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The Successful Road of Reentry After Conviction

Coretta Paula Butts
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Coretta Paula Butts

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

The Successful Road of Reentry After Conviction

by

Coretta Paula Butts

MA, Saint Joseph's College, 2011

BS, Saint Joseph's College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

July 2021

Abstract

A problem exists for ex-convicts who are undergoing re-assimilation: their career options are limited once the label of ex-convict is applied to them. Labeling, which has created a gap between unsuccessful prisoner reentry and successful prisoner reentry, is a prevalent issue in the United States. Although research is available on the effects of labeling, limited information is available regarding the social effects labeling has on ex-convicts during their reentry process. The purpose of the study was to examine the current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs in the state of Florida to investigate why they are failing to assist ex-convicts in successful reentry. This qualitative study with an ethnographic design explored the effects of societal labeling on the ex-convict population in Hillsborough County along with why current county policies and procedures are not ensuring ex-convicts' basic needs, like housing, education, and employment options, when convicts are released from prison. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Becker's labeling theory. A random sample of participants was selected including case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialists, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by pinpointing new knowledge and ex-convict reentry stability, along with valuable policies and procedures for ex-convict reentry programs in Hillsborough County, Florida.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all of those imprisoned or recently released from prison who have found much difficulty with reentry. You are not alone; do not allow your past or others to dictate your life or your success.

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Praise be to God. This has been a long, interesting journey. God has led me through each and every distraction, hurdle, and enemy attack that has come along my way. I thank you, Jesus, for picking me up every time I wanted to quit or give up. To my one and only baby girl, mommy's biggest cheerleader, Peyton Clarke Espinoza; for you, I would climb to the top of any mountain; I furthered my education and reached for the stars for you. Baby girl, the sky is the limit; there is nothing in this world you cannot achieve. To my parents Geoffrey and Marcel Butts, thank you two for always supporting me and having my back; I could not have asked for better parents; I love you and respect you both more than you could ever know. My siblings Junea and Geoffrey you both already know my love for you both is endless even at those moments I fail to show it (Geoff this one's for you the sky is the limit). My other half Kim (Ken) Lamar I thank you for putting up with my crazy and always encouraging me to stick to my goals and stay true to myself you are love. To my friend and daughter's father Anthony (Chris) Espinoza we started this journey together and even though we parted ways prior to me becoming Dr. Butts you have always been super supportive of me furthering my education and I thank you for that. My family, Nicole Herbert, Michelle R., Leslie R., and two of my day one's Michelle P. (Cosby), Noonie, Shawn L. and Michael F. (Flemmy) thank you for always keeping me grounded and always encouraging me to push further whether it's a health goal or maintaining my own personal balance. My good friends and Walden Doctoral colleagues Jessica Chrystal and Toniann Walker, thank you for the 3am talks and encouraging me and being positive mentors in my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The ability for convicted criminals to reenter society successfully is a primary necessity for them to resume their lives. Reentry facilities play a crucial role in assisting ex-convicts towards successful reentry into society (Viglione et al., 2017). The United States has had the highest numbers of incarcerated individuals in the world since 2002 (Anderson, 2015). Ex-convicts face a significant problem with re-assimilation to work, which has created difficulty between unsuccessful prisoner reentry and successful prisoner reentry. With limited career options for ex-convicts, prisoner reentry is a prevalent issue within the United States. Statistics show that county jails may house a daily average of 731,200 inmates at one time (Golinelli & Minton, 2014). An extremely high rate of incarceration exists in the United States, with over 1.5 million prisoners being housed annually in state and federal prisons (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014).

There appears to be a revolving door in the jail population with an average of 12 million arrests being processed and released annually (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017; Minton & Golinelli, 2014). These astronomical numbers of mass incarceration prove that incarceration is a significant issue, and lack of successful reentry programs may be their probable cause. Reentry refers to services formulated with the intent of reforming convicts while preparing for the return to society. Reentry means “all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and to live as law-abiding citizens” (Petersilia, 2003, p. 3). Though the types of reentry programs offered may vary, many researchers agree that correctional education programs

help to reduce recidivism and increase employment rates (Foley, 2001; Formon et al. 2017; Jenson & Howard, 1990; Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1997).

Since the 1990s, researchers have examined various types of prisoner reentry programs (Formon et al., 2017; Grown et al., 2017; Sampson & Laub, 1997). Reentry has a massive disparity for the United States and should be researched more closely on a state-to-state level. Specifically, an ex-convict reentry issue exists throughout the State of Florida. How do program procedures influence ex-convict reentry? According to the Florida Department of Corrections (2017), inmate admissions for 2016-2017 were 28,783 (25,273 were males and 3,510 were females); these high figures have decreased approximately 5% for 2016-2017 from the previous fiscal year. Significantly, almost 49% of these inmates admitted during 2016-2017 had served time in the State of Florida prison system before (Florida Department of Corrections, 2017) The high rates of recidivism among ex-convicts demonstrate a significant problem with successful ex-convict reentry (Fazel & Wolf, 2015). The Bureau of Justice Statistics' Recidivism Study of State Prisoners followed a sample of ex-convicts released from 30 states for 5 years. After their 2005 release, according to statistics, 67.8% of prisoners were rearrested within a 3-year timespan and 76.6% were rearrested within a 5-year timespan (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017).

Reentry programs may help ex-convicts toward successful re-assimilation. Researchers are unsure of what attributes genuinely correlate with successful re-assimilation; inmates face many hurdles and obstacles during their reentry process. Vance and Noelle (2018) noted that labeling is a sociological and criminological theory that

shows a large correlation among negative societal responses that may lead individuals who have done wrong to act or become more deviant due to the impact of societal labeling. Thus, labeling is making successful prisoner reentry less probable. According to Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, all sexual predators, sexual offenders, career criminals, and convicted felons must report to the Criminal Registration Unit (CRU) within 48 hours of being released from jail or prison or relocating into Hillsborough County (Hillsborough, County Sheriff's Office, 2019). While registering as a felon may alert county residents of whom to be aware, instead, it might send the message of who to stay away from, who not to hire, and who to prejudge and label ex-convict based on their prior arrest (i.e., felon, rapist, murderer, thief).

Background of the Study

Researchers posited there is a need to develop post-release programs to assist ex-convicts with successful reentry (Wright et al., 2014). It appears that reinforcing correctional education programs with post-release reentry programs may positively affect successful re-assimilation for ex-convicts. Specific intervention programs include (a) mental health counseling, (b) Alcoholics Anonymous, (c) drug awareness, (d) family counseling, (e) cognitive-behavioral programming, (f) parenting courses, (g) job training, and (h) educational or (i) vocational training (Erdem et al., 2016; Formon et al., 2017; Lowenkamp et al., 2009; Mboka, 2017; Tong & Farrington, 2008; Walters, 2005). However, past studies found that ex-convicts have much difficulty (a) locating housing, (b) finding employment, (c) receiving mental health counseling, (d) entering substance abuse treatment, and (e) complying with the terms of their release (Cobbina, 2010;

Kazura, 2017; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; McNeeley, 2018; Morani et al., 2011).

Reentry programs might be a platform or a gateway toward a prisoner's successful rehabilitated life. Moreover, reentry programs may work best for releasees when the programs have been completed thoroughly.

As with most intervention programs, re-assimilation may be more cohesive when applied at its earliest stages. It is possible for the reentry process to begin for individuals, prior to prison release, whether it be peer support (Bellamy et al., 2012) or taking on the role of a life coach (Schinkel & Whyte, 2012); positive support and commonality might produce higher levels of reentry success. There is an array of programs offered within the state of Florida prisons, such as mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, personal counseling, HIV/AIDS treatments, and anger management (Florida Department of Correction, 2015). Florida, as a state, does not offer all programs to all of their detention centers or prisons. Therefore, all necessary provisions to successfully re-assimilate in the state of Florida are not available to all; this exclusion might be due to location, availability, offense history, finances, or length in prison term.

Hillsborough County offers residential and nonresidential services for children and adults at risk of recidivating through Children's Services Hillsborough County Department of Children's and Families. Services consist of counseling, day care, residential treatment, and emergency shelter. Reentry is more likely to be successful when housing placements post-release are stable, safe, and secure (Bell et al., 2013; Lutze et al., 2013; Lowenkamp et al., 2006; McNeeley, 2018). Securing proficient housing is one of the most critical and time sensitive factors involving successful re-

assimilation (La Vigne & Parthasarathy 2005; McNeeley, 2018; Nelson et al., 1999; Roman & Travis, 2004). Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles Driver License Offices have five locations within Hillsborough County, which issue driver's licenses for a fee or replacement driver's license and state identification cards at no cost with inmate identification card and current release papers.

Abe Brown Ministries and Drug Abuse Comprehensive Coordinating Office (DACCO) are both nonprofit reentry service providers located in Hillsborough County. Both nonprofits offer drug and alcohol support services, case management, counseling, and family counseling. Abe Brown Ministries also assists with employability, parole, and probation requirements, along with clothing assistance. Shelter for men and women released from prison is provided for a \$35.00 minimum a week rent. Where some of these services provided in Hillsborough County are a necessity to ex-convict successful reentry, most ex-convicts do not have transportation or the monetary resources to pay rent or obtain employment right after release; therefore, many of these programs lack effectiveness. Reentry may be more successful when the ex-offender does not face extra barriers, burdens, and obstacles such as homelessness and unstable housing (Clark, 2016; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011; Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Roman & Travis, 2006; Wallace, 2015). In most cases, the need for family support and guidance may also be critical factors that decipher whether an ex-convict can reenter society successfully. Lack of family support, legal obligations, medical necessities, and transportation conflicts are a few hurdles that an ex-convict may face. These barriers might cause ex-convicts to seek housing options apart from family or loved ones (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Kazura, 2017).

Problem Statement

This qualitative study explores the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs located in the State of Florida to successfully reenter back into society.

Hillsborough County has not updated their county “Task Force” statistics since the 2008-2009 fiscal year. In that year, Hillsborough was ranked the highest within the state of Florida for transferring 673 juvenile delinquency cases into the adult court system.

Hillsborough County also received one of the highest capita referral rates in the state of Florida for having 11,126 delinquency referrals into the juvenile justice system for the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

Though Hillsborough County Task Force statistics have not been publicly displayed in a decade, current arrest rates are still extremely high within Hillsborough County (Florida Department of Corrections, 2015). In 2014, 78% of Hillsborough County inmates were legally considered to be innocent, and were not convicted of a crime, yet 21.4% of those individuals served longer than 1 week in jail while another 8.7% of those inmates served more than 1 month after being found innocent (Florida Department of Corrections, 2015). These 2014 Hillsborough County statistics were the highest rates out of the 20 Florida counties researched during the 2014 fiscal year. These statistics show there is a major problem regarding the current policy and procedures in Hillsborough County reentry (Florida Department of Corrections, 2015). These statistics suggest that Hillsborough County may benefit from looking more closely at what is working and what is not working in their current reentry policies and procedures. Current Hillsborough

County policies and procedures may be failing; due to a societal label that has not been carefully planned for within Hillsborough County's current policy and procedures. This lack of reentry planning has created a major problem for ex-convicts and their successful reentry process. Because of their felon labels, numerous ex-convicts are not permitted housing or employment in many communities within Hillsborough County.

Prisoner reentry is a prevalent issue within the United States, and career options are notably inadequate for ex-convicts. Researchers agree offenders should take work and training programs to better prepare themselves for reentry (Anderson et al. 2018; Richmond, 2014). However, locating successful reentry training programs appears to be more of the issue, which is that although Hillsborough County offers many programs to its ex-offender population, due to lack of funding, nature of crime committed, age of the ex-offender, and sex of the ex-offender, these programs are not available for all. The reentry programs available in Hillsborough County are primarily geared towards mental health counseling, housing, medical necessities, and acquiring emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. There are a few programs geared towards assisting ex-convicts with employability. However, assistance is limited because it can only come through donations and grant funds when and if funding is available.

Organizations like Hillsborough Ex-Offender, Employability Workshops, Reentry Network, and Employment Opportunity Program, all located throughout Hillsborough County, offer job training, education courses, employment assistance, and referrals. These organizations also assist ex-convicts with job placement and social service referrals, based upon the current funding available in the budget.

Prior studies indicate that a majority of ex-convicts would participate in voluntary reentry programs, if the programs were readily available (Anderson et al., 2018; Morani et al., 2011). The lack of reentry program availability may be a predetermining factor that might attribute to adverse outcomes and may result in higher recidivism rates.

Approximately 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons annually (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017; Carson & Sabol, 2012; Schlager, 2013). These ex-convicts will either reenter the general population or find placement in state institutions (Subramanian et al., 2015).

The failure to provide successful reentry programs such as general education degree (GED) programs and effective treatment services for ex-convicts at risk for reoffending may also affect specific geographic areas more than others. This study's premise focused on Hillsborough County and the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County through their reentry programs in Florida to reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. Subsequent studies will focus on specific program development as an extension to this study, to be mentioned in Chapter 5. Future researchers will seek to identify which programs were more helpful than others, which programs were less helpful than others, and which programs were not present.

In 2003, FS 775 enacted the "Criminal Registration Unit (CRU) and Self-Arrest," which mandates all career criminals, convicted felons, sexual offenders, and sexual predators follow policy and report to the CRU within 48 hours of release to Hillsborough County. Once an ex-convict reports to CRU, they must follow the procedures and register

with Hillsborough County as a career criminal, convicted felon, sexual offender, and or sexual predator. This study identified factors that most likely assist an ex-convict to be successful in reentry after labels are applied. The overall research question for this study was: What policies and procedures should be put in place to assist Hillsborough County to increase successful ex-convict reentry? It was necessary to revise and re-build current policies and procedures designed for Hillsborough County, ex-convict reentry. Moreover, Hillsborough County reentry policies and procedures should have been researched and analyzed further. The problem was many nonprofit organizations must follow the policies in place to receive state and federal grants and funding. However, these organizations may not have policies and procedures in place, which may make it more difficult for ex-convicts to reenter successfully at a community level (Garland et al., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact labeling has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. The target population consisted of ex-convicts, correctional officers, counselors, housing specialists, and any individuals who had a direct connection to ex-convict reentry in Hillsborough County, Florida. This study's findings may contribute to social change by providing new knowledge, ex-convict reentry stability, along with valuable policies, and procedures for ex-convict reentry program in that county. There were no data to confirm which Hillsborough County reentry programs are

more helpful at this time. However, as previously mentioned in the problem statement, subsequent research focused on programs, program development, and program outcomes.

Research Questions

From the problem statement and purpose of the study, the principal research question asked: How do current policies and procedures in Hillsborough County, Florida, support effective ex-convict reentry? I explored current policies and procedures that Hillsborough County has in place to assist with successful ex-convict reentry.

Theoretical Foundation

This qualitative study explored the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs located in the State of Florida to successfully reenter back into society.

Labeling theory is a sociological and criminological theory that states, a strong, negative societal reaction to an individual's wrongdoing can lead the individual to become more deviant (Kroska et al., 2017). Furthermore, recent studies have shown that being labeled lowers educational opportunities (Kirk & Sampson, 2013) and increases recidivism by altering self-image (Kroska et al., 2017). Kroska et al. (2017) concluded there is a strong correlation among criminal sentiments, beliefs that are devalued, and things that are discriminated against. According to labeling theory, an official deviance label promotes the development of deviant self-meanings. Becker (1963) stated that labeling creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to labeling theory, an official deviance label promotes the development of deviant self-meanings. Becker (1963) stated that labeling creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to labeling theory, an official deviance label promotes

the development of deviant self-meanings. Becker (1963) stated that labeling creates a self-fulfilling prophecy

This study's research qualitative method had an ethnographic design. According to some theorists, the ethnographic researcher intends to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of study with emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). The phenomenological research design is also commonly paired with qualitative studies. It focuses on the concept or issues a group similarly experiences, which made this design an appropriate approach to identify participants' personal connections with how reentry policies and procedures in Hillsborough County affect its ex-convict population. Phenomenological research designs are normally more time consuming regarding exploring participants' personal experience and can require up to recruitment of 20 participants. I used scholarly journals, peer-reviewed articles, participant observations, and interviews to build this study.

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempted to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter society. The conceptual framework guiding this dissertation was Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, also known as the basic needs theory, proliferated from Maslow's theory of human motivation paper. Maslow's theory states that humans strive to accomplish specific needs; once that need is met, a person desires to fulfill the next one. The constructs underlining this theory are

explanations for self-actualization, based upon the premise that each hierarchical level of motivational needs is contingent upon accomplishing the step in the prior level. The theorist's original hypothesis stated that having one's basic needs met is a necessary prerequisite to pursuing a fulfilling life (Maslow, 1943). Studies today rely on Maslow's theory to better understand social and emotional well-being (e.g., Gorman, 2010; Henwood et al., 2014) and behavior change in relation versus health (e.g., Freund & Lous, 2012; Henwood et al., 2014; Roychowdhury, 2011).

The key constructs of the study were Hillsborough County reentry policies and procedures, the labeling theory, and Maslow's basic needs theory. Along with those four constructs, (a) housing, (b) employment, and (c) education are some specific issues that ex-convicts face that might affect successful reentry and basic needs from being met due to societal labeling. Conceptually, (a) housing, (b) employment, and (c) education also fall within the five-level tier of Maslow's basic needs theory. These needs play an important role in the ex-convict's reentry process; ex-convicts who are negatively labeled might experience more difficulties locating housing and employment along with surviving and providing for themselves outside of jail. Regarding labeling theory, the theoretical framework of the study, Vance and Noelle (2018) believed that ex-convicts who experienced lower levels of labeling have higher success with reentry.

Nature of the Study

As previously mentioned, the nature of this study was to explore the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter back into society. I

searched to find new explanations for the effects labeling has on Hillsborough County reentry programs and how their current policies and procedures affect its ex-convict population along with ex-convict housing, education, and employment options. Labeling plays a major role within the criminal justice system. Individuals may be labeled as many things, such as felon, ex-convict, convict, jail bird, or prisoner. This study shows the effects Hillsborough County reentry policies and procedures and applied labels pose on ex-convicts as they attempt to reenter society and locate housing, employment, and education. Contingent upon the nature of the crime committed, some individuals might also be labeled after the crime they were accused of, sentenced for, or acquitted from (i.e., thief, rapist, murderer, drug dealer, etc.).

In this study, I intended to provide new knowledge and valuable insight on current policies and procedures in Hillsborough County. I interviewed participants, reviewed case studies, and completed comparison analysis, observations, and field research, which are all recognized as strengths in qualitative studies. Qualitative research is naturalistic and is suited to understanding the general public and everyday life and is dependable according to the qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The paradigm design is a philosophical and theoretical framework of scientific school or discipline that applies theories, laws to perform, and support experiments and research (Creswell, 2009).

Definitions

The definition section lists terms, phrases, and definitions used commonly throughout the topic of ex-convict reentry.

Behavioral interventions: Require action rather than just talking alone. The individual is required to do something proactive regarding his or her intervention; it is action-oriented, not talk-oriented (Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006).

Helper therapy principle: HTP, the helper therapy principle, involves the benefits someone receives by helping another person with similar challenges (Pagano et al., 2010).

Prisoner reentry: A geographic and dispositional intervention, occurring at once inside former prisoners' home communities and at the same time inside former prisoner's heads (Miller, 2014).

Recidivism: A habitual relapse into crime; chronic tendency toward repetition of criminal or antisocial behavior patterns. It is defined more inclusively as reoffending, rearrest, or reconviction for the same or a different criminal offense (Wohl et al., 2011).

Reentry Programs: Some reentry initiatives direct participants toward a variety of services related to need and generally appear to be successful in providing increased access to services and improving justice-related outcomes (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006).

