

2019

# The Effects of Popular Culture on Public Attitudes toward Female Parolees

Annette Smith Durette  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Annette Smith Durette

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

The Effects of Popular Culture on Public Attitudes toward Female Parolees

By

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MS, Bowie State University, 1999

BSN, Bowie State University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2019

## Abstract

The depiction of offenders in drama shows may play a significant role in how society views them. The purpose of using Gerbner's cultivation theory in this study is the belief that the frequency of watching, and the content of television shows can influence public perception. Previous research has used cultivation theory to investigate television shows, but no effort was made to differentiate between genres. There is an important gap in the current literature because few studies have examined how particular television shows influence society's views of female parolees. This study intends to address that weakness by limiting the study to female offenders. The purpose of the proposed research is to explore the impact of age, gender, genre, demographic location, and frequency of viewing certain television shows on the perceptions of female parolees by the general public. A sample of 263 participants, recruited through social media, completed the surveys. Data analysis was accomplished using multiple linear regression and logistic regression statistics. Findings indicated that the rate of watching the drama shows did not influence how the television viewers perceived female parolees. However, friendly shows were more likely to make participants more accepting of ex-offenders. The results of this research would make a significant contribution to the existing literature. It would enhance social change through initiatives that highlighted issues in some drama shows, and positively affect the perception of viewers.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my very supportive daughter Dione Washington who has been my cheerleader throughout this endeavor. My husband Virgus Durette (late) who provided laughter on those days when I was feeling down. I would also like to thank my friends and family who patiently stood by me, kept me focused, and understood when I could not attend all festivities. I would like to recognize my fellow dissertation colleagues who are walking down the same path for their strength and commitment as they juggle careers and family and continue to the finish line. My faith has also kept me moving forward, and I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and showing me the way ahead.

## Acknowledgments

To my terrific committee members Dr. Ray London (late), Dr. Kristen Beyer, Dr. Edward Keane, and Dr. Jana Price-Sharps I would like to sincerely thank you for being by my side as I climbed this mountain to the summit. Dr. Beyer, I am enormously grateful for your guidance, encouragement, support, and a shoulder to cry on when my world was falling apart. You helped me to continue that climb up. Dr. Keane, thank you for helping me through the methodology section, your patience, guidance, and feedback was valuable to my success. I would also like to thank Dr. Price-Sharps and members of the IRB for their review and approval. Finally, I would always be grateful to Dr. London, whose multiple proofing of my work initially paved the way for the final product.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The incarceration rates of female offenders within the United States' criminal justice system are increasing (Minton & Golinelli, 2014). When these female offenders are released, they generally return to their communities and often face challenges reintegrating back into society. The way formerly incarcerated women are portrayed by the media may have a role in how these ex-offenders reintegrate into society (Gibson, 2014). However, few studies had investigated how the media, specifically television programs, influence society's perception and acceptance of female ex-offenders (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012). In this study, I sought to explore if, and to what extent, the type of program or the amount of time spent watching these shows influenced how female ex-offenders were perceived and accepted within their communities upon their release.

The United States has the highest incarceration rates for women in the world, with most of these incarcerations attributed to substance use (Bui & Morash, 2010; Minton & Golinelli, 2014). Women play an essential role in the stability of the family unit, but when they are released from prison, they may experience difficulties reintegrating into their communities because of challenges with housing and employment (LeBel, 2012). In a neoliberal society, there was a more punitive turn to punishment for criminal behavior. Strict laws were implemented to punish those who commit crimes. However, there are disparities between individuals who commit white-collar crimes versus those who commit non-white-collar crimes, and the way they are punished (Allen & Savigny, 2012).

White collar criminals are usually incarcerated less often than individuals who commit non-white-collar crimes. However, even when they are incarcerated, they have the financial means to continue their previous lifestyles upon release. Therefore, they are not usually subjected to the same consequences of post-incarceration struggles of finding adequate employment and housing (Allen & Savigny, 2012). In this study, I investigated if there was any external impetus such as viewing prison drama shows like *Orange is the New Black* that influenced how the public viewed these offenders when they return to their communities, and consequently explored the reintegration impact for these offenders.

There were few studies that were done to look specifically at shows such as *Orange is the New Black* and the impact on acceptance levels of these offenders when they were released. Schwan (2016) provided a critical evaluation of the *Orange is the New Black series* and argued that the way women in prison are portrayed in prison films could make a difference in how they are perceived by viewers. Schwan contended that the show could play a role in raising awareness of female inmates and their struggles with incarceration and could impact how they are viewed in society. Even though the subject matter of the series vacillates between current social issues as well as the outdated depiction of women it still appeals to popular culture (Silverman & Ryalls, 2016).

The series *Orange is the New Black* attempts to portray diversity by adopting a multiculturalist view; the cast is multicultural, and there are efforts made at inclusivity. The series depicts women acknowledging that they have broken the law and have taken responsibility for their incarceration. However, Belcher (2016) stated that the series has

not adequately supported inclusivity and there were multiple examples of stereotypical behaviors. The author argued that with the portrayal of inequality between various cultures the show failed to satisfactorily critique neoliberalism. Even behind bars, illegal enterprises are punished differently based on one's race (Belcher, 2016). This portrayal may negatively impact viewers' perceptions of offenders. In the current study, I assessed the impact, if any, of watching these drama shows and influence on the acceptance of female ex-offenders back into society.

