BARRIERS TO A REAL SECOND CHANCE: SEEKING

REDEMPTION WHILE SET UP FOR FAILURE

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Abstract

With the enactment of the Second Chance Act in 2008, there has been a need to better understand the effectiveness of prisoner reentry programs and the services that are provided within these programs. Since then, numerous articles have described the barriers that previously incarcerated persons encounter during reentry and how this increases the likelihood of recidivism. The goal of this current study is to understand what current barriers exist for individuals within a local reentry program and then to suggest future implementations that could reduce the impact of these barriers. To achieve this goal, qualitative research methods are employed to understand the experiences of 24 clients within a local reentry program. In this study, secondary interview data collected in 2022 is reexamined to extract themes that explore the barriers that reentry clients encounter when returning back to the community and to gain an understanding of what resources are needed for this specific population. These thematic findings overlap with the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks presented in this project, which demonstrates why services are inaccessible for this population and how stigmatization negatively impacts the reentry process for previously justice-involved individuals. Future implications explore how altering modern policies could limit the impact of reentry barriers and how conducting additional studies could provide more solutions for overcoming reentry barriers.

Keywords: Reentry barriers, stigmatization, recidivism, incarceration

Dedication

The first person I would like to dedicate this project to is my mother. I never could have achieved all this without her support and encouragement. Understanding all the sacrifices she made to raise me as a single parent, I am constantly inspired by her strength, determination, and generosity. Thank you for reminding me that I could overcome any obstacle in my way. I am beyond grateful for all your support, encouragement, and compassion.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In 2021, 5.4 million adults were imprisoned in the American correctional system (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2023). This figure is based on the significant changes and challenges that have occurred within the U.S. correctional system throughout the last few decades. On a global scale, the rates of adults under correctional supervision in America has always been the highest in the world when compared to other developed nations, such as Canada and the United Kingdom (Prison Policy Initiative [PPI], 2021). Mass incarceration has been one of many ongoing challenges in the U.S., even with rates of incarceration being inconsistent across states. For example, in the year 2021, Nevada had 10,202 people in their prisons, California had 101, 389 people in their prisons, Texas had 131,734 people in their prisons, and New York had 30,321 people in their prisons (BJS, 2021b). Furthermore, when comparing the states within the U.S. to countries around the world, states like Nevada and Texas have higher rates of incarceration than most other countries (PPI, 2021). These figures alone demonstrate why mass incarceration is a concern within the U.S. and how high the rates of incarceration are within the U.S. when compared to other nations around the world.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, overall, the U.S. saw a decrease in the rates of incarceration within the country's jail and prison systems. Similar to the discrepancies in state incarcerations rates per capita, effects from the COVID-19 pandemic varied widely depending on the local response, policies, and the specific conditions within each correctional facility (BJS, 2021a; PPI, 2020). This decline did not eliminate the inherent disparities in the system, as persons identifying with specific demographic groups still faced higher arrest and incarceration rates.

Variations also existed across the country with different correctional institutions arresting and incarcerating different rates of persons. For example, even with the decline of arrests and incarcerations, people of color – particularly African Americans and Hispanics, are still overrepresented in the incarcerated population. Racial disparities in the system have been and continue to be well documented issues that are connected to systemic bias, racial profiling, and socioeconomic disparities (Adelman, 2020; Garland, 2013; Washington, 2018). Further, the majority of incarcerated individuals have mental health and substance use disorders as they are more likely to have interactions with the criminal justice system (Luciano et al., 2014; Tsai & Gu, 2019). Important to this project, a cycle of incarceration has been well-documented, as those who have been previously incarcerated are still more likely to return to the criminal justice system due to challenges in finding employment, housing, and community support (Pager, 2006; Pinard, 2010; Silver et al., 2021).

These disparities in incarceration reveal a complex and inconsistent picture of who is incarcerated and the reasons why they are incarcerated. Most of these disparities are linked to limited financial resources, lack of access to supportive resources, ongoing racial discrimination, mental health disorders, and limited treatment options. Thus, it is important to highlight that these disparities in incarceration rates are influenced by a complex interplay of social, economic, and systemic factors. In spite of the decrease of incarceration rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. correctional system still relies on imprisonment and incarceration to control crime rather than providing access to reentry and treatment services.

As expected, this reliance on incarceration would result in millions of American adults reentering after interacting with the correctional system. In 2019, it was found that over 10 million American adults were reentering from jails and prisons in the country (Wang, 2024).

Wang (2024) estimated that this number dropped to 7,659,492 American adults in 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic delaying processes within the court and correctional system. Although there was a decrease, close to 8 million Americans are reentering their communities post-incarceration. During the reentry process, this population encounters new challenges due to the structural, legal, and individual barriers they are encountering post-release.

Upon reentering, previously incarcerated individuals are limited by their record, the stigma surrounding incarceration, and the community supervisory guidelines imposed on them during their transition back into society (Augustine, 2019; Gray et al., 2001; Ortiz & Wrigley, 2022; Sinko et al., 2020). Based on the lack of resources available to those reintegrating, the reentry process for formerly incarcerated individuals has proven to be riddled with challenges, ranging from limited housing opportunities and intense community supervision to limited employment opportunities and poor health outcomes. These realities are further exacerbated by legal barriers, systematic bias, and the lack of community support upon reintegration into society.

To combat the ongoing problems associated with mass incarceration and reincarceration, local-level reentry programs have been implemented as a means of reducing recidivism and re-incarceration and reducing the financial burden of repeated incarceration and associated costs. These programs also vary in their goals and service provision. For example, some reentry programs focus solely on training for employment while others address numerous barriers – including challenges related to employment, housing, education, healthcare, and legal rights. Overall, these programs were designed to provide services for formerly incarcerated persons, promote rehabilitation, and provide them with necessary resources to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Finally, in 2008, Congress enacted the Second Chance Act (SCA), now a federal law aimed at reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for individuals released from prisons and jails. By providing funding to reentry programs, research grants are also awarded to those evaluating the best practices within these programs. This Act also encourages collaboration between federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as non-profit organizations, to develop, implement, and evaluate reentry programs. Studies conducted on the impacts of the SCA funded programs have revealed a variety of findings namely the need to provide more resources based on treatment and support for those individuals navigating the reintegration process (Miller et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2019; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Visher et al., 2017). The reality is that challenges are still present and that reentry research remains complex due to inconsistent data and varying jurisdictional practices associated with community supervision.

The Current Study

The U.S. correctional system's heavy reliance on incarceration has posed significant challenges for individuals attempting to reintegrate into their communities. Reentry programs stand as a pivotal strategy to address these challenges and offer opportunities for those previously involved in the justice system. The present project is rooted in the secondary analysis of qualitative interviews conducted in 2022 with formerly incarcerated individuals who are clients of a local reentry organization. Its primary objective is to investigate the barriers and challenges faced by clients participating in a reentry program funded by the Second Chance Act (SCA).

In alignment with existing research, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles encountered by formerly incarcerated individuals

during their process of reintegration into society. Additionally, goals are to identify the types of services that could facilitate their reentry journey and explore potential solutions to overcome these barriers. Furthermore, the qualitative data examined in this thesis will provide insights into the contextual factors linked to reentry challenges and suggest future implementations to help clients surmount these obstacles.

This thesis project is guided by two central research questions. The first aims to understand the barriers faced by formerly incarcerated individuals within a reentry program as they reintegrate into their community. The second explores services that can be introduced to develop strategies for overcoming these barriers. Findings of this study are important because they will be useful in promoting successful reintegration and reducing the impact of mass incarceration on individuals and communities.

Outline of Thesis

In order to address these broad research questions, the first chapter of this thesis will explore the history of mass incarceration, the enactment of the Second Chance Act, and the implementation of reentry programs in the U.S. The second chapter will provide a review of literature on the current common barriers that previously incarcerated individuals face during their transition back into the community. The third chapter offers theoretical frameworks that explore how class conflict, oppression, labeling, and stigma impact previously incarcerated persons' identity, sense of self, and access to resources. The fourth chapter outlines the methods used to study barriers within a localized reentry program, primary research questions, a description of the importance of qualitative research methods and analysis, as well as its methodological limitations. The fifth chapter reveals what current barriers existed for reentry clients at a local reentry organization called Hope for Prisoners in 2022 based on the interview

data collected during this year. The sixth chapter builds on the previous one by exploring what challenges reentry clients faced, how they navigated those barriers, and what future implementations would be beneficial for reentry clients in this program. The seventh chapter discusses how the experiences of reentry clients relates to previously mentioned theoretical frameworks and literature to demonstrate the connections being established within this current study. The eighth or final chapter concludes with an overview of general conclusions as well as some thoughts about future research implications to help navigate barriers to reentry.

Collectively, the chapters within this thesis will explore several critical aspects related to the topic of prisoner reentry. This will include an overview of the history of mass incarceration, a review of prevailing reentry challenges based on recent literature, an analysis of theoretical frameworks that shed light on contemporary barriers associated with reentry, and an exploration of the research methods being employed for this thesis project. To begin, and previously mentioned, the following chapter will describe the causes of mass incarceration, the enactment of the Second Chance Act, and how reentry programs became a potential solution in the American correctional system.

Chapter One: Understanding U.S. Mass Incarceration & Connections to Reentry Efforts

Mass incarceration in the United States refers to the pervasive and unprecedented growth of its jail and prison populations, which began in the 1970s and continued for several decades. It is characterized by the massive increase in the number of individuals incarcerated, often for non-violent offenses driven by the War on Drugs and "tough on crime" legislation. This phenomenon has disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, particularly African American and Hispanic populations, leading to significant racial disparities in incarceration rates. Mass incarceration has not only strained the criminal justice system, but also had far-reaching economic and social consequences, including barriers to reentry, reduced access to resources, and profound social inequalities. Efforts to address this issue have gained momentum, focusing on criminal justice reform, alternatives to incarceration, and policies aimed at reducing recidivism and improving rehabilitation programs.

Recently, in 2020, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2022, p. 1) claimed that there was "an estimated 5,500,600" people who were being held in adult correctional facilities. Within this estimate, about a fourth were currently incarcerated with the remaining sentenced to community sanctions (BJS, 2022). Despite there being over 5 million people within the correctional system in 2020, this number was a gradual decrease from earlier estimates. The Prison Policy Initiative (2023a) claimed that the decreases in incarceration rates were due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which created temporary delays within the legal system. In other words, cases were not being processed at the same rate that they were prior to the pandemic and as a result, the rates have begun to rise again.

Although 2020 led to a decrease in incarceration rates, individuals from specific demographics were being arrested at higher rates when compared to other groups. However,

depending on which correctional institution is being studied, the breakdown of who is being incarcerated changes based on which institution is being evaluated. For example, in 2021 when over a million individuals were sentenced to federal or state prisons, the majority identified as Hispanic or African American, male, and sentenced for a drug offense (BJS, 2021b). For jails in 2020, while half a million of individuals were sentenced to jail, the majority identified as White, male, were not convicted, and had committed a felony offense (BJS, 2020).

As these findings reveal, disparities in incarceration rates and are attributed to a lack of access to financial resources in lower income areas, co-occurring drug use and mental health disorders, and to discriminatory practices still being applied to racial minorities in the United States (Campbell & Vogel, 2019; Schnittker & John, 2007). In recent years, even though there has been a slight decrease in incarceration rates, the American correctional system is still relying on incarceration to incapacitate individuals rather than finding resources to tackle the social inequality and the reliance started decades prior. To understand how this overused practiced became accepted in the United States, the next section will describe the history of mass incarceration and how incarceration was viewed as a solution to ongoing political and social issues throughout recent decades.

Research on the Consequences of Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration is a term that refers to the historically higher rates of incarceration for a developed nation and to the systematic incarceration of groups of people rather than the incarceration of only specific individuals (Garland, 2001; Western & Muller, 2013). It is a term that has been used to refer to the significant and sustained increase in the number of individuals in prison or jail, typically accompanied by a higher-than-average incarceration rate. This term also signifies the state of socio-political affairs where a substantial portion of the population,

8

often involving a disproportionate number of certain demographic groups, namely racial and ethnic minorities, low-income persons, and sometimes specific communities of people, are incarcerated or under some form of correctional supervision. In short, mass incarceration is characterized by the widespread and persistent use of imprisonment and punitive policies as a response to crime and social issues, resulting in a continuously expanding prison and jail population.

Beckett and Francis (2020) determined the main causal factors linked to the mass incarceration boom that started in the 1960s. Politicians of the 1950s and onward realized that they could use crime as a method to stigmatize marginalized populations. These populations were those made up of the lower-class persons identifying as Black or African American. During the Civil Rights movement, politicians ensured that specific populations were victims of policies that were "tough on crime" and these political tactics were used for decades after the fact (Beckett & Francis, 2020). Generally, "tough on crime" political tactics include mandatory minimum sentencing, aggressive law enforcement efforts combating drug offenses coupled with lengthy sentences for drug-related crimes via the "War on Drugs", truth in sentencing laws, three-strikes laws, and a range of other zero tolerance policies (i.e., broken windows policing and stop and frisk programs). The creation of these tougher policies led to higher rates of incarceration, over-incarceration via longer sentences, and increased costs associated with imprisonment (Lattimore, 2022).

For the marginalized groups who were targeted through the use of these policies, they were incarcerated at higher rates, stripped of many rights, and lost access to a multitude of resources. According to Kirk and Wakefield (2018), some of the consequences that previously justice-involved individuals suffered from were housing instability or insecurity, worse health

outcomes, a lack of employment opportunities, and relationships being negatively impacted post-incarceration. Again, the policies and the correctional system as a whole was designed to oppress certain groups based on racist and classist assumptions (Rizer, 2023). This systematic oppression has done more harm to those who were previously incarcerated because upon release, the number of legitimate opportunities is extremely limited. Upon release, thousands of U.S. citizens are struggling to reenter their communities due to how difficult it is to gain access to housing, employment, education, healthcare, and other basic necessities that improve one's quality of life.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on criminal justice reform efforts used to address these concerns. There have been several suggestions proposed to decrease rates of mass incarceration and improve the correctional system as a whole – promoting a balance and evidenced-based approach to crime and punishment. One suggestion from Kreager and Kruttschnitt (2018) was to allow experts in the field of social science access to conduct more research within correctional settings. They argued that social scientists would be able to evaluate what situations are arising within these facilities and what evidence-based practices could be used to resolve conflicts within these spaces. According to Beckett (2018), another suggested tactic for improving the correctional system is relying on reentry programs as a countermeasure to combat the mass incarceration crisis that the United States currently faces. This would alter the previous assumptions of the community about those who were considered "criminals" and help those reentering access the resources that they need (Beckett, 2018). Reentry programs are strongly supported since they work with previously justice-involved individuals to ensure that their reintegration process back into their community is successful.

Even so, these programs could not overcome the intense policies created during the "tough on crime" period within the United States. These tough on crime policies, inclusive of the

War on Drugs, had a profound impact on the U.S. criminal justice system. These policies led to a significant increase in the U.S. incarcerated population and created challenges for individuals reentering society after serving their sentences. Furthermore, with this increase in the U.S. incarcerated population, over 10 million people were reentering in 2019 and this number was estimated to be close to 8 million people in 2022 (Wang, 2024). Therefore, due to the number of individuals reentering and the specific challenges they encountered during their reentry process, the Second Chance Act was created to address the rising rates of incarceration and recidivism within the United States.

The Second Chance Act

As a response to the recognition that many individuals, especially those with non-violent offenses, faced substantial obstacles when reentering society, the Second Chance Act (SCA, 2008) was enacted to provide federal funding to reentry programs that aimed to reduce recidivism while also providing resources to individuals post-incarceration (Ames, 2019). More specifically, this Act was enacted to provide federal funding to reentry programs to improve the quality of services provided, to conduct research on how effective these services were, and to determine new resources would aid in reducing the recidivism rates (The Second Chance Act of 2007, 2007-2008).

Much of the support for the Second Chance Act (SCA) centered around its potential to reduce crime and recidivism rates, which explains the bipartisan backing the Act received. This support also extended to the allocation and utilization of federal funding for the SCA's initiatives. Changing the political rhetoric of "tough on crime" to deserving of a "second chance", this federal Act also encouraged Americans to have a new perspective on those who had been previously incarcerated. Instead of seeing previously justice-involved individuals as criminals

who were incapable of changing, this Act aimed to humanize those who were incarcerated and give individuals a chance to access services that would be helpful during their reentry process.

To some experts, the SCA was another iteration of a policy that may have more harmful consequences to the American people. In 2007, before SCA was enacted, there were questions about whether this policy would succeed since there was a lack of research in reentry programs and their effectiveness in decreasing rates of recidivism. Concerns raised by O'Hear (2007) noted that it would be difficult to remove the stigma that policies from previous decades created towards people who were incarcerated. Despite the reasonable criticisms of the SCA, the Act was passed and reentry programs received funding to reduce recidivism rates while also providing resources to populations who had been stripped of their freedoms and resources after being incarcerated.

In the years that followed the enactment of the SCA, studies were done to determine what the best reentry practices were for individuals returning back to their communities. For example, Ortiz and Jackey (2019) conducted 67 interviews with 57 previously incarcerated individuals and 10 reentry program staff, and they found that one of the main barriers during reentry was that the correctional system and the reentry programs had opposing goals. Correctional facilities and their staff felt that the reentry process was the responsibility of the reentry programs, so individuals were not prepared to transition prior to release. However, Ortiz and Jackey (2019) claimed that the reentry process and the goals of both institutions should be to aid in the reintegration process for individuals who are transitioning back into the community. The argument is that those within the correctional system should be assisting with the reentry process, not creating more obstacles for people who are trying to turn their lives around.

There have been other studies evaluating reentry programs and the services they offer, including limitations these programs are currently facing. Many notable challenges involve a lack of funding, a lack of available resources within the community, and an intense fixation on the goal of decreasing recidivism rates over providing opportunities for pro-social inclusion to people that are attempting to restore their relationship with their community (Ames, 2019; Anderson-Facile, 2009; Baer et al., 2006; Lattimore & Visher, 2013). Despite the beneficial outcomes from these reentry programs, the focal point that guided the support of reintegration programs and services was that there was going to be evidence of a decrease in recidivism rates.

Criticisms Associated with Reentry Programs

As mentioned in the previous section, the passing of the SCA is important to consider when discussing the history of reentry programs and the problems that arose within these programs for previously justice-involved individuals. Another important consideration is how different each reentry program is and how some programs were either ineffective or did not provide the necessary resources for individuals to successfully reenter society. Prior to passing the SCA, there were concerns about reentry programs and if these programs would be able to achieve the goal of reducing recidivism due to how mixed the evidence was at the time. Some of the primary concerns associated with reentry programs were how this would increase the caseloads of reentry practitioners and how strict community correctional practices could potentially increase recidivism (Travis, 2000). However, with the enactment of the SCA, more research would be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of reentry programs.

In the years that followed, several studies explored challenges that formerly incarcerated individuals were encountering post-release. Anderson-Facile (2009) outlined major barriers to reentry that had been occurring within reentry programs and why previously justice-involved

13

individuals were struggling to successfully reenter their communities. These barriers included

housing inaccessibility, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of community support

during the reentry process (Anderson-Facile, 2009). Unfortunately, these are current-day barriers

that are still affecting formerly incarcerated individuals during their transition back into their

community (Agan & Makowsky, 2023; Augustine, 2019; Augustine & Kushel, 2022; LaBriola,

2020). Additionally, one's record creates many limitations on the resources that previously

justice-involved individuals could access post-release. As Hall and colleagues (2016) explored in

their article, the laws that negatively impacted individuals post-release limit their access to

necessary resources and exclude previously justice-involved individuals within American

society. More specifically, they addressed how previously incarcerated individuals struggled to

access financial, housing, and employment resources based on their incarceration history (Hall et

al., 2016). Hall and colleagues also described how stigmatization and exclusion contributed to

promoting recidivism rather than discouraging recidivism.

Furthermore, there have been criticisms against reentry programs based on the lack of

successful implementations and the intensity of community supervision post-release. Some

scholars argued that reentry programs contributed to cycles of reincarceration and decreased

opportunities for reentry clients to succeed once released from correctional facilities (Wacquant,

2010; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). In other words, due to surveillance, community supervisory

conditions, and a lack of resources, previously justice-involved individuals end up returning back

to the correctional system rather than successfully returning to their communities.

