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**READING IN PRISON AND
REHABILITATION. AN
ANALYSIS OF PIPER
KERMAN'S *ORANGE IS THE
NEW BLACK***

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ABSTRACT

Fiction has always made readers to explore new horizons and share experiences with the rest of the world. My dissertation addresses the question of how literacy and reading are essential to an inmate's rehabilitation. The current policy of banning certain books in prison prompts people to consider the act of reading as a privilege for prisoners and a menace for the system. Bearing in mind the cultural, political and social aspects such as mass incarceration in the United States, I focus on the analysis of the novel *Orange is the New Black* by Piper Kerman and the series by Netflix based on the same text, together with other articles and publications on related topics taken from reliable think tanks such as the Cato Institute, which provides information on prison conditions, or neuroscience articles, which give value to the question of adaptation and reflective reading. Piper Kerman served thirteen months at FCI Danbury, a minimum security prison located in Connecticut for her involvement in money laundering and drug trafficking crime. The account of her confinement makes us realize that among all the projects carried out in prison, education and reading programmes are almost nonexistent, a fact which contrasts with the Netflix series based on the same novel where inmates make a great use of the library and quotes from novels are common in their conversations. Studies show that receiving correctional education reduces rates in recidivism resulting in a 43% lower chances of recidivating if the inmate participates in an education programme. However, surveys show that the correlation between experience inside prison and recidivating does not undermine those rates in recidivism. Reading programmes should be complementary of education ones as this activity implies reflection, which is a response to experience as stated by Boud, Keoghand and Walke in 1985, and Keith Oatley in 2006, and also makes people more empathic providing them with problem solving skills.

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I am thankful to the Villaveirán family who a hundred years ago were able to bring together the activity of reading and the forging of iron in their blacksmith's. They were and still are my role models.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The acclaimed series by *Netflix Orange Is The New Black* (OITNB), based on the novel with the same title written by Piper Kerman, has opened a window through which viewers and readers are shown how female inmates strive for a life in American prisons. The author of the novel and the main character in the series was sentenced to fifteen months for a drug smuggling crime and after her release she wrote and published her experience behind bars. An outstanding element in both the series and the novel soon catches the attention of viewers and readers: reading books seems to be a key and controversial issue while people are incarcerated. This is the starting point of this MA dissertation.

The main objective of this study arises after a close reading of the novel reading of the novel: to identify whether literacy and reading are essential to an inmate's rehabilitation and whether the act of reading books might also be considered a privilege or even a menace for the system.

In order to determine if there are any statistically significant behaviour differences between those inmates who have spent time in prison enrolled in a reading programme and those who have not, a range of research questions will be suggested:

- Do education programmes implemented in American Prisons have an impact on prisoner's behaviour?
- Can we establish a correlation between enrolment in reading programmes and more successful rehabilitation of inmates?"
- Are all book-restriction policies in US prisons reasonably justified?

In light of the above questions, there arise the following formulated hypotheses:

- Inmates who spend time reading are more likely to succeed when they are released from prison.
- Some prison book ban policies in US federal and state prisons are not reasonably justified.

- Prisoners' participation in education programs positively correlates with better prisoners' behaviour.

This is an innovative study, which derives from the analysis of the novel OITNB and how education and reading in particular appear as key elements showing changes of behaviour between those inmates in the series who have access to literacy programmes and the library and those inmates described in the novel, where access to education and reading seems inadequate. Thus, this study will serve as complementary to previous studies and research carried out to establish a relationship between low rates in recidivism associated to those inmates who have participated in education programmes while incarcerated and those who have not. Therefore, this study will focus on the importance of reading and their related features such as reflection and creativity and the importance of the development of this skill, which might be considered a privilege, a necessity or a threat for the system.

It is a study, written ten years after the publication of the novel OITNB, and seven years after the release of the acclaimed series' first episode based on the novel. It was the movie format the one that drew the attention of a great amount of viewers, who immediately asked for more seasons, extending the impact of the novel, well beyond Kerman's initial expectations and putting life in American prisons at the heart of the public debate. The series release coincided in time with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's implementation of a ban that forced incarcerated people in New York state prisons to receive only some selected titles of books. This was a measure that eventually spread to the rest of the states and federal prisons.

This study is aimed to analyse the effects of reading on inmates during and after serving prison time. It is part of English studies and it is relevant as it tries to link the analysis of a novel and a Netflix series to previous studies related to education in prison, adaptation of life behind bars, recidivism and its reasons, neuroscience and actual experiences of inmates who considered reading a weapon to set people free.

The main sections in this study are organised as follows:

- Literature Review: it is divided into subsections and it is aimed at providing a thoughtful, thorough, and critical review on previous research on the different angles of this topic.
- Materials and methodology: the research design follows a cultural studies approach, since it focuses on the political dynamics of a contemporary issue. A synchronic analysis of primary and secondary sources is carried out with the novel and the series as primary sources together with official reports and reliable articles.
- Discussion and findings: this is the most outstanding section as it deals with the analysis of those sources of information taken into account in this study and how they are relevant to draw conclusions and answer the research questions and hypotheses. An autobiographical evidence from the point of view of Piper Kerman, author of the novel OITNB marks the starting point. This is followed by an introduction on the American criminal justice system, education programmes in prison and incarceration forms of punishment and rehabilitation for the commission of felony and other offenses. In order to create an association between those actual experiences and the need of a programme which enhances literature as its main goal, studies and research on neuroscience and reading are presented. This section ends with a discussion of how reading and literature are associated with reflection and adaptation and the importance of reflection and reading in order to avoid recidivism.
- Conclusion and lines for future research: it summarises and explains the main results of the study, the final idea after discussing findings and it is intended to round off the study with possible new lines for future studies.
- References: a list of documents, books, and links classified by author which have been taken into account to carry out the work.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education and literacy in prison are among the most significant current discussions due to the problem of mass incarceration in the United States. It is believed that the implementation of education and reading programmes might change inmates' behaviour while they are serving a sentence in prison and after their release in the outside world. How society can prevent some people from going to prison and the tools to successfully achieve a release with low rates of recidivism is one of the most hotly debated issues nowadays. We shall review some of the available literature in the following sections.

2.1 The American criminal justice system

The American criminal justice system does not have only one type of institution but a range of different buildings spread around the country. The country holds 2,3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, 80 Indian Country jails, military prisons, immigration detention and civil commitment centers and state psychiatric hospitals (Bard Prison Initiative, 2019). The difference between federal prisons and state prisons relies on the fact that the former institution is managed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, where drug offences are the most common type of crime (81,000) together with public order offences (65,000). According to the department of justice, the FY 2019 Congressional budget request for the BOP S&E Appropriation totals \$7,042,328,000 (U.S. Department of Justice Federal Prison System, 2019). On the other hand, state prisons are run by state authorities holding state law violators. Those who are put in a state prison are considered to be more dangerous due to the nature of crimes they commit, such as murder, rape or gun-related criminal activities. 1 in 5 incarcerated people is locked up for a drug offence and there are over 1 million drug possession arrests each year (Sawyer and Wagner, 2019). These figures together with popular unrest about the situation of increasing mass incarceration, might be the result of the citizen thinking what is wrong about the American criminal justice system.