Wounded Healer: Recovering substance users and ex-convicts may become wounded healers (Brown, 1991). Maruna (2001) argued that "the desisting self-narrative frequently involves reworking a delinquent history into a source of wisdom to be drawn from while acting as a drug counselor, youth worker, community volunteer, or mutual-help group member" (pp. 117).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the concepts a researcher believes to be true without having proof or evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first assumption was the sample size was large enough to address the study's gap in the literature in locating the critical components in successful ex-convict reentry. The second assumption was participants answered all questions truthfully and understood their replies were confidential. The third assumption was this study allowed room for common themes involving current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs for exploration.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations usually restrict populations, so the results of the study are generalized to a finite group (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The first delimitation is the population of the participants. The participants consisted of ex-convicts who successfully re-entered the community, ex-convicts who participated in reentry programs but had difficulty re-entering society, reentry program supervisors, and managers, and all who have or had a direct rapport with Hillsborough County reentry programs. By interviewing these participants, my research question was answered during my interviewing process. For convenience, interviews and research were conducted in Hillsborough County where I was a current resident at the time of the study.

Limitations

Limitations refer to the restrictions in any study over which a researcher has no control (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The study's participants were individuals who successfully re-entered, ex-convicts who completed a reentry program, and individuals

who worked with reentry programs. One limitation was my use of a small sample size of 10 people. To avoid personal bias, I did not interject my thoughts or opinions while interviewing my participants. Creswell (2009) stated during observations that a researcher may see certain things that are personal or private to the participant, and therefore a researcher is unable to report, which is also known as nonreactive observations. Webb et al. (2000) referred to these nonreactive observations as basic noninstructive observations in a research setting that usually are out of the researcher's control (Webb et al., 2000). Another limitation Creswell (2009) mentioned during the observation process is that subjects may find researchers to be invasive or intrusive; it is essential for a researcher to attempt to develop a rapport with participants, so there is an open level of comfortability.

Significance of the Study

Some institutions offer training programs, counseling, and schooling to inmates, while other institutions provide minimal or no programs at all. Hillsborough County reentry policies and administrative procedures do not help ex-convicts successfully find work after reentry. First, this study helped fill a gap in literature by exploring the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. Second, locating common trends in reentry programs that provide solid training, job placement, and aid in the reduction of recidivism, may be a benefit to ex-convicts during their reentry process. Lack of labeling might help increase employment opportunities and also assist in building ex-convict's morale. Therefore,

examining various ex-convict reentry program policies and procedures can be worthwhile to both ex-convicts and stakeholders. The findings in this study might contribute to social change because understanding the affects reentry programs have on ex-convicts is an essential step toward creating positive social change and successful reentry. Ex-convict reentry has received attention from researchers; however, several individuals continue to struggle with rebuilding themselves after incarceration. Moreover, the success ratios of reassimilation in ex-convicts are generally not high. Recidivism is common in the United States, and unfortunately, society perceives it as normal because approximately two-thirds of ex-convicts are rearrested within a 3-year period (Anderson et al., 2018; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017; Durose et al., 2014). More than six individuals out of 10 are reincarcerated for parole violations and new convictions (Mukamal et al., 2015). The U.S. jail population is significantly higher than the U.S. prison population; U.S. jails process and release an average of 17.14% more inmates a year than U.S. prisons. For many citizens and stakeholders, the rising cost of recidivism and incarceration are the main reasons reentry has become a topic of interest. I located successful tactics within reentry programs and how they might have improved Hillsborough County's current reentry programs and procedures, which may be beneficial to ex-convicts during their reentry process, increasing the chances of success.

Significance to Practice

This study may contribute significantly to the ex-convict population by giving ex-convicts a chance to reenter society without carrying the label for which they have

already paid restitution. This study may also clarify to professionals who work with this population long term effects of labeling.

Significance to Theory

The current policy and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs give a clear depiction of why recidivism rates are high within the county. No specific policies or procedures have been designed in Hillsborough County to assist ex-convicts with successful reentry. The alignment of the study with labeling theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs showed the connection of these theories with the many barriers the former inmates experience due to the stigma society places upon them. For many, even getting their basic needs met is a longtime struggle.

Significance to Social Change

A widespread agreement exists amongst researchers in regard to ex-convict reentry being one of the leading criminal justice challenges in the United States (Anderson et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2011). Therefore, knowing what works and what policies and procedures are deemed successful in the process of ex-convict reentry can create benefits significant to social change and may also decrease the high amount of recidivism. Researchers have found assisting ex-convicts with employment opportunities and providing job training programs to be effective in reducing recidivism (Formon et al., 2017). The labeling theory demonstrates prisoners can be prevented from getting education and jobs because people see the word "convicted" and automatically associate label that with a criminal rather than a rehabilitated individual.

I examined the impact the labeling theory has had on ex-convicts when they attempted to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. This study may be a benefit to ex-convicts during their reentry process. Lack of labeling may help increase employment opportunities and assist in building ex-convict's morale; therefore, examining various reentry programs for ex-convicts can be lucrative to both ex-convicts and stakeholders. The findings in this study might contribute to social change because understanding the effects reentry programs have on ex-convicts is an essential step toward creating such social change for successful reentry. In this study, I hoped to locate Hillsborough County reentry programs that provide solid training and job placement programs for ex-convicts through their current policies and procedures.

Summary and Transition

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact labeling has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. I looked at what procedures could guide an ex-convict toward successful reentry to help the ex-convict avoid experiencing recidivism, and how program procedures influence ex-convict reentry. Chapter 1 also introduced the theoretical framework, which is the labeling theory, which may prevent the ex-convict from opportunities such as receiving appropriate education and job placement. Individuals may see the word "convicted" and automatically associate the applied label with being a criminal rather than a rehabilitated individual. This study examines how

labeling can assist an ex-convict to experience successful reentry or the opposite recidivism. Maslow's basic needs theory is the conceptual framework which helps align the importance of an ex-convict's basic needs being met first, prior to ex-convict taking on any other task.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review provides extensive information on the current reentry policies and administrative procedures of Hillsborough County. The issue is Hillsborough County's reentry policies and administrative procedures do not help ex-convicts successfully find work after reentry due to societal labeling. This qualitative study explored the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempted to use current policies and procedures of the reentry programs to reenter society successfully and avoid recidivism. Current Hillsborough County policies and procedures may be failing due to societal labels, which have not been carefully planned for within current policy and procedures. The purpose of this study was to explore ex-convict reentry programs in the Hillsborough County and how they affect ex-convict housing, education, and employment options.

Researchers within the last decade have described ex-convict reentry as one of the most prominent criminal justice issues within the United States (Hall et al., 2016; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; Mijs, 2016). Most researchers agree that reentry is unavoidable because, eventually, the vast mass of inmates will be released into the general population (Anderson, et.al., 2018; Formon et al., 2017; Subramanian et al., 2015). To investigate the issue of ex-convict reentry, I applied Becker's (1963) labeling theory as a theoretical framework and the conceptual framework of Maslow's basic needs theory (1943). I aimed to identify successful programs and procedures to assist ex-convicts with reentry and avoid recidivism. To create a point of reference for answering these questions, in this chapter, I researched past studies conducted on reentry. At the

beginning of the literature review, the methods used by pioneer researchers regarding prisoner reentry are explored. Next, the characteristics associated with program success are identified. To address that gap in ex-convict reentry, the goal of the current study was to acknowledge the following question: How do reentry policies located in Hillsborough County in the State of Florida affect its ex-convict population? Available Hillsborough County reentry programs and ex-convict opportunities are also explored.

To build this literature review, I accessed the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and Florida State Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) employment programs for offenders once released from jail or prison and investigated reentry programs design. Hillsborough County's current reentry programs, policies, and procedures were reviewed and analyzed, along with the details and attributes that have made these programs successful or unsuccessful. Academic achievement, high school diploma/GED, college graduation, skilled trades, faith-based reentry programs, AA, mental health treatment programs, work training programs, and family support are a few factors that may contribute to higher rates of employment for ex-convicts, hence, lowering the amount of recidivism. Labeling, unstable housing, no employment, low education, and lack of family support are challenges to successful re-entry and these challenges are common barriers that ex-convicts often face after their release.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate articles and books used in this review of the literature, I performed an online search through Academic One-File, ERIC, SAGE, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, and EBSCO databases, accessed through Walden University library website,

and Florida State's Hillsborough County library website. I also used the reference section of similar studies to locate more research and articles that were relevant to my research. The following were search terms used: *Hillsborough County reentry programs*, *Hillsborough County reentry policies and procedures*, *prisoner reentry*, *successful reentry programs*, *reentry*, *ex-prisoner success*, *ex-convict reentry*, *ex-convict re-assimilation*, *ex-convict reentry programs*, *State of Florida reentry programs*, and *re-assimilation* in the State of Florida. The following review of literature assisted in guiding my approach for the current study and closed the existing gaps in knowledge regarding reentry. I focused on peer-reviewed articles in this literature review when I used the reentry themes.

Theoretical Foundation

Qualitative researchers are obligated to fully explain their theoretical lens throughout each step of their research process (Janesick, 2004). Becker's labeling theory (1963), which developed from Lemert's labeling theory, is the theoretical foundation of this study. The labeling theory underlines social responses to deviance and crime and it critiques the effects labeling has on criminals suggesting that crime levels may also increase due to labels categorizing individuals and their behavior as deviant. Becker formed labeling theory from Lemert's social reaction theory. Lemert's theory pinpoints two key terms: "primary" and "secondary deviance." Primary deviance "has only marginal implications for the status and psychic structure of the person concerned" (Lemert, 1967, p. 40). However, secondary deviance "becomes central facts of existence for those experiencing them, altering psychic structure, producing specialised

organisation of social roles and self-regarding attitudes” (Lemert 1967, p. 41). Though the gateway to the labeling theory began long before both researchers did their work, these theorists are equally well respected for contributing to the fundamentals of the labeling theory.

Currently, researchers believe, after being imprisoned, an ex-convict feels as though their outside environment becomes a prison as well. Labeling combined with low self-esteem contributes to further increasing poor outcomes for the ex-convict instead of gearing them toward conforming to social norms (Orrick et al., 2011). The issues to date relating to the labeling theory consist of who finds certain acts deviant (i.e., the state, government, law enforcement) and why these acts have been deemed wrong or deviant. Are actions being considered deviant because they lack societal conformity, or are these labels placed for the good of society? Usually, a correlation exists between young adults who spend time in and out of the criminal justice system and the labels applied to them. Reentry and social service providers are the main players who can impact how politicians and communities respond to ex-convicts and their reentry journey (Sampson, 2011). Garland et al. (2014) found labeling communities as gang-affiliated or unsafe are the primary concerns of stakeholders regarding ex-convicts reentering their communities. Sampson (2011) mentioned the importance of institutional social networks and building relationships with other organizations as imperative in growing collective efficacy for ex-convicts. Though the government is the main funding source for most nonprofit organizations and reentry programs, it is important to educate individuals and have the community on board. Ex-convict community integration is important to limit fear, stop

labeling, and to shape the reentry organizational structure to fit the community's needs, not based upon government funding (Delgado 2012).

Many incarcerated adolescents also possessed documented behavior problems stemming back to early pre-school (Gottfredson, 2001; Lahey et al., 2003). Academic failure can lead to feelings of inferiority: Teachers and fellow students use labels to group students as the smart ones, popular ones, nerds, geeks, outcasts, druggies, deviants, and so on. These factors can easily play a role in snowballing toward success or failure for individuals depending on how they are being labeled. Sussman et al. (2007) also provided a list of factors that play an enormous role in teenage conformity: suffering from peer pressure, wanting or desiring approval from others, possessing strong negative affiliations, and having a history of mingling in deviant behavior.

Social controls hold an enormous effect on individuals, especially those who are searching for a sense of belonging. People who do not feel as though they belong to a group are more likely to follow suit whether positively complying with a social group, athletic team, or adhering to deviant behavior social controls such as gangs or inmates (Lafleur & O'Grady, 2016). Criminology has the attention of researchers as a large sum of ex-convicts are returning to the criminal justice system shortly after being released, Sampson and Laub attributed much of their early research (2000-2010) to exploring the theoretical lens of the effects of self-control and informal social control on reintegration (Lafleur & O'Grady, 2016). Laub and Sampson (2001) found that where some factors play a leading role in crime reduction for adults, they may result in adverse effects in adolescence. Employment may be responsible for contributing negative attributes to

juvenile behavior, yet work is correlated positively with reducing criminal activity in adults (Paternoster & Bushway, 2001).

Literature Review

Prisoner Reentry and Post Release Housing Options

Past studies have shown that stable housing allows the ex-convict time to focus on other vital areas in their life, which are needed to build or create successful reentry (i.e., look for employment, attend programs, or support groups). Kazura (2017) believed if a releasee has a stable home environment, they are more likely to remain in compliance with parole, probation, and the law (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Kazura, 2017). Kazura (2017) described prisoner reentry as a significant criminal justice issue affecting the United States (Kazura, 2017; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Prisoner reentry is unavoidable because eventually most prisoners will be released back into the population (Anderson et al., 2018; Subramanian et al., 2015; Travis & Visser, 2005; Petersilia, 2004). Stability may be the top necessity for newly released prisoners, obtaining and securing stable and affordable housing is often the first obstacle individuals are faced with post-release (Kazura, 2017; LaVigne et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2011; Roman & Travis, 2004; Schlager, 2013). Academic literature has noted homelessness and residential instability as the most profound challenge regarding ex-convict reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011; McNeeley, 2018; Roman & Travis, 2006).

Homelessness is a barrier that many releasees face after serving their jail or prison sentence. Kurbin and Stewart (2006) emphasized that the place of residence for ex-offenders after having been labeled had a significant effect on their ability to reintegrate

into society (Kurbin & Stewart, 2006, p. 172). Once labels are placed on ex-convicts, the labels make it challenging for them to secure permanent housing. Homelessness and housing instability are the main challenges in successful ex-convict reentry with homelessness being a common outcome for many ex-convicts (Gunnison & Helfgoff, 2011). Federal and state policies prohibit felons from residing in most communities and public housing facilities (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Roman and Travis (2006) found even when properties are available, many housing authorities will not provide housing for ex-convicts; further, those may not have a clean background check, mainly because of their label, and the safety of the community (Lutz et al., 2014).

Various researchers also tied labeling to homelessness from ex-convict housing dilemmas which stem from lack of family support, estranged relationships, or limited finances (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011; Lutze et al., 2014; Philips & Spencer, 2013; Rodriquez & Brown, 2003). Many high-risk offenders encounter homelessness or may reside in low-income motels or temporary housing predominately located in impoverished, high-risk, unsafe areas, and therefore, they are more likely to re-offend (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Miller et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2016; Wallace, 2015). Lutze et al. (2014) noted high-risk offenders living in high-risk conditions are more likely to take part in criminal activity and criminal behavior and thus can be a threat to community safety. Lutze et al. concluded that providing ex-offenders with housing along with necessary support services increase the probability of successful re-entry.

Most researchers agree if one's basic needs are not met such as housing and food, such lack is not conducive toward successful recovery (Formon et al., 2018; Maslow, 2011; Padgett et al., 2012). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress (2016) revealed that on an average night in 2016 approximately 549,928 individuals were experiencing homelessness within the United States. The mass majority (68%) accounted for homeless persons residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe havens, while 32% are reportedly in unsheltered environments (AHAR, 2016).

There is a high correlation between homelessness and reentry with nearly 1% of the United States incarcerated at any given time, and with 2% the United States population being under parole or probation supervision (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Research shows a correlation between formerly incarcerated individuals or those with a current or past criminal background tend to avoid any government buildings, hospitals, and intervention centers due to the fear of being rearrested (Brayne 2014; Goffman, 2014).

Hamilton (2010) investigated releasees involved in state and government reentry programs, ex-convicts who enroll in Reentry Court Initiative (RCI) programs, which is a deviation from The Office of Justice Programs (OJP). OJP are reentry court programs created in the early 2000s and established for reentry courts to provide reentry support to releasees in the following six areas: accountability to the community, active oversight, assessment and planning, graduated and parsimonious sanctions, rewards for success, and management of support services. Hamilton's study consisted of over 300 RCI participants

and a test group of over 600 ex-convicts over a 3-year time span, post-release. Hamilton concluded that re-entry court participants had higher numbers of reincarceration.

Hamilton's (2010) research followed state and government policies and procedures that are set in place for the reentry process. Hamilton attributed these higher rates of recidivism to what is referred to as the "supervision effect," which is when the ex-convict is working closely with the court or being supervised closely by parole or probation officers, hence making violations more noticeable. These findings helped identify the gap of literature that this study filled by providing outcomes of reentry programs that are following policies and procedures at the federal and state level but have not provided policies and procedures for ex-convict reentry at a county level. However, Taylor's (2013) found the complete opposite of Hamilton (2010). Taylor's (2013) findings revealed that, 3 years post-release, re-entry court participants had 43% re-arrest rate while 53% of the test group were reincarcerated.

Taylor (2013) also showed that re-entry court participants were least likely to be arrested on new charges, while ex-convicts who complete the entire re-entry court program have a lesser probability of re-arrest or facing new convictions. Taylor's study can easily tie to Maslow's second tier of his basic needs theory that includes the need for safety, belonging, and esteem. Maslow's basic needs theory reviewed in conjunction with the labeling theory assists one in understanding how labeling may affect the reentry process of ex-convicts as their basic needs might become more difficult to meet without having the proper policies and procedures in place to guide ex-convicts toward successful reentry. Taylor believed it may be that new arrests had declined for re-entry court

participants due to creating a sense of belonging, and the group's dynamics might have also assisted with building better self-esteem for the ex-convict.

Barriers to Reentry

Ex-convicts continue to face impediments, also known as “invisible punishment” (Travis, 2002). After ex-convicts' release, many obstacles contribute to ex-convict housing instability (Formon et al., 2017; Roman & Travis, 2006). Housing is one of the most significant challenges regarding successful ex-convict reentry (Anderson et al., 2018; Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011; Rodriguez & Brown, 2003). These findings are consistent with the aforementioned U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development AHAR report to Congress (2016) which revealed that annually, over half a million individuals have experienced homelessness within the United States. In many cases, federal and state laws and policies are in place to prevent convicted sex and drug offenders from obtaining or residing in public housing (Geller & Curtis, 2011; Lutze et al., 2014; Philips & Spencer, 2013).

Farrall et al. (2014) integrated a model of desistance which cumulatively reviewed macro- and micro-level strategies along with both structural and individual-level factors. Macro-level strategies consist of social institutions, family, justice system, epidemics, and economics, while the micro-level strategies focus on gender, ethnicity, crimes committed, length of arrest history, chemical dependency, and support groups. Farrall et al. (2014) believed that family support, self-perception, emotions, and feelings all play a major role in connection to re-offending. Farrall et al.'s macro-micro model demonstrates how combining a few of these factors can make the reentry process extremely difficult.

Reentry and Housing Instabilities

Housing is vital in ex-convict reentry because when an ex-convict is released from prison and lacks housing stability, the ex-convict has few options (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011). Lutze et al. (2014) have documented that locating housing for previously incarcerated individuals can be a considerable challenge. State and some federal policies and laws prohibit ex-convicts, contingent upon the label of their crimes, to reside in public housing (Lutze et al., 2014). Ex-convicts who have sex offender and drug-related charges may be more likely to be rejected from public housing communities (Formon et al., 2017). However, other housing accommodations may be available and used by ex-convicts, such as transitional housing.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is supportive housing geared to fight against homelessness. Transitional housing organizations, which began in the United States for ex-convicts in the early 1800s, include homeless shelters, residential reentry centers, and halfway houses. The first halfway house opened in Massachusetts in 1817 to provide temporary housing for ex-convicts who lacked housing and financial stability (Abadinsky, 1987). Post-release, most offenders reside with family or life partners (Nelson et al., 2011; 1999; Urban Institute, 2006). Establishing stable housing allows the releasee the opportunity to regain control over their own life, and provides consistency with daily activities (Lee et al., 2010; Shaw, 2004). Moreover, it releases the burden of being codependent on family members, significant others, and friends while also decreasing the risk of prisoner recidivism (Garland et al., 2011; Kazura, 2017; Metraux & Culhane, 2004).