In summary, there are several reasons why reentry programs are viewed as ineffective

and punitive. Notwithstanding, every reentry program will be unique based on its design, its

goals, and its dedication to helping previously incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society.

Since all programs are not created equal, it is important to consider what empirical evidence is available when deciding on the effectiveness of a reentry program and the services it provides for previously justice-involved individuals. This current study aims to understand the current barriers to reentry at a specific reentry program, but the results in this study cannot be generalized due to this reentry program's specific location, reentry services, and community.

Issues in Studying Recidivism and Reentry

The problem with studying recidivism and reentry is that it has been extremely difficult to determine the rates of recidivism in the last 15 years let alone average rates of recidivism for cohorts over certain timeframes (i.e., 3-, 6-, 12-months and longer). Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the reason why individuals are recidivating. For example, data from the BJS (2021c) suggested that in 34 states, that only 1.8% of recidivism rates in 2012 were due to technical violations of the individual's parole or probation conditions. However, more recent data from the Prison Policy Initiative claims that in 2021, "These supervision violations accounted for 27% of all admissions to state and federal prisons" (2023, p. 20). This inconsistent range in rates of technical violations is one example of the many challenges associated with conducting reentry research. The methods for calculating recidivism rates are inconsistent and accurate data is sometimes not available. Additionally, operationalization of recidivism varies across states as does availability and accuracy of parole and probation data, and court data for individuals returning back to prison. Many of the available reentry reports do not explore why individuals are violating their supervisory conditions or committing new offenses altogether.

When reports do explore the prevalence of technical violations for those who are on probation and parole in the U.S., mixed results are the norm. As Kaeble and Alper (2020, p. 2) explain, probation is, "is a court-ordered period of correctional supervision in the community"

and parole is "is a period of conditional supervised release in the community following a term in state or federal prison." On both probation and parole, individuals will have to follow specific conditions when they return back to their community, also known as supervisory conditions. Some common supervisory conditions are frequent drug testing, following curfew restrictions, accessing and maintaining employment, and failing to meet with their parole or probation officer (Gray et al., 2001). These conditions are not necessarily crimes, however, once violated the individual will be rearrested and reincarcerated for a technical violation. In other words, a technical violation is when previously incarcerated individuals are under community supervision and violate one of the supervisory conditions that has been assigned to them by the parole or probation officer.

The Prison Policy Initiative (2023a) explained in their recent report that while community supervision is seen as a tolerable alternative when compared to incarceration, the strict conditions they must follow are designed to set individuals up for failure when they reenter the community. Another consideration to be had when studying reentry and technical violations is how these community-based rules vary depending on which city or state that someone resides in. For example, Fenster (2020) when looking at rates of technical violations in Washington D.C. compared the rates to other cities in the U.S. She claimed,

> "When compared to the share of people held for supervision violations in other large cities like Philadelphia (58%), New York City (27%), and New Orleans (22%), D.C.'s incarceration for violations (about 14%) appears consistent with – or even more modest than – other cities'" (p. 4).

This is part of the reason why reentry is difficult to study across the country because every jurisdiction has different expectations when it comes to community supervisory conditions and therefore, it is difficult to compare rates of technical violations in different jurisdictions.

Many of the studies that use statistical analysis to determine the rates of recidivism and rearrests, oftentimes do not consider the reasons why previously justice-involved individuals violated their release conditions or were charged with new offenses. One component of reentry programs is the ability to understand and empathize with those who want to redeem themselves since they regret the choices and mistakes they made in their past. Reentry programs are staffed with case managers, counselors, and other staff members who have altruistic intentions to support their clients as they reenter their communities. In other words, the staff who chose these careers have the passion to find resources for those who need them and to make their transition back into society as easy as possible. This approach could prove to be successful since many programs who are only focused on recidivism have been missing the more supportive and empathetic components of reentry programs.

As Pettus-Davis and colleagues (2019) found in their review of 1,053 randomized control trials within reentry programs, that current programs only had a minimal impact on recidivism rates and that,

> "By reorienting the focus of reentry service provision toward improving the well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals, that recidivism rates will also reduce as a secondary effect of improved well-being" (p. 640).

The significance of this quote demonstrates that showing compassion and support to the individuals within these programs could result in better outcomes for both the individuals in these programs and the recidivism rates.

This would also require clients within these programs to navigate barriers since every individual is struggling depending on what type of offense they have committed and how their record limits their current access to services. There are many barriers for those who suffer from mental health disorders and have a history of violent offenses (Pogorzelski et al., 2005). Along with this, access to housing and employment is limited for those who have felony records when compared to those who have committed lesser offenses. This is one of the current-day challenges for those who are reentering. Every person who is reintegrating is trying to fight for an opportunity to prove that they have redeemed themselves, while constantly being reminded of and judged for a history that no longer defines them. As Ames (2019) stated in their report, "NIJ-supported research has shown that there is no one-size-fits-all model for successful reentry" (p. 2). This argument still applies today as more research is done on the current barriers that individuals encounter during reentry and on how a successful reentry process should be conceptualized.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

As mentioned previously, following the enactment of the Second Chance Act, federal funding became more accessible to reentry programs. The main goal or intent of this Act was to provide funding for reentry programs that have demonstrated success in decreasing rates of recidivism while also providing access to services and resources to best serve the populations within their community (The Second Chance Act of 2007, 2007-2008). With the availability of federal funds to support reentry program efforts, the SCA made significant strides in addressing the challenges faced by individuals reentering society post-incarceration. Even so, as a policy, the SCA could not eliminate the systematic factors and structural issues within the criminal justice system and within society.

Some of these systemic factors include deeply rooted racial disparities in society and throughout the criminal justice system, over-policing of certain communities and the continued practice of racial profiling, the continued use of mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and the use of private prisons and the for-profit prison industry. In addition to these disparities, there is also inadequate access to legal representation for those with limited financial resources, socioeconomic inequities that continue to contribute to involvement with criminal activities (i.e., poverty, lack of educational opportunities and limited access to healthcare and mental health services), and collateral consequences associated with restrictions on housing and employment for individuals with criminal records.

As mentioned earlier, for those reentering their communities, these collateral consequences - or their reentry challenges - vary based on an individuals' place of residence/geographic location, their parole supervisory conditions, intersecting identities, and

any specific healthcare and mental healthcare needs they have as these will change over time (Ames, 2019; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). These challenges, or barriers to reentry, are important to document because this indicates where the criminal justice system needs to be improved and, by extension, where reentry programs can accommodate for their clients' current needs.

The barriers of reintegration have been documented over the years, showing that these reentry challenges have burdened this population for decades (Pager, 2006; Pinard, 2010; Silver et al., 2021). For example, individuals in rural communities have difficulty accessing resources since the services providing treatment and other necessities are located closer to cities (Bowman & Ely, 2020; Huebner et al., 2019; Ojha et al., 2018; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). In addition to this, the population being most impacted by the obstacles associated with reentry usually have histories of housing instability, difficulty accessing employment, a lack of mental health resources, and other challenges linked to financial instability (Anderson-Facile, 2009; Morani et al., 2011).

At the turn of the century, experts were concerned about whether reentry programs could truly accommodate those trying to reintegrate back into their community (Petersilia, 2001). Questions arose about if the community would be supportive, if there would be access to stable housing, and whether or not these transitions back into the community would effectively decrease rates of recidivism were common (Visher et al., 2017). Some experts criticized that, since more funding went towards correctional agencies, reentry programs were viewed as insignificant or frivolous in their pursuit to help formerly incarcerated individuals reenter society. In spite of these criticisms, reentry programs across the United States are working hard

to provide services for their clients, to identify features that lead to successful reintegration, and to reduce the rates of re-offending (Hunter et al., 2016; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Wright et al., 2014).

Presently, ongoing research seeks to understand more about those factors that contribute to a successful reentry process. Ongoing research also hopes to elucidate on the formidable challenges impeding individuals as they return to their communities. These investigations hold paramount importance as they pinpoint critical gaps requiring attention and offer insights into areas ripe for improvement, ultimately striving to enhance overall outcomes. A recent example of this is Rydberg's (2018) qualitative study that examines reentry barriers experienced by those who committed sexual offenses compared to those who have no history of sexual offenses. Specifically, those who had sexual offenses on their record had more trouble acquiring housing and employment opportunities based on their offense when compared to those reentering who had not committed a sexual offense (Rydberg, 2018). This study is one example that shows the importance of considering offense types when documenting barriers associated with reentry, something that the SCA does not solve for.

Other studies have also determined that community characteristics do matter when designing reentry services and that the COVID-19 pandemic created more obstacles for individuals to overcome when attempting to access resources (Desai et al., 2021; Kramer et al., 2023). In other words, the socio-economic conditions of one's community impacts their individual reentry process and could create more limitations for this population. With these considerations in mind, examining the current barriers that are hindering the reentry process is essential because formerly incarcerated individuals are at a tremendous disadvantage upon

reentry, especially when individual and community-level factors have been found to create more restrictions to accessing resources.

Based on the current literature, some of the structural socio-economic barriers that this population struggles with include securing stable housing, finding satisfactory employment, accessing health and mental health care resources, remaining sober post-release, as well as experiencing public social stigmatization, including the internalizing of this stigma and impacts to one's self-perception (Goger et al., 2021; Muentner & Charles, 2020). The following provides a review of research associated with these obstacles: housing, employment, substance abuse, administrative barriers, and stigmatization. Collectively, it becomes evident that access to a diverse array of opportunities and services is crucial for enabling a successful reentry process.

Access to Housing

Obtaining housing within the United States is already difficult for the average American. Between rising prices of rentals and residential homes for sale, Americans already struggle to obtain stable yet affordable housing (Roman & Travis, 2006; DeLuca & Rosen, 2022; Parolin et al., 2022). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans without criminal records struggled to access housing based on a lack of financial stability and housing resources, which led to worse mental and physical health outcomes for American adults (Bhat et al., 2022; Kim, 2021). In addition to this, many individuals lost their jobs during the pandemic, which resulted in struggling to gain access to health insurance benefits since they no longer had access to these benefits via their form of employment (Bundorf et al., 2021; Fronstin & Woodbury, 2020; Garrett & Gangopadhyaya, 2020). In other words, housing and employment opportunities are

scarce for those who currently live in the United States and have not interacted with the justice system.

However, upon reentering their community, previously justice-involved individuals have more barriers to overcome when obtaining housing options. These housing barriers include passing background checks, paying application fees, accessing funds to pay rent, and finding secure employment options to ensure that they can reside in the same location long-term. Due to these structural yet localized housing barriers, access to housing options are dramatically reduced. In other words, previously justice-involved individuals confront the same barriers that those without a record do - as far as affordability and finding stable housing goes – but this specific population encounters more challenges due to how their prior criminal record is used against them to limit their options and prevent them from establishing a stable foundation to build upon during their reintegration journey.

Since housing options are limited, previously incarcerated persons have no other choice but to accept housing in neighborhoods that are considered dangerous, unstable, and high-crime areas. Unfortunately, studies show that housing choices are extremely limited for this population and that this will increase the likelihood of recidivism occurring (Anderson-Facile, 2009; Lutze et al., 2014; Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019). The living conditions that this population is forced to endure to secure any form of housing has the potential to push or provoke previously incarcerated persons to recidivate because they are within an area where crime is more rampant than other neighborhoods within their county or state (LeBel, 2017; Roman & Travis, 2006).

For those who cannot afford and do not obtain any housing, these individuals are considered unhoused, which means that they reside in a shelter, live out of their car, or are forced to live on the streets (Moschion & Johnson, 2019; Remster, 2021). Formerly justice-involved

individuals are "almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public" (Prison

Policy Initiative, 2018, para. 2). Furthermore, they found the people who were most affected by

homelessness were previously justice-involved individuals who had been incarcerated on

multiple occasions and who had been released for "less than two years" (Prison Policy Initiative,

2018, Figure 1). Those who are suffering the most are those who have been recently released

after several incarceration experiences because they do not have access to housing services or

they cannot pass the screening process associated with rentals. Lacking access to housing options

forces previously justice-involved individuals to commit offenses like trespassing and other

offenses as a means of survival, which can result in rearrest. Augustine and Kushel (2022)

mention that even when individuals have access to transitional housing and similar housing

options, the mandatory programming or treatments within these residential facilities can be at

odds with supervisory conditions, which means that previously justice involved individuals are

set up for failure when these requirements contradict each other. This is how the system

contributes to the issues of housing insecurity and instability for previously incarcerated

individuals.

Furthermore, many assumptions are made about this group based on their previous

experiences with the justice system. Stigmatization of this population adversely affects their

opportunities to prove that they have changed and that they want housing to create more stability

in their lives that allows them to continuously improve their lives. Stigmatization creates the

biggest obstacle when it comes to these individuals obtaining safe and secure housing (LeBel,

2017). While these individuals seek support and trust, the preconceived notions associated with

their criminal history leads to housing instability and in some cases, outright homelessness

(Keene et al., 2018a; Lutze et al., 2014). It is difficult to prove one has evolved or redeemed themselves when no one is willing to give them a chance to prove it.

Additionally, the lack of opportunities puts individuals more at risk to re-offend since they cannot access legitimate resources for housing, employment, and other services (Keene et al., 2018b). Along with this, communities may not be as open-minded or receptive to promoting the reentry of previously incarcerated individuals based on accepted stereotypes and myths within the United States (Berry & Wiener, 2020). The process of reintegration requires support, trust, and access to services that will help the individual transition back into society without creating more barriers that would encourage the act of re-offending.

Stigmatization, stereotypes, and closed-mindedness are what creates the biggest barrier for those reentering who are attempting to access stable and secure housing (Keene et al., 2018b; LeBel, 2017). Without community support, individuals are more inclined to recidivate based on how they have been excluded by their community and their need for financial resources to survive after being incarcerated. In spite of these limitations, reentry programs and the staff within them desire to decrease rates of recidivism by helping individuals overcome the challenges they are forced to confront when finding housing. Reentry staff, like case managers, advocate for their clients to increase the odds of obtaining housing, which is one of the protective factors that aids in preventing recidivism (Keene et al., 2018a; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). In spite of this potential advantage, individuals must still find ways to access financial stability to afford housing and other necessities within their community. To do this, individuals must gain access to employment, which is another barrier that individuals must overcome when reintegrating back into society.

Employment Opportunities

Gaining access to employment during the reentry process for formerly justice-involved individuals is another massive barrier. Their criminal history limits what employment opportunities they have, which industries they can work within, and the amount of money they would gain from these employment opportunities. The career options also decrease if these individuals do not have a high school diploma or education that is equivalent to a high school diploma and if these individuals do not have any employment history prior to being incarcerated (Duwe, 2015; Fahmy et al., 2022). Despite the fact that many of the people within this population are from marginalized and disadvantaged communities, employers rely on paperwork, interviews, and background checks to decide who should become an employee (Goger et al., 2021). In addition to this, some employers will rely on implicit and/or explicit biases when deciding who to employ at their company (Goger et al., 2021; Lindsay, 2022; Uggen et al., 2014). When interviewing 50 previously justice-involved men about their experiences with employment, Lindsay (2022) found that only 2 men could access employment after receiving job training credentials while incarcerated. During their job interviews, the men in this sample attempted to prove their redemption or describe the specific skills acquired during their job training, but employment was still a barrier for those who did have the required credentials (Lindsay, 2022). In other words, rather than allowing the individual to provide an explanation for their history, employers tend to not empathize with one's history or care about the reasons behind why they committed a particular offense.

Consequently, from the lack of employment options, individuals may resort to hiding their record or at the worst, they return to engaging in illegitimate opportunities to gain financial stability. For example, research by Augustine (2019) found that those who were honest about

their criminal history ended up accessing employment options that were seen as meaningless, dissatisfactory, and undesirable. This means that whether someone is honest or resorts to lying about their history, the risks and conditions of their employment vary. With those who hide their previous justice involvement, work is satisfactory, but the risk of having a background check conducted will result in added stress. For those who were open about their record, they can only find access to employment that is temporary, exhausting, and viewed as insignificant when compared to other professions (Agan & Makowsky, 2023; LaBriola, 2020). This is one of the reasons why gaining employment post-incarceration is a considerable barrier to overcome during the reentry process.

Another reason employment is a common barrier for formerly incarcerated individuals is because they must pay for their housing, their treatments, their counseling, their community supervision, and other services that will result in the accumulation of debt. In spite of the evidence showing the benefit of previously justice-involved individuals having access to livable wages and job benefits like health insurance, these opportunities are limited and inaccessible for those who are trying to reenter society (Albertson et al., 2020; Duwe, 2015; Freudenberg et al., 2008; Mellow & Greifinger, 2007; Payne & Brown, 2016; Woods et al., 2013). Prior to release, individuals would have intense anxiety while considering how they would become financially stable and how they would acquire long-term employment to pay off their debt (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Between the overwhelming frustration and worry associated with how inaccessible jobs are, how they will pay back their debt, and how they will acquire benefits like health insurance, it makes sense why individuals may feel inclined to re-offend (Agan & Makowsky, 2023; Augustine, 2019; LaBriola, 2020).

In addition to this, depending on the offense that the individual previously committed, employment opportunities are limited by structural, legal, and personal barriers. As expected, those with felony records had a more challenging time acquiring employment opportunities than those who had been incarcerated for a lesser offense (Augustine, 2019; Fahmy et al., 2022; Rydberg, 2018). Fahmy and colleagues (2022) found that while healthy familial relationships could assist an individual reentering the community, those who had committed violent offenses were less likely to have contact and support from their family. Along with this, those who had a history of committing sexual offenses were less likely to access employment and had tighter restrictions on where they could be employed, what careers they could apply for, and how to find employment since they were restricted from using web browsers (Rydberg, 2018). The offense type changes the dynamics of accessing employment and what restrictions are enforced upon previously incarcerated individuals. As demonstrated within these studies, different offense types create varying restrictions and again, without access to employment, individuals will feel more inclined to recidivate based on anxiety, agitation, and desperation.

Despite all these reasons why access to employment is a considerable barrier for those reentering, some studies emphasized how reentry programs and the services provided can create better employment outcomes. As mentioned earlier, healthy connections to family and familial support were shown to be linked to better employment outcomes and smoother transitions back into the community (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Cook et al., 2015). Reentry staff who collaborated with employers to help their clients access employment and provided other services to aid with the reentry process created more professional opportunities for the previously justice-involved population they served (Rossman & Roman, 2003). Professional development courses and training along with employment specialists helped facilitate job accessibility and the creation of

professional skills for this population (Duwe, 2015; Fitzgerald et al., 2013). Taking community-specific needs into consideration, these are some implementations that have benefited individuals in previous studies when reentering their particular community.

Although these implementations seem to be a resolution, gaining employment – let alone employment with a livable wage – is seen as a difficult, stressful barrier to overcome for those reentering. Since community-specific features influence the accessibility of resources, the employment barrier will continue to be an ongoing conflict based on a community's job accessibility, available training or educational programs, and view on previously justice-involved individuals. Employment is a difficult barrier to overcome during reintegration and when reading articles about the challenge of gaining employment, substance abuse was also mentioned as another barrier that could impact one's opportunity to access reentry resources and services.

Substance Abuse & Sobriety

While reexamining substance use disorder (SUD) data collected through the use of the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions - III, Tsai and Gu (2019) concluded that,

> "The strong association between SUDs and incarceration in the U.S. adult population suggests it is important to increase access and incentives to access SUD treatment during and after incarceration" (p. 8).

It has also been estimated that over 80% of justice-involved individuals within both the federal and state prison systems were either suffering from a substance use disorder or were incarcerated for substance-related offenses (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). In other words, rather than receiving treatment alternatives, the majority of individuals suffering from substance use disorders are sent to correctional facilities.

During incarceration or following incarceration, individuals face barriers when trying to access treatment programs and services. Bunting and colleagues (2018) interviewed social service providers to determine what barriers existed for those overcoming opioid addiction within rural communities. Some of the barriers included stigmatization, overwhelming caseloads, limited treatment services, more access to substances in this region, and a lack of addiction education within the correctional agencies (Bunting et al., 2018). Individuals suffering from the disease of addiction or substance abuse disorder are discriminated against and stigmatized based on the assumptions and labels placed on this group.