Piper Kerman reopens the debate of mass incarceration in the United States and the statistics that suggests that the U.S. represent approximately 5% of the world population but it holds a 25% of its prisoners (American Psychological Association, 2014). Drug offenders have gotten all the attention due to their long sentences, but as the prestigious Cato institute has recently suggested violent crimes represent the majority of offences in prison. Also, the definition of what is violent varies depending on the administrator of justice, which in this case, varies from State to State. Thus, if the solution for mass incarceration would rely on the release of nonviolent offenders, this would also apply to drug offenders, illegal possession of arms or burglaries against vacant properties, for instance, a measure far from any reasonable application. It is also true that most of the arrests carried out due to drug possession lead to prison sentences. And that is precisely the reason why, apart from the reforms carried out in terms of budget to reform the system, it might be important to adopt measures which imply the introduction of education programmes, which point at the possible relationship between their implementation in prison and the decreasing of inmates reoffending. The chance of establishing ties between reading and recidivating would be a quantitative solution for the government and a qualitative one for the inmates who might take advantage of something truly important as it is education and literacy.

2.2 Education programmes

Prison education programmes are part of a larger number of prison programmes aimed at increasing safety and to decrease rates in recidivism. Inmates who actively participate in these programmes are likely to have low rates in recidivism (Harer, 1995, p.1). From the point of view of Piper Kerman in her novel, a range of questions and doubts come to our minds as readers not only try to understand her own experience but also to understand why all these women are there and how different programmes, such as education programmes which seem to be nonexistent in that prison, might be a positive way to help the inmates during their time in jail and after. Motivation could be the key for the success of these programmes. Under well established and organised education programmes which stimulation and incentives

are the main goal, inmates would be able to succeed better in their tests than under a standard one (Kandal, Ayllon and Roberts, 1976). Apart from this motivation of inmates with striking programmes, there is an urge to implement useful and feasible programmes which provide the inmates with actual future opportunities training them with remarkable skills and try to avoid the consideration that inmates can only be motivated by money awards (General Accounting Office, Washington D.C. , 1993). The government also agrees on the fact that offering education and other recreation programmes “that meet the needs and interests of the inmate populations, provide options for the positive use of inmate time, and enhance successful integration into the community” (Federal Bureau of Prisons).

2.3 Ethnicity, poverty and age

Poverty plays an important role in mass incarceration. As Piper Chapman shows in the series, she has to wear handmade flip flops until she receives money to buy products at the supermarket. Yet the question of money goes beyond the prison walls. There is a huge disproportion between people in jail and the rest of US citizens. Bails indicates how poor or rich you are. They can reach the amount of 10,000 dollars and even when a bail is set below 500 dollars, a high percentage of defendants can afford it (Phillips, 2012, p.51). In the novel OITNB, we are given an account on the inmates’ origins and backgrounds. The author talks about well differentiating groups: Black, Hispanic, Asian or White. In a report by the Pew Research Center, 2019, John Gramlich claims that not only can we find poverty disparities but also racial or ethnic disparities. There were 1,439,808 sentenced prisoners in the U.S. at the end of 2017. Percentages of race and ethnicity in U.S. prisons look different from the population of the country as a whole. Black and Hispanics represent larger shares of prisoners than the U. S. adult population does. Hispanics represent 16% of the adult population, Whites 64% and Blacks 12%. Hispanics account for 23% of inmates, Whites for 30% and Blacks for 33%. Apart from blacks, whites and Hispanics, these totals include inmates from other races and from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds (Pew Research Center, 2019). Nevertheless, these percentages point at a correlation and not causation. The

number of offenders divided into blacks, whites and Hispanics is related to their representation in arrest statistics. There is a low white representation, a high black and a moderate Hispanic representation. Black people have a high percentage of imprisonment due to their connection to “violent” crimes, which are commonly punished with imprisonment, whereas Hispanics, due to their number of arrests, which do not necessarily end up in jail, represent a high percentage for committing more offences than whites. Moreover, there is a racial disproportionality as Hispanics are not accounted in white and black but only as white and Hispanic. (Harris, Steffensmeier, Ulmer, and Painter-Davis, 2009). Trying to understand the causes of mass incarceration, whether poverty or the number of inmates by ethnic group, we should have a look at the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA), a part of the Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act, a law passed by the City Council of Columbia in order to revise sentences, and request for a reduction, of people who were sent to jail when they were only juveniles and who have been serving long sentences. This is thought to be another alternative to decrease mass incarceration, because scientific studies have tested the hypothesis that our brain does not distinguish between impulses or dangerous behaviors until the age of 25 (Health, 2019, pp. 216-221). Thus, immaturity is not a static feature but a state that can be changed through the years. Yet, criminal law is there to make society whole again, including the families of people who die because of the crimes of drug smugglers, traffickers, and money launderers. Piper Kerman, although neither young and with no evidence of immaturity at that age, she was 24 in 1993, decided to go on a trip to Indonesia to meet her partner, Nora, in spite of knowing she was involved in illegal activities. Nevertheless, Kerman “wanted and adventure, and Nora had one on offer” (Kerman, 2010, p. 4).

2.4 Incarcerated women

According to the Bureau of Justice and its Historical Corrections Statistics in the U.S., the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 750% between 1980 and 2017. This means a variation of numbers from 26, 378 in 1980 and 225, 060 in 2017. These figures vary depending on the state being Oklahoma the one with the highest

rate of female imprisonment (157) and Massachusetts the state with the lowest incarceration rates (9). The proportion of imprisoned women due to offences related to drugs has increased from 12% in 1986 to 25% in 2017. In 1993, Piper Kerman got involved in illegal activities related to drug smuggling and money laundering in 1998, and in 2007 she was finally sent to prison, where she was supposed to serve a 15 months sentence which was finally shortened to 13. The series uses the name of Litchfield Correctional Facility but the actual location was the Women's Federal Prison Camp in Danbury, Connecticut, which also has an adjacent low security satellite prison and a minimum security satellite camp. Nowadays it is a male/female prison since 2013, when the government decided to move some inmates to other prisons.