Garland et al. (2014) examined a range of possible influences on support, including general support for helping ex-convicts during reentry process, community influences, demographics, and the types of ex-convicts residing in the transitional housing. Garland et al.'s goal was to fill the gap in literature by finding how ex-convict based transitional housing are influenced and if those influences affect recidivism. One thousand Missouri residents were contacted through Survey Sampling, 85 individuals were excluded and a total of 386 individuals responded, which was 42% of the 915 sample population size, which mirrored the general Missouri population, with demographics playing a major role with residents who have a higher education being more supportive to less punitive sentences for law violators (Maruna & King, 2009).

Garland et al.'s (2014) results found that 54% were supportive of having transitional housing in their city or town, but only 28% were in favor of having transitional housing in their neighborhood. The research also linked housing stability, and higher education levels with lower levels of recidivism (Garland et al., 2014). Acquiring appropriate housing is a significant factor toward gaining successful reentry; many ex-convicts are released and return to the same communities that are unsafe, exhibit high crime rates, and they often have been faced with the people and phenomena that originally turned them toward the life of crime. Homeless shelters, residential reentry centers, and halfway houses are entities that many individuals must consider post-release whether because of parole restrictions, family differences, or the need of treatment (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Roman & Travis, 2004). These housing options are better known as transitional housing facilities, which are often nonprofit community-based

centers, usually government funded and monitored by law enforcement. Transitional housing typically offers releasee support services such as case management, service coordination, and short-term treatment programs (Shilton et al., 2010).

Past studies have linked transitional housing with successful reentry (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Currently in 2018, transitional housing is geared to implement growth for recently released convicts who are society (Fontaine et al., 2012; Garland et al., 2017). Transitional houses are primarily run by nonprofit organizations that receive state funding, governmental grants, and local community resources to provide ex-convicts with necessary resources such as shelter, mentorship, employment assistance, and short-term treatment (Garland et al., 2017; Shilton et al., 2010). Transitional housing is a favorable path toward community reintegration (Criminal Justice Policy Review, 2014).

Past studies have linked transitional housing with successful reentry (Garland et al., 2017; Routh & Hamilton, 2015; Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Moreover, in recent reports, Bayens and Smykla (2013) found halfway houses are one of the most cost-efficient government-funded housing methods available for ex-convicts. The researchers found that, generally, traditional housing saved an average of \$4,325 per individual versus other local community housing facilities (Bayens & Smykla, 2013). Though transitional housing is not private housing, it provides necessities for offenders while also mandating compliance with other needed services such as educational and vocational programs, mental health, AA, counseling, parole, and probation; these factors may contribute significantly toward successful ex-convict reentry.

Educational and Vocational Programs

Education is the key to success, but many sentenced inmates may lack education. Mediocre reading abilities in young adults are believed to be a predetermining factor that leads to low educational achievement (Pace, 2018). Low education levels double the probability of being incarcerated as an adult (Gottlob, 2007). Vacca (2004) showed more than half of the adults imprisoned in the United States have less than an eighth grade education and can neither read nor write. The Bureau of Justice statistics (2007) supported Vacca's (2004) findings; U.S. statistics showed 41% of all federal and state inmates did not complete high school in comparison to 18% of the general population. Shippen (2010) noted adult convicts have reading scores equivalent to those of seventh graders. Research has also suggested that approximately half of the general unincarcerated population have completed some college, but less than one fourth of U.S. state and federal inmates have any college education (Harlow, 2003).

Most U.S. correctional facilities and prisons offer some vocational training or educational programs. The GED program tends to be the most common (Foley & Gao 2004; Formon et al., 2017). Inmates were more likely to participate in programs if those programs ensured they would be able to secure employment after their release (Formon et al., 2017). Vocational education participation provides the convict with the appropriate work skills and job qualifications so they can successfully reassimilate into society (Alos et al., 2015; Formon et al., 2017; Hunter & Boyce, 2009). Participating in educational programs while incarcerated has many benefits, not just for the inmate but society as well. Several studies link vocational programs as an efficient way to reduce recidivism

(Formon et al., 2017; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Mackenzie, 2006). Gerber and Fritsch (1995) found that inmates involved in vocational programs were less likely to get involved in disciplinary violations.

Work program enrollees have also been known to have better chances of securing employment and earning higher wages than ex-convicts who never enrolled in an educational program (Formon et al., 2017; Stana, 1993). Blomberg et al. (2011) conducted a study with a sample of 4,147 ex-convicts released from Florida State correctional facilities. The researchers sought to find if academic achievement served as a positive turning point for ex-convicts in redirecting them to avoid experiencing recidivism. Blomberg et al. used Sampson and Laub's (1997) theory of cumulative disadvantage, which like this study, is a combination of social controls and labeling theories. Blomberg et al. focused on policy and interventions geared towards increasing educational programs and reducing recidivism. The researchers' findings were both policy and theory related. They concluded that youths who attend educational programs while incarcerated are more likely to attend school and educational programs post release and avoid experiencing recidivism (Blomberg et al., 2011).

Researchers have also found that inmates who participate in vocational programs would have a better employment history after their release (Formon et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2002; Vacca, 2004). Many variables are attributed to prisoner reentry program involvement and un-involvement (i.e., type of programs available, length of incarceration, if a prisoner is subject to early release), they may not be privy to take part in educational programs, which might be a disadvantage to the inmate (Callan &

Gardner, 2005). Moreover, educational and vocational programs were designed to assist ex-convict establish career training and employability (Alos et al., 2015).

Reentry and Employment

Locating stable employment is one of the most critical identified factors in accomplishing successful ex-convict reentry (Formon et al., 2017; Lageson & Uggen, 2013; Visher et al., 2010). Research has suggested that family support and meaningful relationships with friends and mentors are imperative in the ex-convict's work search (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Kazura, 2017; Souza et al., 2013). Friends and family may be able to provide releasees with referrals, resources, and available employment opportunities to which the ex-convict did not have connections on their own (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Kazura, 2017). Individuals who have a close rapport with ex-convicts might be reliable reference to a potential employer, and they may also be able to provide a good character reference for releasees, hence allowing the employer to see more than the ex-convicts arrest history (Lin, 2001).

Berg and Huebner (2011) claimed there is little literature regarding how big of an impact family and friends and social networking facilitate ex-convict re-assimilation. Empirical evidence has proved that ex-convicts who maintain consistent positive family relationships post release have greater success locating employment and re-assimilating into the community (Visher & Travis, 2003). However, other researchers have stated that many ex-convicts' social identities are discredited due to labeling their criminal background, which may make it extremely difficult for them to locate and obtain work

(Begun et al., 2011; Graffam et al., 2008; Moran, 2016; Willis, 2017; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008).

Kazura (2017) conducted an intervention program that took place in a Northeast U.S. prison and consisted of 40 couples (40 male inmates and their 40 un-incarcerated female partners). The program's goal was to reduce the negative impact incarceration has on families. Kazura examined the short-term effects of incarceration on intimate relationships, also focusing on relationship satisfaction, confidence, negative interactions such as labeling and positive interactions for the 40 couples. Kazura collected pre- and post-surveys from all participants before they took part in the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program and After Program Completion. Kazura's study concluded with a series of two-by-two (time and gender) analysis of variance to review the changes from pre- to post-intervention.

According to Kazura's (2017) results, both men and women showed a significant increase in confidence. Relationship satisfaction also increased for both prisoners and their partners. Positive interactions also increased. The study also showed that negative interactions decreased. Both prisoners and their mates stated they felt the intervention study was beneficial toward improving communication and confidence. The study found that those ex-convicts who participated in reentry intervention programs were more likely to apply learned techniques to communicate their feelings instead of acting out disruptively or violently, which lowered their rates of recidivism (Kazura, 2017). The whole family suffers tremendously when men are incarcerated and separated outside of their homes (Kazura, 2017). It was beyond the study's scope to verify if participation in

the relationship education program had long-term positive outcomes. However, the findings regarding the short-term effects were significantly beneficial for reducing recidivism (Kazura, 2017). Evidence-based studies found that prisoner relationship programs geared towards educating the needs of inmates and their families have a positive stigma and are critical for lowering recidivism and geared towards an ex-convict's successful reentry (Hairston et al., 2004).

Some researchers posited a negative stigma exists that correlates with social identity status and criminal background that creates labeling in ex-convicts' seeking and obtaining employment (Graffam et al., 2008). Being stigmatized, as described earlier in the labeling theory, may leave the ex-convict feeling untrustworthy or ostracized in the presence of others, which might take a toll on the ex-convict's emotional and mental well-being (Gold & Richards, 2012; Imhoff, 2015; Moran, 2016; Willis, 2017). Moreover, stigma management strategies are encouraged and even offered in some jail and prisons to assist offenders with obstacles they might face during employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011).

Work and training programs are encouraged during incarceration to prepare offenders for their return to society (Formon et al., 2017; Richmond, 2014). Stigma management has been proven to be a vital strategy applied in workplace environments (Formon et al., 2017; Jones & King, 2014). Prior studies show ex-convicts often are blacklisted from particular occupations and trade schools (Westrheim & Manger, 2014). Obtaining employment after release has also been found to be an essential factor in desistance. Lipsey (1995) concluded that job placement was the most critical factor in

lowering rates of recidivism. Baer et al. (2006) agreed with Lipsey (1995) that employment programs play a role in an ex-convict's adjustments to reentry; however, after Visher et al., (2006) review of multiple employment programs the researchers found that employment programs do not appear to have a statistically significant impact regarding reoffending. Formon et al. (2017) found that job training programs were a practical way of reducing recidivism in ex-convicts.

Formon et al., (2017) examined a total of 617 graduates from a community vocational training center in which both ex-convicts and non-offenders were participants. This study's results concluded that program graduates, both ex-convicts and nonoffenders with similar educational backgrounds were able to locate job placements at an equal rate after program completion (Formon et al., 2017). Employment allows the ex-convict to develop financial stability, which is a vital resource post-release (Scott, 2010). Job placement brings monetary funds that enable the ex-offender to take care of their basic needs such as food, housing, transportation, and other relevant factors that aid in successful reentry (Formon et al., 2017). Stable employment correlates with increased self-esteem and confidence, which creates a smoother transition with reentry (Visher et al., 2010). Family support has also been linked to positive outcomes of ex-convict reentry and reducing recidivism (Kazura, 2017). Post-release, most offenders reside with family and or life partners (Kazura, 2017; Nelson et al., 2011).

Establishing stable housing allows the releasee the opportunity to regain control over his or her own life, and provides consistency with daily activities (Formon et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2010; Shaw, 2004). Moreover, it releases the burden of being

codependent on family members, significant others, and friends; while also decreasing the risk of prisoner recidivism (Garland et al., 2011; Kazura, 2017; Metraux & Culhane, 2004). Acquiring appropriate housing is a leading factor toward gaining successful reentry; many ex-convicts are released and return to the same communities that are unsafe, exhibit high crime rates, a need for safety, and often revert them to face old people and things that geared them toward the life of crime they started.

Housing opportunities are not readily accessible post-release; quite often lack of finances, failure to provide current employment or work history, or criminal history may deter communities or landlords from renting or providing housing to ex-convicts (Morani et al., 2011). Researchers have found a positive correlation with housing instability, homelessness, and higher risks of reincarceration (Henwood, 2014; Lutze et al., 2013; Steiner et al., 2012). The heavy burden to secure permanent housing along with several failed attempts to obtain it might be the primary source of program failure. Certain crimes such as theft, prostitution, and drug sales increase the likelihood of homelessness and housing instability (Lee et al., 2010). Lutze et al. (2014) sought to fill the gap in literature by coordinating responses to reentry through the outcomes of a Washington State Reentry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP). The program provided housing for high risk homeless ex-convicts such as thieves, drug dealers, and prostitutes after their release from prison; they also provided access to community agency and resources: police, community corrections, officers, social service providers, employers, and housing managers.

The goal of the study was to provide stable housing for up to one year and reduce recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014). Lutze et al.'s (2014) findings showed that people who

develop policies should not see housing as a fixed concept. Instead, they need to see it as a “fluid and volatile state of being for offenders that is an ongoing threat to successful reentry and long term reintegration” (p. 483). The evidence in this study’s findings also correlated with Hamilton’s (2010) Reentry Court Initiative (RCI) study involving the “supervision effect,” which refers to when an ex-convict is working closely with the courts or officers, making violations more noticeable (Hamilton, 2010). Both studies found providing housing with community services increases successful ex-convict reentry (Lutze et al., 2014). However, these studies found many forms of supervision that increase surveillance of ex-convicts also tend to increase revocations significantly (Taxman, 2003). Stability may be the top necessity for newly released prisoners. Past studies have shown that stable housing allows the ex-convict time to focus on other vital areas in their life, which are needed to build or create successful reentry (i.e., look for employment or attend programs or significant support groups).

Many researchers, community members, and stakeholders have acknowledged that a massive problem with returning offenders exists. In 2011, for example, 688,384 prisoners reentered the United States, state and federal prisons (Carson & Sabol, 2012). This number has increased tremendously over the past decade and has more than tripled since 1980, where statistics showed 170,000 U.S. prisoners released that year (Guerino et al., 2011; Lynch & Sabol, 2001). The massive increase in prisoners and returning offenders may be due to the lack of satisfactory reentry programs or the lack of available employment opportunities for ex-convicts. Recently, the prison population exceeded 2.2 million inmates (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). The United States had an estimated 2,173,800

convicts occupying state and federal prisons in 2015, which was the lowest rate of incarceration in the country since 2004 where there were reportedly 2,136,600 inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). Approximately 825,000 inmates are released from prison each year (Glaze & Bonczar, 2009). An estimated 70% of those releasees are rearrested within the three-year timeframe of being released (Durose et al., 2014). For many citizens and stakeholders, the rising cost of recidivism and incarceration are the main reasons reentry has become a topic of interest.

Quite often, reentry programs are designed to be more of a rehabilitation center for the ex-convicts where the counselor is examining the releasee's behavior based on their prior offense. Looking at earlier scholars' work, Koschmann and Peterson (2013) researched the relationship between communication breakdown from being cut off from networks and social capital and an ex-convict's ability to successfully reenter society. The researchers posited the focal point of most reentry programs was on the negative (i.e., parole violations, criminal behavior, and treatment compliance), and these programs failed to target the main issues that might cause one to deviate from successful rehabilitation (Koschmann et al., 2013). Koschmann et al. concluded their study by stating mentoring provides favorable conversational outlets for the ex-prisoner post-release that may be conducive to successful reentry.

Liem and Richardson (2014) conducted a study with inmates who were serving life sentences. Referred to as "lifers," these inmates realized it was impossible to receive forgiveness from their victims, so in turn, they dedicated their life sentences to being mentors and leaders of youthful offenders who might have had fallen down the same

path. Irwin (2005) stated ex-prisoner to prisoner mentorship is very common. Many reentry program developers, directors, case managers, and staff members may usually hold some criminal record or background and are now using their experience to steer others away from deviant lifestyles, which has been extremely helpful during the reentry process. These reformed convicts are known as wounded healers. The general goal of reentry through the eyes of a wounded healer researcher is that the effect of reentry success may increase mainly depending on the level of mentor experience and commonality received during the reentry process.

Researchers have established that wounded healers have assisted with higher rates of successful reentry (Silverman, 2013; Zemore et al., 2004). Mazerolle et al. (2013) revealed that individuals are more likely to cooperate and remain in compliance when they feel they have been treated justly, and their situations or circumstances are related. However, when an ex-convict is forced to live in the past or continue to pay restitution after returning to society, it may cause the individual to act defensively, feel inferior, or behave out of line or out of place (Mazerolle et al., 2013).

Quite often, offenders are faced with similar oppositions post-release that they were dealt with while incarcerated (White et al., 2012; Willis, 2017). Past studies focused on identifying some evident vital obstacles to a successful release, with the hopes that locating the barrier would increase the odds of successful ex-convict reentry (Petersilia, 2003; Schlagar, 2013; Sieter & Kaadela, 2003; Taxman et al., 2003). Ex-convicts may often be released back to the communities from which they originated, which are usually impoverished and have many disadvantages, such as restricted employment and housing

options as well as limited availability and accessibility of education and government-funded programs along with statewide subsidies (Koschmann et. al., 2013).

Reentry has become one of the top political issues in criminal justice. City, state, local, and personal budgets are all being affected due to the rising cost of incarceration and recidivism. The tough on crime movement was created in the 1980s as a public safety precaution; it uses detention and imprisonment as its primary method to reform individuals. The tough on crime movement has performed throughout the 1900s into the 21st century (Guy, 2011). Throughout this century, an array of laws piggy-backed off the principle of the tough on crime movement (e.g., three strikes, mandatory minimums, and zero tolerance). These laws were designed to scare potential criminals straight and keep lawbreakers off the street. Using prisons as a form of public safety brought many unique events (Guy, 2011). Instead of these new laws assisting in the lowering of incarceration rates, the rules created a culture which categorized more individuals and their behaviors as deviant, hence causing more individuals to be criminals.

Cressey (1955) believed that ex-convicts should be trained as practitioners to assist in rehabilitating other offenders. Research regarding ex-convicts showed a connection with reentry and peer support groups (Bellamy et al., 2012), ex-convicts wanting to help others (LeBel, 2007), and former prisoners taking on the role of “life coaches” (Schinkel & Whyte, 2012). Some states have programs designed toward cutting down on recidivism. The Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) incarcerates nearly 97,000 inmates within their 148 statewide facilities and supervises approximately 167,000 individuals under parole, probation, and other community supervision programs.

It is the third largest state prison system in the United States, consisting of 50 correctional institutions, seven private partner facilities, 17 annexes, 35 work camps, three re-entry centers, 13 FDC operated work release centers, 19 private work release centers, two road prisons, one forestry camp, and one basic training camp (FDC, 2016-2017).

The State of Florida attributes their 20-year decrease in crime to the following safeguards that focus on policies and help with penalizing harder for certain crimes, providing more police protection, and designing crime prevention mechanisms. The State of Florida's research department is controlled and administered by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) and managed by the Joint Legislative Auditing Committee. The primary objectives of these organizations are to identify barriers within the states correctional departments, provide solutions regarding the state's performance, and ensure overall accountability. Through policy enforcement, FDC has partnered with several organizations with the hopes of increasing successful prisoner reentry.

The Mental Health Pilot Program with Agape Mental Health (MHPP) is one of the programs offered in the Florida to inmates 6 months prior to their release. The MHPP was created to provide inmates assistance with counseling, early reentry strategies such as housing searches, community integration, local resources, and creating plans toward ex-convict successful reentry. Case managers and probation officers work with inmates to help them develop life skills and reentry skills and prepare them for the road ahead. The Rand Corporation (2014) reported that individuals who participate in high-quality correctional education programs, are 43% less likely to experience recidivism within a 3-

year time frame than individuals who did not take part in high-quality correctional education programs (Davis et al., 2014).

The Florida State Department of Corrections formed the pilot program Second Chance Pell at Columbia Correctional Institution Annex by partnering with Florida Gateway College. The organizations provided 65 inmates the opportunity of earning associates degrees through live and online learning. The Miami-Dade Portal is funded through the Second Chance grant. The portal program serves a double function by providing services for both pre-released Everglades Reentry Center inmates and post-released inmates from any Florida institution entering Miami-Dade County. Since the inception of this portal program on October 1, 2016, over 200 pre-released inmates received service and approximately 60 post-release ex-convicts have been assisted with mental health services, substance abuse treatment, housing, employment, vocational training, and mentorship programs. Leblanc and Ritchie (2001) shared that the effect of reentry success may increase mainly depending on the level of mentor experience and commonality received during the reentry process, known as “Helping Others as a Response to Reconcile a Criminal Past,” the role of the wounded healer in prisoner reentry programs.