Furthermore, other studies have found that many programs have the tendency to use the same treatments or therapies on all the individuals within their reentry programs and that this creates limitations on how many individuals can successfully reintegrate (Hanna et al., 2020; Kendall et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2020). From these studies, the implication suggested is that substance abuse treatment should be reliant on the individual's needs and that creating an individualized treatment plan would significantly contribute to an individual's successful reentry process. Again, this specific population is oftentimes discriminated against and based on the assumptions made, individuals all receive the same treatments out of convenience and cost-efficiency. Creating more personalized treatment methods could function as a protective factor against relapse and recidivism.

Along with this finding, studies found that reentry staff and treatment providers helped previously incarcerated individuals reintegrate by referring them to substance abuse treatment services and acting as a support system during the treatment process (Kendall et al., 2018). However, while more referrals to different treatment options was beneficial, Moore and colleagues (2020) found in their systematic review that more programs needed to implement

30

evidence-based treatment programs that aligned with an individual's risk of relapse. As discussed in previous sections, finding ways to access housing and employment opportunities is a distressing and discouraging process for those who are reentering. Between the stress of reentering the community and maintaining sobriety, an individual could feel a desire to use substances since that has been a long-term coping mechanism for an individual who has a history of substance abuse. In short, substance abuse is important to consider because it is linked to recidivism rates due to the individual's desire to relapse following distressing events and circumstances (Phillips, 2010).

To summarize the key issues with substance abuse treatment within reentry programs, this tends to be due to stigmatizing attitudes, limited access to treatment, and a lack of personalized treatment plans. The most successful programs were programs with community partners who collaborated to provide treatment resources and programs who could provide a variety of treatment options to their clients (Friedmann et al., 2009; Kendall et al., 2018; Ray et al., 2021). Despite the beneficial implementations found, many reentry programs do not have access to enough funding, staff, or resources to create comprehensive, evidence-based treatment programs for their clients suffering from substance abuse. Due to these limitations, substance abuse is seen as a barrier to reentry because of the lack of treatment options available in the United States and the stigmatization that follows those who have a history of substance abuse. Additionally, administrative barriers also create stress and interfere with this process because community supervisory guidelines have the expectations that formerly incarcerated individuals can access housing, access employment, and maintain sobriety.

Administrative Barriers

Although the challenges explored above contribute to the creation of obstacles for previously justice-involved individuals, many of these barriers overlap through the criminal justice system and the requirements of those on parole or probation. As mentioned previously, the supervisory conditions that those reentering must follow during reintegration create expectations for them to fulfill while also limiting how they can meet these expectations. Again, some of these conditions are following curfew, passing drug tests, and accessing and maintaining employment (Gray et al., 2001). These are not criminal offenses; they are supervisory conditions imposed on individuals once they are either on parole or probation. However, these conditions are important to consider when studying reentry because it is these administrative challenges that set individuals up for failure upon reentering their communities.

As Harper and colleagues (2021) reviewed articles on financial debt after interacting with the American correctional system and what they found was the debt accumulated from both legal and non-legal factors contributed to decreasing employment opportunities and encouraging recidivism from the lack of available financial resources. As mentioned earlier as well, employment opportunities were limited by the legal barriers created upon reentering society. Despite a desire to follow the laws in place, many previously incarcerated individuals cannot access job opportunities after disclosing their records (Augustine, 2019). As a result, previously justice-involved individuals feel inclined to lie about their records as a way of obtaining satisfactory job opportunities to pay off their debts from the criminal legal system and from factors outside of the system.

Western and Harding (2022) suggested that the criminal justice system forces formerly incarcerated individuals to return to illicit employment opportunities or careers revolving around

criminal activity. The system forces these individuals to turn to crime again because upon release, the criminal justice system still has control over people leaving the system through the use of community-based sanctions and surveillance (Western & Harding, 2022). In spite of the message of redemption that reentry programs promote, the criminal justice system creates structural barriers for those who are trying to reintegrate rather than creating opportunities to succeed (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019; Seim & Harding, 2020). In addition to this, Ward, Stallings, and Hawkins (2021) when studying perceptions of reentry barriers between criminal justice practitioners and previously incarcerated individuals, there were differences in how practitioners perceived challenges when compared to those reentering the community.

In their article, they found that practitioners were more inclined to say those who were reentering were struggling more with personal barriers rather than structural ones. However, the authors specified that formerly incarcerated individuals would understand how to classify and rate the barriers they were encountering better than practitioners who were supervising them (Ward et al., 2021). The previously justice-involved individuals within this study claimed that the top three barriers were, "limited employment opportunities, the ability to pay court fines or fees, low wages, inability to return to former employment, and poor credit rating" (p. 96). As Ortiz and Wrigley (2022) confirm these administrative barriers set previously justice-involved individuals up for failure and these authors even argue that the fear of violating one's supervisory conditions is a means of constant control over those reentering their community. In summary, the system creates obstacles for previously justice-involved individuals, which creates more opportunities to be reincarcerated rather than being reintegrated.

Stigma & Impacts on Self-Perception

As mentioned in the last few sections, stigmatization is the source of prejudice and discrimination against those who have previously experienced incarceration. Returning to the community is full of challenges due to the negative beliefs and biases held by the general public, which leads to housing, education, employment, and other necessities becoming inaccessible for those who are fighting for another chance (Feingold, 2021). These challenges drastically impact the personal and professional lives of those reentering and as a result, they feel isolated, excluded, and discriminated against within their community (Petersilia, 2001). Even if one can find housing and employment, it is both the unfavorable assumptions held by practitioners (parole and probation officers) and by their neighbors that discourages the individual during reentry (Sinko et al., 2020). In other words, the formal forces of social control have negative perceptions of previously justice-involved individuals and this influences informal forces of social control to also perceive this population negatively.

These disappointing interactions create a sense of isolation and eventually, individuals feel excluded from the community that they were hopeful about transitioning back into again. The stigma associated with incarceration creates a shift in perception within society and against one's own self, which negatively impacts one's self-esteem and self-worth. Some studies have found that this can negatively alter one's self-perception leading to more insecurities, more mental health struggles, and a sense of hopelessness (Moore et al., 2018). The stigmatization of formerly incarcerated individuals results in a significant decrease in the opportunities available to the general public, the same opportunities that would allow this specific group to prove their commitment to their community. Instead, in direct contrast, the opportunities are limited by the labels placed on them both within and outside of the correctional system.

Why Are Barriers to Reentry Important to Consider?

Altogether, these barriers create overbearing challenges for previously justice-involved individuals who are attempting to successfully reenter their communities. Between housing, employment, substance abuse, administrative barriers, and stigmatization, previously justice-involved individuals are hindered by barriers during every step of their reentry process. To overcome these barriers, most programs accommodate by providing access to references for affordable housing options, potential employment opportunities, free and/or inexpensive treatment or counseling options, and reentry staff who create individualized reentry plans and advocate on their client's behalf. In spite of these protective factors, this population is currently facing barriers linked to the stereotypes associated with their prior experiences. As a result, the main barriers associated with reentry are limiting previously incarcerated individuals from reentering their community.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

After becoming more familiar with the importance of reentry processes and what current barriers research claims to be difficult to overcome, the next question that needs to be answered is why these specific issues are occurring. As seen in the previous chapter, recent literature has explored what barriers previously justice-involved individuals are experiencing and what future implementations could decrease the impact of these barriers. This research has been crucial within the area of reentry research because it has highlighted specific factors that changed how accessible reintegration services were for previously justice-involved individuals. This is especially true when considering different offense types, identities, and age groups, and how this impacts access to numerous services. From this perspective, researchers might begin to question the cause or contemplate what theoretical framework could explain the recurrence of formerly incarcerated individuals encountering discouraging barriers during their reentry process.

Theories are used with the intent of explaining specific phenomena between people, places, and society as a whole. In the specific field of criminology, theories are designed with the intent to describe why individuals are involved with criminal behaviors and why rates of crime vary depending on different geographical locations. In other words, theories are applied to specific crime-related situations to identify the cause or to determine what causal relationships are present within unique circumstances. Theory can reveal why particular problems keep occurring repetitively and why problem-solving techniques fail once implemented to decrease crime.

Similar to the vast majority of crime-related research topics, theories can be applied to explore reasons why formerly justice-involved individuals are overwhelmed by the present reentry barriers that exist post-release. Despite theories accounting for potential causes, the

specific issue of reentry is difficult to create a theory based on how variables vary between different individuals, reentry programs, and communities. In spite of this limitation, there are some theories that can be used to explain why previously justice-involved individuals suffer from disadvantages and struggles to reenter once released. The specific theories mentioned in this section, while abstract, discuss how society treats groups that would be considered excluded from society and oppressed by dominant forces within society.

This exclusion and oppression leads to previously justice-involved individuals feeling hopeless during their reentry into society and in certain situations, deciding to engage in crime since they cannot gain access to resources with ease. Reentry programs attempt to combat the barriers that society has created for their clients, however, these programs can only do so much with the amount of funding they have access to and the limited resources available in their counties. As a result, previously justice-involved individuals unfortunately are impacted by the labels placed upon them by society and the challenges created within society based on how this population is perceived. Furthermore, formerly incarcerated individuals could also encounter additional forms of discrimination based on their racial identity, their gender identity, their socioeconomic status, and other variables based on accepted community biases and misinformed beliefs. Based on this lack of resources and community acceptance, previously justice-involved individuals must confront community-based conflict and relentless stigmatization.

Conflict Theory

Karl Marx's works are oftentimes used in the fields of economics, politics, and philosophy to explore how capitalism created a sense of cutthroat competition and encouraged issues to arise between different social classes. While these readings are valuable within these disciplines, due to how often Karl Marx discussed societal conflict arising from capitalism, a

sociological theory arose from this assumption known as Conflict Theory. Marx's Conflict Theory is a macro-level sociological theory that examines different classes and how conflict arose between distinct groups. Initially, Marx created this theory to explain the conflicts that occur within capitalism between the capitalists and the working class that they employed within their industry (Massey & O'Brien, 2019). Also, in its initial state, while the capitalists ruled over their employees, the horrific working conditions created conflicts that would lead to the oppressors' downfall. In other words, the capitalists were responsible for their workers revolting against expectations since their workers were overworked and underpaid (Bartos & Wehr, 2002; Massey & O'Brien, 2019).

Since Marx's theory of conflict did relate to society as a whole, this theory was eventually expanded to reflect on current issues revolving around class conflict and forces of oppression within society. In many societies, the dominant class has more power and access to more resources when compared to classes that are more disadvantaged and discriminated against. The dominant class or group will always desire to have more power because they have more influence over politics and interests within society. Additionally, those in the dominant group will typically resort to manipulation and coercion to ensure that the oppressed class remains compliant (Handel, 1993). To hold onto their power, the dominant class may use religious, political, and other belief systems to manipulate the subservient group (Collins, 1975). Despite the oppressors desire to hold onto power, the oppressed group becomes frustrated with how their interests are dismissed and this is how conflict begins within a society (Handel, 1993). Marx claimed that conflict arises based on clash in polarizing interests between the oppressors and the oppressed, and that the oppressed group decides to rebel against the narrative created by the oppressors to gain access to more power within society (Massey & O'Brien, 2019).

In simpler terms, the dominant group within a society or institution uses their influence to remain in control, so that they have an easier time accessing resources and services. This would mean that the subservient group is deprived of these resources and services, which Marx suggested leads to conflict and an eventual desire to revolt for change (Collins, 1975; Handel, 1993; Massey & O'Brien, 2019). Marx also suggested that conflict would occur until the oppressed become the oppressors creating a vicious cycle or until society found a way to function without a class system (Handel, 1993).

Within the area of reentry research, two groups can also be identified based on the oppressive forces within society that desire to have control over previously justice-involved individuals and their reentry process. The oppressive forces would be a group consisting of the general public and anyone who advocates for policies that create more barriers for those reentering. Even if this dominant group lacked malicious intent, this group would desire to have more access to housing, employment, and treatment options, which would still result in oppression for previously justice-involved individuals. Although the dominant group would have more opportunities than their counterparts, the dominant group would continue to advocate for policies that would allow them to have more control in society, which decreases any services that the oppressed group can access within society. This in itself leads to frustration for previously justice-involved individuals because they cannot access housing, employment, and other necessities, which could lead to conflict in the form of recidivism to gain access to materials that are otherwise inaccessible.

Studies have used Marx's Conflict Theory to explain the continuous societal conflict that leads to the oppression of formerly incarcerated individuals post-release. Stucky (2013) examined how sociological theories could explain the treatment of those convicted of sexual

offenses. When examining the causal link between power and previously justice-involved individuals, Stucky (2013) acknowledged that those in power have more influence when it comes to the creation of laws and how they are enforced to keep previously justice-involved individuals oppressed, especially those who are racial and ethnic minorities. Corwin (2008) also used Conflict Theory to address that previously incarcerated individuals are at a severe disadvantage since those reentering are reintegrating without any knowledge about what resources are available in their community and how to access these services. In other words, along with being oppressed by legal factors in American society, those reentering are unaware about what resources exist because then the more powerful group has a better chance at accessing those resources.

In addition to these studies, Collins (2014) claims that according to Marx, conflict is necessary for societal change, but that systematic oppression creates a divide in resources between those who are reentering and those who are in power. For those in power, they use community sanctions, supervision, and reincarceration as tools to maintain their power by setting previously justice-involved individuals up for failure (Collins, 2014). Conflict Theory as used in these three studies showcases how legal factors, hidden resources, and reincarceration are used as tools to keep the dominant group in power by oppressing previously justice-involved individuals. This is how the process of reentry fits within Karl Marx's Conflict Theory, how oppression impacts this specific population, and how inaccessible resources are for this group.

Limitations: Conflict Theory

The limitations of Marx's Conflict Theory and his specific propositions should be considered within this current study. As previously stated, this theory was originally designed to explain conditions within the workforces in capitalist societies and how conflict was born from

the harsh labor conditions that powerful capitalists created within their businesses (Massey & O'Brien, 2019). While this was a revolutionary theory, this theory was not designed with the intent of studying social issues and by extension, the specific population of previously justice-involved individuals. As a result, the application of this theory is loose and cannot explain all of the variables that must be considered during the reintegration process.

Another limitation of this theory is that mechanisms within this theory are explained, but they do not explore how groups obtain power, keep power, and gain power from an oppressive group or class (Collins, 1975). The concept known as conflict is simplified as a difference in ideals between the two groups and the actions taken by the oppressed group are considered intense yet rarely any examples are given. This means that there are challenges surrounding how conflict is defined and what actions would result in the shift of power between the oppressors and those who are being oppressed. The last limitation that should be considered when applying this theory to specific situations is that this theory relies on cynical assumptions about humanity and how different groups interact with each other (Collins, 1975; Handel, 1993). This theory assumes that humans base their worth on how they can gain or hold onto power, meaning that this theory assumes humans are self-serving and only care about what they can manipulate within a system or society (Bartos & Wehr, 2002; Collins, 1975; Handel, 1993).

As far as group interactions are concerned, this theory assumes that groups will gain power through rebellious and aggressive means rather than resolving conflict through the use of diplomatic strategies (Massey & O'Brien, 2019; Handel, 1993). These are cynical assumptions because they assume human nature is based on selfish intentions and aspirations, where the sole concern is gaining control over another group. In spite of this assumption, the goal within this study is to gain a better understanding of the oppression of previously justice-involved

individuals to see how this oppression limits the resources available to this population. As mentioned in the first limitation, Conflict Theory does not precisely align with the specific topic being discussed within this study, but it does create a discussion about oppression within society and why certain populations have more access to services over other populations. These are three main limitations that should be acknowledged when applying this theory to the issue of reentry and the barriers that individuals are facing when reentering their communities.

Labeling Theory

Matsueda's Labeling Theory

Over the years sociologists, psychologists, criminologists, and other experts study the impact of labeling individuals within society, which has resulted in the creation of different interpretations of labeling theory and how it can be applied to human behavior. As a micro-level theory, labeling theories have the goal of explaining how labels or stigma influence an individual's behaviors based on how they are perceived within society. Although Howard Becker's Labeling Theory (1963) is related to this topic, one of the more appropriate iterations of labeling theory would be Ross Matsueda's Labeling Theory, which expanded on Becker's theory to include the concept of informal social control. Specifically, Matsueda wanted to understand more about informal social control and how self-perception was influenced by the process of labeling. As Matsueda wrote in his article about delinquency and labeling, "An important question in the study of social control involves the mechanisms by which informal groups control the behavior of members" (1992, p. 1577). To better understand this phenomenon, Matsueda studied juveniles' perceptions of themselves and how rates of delinquency were influenced by their perception of self.

The reason Matsueda's Labeling Theory was a new iteration was because it considered the concept of "reflected appraisals," or how one's self-perception was influenced by informal social control forces, such as parents, friends, and other individuals (Matsueda, 1992, 1578). He also wanted to study how these reflected appraisals influenced juveniles' behaviors and how this led to juveniles "role-taking" based on the labels that had been placed upon them (Matsueda, 1992, p. 1580-1581). What Matsueda found was that juveniles were strongly influenced by the labels placed on them by informal social forces, and that those who were considered delinquents by these forces were more likely to engage in delinquency (Matsueda, 1992).

Matsueda's article on labeling and reflected appraisals adds a new layer to the discussion about how harmful negative labels are and how these labels alter one's behaviors. For those who have experienced incarceration, this population unfortunately is formally and informally labeled, depending on which group they are interacting with. Within a formal context, populations who are reentering could be labeled as criminals, as felons, and any other stigmatizing label that creates mental barriers for those reentering. Within an informal context, family, friends, and other informal social connections could see these individuals as criminals, felons, ex-cons, and any other negative identity that also creates mental barriers by altering one's self-perception.

As Matsueda asserted, one's self-perception is altered by the label placed upon them and depending on how that label is interpreted, people may choose to recidivate based on the hopelessness they feel or to defy expectations and keep attempting to access resources to have a genuine second chance. This decision sounds simple, but when an individual has encountered countless barriers and lives within a location that believes in tough-on-crime policies, then an individual would be forced back into crime as a means of survival. Reentry in itself is not a straightforward process, but the barriers that exist can be linked to stigma and how society

43

oppresses individuals post-release rather than giving them opportunities to succeed and to seek redemption within society. Reentry programs were created to reduce recidivism (Ames, 2019; The Second Chance Act of 2007, 2007-2008), however, that is a difficult goal to achieve when the society around this program is not as open-minded and empathetic as case managers, social workers, and staff in the program.

In other words, how one is labeled does influence their identity and how they view themselves. For those who have been previously involved with the justice system, they have been both formally and informally perceived in a negative light, which creates mental and physical barriers during the reentry process. Upon release, reentry programs aim to create opportunities and empower individuals to succeed, but the stigmatization and discrimination that exists is a frustrating barrier to overcome, especially in the United States where punishment is prioritized over rehabilitation. The stigma associated with previous incarceration experiences and the negative perceptions of individuals during their post-release period could encourage individuals to resort to offending due to how inaccessible services are for this population. As mentioned earlier, this can be a result of one's self-perception being negatively impacted and the acceptance of a new role within their community. This is how Matsueda's Labeling Theory explains why previously justice-involved individuals are disenfranchised within society and how stigmatization creates more barriers for those who want to reenter their communities after experiencing incarceration.

Modified Labeling Theory

Another labeling theory that could explain the disenfranchisement of previously justice-involved individuals is Modified Labeling Theory. As proposed by Link and colleagues in 1989, this modification of labeling theory aimed to explain how institutions place labels upon

individuals and how this formal label impacts one's perception of self along with their behaviors. Initially, the study centered around individuals who were suffering from psychological disorders and how they responded to the labels placed on them based on their desire to seek mental health treatment options. Link and colleagues believed that previous iterations of labeling theories failed to understand how labels influenced behaviors and how stigmatized identities played a role in this process (Link et al., 1987).