Isolation and deprivation are the reason for the implementation of education and reading programmes. Most inmates find it difficult to adjust not only to their imprisonment but also to the outside world after they have been released (Rowe, 2004, pp. 132-134). Living in prison is not only a question of following some rules and trying not to break them, spending time in prison means adjustment and the internalization that "extra and intra institutional social support mechanisms may reduce the inmate-perceived stresses associated with imprisonment" (Winfrey and Shanhe, 2006, p. 32). Inmates need social support while incarcerated. This lack of support would be translated in an inmate breaking the rules in prison. These women have their needs and they have their ways of adapting or responding to imprisonment (Kruttschnitt and Gartner, 2003) and the attitude towards these rules will depend on the type of institution, the disciplinary regime and the organization schemes and objectives of a given institution (Gusky, 1959; Berk, 1966; Street, Vinter, and Perrow, 1966; Wilson, 1968). Inmates behaviour, adaptation and responses, to this new system, will be conditioned by their experiences lived in the outer world and their communities (Irwin and Cressey, 1962, Cline and Wheeler, 1968; Irwin, 1970). Personal and social goals for prisoners can be related to activity, privacy, safety, emotional feedback, social stimulation, concrete support, structure and freedom (Skeist, 1980). The implementation of educational programmes are important to create a learning environment in prison and voluntarily participate in them can be

effective to promote critical reflection and avoid recidivism (Behan, 2014, p.20). They need to distinguish themselves from other types of rehabilitation programmes and they should be based on principles of pedagogy (Behan, 2014).

Before Kerman, we had already had the opportunity to read about freedom and loss when Rose Giallombardo stated that “the loss of liberty and autonomy are among the most uniformly felt deprivations of imprisonment among female inmates” (Giallombardo, 1966, p. 273). She also threw light onto some aspects inmates have to face at the moment of imprisonment; those related to the loss of their own lives and belongings, getting dressed in big orange suits and carrying sizes too large or too small. At one point in the future, it would be really interesting to analyse the deconstruction of the female prisoner.

2.5 Reading can make a difference

Writing and reading seem to be clear ways of escaping from the actual situation. The experience of reading, the act of reading fiction is related to the world we are living in. “Fiction is the simulation of selves in interaction. People who read improve their understanding of others” (Oatley, 2017, p. 261). There is a connection between narratives and the activation of some parts of our brains as the fact of reading can create emotions and imagery in our brains as if we were feeling or watching them (Dougherty, 2012). The situations undergone by inmates in a prison should serve them to face outer experiences. One of the concerns when an inmate is released is the time she would spend without recidivating. One must think about the trouble he or she might find in the outer world, where the theory learnt in prison seems to be a hard reality and the act of looking for a job and looking for a house seem much more complicated than instructions which they had been given to when they were inside. This state can leave to frustration and, therefore, to seek for solutions without being reflective. The individual and his or her experiences are bound to their understanding of the world. This understanding encompasses everything we learn together with our involvement in that process (Boud, Keogh and, Walke, 1985). The act of reading might lead to this state and might be what makes the author of the novel OITNB, Piper Kerman, to face her incarceration from a different point of view compared with

other inmates. "Reflection is a forum of response of the learner to experience" (Boud et al. 1985, p.18). Piper Kerman and College & Community Fellowship (CCF) agree on the idea of improving education so as inmates get ready to face not only the world of work, but also developing a self-reflected mind. An action which has previously been reflected implies that the resulting action will be more effective (Drucker, 2006).

The education and training needs may be formal in nature to a great extent but a major need for informal skills has also been identified (life skills, the ability to function in a team, at work, in society, in the family, etc.)...teaching must... in the prison environment, be epitomized by the development of qualitative characteristics, self- confidence, the ability to solve problems, creativity, the ability to learn new things and to collect and evaluate information (Raundrup, Langelid, 2004, p.9)

According to a report of the National Center for Education Statistics; *Reading Literacy in the United States*, the results of American students in their performance on the IEA Reading Literacy Test is not as negative as the results of the U.S.'s National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which show that only a small percentage of American Students were able to read with a high level. This deficiency in reading skills might cause intellectual and social damages, but the most outstanding feature is that it might "cognitively handicaps them for life" (Beres, 2017). Reading is connected to our brains and the way we perceive information from the outer world. Neuroscience has made us aware of our brain's capacity to record every word we read, building associations with smells, noises, conversations among characters in a story or even metaphors. In a 2006 study, researchers tested the hypothesis that "processing words with strong olfactory associations also activates olfactory regions of the brain" (González, Barros-Loscertales, Pulvermüller, Meseguer, Sanjuán, Belloch, Ávila, 2005). At this point, reading skills seem to be essential to cope with life and not only concrete words are the ones to be processed by our brains but also those "abstract semantics" (Pulvermüller, Moseley, Egorova, Shebani, Boulenger, 2013).

Reading fiction makes ourselves conscious of the world we are living in and "engagement in fiction may involve understanding characters by inferences of the

sort we make in conversation about what people mean and what kinds of people they are” (Oatley, 2016, p. 621).

According to College & Community Fellowship (CCF), those inmates who lack a high school degree, which represents a 65% of U.S. prisoners are likely to recidivate within three years. There are numerous prisoners with poor levels of literacy and numeracy skills (Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero, 2013; Vacca, 2004). The lack of these skills and knowledge makes it difficult for released prisoners to deal with the rapid changing knowledge-based society (European Commission, 2005; Vacca, 2004).

“For these women, reading seems to allow for deeper and more deliberate reflection, possibilities for revisiting materials, and greater autonomy of thought and imagination” (Sweeney, 2010, p. 65).

Megan Sweeney wrote in her book *Reading Is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women’s Prisons* that:

Many women who now consider themselves avid readers were not readers before they came to prison. Some were struggling to make ends meet by working two or three jobs, some were deeply involved with drugs and alcohol, and some were barely literate and had never experienced the pleasures of reading. (Sweeney, 2010, p. 65)

Sweeney conducted a survey interviewing ninety-four women imprisoned in North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania, in order to find out about their habits in reading and how their behavior is affected by taking part in this activity. She bases her text going back to the 1960’s and 1970’s, when the prisoner’s rights movement started to be heard and the restrictive prison conditions in the 1980’s when some prison libraries were closed and there was little funding for setting up educational programmes and libraries together with the dropping of every educational programming at any level in 1994. In 2006, the Supreme Court denied in a Pennsylvania prison secular newspapers and magazines to prisoners, and as Megan Sweeney says it was done “as an incentive(e) for inmate growth” (Sweeney, 2010, qtd. in Breyer 2). Prohibiting

reading might be considered as a way to deny inmates the opportunity to thrive and rehabilitate.

The law passed by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision banning some book titles, might mean a dehumanization of those people incarcerated who are no longer seen as human beings “capable of deep thought, growth and change” (Sweeney, 2012, p.239). Is it this change, this growth and deep thought about what those in power are afraid of? Are those inmates enrolled in educational programmes potentially less dangerous than those who are given the weapon of books? At the beginning of the twentieth century some punishments in prison were locking the inmate in his or her cell without tobacco or reading (Handbook of American Prisons and Reformatories, 1929).