### **Historical Perspective**

The prosperity and well-being that was promised from neoliberalization have not materialized; instead, it caused harsher punishment and inequality (Allen & Savigny, 2012). Historically, men were usually incarcerated more frequently than women, but there has been a change in recent years, and the incarceration rates of women have steadily increased because of stricter laws targeting illegal drugs, larceny, and prostitution (Minton & Golinelli, 2014; Swavola, Kristi, & Subramanian, 2016). As the incarceration rates rise, there has been a proliferation of private prisons to accommodate the growing numbers of people being incarcerated (Davilmar, 2014). With this increase in incarceration, there are more significant numbers of ex-offenders returning to the community. Despite programs to assist with reentry efforts, offenders returning to their communities have difficulties with reintegration (Maruna, 2011). The media can play a role in how offenders are portrayed, which impacts their acceptance back into society. This section discussed the evolution of criminal behavior and punishment, as well as the historical role the media has played influencing the public.

## **The Influence of Neoliberalization on Crimes**

Punishment—based on Old Testament views—of those who violate the law was embraced by the neoliberal society of the Reagan government in the United States and the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom and continues today (Allen & Savigny, 2012). Goldman and Cropanzano (2015) recommended that the adherence and implementation of the laws are defined and documented. When existing laws are adequately implemented, the rule of law is satisfied, and they help shape appropriate societal behavior. However, if the implementation of and compliance with these laws are inconsistent or ignored, and the rights of any group are exploited, the rule of law is undermined (Slapin, 2015). Neoliberalization is defined by Harvey (2005) as a theory of political and economic practices that focus on the deregulation of the economy to enable free markets and free trade. The proposed intent was to promote well-being, safety, and security for all members of society—wealthy and poor alike—because it would be beneficial to them (MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). However, this allowed big business such as banks to continue making huge profits while shifting the risks to members of society (Felge, 2011). Neoliberalization fostered entrepreneurial independence and industrial deregulation that increased financial risk-taking, which paved the way for increased corporate or “white-collar” crimes (Allen & Savigny, 2012).

White-collar crimes are usually underrepresented in the media with more coverage allocated to violent and other street crimes, but white-collar crimes often result in consequences that are more harmful and longer lasting for the victims (Allen & Savigny, 2012). White-collar criminals are usually in a position of trust and high social

positions. However, these cases can be hard to prove and harder to prosecute. Allen and Savigny (2012) argued that this might be influenced by the perpetrators' social status within the community. Even though there is public awareness of white-collar criminals, such as Bernie Madoff, the rates of prosecution for white-collar criminals are lower than those of other crimes (Allen & Savigny, 2012; TracReports, 2014). In the case of the savings and loan corruption scandal, known as the Keating Five, Senator John McCain was implicated as a co-conspirator. Despite the seriousness of the allegations, this case was never prosecuted. (Thompson, 1993). Most white-collar criminals are not incarcerated to the same extent as offenders who commit non-white-collar crimes. Therefore, white-collar criminals are not usually subjected to the repercussions of incarceration, such as difficulties finding jobs and adequate housing (Allen & Savigny, 2012). Many of these individuals who commit white-collar crimes are not described as criminals in the media, and most often they can afford the best legal defense and have enough money to continue their current lifestyles (Allen & Savigny, 2012).

The influence of neoliberalization has also been linked to criminal behavior in individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The reality is that neoliberalization has resulted in inequality and marginalization of the socioeconomically disadvantaged through stricter laws, and punishments to maintain law and order (Allen & Savigny, 2012). In this neoliberal society, offenders are not regarded favorably and as such, are not seen as deserving compassion, and their crimes are publicized more often. It was surmised that neoliberalization had created an environment of increased inequality, poverty, and deprivation that can result in criminal activities as a means of survival.



## **Incarceration Data in the United States**

There are more women incarcerated in the United States than any other country. A Department of Justice report showed an increase of 10.9% in the number of imprisoned women between 2010 and 2013, while the male prisoner population decreased by 4.2% (Minton & Golinelli, 2014). This trend continues with a recent report from the Department of Justice that showed an increase of 700 women who were sentenced to more than a year in prison in 2015 to 2016 (Carson, 2018). This increase in the number of incarcerated women has been attributed to substance abuse issues and stricter laws on drugs (Bui & Morash, 2010; Carson, 2018). Even though women usually commit fewer violent crimes than men, their rate of incarceration continues to increase (Carson, 2018; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). A shift in policies has assumed a more punitive role, and the harsher sentences are usually covered in the media, which makes it difficult for some offenders to return to their communities (Allen & Savigny, 2012). The fear of crime within communities can be related to a lack of diversity and disconnect within the neighborhoods, as well as fear-inducing media portrayals (Gibson, 2014). The increase in incarceration results in higher reentry issues that make reintegration into the community daunting. When ex-offenders return to an environment that perpetuates criminal behavior, it makes it difficult for the ex-inmates to avoid recidivism (Scott, Grella, Dennis, & Funk, 2014).

The United States has adopted punitive solutions to combat crimes such as empowering law enforcement personnel to arrest individuals for street infractions, such as individuals who are under the influence or in possession of illegal substances. The rate

of incarceration has been woefully inadequate in deterring crimes or modifying criminal behavior; instead, it has succeeded in disrupting families and imposing harsh injustices (Nagin, 2014). Even though the United States has 5% of the world's population, it has more than a quarter of the world's incarcerated individuals, with about 50% of those serving drug-related crimes (The United States Department of Justice, 2014). Several reasons may be responsible for this high incarceration rate. African Americans are more likely to be incarcerated and believe that they are victims of racial profiling. The courts and juries are also usually willing to convict black men and women more often than other races (Muller & Schrage, 2014). Television shows that portray violence may result in public fear that can influence policies created to maintain social control (Britto & Noga-Styron, 2014). However, empirical evidence to date has not supported the belief that incarceration is effective in curbing recidivism even though politicians are slow to admit that the "get-tough" legislation has not produced the expected results (Mitchell, Cochran, Mears, & Bales, 2017).