Understanding how institutions influence the process of labeling and stigmatization, Modified Labeling Theory was developed to understand how people respond to the labels they received within institutions and how this label impacted their lives when released from these facilities. Initially, prior to the creation of Modified Labeling Theory, Link and colleagues (1987) wanted to develop a better understanding of why patients were suffering from social distancing. Community perceptions of mental health and those who had received treatment in a mental health facility influenced the amount of social distancing the labeled individual was facing when reentering society (Link et al., 1987). Despite asking for assistance from facilities and desiring to seek out treatment, patients who previously interacted with mental health institutions were confronted with stigmatization and exclusion (Link et al., 1987; Link et al., 1989). As a result, Link and colleagues wanted to expand on why this was occurring, how institutions contribute to labeling, and what variables were being ignored by labeling theorists.

Similar to Matsueda, this emphasis on the negative impact of formal labeling via institutions added a new layer to the discussion of the harms of formal labeling. As Link and colleagues explore in their original article on the impacts of labeling, "Thus, when a person learns that someone has been in a mental hospital, a set of preexisting conceptions about what this means is activated… These expectations are then applied to the labeled person and can affect

45

how he or she is perceived and, eventually, is treated" (1987, p. 1474). To assess this hypothesis, 152 adults from Ohio were asked about a vignette about a fictional man who spent time in a mental health facility and their perceptions of how dangerous this individual was based on the specific vignette read to them over a call (Link et al., 1987). From this study, Link and colleagues found that formal labeling had an impact on community perceptions and stigmatization for labeled individuals, which led to the development of the Modified Labeling Theory.

In 1989, Link and colleagues studied more about the impact of formal labeling, but during this year, this theory is called Modified Labeling Theory and explores propositions within this specific type of labeling. Within this article, Modified Labeling Theory is a theory that proposes that as individuals socialize throughout their lives, they develop belief systems and potentially biases about specific behaviors and specific groups of people. With these preconceived notions, an individual who is labeled by an institution will rely on their beliefs to judge their own behavior and as a result, will suffer from self-stigmatization and shame (Link et al., 1989). In addition to this, Link and colleagues (1989) also suggest that depending on the individual's available support systems, they may resort to various coping strategies to either hide their label, educate others about their label, or socially withdraw from others to avoid confronting this label. This can also result in consequences, such as losing relationships due to withdrawing or stigmatization, refusing to access treatment options due to negative beliefs surrounding one's label, and limited employment opportunities due to the label placed upon the individual.

Although Modified Labeling Theory was a theory developed to explain the stigmatization that patients receiving psychiatric treatments encountered, Modified Labeling Theory can be

46

used to explain how the correctional system formally labels previously incarcerated individuals. Prior to incarceration, an individual would develop beliefs based on the people they socialize with and the views that they share about those who are incarcerated. In time, when the individual interacts with the justice system and becomes formally labeled as a "criminal," "felon," or any other negative label associated with the justice system, then the labeled individual applies their previous beliefs to themselves. During this process, the labeled individual becomes aware of the stigma surrounding their formal label and how differently they will be treated based on the label that has been used to describe them or their behaviors. This would become especially apparent upon release, where similar to Link and colleagues (1989) original article on Modified Labeling Theory, the labeled individual would struggle with gaining access to job opportunities, locating treatment programs, and maintaining previous or current relationships based on how this formal label affects their self-perception.

As noted in the review of literature, this would also create challenges when accessing housing and the justice system may create more administrative barriers for individuals based on the conditions of their release. After being formally labeled and released, previously incarcerated individuals believe they will be treated differently based on their record and based on the general views within society when considering incarceration. This could create more challenges during reentry since individuals must decide if they will disclose their record since they understand how it could limit their opportunities to access resources and to preserve current relationships. Again, these developed beliefs could negatively alter one's perception of self and this could influence them to hide their record or if excluded within their community, resort to recidivism as a means of embracing behaviors associated with their general beliefs of those who have experienced incarceration. As described by Link and colleagues (1987 & 1989), the behaviors one engages in

would be altered by this new label and depending on the support they had post-release, the individual could get resources to help them transition back into society or the individual may feel excluded and rely on societal expectations to inform how they behave when transitioning back into the community. Similar to Matsueda's Labeling Theory, this is how Modified Labeling Theory would explain the exclusion of previously justice-involved individuals within society while also showing how this would affect individuals' behaviors and access to resources during the reentry process.

Studies on Labeling Theories & Reentry

Several studies have been done to show how labeling impacts those who are reintegrating back into their community. King and Smith (2023) in their study about incarcerated women who had diagnosed mental health disorders found that the labeling that came with being diagnosed with a mental illness led to stigmatization towards the individual. Furthermore, incarcerated females experienced an overlap of stigmatization based on their criminal records and their history of mental health challenges (King & Smith, 2023). Mingus and Burchfield (2012) when studying how labeling impacts individuals convicted of sexual offenses and their reentry process, they found that most participants in the study out of 150 felt that they were going to be devalued or discriminated against within society based on how they were labeled. Labeling impacts individuals inside and outside of the correctional system by creating barriers to the opportunities they are trying to access after they are released. As Kavish (2017) stated when discussing labeling theories and how this influenced criminal behaviors, the policies that could be implemented to reduce the stigmatization that follows after an individual is labeled. Kavish claimed that "ban the box" policies and additional policies aimed at helping previously justice-involved individuals access financial resources could help combat the formal labeling that people

who have interacted with the correctional system encountered. The formal labels placed on individuals at different levels of the American correctional system impact how they are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves.

Labeling Theories: Stigmatization

When individuals are formally labeled by institutions or the practitioners who work within formal institutions, this is what leads to the process known as stigmatization. Goffman (1963), in writing *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, discussed the social and psychological aspects of how individuals with stigmatized characteristics or labels manage their identities and navigate societal interactions. Therefore, labeling and stigma are interconnected concepts that pertain to the negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with individuals or groups due to certain characteristics, behaviors, or labels. Stigma encompasses the social disapproval and discrimination directed toward those who are perceived as different or deviating from societal norms. Labeling, on the other hand, focuses on how individuals are categorized or identified based on traits or behaviors, which can, in turn, reinforce and perpetuate stigma.

Together, these concepts highlight how societal judgement and the application of labels can impact an individuals' self-esteem, opportunities, and overall social integration. When analyzing the impacts of labeling in the American correctional system, the negative shift in public perception and self-perception that previously justice-involved individuals experience is referred to as stigmatization. As Winnick and Bodkin (2008) found in their study where 450 justice-involved males were asked for their opinions on how being labeled as an "ex-con" interferes with life outside of prison. As expected, when analyzing the results from their questionnaire, majority of the participants understood the stigma associated with the label and knew that they would be discriminated when reentering, even if their offenses were nonviolent

49

(Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). Shi, Silver, and Hickert (2022) found that the factors that were most likely to alter the public's perception of previously incarcerated individuals was racial identity and the belief that criminals are inherently malicious.

In other words, although being incarcerated creates a stigmatized identity for previously incarcerated individuals, factors like racial identity and beliefs surrounding malicious intent create more stigmatization towards these individuals when they are reintegrating (Lebel, 2012; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). However, self-perception is a huge piece of how stigmatization leads to eventual role-taking and recidivism. As Benson and colleagues (2011) found when studying a boot camp program for those previously incarcerated males, the 240 participants within this study were enthusiastic about reentering their community and believed that reintegration would be possible. The authors suggested that this was based on the fact that the majority of the participants in this study had only been incarcerated in jail, not in prison. Stigmatization occurs from how reinforced formal labels are by public entities, such as institutions and practitioners.

Limitations: Labeling Theories

Similar to Conflict Theory, there are three major limitations that must be noted before addressing the methods that will be utilized within the current study. The first limitation is that both of the labeling theories described in this chapter did not specifically study previously incarcerated adults. Matsueda studied juveniles and delinquency, meaning that this theory was not designed with adult populations in mind (Matsueda, 1992; Zhang, 1997). Link and colleagues (1989) were studying psychiatric patients and how formal labeling impacted their transition back into the community. The specific population of previously incarcerated individuals are a stigmatized group and have suffered from the labels placed on them by both formal and informal social forces. As a stigmatized group, the labels associated with

incarceration could help explain why more barriers exist for this group and how stigmatization may encourage individuals to resort to crime to obtain inaccessible resources. The hope is that reentry programs offset this need to resort to lying about one's history or returning to re-offending, but as the literature suggested in the previous chapter, there are still challenges for individuals who are reentering in recent years. In other words, the original assertions of Matsueda's Labeling Theory and Modified Labeling Theory were not based on studying previously justice-involved individuals' experiences with labeling, but the concepts of labeling, reflected appraisals, adopting new roles, and exclusion within society can be applied to this current study about individuals who are currently reentering post-incarceration.

The second limitation to be acknowledged is that for an individual to alter their behavior or adopt a new role, these labels must be constantly reinforced and the labeled individual should be aware of the stigma surrounding them (Link et al., 1989; Matsueda, 1992). So, one instance of labeling by a formal entity is not what will lead to changes in one's behaviors and self-perception. This process would have to occur on more than one occasion from formal entities for a person to begin forming a habit around this newly perceived sense of identity. This also means that if someone is interacting with the correctional system on multiple occasions and they are formally labeled as a criminal or any other label that would create a negative perception of self. Meaning that while several instances of being formally labeled in a negative way are more likely to change one's behaviors, identity, and self-perception, there is no way to determine how many times an individual would need to be labeled for them to alter their behaviors or take on a new role (Link et al., 1989; Matsueda, 1992). Labeling affects people at the individual-level, and therefore, it is difficult to determine how many negative labeling incidents an individual would need to endure before their behavior is altered to align with their change in self-perception.

51

The final major limitation is that these two labeling theories assume an individual's behavior is determined by how they are viewed by others within society (Kavish, 2017; Link et al., 1987; Link et al., 1989; Matsueda, 1992). For both of the labeling theories presented within this section, the main assumption they rely on is how individuals engage in behaviors based on the way they are expected to act within their community or group. Humans are too individualistic, and therefore, assumptions like this one cannot be applied to every person and every group due to how different contextual factors alter one's decision-making processes. Depending on one's personality, negative labels could either discourage or encourage individuals to succeed based on their values and experiences. In spite of how labeling theories explain individuals' self-perception and behaviors, these theories were not created with the goal of understanding cases in which individuals defy expectations after understanding the label placed onto them. In Matsueda's Labeling Theory, this perspective of defying expectations is never addressed since he was studying juvenile delinquency and how labeling resulted in changes in self-perception and role-taking (1992). On the other hand, while Modified Labeling Theory acknowledges that psychiatric patients experience stigmatization, this theory also acknowledges that positive beliefs and healthy support systems could mitigate the impacts that negative labels would have on this population (Link et al., 1987; Link et al., 1989). In other words, labeling theories rely on an overgeneralization about human nature and human behavior that cannot be applied to all cases, and therefore, these theories can only present a potential reason why more barriers exist for those reentering rather than explaining the potential for recidivism during reentry. These are three notable limitations that should be considered when using Matsueda's Labeling Theory and Modified Labeling Theory in this current study that seeks to better understand the barriers that individuals encounter when reentering their community.

The three theories mentioned in this section explain why previously incarcerated individuals are deprived of resources, discriminated against, stigmatized within society, and pushed towards recidivism. Marx's Conflict Theory explores how dominant forces in society perpetuate a cycle of punishment and reincarceration to allow those in power to have access to the best resources within society. However, since Conflict Theory was based on dynamics with capitalist societies, this theory assumes humans are inherently self-serving and that the only method for resolving conflict is through violent or intense actions. For Matsueda's Labeling Theory, this theory understands how people are formally labeled, how reflected appraisals reinforce these labels, and how changes in self-perception can result in taking on positive or negative roles. Similarly, Modified Labeling Theory also aims to understand how people are formally labeled, but how their behaviors and self-perception are altered based on previously established beliefs the labeled individual developed based on who they socialized with prior to being labeled. Additionally, one's formal label can lead to stigmatization, which can create more disadvantages for individuals when trying to access resources to reintegrate successfully back into their community. The criticisms associated with labeling theories are that initial studies were based on different populations, that role-taking and behavioral shifts only occur if labels are repetitively reinforced, and that labeling is viewed as deterministic.

In this current study, Conflict Theory, Matsueda's Labeling Theory, and Modified Labeling Theory explain why previously justice-involved individuals are oppressed within American society and how barriers have been created through the use of formal labeling. These theories offer explanations for why previously justice-involved individuals are currently facing barriers when attempting to smoothly transition back into their communities. The next chapter

will expand on how this study will be conducted to show the oppression and the exclusion that previously justice-involved individuals are facing within their communities.

Chapter Four: Current Study & Methods

Relying on the information gathered in the last two chapters helps create an understanding of why this study is topical in the modern age and what theories assert about human behavior. The second chapter explores the most common barriers that individuals have recently experienced upon returning to their community after being incarcerated. According to recent research, necessities like housing, employment, and treatment programs are inaccessible to previously incarcerated individuals based on the stigmatization they endure after being formally labeled as a criminal. The third chapter explores the importance of power, conflict, and labels to explain why this specific population is oppressed within American society. Together, these chapters create an understanding of how oppression affects previously incarcerated individuals and how oppression limits the resources and services that this population can access in their community.

More importantly, these previous chapters facilitate the future discussions how on classism, class conflicts, disparities, formal and informal labeling and the stigmatization process impact the treatment of formerly incarcerated individuals. The knowledge gained from previous studies have highlighted the challenges that individuals face during reentry and why this group struggles during the transition. The assertions addressed by theorists provide a blueprint for understanding perception of oneself, how society perceives them, and why resources are limited for groups who are labeled based on their previous experiences. Altogether, these relevant theories and studies showcase some reasons why resources and services may be more inaccessible to previous justice-involved individuals.

With previous chapters exploring the development of reentry programs and the contemporary challenges individuals within these programs encounter, this chapter will outline

how the data was collected for this study and what research methods will be employed to study this specific population's barriers. The sections within this chapter will give an overview of a local reentry program, detail the methods being utilized within this current study, and provide an explanation of how the findings should be interpreted and what limitations this study has based on the methods being utilized. Similar to previous studies, this current study relies on data collected at a local reentry program within a Southwestern state to examine what current challenges exist during the reintegration process. In the following section, the program's founder, goals, and demographics will be discussed to expand on this program's formation and intentions.

Hope For Prisoners

With permission to use the name and city of the research site location, Hope for Prisoners (HFP) is a reentry program located in Las Vegas, Nevada. As mentioned in the website's page titled, *Jon Ponder*, this program was founded in 2010 by Jon Ponder, who desired to make the process of reentry smoother for those reentering the community due to his own previous experience of incarceration and community reintegration (Hope For Prisoners [HFP], 2023). From the knowledge gained from his experiences and understanding the barriers that others faced upon reentry, Jon Ponder founded Hope for Prisoners to help individuals access opportunities to make their reentry process less stressful and daunting. As mentioned on the same page, "HFP has served nearly 4,700 clients since its inception in 2010 and boasts a 6% rate of recidivism" (HFP, 2023, para. 4). This program within the Clark County area has aided thousands of people regain the ability to reenter society and overcome the obstacles that they face within their everyday lives.

Furthermore, as mentioned on the Hope for Prisoners' website again on a web page titled, *Mission, Vision, and Programs*, the vision guiding this program is,

> "HOPE for Prisoners works to empower the formerly incarcerated and their families to create a successful future built on strategic leadership and character development. By assisting those fighting for second chances, we strive to serve, build and strengthen our community" (HFP, 2023, Vision section, para. 1).

Hope for Prisoners as an organization is built around the idea that previously justice-involved individuals should be allowed to have a second chance to become part of their community. In addition to this, this program has altruistic goals to help individuals reconnect with their loved ones, graduate from educational programs, obtain certificates from job training services, and access any resource or program that would make the transition back into one's community easier to experience. In short, Hope for Prisoners was founded by Jon Ponder who used his experiences to create a program that helped previously incarcerated individuals have a second chance at life within their community.

Hope for Prisoners: Demographic Information in 2022

Although Hope for Prisoners has helped thousands of individuals, the data used within this study is secondary data and based on information collected in 2022. This data was collected to evaluate HFP as a reentry program based on rates of recidivism, the reasons associated with the changes in recidivism rates, the description of services provided by HFP, and the challenges that clients faced as they reentered their community in 2022. This evaluation was based on a grant offered by the Department of Justice (DOJ) through the Second Chance Act (SCA) to evaluate Hope for Prisoners as a reentry program and determine what the program's strengths are and what could be improved in the program's future.

As a result, in 2022, a majority of the formerly incarcerated individuals had access to reentry resources and programs through the use of this DOJ grant to overcome barriers associated with housing, education, employment, and other necessities that were difficult to acquire under normal conditions. For those who did not need the services provided by this grant, they were considered assigned via general assignment, meaning they would have access to Hope for Prisoners for the services that were provided without the use of the DOJ grant. From the data collected during this evaluation, 6 individuals were assigned through general assignment while the remaining 240 individuals were assigned via the conditions of the DOJ's grant. This means that during the year of 2022, there were a total of 246 individuals enrolled in Hope for Prisoners to gain a second chance at becoming part of their community again.

Since there were 246 clients within the program in 2022, data was collected on their demographics to illustrate who was within the program during this time period. Variables that are important to consider within a reentry program is the age of participants, the gender identity of participants, and the racial identity of participants. For age, the mean age was 36.9 and the age range within this study was 19 to 69. For gender, 57 (23.2%) participants identified as female and 189 (76.8%) participants identified as male. Lastly, for race, 106 (43.1%) participants identified as White or Caucasian, 79 (32.1%) participants identified as Black or African American, 7 (2.8%) participants identified as Latinx or Latino/Latina, 5 (2%) participants identified as Asian, 2 (~1%) participants identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 5 (2%) participants identified as Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 19 (7.7%) identified as mixed, 17 (6.9%) identified as other, and 6 (2.4%) claimed that they did not know their racial identity. This is the general demographic information that was collected for the evaluation of Hope for Prisoners.

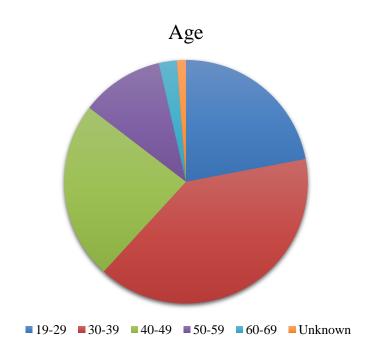**Figure 1.** *Hope for Prisoners DOJ Data: Age Groups*

Age

■ 19-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-59 ■ 60-69 ■ Unknown

Figure 2. *Hope for Prisoners DOJ Data: Gender*
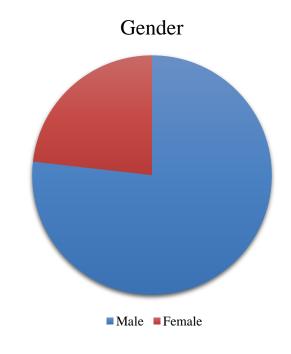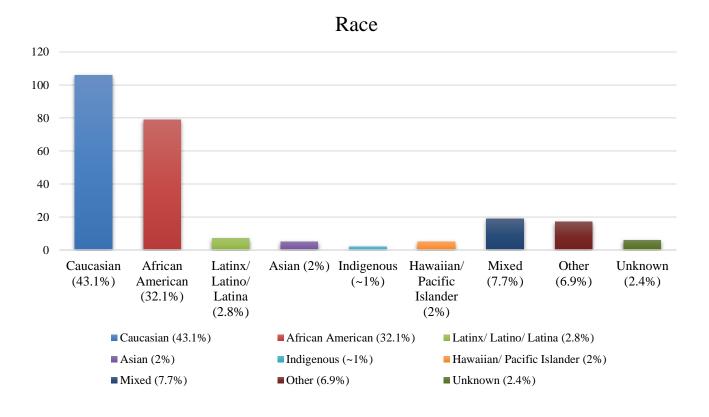

Gender

■ Male ■ Female

Figure 3. *Hope for Prisoners DOJ Data: Race*

Race

Based on the figures above, it is easier to visualize the different populations and groups that Hope for Prisoners aided during the reentry process. In 2022, most HFP clients identified as a Caucasian, male between the ages of 30 to 39. However, while these are the groups that are most represented within the data collected during the program evaluation, it is important to understand the disparities that marginalized groups must confront when attempting to reenter. Similarly, like most criminal justice issues, the contextual and situational factors that an individual faces during their reentry journey is unique to them, which is why understanding an individual's identity along with their previous experiences is necessary during their reentry. While one can take the numbers at face value, it is important to consider varied factors that may impact one's willingness to enroll into a reentry program and one's commitment to remain

within the program for long-term. For the purposes of this study, while barriers are addressed, future implications will advocate for more research to investigate the causes of these barriers and understand the role of discrepancies in relation to reentry challenges that clients have faced in the past.