The New York DOCCS and its implemented Directive might be associated to an activity which can be a threat for the system in contrast with the opinions and ways of thinking of those who some time ago spent their days in prison. There are many testimonies of people who have been sentenced for a crime whose only and powerful way to escape from prison was reading books. In an article by the New Statesman (2014), the writer Kester Aspden explains why reading books in prison can set you free. He was sentenced to 18 months for a robbery at the age of 17 in a British prison. In his incarceration he read authors such as Graham Swift, Bret Easton Ellis or Ian McEwan. At that time, he remembers that books and reading were not considered a threat or a luxury, there were just part of the policies and as he states, activities of great importance as to avoid any other dangerous activities such as “boredom, hopelessness, violence or self-centred pettiness”. He agrees with the idea that books are necessary and help to empathise with people. This was similar to the case of the American poet Reginald Dwayne Betts who was sentenced to eight years in prison because he was involved in an armed robbery and carjacking at a northern Virginia shopping mall. In an article by the New York Times, Betts talks about his hard times in prison and the troubles he undergone until he discovered a book of poems which saved his life. He considers reading a magic activity highly connected to the inner self and the way we behave.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The research design follows a cultural studies approach, since it focuses on the political dynamics of a contemporary issue: the novel *Orange is the New Black* by author Piper Kerman which was written in 2010 and it was put on stage by director Jenji Leslie Kohan in 2011 who built a story based on the novel to film up to seven seasons. The departure point is also related to the current situation regarding the United States and a new law limiting the titles of some books, which are no longer allowed in some American prisons. This arbitrary banning of books has met a strong criticism, which is written down in outstanding newspapers such as The New York Times. Yet the most significant starting point is the relationship between the level of literacy inmates show in the novel and in the series and how this aspect has a correspondence with the fact that reading affects behaviour and consequently produces lower rates of recidivism as stated by one important research carried out by the centrist Rand Corporation.

In light of the above, this work has been carried out studying a range of primary and secondary sources of information:

Primary sources refer to the novel *Orange is The New Black*, a reading which inspires and brings questions about the American prison system but above all about the importance of education and reading and the need to develop programmes which enable inmates to thrive in their lives through literacy. The movie series was inspired by the novel but depicting a different reality as regards books and reading. In the screen adaptation, and during its seven season, unlike of the novel where the library was closed due to a mould infection affecting furniture and books, the audience of the series is the witness of a library which is working and run by some inmates and it is also witness of the importance of reading books and how they change the way inmates behave and use the language. In order to give shape to those ideas and hypothesis, I have also taken into account as primary sources some official reports which will serve to support my arguments such as “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019” which offers a deep insight on the American prison system. It gives you with a picture of the different systems of confinement in the United States which are divided into state prisons, federal prisons, juvenile correctional facilities, local jails,

indian country jails, military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers and state psychiatric hospitals. With this article we can also be aware of the type of offence committed. The sentencing project and its publication on "Incarcerated women and girls" offers information about the growth of female presence in jail and a whole picture of features such as race and ethnicity, and offence type. Once a comprehensive study of the American prison system and how the female side has grown in importance due to its outstanding presence in the system has been developed, the focus of this thesis moves to the relevant sections, which give notoriety to the issue of correctional programmes in prison and the enrolment in education programmes so as one of the hypotheses stated at the beginning might be supported on reliable sources. This is the case of the article by the Rand Corporation called "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education", a meta-analysis to evaluate the association between education programmes and the reduction in recidivism rates. This article gives shape to the previous hypothesis providing the thesis with compelling arguments, linking the ideas deduced from the story told in the novel and the story showed in the series. The article "Incarceration, Recidivism, and employment" by the Cato Institute, which gives an account of the increasing number of incarcerated people in many Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developing Countries (OECD) and how ex-convicts manage to reintegrate into society after incarceration.

From this primary information, there are a number of chapters and articles on different topics which have helped to develop the previous hypothesis linking the idea of the importance of reading programmes inside prisons and its association with low rates in recidivism to other areas of knowledge such as neuroscience. These secondary sources refer to issues such as behaviour and social roles in prison for women as well as the prison community and their experiences comparing different systems such as the Scandinavian and the gap between prison objectives and the actual situation inmates face when they are released, as stated by Rose Giallombardo and D. Clemmer. I have also considered the importance of understanding the concepts of "prison culture" and "inmate culture" defined by John Irvin and Donald R. Cressey in their publication "Thieves, Convicts and the Inmate

Culture". In order to continue building solid arguments and a well-established reasoning for the hypothesis stated at the beginning, from the novel, the series, actual figures of an actual prison system, the presence of women in jail, social roles and how terms such as "prison culture" and "inmate culture" are coined to talk about the complicated panorama which is a correctional, we are driven to how education is introduced in the system, the different programmes offered in prison and more specifically those programmes regarding literacy and education. The Rand Corporation and its article "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education", gives an account on how these programmes are carried out and how we can notice a correlation between the enrolment in these kind of programmes and low rates of recidivism. I have also taken into account those articles in newspapers whose topics support with testimonies and experiences the idea stated at the beginning of this work. Yet I tried to look for support on a scientific basis so I explored the neurobiological field to understand and realise that there exists an outstanding relationship between reading and the brain, and consequently with our behaviour. I took as a reliable source a study by K. Oatley, professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto on the language of emotions who claims that fiction is connected to our daily life, which implies changes of behaviour and learning to empathise with others, as literature is a reflection of ourselves (Oatley, 1989). Lani Peterson wrote in the Harvard Business Publishing that the art of storytelling is scientifically proven to be an effective way of learning. Stanford researchers also give light to this issue observing the brain patterns when reading a novel resulting in some areas which are activated in the process.

Thus, how can everything stated above turn into a solid basis for the hypothesis which relates reading, the American prison system, women, recidivism, neuroscience and even the consideration of reading as a need, a luxury or a menace? The answer could be in the analysis of American prison system and the different programmes found in its prisons. The Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile analyse the conditions of UK prisons, Piper Kerman describes in her novel the programmes available in her correctional facility while she was there which were far from the ones described in the current official site of the same institution. Furthermore, I have compared and

contrasted Piper's work to titles such as *Reading is my window* by Megan Sweeney, who depicts the life of ninety-four inmates and their relation towards literature in order to bring together their past, present and future times. The Reading Agency and NYC Book Through Bars, are two organizations, from UK and U.S. respectively, which work supplying books to incarcerated people across their countries. On the other hand, in order to understand why some titles might be considered a threat for the system, I found interesting to look in detail to the policies taken into account for the banning of certain books and their arbitrary nature but above all to read to some actual testimonies, which provide answers to how books can save your life in prison or why is it so necessary to read a book while incarcerated.

As stated above, the methodology applied follows a holistic approach, in an attempt to understand the problems posed in our research questions by looking at the whole. The main goal from the beginning is to put together any piece of information available which gives credibility and ends up supporting the main ideas. That is why we can talk about a deductive method which draws conclusions from any article or paper taken into account. The type of data gathered is in a mid-way between qualitative and statistical. It is quantitative as measures of values are shown and represented with figures such as the number of people locked up in the United States, the number of institutions, percentages of inmates with different education degrees, percentages of incarcerated people enrolled in a school education programme or research results statistics on recidivating. But at the same time, data is collected from behaviour observation, that is a qualitative type of data, also gathered as we have followed the account of the events as told by Piper Kerman in her novel, the events happening in the series, neuroscience studies, testimonies, and pieces of legislation on book bans.

4. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The main goals this work has taken into account from the beginning were to identify whether the activity of reading and literacy were essential for an inmate's rehabilitation or whether this practise should be considered as a menace for the system. One of the main objectives was also to find out if reading inside bars was a privilege or a right for prisoners. Thus, bearing in mind all these factors, we could

reach to the point of finding an association between reading, which means that an inmate has been ascribed to an education programme while incarcerated or to any other activity related to literature, and low rates in recidivism. The key point lies on the fact that there exist statistically significant behavioural differences between those inmates who have enrolled in an education programme and those who have not. A number of hypotheses were formulated which were at the same time linked to research questions. I will answer those questions with data to substantiate the arguments in order to give shape to the hypothesis that inmates who spend time reading are more likely to succeed when they are released from prison and also to the idea that reading has started to be considered a weapon of disruption, starting with a discussion of the novel and the series.

4.1 A discussion of *Orange Is the New Black*

In order to look for answers I have carried out a qualitative study of the novel *Orange in The New Black* by Piper Kerman and the series based on the novel. With the publication of the novel in 2010, and its sequel in the form of a series, there arose a debate on the different crimes committed, the extent to which they might be associated to race, gender, age, education or other variables, life inside prison and the way inmates face their stay, which for a great number is a long one, and how the system offers the necessary tools for the prisoners to take advantage of the prison sentence.

The series and the novel makes us observers of a variety of inmates' experiences through the lens of Piper Kerman in her autobiographical novel, Piper Chapman in the series. She served thirteen months at FCI Danbury, a minimum security prison located in Connecticut for her involvement in money laundering and drug trafficking crime. There has been strong criticism for the fact that the position of the main character embodies the white American woman who shows the audience the lives and experiences of "the rest" of inmates whose backgrounds and communities are Latin, African-Americans, Asian, Russian or even religious and planet activists:

The WoC (women of color) in the show each possess their own deeply moving stories. Yet, what is needed to bring them to the forefront is a WASP protagonist who appropriates WoC stories for television audiences...More importantly, why do we need an archetypical a white woman to make the stories of WoC appealing and worthy on television? (Najumi, 2013, para. 3).

The striking fact is that the publication of the novel and the launch of the series makes the world aware of the United States incarcerating more women than any other nation (McCarthy, 2013), together with the audience and the public concern on cultural identity, due to a well differentiated cast divided into groups. Piper Kerman tells the story from her point of view and not only does she show her sorrow for leaving behind her family and partner but also her fears, which she manifests in several ways. She is afraid of the rest of the inmates' behaviour and wonders how she will be able to survive among them. One of her concerns is adapting to life in prison, where it seems to be so different from her life in the outside world. But as one of the inmates told her once, she should spend her time some way instead of just letting the time pass.

In prison, there exists a range of programmes such as the training of guide dogs, an electricity workshop and a warehouse where a company called Unicor operates inside the federal prison system, making radio components for the army and selling them to the government for thousands of dollars. Piper was eager to teach or enroll in the educational programme, but she said that the programme was not operating at that moment as the two classrooms, the walls, furniture and even the books were infected by toxic mold. "Following the mold shutdown of the GED program in the winter, all the tainted books and curriculum materials had been thrown out and were not replaced" (Kerman, 2010, p. 48). Facing a situation where books and education were not a primary need in that place was disappointing to her. She agreed that getting a title inside those walls was one of the only positive things inmates can experience in that place, even if the ways to achieve it have been trying several times and receiving lessons in a classroom with more than thirty people with antisocial behaviour. Apart from the classroom environment, the choice of the new teacher was far from helping to improve the situation. As Piper claims, insults and threatening

were normal and he was the kind of person who was only interested in getting paid for eight hours of work and whether the pupils learned or not was not of his interest. Whether a paradox or not, the inmates were glad to hear the news (Kerman, 2010). In a handbook provided by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and the Federal Correctional Institution - Danbury, the actual location and institution where Piper Kerman was sent to, information about programmes is publicly available. Literacy is mandatory and the acquisition of the GED, General Equivalency Diploma seems to be eligible to vest the maximum amount of earned good conduct time (Federal Bureau of Prisons). Studying also provides the inmates with job pay promotions. As obtaining the GED diploma might sometimes be carried out online, inmates are encouraged to enrol in typing courses (Federal Bureau of Prisons). There are also occupational training, which prepares inmates for specific jobs with a certificate, college, vocational training or apprenticeship programmes designed to offer on-the-job learning in industries. Library services seem to be available with periodicals, newspapers, fiction, non-fiction and reference books, as well as Electronic Law Libraries (ELL) to prepare legal documents (Federal Bureau of Prisons)

A fact which draws the attention of the audience in the series OITNB is the presentation of Morello, an inmate in charge of driving the Correctional lorry, who appears with her makeup on and red lips. The series is full of ironic representations of the actual organization of a Correctional Institution where makeup is forbidden and clothes are totally plain and it is impossible to get your own size. But they even play jokes with this issue. Are these jokes out of reality? Are they the evidence that intelligence acquired through reading and studies, such as those who have been prepared to run a tv series, actors, actresses, directors or sound and video engineers prone to be more reflective about life and behaviours and thus, to be able to manage life without the temptation of committing a crime which will lead them to end up in jail? Is Piper Kerman able to regret doing what she did because she has been educated and possesses a university degree? We might not have answers to these questions, but we might find if there exists a correlation between reading and change of behaviour for a positive one inside prison and once they are released. Piper

Kerman tried to maintain contact with the outer world by receiving letters and answering them back to people who were interested in her situation and who wanted to share their experiences with her. Joe Loya was a man who had been sentenced to seven years and who used to tell Piper in his letters how the act of writing saved his life while in prison.

Thus, it is at this point that the hypothesis stated at the beginning of this research come to light as the activity of reading might be closely connected with the number of people committing a crime. In a lecture given by Neil Gaiman for the Reading Agency, he mentions the problem of mass incarceration in the United States as an increasing industry, which in a not too distant future will be in the need of more facilities:

I was once in New York, and I listened to a talk about the building of private prisons – a huge growth industry in America. The prison industry needs to plan its future growth – how many cells are they going to need? How many prisoners are there going to be, 15 years from now? And they found they could predict it very easily, using a pretty simple algorithm, based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds couldn't read. And certainly couldn't read for pleasure.