### **Role of Private Prisons on Incarceration Rates**

In addition to the high incarceration rates of African Americans, there has been an increase in the number of undocumented immigrants being detained because of stricter border security (Davilmar, 2014). As a result, there is a need for more bed space within the system, and some states have looked for cost-saving alternatives to accommodate the increasing number of inmates (Davilmar, 2014). Within the past 10 years, private prisons have been increasingly seen as viable alternatives, and the number of allocated private detention beds has increased from 10% to about 50% (Wides-Munoz & Burke, 2012).

Even though there have been cost-benefit analyses done to evaluate the effectiveness of these private prisons, the results have been inconclusive.

Nevertheless, proponents of private prisons argue that privately run institutions are run more efficiently. Therefore, they are more capable of reducing costs (Davilmar, 2014). The neoliberal point of view holds that the best contribution to society is competition and innovation. This position is supported by activities that back the privatization of public services and market competition (Davilmar, 2014). There is a vested interest among the policymakers—who were responsible for drafting the bill—and the managers of the private prisons, but this relationship does not violate any current laws, and there is an urgent need for these services (Martinez & Slack, 2013). The Obama administration started to decrease the use of private prisons because reports indicated unsafe and unethical practices. However, the previous Attorney General Sessions has reversed this decision citing a rise in crime, despite evidence to the contrary, requiring more prison space (Schuppe, 2017; Sullivan, 2016).

Companies that run private prisons have received minimum occupancy pledges from their state's legislators. Therefore, there is a need to increase the number of arrests and incarcerations to ensure there are no empty detention facilities that may elicit budgetary questions from constituents (Martinez & Slack, 2013). The increased dependence on private detention facilities fulfills the desire to mete out punishment to satisfy society's illusion of security. The adoption of zero tolerance to control such crimes as drugs and alcohol infractions has assisted in the increasing numbers of the prison populations. Individuals arrested for drugs and alcohol offenses can then be

subject to stiff penalties resulting in incarcerations (Wacquant, 2014). After serving prison sentences, individuals who have no place to turn because of poverty or loss of employment may resort to criminal activities to support their families because ex-offenders are ineligible for governmental social programs (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011).

### **Public Attitudes on Offender Reentry**

The behavioral change required for successful reentry into society is the offenders' responsibility, but they will not be successful without relapse prevention assistance. Lack of rehabilitation and treatment initiatives for ex-offenders may contribute to high recidivism rates, and thus keep the prisons filled (Macklin, 2013). Furthermore, women with felony records are permanently stigmatized and excluded from opportunities such as education and employment, which results in feelings of despair because they feel powerless to move forward successfully and rebuild their lives (Maruna, 2011). Therefore, positive reinforcement of their achievements may help restore their self-esteem. It is interesting to note that women from neighborhoods with large numbers of previously incarcerated individuals report higher experiences of stigma from members of the community. LeBel (2012) speculated that this stigma results from a cycle of mistrust that is seen in mainstream society and becomes perpetuated in these neighborhoods.

### **Reentry efforts for female offenders.**

When women are released from prison, they believe employment is necessary to prevent recidivism and help them change their offending behavior since they are usually

primary caregivers (Macklin, 2013). Therefore, programs that assist them in obtaining relevant education and training are helpful (Opsal, 2012). One such program is the Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative (TPCI), which was started in 2001 by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). The NIC has recognized that a problem requiring intervention exists, and this program was initiated to assist female offenders in successfully returning to the community post-incarceration (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). TPCI is an evidence-based framework that includes offender risk-assessments to ensure that appropriate services and assistance are provided. This model engages offenders in a behavioral change process that starts with incarceration to their eventual release from prison, instead of just the first few months after their imprisonment.

Inmates who complete educational programs or work-study programs are viewed as exhibiting positive behavioral changes and may be rewarded with achievement awards that aid in their smooth transition back into their communities (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). The State of Michigan has reported a decrease of 12.3% in the rate of female recidivism since the implementation of the TCPI initiative. This success has been attributed to the follow-up period after inmates are released. Six months or more has been suggested for this post-care period but can be extended to assist the offenders in removing any barriers that may result in recidivism (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). The focus of the current research was to determine if mass media such as television drama shows can affect the public's opinion of women who break the law. The shows' portrayals of the humanity of incarcerated individuals may assist with reintegration. Also, these shows may provide viewers with positive examples of inmates making them

more easily accepted by the public once released, thereby playing a role in offender reintegration and helping to reduce recidivism.

### **Media and Public Attitudes on Inmate Reentry**

Exposure to diverse types of media can play a role in influencing public attitudes and affecting social change that can impact offender re-entry (Garland, Wodahl, & Cota, 2015). Individuals who have been convicted of crimes have difficulty reintegrating back into society, thus leading to a higher likelihood of recidivism (Scott et al., 2014). The way incarcerated individuals are portrayed in both print as well as television media can influence the way they are regarded by the public. Members of the public may consider offenders as evil, immoral, and not worthy of being rehabilitated. This perception may be further reinforced if the media portrays re-entry programs as ineffective (Garland et al., 2015).

When offenders are released from prison they expect to return to their communities. However, there is not much effort made to help these ex-offenders make a smooth transition back home (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Maruna, 2011; May, Applegate, Ruddell, & Wood, 2014). Policymakers have acknowledged that current resources for ex-offenders may be inadequate, so they attempt to create policies to decrease the barriers to assist ex-offenders in returning to their communities (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). Some employers are willing to hire individuals who have been previously incarcerated so policies that support these companies can benefit the ex-offenders. However, strategies to help with job creation may not remove the barriers that exist for ex-offenders. Most of these ex-offenders are unskilled and as such, are more

likely to be hired into low-paying jobs (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). Uneducated ex-offenders who lack the knowledge necessary to complete job applications and develop interviewing skills and are unaware of what is appropriate conduct in the workplace, will not be successful in obtaining employment. Such offenders may eventually be more likely to recidivate (Scott et al., 2014).