The Current Study

The current study aims to identify the challenges that individuals within Hope for Prisoners faced as they reentered their communities in 2022. To identify these specific barriers, this study will be reexamining interview transcripts that were conducted and transcribed within the 2022 DOJ SCA evaluation. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews were originally conducted as part of the data used within Hope for Prisoners' final DOJ SCA evaluative report. For these evaluations, data was collected from interviews, focus groups, and statistical analyses conducted within the program to determine the efficiency of this reentry program. For the interviews, 24 interviewees were randomly selected from the 240 participants who met the criteria specific to the DOJ grant (i.e., must have had prior incarceration experience, categorized as "high-risk" to reoffend). Their demographic information was collected prior to the interviewing process (see Appendix B). However, two of the interviews in this study were not conducted, which resulted in only 22 interviews being conducted and transcribed. These interviewees were asked five general questions (see Appendix A) about their experiences within Hope for Prisoners and their responses were transcribed throughout 2022. For this current thesis project, these twenty-two interview transcript files will be used to reveal what barriers are currently creating hurdles for those reentering and what implementations could diminish the negative impact of these barriers or alleviate the stress they cause altogether.

During the interviews, participants were asked about their reentry experiences, more specifically the challenges they encountered, their current accomplishments, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their goals for the near future. While the original interviews were conducted to evaluate Hope for Prisoners as a reentry program, the participants within this evaluation discussed any struggles they had a challenging time overcoming and therefore, their specific reentry barriers were mentioned and explained. In this current study, the transcripts will be thematically coded based on the barriers discussed and the shared experiences the participants elaborate on during the interviews. The themes within the findings will be created based on what the interviewees feel are the most intense barriers and the reasons why they believe these barriers created challenges during their reentry process (see Appendix E). The thematic coding of these interviews aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Within the context of Hope for Prisoners 2022, what were the primary barriers that clients faced by participating in the reentry program?

RQ2: From the 2022 interviews with Hope for Prisoners clients, what lessons can be drawn to guide future strategies and interventions addressing identified barriers?

The goal behind this study is to understand what challenges individuals are claiming are disrupting their transition back into their community. Based on the literature described in the second chapter, the expectation for this study is that the identified barriers will align with what current research has determined are common barriers for those reentering. In this specific context, I expect the barriers that will be discussed in the findings will be related to housing, employment, substance abuse, administrative challenges, and stigmatization. As a reentry program, Hope for Prisoners focuses on helping previously justice-involved individuals

62

accessing opportunities and creating an easier reentry journey for the community it serves. From these interviews, previously justice-involved individuals are sharing their experiences to elaborate on what challenges they have faced or are currently facing in order to address barriers that are present during their reentry process. This approach allows participants to share their experiences and gives them the ability to elaborate on how these challenges have affected their transition without the fear of judgment or criticism.

While analyzing transcripts, the researcher must immerse oneself in the data to gain a better understanding of the contextual and situational factors affecting the participants in the study. This approach requires the use of inductive reasoning, where the researcher closely examines the transcript data to determine what questions, themes, or insights emerge based on the findings. Therefore, while the original study did ask interviewees about the barriers they encountered while reentering, it did not review how the barriers discussed could inform future implementations that could assist in overcoming barriers during the reintegration process. This second question derived from my own contextual readings and coding of transcripts. This is why this thesis research project includes a second research question concerning future strategies to help those reentering overcome the barriers that significantly impacted their reintegration process.

Basically, qualitative research involves a dynamic interplay between data exploration and question generation, with each informing and enriching the other. Therefore, both of the research questions guiding this thesis project will offer an understanding of previously justice-involved individuals' experiences while reentering and what implementations could help overcome the challenges they encounter in their community. In the next section, I will be addressing my training in qualitative research methods, more specifically my experiences with using open

coding and thematic coding when identifying significant quotes and themes within transcription files.

Training

During the summer of 2023, I was trained on how to use open coding and thematic coding when identifying important concepts within interview transcription files. Open coding is the process in which quotes are identified within transcription files to align with codes that the principal investigator has created that would answer the research questions. For the original evaluation, these codes were in relation to the effectiveness of this reentry program and what improvements could be made to increase effectiveness for previously justice-involved individuals. As a graduate research assistant, I learned how to use open coding when identifying relevant information for a specific research project.

The process of open coding consisted of identifying relevant quotes and summarizing the themes present within these quotes (Elliot, 2018; Rogers, 2023). For my training, I began by coding for answers to the interview questions, originally coded as "successes" and "barriers" based on answers to interview questions 1 and 2 (see Appendix A). Following that step, I coded answers from interviewees that referred specifically to the barriers and successes they encountered during their reintegration process. This allows for the principal investigator to identify specific themes within the interview data (Taylor, 2015; Williams & Moser, 2019). Upon completion of these steps, I sent my coding files to the principal investigator who ensured there was inter-coder reliability (see Appendix A).

Inter-coder reliability in this specific context refers to my coding files being compared to the principal investigator's coding files and to the other graduate research assistants' coding files to ensure that we all identified the same quotes and themes from the same interview data

(Kurasaki, 2000; MacPhail et al., 2016; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). This process was repeated for every transcript to ensure the interviewee's quotes and the summaries that were created as a result were all capturing the same general information from the quotes being used, and that they all related to the open codes of "successes" and "barriers".

From this training, I learned the value of qualitative research, especially when understanding the unique contextual and situational factors that impact previously justice-involved individuals' reintegration back into the community. I also learned that this process involves systemic examination of existing interview transcripts, whereby a research team explores the content to derive meaningful insights and that the analytical phase includes the discovery of patterns, thematic elements, and contextual examples embedded within the transcripts. Within the original 2022 evaluation, a similar methodology was employed, and for the present study, I will be using both transcription files and open coding files to answer this study's research questions. In the following sections, I will be addressing both the strengths and limitations of this approach. This conversation aims to explain how the findings may be properly contextualized and interpreted within the parameters of the current study.

The Value of This Approach

For this current study, a secondary data analysis of qualitative data will be used to answer the two research questions mentioned in the last passage. In this specific study, the type of qualitative data that will be used are transcripts from 22 personal interviews at this reentry program. The benefits of using secondary data analysis are that time was saved during data collection, that this qualitative data can be reanalyzed to answer more specific research questions, and that more time can be dedicated to understanding the findings (Riedel, 2000).

Expanding on the methods used, the transcripts used within this study are crucial for answering the research questions that this study aims to answer.

As a form of qualitative research, interviews allow researchers to understand another's perspective, background, and experiences to gain a better understanding of how these factors overlap and affect the study's research questions (Patton, 1990). In the specific case of individuals who are reentering their community, their experiences and background would allow researchers to understand how these factors impacted their reentry journey. In addition to this, interviews allow for more context to be provided about how events unfolded or about what potentially created more barriers for them during their reentry process. As mentioned, this is a study utilizing qualitative research methods and this is being used to understand the contextual factors that could be creating more barriers for reentry clients and to know how situations arose from participants' perspectives since they would know their challenges best (Maxwell, 1996). Overall, this study is a secondary data analysis, which uses qualitative data in order to comprehend how these barriers arose and what previously justice-involved individuals experienced when these barriers prevented them from reentering their community.

Limitations

Again, the current study will be reliant on qualitative research techniques, more specifically the use of thematic coding based on individual interview data collected in 2022. It is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with this research method and to address the proper way to interpret the findings in the following chapter. The first limitation is that this study's findings are based on a smaller number of participants (Adams et al., 2007; Maxwell, 1996). During 2022, only 22 personal interviews were conducted and transcribed, which is a significantly smaller sample size when compared to other studies. This means the findings of this

study cannot and should not be generalized since these findings would only relate to the specific participants who were interviewed within this timeframe. An additional concern with generalization is the impact that community-specific characteristics have on the reentry process since every county will have different reentry goals, based on how much funding is available and how many services can be accessed within a specific county.

The second limitation is based on specific participants from a specific location (Adams et al., 2007; Maxwell, 1996). Those reentering their community within Clark County face unique barriers and the findings of this study, while important, should not be assumed for all cities and counties within the United States. While some reentry barriers are common, the reasons why these barriers exist may vary based on the cultural context, the financial limitations, and the community values at play within these regions. Again, this does not take away the value of these findings and how they add onto the discussion of reentry barriers, but the particular reasons associated with these barriers will vary based on the living conditions within the Clark County area when compared to other American counties. Acknowledging the diverse experiences of interviewees is the goal within this study, but these findings cannot be applied to every individual who is reentering after experiencing incarceration.

The third limitation is that interview data is based on the participants and their experiences (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1990). This approach has its strengths since it gives individuals a way to voice their concerns, to explain their experiences, and to explore why they face the obstacles they have or are currently attempting to overcome. In spite of the benefits of this approach, nothing can confirm their experiences or prove how events unfolded in their lives. While sharing one's experiences is a crucial component of understanding the challenges that previously justice-involved individuals face, experiences are based on personal events, which

means that one's subjective perception will influence how they recall previous events and experiences. Additionally, if the individual is currently facing a barrier at the time of their interview, there may be more negative feelings associated with that challenge due to the stress that it is creating for that individual on a daily basis.

The last limitation is that this study is not comprehensive. Since this study is based on interview data collected during Hope for Prisoners' evaluation, this was the only reentry program within this study. This means that the findings within the evaluation and by extension, within this study, should be considered when discussing Hope for Prisoners as a reentry program and the barriers that participants are currently facing within this unique reentry program. In other words, the findings of this study can only be associated with the interview data collected from interviewees at HFP during 2022. In addition to this, the themes that emerge are based on this qualitative data, which should be considered when the conversation of future implementation takes place. These are the four major limitations that impact the methodology of the study and alter how the findings should be interpreted in the next chapter.

Although these limitations impact how the findings will be interpreted, this does not dismiss the relevance and importance of the findings in the next chapter. This current study will identify the unique barriers and challenges that individuals enrolled in Hope for Prisoners reentry program encounter during their transition back into the community. Utilizing interview data collected in 2022, this study will identify the barriers that reentry clients and case managers at this reentry program addressed when asked for their thoughts on Hope For Prisoners. The use of qualitative data will provide contextual information and explanations as to why these barriers may exist and why they affect certain populations over others. Through the use of thematic coding, themes will be created based on the common issues addressed and the challenges that

negatively impacted their reentry journey. In summary, upon reexamining transcripts based on interviews conducted in 2022, themes will be created based on the recurrent problems acknowledged by interviewees and this will result in future implications for Hope for Prisoners based on what clients and staff alike think could benefit the future of this reentry program.

Chapter Five: Findings I: Current Barriers to Reentry

Using the qualitative research methods discussed in the last chapter, these next two chapters will be a comprehensive overview of the results from the 22 interviews conducted and transcribed in 2022 at Hope for Prisoners (HFP). Interviewees are categorized according to the time of their interviews, denoted by numerical labels (#1, #2, etc.), with the deliberate omission of any identifying information to maintain anonymity. Consequently, the pronouns "they" and "their" are uniformly used across all interviewees to maintain confidentiality.

Findings will consist of thematic insights or main themes derived from an analysis of the predominant barriers encountered and the most frequently recommended resources discussed by interviewees.[1] As mentioned previously, participants responded to five general interview questions about the Hope For Prisoners reentry program. These responses serve as the basis for addressing the two research inquiries in the current study (see Appendix A). The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: Within the context of Hope for Prisoners 2022, what were the primary barriers that clients faced by participating in the reentry program?

RQ2: From the 2022 interviews with Hope for Prisoners clients, what lessons can be drawn to guide future strategies and interventions addressing identified barriers?

The findings for this thesis are organized into two (2) separate chapters. This chapter will address findings related to the first research question. Chapter 6 (or, "Findings II") will discuss findings based on the second research question.

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[1] During the original reentry program evaluation, the interviewees were discussing the most challenging barrier they had encountered at the time of their interview in 2022. It should be acknowledged that all clients within the program expressed how challenging it was to gain access to housing and employment with a record during their reentry process.

Current Barriers for Reentry Clients

Recent literature has shown that formerly incarcerated individuals encounter countless barriers when returning to their communities and accessing services within the community. For previously justice-involved individuals, their record and the negative perceptions associated with their incarceration experiences limits their ability to access services for housing, employment, treatment, and other necessities during their reentry process. As discussed in the chapter about theoretical frameworks, previously justice-involved individuals suffer from being a group that is seen as less worthy of resources than the dominant social forces within America. Instead of creating opportunities for success, those without a record or criminal history punish those who are trying to reenter and prevent them from accessing services that the general population could access with ease. In addition to this, the formal labels attributed to formerly incarcerated individuals influences their self-perception, their behavioral expression, and how they adapt to the community they are reentering.

In other words, previously incarcerated individuals are continuously punished for a history that no longer defines who they are or their newfound goals when reintegrating back into society. Furthermore, the barriers created within society for those who are reentering are difficult to overcome, which is why it is crucial to discuss what is currently creating challenges for reentry clients. Employing the methods described in the last chapter, the following sections explore the most common barriers for the 22 clients randomly selected for interviews in 2022. The specific barriers that impacted clients the most include barriers related to housing, employment, and substance abuse. After this, additional barriers reported will also be briefly explored to gain an understanding of uncommon yet unique challenges that affected previously-justice involved individuals at HFP in 2022. This chapter will conclude by restating the barriers

that were found within these interviews and reviewing what resources could be implemented to overcome the primary barriers that were mentioned in 2022.

Housing

There are several barriers that those reentering encounter when attempting to gain access to housing. As mentioned earlier, economic and societal barriers limit the housing options available for those who are trying to create stability for themselves post-release. Some of the challenges associated with housing include passing background checks, gaining access to financial resources to afford housing options, and ensuring that their new residential area will not promote recidivism. For those who cannot pass background checks and afford housing, these challenges result in housing insecurity or homelessness, which could potentially result in reoffending (Moschion & Johnson, 2019; Remster, 2021). Housing insecurity affects this population more than the general population because their record, whether they were incarcerated in a jail or prison, dictates if they will be able to access housing. This is linked to labeling and stigma, and how more barriers are created based on the formal labels imposed on an individual or group (Berry & Wiener, 2020; LeBel, 2017; Link et al., 1989). In this specific study, barriers to housing were the most common barrier with 8 out of 22 interviewees reporting that they had barriers to housing when reentering back into their community (see Appendix D).

When asked about the barriers they encountered during their reentry process, Interviewee #4 responded by claiming,

"Housing all the way. Housing. It took me forever to find somebody to rent to me because of my felonies. So that was…a big obstacle when I came home. I've now found somewhere, but it took me months to find somebody. So housing was my main obstacle."

When this interviewee was asked how they found housing, it was not through HFP, instead they had to find a realtor who would collaborate with them to find housing. The housing options provided by the reentry program were located in high-crime areas, and the interviewee did not want their children living in an unsafe environment. Another obstacle that is briefly discussed within this quote is the harm that one's record has on the chance of them accessing housing. Over the last few decades, the housing market in America has become tougher to navigate, but it is more difficult for previously incarcerated individuals between the lack of resources available and the record that they must disclose when applying for housing opportunities.

When asked about their barriers to reentry, Interviewee #12 mentioned their challenges related to housing,

> "Background checks…. ok, so I used to be a drug addict, so I can't rent nowhere. The other thing is…I'm not eligible for low-income housing. There's a lot— those kinds of things need to be changed..."

Again, due to this interviewee having to disclose their record, their housing options are extremely limited. In their interview, they mentioned how they could not access housing and how this should be changed because the community they are reentering is judging their character based on a record that no longer defines them. In addition to this, since housing is extremely limited for this population, the few housing options that they can gain access to could be triggering since they are located in areas where crime is present at higher rates, especially if the individual reentering is struggling to gain access to necessary resources.

Interviewee #13 specified their concerns with the difficulties of gaining access to housing and how the locations of these specific housing options could potentially set some reentry clients up for failure,

> "Housing…Because of my record…. Even a weekly apartment, you can't get a weekly apartment or nothing…. And the few places that will take you are in such bad areas, that it would just be a trigger for most people to go back."

From the quotes within some of these interviews, reentry clients have claimed that they have needed to find resources outside of their reentry program, they have struggled to pass background checks, and they have considered how difficult it would be to reside in high-crime areas post-release. Another connection that one interviewee made post-release was the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on accessing housing based on how various services were delayed within the country.

More specifically, Interviewee #11 struggled with reentering during the COVID-19 pandemic and shared during their interview,

> "I mean for housing it took a while, but it's just a process that you had to go through and all the documentation and like I was missing some documentation, but because of COVID…it took… a lot longer than it normally would as if it wasn't COVID."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, housing was a general barrier for Americans without criminal histories or records, resulting in worse health outcomes for this population (Bhat et al., 2022; Kim, 2021). During this same period, previously justice-involved individuals reentering encountered more barriers during this time when compared to their counterparts who did not

have a record. From this specific quote from Interviewee #11, those reentering may not have the

documentation necessary to access housing opportunities or to be considered as a housing

applicant. Gaining access to documentation during this time period was delayed significantly

based on the sudden shift in employment conditions across the country, but for those who did not

have a record, they already had any documentation needed to apply for housing. In other words,

the pandemic did negatively impact those who were reentering during that time and created more

barriers when it came to creating stability for previously incarcerated individuals.

In addition to this, two reentry clients struggled to access housing due to the stigma

associated with their history of incarceration. Research shows that for those reentering their

record is used against them when trying to apply for housing, even if they do not have a violent

offense on their record (Keene et al., 2018a; Keene et al., 2018b). This can result in situations

where temporary housing solutions are not available and therefore, previously justice-involved

individuals must find ways to cope without any form of housing stability and housing security.

In 2022, unfortunately, Interviewee #21 was experiencing homelessness, even after

applying for resources offered at this program. They stated during their interview,

> "Yeah. I mean I'm still, um, in the process of trying to find stable housing, so that way I
> can get my kids back…. I actually applied for housing and I got on the list, um, but I'm
> still like number three-thousand-something-something."

This reentry client was experiencing homelessness and could not reconnect with their

children until they accessed stable housing. It was revealed later in the interview that this

interviewee was living out of their automobile as that was their only option for obtaining

housing. This is the consequence for some that are trying to reenter yet struggling to access the

basic necessities of life that would create a sense of stability and hopefulness. Previously justice-involved individuals need a secure residential address upon reentering, this allows individuals to have stability when reentering the community by allowing them to have their basic needs met, such as sleep, shelter, and safety. In addition to this, it has been proven that those without access to stable housing opportunities are more at-risk for recidivism (Keene et al., 2018b; Lutze et al., 2014; Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019).

For Interviewee #14, while they also had trouble gaining access to housing, they admitted during their interview that, "...one of my biggest barriers that, thankfully I have a boyfriend that I live with; but the biggest barrier I see for me, and any other felon is housing." Within the same interview, they mentioned that any housing options that are available for those who have a felony record tend to be in locations with higher crime rates and a lack of safety. From these interviews, the experiences of those reentering tend to align with the research that has been previously conducted on housing conditions for those who are reentering their community post-incarceration. They identify similar barriers to housing, including their records being used against them, difficulties accessing documentation needed for housing, and accessible housing being located in areas that could promote reoffending.

From sharing their experiences, these reentry clients' who suffered from barriers to housing explained what their specific challenges were when attempting to gain access to housing. This was the most common barrier reported by reentry clients at HFP during 2022 from the 22 interviews conducted during this time period. As mentioned in recent literature, it is important to consider how the lack of housing options available for previously justice-involved individuals impacts the likelihood of recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014; Moschion & Johnson, 2019; Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019; Remster, 2021).

Employment

Another barrier that was addressed by reentry clients was difficulty accessing employment or securing long-term employment. Employment is a significant barrier to reentry because upon reentering back into the community, a successful reentry journey is dependent on one's ability to access steady employment to accumulate financial resources. In this current study, 6 out of 22 clients reported that they had barriers related to accessing or regaining employment and if they had access to employment, another concern was related to the ability to be promoted at their specific job.