(Gaiman, N.. Neil Gaiman Reading Agency lecture, 2013, 00:02:07)

Piper Kerman receives dozens of books, a fact which makes the inmates look at her as an odd bug or a freak. This avalanche of books showed, as she writes in her novel, that she was different from the rest of inmates. Some of them used to borrow her books. Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, *Alice in Wonderland* are examples of the stories that Kerman used to read to pass the time, because books “served to fill the time and keep me company inside my head, but I was really lonely in my actual physical life” (Kerman, 2010, p. 33). Those were worlds of fiction which made her bury in lives and adventures of different characters. Apart from fiction books, she had two subscriptions to The New York Times and the The New York Republic. Piper's uncle, Winthrop, used to send her books and letters to tell her the news outside such as how the website she had set up was being a success. Through this real website, everyone could read Piper's worries, comments, news and it was through this web that people could read she was interested in exchanging post with other people as

well as books. Uncle Winthrop sends Piper a Japanese Street Slang dictionary, novels by Joe Orton, an English playwright who shared with Piper the fact that both were sentenced to prison, although their crimes were different. *The Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon is also sent to Piper, a novel which is considered to be the greatest American novel published after WWII. A complex text which joins science, metaphysics, profanity, literary property and culture. Kerman started to receive letters from a man called Joe Loya, who had been sentenced to seven years for a bank robbery and who stated that writing and reading had saved his life in prison. With the massive flow of books, Kerman writes in her novel that it sometimes made her feel uncomfortable. Receiving books was also linked to the idea that your life outside was fine and full with people who used to think about you and sent you books and presents all the time. However, inmates had already identified Piper as the one who had books and the one who can lend them as well. They borrowed titles such as *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, a biography of John Adams and even some of the inmates fond of rap music goes to Kerman to borrow her some books related to this type of music. Was Piper seen as different from the rest of the inmates by the fact she could read and was interested in literature? She was in fact recognised among the prisoners as the one who receives books and reads them. Thus, can reading and literature in general change the way people see us and how we see them? Can an inmate change her behaviour and being more reflective about her acts after spending time in prison immersed in a reading programme and not only in an education programme?

4.2 The impact of books and reading in prison

Incarceration and the experience in a prison might not mean a change of behaviour when being released. The Cato institute carried out a research on the Norwegian prison system taking into account those prisoners enrolling in rehabilitation programmes based on job training and education. The results did not state a correlation between those who were ascribed to these programmes and their low rates in recidivism and those who did not (Bhuller, Dahl, Loken, Mogstad, 2017). On

the other hand, the Rand Corporation research states that receiving correctional education while incarcerated reduces rates of recidivism. Their results show that inmates who have participated in educational programmes while in prison had 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than inmates who have not. This means a reduction in the risk of recidivating of 13 percent points for those who enrolled in educational programmes opposite to those who did not participate in any of them. Previous studies have already been carried out by Gallagher, MacKenzie, Wilson and Drake in 2006 and 2000, with similar results, showing 11 percent points out of the 13 percent from this last research. Those studies focused on inmates who did not possess a high school title or general education certificate (GED) in order to find out that inmates who participated in high school or GED programmes had 30 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who had not. The research also showed that those participating in an adult basic education programme (ABE), a GED programme, a highschool programme or a training and vocational programme, showed less rates in recidivism. According to Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, 2018, in United Kingdom, the difference in the number of convicts who will reoffend in a year's time after having spent time in an education programme and those who have not participated in any education programme results in a 34% for prisoners learners compared to 43% from those who do not engage in any form of learning. In the UK, figures show that over 54% of incarcerated people arrive to prison with literary skills equivalent to elementary education, overpassing the general media of the country. The number of inmates enrolled in educational programmes and thus, achieving a certificate has fallen down by 13% in 2017. There has also been an increase in achieving Level 3 qualifications and the number of people studying in the open university instead that via mainstream prison, has risen in the year 2008.

In a research carried out by the Rand Corporation and titled How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? 2014, in the United States results show that only 37 percent of inmates located in federal and state prisons attained basic education in 2004, compared with 19 percent of the general U.S. population aged 16 or more. Only a 16.5 percent attained a high school diploma compared with 26 percent of the general U.S. population and a 14.4 percent attained

secondary education compared with 51 percent of citizens who do not live an incarcerated life. Literacy levels seem to be lower in comparison with the rest of the general population. The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) shows that adults have lower scores in literacy (prose, document and quantitative). Results were based on evidence taking into account a number of 1,200 inmates, aged 16 and over and 18,000 people in U.S. households. (Greenberg, Dunleavy, and Kutner, 2007)

On the other hand, a research by the Cato institute states that incarceration rates have risen in many OECD countries and that the United states rate has gone from 220 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1980 to more than 700 per 100,000 in 2012. Taking into account those figures related to the correlation of education and recidivism and the increasing number of people going to prison, we could conclude that there exists an actual problem with those convicts who end up being ex-convicts to go back again to jail. Thus, education and achieving degrees and a certificate might not be the real solution to the problem. In spite of the figures which indicate slight changes in recidivism rates for those inmates who have participated in education programmes opposite to those who did not, the idea that education would save criminals from committing a crime again, might not be the key, as Cato institute explains in a survey, the correlation between the experience inside prison and the risk of recidivating after release, does not undermine the rates of recidivism. Can reflection associated to reading be the key? Does reading lies under the real success of prisoners change of behaviour? If it does, does this cause a menace for those who are in charge of inmates inside prisons? Would it be real a world as depicted in the series OITNB, where the inmates would address their superiors quoting Shakespeare? "If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? (The Merchant of Venice, III, i, 52-54). Imagine those prisoners immersed in a fictional world reading and reflecting on Chinua Achebe's words "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (Things Fall

Apart, 1958, p. 161). Thus, reading, reflection might make a difference in spite of the drawbacks these activities could produce in a well-established prison system.

This is clearly explained in the series OITNB in contrast with the novel. While in the novel we have an author who writes in a documentary style her months in prison, in the series we have an extra amount of sensationalism in order to draw the attention of the audience and thus, reaching high numbers of viewers. Yet in this fictional world, there arise the key to our previous questions. In the series OITNB, inmates not only borrow Piper books but there is also a library full of books. Inmates seemed to be fond of reading. Alex is filmed reading *City of Thieves* by Daniel Benioff, *Born to Run* by Christopher McDougall, *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, *The Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff and *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. Red, the Russian cooker, reads *Freshman Year & other Unnatural Disasters* by Meredith Zeitlin. Larry reads *The Complete Master Cleanse* by Tom Woloshyn. Taystee reads *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. She also mentions *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Officer Foster reads *Night shift* by Stephen King. Maria, Taystee and Piper are interested in *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James. Black Cindy reads *1,000 Places to See Before You Die* by Patricia Schultz. Daya is fond of drawing and she reads Manga comics. And the greatest surprise for the audience is Suzanne reading Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Coriolanus*. How are these conversations among inmates in this fictional prison? Do they acquire any special characteristics? If we take into account the vast amount of literature they read, their witty, satirical and eloquent exchanging of words is not surprising. Imagine Suzanne quoting Shakespeare in a scene where she utters "Little honor to be much believed" or "You common cry of curs whose breath...". Piper quotes Neruda and makes jokes with his words adapting them to her situation: "I'm gonna do to you what the spring does with the cherry trees, but in a prison way". Even Black Cindy, who is reading *1,000 Places to See Before You Die* dares to say "-Yo! (chuckles). - Expand your horizons, too. Taystee has also time for a conversation about the *Ulysses* arguing that "everyone says it's so genius, but I call it bullshit. Ain't nobody got time for that". She also advocates *Harry Potter* as it is one of her favourites: "-Wait, shortie, you want a book to read, or a step tool? - "Cause I tell you right now you ain't stepping on

the Goblet of Fire. Don't be fucking with Harry Potter". In an attempt to change the prison rules, some inmates participate as election leaders. One of them is arguing for having separate bathrooms: "- Well, I say we should have a whites only bathroom. - This ain't the fucking "Help", bitch, but you will eat my shit". Quoting and being able to exchange ideas and thoughts that are the result of reading a book makes a difference regarding the novel and the series. This way, one can imagine that the real situation in a prison, as Piper Kerman writes in her novel, is far from the one presented in the series, where dialogues and as a result their behaviour could not be the same if those inmates were not in touch with literature which undoubtedly seem to make a big difference in the way they exchange their ideas being able to reflect on them even comparing their experiences with the ones lived by fictional characters.