### **Influence of Print Media**

Media can influence how individuals think and act as well as drive public policies. Prior to the proliferation of television drama shows, print media have been associated with influencing public opinion and bringing about social change. One such medium is the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriett Beecher Stowe. This book incited antislavery sentiments in the Northern states, while Southerners tried to discredit its contents (Reynolds, 2011). In addition to influencing cultural change, it has also been credited with changing political policies. It was theorized that because of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there was a shift in cultural beliefs, and this shift was responsible for the Civil War, which was necessary to bring about the end of slavery (Reynolds, 2011).

Another book that was deemed responsible for social change is *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. In his book, Sinclair criticized the working conditions and exploitations of individuals within the meat-packing industry. He exposed the deplorable conditions in which these individuals were forced to work, thus putting them at significant risk for severe cold-related injuries (Banzon & Norton, 2015). As a result of his investigative work, an angry public response paved the way for the passage of the Meat Inspection Act

and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Subsequently, this led to the modern Food and Drug Administration (Banzon & Norton, 2015).

### **Influence of Television Shows**

As with print media, the public's television viewing preferences can influence how they feel about criminal justice and can result in acceptance, tolerance, or misconception about the criminal behavior (Neuendorf, Skalski, Jeffres, & Atkin, 2014). Television news and drama shows may be very influential to public opinions, and myths are accepted as accurate depictions of current situations in crime and punishment (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). Policymakers have vested interests in continuing to perpetuate these beliefs to justify existing policies. The central theme in crime dramas is justice, based on the capture and incarceration of the offenders. These shows suggest that criminal behavior is a problem that can be addressed through social control procedures such as a 'get tough' approach (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011).

Television shows about incarcerated individuals are continuously evolving, so research was needed to find out how these shows affect public emotions and opinions (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). In reviewing the literature, there was evidence that suggested that television shows that focus on female offenders continued to grow (Ashikali, Dittmar, & Ayers, 2014; Cheliotis, 2010; Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Goldberg, Smith-Adcock, & Dixon, 2011). Earlier studies had looked at the influence of television news media, print media, and nonfiction shows that cover criminal activities on public opinions (Goidel, Freeman, & Procopio, 2006; Grabe & Drew, 2007). In their study, Goidel, Freeman, and Procopio (2006) found that heavy viewing of crime drama



shows resulted in more support for punitive resolutions for criminal activities. In contrast, Grabe and Drew (2007) found that neither the length of time spent nor the frequency of watching crime shows altered the viewers' preconceived perception or attitudes about ex-offenders.

### **Differences in Television Genres on Public Attitudes**

While some programs advance the punitive neoliberal agenda, others support the rehabilitative perspective. If the punishment is in the best interest of the broader population, most individuals usually accept it (Chui, Cheng, & Wong, 2013). Nevertheless, proponents of rehabilitation versus extended incarceration are less resistive to rehabilitative measures that will assist offenders in returning to their communities (Garland et al., 2015).

There are several shows from different genres, such as dramas and documentaries that focus on female inmates. One such television show is Netflix's drama *Orange is the New Black*, that presently has a following within popular culture (Steuver, 2013). Other drama shows that focus on incarcerated women are *Bad Girls* (Holmwood, 2008), and *Wentworth* (Badham, 2014). There are also documentaries that focus on incarcerated women such as *Cell Block 6: Female Lock Up* (Kapin, 2011), *Beyond Scared Straight* (Vignati, 2011), and *Breaking Down the Bars* (Ito, 2011). Other documentaries such as *Wives with Knives* (The Futon Critic, 2013), and *Deadly Women* (Discovery Press Web, 2011), also focus on female offenders. Some episodes of these shows depict women as victims, but others are about women who are motivated by greed and jealousy.

There are other crime drama shows that do not focus exclusively on women but are also supported by popular culture, and the need to get tough on crime. Shows that fall within this group are *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)*, *Law and Order*, and *Evil, I*. Even though *CSI* and *Law and Order* concluded active taping of their series in 2015 and 2010 respectively, reruns of these shows are still available for viewing. *CSI* is about using forensic science as a tool to investigate criminal behavior, and *Law and Order* is a general crime-based show with episodes that encompass crimes against males, females, adults and children (Maeder & Corbett, 2015). Even though *CSI* and *Law and Order* do not emphasize the prison experience, criminal justice experts fear that viewers of these shows may have unrealistic expectations about the presence or absence of forensic evidence. Because of these expectations, they may be unwilling to convict someone if forensic evidence is not present (Maeder & Corbett, 2015). The documentary *Evil, I* reenacts the most horrific crimes with the information provided by the murderers themselves. This show offers a glimpse into the twisted minds of serial killers (Discovery Press Web, 2012).

Contemporary drama shows have also ventured into the realm of criminal profiling. The public's perception about profiling and its contribution to forensic science can be gleaned from shows such as *Criminal Minds*. This show presents an inaccurate view of criminal profiling and the issues of psychopathology and criminal behavior. The relationship between psychopathy and aggressive behavior is complex and can be challenging to diagnose. The current approach to managing psychopathy is reactive rather than proactive, and there are concerns that violent actions perpetrated by

psychopathic individuals may not be preventable (Reidy et al., 2015). The simplistic way psychopathy and criminal acts are portrayed on *Criminal Minds* belies this complexity.