With job inaccessibility and the lack of resources available for those who are seeking employment, previously justice-involved individuals struggle with gaining and maintaining employment with the United States. Research explores how the quality of employment that previously justice-involved individuals can access does influence the potential for recidivism based on needing financial resources upon reentering (LaBriola, 2020). Additionally, the expectation to disclose one's record would diminish the likelihood of acquiring employment, so those reintegrating may be required to find ways to work around the law based on the barriers to employment they are experiencing (Augustine, 2019). This can impact reentry programs as well and the resources that are available to clients in these programs based on their history, record, and what resources are being offered within the program.

Unfortunately, for Interviewee #15, when they were attempting to gain access to employment at HFP, the career development resources were not as dependable as the client believed they would be when regaining employment. As they stated within their interview, when being asked about how they eventually accessed employment,

"I seeked employment elsewhere and I ended up finding a job that I'm still with today. And within that job I've been promoted and stuff like that so that's been awesome. But obviously it burned courage to go through the job developers here, but it didn't work out that way for me."

During their time as a reentry client, Interviewee #15 explained how the career development services provided at HFP created more barriers to employment rather than helping them navigate the job market with a record. Interviewee #15 mentioned how the career developer did not get back into contact with them and due to the lack of resources available through the reentry program, they had to rely on resources that they were fortunate enough to find on their own.

Another client, Interviewee #6, struggled with regaining their previous form of employment as they mentioned when discussing how employment created the most challenging barrier for them,

"Well, I actually, I'm a nurse— or well I was. I can't be a nurse again until 2026 because of it…. But um, being used to being in that – and then finding out you- you can't work that was my biggest obstacle."

However, this interviewee later explained that HFP provided the resources and services that allowed them to enter a different field of employment for the time being. This included helping this individual acquire formal attire and practice for their upcoming interviews. The services this client received helped them overcome this barrier to employment they faced during their reentry journey.

From these two different perspectives, finding employment post-release created a challenge during their reentry process, but the resources they accessed either individually or through the program helped them overcome this obstacle. Within the interview data, it was common to see that employment was obtainable, but that it took a longer period of time to gain employment when reentering the community.

As Interviewee #8 mentioned when discussing their process when it came to accessing employment,

"Like I was fortunate, I have…a ridiculous ton of family that received me with open arms. So, that-obviously that support system makes a great world of difference. But, for people lacking that, um Hope for prisoners is that…. it was like maybe 3 weeks later and I had a job and I'm at the same job like right now."

Familial support tends to be a positive influence on those reentering because it provides previously justice-involved individuals with stable housing while they gain access to employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Fahmy et al., 2022). However, not everyone who is reentering has familial support or a support system upon reentering, so gaining access to housing, employment, and other necessities is more of an immediate concern for clients who lack this support. Research shows that when previously justice-involved individuals have access to employment services during reentry, such as job training and career development are less likely to recidivate (Duwe, 2015; Fitzgerald et al., 2013).

HFP has amazing resources to overcome barriers associated with employment, however, interviewees were concerned about job availability and the amount of time it would take before accessing employment. Considering how the majority of interviewees struggled with barriers to

housing, struggling with accessing employment becomes more difficult when there is a lack of social support and a lack of housing security. Fortunately, these interviewees were able to find employment, but there needs to be more emphasis on providing resources for those who may no longer have familial support or those who struggle with regaining employment post-incarceration.

Substance Abuse & Sobriety

Research on reentry programs show that substance abuse and remaining sober are one of the most common and concerning barriers during the reintegration process (Moore et al., 2020; Phillips, 2010; Tsai & Gu, 2019). For those reentering who have a history of substance abuse, they encounter countless, distressing barriers based on their history of incarceration and how limited they are by their record. In these cases, previously justice-involved individuals who have a history of substance abuse and substance-related charges may be more prone to relapse based on how difficult their transition back into the community is. In this study, 6 out of the 22 interviewees claimed that they struggled with substance use and sobriety the most when returning back to their community.

Additionally, substance abuse tends to be linked to mental health disorders, which can result in stigmatization and negative self-perception. As Interviewee #22 mentioned in their interview when asked about the biggest barrier they encountered when reintegrating back into the community,

> "... when I went home, I seen the effect of what I caused and that got me into depression and got me back into methamphetamines…. And just sober for like maybe a month and a half as when I got released, and then, I was just right back into the dirt."

80

In this account, the reentry client recalls the shame they felt when they returned home post-incarceration and how this negatively impacted their mental health, which led to the client resorting to using substances as a way to cope with these feelings. Following this period of substance abuse, this individual was rearrested, but the mental health programs offered within a correctional facility helped the client understand their mental health challenges and how this resulted in their substance use. At the time of the interview, the individual had recently rejoined HFP and therefore, could not speak to the strengths of the program or what could be improved. However, their change in mental state when they first reentered and how their self-perception significantly shifted is important to acknowledge, especially when considering the stressors associated with reintegration and how reentry clients may relapse to cope with these stressful obstacles.

Other clients also discussed their struggles with substance abuse and how this was their largest barrier upon reentering. As Interviewee #2 said during their interview in 2022,

> "I guess at first the hardest thing to do is stay sober. And then, um, when you start at nothing it's kind of depressing and it's kind of like, you feel like you can't do anything."

This reentry client was struggling with remaining sober due to the stress that had accumulated from how inaccessible resources were post-release. This is important to consider since many of the barriers that clients are facing when reentering the community tend to contribute to a vicious cycle of reincarceration. For example, one's history of substance use may result in incarceration, which in turn would limit their ability to access housing and employment. Due to the stress created by these barriers, the reentry client may resort to substance use as a way to cope with the lack of certainty they are experiencing during the reentry process.

While the quotes presented from the two previous interviewees explore concepts like mental health concerns, behavioral expectations, limited access to resources, and difficulties remaining sober, a few clients had different experiences when maintaining their sobriety. As Interviewee #20 mentioned when expanding on their struggles with sobriety,

> "...well, when I was an addict, I was never consistent and held accountable for my actions, so I've gotten way better at it. I'm responsible now."

The interviewee explained how their newfound commitment to the program allowed them to take responsibility and maintain sobriety. So, in this reentry client's case, while they refer to oneself as an "addict," they use the past tense to signify that they have changed since joining HFP. In other words, while they encountered the barrier of remaining sober, their commitment to sobriety and this specific reentry program helped them overcome their challenges associated with substance abuse.

Another interviewee, Interviewee #3, also mentioned that HFP is responsible for helping them when encountering challenges related to maintaining sobriety,

> "The main one was my addiction…you know what I mean, so that was hard to give up, but I did, you know, so I really give the credit to HFP for getting me started, if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have known how to handle this."

While in the program, this interviewee took courses related to skill development and mental health, which helped them understand why they were using substances to cope and learn better ways to cope with distressing moments. These last two quotes demonstrate that there are substance abuse resources at HFP and that they can be beneficial for those reentering, especially

when considering the beneficial coping skills clients can rely on when encountering stressful situations. The earlier quotes in this subsection identify a few challenges that must be addressed as well, which are concerns related to co-occurring disorders and how substance abuse limits one's access to other services.

Again, substance use disorders are common when looking at the American prison system and the lack of treatment options available both at the federal and state level (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). When individuals who have a history of substance abuse are released without access to housing, employment, and other resources, this creates an overwhelming amount of anxiety for the individual and could result in relapse due to the sudden transition. Additionally, those suffering from co-occurring disorders require a different, individualized treatment plan based on the specific needs that would need to be met during reentry based on what disorders are occurring simultaneously (Hanna et al., 2020).

As Interviewee #22 mentioned during their interview, their depression negatively impacted their mental state, which resulted in the interviewee relapsing and being reincarcerated. This reentry client's treatment plan as a result would be different from reentry clients who are not suffering from co-occurring disorders, instead only suffering from substance use disorders. Interviewee #2 does not mention a history of mental health challenges, but their history of substance abuse limited their resources when reentering, which still would result in intense anxiety due to their lack of stability upon reentry. These experiences of mental health challenges and limited resources show how valuable individualized treatment plans are for those who are reentering, especially for those who have a history of substance abuse. While some individuals found HFP's substance abuse resources to be effective when addressing concerns related to substance abuse, there still needs to be considerations about the specific conditions or limitations

related to their clients' substance use history and how this may negatively impact their reentry process.

Additional Barriers

While the most common barriers reported by clients were related to housing, employment, and substance use, there were still additional barriers that previously justice-involved individuals mentioned when originally interviewed in 2022 (see Appendix D). While these barriers were not as frequent, they still created challenges for previously incarcerated individuals upon reentry. These additional barriers were difficulties related to accessing transportation, accessing documentation, stigmatization, and mental health.

Starting with transportation, Interviewee #9 and Interviewee #17 reported barriers related to finding ways to get to HFP's building. Both of these interviewees overcame this barrier by either using multiple forms of public transportation or by finding someone who could reliably drive them to the organization at specific times. If these reentry clients were unable to access transportation, they would not have been able to actively participate in the program and access the specific services offered at HFP.

Another barrier that two previously justice-involved individuals encountered were related to gaining access to documentation. However, for these specific individuals, the main reason why this was difficult or took more time was due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was taking place and created many delays when accessing documentation. As Interviewee #8 explained,

"The only reason it took so long for me to get my ID from that was because, at that point we were borderline at the height of COVID. So, the scheduling they had at the DMV took like two or three months."

Due to the unforeseen circumstances created by the pandemic, this interviewee had to wait longer to gain access to their driver's license. Interviewee #11 also experienced similar challenges when attempting to gain access to documentation during the pandemic. In other words, accessing documentation seemed to be a concern that was exacerbated by the pandemic and how delayed many processes were during this time.

The third additional barrier that was encountered by one reentry client was stigmatization. Interviewee #18 discussed how stigmatization impacted housing for those reentering, "And because we're now felons and that we have that stigma against us, there's really nowhere for us to find places for us to rent." While this is the only interviewee who explicitly mentioned the stigmatization they encountered while trying to access housing, other reentry clients in 2022 could have also experienced stigmatization associated with their record, which also would limit their access to housing, employment, and additional services.

The last additional barrier was mental health and more specifically, how co-occurring disorders impact substance use. As Interviewee #22 mentioned when discussing the difficulties of remaining sober post-release, their mental health disorder resulted in their relapse and in their rearrest. With co-occurring disorders, it is crucial that reentry programs implement substance abuse treatment programs to help aid clients maintain sobriety and to reduce recidivism rates (Luciano et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2019). For Interviewee #22, they were not as actively involved with HFP at the time of their relapse, but receiving mental health treatment within the

correctional facility where they were housed helped them become more open-minded about

mental health services and attempting to reenter the community again.

These were the additional barriers mentioned by reentry clients at HFP in 2022. Altogether, all of the barriers mentioned in this chapter impacted the randomly selected participants who were interviewed during the initial evaluation in 2022. This information answers the first research question proposed and provides information to answer the second research question within this study. The following section will describe resources and services that would be beneficial to implement within the reentry program, HFP, based on the experiences expressed within the interview data collected in 2022.

Chapter Six: Findings II: Beneficial Resources

Based on the interview data collected in 2022 for the DOJ evaluation of this specific

reentry program, several barriers were identified that connect with the relevant literature

mentioned in previous chapters. The second research question of this study aims to use the

barriers addressed within the interview data to consider what future services should be provided

to help future reentry clients overcome barriers at this specific reentry program (see Appendix

C). The following subsections will be discussing common barriers that reentry clients

encountered upon reentering and what services could be provided within the program to

overcome these barriers.

Accessing Housing

The most common barrier that previously justice-involved individuals experienced upon

reentry was difficulties associated with accessing housing. In 2022, some reentry barriers

associated with housing included limited housing options based on one's record, accessing

documentation needed for housing during the pandemic, and housing inaccessibility based on the

lack of housing options available for those with felonies on their record. For interviewees who

suffered from challenges related to housing, their responses to these challenges varied.

Although 6 interviewees out of the 8 found housing, only 2 found housing using the

resources offered at HFP. The 4 interviewees who accessed housing either found resources

outside of the program or found someone who they could live with while searching for long-term

housing options. However, for the couple of interviewees who were limited by their records,

Interviewee #12 never explained their current housing situation and Interviewee #21 was living

in their automobile at the time of their interview. Based on the experiences of these reentry

clients, having a felony on one's record significantly limited the housing options available for previously justice-involved individuals, even if these felonies were nonviolent offenses.

Overall, for previously incarcerated individuals within this reentry program in 2022, having a record limited where they could rent and the services, they could use to access housing. Unfortunately, this is still seen within research today with previously justice-involved individuals struggling to access housing, especially if they have felonies on their record (Berry & Wiener, 2020; Bryan, 2023; Evans et al., 2019; Ewald, 2023). As mentioned earlier, the housing options that are available could be triggering due to the prevalence of crime within these areas (LeBel, 2017; Reece & Link, 2023; Simes, 2019). From these experiences, it is evident that housing resources are necessary for those reentering post-release, especially when overcoming the barrier of background checks and negative perceptions associated with previous justice system involvement.

Although housing is inaccessible for those reentering, several suggestions have been proposed to help previously justice-involved individuals overcome these housing barriers. LeBel (2017) gives a comprehensive overview of the general challenges that reentry clients encounter while reintegrating. Some of the challenges noted in this article include the stigmatization process associated with having a criminal record, the location of housing opportunities for reentry clients, and how difficult it is to access financial resources post-release (LeBel, 2017). Within this current study, previously justice-involved individuals shared their experiences with housing inaccessibility based on affordability, location, and background checks. Since these barriers are affecting those reentering communities across the U.S., several suggestions have been made to overcome these housing barriers.

In their article, Beck and colleagues (2023) outlined future implementations to improve housing accessibility outcomes for those reentering. At the reentry program level, they suggest planning housing accessibility for individuals prior to release, evaluating the needs of those who are attempting to access housing, and collaborating with community partners to help reentry clients access employment (Beck et al., 2023). Employment is a crucial consideration when discussing housing accessibility issues because upon reentering, previously justice-involved individuals may struggle with housing affordability and credit score requirements.

At the federal level, Beck and colleagues (2023) suggest that Second Chance Act and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants could be used to collaborate with programs on creating housing opportunities for those reentering, create financial incentives for those who would help find housing opportunities for those reentering, and provide financial resources to reentry clients who are struggling to gain access to housing due to lack of available financial resources post-release. Housing barriers are linked to structural and societal disparities in the U.S., which is why federal-level resources are necessary to consider when identifying potential solutions to housing inaccessibility (Goger et al., 2021; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019; Seim & Harding, 2020). For those who could not access housing or were at-risk for homelessness, Vaclavik and colleagues (2018) found that financial support to access housing and immediate housing resources for those who did not have access to stable housing proved to be beneficial for those reentering and their families. In summary, the housing barriers that previously justice-involved individuals encounter are at the local, federal, and societal level, and to overcome housing as a barrier, there must be resources provided to overcome challenges at every level.

Open-mindedness & Employment

Although research details the limited resources offered in other reentry programs, HFP offered beneficial resources to help previously justice-involved individuals overcome barriers associated with employment. While 6 previously justice-involved individuals encountered challenges when gaining employment, 4 out of these 6 individuals were able to gain employment through the resources provided through the reentry program. For the two reentry clients who were unable to access employment using those same resources, they still were able to access employment through services provided within the community rather than relying on the reentry program.

In other words, the employment services provided at HFP assisted most of the clients experiencing this barrier regain employment during their reintegration process. For those who could not access employment through these same resources, this aligns with research about employment services that must be designed around an individual's skill set and needs (Duwe, 2015; Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2013; Towne et al., 2023). HFP offers ways for individuals to conduct mock interviews, to access formal attire for job interviews, and to gain new certifications to make accessing employment easier than other reentry programs. Moving forward, employment services offered at this program should evaluate the career development services offered and consider how to make these services more individualized to those who may encounter more obstacles when attempting to reenter the workforce while reentering the community.

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Treatment

Current services offered at HFP helped overcome any barriers related to substance abuse for those reentering. There were two interviewees who had only recently joined the reentry program and therefore, did not know what resources were available to them at the time of the interview in 2022. As research shows, individualized treatment plans for reentry clients suffering from substance abuse significantly improves their chances of successfully reentry into their community (Friedmann et al., 2009; Kendall et al., 2018; Ray et al., 2021). Within this current study, reentry clients also mentioned the importance of mentorship, program staff, and shared experiential knowledge of the difficulties that come with remaining sober during reintegration.

Several interviewees commented on how their substance use began as a way to cope with traumatic experiences or to overcome mental health challenges. As mentioned, when answering the first research question, Interviewee #22 explained how they suffered from a mental health disorder along with a substance use disorder. This is a common occurrence for those who have drug-related offenses on their record and are in the process of reentering their community (Hanna et al., 2020; Houser et al., 2019; Lenz et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2019). Mental health challenges impact the reentry process for previously justice-involved individuals, especially for those who have a substance use disorder and are struggling with maintaining sobriety. In this study, Interviewee #22 had a unique experience since they received mental health resources while incarcerated, which resulted in the interviewee developing strategies that would prevent relapse. At HFP, there is more of an emphasis on creating an environment where clients' substance abuse and mental health challenges are understood to create a better treatment plan for each client. The support from staff and mentors who have similar experiences can empathize with these clients and offer advice on how to overcome these unique barriers. In other words, HFP does create

individualized treatment options for reentry clients within their program and relies on services that respond best to reentry clients' immediate needs concerning sobriety.

Fortunately, at HFP in 2022, interviewees seemed to be hopeful or optimistic about the substance-related treatments they either received or were going to receive in the future within this reentry program. Some studies have been conducted recently to determine what programming and services are beneficial for those with a substance use disorder, a mental health disorder, or co-occurring disorders. Substance use disorders and mental health disorders tend to overlap, which means that previously justice-involved individuals could be suffering from two or more disorders during incarceration and their eventual reentry process. Galletta and colleagues (2021) offer a comprehensive overview of how to assist those who are reentering while also suffering from co-occurring disorders. These future implementations include pre-release evaluation, pre-release treatment planning, education about previous substance for reentry clients use post-release, collaborating with non-judgmental treatment providers in the community, ensuring reentry clients have access to a support system, and reentry staff referring clients based on individual needs during their reentry process (Galletta et al., 2021; Nichols et al., 2021). According to Pettus-Davis and colleagues (2019), another way to improve treatment services offered within correctional setting and reentry programs is by creating manuals about evidence-based treatment plans for this specific population. These manuals could be used by staff with the correctional system, reentry programs, and other services to ensure the best treatment options were available to reentry clients who were suffering from various disorders during the reintegration process. In other words, while HFP provided substance abuse treatment plans that were designed with each reentry client's specific needs in mind, there has been research done to

determine what additional implementations could improve this process and accommodate for a variety of mental health and substance use disorders.

The Impact of Current-Day Barriers

Similar to what previous studies have found, this study reveals that the most common barriers for reentry clients at HFP included housing, employment, and sobriety. As mentioned, while this program offers a multitude of beneficial services, there is still a need for more individualized resources to help overcome situational barriers that arise during the reintegration process. Previously justice-involved individuals who cannot access shelter, employment, and treatment resources feel excluded within society and defined by their history. Using the findings revealed in this chapter, the following chapters will connect these findings to previously established theoretical frameworks and consider the future implications that arise from this current study.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

In the previous chapter, the two research questions guiding this project were answered. It was found that the most prevalent barriers to reentry at Hope for Prisoners (HFP) in 2022 included barriers to housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment. From there, the services that could be implemented in the future to create better reentry outcomes included more housing options for those with a record, more specific career development plans offered within the program, and individualized treatment plans for those suffering from substance use disorders. In this chapter, there will be discussions about how the results found within this current study can be linked to theoretical perspectives and relevant literature evaluating the effectiveness of reentry programs.