Many convicts and ex-convicts prefer to be mentored by ex-convicts who have successfully reentered society and are now known as “making it” or accepted by the status-quo (Leblanc et al., 2001). It is quite common for those who have a history of crime, to re-assimilate by focusing their energy on providing care or mentoring others who are heading in similar paths that caused their dysfunction. Individuals rendering re-

assimilation programs, support groups, peer support, or therapy may be deemed extremely beneficial in an offender's reform process, if the offender can relate to the wounded healer's journey (Bellamy et al., 2012). According to Liem et al. (2014), the wounded healer is defined as an individual making amends for prior wrong-doings by coaching or mentoring others who are exuding at-risk behaviors.

The hopes of the wounded healer are to assist mentees into turning their wrongs into rights. Silverman (2013) noted that the role of the wounded healer is beneficial to self-help groups because the wounded healer has been in the mentee's shoes as well. The wounded healer's path, which led to their current success may give the ex-convict hope, room for change, and a chance for success, based on their commonality. Florida prisons have an array of programs offered, such as mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, personal counseling, HIV/AIDS treatments, anger management, and so on (FDC, 2015). Florida as a state does not offer all programs to each of their detention centers or prisons. Therefore, all necessary provisions to successfully reassimilate in Florida State are not available to all whether this exclusion is due to location, availability, offense history, finances, or length in prison term.

The wounded healer acknowledges there are many hurdles toward successful reentry, yet these ex-convicts successfully maneuvered around those barriers and claimed success (Arrigo & Takahashi, 2006; LeBel, 2007). The wounded healer may still be healing from their own criminal past. Halsey and Deegan (2012) said it is important for the wounded healer to see other labeled and stigmatized individuals beat the odds and make it in society (Halsey & Deegan, 2012). Lebel et al. (2015) found that the wounded

healer benefits and finds healing from mentorship; the wounded healer reentry program is designed to assist the wounded healer with moving on with their life (Lebel et al., 2015). However, they find strength and tenacity while coaching and guiding others away from a life of crime.

Liem et al. (2014) posited it may be possible that the wounded healer is attempting to live vicariously through the individuals they are mentoring, which might allow closure for the wounded healer to move forward in their own life and forgive themselves for the past. Liem et al. (2014) admitted it may not be possible for all convicts to make amends with their victims; however, these wounded warriors expressed their gratitude by mentoring at-risk teens away from a life of crime. Helping others to make up for one's past endeavors has been referred to as reversed labeling or creative restitution (LeBel, 2012). This type of mentoring may be beneficial for all; researchers have held that sharing the same or similar experiences with others who can sympathize, relate or understand gives strength and hope for change (Silverman, 2013; White et al., 2004). Self-help groups may be a critical component toward one's successful reentry.

Hillsborough County Detention Centers

Hillsborough County Jail (HCJ) is located in the State of Florida and was established in 1994. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, HCJ has a daily population of 4,541 inmates. However, the jail's stated capacity is 175 persons. Moreover, this reflects HCJ being on average 2490% overcapacity. Hillsborough Correctional Institution (HCI) was established in 1976 and houses approximately 290 inmates daily. The facility has a total capacity of 431 individuals. HCI is a state

correctional institution designed to house inmates serving 5 to 10 years' sentences for violent crimes or drug offenses. Hillsborough County (CSC) is a small minimum security State of Florida correctional facility. CSC is designed to house 112 inmates and estimates an average of 83 inmates daily. Cumulatively there are approximately 5,000 inmates occupying Hillsborough County detention centers on the daily basis. Hillsborough County has an estimated population of 1,408,566 (U.S. Census, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

In this literature review, there has been a problem with ex-convict reentry, leaving a gap between the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter society. While these policies are being implemented at a state level, there are not clear program policies or procedures on a county level to show the effectiveness of how ex-convicts reenter successfully. The main purpose of this study was to seek answers to the following question: What policies and procedures should be put in place to assist Hillsborough County increase successful ex-convict reentry?

Throughout this literature review, common themes regarding ex-convict reentry are addressed along with looking into how the policies and procedures of Hillsborough County are currently designed to assist with successful ex-convict reentry (i.e., housing, education, and employment etc.) Within the last decade, researchers have found ex-convict reentry to be one of the largest criminal justice issues within the United States (Hall et al., 2016; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013; Mijs, 2016). Most researchers have also agreed that reentry is unavoidable because, eventually, the vast mass of inmates will be

released into the general population (Anderson et al., 2018; Formon et al., 2017; Subramanian et al., 2015).

Past scholars have positively correlated reentry success to the level of mentor experience and commonality received during the reentry process. Researchers have established that these mentors, known as wounded healers, have assisted with higher rates of successful reentry (Silverman, 2013; Zembre et al., 2004). The literature continues to show a gap in ex-convict reentry and successful ex-convict reentry. Most reentry programs aim to create an easy transition from incarceration to the community (Lattimore et al., 2014). This present study filled at least one of the gaps in the literature and extended knowledge in the discipline of creating suitable policies and procedures geared towards assisting ex-convicts during their reentry process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research Design and Rationale

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the impact the labeling theory has had on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs in Florida to successfully reenter society. Ethnographic research was used to obtain a holistic picture of the subject of study with emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (see Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). I collected data from case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialist, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or have had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry who were aware of Hillsborough County's reentry policies and procedures, and who have been labeled, or have witnessed labeling while attempting to apply Hillsborough County's reentry policies or procedures.

Interviewees consisted of case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialist, program directors, and reentry support managers. Data collection from these individuals assisted in answering my research question because the individuals' current or former direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County. I conducted ethnographic observations with my participants. As previously mentioned, the ethnographic approach allowed me to see the larger picture and stumble upon their unexpected truths. Semistructured interviews designed and extrapolated from previous literature with published authors were also conducted during this time. I then analyzed and coded the data. In this chapter, I describe ethnographic design for this qualitative

study and discuss the rationale, role of the researcher, data sampling process tools, participant recruitment, methodology, ethical standards, and safeguards I followed to ensure all participants' protection.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to understand the subjects within their natural environment; by doing so, the researcher can better understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. According to Creswell (2013), ethnography studies are typically flexible and take place by observation and interview mainly in a natural field setting. Before conducting any data collection, I applied for and obtain prior authorization from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of all human participants, by upholding ethical conduct, maintaining participants confidentiality, and controlling bias and opinions. Machi and McEvoy (2016) stated, "By rationally identifying and confronting these views, the researcher can control personal bias and opinion and commit to being open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data" (p. 21). Once I secured approval, I sent out approximately 100 emails to individuals who are employed and or affiliated with Hillsborough County in the State of Florida reentry programs, department of justice, and Hillsborough County correctional facilities. Hillsborough County was chosen for this study out of convenience to the researcher. Though Hillsborough County appears to have high rates of recidivism, I currently reside in Hillsborough County, so it was easier for me to recruit individuals who may or may not have had transportation or permanent

housing to schedule face to face ethnography observations and interviews with participants.

I obtained prospects' email information from company websites, managerial approval, standard recruitment forms, and word of mouth. My goal was to obtain 10% of the population to whom I reached out, which is 10 participants. I then arranged to do direct ethnographic observations and interviews with participants. Each participant was e-mailed a consent form once they agreed to participate. Once I received signed consent forms returned from each participant, all participants' data were number coded to ensure confidentiality (i.e., Subject 1 through Subject 10 abbreviated as S1 through S10). Participants were not listed or documented by name or organization affiliation to protect and ensure confidentiality.

The goal of the ethnographer is to become engulfed in the culture just like the participants and record extensive field notes. Creswell (2013) suggested researchers turn the interview into an open, collaborative discussion instead of one-way questions. The ultimate goal of the researcher is to conduct observations, interviews, record and code data while remaining in compliance with ethical standards and procedures. In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to understand the subjects within their natural environment; by doing so, the researcher can better understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. Researchers must document all sides of the question, for they cannot manipulate data to fallaciously prove their case (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Methodology

Case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialist, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County, Florida were the selected population for this qualitative ethnography study. Like the ethnographical design, the phenomenological design is also a suitable approach in a qualitative study. In phenomenological theory, the researcher also lives vicariously through participants' phenomena and experiences (Creswell, 2009; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Tomkins and Eatough (2013) supported that a phenomenological design can depict how individuals adapt and experience a phenomenon. However, phenomenological studies usually require an extended period of observation and large groups of participants, for which this study did not have extended periods of time for observation due to time requirements. The required sample size for qualitative studies is an average of five to 50 participants (Dworkin, 2012). In this qualitative ethnography study, I sought 10 participants, a number which I attained.

I reached out to 100 potential participants via email in anticipation to receiving a 10% response success rate. Participants could have been either male or female and were recruited via company email. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument used to collect the data. Each participant was interviewed and observed in their natural settings, individually by me. The ethnographical approach allowed me to see the larger picture and stumble upon unexpected truths through serendipity. Janesick (2004) stated that the qualitative researcher is in touch with all of their senses and should expect the unexpected. I prepared to ask 14 open-ended semistructured interview questions

regarding ex-convict reentry which were recorded for accuracy and logged on paper. To ensure the confidentiality and to protect the identities of all participants, all information was coded.

Participant Selection Logic

The population sample for this qualitative study included case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialists, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County, Florida. Participants included both males and females, and I interviewed and observed them in their natural settings. The ethnographical approach allowed me to see the larger picture and stumble upon unexpected truths through serendipity. Janesick (2004) stated the qualitative researcher is in touch with all of their senses and should expect the unexpected. The sample size for qualitative studies is an average of five to fifty participants (Dworkin, 2012). I sought to have 10 participants and achieved that number of interviewees.

Instrumentation

Next, I collected data. Empirical research is the most suitable for this particular study. Empirical research is based on observed and measured phenomena based off direct experiences as opposed to theory or belief. Creswell (2013) stated data analysis involves collecting open-ended data, based on asking general questions and developing a review of the information. A participant's work or home environment were observed along with their overall body language and comfortability during the interviewing process. Current documents revealing company's reentry policies and procedures were observed when

available for review. Semistructured interviews with case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialist, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County, Florida.

I conducted my interviews and observations at the facility and/or treatment center that the participant is involved in; this way the ethnographic approach was more realistic. However, I was also open to interviews taking place at a convenient location for the participants. Each participant meeting began with my purpose of this study, followed by informing the interviewees of at-will participation and asking interview questions. Member checking is an appropriate way to ensure accuracy and dependability of the researcher in which the researchers obtains more than one reliable source of supported documentation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I manually documented the interview setting along with participants' appearance and notable highlights of our meeting. I also used a smart pen recorder to capture the whole discussion, so I could later transcribe and use NVivo and well as hand coding the data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I sought to answer the following research question: What policies and procedures do reentry programs have in place in Hillsborough County, Florida to assist with increasing successful ex-convict reentry? My data came from ethnographical observations, and semistructured interview questions.

- Data were collected at the facility or treatment center that the participant is involved in, or at a convenient location for the participants.

- I, as the researcher collected all data, by manually documenting observations, and recording and hand scribing subject's responses to my 14 open-ended semistructured interview questions.
- There were 10 subjects to observe and interview.
- It was anticipated the duration of data collection events would take 2 weeks. One subject was observed and simultaneously interviewed 1 day a week.
- Data were recorded with an Echo smart pen recording device for accuracy and were manually documented by me.
- Once all data were coded and transcribed, I followed up with subjects with the option to review their responses to ensure accuracy.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The criteria for quality qualitative research is credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Polit & Beck, 2014). I established credibility in this study by using triangulation, which permits the researcher to investigate many methods of various sources to locate accurate information. I collected past data from organizational web-sites, interviews, and observations. Member checks were also completed once I transcribed the data so participants could ensure accuracy.

Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) referred to transferability as how qualitative research can be changed into another context or setting. Transferability and external validity were applied within this study because though this study was focused on Hillsborough County

in the state of Florida, my suggestions for successful program policies and procedures could be applied to other counties, states, and countries to ensure higher success rates in ex-convict reentry. Using this study's findings, I hope to encourage reentry programs to align their policies and procedures to support more useful areas in ex-convict reentry, which may promote a significant decline in labeling and recidivism.

Dependability

Dependability and reliability are synonymous. Korstjens and Moser (2018). believed dependability may be reached through member checking and participants reviewing data for accuracy. This study's data were supported by information obtained by participants during their interviewing process. Dependability was also demonstrated by using triangulation and participant member checking.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established in this study by my being ethical and following the steps to trustworthiness. I documented everything word for word directly from participant's interviews and observations, leaving an audit trail (see Korstjens and Moser (2018). and did not skew data with my own personal thoughts or biases. Ten subjects were interviewed, and data saturation and member checking were completed to ensure accuracy.

Ethical Issues

The ethical concerns of this study geared toward providing safety and full disclosure for the protection of all participants, along with the reliability and validity of all data and documentation.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Qualitative validity defined by Creswell (2009) is the researcher checking for accuracy of the findings by employing specific procedures; Gibbs (2007) differentiated that qualitative reliability indicates the results were the same or similar among several researchers. I followed the “Validating the Accuracy of the Information” Data Analysis in Qualitative Research linear, hierarchical approach (Creswell, 2009), which list eight steps including organizing and preparing the data for analysis, reading through all data, and starting a detailed coding process. I followed these steps thoroughly to ensure accuracy and validity throughout my study. Theorists also recommend researchers dedicate time observing their study environments and familiarize themselves within the scope of study to build a rapport and trust with their participants (Creswell, 2013; Leung, 2015).

Validity

According to Leung (2015), validity in qualitative research is the researcher acquiring the “appropriateness” of the tools, processes, and data. The design must be valid for the chosen methodology, and the methodology must be appropriate for answering the research questions (Leung, 2015). Validity refers to the accuracy in the findings and is dependent upon trustworthiness and the experience of the researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggested that various strategies be used to accomplish both internal and external validity. This study accomplished validity by the consistency in conducting all interviews. To ensure validity, all participants were asked the same 14 semistructured interview questions that I designed

and extrapolated from previous literature (e.g., Lebel et al., 2015; Lutze et al., 2013). Data were collected from organizational websites along with any company documentation given to me to examine. Validity was also demonstrated through using member checking after the interviewing process once data were coded and transcribed. The goal of achieving validity is to establish trustworthiness and accuracy during and after the interviewing process (Leung, 2015).

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability ensures accuracy and a higher level of consistency. There is a margin for variance within qualitative research as long as the epistemological and methodology angles are similar but equally rich in content (Leung, 2015). Babbie (2010) shared concerns regarding reliability becoming subjective when a single researcher is the only data source. I maintained reliability by spending time observing participant's environments on the video platforms or over the phone, developing a rapport, and building trust (Creswell, 2013; Leung, 2015).

Grossoehme (2014) suggested that reliability is when a researcher has the ability to replicate prior studies with similar backgrounds and accomplish similar results. As previously mentioned, I asked 14 semistructured interview questions that I designed and extrapolated from previous literature on the topic as a form of reliability (Lebel et al., 2015; Lutze et al., 2013). This study also supplied more than one reliable source of supported documentation to ensure reliability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). All sequences of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages were recorded with an Echo smart pen recording device and hand recorded by me in a journal to ensure reliability

(Grossoehme, 2014). Data were later transcribed and NVivo and hand coded as a part of member checking.

Ethical Procedures

I followed the guidelines of Walden University's IRB approval to ensure that my participants' safety was at risk. During the observation and interview process, I documented and coded all recordings and case notes to ensure confidentiality. I replaced subjects' names with pseudonyms (i.e., S1 through S10). so that their identity remained concealed. I openly provided the objectives of this research verbally and in writing for all participants. Participants must have consented and signed a copy of the form to participate. To avoid skewing data, I did not share my personal opinions or experiences regarding prisoner reentry with my subjects, nor did I interview more than one informant at one given time. Interviews took place at a convenient location for the participants but over a video platform or over the phone due to COVID-19 restrictions, and took approximately 20-30 minutes; however, more time was allotted for each participant if needed. I kept all collected data on a USB drive, and all stored data excluded identifying information that would identify Subjects 1-10. The files on the USB drive are to be password protected and locked and stored inside a locked safe for 5 years to ensure participants' concealed identities.

Data Analysis

The data were disassembled by each participant's interview responses. Participant's responses were manually analyzed by the researcher using hand coding in addition to being run through NVivo. After data were hand coded, member checking was

used to ensure accuracy. Member checking in qualitative research is used by researchers to increase both the credibility and validity of qualitative research (Leung, 2015). NVivo, qualitative software was used for accuracy and member checking. Manual coded data were disassembled, reassembled, and entered in NVivo to be interpreted. The goal of the data analysis process was finding commonality in themes to answer my research question: What policies and procedures do reentry programs have in place in Hillsborough County, Florida to assist with increasing successful ex-convict reentry?

Summary

In Chapter 3, I attempted to explain and simplify the rationale for using the ethnographical, qualitative research design for this study. The chapter also reviewed the roles of the researcher and the importance of protecting participants by disclosing all information upfront and maintaining ethical and professional standards at all times. Data collection must be handled confidentially and coded to secure the protection of participants' identities. As the researcher, I abided by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of all human participants, control personal bias, maintain ethical conduct, while maintaining participants' confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact labeling has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs to successfully reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. The target population consisted of ex-convicts, correctional officers, counselors, housing specialists, and any individuals who had a direct connection to ex-convict reentry in Hillsborough County, Florida. From the problem statement and purpose of the study, the principal research question asked: What policies and procedures should be put in place to assist Hillsborough County increase successful ex-convict reentry?

This chapter provides an overview of the study's findings. I received Walden's IRB approval on March 23rd, 2020, approval number 03-24-20-0322104. I collected data pertaining to a qualitative study with an ethnographic design, which was appropriate for this study. Ethnographic studies are typically flexible and take place by observation and interviews mainly in a natural field setting (Creswell, 2013). The goal of this study was to receive lived experiences from case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialist, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County, Florida. Ex-convicts were the selected population, for this qualitative ethnographic study. To answer my research question, I conducted interviews with 10 participants. I established contacts with my potential participants by sending out 100 emails to numerous Hillsborough County reentry programs, county offices, social service offices, and local businesses. Once I

received a response from my invitation to participate e-mail, I contacted prospects and explained the academic reasons for my study and that the results of this study would be documented, published, and possibly shared with other reentry programs and community leaders. I explained informed consent to each prospect, and they signed a consent form prior to starting the interviewing process.

Setting

Interviews took place in a private setting where participants provided intimate details to each of the 14 open-ended, semistructured interview questions. Participants' interviews occurred face to face or via phone. I interviewed a total of 10 participants. Each participant was referred to as Subject 1 through Subject 10 to conceal their identity. I became engulfed in each participant's culture, allowing them to feel comfortable and disclose information freely. I recorded extensive field notes by hand and also recorded the interview via Echo smart pen to ensure accuracy during the data collection process. I then transcribed and coded the interviews.

Demographics

This study's population sample included case managers, counselors, ex-convicts, housing specialists, program directors, reentry support managers, and individuals who have or had a direct rapport with ex-convict reentry within Hillsborough County, Florida. Participants consisted of 10 individuals, Subjects 1 through 10. There were eight males (80%), two females (20%), six ex-convicts, (60%), four Hillsborough County Sheriff Department employees (40%), four currently involved with Hillsborough County reentry programs (40%), three wounded healers (30%; individuals who are reformed and now

dedicate their time helping others during their reentry process); two case managers (20%); and one recently retired Sheriff (10%). Data saturation was achieved by interviewing several individuals who are a part of ex-convict reentry in all areas.

Data Collection

As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted in a private location convenient for each participant. All 10 participants were asked the same 14 semistructured open-ended interview questions. To establish credibility in trustworthiness, member checking was next applied by sharing a brief summary of the findings with participants, which allowed participants a chance to verify their responses and an opportunity for me to extrapolate additional data that may have been missed during the initial interviews. Member checking in qualitative research is used by researchers to increase validity (Leung, 2015). I originally anticipated it would take 2 weeks to collect my data. However, due to unusual circumstances the world encountered during my data collection stage – the Covid-19 pandemic and current state-issued social distancing orders – it took 6 weeks to complete my data collection. While data collection took longer than I anticipated, the goal of the researcher was to ensure participant's safety and to keep possible risk factors minimal.