The portrayal of professional profilers on *Criminal Minds* suggests that criminal profilers can discern unique information about a perpetrator just by the location of the crime and the type of victim. Profilers do not have insightful episodes as to the characteristics of the offender, nor do they have unlimited resources that allow them to solve heinous crimes in a few days as depicted on *Criminal Minds* (White, Lester, Gentile, & Rosenbleeth, 2011). There are problems that are inherent to the practice of criminal profiling and the televised depiction in such drama shows as *Criminal Minds* is far from reality. Nevertheless, such representations may be perceived as accurate by the viewing public and most likely influence the members of the public who may become jurors. Potential jurors may view all offenders as dangerous people and guilty of the crimes for which they are charged (White et al., 2011).

Media can play a role in influencing public attitudes, result in social change, and shape policy development. As discussed, print media has historically influenced public opinion and has resulted in changes in policies. Likewise, based on the genre of television shows, they may also have an impact on public attitudes. This study aimed to find out if drama shows can influence how ex-offenders are viewed within their communities.

### **Background of the Study**

Background information guiding this study was described such as relevant research and the identified gap in the literature that this study addressed. The theoretical

framework underpinning the study was also introduced. Contrasting views of the influence of prison films on public opinions were presented. In addition, the role the media played in determining or reinforcing how ex-offenders are perceived was discussed.

Several scholars have used cultivation theory in their research on the impact of mass media and its influence on the public's opinion of offenders and ex-offenders. Cultivation theory suggests that reality can be distorted based on the amount of time spent watching television drama shows. Previous research studies such as Kahlor and Eastin (2011), and Mutz and Nir (2010) have used the cultivation theory primarily to investigate television shows, but no effort was made to differentiate between genres. More current studies such as Ashikali, Dittmar, and Ayers (2014), Gibson (2014), and Hetsroni (2014) have expanded the application of this theory to genre-specific inquiries of medical dramas, reality shows, and crime dramas within the United States and internationally. Morgan and Shanahan (2010), and Neuendorf, Skalski, Jeffres, and Atkin (2014) proposed a theoretical approach applicable to this study and in doing so have reinforced the validity and reliability of its use. The cultivation theory was appropriate for the current study since no research had explicitly looked at the impact of cultivation on the perception and acceptance of female ex-offenders.

Cheliotis (2010) presented arguments from both opponents and proponents of prison dramas and explored their influence on public opinions about offenders. Except for individuals in law enforcement or the judicial system, offenders' families, and victims of crimes, most people were not aware of what occurs within the criminal justice system.

The author asserts that the way the public interprets the information provided in the media can be influenced by how the information is presented. There are several previous prison shows available but a few portray offenders as evil, depraved, and beyond rehabilitation. One such show is the drama *Oz*, which showed inmates engaging in violent and reprehensible behaviors. There were also instances in which the guards condoned actions that could put the public's well-being at risk if inmates engage in similar practices after their release (Andrew, 2016). These behaviors may have a negative impact on the public's perceptions of offenders and correctional officers. Such shows missed opportunities to teach the public about the functional activities of the prison system, and instead they perpetuate the marginalization of offenders.

The influence of drama shows on viewers can also play a role in guiding policies. Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011), May, Applegate, Ruddell, and Wood (2014), and Surette (2013) studied public activities and its impact on policymaking based on their viewing patterns and interpretation of crime shows. Policy developers tend to base their decisions more readily on perceived public views and personal beliefs rather than on empirical data. Therefore, it is important to have research data in support of issues that the public determined to be important. With the plethora of crime-related shows currently available, individuals can decide which shows are preferable for their viewing. Nonfiction crime shows have provided the opportunity to learn how criminals are dealt with as they pass through the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that these nonfiction shows, like the dramatized versions, sensationalize the illegal activities and intensify fear within members of the public.

When offenders return to their communities they face many challenges. The following studies addressed some of those concerns: Atkin and Armstrong (2011), LeBel (2012), and Maruna (2011) discussed the difficulties, such as finding employment and housing, that ex-offenders face when they have been released from prison. They also investigated factors such as stigma and types of offenses that may play a role in employers' hiring practices. Ex-offenders need to find employment that will allow them to meet their needs and those of their families to prevent recidivism. If employers are not willing to hire ex-offenders or if individuals working within these companies are not receptive to ex-offenders, it will be discouraging for ex-offenders. Despite efforts by various states to address inmate reentry into their communities, empirical data to address the challenges that they face from members of the community and the factors that may contribute to these difficulties have been neglected. Some public policies that have negatively impacted the reintegration efforts of ex-offenders. Policymakers often take the opinions of the public into consideration when making decisions. There are rights and privileges that are not extended to ex-offenders such as access to federal student loans and public housing, as well as the ability to hold public office (Garland et al., 2015; Hoskins, 2014).

In addition to having difficulties finding jobs and housing, researchers have addressed ex-offenders' continued loss of the privileges that are afforded the rest of society, such as voting rights. Gray (2014) discussed the legal protections of ex-cons in countries such as the United States and Australia. In Australia, individuals who serve sentences of less than three years retain their voting rights. There were multiple

amendments to the electoral legislation, but the Australian Human Rights Commission argued that allowing these inmates to vote can serve as an encouragement to assist with rehabilitation and societal reintegration. The Australian government maintains that incarcerated individuals are still citizens, and members of their communities post-incarceration. This approach is in line with judicial decisions in other countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. Unlike Australia, the United States has strict laws preventing individuals with felony convictions from voting. However, this is not consistently applied in all states. In addition to legal protections, privacy laws are stricter in other countries than in the United States. These countries have adopted more stringent restrictive policies to prevent the indiscriminate use of private information (Myers, 2014). The additional privacy can be beneficial for ex-offenders who are trying to reintegrate into society.