Current Barriers & Limited Access to Resources

Out of the 27 reported barriers to reentry in this current study, eight interviewees struggled to access housing, six interviewees encountered barriers to employment, and six interviewees struggled with maintaining sobriety. The interview data revealed how difficult it was for previously justice-involved individuals to reintegrate back into their community in 2022, especially when considering how their record reduced the resources available to them. These findings align with data collected from reentry clients at HFP, which reveals that reentry clients encounter similar challenges when reentering the community, especially concerning access to housing, employment, and treatment services (Troshynski et al., 2016; Troshynski et al., 2022; Troshynski & Willis, 2024). Upon reentering the community, previously justice-involved individuals encountered financial and legal barriers that limited their ability to obtain housing, employment, and treatment services.

Marx's Conflict Theory explained how powerful groups within society create rules that oppress those who are marginalized within a society. As the oppressed group, background checks are used to limit previously justice-involved individuals' access to stable housing and long-term employment options (Agan & Makowsky, 2023; Augustine, 2019; Hall et al., 2016; LeBel, 2017; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). More specifically, when there were housing options available for reentry clients at HFP, these options were located in high-crime neighborhoods, which would pose a safety threat to the individual and their families. Additionally, offense type did change how reentry clients overcome barriers to housing since those with felony convictions could not access housing when reentering their community. In other words, when discussing housing options, reentry clients were extremely limited based on how their record was used against them and what housing options were available to them.

For other primary barriers outlined in the findings, accessing employment and remaining sober during reentry also created barriers for previously justice-involved individuals in this current study. While not as challenging as navigating the housing market with a record, employment options were also limited due to the specific situations reentry clients encountered while searching for employment options. These situations included background checks, issues with resources offered at HFP, the inability to return to a prior form of employment and waiting for access to employment for weeks after being released.

These situations also align with the propositions of Marx's Conflict Theory because current legal barriers limit how one's record affects their process for gaining employment and how much time searching for employment takes compared to those without a record. As mentioned in the last chapter, this is why ban-the-box policies do not work as effectively as expected because these policies only extends the amount of time that a property owner or

employer must wait before conducting a background check on an individual who is reentering (Saba, 2019). Currently, the power dynamics and social inequality that previously justice-involved individuals experience while attempting to obtain housing and employment is apparent. This aligns with Conflict Theory because criminal records are used as a measure to discriminate against those who were previously incarcerated, especially those from low-income backgrounds and those identify as racial and ethnic minorities (Lindsay, 2022; Uggen et al., 2014). Additionally, contemporary policies and programs continues to reinforce the cycle of incarceration through the use of background checks, intense supervisory conditions, a lack of financial resources, and discrimination against groups that were considered marginalized prior to their incarceration (Beck et al., 2023; Goger et al., 2021; LeBel, 2017; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019).

In other words, modern policies and programs are designed to oppress those who have previous incarceration experiences, and therefore, those who identify with other marginalized groups with have a significant decrease in the limited resources available for previously justice-involved individuals. This is why future policy and program implementations are important to consider since most of the barriers associated with housing and employment stem from structural, federal, and societal barriers that prevent the successful reentry process of previously justice-involved individuals.

All of the interviewees who suffered from barriers to employment eventually gained access to employment from the services offered at HFP or by accessing resources within their community. However, obtaining employment was a barrier for reentry clients in this study depending on how long it took to access employment, what employment opportunities were accessible, and if they had the skills needed to be employed at these locations. Reentry programs are designed to help previously justice-involved individuals reintegrate, however, staff within

these programs struggle to gain access to resources and services based on the structural,

financial, and social barriers that those reentering encounter within their community. While there

are housing and employment opportunities within communities, accessibility relies heavily on

whether the property owner or employer will deem the applicant as eligible for those

opportunities. Those in power, such as policy makers, employers, and property owners are the

ones who influence what conditions must be met to access necessities during the reentry process.

There is an imbalance in power, which results in previously justice-involved individuals being

excluded within society, resulting in more marginalization and disrupting their successful

reintegration.

For those who struggled with maintaining sobriety post-release, this also could be linked

to Conflict Theory. Again, the resources available to previously justice-involved individuals are

based on the social inequalities they face and the power dynamics that affect resource

availability. For example, with substance abuse treatment, effective, evidence-based treatments

are reserved for those without a record, for those who can afford these programs, and for those

who can access these treatment programs based on the services being offered within this program

(Albertson et al., 2020; Galletta et al., 2021; Harper et al., 2021; Woods et al., 2013). In other

words, resource accessibility is dictated by those economic interests, institutional guidelines, and

societal expectations and norms. For those who cannot afford treatment or access treatment

based on their record, those who have financial resources and are not stigmatized based on their

lack of justice involvement are able to access effective treatment programs for sobriety. This is

especially true when looking at substance abuse treatment for previously justice-involved

individuals who are marginalized based on their racial and ethnic identity (Garcia-Hallett, 2019;

Kirkegaard & Manaugh, 2023; McCorkel, 2017; Williams et al., 2020). Previously justice-

involved individuals are limited based on their record and how this group is perceived within society, which demonstrates the need for policies and programming that reduces the structural inequalities while also creating equitable opportunities for substance abuse treatment (Galletta et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2020; Nichols et al., 2021; Pettus-Davis et al., 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2017).

For the six interviewees who suffered from a history of substance abuse, the barriers they encountered post-release created challenges while maintaining sobriety. Those suffering from substance abuse or co-occurring disorders may be inclined to relapse due to how intense the reentry process is, especially without necessary resources that would result in a successful reintegration (Hanna et al., 2020; Luciano et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2019). Similar to the previous barriers discussed, those suffering from substance abuse are also limited by their record and by the legal barriers that restrict their access to beneficial services. For previously justice-involved individuals they do not have access to the insurance plans or treatment options that those without a record can access (Albertson et al., 2020; Freudenberg et al., 2008; Mellow & Greifinger, 2007; Woods et al., 2013). In this current study, most of the 6 reentry clients who suffered from substance abuse were maintaining sober at the time of their interview and the two newer reentry clients were encouraged to take advantage of the resources available at HFP.

In this current study, housing, employment, and substance abuse were primary barriers that previously justice-involved individuals encountered when reentering their community in 2022. Additionally, this can be linked to Marx's Conflict Theory because powerful groups within society created conditions and laws to limit previously justice-involved individuals' access to resources. In other words, based on the interview data collected in 2022 at HFP, background

checks and the stigma associated with having a record limited reentry clients' opportunities to obtain access to resources to help them overcome primary barriers to reentry.

Labeling, Self-Perception, & Stigmatization

Within this study, previously justice-involved individuals implicitly or explicitly described how their label within society affected their reentry journey. Interviewees described the process of being excluded within society based on background checks, offense type, and criminal history when attempting to gain access to services. This aligns with Link and colleagues' Modified Labeling Theory, which explains how formal labeling limits opportunities to employment, housing, relationships, and other needs within modern society (Link et al., 1989). Upon release, interviewees within this study encountered barriers based on the formal labels placed on them and the record that they were required to disclose to gain access to resources. Modified Labeling Theory asserts that individuals are limited by the formal label placed on them. In this study, reentry clients elaborated on how their histories were being used to assess them as individuals post-release, even if they had changed over time. As a result, their record was used to determine what resources and services they could access, which created more barriers to overcome rather than providing resolutions to create a smoother transition back into society.

Labeling is a crucial consideration to have when looking at previously justice-involved individuals and their reentry process because these formal labels negatively impact one's self-perception and worth (Feingold, 2021; Moore et al., 2018; Petersilia, 2001; Sinko et al., 2020). Another labeling theory mentioned previously is Matsueda's Labeling Theory and how labels can alter one's self-perception based on how that individual is perceived by others within

society. According to Matsueda's Labeling Theory, the label placed upon an individual in conjunction with their treatment within society based on their label will alter their self-perception (Matsueda, 1992).

In this study, this would be aligning more with reentry client narratives that discussed interactions with others and how they perceived themselves following several interactions post-release. For example, Interviewee #8 elaborated on how they experienced barriers to employment, but they were able to successfully access employment and reenter the community due to the familial support they received post-release. This support system and the lack of judgment from their family allowed this individual to have hope and feel supported during their transition back into the community. On the other hand, Interviewee #18 described being labeled as a felon and how the stigma associated with that label results in a sense of hopelessness when searching for housing and other resources. As shown from these examples, how others respond to formal labeling impacts one's self-perception and this change in self-perception will affect their reentry process.

Being considered a "felon," "criminal," or any other stigmatizing label post-release will adversely impact one's reentry journey. As research shows, labeling negatively impacts one's self-esteem, self-perception, and behaviors, especially when considering how these labels limit access to resources during the reentry process (Kavish, 2017; King & Smith, 2023; LeBel, 2017; Mingus & Burchfield, 2012). Both Modified Labeling Theory and Matsueda's Labeling Theory explore how those who are formally labeled by institutions and excluded within society would be more inclined to recidivate based on the lack of opportunities available to labeled individuals. In this current study, a majority of interviewees in 2022 acknowledge how their label affected resource accessibility and how this altered their behavior or perception during their reentry

process. In short, the formal labels placed upon previously justice-involved individuals in conjunction with how society perceives that label will influence their reintegration process in various ways.

When researching reentry barriers, Conflict Theory explains the inequality that those reentering face due to the power imbalance that exists between those who influence the laws and rules compared to those who must follow them post-release. Conflict Theory also highlights how structural inequalities limit the opportunities of those reentering and labeling demonstrates the how societal perception is negatively influenced by this inequality. The labeling theories explored above show how self and societal perception is negatively influenced by the discrimination that those reentering encounter based on their history. Between how oppressed previously justice-involved individuals are and how negative societal perception results in exclusion, this results in more barriers to a successful reentry process and these factors contribute to cycles of recidivism. This is why there needs to be future implementations designed to reduce the inequalities that formerly incarcerated persons encounter post-release, to educate the public about the experiences of this group, and to challenge stigmatizing attitudes associated with this group. These implementations would reduce shame associated with one's record, encourage more community partnerships to support those reentering, and allow for previously justice-involved individuals to have more resources during their reintegration process.

The Value of Individualized Reentry Programming

One of the main concerns addressed throughout this current study was the value of individualized reentry services and treatment plans. Studies evaluating reentry programs have found one of the main challenges to reentry are the reliance on the same resources and treatments

for all reentry clients in a respective program (Ames, 2019; Kendall et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2021). Every previously justice-involved individual will have unique experiences, needs, and goals during their reentry process, so reentry programs should consider how to create individualized community reintegration plans. As noted in the first chapter, not all reentry programs are designed the same way and therefore, the programming at each program will vary significantly. However, at Hope for Prisoners (HFP) the majority of interviewees from 2022 were satisfied with their experiences at HFP and the services they received within the program. This does not dismiss the barriers they encountered while reintegrating, but the reentry staff within this program do care about their clients and want to help them successfully reenter the community.

During their interviews, reentry clients who had attended the program for a longer period of time acknowledged how HFP improved their resources and began providing more services to help overcome barriers to reentry. Although reentry clients in this study still encountered barriers based on their record and the stigma associated with it, HFP attempted to alleviate the stress of reentry by providing community-based services and working with reentry clients to better understand what their current challenges were in 2022. This is why the findings revealed that interviewees were able to gain access to employment and substance abuse treatment within the program.

However, housing accessibility was a difficult barrier to overcome with only two interviewees using the resources offered at HFP to gain access to housing. This is why individualized reentry services are necessary to consider at HFP because the resources currently available may not be effective for everyone entering the program. For example, those who have committed a violent offense or have a felony on their record encountered more intense housing

and employment barriers than those who have a lesser offense on their record (Huebner et al., 2019; Rydberg, 2018; Whittle, 2018; Williams et al., 2019). Again, this does not mean the resources at HFP are ineffective, however, there is limited access to these resources based on how previously justice-involved individuals are perceived within society and the intense structural barriers that have been implemented to limit their involvement with the community. This means that future policies and programs should be created with the goal of reducing structural barriers, power imbalances, and stigmatization that limits services for previously justice-involved individuals. In summary, for there to be more opportunities for successful reentry, there needs to be future implementations that create equitable access to resources and reduces discrimination against previously justice-involved individuals.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion & Future Implications

With over 5 million adults being incarcerated in the U.S. in 2021 and over 7 million being released in 2022, it is clear that the issues surrounding the cycle of incarceration and reentry are affecting millions of people in America (BJS, 2023; Wang, 2024). Previously justice-involved individuals are significantly impacted by the collateral consequences that they encounter post-release and finding strategies to overcome these barriers creates more anxiety and frustration due to how limited the available resources are for this specific population. In 2023, there were 33,000 individuals within the Nevada correctional system (PPI, 2023b). Specifically, 13,400 adults were under community supervision, 7,900 adults were incarcerated in jails, and 11,300 adults were incarcerated in federal and state prisons (PPI, 2023b).

In the U.S., the issue of reentry is affecting millions of people, either directly via legal and structural barriers to reentry or indirectly through what resources they can access and what support they have available to them. In Nevada, with thousands of adults being incarcerated and released in the state, it is important to understand the experiences of those reentering and what challenges they are encountering to improve the reentry process in the state.

The purpose of this current study was to understand the experiences of previously justice-involved individuals reentering their community at a local reentry program and explore what common barriers they encountered during their reintegration process. In addition to this, these responses were used to understand what resources were beneficial during the reentry process and what services should be provided to reentry clients in the future. In other words, from the 22 interviews conducted at Hope for Prisoners (HFP) in 2022, the interview data collected explored what barriers affected the reentry process, what resources were used to overcome these barriers,

and what future implementations would be beneficial for those reentering in this specific location.

This current study included relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to determine what barriers affect the reentry process, how barriers influences recidivism rates, and why previously justice-involved individuals encountered a multitude of barriers during their reentry process. Qualitative research methods were utilized to understand the personal experiences of previously justice-involved individuals during their reintegration process and why they encountered unique barriers while attempting to gain access to reentry services. Within this study, it was determined that the most prevalent barriers to reentry included barriers to housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment. It was also acknowledged that more housing resources, career development services, and individualized treatment plans for substance abuse would help previously justice-involved individuals overcome these current barriers.

However, due to the small sample size and the interview data being collected from reentry clients within a specific reentry program, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond this current study. More research needs to be conducted to better understand individuals' experiences with contemporary barriers to reentry and what resources would benefit previously incarcerated individuals during their reentry process in America. Before expanding on the future research implications of this study, the next section will give an overview of the limitations of this current study and how the findings of this study should be interpreted.

Future Implications & Research Directions

When studying reentry programs and the various services provided within them, the findings within every study can be used to determine what future implementations are needed

105

within programs and what policies would be beneficial to implement for previously justice-involved individuals who are encountering barriers during their reentry process. As discussed in the last few chapters, the most prevalent barriers to reentry within this study included barriers to accessing housing, employment, and treatment options for substance use and mental health disorders. From these findings, there are future implications that should be considered when identifying reentry barriers arising at the individual, structural, and federal levels.

Within reentry programs, housing needs should be evaluated prior to release and correctional facilities should be working with community partners to assist those reentering gain access to employment opportunities that will allow them to gain access to financial resource to obtain housing (Beck et al., 2023; Silver et al., 2021). The policies that would reduce stigmatization for previously justice-involved individuals searching for housing include the use of SCA and HUD grants to create financial resources and to incentivize those who would help offer housing opportunities (Beck et al., 2023). These suggestions overlap with some of the future implications that could be implemented to increase employment opportunities for previously justice-involved individuals. Silver and colleagues (2021) suggest that job training should begin within correctional facilities, which would allow individuals to gain access to various credentials and skills related to employment. Once again, a program-related suggestion is that correctional facilities should be collaborating with sources of employment within the community to help those reentering gain stable, long-term employment within the community (Silver et al., 2021). Since the barriers to housing and employment overlap based on concerns related to background checks, the sealing or expungement of records could also prove to be beneficial for those who are attempting to access housing or employment opportunities (Beck et al., 2023; Saba, 2019).

For substance abuse and mental health treatment, most of the future implementations are suggested for programs rather than overarching policies. To better serve reentry clients suffering from co-occurring disorders, some future implementations include pre-release evaluation of client's specific needs, substance abuse education programs offered during reentry, collaboration with non-judgmental community partners, and reentry staff making referrals to treatment based on individuals' identified needs (Galletta et al., 2021; Nichols et al., 2021). To create more understanding and opportunities for treatment, Pettus-Davis and colleagues (2019) also suggest that creating comprehensive guides for evidence-based treatment of co-occurring disorders to provide to correctional facilities, reentry programs, and other services may help with increasing the quality of treatment resources for those reentering. These are some of the future implementations at the individual, structural, and federal level that could help previously justice-involved individuals overcome reentry barriers they encounter post-release.

As mentioned earlier, these findings cannot be generalized to other reentry programs or communities, but future studies could be conducted to better understand prevalent barriers to reentry and how to overcome these challenges during the reentry process. One future study could interview reentry clients from several reentry programs across the country to determine how barriers to reentry differ based on location, cultural values, and community support. Additionally, this future study could be used to determine how common it is for previously justice-involved individuals to experience barriers to housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment. Using this new study's results, researchers could determine if different cities experience distinct reentry barriers or if general reentry barriers are shared across several American cities.

Another future study that could be conducted would identify which housing resources are most beneficial to reentry clients post-release. In this current study, it was acknowledged that one's record decreases housing options for those who were reentering at HFP in 2022. However, future research should focus on understanding what resources are beneficial when gaining access to housing based on the experiences of reentry participants at several reentry programs. A multitude of studies have been conducted that reveal how difficult it is for those reentering to access housing, so more research needs to be conducted to determine what resources and policies are effective when gaining access to housing post-release (Augustine & Kushel, 2022; Hall et al., 2016; Lutze et al., 2014; Moschion & Johnson, 2019; Remster, 2021).

A third future study could work towards understanding the barriers that exist for those with a felony record compared to those with lesser offenses on their record. One of the most important findings within this study was how one's housing options were limited by their record, especially if they had been convicted of a felony. In the future, it would be beneficial to conduct research on how a felony record impacts one's access to housing, employment, education, treatment programs, and other resources within different reentry programs. This would identify if those with a felony record are impacted by legal barriers, geographic location, community support, and stigmatization compared to those who have not been convicted of a felony. Overall, while several studies could be conducted to better understand the experiences of previously justice-involved individuals, this current study shows the value in conducting studies centered around identifying prevalent barriers to reentry, effective housing resources for reentry clients, and barriers to reentry that arise based on the offenses on one's record.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

SUCCESSES/BARRIERS (For Interviews with Clients, 2022)

1. Since January of 2020 (the start of the DOJ grant), and since you've been a client at Hope For Prisoners, what are some of the biggest barriers you've encountered on your reentry journey?
   a. How did Hope For Prisoner (the organization) help you overcome these barriers?
   b. What's an example?

2. Since January of 2020 (the start of the DOJ grant), again, since you've been a client at Hope For Prisoners, what are some of the biggest successes you've experienced?
   a. How did Hope For Prisoners (the organization) help you or facilitate these successes for you?
   b. What's an example?

3. Overall, what's an example of how COVID-19 has impacted you on your reentry journey?
   a. How did Hope For Prisoners help you during this time?
   b. What's an Example?

4. What are some of your goals for yourself, for your future? 2- , 5- , 10- years down the road?
   a. How has Hope For Prisoners helped you realize and plan for these goals?
   b. What's an example?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to let me know about what works well?
   a. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about continued obstacles or barriers you're experiencing?