Data Analysis

I disassembled the data for each participant. Each participant's interview responses, member checking, and my observations of them were manually transcribed and entered into individual Microsoft Word documents labeled Subject 1 through 10. After reading and analyzing the interview transcripts, I looked for how their responses

related to policies and procedures and the reentry programs that Hillsborough County, Florida has in place. Next, data were reassembled and analyzed for common themes. Themes were next underlined in Subjects 1 through 10 Microsoft Word documents and hand coded originally as Theme 1, Theme 2, and Theme 3. The data were imported into NVivo and disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted. The three broad themes obtained from NVivo needed a thorough manual review from which arose eight themes from a more detailed analysis. This method of data importing and manual review along with member checking, interviews, and observations was used to establish credibility through triangulation. Although NVivo's data interpretation revealed themes that supported the manual analysis, the manual review yielded more in-depth information that aligned with the problem, purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

When a study is trustworthy, authenticity is present. Using detailed design descriptions is one element of trustworthiness (Toma, 2014). Detailed recordkeeping including annotating researcher bias to help triangulate the study is another (Toma, 2014). Because qualitative research has historically not been held in the same esteem as quantitative research, it becomes important to conduct studies in a methodical, rigorous way to get usable, meaningful results (Nowell et al., 2017). Further, such research should be recorded as having been done in a thorough manner through audit trails and the like to establish credibility (Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

In qualitative studies, credibility involves ensuring the accuracy of the study's findings (DeJonckheere & Voughn, 2019). To enhance the credibility of my research, Loh (2013) listed seven techniques for credibility in a table based on the previous work of Lincoln and Guba (1985). The seven criteria Loh listed were the following: (a) engaging for an extended time; (b) observing with persistence; (c) using triangulation, including methods, investigators, and sources; (d) analyzing cases negatively; (e) archiving data; and (f) using member checking. As previously mentioned, I established credibility by using triangulation. Also used were interviews, observations, organizational websites, member checking, and NVivo to collect data and obtain accurate information from my 10 participants. Such methods helped to ensure credibility because these data came from sources outside of the data analysis process, bringing less subjectivity into the study.

Transferability

When the findings of a study can be transferred to another setting, transferability has been achieved. Because qualitative studies generally use small samples in the absence of statistical analysis, they cannot be easily generalized; thus, readers of the study can decide if a study is transferrable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Transferability is the level to which the results of a particular study can be used in other circumstances, and these include situations, human participants, settings, and times (Mosalanjad et al., 2018). The audit trail I tried could increase the transferability of the results because such a trail displays the step by step processes from start to finish (Johnson et al., 2020). Included in

the audit trail were information about the research design choice, my recruitment methods, and procedures for collection, coding, and data analysis in addition to interview notes and recordings, transcript summaries, and my reflective journal. The audit trail includes details about why I chose the research design and method, how I recruited the participants, and how I went about collecting, coding, and analyzing the data. I also included copies of interview notes, interview recordings, summaries of each transcript, and information from my reflective journal. Moreover, I used random sampling to recruit the participants for my study, no one with whom I was acquainted.

A positive side of random sampling is its fairness, in which any member of a certain population has an equal opportunity of selection (Sharma, 2017). Transferability and external validity were applied in a few ways throughout this study. Five out of the six ex-convict participants reported being arrested in other counties and states other than Hillsborough County, FL. These five ex-convicts also reported, while Hillsborough County lacked program availability and resources to assist with reentry, many of the other state prisons they have visited were also lacking in the same areas and offered little to no assistance with their reentry process. The data obtained from this study can also be applied to other programs and policies state and world-wide. The literature, which confirmed my findings, demonstrates similar program and policy issues across the state of Florida as well as throughout the United States, such as type of crime committed, negative effects of labeling, neighborhood and employment challenges and the lack of programs and policies to address these issues so former prisoners can reenter the community successfully.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is much like reliability in quantitative research. It refers to the constancy of the data and the rigor with which the study is conducted (Gibson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Dependability can be accomplished when the findings show consistency to the point it could be done again by future researchers (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I employed such rigor through an audit trail in which I clearly documented information on each step of the research process including interviews and how data themes were identified. The way the study was arranged methodologically, the role of the researcher, and a clear recruitment process would let others duplicate the study. Another way this study established dependability was through member checking. After transcribing data, documents were reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability means the level to which the findings of a study can be confirmed or authenticated by other researchers (Amankwaa, 2016; Anney, 2014). I increased confirmability in my research findings by using a reflexive journal and an audit trail. The audit trail contained details of how data were collected for the study so that another researcher would become acquainted with every step of the research process (Nyirenda et al., 2020). The reflexive journal was used to enter my notes as a form of documentation, and they included my personal thoughts, point of view and other observations that took

place during the data collection process. I also kept an audit trail of the notes taken during the interviews and recordings of the interviews (e.g., Amankwaa, 2016; Morse, 2015). Confirmability in this study was easy to achieve. It required the interviewer to remain ethical, keep personal opinions and bias outside of the study, and establish trustworthiness with interviewees. Data were recorded by hand or computer and transcribed word by word for accuracy. The audit trail includes a compilation of all notes collected, recorded and analyzed as well as detailed written descriptions of data collection and analysis stages of the study.

Results

After transcribing interviews, documents, and completing member checking, I transferred all the data into Microsoft Word. Each participant's data were disassembled and manually analyzed. Then, data were reassembled. A manual analysis was completed to find common themes. Next, I underlined the themes in Microsoft Word according to my manual analysis. The data were entered into NVivo where they were also disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted for themes. NVivo's interpretation of the data revealed three themes (programs, reentry, and successful reentry that underlay the eight themes found in the manual Microsoft Word analysis (successful vs. unsuccessful reentry, policies and procedures to lower recidivism, experiences in reentry, labeling and its effects, unmet needs from labeling, age affects successful reentry, geography affects resources, and type of crime is tied to reoffending). These themes are connected to necessary components in the reentry process. The intent of this qualitative research was to answer critical questions regarding the different types of reentry programs available in

Hillsborough County, Florida and how labeling affects reentry program policies and procedures. Based on the research question and data analysis, the following are eight themes that arose during the process.

Theme 1: Successful Versus Unsuccessful Reentry

All the participants were asked to describe the difference between successful and unsuccessful reentry. Reentry in general was referenced 35 times within the 10 interviews by nine subjects. Successful reentry was referenced 15 times within the 10 interviews by seven subjects. S1 talked about the importance of having a “contingency plan,” where the person “knows needs to be done, and gets it done.” It was important for S1 to not seek out people who were “not good for their positive and successful reentry.” S1 saw unsuccessful reentry as “falling back into old tactics, that you stayed away from, only because you didn’t have access to them.” Essentially, if there is no access, there is no temptation “to go back into [their] old ways.” S2 emphasized the importance of family where “you kind of can pick back up with life where you left off,” whereas unsuccessful reentry was “no family no support.” S3 defined success as “just to get back into society,” and “getting the f_ck out of jail.”

S4 defined successful reentry as one who follows program steps, stays out of prison, and is “holding down employment. The “complete opposite” extreme would be “doing the same thing that got you locked up in the first place, having no plan or family support.” S5 also mentioned family support as the lack thereof in unsuccessful reentry along with no education background or work history. To S5, successful reentry is being “fully integrated,” being a “regular citizen.” S6 repeated the refrain of being able to “get

a job, housing, is able to stabilize their life, not reoffend and not fall back into some sort of crime” and unsuccessful as “not able to get a job, or housing or anything that regular society is able to do.” Coming from the perspective of someone who works with ex-convicts, S7 defined reentry as those “trying to navigate their way back into society.” S7 goes on to state that successful reentry is “wanting to get help for any issues that have occurred while they were locked up or childhood or other traumatic experiences ... wanting to work on themselves to get back into the community ... *wanting* the change.” Unsuccessful reentry to S7 is “people who are in complete denial or have ongoing addiction to drugs and alcohol will put them right back into our jail prison system or Baker Act, which allows for involuntary examinations or institutionalization of an impaired individual.”

S8 reiterated the “wanting to” theme as “the desire and goal to be integrated into society ... *wanting* to work with society to successfully promote themselves.” S8 had harsh words for unsuccessful reentries: “Where I’m tainted on [reentry], is that there are still those individuals who are trying to decipher that. Those malingers, they just want to suck off of society, and take what they can get.” The “nuts and bolts” of successful reentry to S8 was “do they get rearrested or not?” For the “first 6-month period following release of prisoners [they] work closely with certain individuals [and if] not rearrested within that first 6 month timeframe, and they work within the perimeter of the community, then we label them as successful” compared to those who get back into trouble quickly and are thus not successful. S8 continued in great detail about the significance of the 6-month mark, essentially talking about the “fine line” between

successful and unsuccessful reentry yet the professionals like S8 know it well: “For example, if there is a new program or an opportunity that opens up, and I ask, ‘If I give you a drug test right now, are you going to pass it?’ and their answer is ‘no,’ they’re not successful in my mind.”

S9 saw the waiting period for reentry so long personally that they experienced “almost like culture shock.” S9 continued, “My first couple days out, I couldn’t even sleep right. My whole timing was off. So as far as me reentering into society it was a very slow process.” S9 felt that the process could not be explained a person who had not experienced it. To be successful, S9 said, “Well as far as being successful in society, you have to change your mind-set. If you can’t change your mind-set you’ll never move ahead. I had to learn how to change my mind-set, before I came out,” and they have seen many individuals who could not change “their mind set,” so that “years later they were doing before they came to jail. This repeat behavior makes it harder for the guys that are trying to make changes and do the right thing after their release.” Finally, S10 emphasized “obtaining and maintaining employment, clean, safe, and affordable housing. Staying out of trouble and not getting rearrested.” S10 also discussed the lack of training regarding universal availability: “Any place I’ve been training wasn’t available for everybody. Like while you’re in county jail awaiting sentencing you’re just sitting there.” S10 continued describing getting moved around with so much going on “at once,” that “if you don’t have the right connections or a paid attorney, there’s no programs really available for you.”

All the participants had ready answers to the issue of successful versus unsuccessful reentry because not only had they experienced it in one form or another (i.e., as ex-convicts or people who worked with such individuals), but they had also much time to observe others in the same circumstances. Most participants had been incarcerated multiple times from a young age. A few participants had witnessed the entire picture from a professional perspective. Thus, the first research question yielded rich results.

Theme 2: Policies and Procedures to Lower Recidivism

As a study under the department of public policy, a main focus was policies and procedures to address the problem of recidivism and the effect that they had on keeping former inmates out of prison. Overall, government programs in addition to ones in the community were helpful from the participants' perspective; however, their success largely depended on the efforts of the formerly incarcerated individual. S1 emphasized "surrounding yourself with good people that have similar goals in mind" and that probation and parole have "successful tools in keeping ex-convicts accountable for their actions" with a main goal of being "released and able to stay within society," to "follow the rules, of life the laws; rules and laws are in place and enforced for a reason."

S2 discussed a job placement program to the best of their recollection known as "Insurance for Returning Citizen's to Major Corporations," which was "very helpful" in allowing individuals to "gain employment." S2 used a "lot of mentoring" and kept themselves "very busy and surrounded by good folks" with continuing education and self-development. S2 suggested, "Reentry programs should be more relatable, they

should be run by people who have actually had successful reentry or governed by successful returning citizens.” Further suggestions involved the need of the programs to “be a more structured kind of hand to hand thing, a more hands on approach,” particularly because people dealing with programs have a lack of knowledge in this area and could gain more insight from actual successful citizens who have successfully reentered society.”

S3 offered simple advice on successful programs and policies related to having a good job, liking it, and surrounding oneself “around good people.” On their importance, the advice was more specific: “Before [prisoners are] released it’s good to be part of a program pertaining to the reason they got locked-up; it also depends on the way society is now after the release and of course the type of crime committed.” S4 stressed the importance of “getting in the right programs, placing people in the right programs,” distinguishing even for specific crimes the differences in program focus: “For instance, every drug program is not for everyone with a drug charge; some are locked up for using and abusing and some for selling. A drug dealer is not going to benefit from an NA course.” To increase success under reentry procedures, S3 believed “picking the right programs and trade schools” are important to lower recidivism and to stay sober and away from the “old crowd of people” they used to hang out with.

Any policies “that attack the barriers against reentry” were important ones for S5. S5 felt that fair hearing policies would allow people inside and outside the system to get help, especially if they teach work skills to make the individual more valuable to the marketplace. Further, S5 noted that an “extremely important” policy was to allow ex-

convicts to have “affordable and safe housing.” S5 took time to educate themselves about what programs and services were available and engaged in public speaking and mentoring to prevent others from making the same [poor] choices. S5 recommended there be “more support and assistance given in the realm of reentry, housing, family support, employment all of that [to show] law enforcement and legislatures that these programs do work and are helping people to turn their lives around.”

S6 was with the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Department that would check in with recent releasees to see if “they had jobs, stable housing and [could be put] in touch with certain programs to help them.” S6 recalled warning them to make sure what they had been doing before, they could not keep doing. Though recently retired and not completely sure of what was being done now, S6 recounted individuals being released from jail to a “central place and be released into society that way,” kind of like halfway houses” that were not permanent but a place to report to and be integrated back into society. Those programs were mandated and run from the Offices of Home Detention and House Arrest. S7, however, could not think of a specific policy but tried to “work goals for each individual person, based on their mental health substance abuse, history, incarceration history ... getting on correct medications, getting outpatient treatment, going to group therapy, attending churches, and positive community outreach services.”

The most detailed participant regarding responses was S8. To sum it up, S8 emphasized compliance with state statutes. Also, S8 divided up different kinds of offenders: “Policies and procedures deal with anything from your long-term felony offender, to basic felony offender, to sex offenders, sex predators and actually there is a

whole host of statues that apply and obligations that must be fulfilled.” S8 emphasized the importance of compliance so that ex-convicts do not get rearrested from something as simple as not updating their ID card, especially for sex offenders; further, even if this former case manager filled out a form for an individual, it was important to go over it carefully with them to make sure they had “some skin in the game.” This procedure includes giving the applicant a task to “make them familiar with the program,” so they do not lose a job due to simple errors. S8 follows up with individuals so they will not “turn their backs after their 6 months is completed,” some as long as 10 years later to “mentor them and get them back on track” and a “safe place to bounce their fears and ideas off of.”

Further on in the interview in responding to another question, S8 went back to policies and procedures and added that people who have been incarcerated have had “a lot of time to contemplate their situation and what they want to do.” S8 added that those who decided to take “the religious path” were motivated to “share stories to help individuals who are going down the same path they have or assist other at risk individuals.” However, there are few “venues or places that allow for these types of events to take place, for various reasons,” so S8 calls on religious individuals personally “to see if they would like to share their success and their stories with others who are now just starting their reentry process.”

Similar to what S8 expressed about religion, Abe Brown Ministries was personally introduced to S9, which is “very great and also has the ability to work,” but of course a person has to be “willing to change.” S9 described the program as “very positive

and uplifting and staff members will do their best to help you,” though sometimes “guys in the system” will “come to these types of organizations for their own little manipulation, not to get help and on their feet.” S9 also commended Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office reentry program case management team. Still, S9 felt that though “there’s nothing like a helping hand,” they would not receive the help until they helped themselves, mainly by “staying away from nonsense” and keeping “far the hell away from anything negative.” The help S9 has received is important to pay back, so they “try to find ways [to] give back and help others through their journey.” S10 simply keeps “only healthy relationships,” for “if someone or something becomes toxic I’m gone; positivity wins over negativity always.” Though it has not always been easy, S10 learned if they want better, they have to follow the rules and be accountable for their own actions.

Theme 3: Experiences in Reentry

Reentry was one of the original three themes, and the participants gave short but specific accounts of their experiences under Theme 3. In other words, some discussed specific programs by name and others described the lack of programs. S1 had been in several reentry programs, once while incarcerated. Interesting, most of S1’s experience with reentry programs was in prison and had mainly to do with substance abuse. S2 was lacking in experience with programs, saying, “Actually, I didn’t participate in any. There was one that was available called “Operation New Hope,” but it did not work out due largely to the abundance of paperwork and “nothing set up from one appointment to another” and its “limited spaces.” S3 reflected to their first time, the only one attended and described it as a “bootcamp” with “a lot of different programs,” and they were in

class all the time learning “a multitude of different stuff” mostly about oneself and “figuring out who you are as a person ... dealing with you yourself first.” Then, the larger society was discussed, though successful for them, S3 added that “you have to change yourself first.”

There were two programs S4 attended. One was a “28-day program in St. Charles Hospital, New York,” and another was “a program funded through the YMCA in Tampa, Florida.” Both were required stipulations for parole. S5 did not go through any programs, “none,” emphasizing that when they were released, “reentry programs were done through word of mouth; so, you would hear from one ex-con what program they did, or what program they were trying to be a part of”; however, by the time S5 found the program and went there to sign up, “there’s either no funding available, not enough spots left, or the program has closed down, and moved to a different location.”

As a professional law enforcement officer, S6 “would get a list of recently released offenders within our zones.” S6 every “couple weeks” would make contact with the “recently released [and] sometimes visit the facility they’re released to make contact, you know, just talk to them and touch bases.” S7 discussed issues with geography, presented in more detail under the geography theme. S8 characteristically provided in-depth details as a case manager, emphasizing, “I do not have any exact program that I administer to them; I’ve provided services available through the community resources such as the basic ‘Ready to Work’ program.” Although they have been “pretty beneficial,” they “don’t really have enough carrots to dangle in front of these individuals to keep them motivated.” As a case manager, S8 prefers programs with a residential

component attached to them because “transitional housing is usually their biggest need and the best way to go” particularly because that helps them complete the program without worrying about basic needs. S8 also liked basic education programs like the GED and a career source program with “very good computer literacy” to help “push these individuals forward that were struggling to keep up with today’s technology.”

The PRIDE program was described by S9 as a “course designed for inmates and people with criminal backgrounds looking into entrepreneurship. S9 added that Abe Brown Ministries reentry program “provides transitional housing during the reentry process,” and that they “also participated in Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office Reentry Program.” S10 attended AA meetings monthly “to stay on track and have weekly contact with [their] sponsor” not because of being required to do so, but “because with all the world’s crazy these meetings and social interactions are needed to keep [their] mind on the right path.”

Theme 4: Labeling and its Effects

Responses to both Theme 4 and Theme 5 involved the two main components of the theoretical framework, the labeling theory and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The participants had immediate reactions to the labels they or their charges faced from the greater society surrounding them. S1 listed several labels: “Ohhh hahaha you mean what labels don’t they face? Liars, thief, garbage, trash, jailbird, good for nothing, criminals, druggy, loser, oh the list goes on and on.” S1 complained there are “some days you don’t even want to try. It’s like your doomed before even opening your eyes; sh*t, it is hard

man. It can get real tough.” Still, S1 advised, “If you have family, friends, any loved ones, keep them close; don’t throw them away because of the pain you feel inside.”

To S2, the biggest label was that ex-convict are “bad people.” Once someone realizes they’ve been to jail or that they’re an ex-offender, “it’s usually not a question of why or what caused you to offend; it’s just usually you’re a bad person.” S2 bemoaned the fact that labels are put on them just for that “one mistake you made” and that labels “cause people to not want to give [them] a second chance.” S2 elaborated further: “Employment is super huge, housing is huge, even bigger. Once you’re labeled a bad person, nobody wants to be associated with bad people, right? So, I believe it causes us to be shut out and not allotted second chances.” S3 noted that society views ex-convicts as “screwballs and screwups, haha... they just don’t value your opinion or views on much of things. I find things are much easier, I just don’t go around telling people that I used to be locked up” to avoid getting a label at all.