Garland, Wodahl, and Cota (2015), Hoskins (2014), and Wellman (2012) discussed how the punishment of offenders continues even after they have completed their sentences. Wellman (2012) contended that it is appropriate to punish individuals for engaging in criminal acts because they have forfeited the right not to be punished. However, the breadth and duration of the punishment can become problematic. As evidenced by support for the felony disenfranchisement laws that restrict activities such as the ability to vote, the punitive views may not change when offenders are released (Garland et al., 2015). Hoskins (2014) argued that when offenders have completed their punishment they have fulfilled their obligation to society and therefore should have their status restored with full benefits, and they should not continue to be punished.

Restrictions that are levied against these ex-offenders might be considered warranted, especially if it is assumed that these restrictions will play a role in reducing the risk of continued bad behavior. For the restrictions for ex-offenders to be justified there need to be compelling reasons to assume that the public is at risk, and there may be alternatives to these limitations that could be implemented to keep the public safe (Hoskins, 2014).

How drama shows affect the public's attitudes and behaviors are not limited only to the United States. Custers and Van den Bulck (2012) provided an international perspective on shows that focused on criminal activities and made comparisons between television crime dramas in the United States and other countries. Violent acts against women are frequently televised in fiction as well as nonfiction shows. Researchers in the United States suggested that because of the graphic depictions of violent acts in these shows they can cause elevated levels of fear in viewers. Similar results have been reported by other researchers outside of the United States such as Belgium.

Bui and Morash (2010) studied the effects of successful reentry and debated the predictors of recidivism in female offenders. Within the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of female ex-offenders returning to the community. This increase has been credited to stricter laws on drugs, and the increased incarceration of women because of substance-related offenses. Even though there are programs that help women return to their communities, these programs only work if the community is tolerant. Scholars have conducted extensive research, which show that when women are released from prison they are faced with challenges such as the inability to find jobs because of limited education, and their history of incarceration. Other problems include the loss of



their children, under the poorly defined “best interest of the child” standard, so these women resort to substance abuse again and are re-arrested.

In reviewing the literature, there was limited attention to female offenders’ reentry into their communities or the media’s influence on the public’s opinion of these offenders. Studies such as Atkin and Armstrong (2011), Garland et al. (2015), Gray (2014), Gibson (2014), Hetsroni (2014), Hoskins (2014), and May et al. (2014) did not specifically focus on women. This lack of specificity demonstrated a gap in the literature that the current research was trying to address. The study also investigated if age or gender of the viewer, the demographic location, and the genre of the drama shows made a difference in how the public perceived these returning offenders.

The influence of television drama shows is usually made evident over time, but the effect of mass media on the attitudes of the public toward offenders is not routinely debated (Tepperman, 2014). Considering some of the movies that have previously played a role in influencing the culture towards prisoners, such as *My Six Convicts* and *Shawshank Redemption*, may provide some insight into the part media played in shaping public opinion (Tepperman, 2014).

*My Six Convicts* is a 1952 film that is based on a book by Donald Powel Wilson, Ph.D. It is the true story of a prison psychologist and his quest to rehabilitate inmates. He tested his theory on six inmates and then used these inmates to help fellow inmates. This film describes life within the walls of a prison, and even though it addresses serious issues, it does so with some degree of humor (Prison Movies, 2010). Unlike the movies under consideration for the current study that focused on female inmates, *My Six Convicts*

understandably focused on male inmates. Both the book and the film were able to successfully humanize the inmates and capture what it is like to be behind bars (Tepperman, 2014).

Another film that provides insight into the strength of personal relationships and triumphs even though it was in the setting of a prison is *Shawshank Redemption*. This film, which was based on a novella by Steven King, was released in 1994. Even though *Shawshank Redemption* is about living within the prison walls the interactions between the characters and the relationships that were forged paralleled the interactions among individuals within society and allowed these inmates to be viewed as individuals worthy of rehabilitation (Gershbein, 2015). Challenges associated with re-entry issues post-incarceration was also covered in the film. One character committed suicide post-release due to his inability to adjust to life outside of prison.

Current crime drama shows such as *Wives with Knives and Deadly Women* are available for viewing on Investigation Discovery channel. In 2015, Investigation Discovery had an average of 897,000 viewers during prime time viewing which was increased from the previous year with viewers, mainly women, between the ages of 25 to 54 according to data from Nielsen (Battaglio, 2016). Alternatively, *Orange is the New Black* and *Wentworth* are available for viewing on Netflix. Even though Netflix is subscription based, its audience is between the ages of 18 and 34, and *Orange is the New Black* averages 6.7 million viewers in the United States (Sharma, 2016). These shows may influence behavior, and just as violent shows may have a negative impact, shows that present a different view of female inmates with a bit of humor may have a

positive effect on viewers. Social change can be achieved through connections with ex-offenders, and members of their communities. The results of this research can affect social change by humanizing the inmates and encouraging viewers to understand what it is like for them behind bars. This understanding may lead to acceptance of the female offenders upon their release, thus facilitating successful reentry into society.

### **Problem Statement**

Variations in how diverse media genres portray offenders may have different effects on public perceptions and subsequent attitudes (Grabe & Drew, 2007). The depiction of the offenders in drama shows may play a significant role in how society views them. Even though some scholars have addressed this, there are still few studies that have examined how television shows influence society's views of female offenders who are released on parole (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014).