Appendix B: Demographics

Table 1. Table of Interviewee Demographic Information

	N	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Age	24			38.4	21	54
Gender	24					
Male		14	58.3%			
Female		10	41.7%			
Race	24					
White/Caucasian		15	62.5%			
Black/African American		4	16.7%			
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		1	4.2%			
Asian/Asian American		0	0%			
American Indian/Alaskan Native		0	0%			
Mixed/Multiracial		2	8.3%			
Other		2	8.3%			
Unknown		0	0%			
Ethnicity	24					
Hispanic		4	16.7%			
Non-Hispanic		20	83.3%			
Marital Status	24					
Single		16	66.7%			
Married		1	4.1%			
Divorced		3	12.5%			
Separated		4	16.7%			
Entered the Program	24					
Pre-release		11	45.8%			
Post-release		13	54.2%			
Total	24					

Appendix C: Needs Based on Reported Barriers

Table 2. Table of Services Needed Based on Reported Barriers

Services Needed Based on Interview Data	Rank	Barriers Experienced	Number of Interviewees
Housing	1	Unable to access housing and homelessness.	8
Employment	2	Longer time to access employment if employment options were available.	6
Substance Abuse Treatment	3	Difficulties associated with maintaining sobriety during reentry.	6
Transportation Services	4	Unable to access transportation based on lack of documentation and financial resources.	2
Documentation Services	5	Unable to access documentation or delays associated with gaining access to documentation.	2
Mental Health Treatment	6	A lack of mental health treatment services during reentry.	1
Total			25

Appendix D: Coding of Reentry Barriers

Table 3. Table of Coded Interview Data

Interviewee	Quotes	Open Code	Thematic Code
Interviewee 1	"Umm, my drug addiction" "I had to quit my job, well I didn't quit, but I had to put it on hold for a little while and then, umm, I went back to work but that place just didn't work for me and then they found me a job."	Interviewee 1 claimed they struggled with maintaining sobriety. They also quit a previous job and had to find a new one at HFP.	Reentry barriers related to substance abuse and employment.
Interviewee 2	"Um really the challenge is like when you first get out, and then you kinda, you kinda get out to nothing, and then you have all these rules and expectations to do this and maintain this, and work and um I mean some people. I guess at first the hardest thing to do is stay sober. And then um when you start at nothing it's kind of depressing and it's kind of like, you feel like you can't do anything"	Interviewee 2 claimed they struggled with maintaining sobriety while reentering due to the barriers that exist post-release.	Reentry barriers related to substance abuse.
Interviewee 3	"So, I found out in AA, 'if you want what I got, do what I do,' so, I really just glommed onto the situation…. when I fell and relapsed, I called him, you know. I didn't want to but I was like, 'man, if I keep going this route, I'm going-' so, I trusted him in what he told me and I called him and told him, and he told me, 'man, don't trip,' and he helped me get right back on point,"	Interviewee 3 claimed they struggled with maintaining sobriety and relapsed. However, the mentor they had at HFP helped them after their relapse.	Reentry barriers related to substance abuse and relapse.
Interviewee 4	"Housing all the way. Housing. It took me forever to find somebody to rent to me because of my felonies. So that was uh a big obstacle when I came home. I've now found somewhere, but it took me months to find somebody. So housing was my main obstacle."	Interviewee 4 claimed they struggled with housing the most due to having felonies on their record.	Reentry barriers related to housing due to the felonies on their record.
Interviewee 5	"We run into these hurdles through the NDOC, you know, it can be very discouraging, they can actually turn somebody to go the opposite direction and it can make you second guess yourself, it can make you, umm, it can make you make irrational decisions, it	Interviewee 5 claimed they struggled navigating between HFP reentry program and the systems managed by the department of	Reentry barriers related to different goals between the department of corrections and the reentry program.

	can make you go back to old thinking habits, and thinking patterns, which, you know, we all know where the road leads," "And I think Hope has changed the mindset of at least a few officers there and hopefully those officers can be somewhat of an advocate for the other ones to help push us forward because you know,"	corrections. They claimed this can result in people returning to their former habits and behaviors.	
Interviewee 6	"Well, I actually, I'm a nurse— or well I was. I can't be a nurse again until 2026 because of it." "But um, being used to being in that – and then finding out you- you can't work that was my biggest obstacle."	Interviewee 6 claimed they struggled with accessing a previous form of employment and therefore, had to gain access to a new form of employment.	Reentry barriers related to employment because they could not access their previous form of employment and had to search for a new job.
Interviewee 7	"I went to one of the Hope graduations I was talking to a few people and one guy was like, "hey, did you get a driving job yet?" and I said no." "He sent me to get fresh produce and they hired me on the stop, no questions asked, they just knew I was a graduate from there and they knew my background and they just kept it under wraps, you know, the human resource guy– it didn't matter that I was an ex-felon, they just – I mean I graduated from the program so, you know, it worked out for me so. They've helped me since I've been out"	Interviewee 7 claimed that they initially did not have access to employment. However, HFP reentry staff helped them gain access to employment through one of their community connections.	Reentry barriers related to employment.
Interviewee 8	"It was like maybe 3 weeks later and I had a job and I'm at the same job like right now. I'm the floor manager now, for probably one of the biggest gun holster companies in the country." "Uh transportation, uh, no— transportation I just caught the bus for a while and that was only because— I couldn't – I had some barriers uh with my license."	Interviewee 8 claimed they struggled to gain access to employment and documentation.	Reentry barriers related to employment and documentation. More specifically, they could obtain their driver's license upon release.

Interviewee 9	"My biggest barrier was transportation, right, so, because I knew that in order to do what I needed to do there was no such thing as catching a bus there, so, I, my biggest thing was transportation, and, so, because I had to jump through a couple hoops to make that happen." "No, I mean, there were other issues, there were housing issues and things that came up afterwards, but once I got the job, that was enough for me to be able to do whatever I needed to do for housing, food, and whatever else I needed."	Interviewee 9 claimed they struggled to gain access to transportation to get to HFP reentry program. Additionally, they also struggled with housing and other barriers, but claimed that their new job helped them navigate these barriers.	Reentry barriers related to transportation and housing.
Interviewee 10	"I think the only barrier I had – the biggest barrier that I had when I started the program is that… my company wanted to promote me… you know, I would've been moved to a salary and they don't want you to be on a salary there, they want you on an hourly, that way they can track your hours, stuff like that"	Interviewee 10 claimed they struggled with challenges associated with employment. While housed in a transitional living facility, they wanted the interviewee to remain on an hourly work schedule, so the interviewee had to wait to receive a promotion.	Reentry barriers related to employment because they were living in a transitional living facility where their supervisory conditions required them to remain on an hourly work schedule.
Interviewee 11	"I mean for housing it took a while, but it's just a process that you had to go through and all the documentation and like I was missing some documentation, but because of COVID, uhh, it took a lot, oh, a lot longer than it normally would as if it wasn't COVID."	Interviewee 11 claimed they struggled with gaining access to housing due to missing documentation. They had to wait longer to gain access to these documents during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Reentry barriers related to housing due to missing documentation. Access to documentation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Interviewee 12	"Background checks." "For the apartments, they make you jump through ten thousand— ok so I used to be a drug addict so I can't rent nowhere. The other thing is I'm not – I'm not eligible for low-income	Interviewee 12 claimed they struggled with gaining access to housing due to their record, more specifically their	Reentry barriers related to housing due to their criminal record.

	housing. There's a lot— those kinds of things need to be changed because of my criminal background."	history of substance-related offenses.	
Interviewee 13	"Housing." "Yeah, you can't even, you can't even get anything. And the few places that will take you are in such bad areas, that it would just be a trigger for most people to go back."	Interviewee 13 claimed they struggled with gaining access to housing. They also mentioned how housing located in specific areas can be a trigger and encourage people to return back to engaging in crime.	Reentry barriers related to housing. Also, the housing that was currently available was "triggering" and would promote recidivism.
Interviewee 14	"Ok one of my biggest barriers that thankfully I have a boyfriend that I live with; but the biggest barrier I see for me, and any other felon is housing." "Yeah, and so it's just under his name and the two roommates, you know. That's really the only thing that I could do— cause I—I, uh, believe like the only places that don't really ask are like silver living houses, that know that's what you are or like really in the ghetto. Like back in the slum of things."	Interviewee 14 claimed they struggled to gain access to housing based on their felony record.	Reentry barriers related to housing due to having felonies on their record.
Interviewee 15	"I wasn't able to really get in touch with the job developer because it was just difficult to with the line –" "I just really, I seeked employment elsewhere and I ended up finding a job that I'm still with today. And within that job I've been promoted and stuff like that so that's been awesome. But, obviously it burned courage to go through the job developers here but it didn't work out that way for me"	Interviewee 15 claimed they struggled to gain access to employment due to the lack of communication from the job developer at HFP.	Reentry barriers related to employment based on the inefficient resources provided within the reentry program.
Interviewee 16	"Well my reentry, uh, barrier, um was opening up because I had a hard time like expressing because I'm not an expressful type per— Well I wasn't uh uh. I never used to like to open up."	Interviewee 16 claimed they struggled with expressing their emotions during their reentry process.	Reentry barriers related to emotional expression.

Interviewee 17	"Getting to the building. I didn't have a car at that time, right, so, my husband had to be the one catering to me, and it was challenge for him because, obviously, he was the only one working at that time, I mean I worked as soon as I came home because I actually had friends that I worked for in businesses, so I worked from home so I didn't struggle with work or commute because I worked from home but when it came to him bringing me here to do my classes to do all that stuff, everything that had to do with the program that required transportation was a challenge, I never took a bus so he would bring me."	Interviewee 17 claimed they struggled with transportation and had to rely on their spouse to get to the reentry program.	Reentry barriers related to transportation.
Interviewee 18	"I think— and I know I mean I can't speak for everybody. But I know from my experience, from other 'experiences that I've talked to and that I've seen, our biggest problem that we have is housing."

"And um, so um there's really nowhere for us to go. And because we're now felons and that we have that stigma against us, there's really nowhere for us to find places for us to rent. It is, but it is very few and far between, or it's in not very good neighborhoods and things like that." | Interviewee 18 claimed they struggled with gaining access to housing and stigmatization. This stems from being considered a "felon" based on their record. | Reentry barrier related to housing due to having felonies on their record. As a result, the interviewee also experienced stigmatization due to them being considered a "felon." |
| Interviewee 19 | "They are understandable. Everyone is really understanding. They really try – and do - understand you and what you're going through and they never give up. So, that's what made everything easier." | Interviewee 19 claimed they did not experience any barriers. Instead, they claimed that reentry staff were empathetic and helped them through the reentry process. | Did not experience barriers to reentry. |
| Interviewee 20 | "Yeah, yeah, because it was hard for me at one point, uh, well, when I was an addict, I was never consistent and held accountable for my actions, so I've gotten way better at it." | Interviewee 20 claimed they struggled with addiction and sobriety. However, | Reentry barriers related to substance abuse. |

		from being in HFP, they admitted that they have improved within the program.	
Interviewee 21	"Hmm, addiction and stability." "Yeah. I mean I'm still, um, in the process of trying to find stable housing, so that way I can get my kids back. My kids have done more time than me already," "Um, I, I've been, I, I actually applied for housing and I got on the list, um, but I'm still like number three-thousand-something-something"	Interviewee 21 claimed they struggled with addiction and that they struggled to gain access to housing. At the time of the interview, Interviewee 21 was living out of their motor vehicle due to the lack of housing options available.	Reentry barriers related to substance abuse and housing. For housing, this interviewee was living in their motor vehicle since they could not access housing at the time of the interview.
Interviewee 22	"Oh shoot, when I went home, I seen the effect of what I caused and that got me into depression and got me back into methamphetamines." "And just sober for like maybe a month and a half as when I got released, and then, I was just right back into the dirt."	Interviewee 22 struggled with substance abuse and mental health challenges. More specifically, they suffered from depression, which created challenges when attempting to remain sober during their reentry process.	Reentry barriers related to mental health and substance abuse. The interviewee's depression resulted in their relapse and reincarceration.

Appendix E: Thematic Coding for Reentry Barriers

Table 4. Table of Thematically Coded Interview Data

Barriers to Reentry	Thematic Code	Quotes
Housing	Record limiting housing accessibility	"Housing all the way. Housing. It took me forever to find somebody to rent to me because of my felonies. So that was uh a big obstacle when I came home." (I4) "For the apartments, they make you jump through ten thousand— ok so I used to be a drug addict so I can't rent nowhere. The other thing is I'm not – I'm not eligible for low-income housing. There's a lot— those kinds of things need to be changed because of my criminal background." (I12) "Yeah, you can't even, you can't even get anything. And the few places that will take you are in such bad areas, that it would just be a trigger for most people to go back." (I13) "Ok one of my biggest barriers that thankfully I have a boyfriend that I live with; but the biggest barrier I see for me, and any other felon is housing…. I, uh, believe like the only places that don't really ask are like silver living houses, that know that's what you are or like really in the ghetto. Like back in the slum of things." (I14) "I think— and I know I mean I can't speak for everybody. But I know from my experience, from other 'experiences that I've talked to and that I've seen, our biggest problem that we have is housing…. there's really nowhere for us to find places for us to rent. It is, but it is very few and far between, or it's in not very good neighborhoods and things like that." (I18)
	Other barriers limiting housing availability	"No, I mean, there were other issues, there were housing issues and things that came up afterwards, but once I got the job, that was enough for me to be able to do whatever I needed to do for housing, food, and whatever else I needed." (I9) "I mean for housing it took a while, but it's just a process that you had to go through and all the documentation and like I was missing some documentation, but because of COVID, uhh, it took a lot, oh, a lot longer than it normally would as if it wasn't COVID." (I11)

	Lack of stable housing & homelessness	"Yeah. I mean I'm still, um, in the process of trying to find stable housing, so that way I can get my kids back…. I actually applied for housing and I got on the list, um, but I'm still like number three-thousand-something-something" (I21)
Employment	Gaining new access to employment post-release	"I had to quit my job, well I didn't quit, but I had to put it on hold for a little while and then, umm, I went back to work but that place just didn't work for me and then they found me a job." (I1) "Well, I actually, I'm a nurse— or well I was. I can't be a nurse again until 2026 because of it… then finding out you-you can't work that was my biggest obstacle." (I6) "He sent me to get fresh produce and they hired me on the stop, no questions asked, they just knew I was a graduate from there and they knew my background and they just kept it under wraps, you know, the human resource guy– it didn't matter that I was an ex-felon, they just – I mean I graduated from the program so, you know, it worked out for me…" (I7) "It was like maybe 3 weeks later and I had a job and I'm at the same job like right now. I'm the floor manager now, for probably one of the biggest gun holster companies in the country." (I8)
	Inefficient employment-related services	"I wasn't able to really get in touch with the job developer…. I seeked employment elsewhere and I ended up finding a job that I'm still with today. And within that job I've been promoted and stuff like that so that's been awesome. But, obviously it burned courage to go through the job developers here but it didn't work out that way for me" (I15)
	Supervisory conditions creating employment barriers	"I think the only barrier I had – the biggest barrier that I had when I started the program is that… my company wanted to promote me… you know, I would've been moved to a salary and they don't want you to be on a salary there, they want you on an hourly, that way they can track your hours, stuff like that" (I10)
Substance Abuse	Maintaining Sobriety	"Umm, my drug addiction." (I1) "I guess at first the hardest thing to do is stay sober. And then um when you start at nothing it's kind of depressing and it's kind of like, you feel like you can't do anything." (I2)

119

		"Yeah, yeah, because it was hard for me at one point, uh, well, when I was an addict, I was never consistent and held accountable for my actions, so I've gotten way better at it." (I20) "Hmm, addiction and stability." (I21)
	Relapse	"When I fell and relapsed, I called him, you know. I didn't want to but I was like, 'man, if I keep going this route, I'm going-' so, I trusted him in what he told me and I called him and told him, and he told me, 'man, don't trip,' and he helped me get right back on point," (I3) "And just sober for like maybe a month and a half as when I got released, and then, I was just right back into the dirt." (I22)
Transportation	Unable to access motor vehicles	"My biggest barrier was transportation, right, so, because I knew that in order to do what I needed to do there was no such thing as catching a bus there, so, I, my biggest thing was transportation, and, so, because I had to jump through a couple hoops to make that happen." (I9) "Getting to the building. I didn't have a car at that time, right, so, my husband had to be the one catering to me, and it was challenge for him…. when it came to him bringing me here to do my classes to do all that stuff, everything that had to do with the program that required transportation was a challenge, I never took a bus so he would bring me." (I17)
Documentation	Delayed access to documentation post-release	"I just caught the bus for a while and that was only because… I had some barriers, uh, with my license." (I8) "I mean for housing it took a while, but it's just a process that you had to go through and all the documentation and… it took a lot… longer than it normally would as if it wasn't COVID." (I11)
Stigmatization	Stigmatization associated with being considered a "felon"	"And um, so um there's really nowhere for us to go. And because we're now felons and that we have that stigma against us, there's really nowhere for us to find places for us to rent." (I18)
Mental Health	Mental health resulting in substance abuse relapse	"Oh shoot, when I went home, I seen the effect of what I caused and that got me into depression and got me back into methamphetamines…. And just sober for like maybe a month and a half as when I got released, and then, I was just right back into the dirt." (I22)

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

M.A. in Criminal Justice							*Expected May 2024*
Thesis: Barriers to a Real Second Chance: Seeking Redemption While Set Up for Failure

B.A. in Criminal Justice							*May 2022*

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Incarceration & Reentry; Trauma & Victimization; Gendered Criminal Justice Contact

PEER REVIEWED MANUSCRIPTS

Troshynski, Emily, Carolyn Willis, and **Kara Forrai**. "'Knowing and working with someone who has made it means I'm going to make it too': Experiential Knowledge as a Catalyst for Transformation in Reentry and Beyond." (*Under review at Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society*)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant							*August 2022- January 2023*
Supervisor: Dr. Emily Troshynski
- Organized qualitative research data. Transcribed 22 interviews with reentry clients and 1 focus group interview with reentry staff. Assisted in coding qualitative data based on general themes identified within the transcripts.

Tourism Safety and Crowd Science Lab					*August 2021*
Supervisor: Dr. Joshua Donnelly
- Conducted research and created a literature review on the dynamics of protest violence and how police attempt to de-escalate conflict within large crowds.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor							*January 2024 – May 2024*
CRJ 104: Introduction to Administration of Justice
- Researched, organized, and created an introductory-level course for students to gain knowledge and recall how the criminal justice system functions in the United States. Specifically, how policing agencies, court systems, and correctional facilities share a

collective responsibility to respond to criminal offenses and create social order within America.
- Created and presented lectures with PowerPoint slides to complement online assignments provided on WebCampus.

Guest Lecture *December 2023*
CRJ 428: Women & Crime
- Recorded a lecture on Zoom based on LGBTQIA+ individuals and how these populations interact with the justice system. Specifically, how transgender individuals interact with the correctional system and how this population faces disparities within this setting.

Guest Lecture *November 2023*
CRJ 104: Introduction to Administration of Justice
- Created a lecture based on the roles of various courtroom actors, the defendant's rights, and the process of jury selection for a criminal trial.

Teaching Assistant *January 2024 – May 2024*
CRJ 270: Introduction to Criminology
Supervisor: Dr. Elena Bejinariu
- Supported online learning by responding to students' concerns via email and grading assignments submitted through WebCampus.

August 2023 – December
Teaching Assistant *2023*
CRJ 428: Women & Crime
Supervisor: Dr. Alexandra Nur
- Assisted in grading written assignments and editing pages on WebCampus to add new assignments or make them more accessible for undergraduate students.
- Supported hybrid and online learning by responding to students' concerns via email and grading assignments submitted through WebCampus.

Teaching Assistant *January 2023 – May 2023*
CRJ 428: Women & Crime
Supervisor: Dr. Emily Troshynski
- Assisted in grading written assignments, responding to student emails, and editing pages on WebCampus to add new assignments or make them more accessible for undergraduate students.

Teaching Assistant *August 2022 – May 2023*
CRJ 104: Introduction to Administration of Justice
CRJ 450: Seminar in Criminal Justice - Corporate Security
Supervisor: Professor Darwin Morgan
- Assisted in grading written assignments, responding to student emails, and editing pages on WebCampus to add new assignments or make them more accessible for undergraduate students.

Urban Adventure Support Staff   *August 2021 – May 2023*
GSC 300: Second-Year Seminar - Civic Engagement in Urban Communities
Supervisor: Megan Kelly

- Facilitated students' learning by encouraging them to use the 5 core skills during high-stress situations.
- Supported students during crime scene simulations, challenged them to use critical thinking skills, and encouraged them to use unique skill sets when facing conflict in their everyday lives.
- Taught students how to use the core skills of the class, which were leadership, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and empathy.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

Rebel Challenge Scholarship, *UNLV* ($11,000)   *2018-2019*

HONORS AND AWARDS

Dean's Honors List, *UNLV*   *7 Semesters*

PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT & SERVICE

Criminal Justice Club, *UNLV*   *September 2022- May 2022*
Club Graduate Officer

REFERENCES

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Dr. Alexis Kennedy
Professor
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