4.3 Banning books in prison

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) enacted Directive 4911A in December 2017 as a pilot project to guarantee safety and reducing smuggling in three New York prisons. Under this new law, inmates may receive packages from only six vendors and this results in a restriction of titles of books received by inmates while they are incarcerated. There has been a number of books which remain untouchable as they were considered to be helpful for prisoners. Among these books, we find one dictionary, one thesaurus, 21 puzzle books, 11 how-to books, 14 religious books and 5 romance novels. Censoring books is an activity carried out by governments supporting the idea of their concern for the population. Yet, measures carried out on the part of those in power seem to be unfathomable. The Comstock Laws were a set of federal acts passed by the United States Congress, banning any book whose contents were considered to be obscene, dealing with contraceptive or abortion and personal letters with sexual content. This prohibition which was part of the Parent Federal Law made that certain medical textbooks were prohibited to be sent to medical students by the United States Postal Service. Whether a menace or a weapon of power, censoring books is always associated to the power in a hierarchy. Those at the top, as in a government, need to

exert control over those at the bottom. Thus, the view is similar in the context of a prison.

Staff from the Six Book Challenge and World Book Night, two reading programmes set up in around one hundred UK prisons with seven thousand prisoners taking part, have written in the website The Reading Agency their point of view towards reading in prison, stating that books are essential to a prisoner's rehabilitation. An inmate from Pentonville HMP claims that it feels like you are reaching a goal which is a positive one and he considers the activity of reading like a meditation pattern, which lets you forget your problems for a moment. Nick Walmsley, head of Corruption Prevention & Counter Terrorism at Pentonville, claims that the implementation of the reading programmes and the use of the library have a direct impact on the prisoners not reoffending after their release. Bearing in mind the results by the Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, the difference in the number of convicts who recidivate after having spent time in an education programme is significant: 34% for prisoners learners compared to 43% from those who do not engage in any form of learning. In the United States the *NYC Books Through Bars*, an association which sends books to inmates also support the fact that education is a human right. A volunteer group works to send books to incarcerated people in 40 states, being able to ship around ten thousand volumes to federal and state prisons. They ask for action although they are the ones who are on the move. They also argue that there is some, but very limited, material for reading inside the prison, as it is the case of Rikers Island prison, where they have to manage with just one book cart.

The list of restricted books varies depending on the state and even some titles are selected to be banned in secret (Zaveri, 2019). The report by PEN America lists the content-based bans which cover books with sexual, nudity or obscenity, books with violent language, depictions of criminal activities or escaping, encouragement of group disruption or racial language. Moreover, prison officers have the legal authority to ban any other book according to their consideration of that book representing a menace for the prison security.

4.4 Reflection, reading and recidivism

Piper lived for 13 months with women who had been incarcerated for committing white-collar crimes, property crimes and drug-related crimes. Little Janet was Piper's best friend. She was sentenced to sixty months for an offence similar to Piper's, but she was also guilty of moving drugs from one country to another as a drug mule. Pop means affection and support to Piper Kerman as she is the one who helps the writer to get through her sentence. She was in prison for her link with the Russian Mafia. Sister Ardeth Platte was a nun tried for trespassing on a military facility, and refusing to answer the Judge's questions. She served two years in the same low security prison as Piper Kerman. Even after Piper Kerman's account on her novel, there are some inmate's lives that remain unrevealed. The series tries to maintain some of the real stories, although the fictional appealing element seems to be important to draw the attention of the audience by introducing new characters such as Brook, a girl imprisoned for illegal political activism; Alex, who was a smuggler for a major drug cartel; Nicky Nichols, Aleida or Daya, who were also involved in drug trafficking; Gloria, who was put in jail for a food-stamp fraud. Yoga Jones and Suzanne "crazy eyes" Warren are the only ones whose crime is considered to be violent as it involved someone's death.

Thus, given the situation explained above, one should perfectly understand that the fact of committing a crime or getting involved in a situation which will probably lead you to end up in a correctional institution should not be read and assimilated as a simple fact, a simple chain: crime, then punishment, then release. But, what people think about this process is a question that goes beyond the scope of this FDD. Adaptation is a key point to bear in mind. Social support, adjustment are important features in the process of an inmate who has been sentenced to prison. I find adaptation to new rules a possible origin for disruptive behaviours while incarcerated. and the urge interinstitutional social support devices which "may reduce the inmate perceived stress associated with imprisonment and yield fewer official rule infractions" (Jiang and Winfree, 2006, p. 32). Candace Kruttschnitt and Rosemary Gartner, 2003, claim that the needs of inmates are a fact and Gusky 1959; Berk 1966; Street, Vinter, and Perrow 1966; Wilson 1968 agree on the idea that the

reaction towards these new rules given by the institution depends on the institution itself. Being imprisoned burdens with you not only the new community and rules you will have to get adapted to but also how you were used to move in your community in the outer world (Irwin and Cressey 1962, Cline and Wheeler 1968; Irwin 1970). Rosa Giallombardo, 1966 has already explained the importance of this loss of liberty.

Thus, correctional institutions seem to look for solutions with the development of a range of programmes which are assigned to inmates at random. as in the case of the novel and the series. According to College and Community Fellowship (CCF), inmates with a higher degree (65% of U.S.prisoners) are likely to recidivate within 3-year time. In the report “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education”, the Rand Corporation, sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance carries out a research whose results state that receiving correctional education reduces rates in recidivism. This results in a 43 percent lower chances of repeat-offences, if the inmate has enrolled in an educational programme inside prison, which means a reduction of 13 percent points in the risk of recidivating compared with those who have not attended the programmes. Previous studies carried out by Gallagher, Mackenzie, Wilson and Drake, 2006, 2011, had just determined this association based on 11 percent points. In the UK, research on prisoners participating in an education programme in prison resulted in a 34 percent of possibilities of recidivating in one year compared to a 43 percent of those who did not participate in those programmes. Even in UK the number of inmates participating in this kind of programmes has fallen down by 13 percent in 2017. (Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, 2018).

