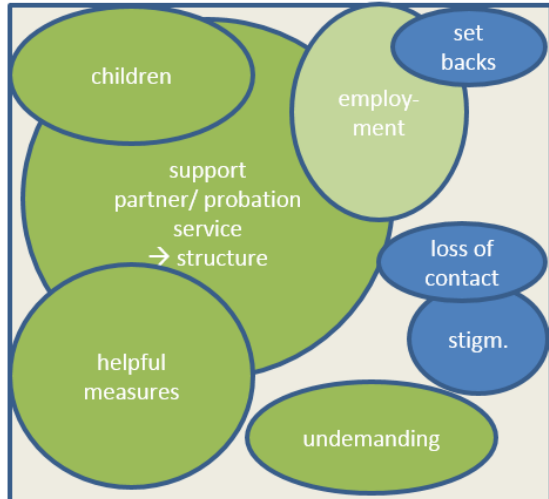
**stigm.** = stigmatization; **h.m.** = helpful measures (release preparation and aftercare)

**Spheric dimension pattern:**

**Patterns of transition**

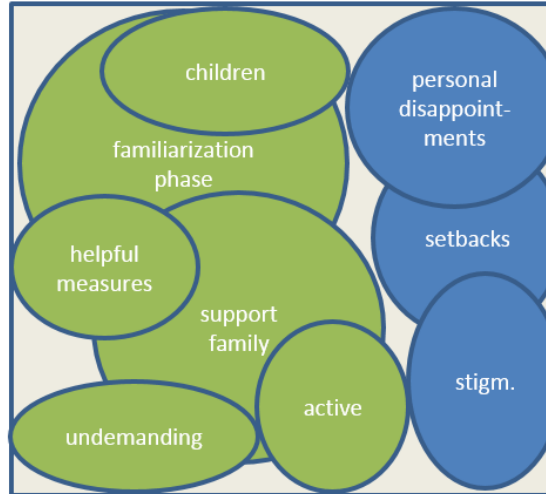
ideal start

Bodo



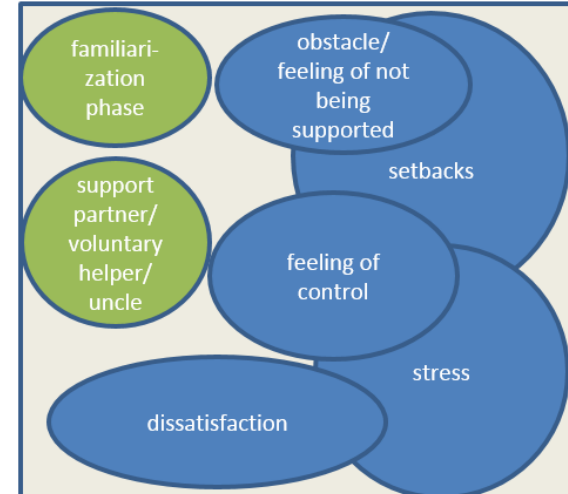
quite good

Manfred

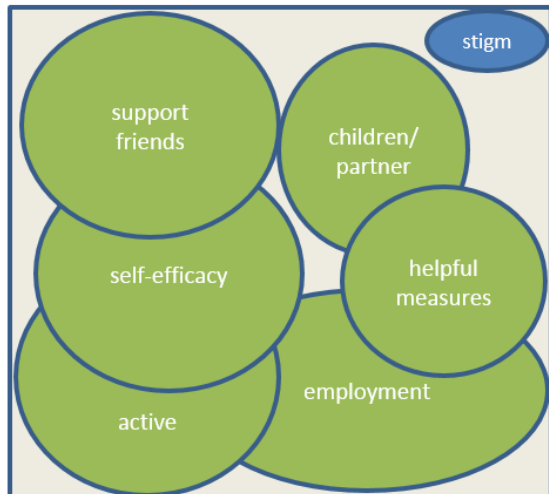


damn hard

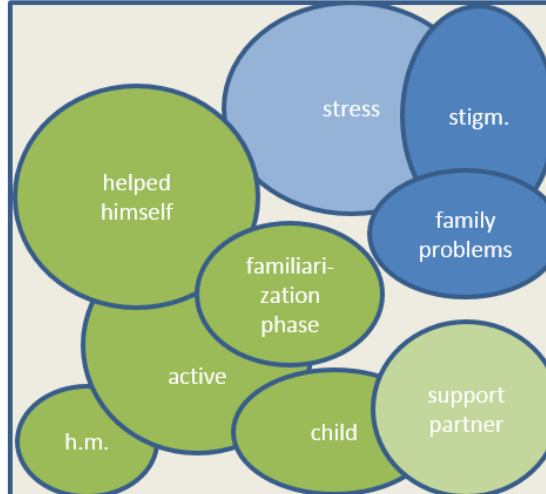
David



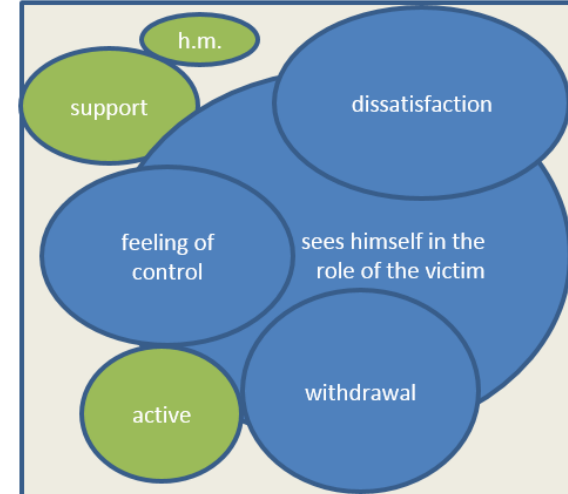
Jakob



Stefan



Lutz



**stigm.**= stigmatization; **h.m.** = helpful measures (release preparation and aftercare)

Over the last decade, increasing attention has been given to the issue of how prisoners reenter the community. Consequently, aftercare programs and supervision measures have mushroomed. By now, it has been widely acknowledged that ex-prisoners' needs center on such issues as mental health (i.e., substance use treatment), social integration, accommodation, and employment. At the same time, little is known about how ex-prisoners experience the very transition between imprisonment and release in their daily lives. This publication depicts research results from a qualitative analysis of 26 interviews with released or newly incarcerated serious (sexual and violent) offenders approximately one year after prison release in order to identify transition formats and challenges that ex-prisoners face during the transition from prison back into the community. Particular attention is paid to the ex-prisoners' experiences with correctional release preparation that aim at facilitating this transition.

This analysis is part of the longitudinal research project "Sexual Offenders in the Social Therapeutic Institutions of the Free State of Saxony". The study's principal goal is to analyze recidivism amongst sexual offenders and the associated factors from multiple perspectives.

# forschung aktuell

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