S4 listed “jailbird, thief, no good,” complaining that “it’s supposed to be once you do the time, you’ve paid your debt to society, but it’s like even after you do your time you still have debt hanging over you.” S4 regretted that “it’s always there and held against you; just being in that situation alone, is enough to drive you crazy.” People might think, for example, “Oh, he’s nothing but a drug dealer; don’t give him a shot; he’s a waste of time; oh, he steals from people, he might steal from you; he’s bad news, don’t waste your time.” Further, people would not want such people “around merchandise, because [they sell] drugs.” S8 concluded that labeling can “definitely discourage

someone from having a successful reentry ... almost like a rehab, it can discourage you from doing the things needed to move forward.”

S5 noted that ex-convicts get labeled as “career criminals; people say things like if they get a chance to do it again they will, lazy, they get labeled as takers, troublemakers menace to society derelicts, uneducated and so on and so forth.” S5 noted that the labels “create space to dehumanize ex-convicts, [allowing] the public to think more about the prior offense so they continue punishing ex-convicts after they’ve served their time.” Society does not care if the debt has already been paid and does not “take the time to get to know who that person is after release,” which can lead to further discrimination due to the “labels and stereotypes.”

To the public, S6 described the perception that “you’re an ex-con, you’re a felon.” In most cases, people who are released have to disclose their arrest history on job applications, and that situation “needs to be improved and worked on” due to the stigma. S6 believed that “certain training and understanding has to be addressed with employers, neighbors and stuff like that. It’s not always public knowledge [because] people have to go looking for arrest history and people’s backgrounds to find it.” Those newly released are not going to advertise their status, so people today tend to “go looking and digging for that kind of information until they find it.” Another way to tell about prison history is to look for gaps in employment. S6 concluded, “There’s a negative stigma in society so these are just a few names and things they have to deal with ‘you committed a crime,’ ‘you just got out of prison,’ ‘you’re no good,’ and that’s not necessarily the case.”

S7 emphasized the label that sex offenders and predators especially face because “those labels stick with them for life” and inhibit finding work. Thus, S7 believed “labels affect more of the sexual offenders and predators more than someone who steals a car or has a robbery charge.” S8 continued that theme, noting that the general population “thinks of a sex offender [as] a baby raper,” a “hard label to overcome.” Because nobody or no politician wants to be involved with their status, they would not, for example “Put their name on a bill or endorse anything to turn that around.” So, S7 sees “sex offender” as “probably one of the biggest labels in itself to carry and society doesn’t want to listen to any explanation whatsoever; unless they’ve had a family member that got jammed up and later had to register as a sex offender.” Such individuals have difficulty finding anyone willing to rent to them, and they also have poor or no credit histories and “face more labels than others.”

In contrast to the other participants, S9 defied labels, stating boldly, “I honestly never really experienced that. I never labeled myself, and I damn sure won’t allow anyone to label me.” S9’s approach towards life now, is “Show and prove,” continuing, “as far as labeling is concerned, I can’t put someone into a category but I will not allow anyone to put me into a category. If I can label someone, then I can label myself.” S10 laughed sardonically: “Ohhh hahaha you mean what labels don’t they face” Liars, thief, garbage, trash, jailbird, good for nothing, criminals, druggy, loser, oh the list goes on and on...” S10 stated, “Some days you don’t even want to try. It’s like you’re doomed before even opening your eyes. Shit it’s hard man; it can get real tough.”

Theme 5: Unmet Needs From Labeling

All participants described the difficulty of meeting basic and higher needs as a result of society's labels. S1 "caught a felony at 24 years old" and now is 42 and still unable to get "certain jobs because of that." Because their record is "not expunged," people see it and use it against him though S1 has not be "arrested in over 10 years," but "still paying the price" for the past. S2 distinguished between urban and rural areas for getting basic needs fulfilled, stating that urban areas have the fewest tools and "are not properly equipped to go through the reentry programs" and therefore have the highest recidivism rates. There is also the issue of lack of resources (i.e., transportation mostly) to get to appointments" and "what do you do between your first and second appointment?" An ex-convict may lack food, shelter, transportation, housing, and "it's just a lot that can go into that when you're looking at the lower propensity or urban areas." Their background involving theft and drug charges puts them "in a hard place," especially because they cannot obtain financial aid "because of a drug charge." Further, if they have been "convicted of a felony, it's tough to obtain housing, you get denied, even with employment if you've been convicted of petit theft or any kind of theft, people won't hire you."

For anyone filling out a job application, S3 insisted "most will be denied" if they were "arrested or committed a crime" with "a lot of times, no access to restricted areas too," which includes the Army, Air Force bases, government facilities, "you're screwed there; they cannot get access." S4 just touched on higher needs for success, saying, "Place people in the right programs, Every program doesn't fit for all. Take the time to be

sure the programs available are what each individual needs to succeed.” S4 also suggested the need “to make the programs fun and entertaining, so it’s a social gathering where people want to share information, which is how they will all get what they need to succeed out of the program.”

S4 began with basic needs: “When I say fully integrated I mean has permanent housing, save housing, they got employment, they have opportunities to explore proper education and they can participate physically,” adding that “any policy designed that will allow ex-convicts to have affordable and safe housing are extremely important in lower recidivism... It lets ex-convicts feel like there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Going into higher needs, S4 added, “Completion of these programs can help to boost esteem and even help chip away at some of the stereotypes and labels; society might start looking at some of these returning citizens differently and give them a chance.”

S6 emphasized the “huge effect” that labels can have on a person’s reentry, especially because some “employers don’t want to hire anyone who has a record; a lot of business owners are not willing to take that chance.” S6 elaborated further: “They’re afraid that they’ll lose business or they’ll be treated negatively, because they let an ex offender in.” People on the outside are also fearful of “giving housing to someone who was just released,” even though the releasee has completed a program, done their time, so they need to be given a chance.” S6 concluded, “They’ve done their part, now they need society to allow them to move on.” S7 works for the mental health facility at the Hillsborough Sheriff’s office, and emphasized their part in helping ex-convicts meet all their important needs: “I think all of our roles here are phenomenal; we all work together

as a team, because we are primarily working toward the same goal of seeing these individuals get back on their feet.” They are “helping them take their medications, make it to appointments, get out in the community, find jobs, be stable, not committing any new crimes.”

From S8’s point of view, finding housing seemed to be “impossible.” S8 described the dilemma in detail: “Right now, I’ve got way too many guys camping out, because nobody wants to rent to them. Some of which have been holding down jobs and still having trouble getting housing.” For those without jobs, “labeling has a huge impact on employment which I spoke of earlier, but an ever greater impact on housing.” S8 continued to discuss higher needs: “Relationships, are very important and ex-convicts want to mend broken relationships after release. With easy accessibility to one’s criminal history via social media or internet often ex-offenders are denied relationships because of the label of their past crime.”

Many ex-convicts had roots in not getting their need fulfilled from an early age: S9, stated, “Well, you have society saying that ex-convicts are no good,” so “if nobody is willing to give them a chance what else are they supposed to do? I know some individuals that grew up their whole life hearing that they’re no good and good for nothing.” S9 went on to tell a “quick story” about the perverse way in which some recidivism is used to get basic needs fulfilled. One individual, “Calvin,” robbed a cab driver, but “beat his case and was released.” The next time he robbed a cab driver, he also killed the driver, yet was “as happy as hell to be back in the county jail awaiting his trial” because the “pressure from society was too much for him.” S9 explained that Calvin’s 30

years plus life sentence made him fulfilled “in the penal system playing cards and working out all day; he had no idea how to live or survive without being told what to do.” Similar to Calvin, S9 noted that “many leave prison and have no plan, no guidance, nothing.” Finally, S10 profoundly emphasized the importance of higher needs: “If you have family, friends, any loved ones keep them close don’t throw them away because of the pain you feel inside...” He then exclaimed, “Wow this interview really took me back to some of the things I’ve been through, dealt with, and grew from. All I can say is life ain’t easy and it’s not fear; tough times don’t last, tough people do.”

Theme 6: Age Affects Successful Reentry

All 10 participants had strong opinions about age of reentry, some of them emphasizing that older reentrants experience more discrimination than younger ones, while others saw the crime rather than the age at which it was committed the main issue. Even people who had been released long ago remained having employment issues years later. S1 noted the problems depended on government policies that involved expunging records as well as the status of the crime. Because S1 “caught a felon” at 24 they still at age 42 cannot “find or get certain jobs because of that; my record is not expunged and people see it and use it against me.” Further, a person who commits a crime at a young age, according to S1 is immature and “still has time to grow and to change; however, when you’re older the public may view a past crime a certain way even though you’ve changed.” S1 concluded, “Ultimately, at the end of the day you’re going to see the crime for what it is, no matter the age. I haven’t been arrested in over ten years, but I’m still paying the price for my past.” S2 noted, “Just by the crime being on your record so long a

lot of time you can commit a crime at a younger undeveloped age and it could follow you forever,” emphasizing, “So you could not have reoffended for 20 years but it’s still on your background so it just hinders you and haunts you forever even if you were younger and not as mature as you’ve grown to be.”

On the other hand, S3 felt “the younger the better. I would think they would attribute it to you being immature, being poor decision making.” S3 reemphasized, “The younger the better; it can make you look better to those on the outside than an older person if you’re still an adolescent.” S4 apologized for their language in their emphasis: “If you’ve been out committing crimes up until you’re fu king 40, oh excuse me. I apologize for that, but if you try to get a job, no one will hire you because you were in prison.” S4 added, “It definitely makes you want to give up, and go back to what it is you normally do that got you in trouble to begin with.”

On the other hand, S5 thought it was more the type of crime than the age that “affects the way people will view you and judge you. Like for instance the general landscape here in Florida is most employers want to hire younger youthful workers.” S5 continued, “So, depending on the situation, crime committed, and what time they had to do, with an older ex-convict coming home with little to no education and a violent crime conviction, it’s going to be extremely difficult to find work.” S9 noted, “There’s a lot of barriers surrounding them ... more challenges with workforce the older you get especially if there’s no work history or education. They must start from the bottom, and that’s a huge mountain to climb.”

S6 noted that age could be a difficult factor: “Well, the younger they offend, the more likely they are to reoffend. The juvenile sanctions that are currently on the books don’t work. The juveniles reoffend more than the adults do because they’re given so many chances.” Even with “the shift to civil penalties rather than jail or arrest and all those implications, juvenile offenders are going to just keep on going; [they’re] are more likely to offend.” S6 felt that adults “depending on the crime they committed” are “less likely to reoffend than juveniles, young teens, mid-teens those ones go back into the system, unfortunately.”

S7 felt it depended “on the age they are at the time of their arrest; like if someone goes in at age 16 and comes out at age 60 or 70 it’s going to be very hard for them to get a job obviously.” No matter how much family support, it “just honestly depends on how much time they served and how committed they are in to getting their act together.” S7 added, “If they have physical disability or mental disabilities they can apply to receive Social Security Disability, but if they’re able to work regardless of their age then we encourage them to work.”

Having work experience and being able to socially interact was most important to S8, who told a story: “Well, I had a gentleman that was 15 years old when he first got arrested. He received probation, but came out committed another crime and received another 25 years.” S8 continued, “So obviously he had no job skills when he got released because when he went to prison he was too young and never had a chance to be out in the work field.” In their job, S8 tended to “look at these individuals who are just coming out of prison to see who all coming out of prison stayed engaged, who’s up on current events,

who maintained whatever interest they had prior to incarceration, who has hobbies.” S8 asks, “Are they interested in sports, who has dreams of fulfilling their life and doing some of the things they always wanted to do?” S8 believed keeping up with current events was important for “guys that went in very young,” S8 concluded, “I think one of the biggest downfalls with most prisons is that there are no programs that deal with current events and provide social interaction.”

The problem for people going into prison is their level of skills. Although S9 was incarcerated between ages 31 and almost 56, they had “some kind of skill level” before they went in. S9 commented on the lack of skills in younger people: “Now you have people going into prison that are kids or like 18-19 years old with no type of skill level at all period. pointblank period.” S9 emphasized, “If a person doesn’t have no type of skill-set coming out of prison, he is going to fail. Help has to be available; they have to be willing to learn new things, build new skills, and accept available help” or they will continue to fail. S10 simply said, “The younger you are, things can be forgiven or even expunged. The older you are, the harder it will be for you to change your mindset.” S10 added, “Also, people are less likely to give an older person that’s still screwing up a chance.”

Theme 7: Geography Affects Resources

Geography is an important factor in recidivism and could affect people on a personal level or institutionally, regarding resources to succeed in reentry and the company they keep. S1 stated, “If I heard the question correctly, I believe staying away from old things, staying away from old areas, bad habits, [is] probably the best thing.

Geographically speaking, that could vary. However, just stay away from old habits,” they advised. S2 distinguished the type of setting (e.g., urban vs. other locales). Though people in urban areas need resources the most, it seems to S2 they have the “highest recidivism rates because they don’t have the necessary tools and are not properly equipped to go through the reentry program.” There is a “lack of resources to get back and forth to your appointments” and “you may not have food, shelter, transportation, housing and it’s just a lot that can go into that when you’re looking at the lower propensity of urban areas.”

S3 was “not really sure about geography but believed “that in certain areas there is gonna be a lot more trouble one can get into than others; if you’re living in an area that offers a lot of programs it’s better for you if you need these programs.” S3 concluded, “I believe in certain areas there is gonna be a lot more trouble one can get into than others. If you’re living in an area that offers a lot of programs, it’s better for you if you need them.” Earlier, S4 had touched on geography in answering another question: “Well, usually people are going to go back to the first thing they know how to do, especially if they’re getting released to the same area they got into trouble at.” S4 added, “It’s about survival once you’re released. They go back to selling drugs, or robbing, or whatever it is they do to survive in these streets.”

S5 made a strong distinction among geographic areas: “If you have returning citizens moving back to particular lower income zip codes, they may not be able to locate housing, and they have no access to educational opportunities.” S5 continued, “They can’t find legitimate employment; they’re more likely to reoffend their likelihood of

going back to jail is very high.” This is “unlike geographic areas that offer more opportunities or support groups usually have fewer returning citizens to that area.” S5 also talked about the economic state of the cities: “Also, the lack of ability to work means that they’re not paying taxes, and they’re not shopping so the businesses in those lower income zip codes are also suffering.” S5 concluded, “So less money is going towards schools, building roads. So, the inability to successfully rehab one individual affects the whole entire community.”

S6 concurred about “particular areas,” stating, “Well, if people come back to a particular area and they’re not able to become successful on their reentry, then the crime is going to go up in that area again.” S6 explained, “There could be more poverty in that area, and they might not be able to get a job; more sources might be needed in that particular area. It’s almost like a domino effect, much not just crime related.” Although many “folks don’t go back out after being released looking for crime and committing crimes again; but some do.” S6 emphasized that for “the majority of these folks, they need something to help get them back on their feet; help, has got to be expected after spending a year, five years, ten years in prison,” and added that “they can’t be expected to come out and know how to do everything on their own because times keep changing they need some help.”

S7 believed that geography was “probably regarding funds and funding more free services for people who don’t have the health insurance or money.” Those just released from prison “don’t have money and are not usually able to get a job right away.” S7 added, “I would say more free community programs that don’t cost as much, would

probably be more specific to certain geographic areas.” S8 noted the importance of zip codes: “Well, what comes first to mind is back in 2010, when we started our reentry program it was identified demographically as zip code 33605 and 33610 in the Tampa area.” Those zip codes had “the highest numbers of individuals returning back to live that were returning from prison.” and “those areas were more prone to have higher levels of criminal activity or those individuals that are more criminal minded in these areas.” Back to the hierarchy of needs, S7 stated, “Not having the right support mechanisms or their basic needs in place such as food, clothing, shelter it is that much more likely they will slip back into old habits.” Further, S7 stated, “Demographically, this is the biggest issue—getting released to underfunded high crime areas eventually individuals get desperate because they have to eat.”

S9 repeated the interview question as they thought out their answer: How can failure to provide successful reentry programs affect specific geographic areas more than others? And then they reflected, “The biggest problem is when you’re coming out of prison and if you have to go back to the same areas without certain barriers, they’re gonna just end up doing the same things all over again.” S9 continued, “So yes, it causes major effects in providing the help to the individuals in need; however, like I previously said any individual that truly wants the help has to actually work to get the help.” They added, “They can apply themselves to get help and if they can’t do that then you can’t help the person at all.” S10 presented a more cynical picture: “When you put a bunch of thugs or criminals in the same poverty struck areas there’s nothing else society is gonna get, accept what they’ve created and what they’re looking for,” emphasizing the

geographical situation is “a mess; crime, crime, and crime mixed with poverty and brokenness.”

Theme 8: Crime Type is Tied to Reoffending

All participants had ideas of distinctions among type of crime and how that affected recidivism, including mental state. S1 emphasized that point: “I think you’re going to have a certain mental capacity, mental disability whatever you want to call it, to commit certain crimes. Ultimately the more devastating the more heinous the crime the more crazier you are.” S1 continued to talk about premeditation vs. spur of the moment crimes: “I mean some people go into stores and steal and commit theft and theft and that is a crime [while] some premeditate a certain crime and don’t just take action on a spur of the moment.” S1 continued to discuss mental state: “Some people are just straight up crazy and there is not too much we can do for them. They may commit a crime, go to jail and sit in jail but it doesn’t change their mind.” S1 concluded, “If it’s an insane person, the punishment of going to jail doesn’t really change a person if they have a mental issue. They are who they are. When people make mistakes, jail works. However, not all crimes are mistakes.”

Connecting type of crime to reentry, S2 said that reentry programs usually “cater to housing and employment as well as education; about half of our offenses are either theft or some kind of drug charge which causes us to be unable to obtain any of those,” which “kinda puts you in a really hard place, [like] you can’t get financial aid because of a drug charge.” S2 continued, “If you’re convicted of a felony, it’s tough to obtain housing, you get denied, even with employment if you’ve been convicted of petit theft or

any kind of theft people won't hire you. It's hard to find employment." S3 noted that "some crimes can screw you up pretty bad. Depending on the nature of crime committed, it can follow you for life," concluding that "it's all according to what the charges are they can definitely cause a damper in your level of success in certain areas."

Distinguishing among offenses, S4 stated, "Some crimes are frowned down upon differently. You have sex offenders, that can really affect a person. Some crimes, give the offender instant gratification or a huge adrenaline rush." S5 saw type of crime from a different perspective than others—public protection: "Well, I think the type of crime committed has a high impact, but I don't think necessarily it's the offense but for protection of the public." S5 distinguished between nonviolent and violent crimes and the "disproportionate discriminatory outlook towards violent crimes and even more so with felony sex offenders." However, "looking at the statistics, violent offenders have a lower recidivism rate than nonviolent offenders; nonviolent offenders are more likely to reoffend." S5 continued, "Often, the public eye views these criminals as the troublemakers. But nevertheless, when the quote unquote troublemakers make it back into society they have a harder time than others reintegrating back into society."

Emphasizing two crimes with high recidivism, S6 noted, "Well, sexual crimes are unfortunately, those types of offenders do repeatedly offend. That's been proven over the course of the years so that is something that needs to be watched." S6 mentioned "those things in place in the Sheriff's Office; the state sets up files for sex offenders, predators, and so forth," adding, "Drugs, dealers and users; those folks can default back into it as

well. If they haven't successfully completed a rehab program in prison, their habits are still their habits and usually these are the biggest cases of reoffending."

S7 did not see specific crimes as important: "I don't necessarily think it has anything to do with the crime committed. I think it's more of the aftermath of it, and what they're going to do about making it right." S7 added, "I don't really think it's the crime committed unless it's domestic violence and things like that; they would have to stay away from that person." Finally, S7 stated, "If it's a sex offender or predators, of course they have to stay away from children and abide by those laws. That's probably all to that question."