In light of the above, whether these results are significant or not, and bearing in mind what the Cato Institute explains in a survey, that the correlation between experience inside prison and the risk of recidivating after release does not undermine the rates of recidivism, we can rely on the reading skills to provide inmates in this particular case with the ability of reading and reflection which might complement their enrolling in education programmes. Oatley (2016) talks about fiction, comparing it with people’s everyday performances and he claims that reading makes people more empathic. The act of reading is connected with the activation of some parts of our brain

(Dougherty, 2012). As we read, we feel emotions, we are even able to relate smells and flavours as in the study carried out by Julio González, Alfonso Barros Loscertales, Friedemann Pulvermüller, Vanessa Meseguer, Ana Sanjuán, Vicente Belloch, César Ávila (2005), testing the hypothesis that processing words with an olfactory related meaning alters some olfactory regions in the brain. Reading skills are essential and directly connected to our brain (Pulvermüller, Moseley, Egorova, Shebani and Boulenger, 2013). That is, reading is connected with being reflective and the understanding of the world we are living in. We learn from the people and situations that surround us (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). Even Piper Kerman and her way of solving problems and managing behind bars is connected with this idea. A person has learnt something when he or she is able to reflect on it (Boud et al. 1985). Thus, formal training is a key point but together with an emphasis on qualitative features such as solving problems skills (Raundrup, Langelid, 2004). A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that only a small number of American students have a high level in reading skills and this might result in future cognitive problems (Beres, 2017).

Education programmes and a quality reading programme would work perfectly well to build a safe and positive environment behind bars, which would be of great help to avoid high rates of recidivism. Megan Sweeney wrote in *Reading is my window*, 2019 that reading provides the inmates with autonomy, imagination and reflection. These results from an interview of ninety female inmates imprisoned in North Carolina. She argues that prohibiting reading means denying inmates the possibility of rehabilitation. In her book, the author maintains that prohibiting literature is associated to a dehumanization of those inmates who will no longer be capable of thinking and reflection nor will they be able to grow and thrive. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the *Handbook of American Prisons and Reformatories*, 1929, reading was considered a privilege and being punished implied the locking in cells without the possibility of reading or smoking.

Last but not least come the testimonies of those people who were imprisoned and found in reading their freedom. The writer Kesler Aspden gives strong argumentation of how reading changed his life while he was in prison. This was an activity which

was connected with the sense of liberty, although he was behind bars. He would consider it as a safe way to avoid other potentially dangerous activities such as boredom, hopelessness and violence. The American poet Reginald Dwayne Betts tells The New York Times how he came across a book of poems which inspired him to become a poet claiming that literature defines ourselves.

5. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER LINES OF RESEARCH

The American criminal justice system holds 23 million people in different types of institutions. 1 in 5 incarcerated people is locked up for a drug offence and there are over 1 million drug possession arrests each year. The United States represent a 5% of the world population but they hold a 25% of the world's prisoners (Sawyer and Wagner, 2019). Nowadays, mass incarceration is a matter of concern to the ordinary citizen, who still thinks that the releasing of nonviolent drug offenders would lead to a solution of this overcrowding. Nevertheless, the concept of nonviolent and violent offences depends on the administrator of justice and varies from State. Once we enter prison grounds, we find a world of inequalities which ask for urgent measures and the need to draw on state budgets to take a chance on the implementation of education programmes together with an emphasis in reading skills.

But prisons are a melting pot of diversity. On the one hand, money makes a big difference before and while people are incarcerated. Bails can go up to 10,000 dollars and beyond, which equals an eight-month salary, building gaps among those who can afford paying them and those who cannot. Goods inside prison are not equally available to all and even money is necessary to survive behind bars. Moreover, inmates' origins and backgrounds also show differences in social behaviours. A roiling mix of ethnic groups and a great range of community traditions live together in a place which has its own strict imposed rules. Inmates serving long sentences since their juvenile times, are also believed to be a target object of study to reduce mass incarceration since the IRAA, a law passed by the City Council of Columbia in order to revisit sentences of people who were sentenced when they were juveniles and are still in prison, seems to be based on scientific studies which

show that there exists a period before 25 years when juveniles are more susceptible of following their impulses and being involved in risky behaviours.

Thus, whether violent or nonviolent offences, the buying power, inmate's behaviour due to age or the origin of prisoners, the problem of reoffending is a goal one to achieve, since serving a sentence in a prison asks for a great number of factors to bear in mind such as gender and social support and the implementation of suitable programmes which guarantee the inmates adjustment.

After a qualitative study of the novel OITNB and the acclaimed series by Netflix based on the same work, there arise some clues which support the hypotheses stated at the beginning of this study. Piper Kerman, tells her experience behind bars. Prisoners inside prison have the opportunity to participate in education programmes to achieve the GED although such programmes seem to lack quality. Reading activities are non-existent, since the library was closed due to a toxic mould which affected books and furniture. Piper Kerman acted as a bridge between literature and some inmates who used to borrow her books which were sent to her by friends or family. Unlike the novel, the series highlights the use of books and the importance of literature in general. A library is a significant element and some prisoners are in charge of it. On the other side of the screen, the audience witnesses how those inmates cope with their lives inside prison, their relationships with others, tensions, insults, officer's behaviours and an exchange of conversations full of literary resources: metaphors, similes and the use of quotations. This intelligent use of language can only be the result of those people's reading skills and their enrolment in reading activities and not only the result of their participation in education programmes to obtain specific titles.

Studies show that receiving correctional education reduces rates in recidivism resulting in a 43% lower chances of recidivating if the inmate participates in an education programme. However, surveys show that the correlation between experience inside prison and recidivating does not undermine those rates in recidivism. Therefore, we are only left with the ability of reading and reflection as complementary patterns of well- established education programmes for a number of reasons stated in this study:

- Reading is associated with the adaptation of a new environment and it is of high importance for an inmate to fill in their sense of loss liberty through reading.
- Reading complements other well established programmes offered in prisons which are insufficient to help offenders to cope with their lives inside and in the outer world when they are released.
- Reading makes people more emphatic and it is responsible for the activation of some parts of our brain when we read about emotions, smells and even abstract elements.
- Reading is connected with being reflective and the understanding of the world we are living in. A person is considered to have learnt something when she or he is capable of reflecting on it.
- Reading provides a person with problem-solving skills.
- Reading is so important and so undervalued that reading associations such as the NYC Books through bars work sending books to a great number of prisons in U.S.
- Reading makes a difference when Neruda and Shakespeare are quoted in the series OITNB.

Thus, banning reading and limiting the titles would deprive people and particularly inmates of the strong benefits of this necessary activity. Not only research and statistics show the association between education and lower rates in recidivism but also the testimonies of those ex-convicts who found in reading a way to escape even while incarcerated. Disposing of books will result in a dehumanization of the inmate and his or her inability to thinking and reasoning. Thus, literature is a weapon which those in power are afraid of, those who will keep considering it as a privilege and a menace activity instead of a necessity as this study has explained with strong arguments. Whether literature might unleash a pacific and silent war against the system or whether the deconstruction of the female prisoner would be an outstanding matter of analysis might be answered in further lines of study as those topics falls out of the scope of the main objective of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is the great

success of a study to enhance other topics which would likely be of great interest and complement the previous ones.

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