This research sought to explore the effects of age, gender, demographic location, the genre of the television shows, and the time spent watching these shows, on the perceptions of female parolees. The shows that were considered for the study were divided into two groups. Group A included shows that portrayed offenders as friendly such as dramas *Orange is the New Black*, *Wentworth*, and documentary *Beyond Scared Straight*. In addition to these shows that focus on incarcerated women, Group B included other drama shows such as *Law and Order*, *CSI*, and *Deadly Women*. Group B shows were included to conduct a more robust data analysis, derive comparative data, and be representative of shows that portrayed offenders as hostile.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This quantitative research explored the effects of viewers' gender, age, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), the genre of the television shows (drama versus documentary), and frequency of watching on the perceptions of female parolees. Age was collated into four groups: 18–29 years; 30–44 years; 45–60 years; >60 years. The age range should be equal for all groups, and offenders portrayed as friendly represented by Group A or hostile represented by Group B. Heavy viewers of drama shows may begin to consider what is portrayed in the shows as reality over time (Mutz & Nir, 2010). Also, viewers who watch drama shows may do so as a source of relaxation that can result in empathetic reactions and exert greater influence on viewers' emotions (Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006).

### **Research Question(s) and Hypotheses**

Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011), May et al. (2014) and Surette (2013) looked at the effect of television news media, print media, or nonfiction shows about criminal behavior and punishment on public opinions. Disparities in the way the offenders are portrayed in the media can have diverse effects on how offenders are viewed by the public. For example, shows such as *'The First 48'* use actual interviews with victims and law enforcement personnel such as the prosecutors, who may provide details to support their opinions regarding the offenders' guilt. This can have an adverse impact on the viewing public who may view the offender as a person beyond redemption who should remain incarcerated. This perception might be different if the interviews were conducted with the offenders or the defense attorneys (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). Studies

such as Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014), LeBel (2012), and Neuendorf et al., (2014) studied the effect of television drama shows about female offenders on public opinion. The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of age, gender, genre, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), and the frequency of viewing television shows that portrayed offenders as friendly (Group A) versus shows that portrayed them as hostile (Group B), on perceptions of female parolees. The following research questions were used to investigate the impact of television shows on the perceptions of female parolees:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_01$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a1$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does the age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_02$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a2$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Does the gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_03$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a3$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Do the location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_04$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a4$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 5 (RQ5): Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_05$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows has no significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a5$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows does have a significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was George Gerbner's cultivation theory. Gerbner (1998) theorized that television programs provided constant imagery of criminal behavior that can affect public perception of societal reality of crime. The cultivation theory is a recognized cultural force that plays an important role in understanding cultivation research from a psychological and social perspective. Cultivation theory was designed primarily to focus on viewing patterns with shared beliefs about their effects. It proposes that the frequency and number of times individuals watch television can affect the perceived reality of the programs. The longer individuals devoted to and the frequency spent watching television, the more inclined viewers are to believe the content of the shows, and this belief may, in turn, influence their attitude (Appel, 2008; Maeder & Corbett, 2015). Although television documentary and drama shows with criminal justice themes have recently grown, contemporary researchers still accept the valid applicability of the cultivation theory to more diverse programs (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Shelton, Kim, & Barak, 2009).

In addition to drama shows, cultivation theory has also been used in the-study of television news programs and their effect on the level of concern for crime within communities (Hetsroni, 2014; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Neuendorf et al., 2014). The cultivation theory framework suggests that when individuals are repeatedly exposed to violence in the news, at either the local or national level, they begin to see violence as more pervasive (Ashikali et al., 2014). There is a direct relationship between the extent of television reality and real-life reaction. If there is an overestimation of television

reality, there will also be an overestimation of the real world (Hetsroni, 2014). Even in communities with below average crime rates, there can still be a high level of fear and the perception that it would be safer to imprison the offenders than to attempt to rehabilitate them if the viewers are exposed to shows depicting a high volume of criminal activities (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

The Internet is changing the way information is disseminated and consumed because of its portability, personalization of content, and on-demand access, which gives viewers more access to information that they deem necessary. Viewers can also decide how and when they access and view television shows. The availability of more television channels has increased choice, and news and radio stations can be obtained in online formats. Even with the availability of more channels viewers usually choose to watch programming that match their political and social beliefs.

Shows and channels that are biased towards a particular group of viewers can cause polarized attitudes. For example, Fox News network tends to provide coverage that is favorable to Republican viewers while CNN's coverage tends to be more favorable to Democratic viewers (Hyun, & Moon, 2016). Nevertheless, despite the increased variety of media outlets, television continues to dominate as a medium for viewing news with a stable group of viewers, at least for the time being (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013).

In their research study, Papathanassopoulos et al. (2013) wanted to uncover the media that were most likely to be used by individuals to obtain news events locally and internationally in countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United States. Their findings suggest that even though individuals—especially younger people—are



gravitating toward the Internet this is still in its infancy, and news outlets like television continue to play an important role in facilitating individuals' access to news (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Amount of Time Spent Watching Television by Age*

Age range	Time spent watching television per week
18-34	20 hours
35-49	32 hours
50+	47 hours

*Note.* From Nielsen Media and Entertainment

In this section, the history of cultivation theory and its benefit in previous research was discussed. Even though cultivation theory has been used in other research studies, there is an identified gap in its use that the current research addressed. There is no research to date that has specifically looked at the influence of cultivation theory on the perception and acceptance of a gender-specific group of ex-offenders as they try to re-enter their communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

A quantitative design was selected for this study. This section discussed the rationale for selecting this design, key variables and how they applied to the study, the proposed data collection approach, and analysis strategy.