Adding some important but misunderstood information about ex-offenders, S8 said: "Those with more obligations per statues to fulfill definitely have higher rates of recidivism. Society has to understand that just because a previously committed sex predator goes back to prison, that does not mean they've committed another sex crime." S8 related a vivid story:

I've had a lot of individuals who have gambled with their freedom because they were desperate to keep employment so those types of crimes make it more difficult for them to stay focused and not to recidivate due to the obligations to fulfill those mandates. Example: Bobby has a job. Employer tells Bobby to be at work at 6 o'clock: "I'm going to work you 12 hours 6 days a week. If you miss a day, you're out." Bobby hasn't had a job in 3 months. He has child support obligations; he's trying to reestablish his driver's license; he's a sex offender so he has 48 hours to report his new employment. He has to come into the Sheriff's

Department they have to identify him, get his ID, get a mug shot; they will identify that he is indeed who he says he is. They will take his new employment information and if he did not report it within that 48 hours, he is now outside of his obligation to report. He can now be arrested for that. However, if Bobby missed work, he was going to lose his job. So, this is a struggle when it comes to this kind of conviction.

S9 also noted ex-convicts will all “struggle tremendously from the inability to get decent housing; a lot of individuals want to reunite with their wives and children, but quite often the areas that ex-convicts get released to are not the safest, most family friendly environments.” Because “most of society has an issue with transitional housing being in their neighborhoods, the areas most of these reentry homes and facilities are located are generally not the best and prominent in crime.” S8 concluded that “the severity of the charges carry a large weight on those individuals who chose to be successful with their reentry ... the heavier their charge usually the bigger their obligations to society will be upon reentry.”

S9’s perspective was from the point of view of “a fu@king violent offender” and complained about societal views: “It’s not right. Yes, I committed a violent crime and I am a felon, but I’ve also done my time.” S9 continued, “Society might look at me like I’m a horrible person and still want to hold my past acts against me, but how can you move on, if they keep pulling you back?” S9 had also seen people “like child molesters and stuff like that receive more leniency from the courts and public than offenders who have violent crimes.” He has witnessed those phenomena “on many occasions,” adding,

“All I have to say is people should stop judging and allow people to move on. If you just meet a person, you should get to know them from that day on and not judge them from their past.” S10 felt that there’s just some things “you can never come back from. Society sets limits to what they consider deviant. If they say, ‘Hey, we hate thieves or rapists,’ guess who has a harder time once they’re released. Can’t find housing or get a job.”

The rich, in-depth results from the manual review extended more specifically the three main themes that were identified in the initial analysis from NVivo, and revealed a total of eight themes that fully covered the range of participant responses in greater detail. I will go into more depth on the data in Chapter 5, interpreting the themes in the light of the theoretical framework and current literature already reviewed in Chapter 2 and added from new searches inspired by the generous answers given by the 10 participants to the 14 research questions.

Summary

Hillsborough County does not have a set of direct procedures in place to assist with ex-convict reentry. The policies currently in place may be difficult for an ex-convict to follow successfully if they do not have the appropriate assistance, guidance, and family support. For many individuals who recidivate, their return to incarceration is usually due to failure to comply with policy mandates rather than for committing another crime. In Chapter 4, I presented the purpose of the study, the research questions, the setting, data collection and analysis, how trustworthiness was achieved, and detailed data given by the participants in the results section. In Chapter 5, I present the interpretation, recommendations, implications, and conclusions on the data collected and analyzed in

this study on the effects of labeling on ex-convicts in Hillsborough County in the state of Florida.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact labeling has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough county reentry programs to successfully reenter society successfully and avoid experiencing recidivism. This study was conducted to find ways to contribute to social change by contributing new knowledge regarding ex-convict reentry stability along with valuable policies and procedures for ex-convict reentry programs in Hillsborough county Florida. In this study, I found that Hillsborough county has many programs that they refer to as reentry. According to my interview subjects lived experiences, reentry programs are not easily accessible or available for many of the reentry population. Reentry programs are usually grant or government funded, so these programs are provided when there is monetary stability. Most interview subjects agreed that reentry programs are an important factor in obtaining successful reentry. Subjects also admitted that they would participate in reentry programs if they were easily available. Based on the findings, I determined that programs that are easily accessible are not directly targeted or geared towards individuals' reentry needs. While documenting subjects experiences, I found that labeling contributes to low self-esteem and is a prerequisite to recidivism.

Interpretation of Findings

During the interviews, each participant truly believed that with the right program available, ex-convicts would be far more successful with their reentry process. Subjects spoke of programs not being available to all, or programs having limited capacity. A few

subjects spoke about getting transferred or being moved to another jail or prison location prior to finishing the program in which they were enrolled. Six out of the 10 interview subjects were ex-convicts. Four out of the 10 were currently involved with reentry programs. Three of the 6 ex-convicts were wounded healers, and three out of the six ex-convicts were current business owners. Subjects spoke about family support and staying clear of people and areas that got them in trouble to begin with. Recidivism is not always a choice; quite often, individuals return to their old behaviors because they have limited resources once they are released. Without their basic needs being met, it is not possible for them to succeed. The following eight subsections provide an interpretation of the rich data inherent in the study.

Theme 1: Successful Versus Unsuccessful Reentry

All participants talked extensively about reentry, especially from their personal perspectives on what constituted successful reentry and what represented unsuccessful reentry. Depending on their personal views as well as their criminal history, there were varying levels of personal accountability. Some spoke about having to relocate, which gave them an opportunity for a new beginning, including owning their own businesses and giving back to their communities. The former inmates, for the most part, had all been out of prison for a few years. Some recounted what they found difficult to change, how they were unsuccessful in meeting their basic needs, which resulted in reoffending just to have “three hots and a cot.” In fact, S9 told a story of an individual who knew he could not make it on the outside, so he ensured he would go back to the security he found in prison by committing a crime solely with that goal. In the opinion of most participants,

society continued to punish them for crimes that were previously committed, even though they had done their time and justice was served. Along with Maslow's (1943) constructs including housing, jobs, and education, ex-convicts face many issues that may prevent a successful reentry into society, especially when their needs run against societal labeling. Those who are fortunate enough to not experience negative labeling are more likely to be successful (Vance & Noelle, 2018), while those who are negatively labeled have difficulty surviving on the outside.

A significant issue is the focus on the negative aspects of reentry such as compliance with treatment, criminal behavior, and violations of parole on the part of reentry programs versus more successful reentry initiatives such as mentoring (Koschmann et al., 2013). Another issue is the degree to which former prisoners disclose their past when seeking employment. Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) suggested that successful reentry could be increased when programs for employment reintegration are provided. There, participants are coached in different disclosure strategies as well as how such strategies will vary according to the circumstances in seeking employment. My findings confirmed the literature on the degree to which former prisoners have positive and negative experiences in reentering the community.

For the most part, the main avenue to preventing reoffending was to keep good company and stay away from negative influences. For example, S4 talked about not "doing the same thing that got you locked up in the first place. S4 also emphasized the importance of family support, which was brought up continually in the interviews. Such support networks "are critical in potentially mitigating the stressors and risks associated

with reentry and reducing the likelihood of recidivism” (Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2018, p. 536). However, many of the ex-convicts and those who worked them in the study found so few opportunities to reenter society (e.g., housing, food, education), especially from the labels given them, that it took huge efforts to have their needs met. Although all the former inmates in the study were ultimately successful, almost everyone went to prison multiple times over many years (e.g., S4 was arrested 36 times; S9 was incarcerated 25 straight years and well over 30 total). Society’s labels prevented them from moving forward.

Theme 2: Policies and Procedures to Lower Recidivism

The participants, for the most part, answered the question about policies and procedures with descriptions of government and community programs. They also stressed the importance of keeping good company and the need for programs to match the issues that got the former prisoners in trouble (e.g., S3 distinguished between two types of drug charges, commenting that a narcotics program was of little use to someone who had been incarcerated for dealing). Mentoring programs were mentioned by various participants, and community programs including religious programs had helpful procedures to lower recidivism. S8, a professional, likes to ask religious individuals to share their success narratives with those who are just on the precipice of reentry. Mowen et al. (2018) found that people who give religious support to ex-convicts can improve outcomes for the latter to help them make meaning of their life situation. S9 also described a religious program, Abe Brown Ministries, that was very positive and uplifting as well as the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office reentry program case management team.

As did others, S9 and S10, for example, cautioned that people have to stay away from all negativity and “nonsense” because they are the ones to take responsibility in the end. Because all offenders had been to prison many times or in some cases for a long time, they had finally gotten to the point of knowing how to get on the right path. S8’s description about types of crime related to Middlemass’s (2017) extensive research on policies and politics of reentry demonstrated (using social disability theory) that society’s views on ex-convicts socially construct a concept that all felonies are equal, and that construction originated in days of enslavement that results in more punishment after time is served. Therefore, I concluded that most successful reentries were based more on individual persistence and conscious awareness of what was out there than any one government policy or program, which was especially true for former inmates who had great difficulty finding jobs or housing, no matter the nature of the crimes they had committed in the past.

In Taylor’s (2013) study, discussed in Chapter 2, it was found that a court program significantly decreased the rearrest rate by about 10% (participants were rearrested at 43% and the test group were reincarcerated at 53%). Although Taylor’s study was conducted in Florida, no such court program exists in Hillsborough County. Even in the presence of programs, Middlemass (2017) posed the question: Are former prisoners permitted to serve their sentences, pay their debts, and successfully reenter society? Middlemass discovered a negative answer to that question, for many policies hurt felons and extend hostility from the public, by deliberate design. Further, the rhetoric on criminal justice rehabilitation continues to hold them accountable through hidden

structural obstacles, which ends up in continuing punishment and discrimination. Most prisoners will never be released from those bonds. Nationally, the Bureau of Justice (2017) reported almost 68% of prisoners were rearrested in 3 years and almost 77% in 5 years. The participants in the study revealed multiple rearrests and reincarceration, which are in congruence with the literature.

Theme 3: Experiences in Reentry

Answers varied among the former inmates and those who served them regarding reentry experiences. Some participants named programs both public and private, and others discussed the lack of programs or at least their inability to access them easily. Some of the participants, including S1, had experienced many different programs both in prison and once they were released, though the main theme for the first participant was in overcoming substance abuse. S2 was denied easy access to the one program that was available due to an inordinate amount of paperwork, no resolution in appointments, and lack of space.

Another participant had experienced a bootcamp that was helpful but came to the conclusion that they had to help themselves first. S4 attended two required programs and S5 did not because they had to rely on word of mouth but when they got there, the program was nonexistent because monies and spots had dried up and the program moved to another place. S6 tried to make contact with ex-convicts regularly, so that was a more informal experience though a conscientious one. S8, even though a professional case manager, could not come up with an exact program other than a community resource for the general public, lamenting there are “not enough carrots to dangle in front of them”

and wished for more of the most effective program that had a residential component to it. S8 also thought it was important to provide former inmates with more up-to-date skills including computer literacy to make them more employable. The last two participants found success with prisoner reentry in a religious program, as a professional who often recommended it and AA meetings for a former inmate to stay on track, even if not required.

The experiences of the ex-convicts and those who helped them revealed a disorganized approach to helping them successfully reenter society. It did not seem there were strong standards and policies to help get them on their feet, even from the point of view of the professionals I interviewed. Myers (2017) conducted a study on female former convicts and strongly stated, “The state’s failure to meet these young women’s social and economic needs had immediate consequences for their physical and psychic well-being as well as long-term consequences for how they engaged with state efforts to care for and control them” (p. 62). As in the first two themes, those who were most motivated to help themselves either by finding a program that worked for them, even if it was one not necessarily set up for ex-prisoners (e.g., AA) or depending on their personal persistence and the right friends and family influences were the most successful (see Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2018). As in the literature review, reentry was a challenge due to the challenging in meeting the most basic needs, particularly in housing; if one’s basic needs are not met, then successful reentry is rarely possible (e.g., Formon et al., 2018; Maslow, 2011). McNeeley (2018), among others, added that success is more likely when post-release housing placements are stable, safe, and secure. Programs that address ex-

prisoner's needs and aid such placements were found by many participants to be inaccessible or not the right fit for people needing to reenter the community effectively; the most effective programs for some participants and as a recommendation of one of the professional participants were programs based on religion, as was researched by Mowen et al. (2018).

Theme 4: Labeling and its Effects

Theme 4 represents more specific details about labeling; the participants had immediate reactions to the labels they personally experienced or knew too well as professionals who were immersed in the needs of ex-inmates. In the theory based on labeling, a label that is applied to an individual, especially an official one, promotes the development not only of society's negative reactions to ex-convicts but also of internalizing the negative classification and too often becomes self-fulfilling (Becker, 1963). The following is a list of all the labels the first participant named: Liars, thieves, garbage, trash, jailbird, good for nothing, criminals, druggies, losers, bad people (S1 complained, "It's like you're doomed before even opening your eyes" and advised to keep loved ones close to ease the "pain you feel inside"). The list continued: bad people (S2 bemoaned that labels can result from one mistake, and once that happens no one wants to associate with them and thus S3 avoids any past disclosure to avoid getting labeled), and S4 advised keeping close family ties to ease the transition: "If you have family, friends, any loved ones, keep them close; don't throw them away because of the pain you feel inside."

S4 who listed thief, no good, talked about debts that hang over them even if the initial debt was paid and how discouraging that would be, for example, because no one wants to hire a thief. People get labeled as takers, troublemakers, derelicts, uneducated and that labels dehumanize ex-convicts, which results in no patience to give people a chance (S5). S6 complained that people think of all ex-cons as felons and with today's technologies, people can keep digging until they find a negative history or employment gaps, even if nondisclosure was attempted. S7 mentioned that sex offenders have the hardest time of all, something S8 said was almost impossible to overcome because people will listen to "no explanation whatever." Still, S9 was the only person who refused to give themselves a label and claims never to have experienced labels. The fact that the interview question about labeling demonstrated a reactive elicitation of the most readily given answers confirms the theoretical framework of the hardships people face who are labeled by society and internalize that stigma.

The results of the study regarding labels were in good parallel with the literature. Orrick et al. (2011) noted labeling along with poor self-esteem further exacerbates bad outcomes for ex-inmates rather than helping them conform to social norms. Garland et al. (2014) expressed community concerns for stakeholders about ex-convicts who had been gang-affiliated or dangerous reentering their communities. Thus, having programs for ex-convict integration into society helps to decrease labeling, fear, and community structure for the communities' needs rather than being based only on government funding. Labels themselves raise recidivism rates by altering the ex-prisoners self-image (Kroska et al., 2017).

Theme 5: Unmet Needs From Labeling

While Theme 4 developed from detailed lists and complaints about typical labels put on ex-inmates, Theme 5 arose from a particularly strong link between the labeling theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As mentioned in the results, all participants gave detailed descriptions of how hard it was to meet both basic and higher needs once labeled. In addition to the normal struggles of ex-convicts, they are also stigmatized by race and class, additional labels assigned to people who are incarcerated at a higher level than other groups in society (Caputo-Levine, 2018). One participant, because of a felony at a young age, does not have an expunged record and experiences great barriers even after not being arrested for 10 years. It was brought out that people reentering urban areas have few tools toward successful reentry and experience recidivism at higher rates than others who have greater access to services. All areas of basic needs (e.g., food, transportation, housing, employment) are often denied to ex-inmates. For example, even a petit larceny charge would prevent most employers from giving a person reentering society a chance due to the thief label. One barrier leads to another (e.g., if people cannot get transportation, how can they make it to appointments on housing, food, employment, or medical needs?).

Regarding higher needs, S4 suggested that if people were placed in the right programs where they were also more social and engaging, "they will all get what they need to succeed out of the program." S4 also touched on needed policies to provide housing that is affordable and safe so "society might start looking at some of these returning citizens differently and give them a chance." The people who worked at the

Hillsborough Sheriff's office did feel they were doing their part in helping ex-inmates with all of their "important needs" including medications, making appointments, getting out into the community, and crime prevention. Still, S8 saw the near impossibility of getting everyone housing due to labeling that has "a huge impact on employment which I spoke of earlier, but an ever greater impact on housing," especially because so much information can be derived from the Internet. Nevertheless, showing resilience, S10 concluded, "All I can say is life ain't easy and it's not fear; tough times don't last, tough people do."

I interpret these results to mean that it is difficult to anyone to meet their higher needs with so many barriers to their lower ones. According to Maslow's theory, once an individual gets their basic needs met, the goal is to strive for the next one. It was apparent that most former inmates reentering society face an almost insurmountable struggle to reach the mid-levels of the hierarchy, yet how much more difficult is self-actualization? The tough on crime movement including policies like zero tolerance, mandatory minimum sentencing, and three strikes created a criminal culture rather than their original intent of scaring straight those who might commit crime (Guy, 2011). This criminalization also led to ineffective policies that put ex-inmates into a position of rarely being able to achieve their higher needs. As in the literature review (e.g., Formon et al., 2018), when the participants who had been incarcerated struggled to obtain housing and employment, they did not achieve a successful reentry.

Theme 6: Age Affects Successful Reentry

Age of reentry was a theme that arose when all participants had strong opinions about this demographic. Some participants felt older reentrants experienced more discrimination than younger reentrants, while others emphasized the nature of the crime as the main point. S1 had a negative point of view about only teens having their records expunged, while people who “caught a felon” at a young age are still having problems getting resources in their 40s. On the other hand, some believed younger people had more of a chance to grow and change and be perceived better than older former inmates. No matter the age, people tend to look at the type of crime in the end, according to S1. However, S3 thought someone who committed a crime while young might have the actions attributed to immaturity and bad decisions. Those who keep committing crimes past their youth, have more difficulty with getting the resources they need, according to S3 and it “makes you want to go back to what it is you normally do that got you in trouble in the first place.” S5 thought youth gave people a leg up in Florida where people want to hire younger workers rather than having someone start from the bottom at an older age, which is a “huge mountain to climb.”

S6 on the other hand saw youth as a problem because people are more likely to reoffend when they start young because “they are given so many chances” and perhaps the older ones would be less likely to reoffend. S7 mentioned people reentering in their 60s and 70s where finding work is almost impossible. Still, if they cannot get Social Security disability due to physical or mental issues, they are encouraged to be determined and find some work. S8 encourages people incarcerated to keep up with events and skills

and find an interest to increase their chances of getting access to resources. Definitely, older reentries might have acquired some skills before having entered prison and younger ones are simply not getting exposed to sufficient training in prison. Unless they are willing to learn new things, it is likely they will fail. The American Psychological Association (2018) advocated for prison education and programming focused on reentry to help ex-offenders reenter society successfully. This participant felt that younger people had the advantage because they can change their mindset more easily than an older person. There were different viewpoints on age of reentry, often tied to type of crime and availability of programming to prepare people to successfully make it in the outside world, but the consensus was that age is an important factor in level of achievement for becoming productive citizens with adequate resources. There is a general paucity in the literature about age of reentry. In one study I obtained on older adults' experiences of incarceration, Smoyer et al. (2019) found the incidents the participants described were not much different from younger people's experiences. They include abuse, unmet medical needs, and loss. Still, for older adults, medical challenges and loss are heightened in the face of older, dying peers and exacerbated medical conditions.

Theme 7: Geography Affects Resources

Geography was a significant topic for the participants. Many saw it as relating to being able to keep good company and stay away from negative influences depending on where they lived, while others highlighted the policies and procedures of releasing people into one area versus another and the importance of that placement regarding resources, thus the emergence of the theme on geography's effect on resources. Those who went

back into the same or similar neighborhoods from which they came had experiences based on their background. Ethnicity plays a part in access to resources, where marginalized groups were relocated to much more disadvantaged areas compared to White former offenders (Simes, 2019; Tyler & Brockman, 2018). As previously stated, geography can affect individuals on personal or institutional levels both in the people with which they surround themselves or in having access to the resources needed for success. Many participants believed that it was strongly up to the individual to determine physically and mentally staying away from the bad influences that got them in trouble in the first place.

Regarding locale, S2 believed that people who lived in urban areas after prison had higher recidivism rates because they lacked the tools needed to settle down and get the resources they needed. S3 conceded that point because certain areas drew more trouble than others and had fewer programs. Moreover, being released to the area from which they came tempted ex-offenders to go back to old habits simply to survive. S5 strongly emphasized a distinction among areas of geography in “certain zip codes” where there is “no access to educational opportunities.” Further, S5 elaborated on the problem on urban inequalities where people are also “not paying taxes, ... not shopping so the businesses in those lower income zip codes are also suffering.” As a result, “the inability to successfully rehab one individual affects the whole entire community.” People “need something to get back on their feet ... which is to be expected” after such a long time in prison where they cannot do everything “on their own” (S6). There are not free programs in certain areas and ex-offenders leave without financial resources (S7). Although S9

emphasized personal responsibility though acknowledging issues with barriers in certain areas, S10 cynically concluded that geography is “a mess; crime, crime, and crime mixed with poverty and brokenness,” a concept backed by various researchers as many ex-offenders move into the “wrong” neighborhoods (e.g., Doekhie et al., 2017; Goldberg et al., 2019; Simes, 2019; Tyler & Brockman, 2018; Veeh et al., 2018).

The participants strongly implied that the barriers they faced were related to marginalized neighborhoods. Due to historic and present segregation in the United States, where people, depending on ethnicity, live in different neighborhoods and go to different schools and even shop in different stores, the natural results are inequality socially, economically, and in access to resources (Archer, 2019). Furthermore, legal systems continue to create and legitimize these segregated patterns, crime-free housing being one strong example that place barriers to successful reentry (Archer, 2019). Hughes and Wilson (2021) revealed that over 95% of state prisoners will eventually enter the community, and almost 80% will be under supervised parole. Astrada (2018) noted there is no single program or universal method of reentry; they are all local. Thus, a program’s structure depends on the resource and needs of the community. Finally, Simes (2019) found that insecurity in housing, recidivism, and vast racial differences clarify “the ecological structure of social inequality in urban neighbors in an era of mass incarceration” (p. 443).

Theme 8: Crime Type is Tied to Reoffending

The type of crime and its effects on ex-convicts’ ability to rejoin society successfully were discussed all through the interviews. All participants distinguished

among crimes and the effects on recidivism. They all had ideas of distinctions among type of crime and how that affected recidivism, including mental state. S1 thought mental capacity, mental state led to certain crimes, especially premeditated versus impulsive acts. Furthermore, mental state does not change in prison. Moore and Tangney (2017) wrote about issues involving negative mental states while in prison related to potential stigma and being labeled upon release: “Will I be discriminated against because of my record? Will others give me a fair chance in the community? Expectations about obstacles can be as detrimental to functioning as the obstacles themselves” (p. 322). S2 emphasized the problem with serving time for theft, which would prohibit people from getting reliable employment. S4 brought up sex offenders due to giving the offender instant gratification, while S5 thought of public protection. Some crimes continue to have dangerous effects on the public after the offender has served their time. S6 noted that both sex offenses and drug crimes lead to recidivism: “If they haven’t successfully completed a rehab program in prison, their habits are still their habits and usually these are the biggest cases of reoffending.”

Emphasizing two crimes with high recidivism, S6 noted, “Well, sexual crimes are unfortunately, those types of offenders do repeatedly offend. That’s been proven over the course of the years so that is something that needs to be watched.” S6 mentioned “those things in place in the Sheriff’s Office; the state sets up files for sex offenders, predators, and so forth,” adding, “Drugs, dealers and users; those folks can default back into it as well.” S7 failed to see the specificity of type of crime as significant: “I think it’s more of the aftermath of it, and what they’re going to do about making it right” but added, “If it’s

a sex offender or predators, of course they have to stay away from children and abide by those laws.” S8 also came up with a hypothetical situation that pits a former sex offender who is gainfully employed and plans to do well in his job running into missed mandatory appointments that conflict with the time and work obligations. Therefore, the person may recidivate not due to reoffending but not being able to keep up with conflicting obligations in the reentry process.

Also, neighborhoods do not welcome people who had done their time for serious crimes even though the people really want to go back to their families. To S9, their violent offense gives them a permanent label of being a “horrible person,” asking if they “still want to hold my past acts against me, but how can you move on, if they keep pulling you back?” S9 disagrees that sex offenders have it worst because they often “receive more leniency from the courts and public than offenders who have violent crimes” and simply wishes people would stop judging do they could “allow people to move on.” S10 thought there were some crimes “you can never come back from [because] Society sets limits to what they consider deviant and the former offenders cannot “find housing or get a job.” It is strongly implied in the study that type of crime can have an outsized effect on an ex-offender’s ability to enter society successfully, especially for theft, sex offenses, and drug crimes both due to labels and lack of access to housing and employment. To conclude the interpretation of the data, the rich, in-depth responses of all participants confirmed the literature on the difficulty of successful reentry due to the stigma ex-offenders experience long after they have served their time for crimes they have committed. Lutze et al. (2014) noted that people who have

committed high-risk crimes who live in high-risk areas can be a community threat due to their higher likelihood to engage in criminal behavior and activity.

Limitations of the Study

As mentioned in Chapter 1, limitations refer to restrictions that occur during a study that the researcher has no control over. I would like to acknowledge that there were limitations in my data collection process. Due to Covid-19 Pandemic many restrictions were put in place, such as social distancing. Offices, schools, libraries, and many Government buildings were shutdown, closed, or had limited accessibility which made it difficult to reach out to subjects. It took longer to complete my interviews, I originally estimated it would take 2 weeks to complete my 10 interviews. It actually took 6 weeks to complete my interviews with my 10 subjects.

Interviews are deemed a strong source of data collection. However, there is always a possibility that subjects responses may be biased due to their current involvement or lived experiences. To ensure there were minimal limitations to trustworthiness, I did not interject with personal thoughts or bias. However, I did attempt to develop a rapport with subjects by developing an open level of comfortability making it easier for subjects to disclose personal information. Many questions focused on subjects lived experiences with reentry, but also referred to experiences during and after incarceration. Two of the six ex-convicts interviewed seemed a bit short disclosing detailed information regarding parts of their reentry journey, while four out of six of the ex-convicts interviewed were extremely vocal regarding their past and very excited to

take part in the interview. All 10 of the subjects truly believe that the information that they shared could help others on their road to reentry.

Recommendations

The findings of this study confirm prior and current research. The study welcomes the need for further exploration of ex-convict reentry policies and procedures. There is a need for additional policies within Hillsborough County's reentry process that clearly implements procedures and strategies to assist and guide individuals during and after their release from prison and jail. The recommendations for further research can close the literature existing gaps in knowledge regarding reentry at the county level. Hillsborough County was selected for my convenience. Further research might benefit exploring the reentry population along with current policies and procedures in other Florida counties that have disparities and are not equally culturally diverse. A broader sample size involving two or more counties in the state of Florida to compare differences and similarities within each geographical location would have enriched the study.

The qualitative approach was the best method for this particular study due to time restraints and limited access to recruit participants. However, future research might benefit from a mixed methods approach, which may include a fully developed study involving both the details of qualitative and quantitative research as opposed to the present study in which only a qualitative design was chosen. Because the purpose of the study was to examine the impact labeling has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures to enter the Hillsborough community and avoid recidivism, any further research could address directly how current policy and procedures

relate to ex-convict reentry, address, labeling, stigmatization, housing, and employment options. Researchers could also benefit from doing quantitative pre- and post-test surveys, which would follow up with ex-convicts every 4 to 6 months for a 3-year period.

Regarding the theme of successful versus unsuccessful reentry and the theme of policies and procedures to lower recidivism, Hillsborough County could create a reentry taskforce to keep track of all Hillsborough releasees and guide them towards obtaining appropriate resources to stay and remain in compliance with their parole, probation, and reentry needs. The county could also benefit from offering housing assistance to ex-convicts and new releasees. Housing specialists could be available to guide ex-convicts through the process of locating, obtaining, and maintaining safe, affordable, reliable housing, for housing appeared to be the most pressing need for ex-convicts to meet one of their most basic needs. The results of the study confirmed the research on labeling: labeling and its affects and unmet needs of labeling, which tie into the necessity of addressing these issues at the county level.

To employ good policies and practices, Hillsborough County could benefit from creating more correctional education programs, which according to Formon et al. (2017), helps to lower recidivism while increasing higher rates of employment, which would meet not only basic needs but help people onto the path to realize higher needs. The county could consider creating more jobs and employment opportunities that do not require a full disclosure of individual arrest histories unless it involves a violent crime or crime committed on the same scope as the position applied for. Considering issues involving age, geography, and type of crime, the latter of which can lead to recidivism

depending on the crime (e.g., business owners might not want to hire someone who had served time for theft), successful programs like the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP; 2018) in Texas that provides education and continuous mentoring for young men released from prison would help individuals' reentry process regarding all three areas of concern brought up continuously throughout the interviews (i.e., age, geography, and type of crime). The program's recidivism rate is under 8% and is one guided by servant leadership and faith based (some of the participants in the present study, both ex-prisoners and professionals touted faith-based programs). Leaders in Hillsborough County could broaden their scope so that instituting such successful solutions can increase chances for ex-inmates to reach the highest levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and truly experience a successful reentry into the community.

Implications

This study has the potential to impact positive social change on many levels. Being aware of the current policies and procedures available within Hillsborough County FL. allows ex-convicts to know what resources are available to them. On the individual level, changes in policies and procedures at the county level aimed at helping people reenter society successfully would help them overcome barriers to housing and employment, as well as being able to access mentoring programs. Such programs specifically for people whose gaping needs that are not being fulfilled would be major factors in preventing repeat offending and the consequent recidivism. Many participants implied that ex-offenders run into surprising barriers as soon as they are released because there is little if anything to prepare them when they were incarcerated. Their probation

requirements can conflict with responsible employment and the lack of transportation and insufficient resources, which can effectively send them back to jails or prisons on technicalities that do not involve committing another crime.

For families of ex-offenders, good policies would involve the family. Holistic programs that involve not only the ex-convict but their inner and outer circles, would strengthen family unity rather than break them up. As S1 said, “If you have family, friends, any loved ones, keep them close; don’t throw them away because of the pain you feel inside.” For those who do not have family ties, setting up affordable group housing with mentors and easy access to practical and spiritual programs could lend positivity to the reentry process.

At the organizational level, good consistent programming could enrich the reputation of law enforcement, probation, employment, and housing as a body that help ex-offenders be successful. Organizations could also engage in community outreach and education. Perhaps if employers were given incentives to give former inmates a chance and the education and knowledge on how to proceed, housing and employment would be more readily available. In addition, if incarceration and reform were more transparent organizationally, and if they used and disseminated educational materials, more citizens might be willing to volunteer to provide positive experiences. Some private organizations in different parts of the country like Offender Aid and Restoration programs encourage volunteers to take family members to visit people in jail and help them find housing and employment as well as assigned counsel intakes, and a charitable bail fund; they also help with post-secondary education, selecting a college, applying for tuition money,

tutoring, and so on (e.g., OAR of Tompkins County, 2021). When law enforcement and other public services partner with community resources, the array of needs are met.

The method chosen for the study, a qualitative ethnographic one, yielded rich results to help fill the literature gap on county level reentry, more than would have been given on a Likert scale survey, for instance. Not only did the participants, both ex-offenders and the professionals who work with them, talk about regular policies and programs, but they added a critical element from a more reality-based perspective of the sheer lack of sufficient programming to help ex-offenders avoid recidivism. The implications of this lack are very powerful in a negative way. Although most participants stressed personal responsibility to make it in the end, the unavailability of resources to help them on their journey simply raises recidivism rates (Mooney, 2018).

Labeling is a major issue regarding reentry and it has been linked with ex-convicts having lower self-esteem and higher rates of recidivism. All the results connected strongly with the theoretical framework of labeling theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Society's labeling as well as internalized bias that could end in self-fulfilling prophecies was prominent throughout the interviews. The strongest implication of the results was the appropriateness of the framework chosen for the study. The problem, purpose, and research questions aligned strongly with these theories as did the interview questions and the themes that emerged.

Identifying ex-convicts' strengths, weaknesses, and needs early helps the reentry process, and that would include the people who work with them and the community in which they end up living. That way, these individuals could be better prepared from

incarceration until successful reentry. Having a waiting safety net as soon as they walk out of the prison gates will result in softer landings and ultimately becoming engaged citizens in society.

Conclusions

My study was based successful reentry of ex-inmates at a county jail and prison in Hillsborough County in the State of Florida. The in-depth interviews and document reviews indicated the barriers these individuals face along with the people who help them. The United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world (Anderson, 2015); at the county level, the number of prisoners at a time in this country exceeds 700 thousand (Golinelli & Minton, 2014). Developing policies and procedures at the basic level, the county, to prevent recidivism at all levels, is an important step toward this plague on society—poor treatment of prisoners long after they have served their time. The present study might play a small but significant role in hearing ex-convicts' and their helpers' experiences with the goal of promoting successful reentry throughout the United States.

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Appendix A: The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016-2017)

INMATE RELEASES

This section includes statistics on the number of inmates who were released from the Florida prison system during the period of July 1, 2016, through June 30, 2017. Time served refers to the percentage of sentence that inmates actually served in prison, plus credit for jail time, compared to their sentence length. For example, an inmate may have been sentenced to 10 years in prison, but his actual time served will be about eight and a half years, once his gain time has been subtracted from his sentence.

- In FY 2016-17, 30,833 inmates were released, a 3.5% decrease from FY 2015-16.
- Most of the permanent releases (18,941 or 61.4%) were due to expired sentences and 15.8% (4,876) were released to probation or community control.
- 17.5% (5,384) were released to conditional release supervision, for more serious offenders.
- The majority of inmates released in FY 2016-17 were white (14,134 or 45.8%) with blacks making up 42.6% (13,136) and Hispanics totaling 11.3% (3,493).
- 35.3% were between ages 25-34 (10,874) and 35.3% were between ages 35-49 (10,850).

RELEASE BY OFFENSE TYPE

Type of Offense	Number	Percent	Avg. Sentence Length in Years*	Avg. Age at Admission
Murder, Manslaughter	804	2.6%	19.1	43.3
Sexual Offenses	1,492	5.5%	9.5	43.4
Robbery	2,273	7.4%	8.1	33.6
Violent Personal Offenses	4,488	15.2%	4	37
Burglary	5,076	16.5%	4.8	34.5
Theft/Forgery/Fraud	5,047	16.4%	2.7	38.4
Drug Offenses	7,060	23%	3.3	38.1
Weapons	1,468	5.4%	3.4	33.8
Other	2,903	8.1%	3	39.7
Total	30,833			

*The above sample of 20 years prior to sentence length is based on the available data.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Gender	
Male	27,387 88.2%
Female	3,446 11.8%

Race/Ethnicity	
White Male	11,606 37.6%
White Female	2,528 8.2%
Black Male	12,210 39.6%
Black Female	926 3%
Hispanic Male	3,309 10.7%
Hispanic Female	182 0.6%
Other Male	42 0.2%
Other Female	10 0.01%

Age on June 30, 2017	
17 & Under	26 0.1%
18-24	3,740 12.1%
25-34	10,874 35.3%
35-49	10,850 35.2%
50-59	4,055 13.2%
60+	1,288 4.2%

Prior DC Prison Commitments	
0	15,634 50.7%
1	6,979 22.7%
2	3,506 11.4%
3	1,933 6.3%
4+	2,763 9%
Data Unavailable	18

Data source: Florida Department of Corrections, as of 6/30/17.

Offense Type	Number	Percent
Property	9,810	32%
Violent**	9,786	32%
Drugs	7,060	23%
Other	4,177	13%

**Includes murder, manslaughter, and sexual offenses.

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INMATE POPULATION

Inmate population refers to the 97,794 inmates who were present in the Florida prison system on June 30, 2017. Florida's prison population decreased by 1,325 or 1.3% from the previous fiscal year.

The Florida Demographic Estimating Conference held on July 10, 2017, estimated Florida's population at 20,473,770 for FY 2016-17, a 1.6% increase in Florida's population over last fiscal year. On June 30, 2017, 477.7 of every 100,000 Floridians were incarcerated compared to 523.8 five years ago in 2013.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

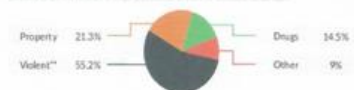
Gender	
Male	91,073 93.1%
Female	6,721 6.9%

Race/Ethnicity	
White Male	34,570 35.3%
White Female	4,316 4.4%
Black Male	44,464 45.5%
Black Female	1,959 2.0%
Hispanic Male	11,735 12.0%
Hispanic Female	414 0.4%
Other Male	304 0.3%
Other Female	32 0.03%

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS BY OFFENSE TYPE

Type of Offense	Number	Percent	Avg. Sentence Length in Years**	Avg. Age at Admission
Murder, Manslaughter	14,888	15.2%	36.4	28.5
Sexual Offenses	12,480	12.8%	24.5	34.1
Robbery	12,465	12.7%	20.8	26.8
Violent Personal Offenses	12,182	12.5%	13.1	31.4
Burglary	15,857	16.2%	13.4	29.9
Theft/Forgery/Fraud	7,257	7.4%	5.3	35.6
Drug Offenses	14,176	14.5%	7.7	35.0
Weapons	4,168	4.3%	7.6	30.5
Other	4,319	4.4%	6.9	35.8
Data Unavailable	2			

** Sentence length in years is an average of all offenses. Offenses for occupational licenses.

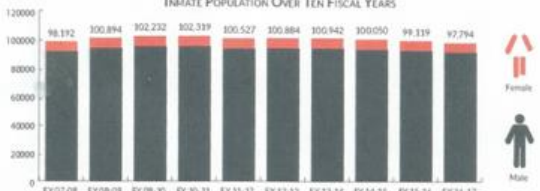


** Violent offenses include murder, manslaughter, sexual offenses, robbery, burglary, violent personal offenses, drug offenses, weapons offenses, and theft. Property offenses include burglary, robbery, theft, forgery, fraud, and other property offenses. Other offenses include occupational license offenses and other offenses not classified as violent or property offenses.

Age on June 30, 2017	
17 & Under	148 0.2%
18-24	9,539 9.8%
25-34	30,161 30.8%
35-49	34,961 35.7%
50-59	15,826 16.2%
60+	7,139 7.3%

Prior DC Prison Commitments	
0	30,935 32.1%
1	21,209 21.7%
2	11,179 11.4%
3	4,264 4.4%
4+	8,215 8.4%

INMATE POPULATION OVER TEN FISCAL YEARS



Appendix B: Research Questions

The overall research question for this study are as followed: How do reentry policies located in Hillsborough County in the State of Florida affect its ex-convict population? I will explore policies and procedures that Hillsborough County use to promote successful ex-convict reentry. I will explore the impact the labeling theory has on ex-convicts as they attempt to use current policies and procedures of Hillsborough County reentry programs located in the State of Florida to successfully reenter back into society. According to Green & Salkind, (2011), “The research question should reflect the difference between the mean of the test variable and the test value” (pp. 165).

Interview Questions

1. How do you define ex-convict reentry?
2. How do you define successful reentry?
3. What policies or procedures have you found useful in lowering recidivism?
4. What policies or procedures do you currently use to increase successful reentry?
5. How many times were you arrested?
6. How old were you at the time of your first arrest?
7. What was the most extended length of time incarcerated?
8. What reentry programs did you participate in?
9. How can the failure to provide successful reentry programs affect specific geographic areas more than others?
10. How does the type of crime committed affect the success of reentry for an ex-convict?
11. How does the age of the ex-convict at the time crime was committed affect the ex-convicts career options?
12. What labels do ex-convicts face?

13. What effects does labeling have on reentry?

What additional information regarding ex-convict reentry, would you like to provide that you have not already addressed?