Previous studies such as Kahlor and Eastin (2011) captured their data about the length of time individuals spent watching shows about crime with online surveys. LeBel (2012) and May et al. (2014) gathered data about the challenges experienced by parolees upon their release from prison, and how the public perceived people who have been incarcerated respectively. Both studies used questionnaires and opted to mail their questionnaires rather than conduct them online. However, because of invalid addresses, May et al. (2014) reported a low response rate. In contrast, online surveys are more advantageous because of its ease of use and its ability to reach a larger population from a variety of geographical areas, but it does require Internet access (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

The current study was a quantitative assessment of viewer perceptions of crime shows predicated upon cultivation theory. Quantitative research provided the capability to measure and understand the relationship between the dependent and independent variables by analyzing the numerical representation of the data (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010; Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2013). Data used in this study was gathered from a survey of male and female viewers of shows portraying female inmates. The independent variables for this study are age, gender, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), the genre of the television shows, and the number of hours spent watching these shows. Additionally, the dependent variables evaluated the effect of drama shows on public opinion, the acceptance of the female parolees, and the perception of these parolees as either friendly or hostile. The sample population was surveyed to determine to what degree watching television drama shows about prison impacted their views on female parolees.

Survey Monkey, which is an online survey company, and Facebook's Walden group were used to collect data for the study using a convenience sample. Before starting the data collection process approval was obtained from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process required that a formal application be completed and submitted. When approval was obtained from the IRB, Survey Monkey's Invitation generator was used to solicit participants and collect data. Since less than the required responses were obtained using survey monkey, Facebook's Walden group was also used for additional responses. Because this study required human participants' informed consent, this was obtained from each participant emphasizing that participation is entirely voluntary.

In this section, the rationale for selecting the quantitative design for the current research was discussed. The dependent and independent variables that were used in the study were described. The proposed data collection and analysis process was introduced. A detailed discussion of the data collection and analysis for this study will be presented in chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

Terms were defined based on their intended use in this research study to ensure that their application was distinguishable and clear. These terms are defined below:

*Attitude*: referred to personal feelings toward a person or object (Kjelsberg, Skoglund, & Rustad, 2007). These feelings may be based on past experiences, gender, and cultural differences. Because of these influences, attitude is uniquely personal.

*Documentary*: referred to a nonfiction depiction of a specific subject matter or events whose purpose is to educate the public (Kapin, 2011). Documentary films provide a specific point of view in support of a particular cause to help stimulate discourse in the hopes of influencing social change.

*Drama*: the embellishment of real-life situations, themes, dialogue, and issues for entertainment (Grabe, & Drew, 2007). Movies that are classified as dramas can encompass films considered to be comedies or tragedies.

*Frequency of TV Viewing*: referred to the approximate daily number of hours spent watching television. Gerber, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) defined this as 0-1 hours (light viewing); 2-4 hours (moderate viewing), and 4 hours or more (heavy viewing).

*Genres of Television Shows*: included television programs that are grouped around common themes such as drama, documentary, reality, and news (Grabe, & Drew, 2007). The focus of the movies selected for this study fell within the genres of drama and documentary.

*Influence*: the ability of a television program to alter behavior, opinions or beliefs in individuals. In their study, Kaye and Johnson (2016) found that even though most individuals tend to gravitate to programs that support their views they also tend to look for information that is different from what they believe to explore different perspectives.

*Offender*: this term described individuals who have been convicted of criminal activities and sent to prison. Members of society expect individuals to adhere to the laws

that dictate acceptable behavior. For individuals who deviate from these laws some degree of punishment is expected (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014).

*Offender Reentry*: referred to all the activities that were required to remove barriers for a successful return of offenders to their community after incarceration. These activities include support for job and parenting skills that begin before the release of these offenders so that they are prepared for their lives post-incarceration (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014).

*Perception*: the awareness and interpretation that is derived from exposure to an external influence. Identification and reaction to this influence are very individualized (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012).

*Recidivism*: referred to the return to criminal behavior resulting in reincarceration of an individual who has been previously released from prison. This definition included individuals who were incarcerated in jails for less than one year and those who were sent to prisons for more than a year (Ostermann, Salerno, & Hyatt, 2015).

*Reintegration*: referred to the programs and skills acquired from these programs to facilitate the functioning of ex-offenders when they return to their communities. Offenders who can obtain employment and housing are more likely to successfully reintegrate into their communities (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014).

*Rural*: is described as areas outside of cities and towns with less than 2,500 people (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016).

*Suburban*: is described as areas surrounding larger cities and metropolitan areas with 2500 but less than 50,000 people (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

*Urban*: is described as metropolitan areas consisting of 50,000 or more people (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

### **Assumptions**

Simon and Goes (2013) described the assumptions made by a researcher in a doctoral dissertation as the proposed study's guiding principles, which cannot be definitively substantiated. Even though the author must assume what cannot be proven, these assumptions are necessary to conduct the research. Assumptions for this research were as follows:

I assumed that the participants would be truthful in their responses to the survey questions from Survey Monkey and Facebook. Survey Monkey has tools that can assist with the security of respondents' identities and confidentiality of their responses.

I assumed that viewers of the drama shows considered in this study watch these shows because they have an interest in the subject matter. Therefore, they should be insightful about how they feel about the offenders when they are released from prison.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Minton and Golinelli (2014) stated that the number of women being incarcerated continues to increase, but few studies have investigated related issues such the public's attitude toward these female offenders when they return to their communities, which may assist in reduced recidivism (Minton & Golinelli, 2014). In recent years, there have been concerted efforts by researchers to make women the focus of their studies, but these continue to trail studies that focus on men (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2016). Studies

such as Garland et al. (2015), Gibson (2014), Gray (2014), Hetsroni (2014), Hoskins (2014), and May et al. (2014), do not focus on the female population.

The scope of this study included an investigation into the influence of age, gender, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), television show genres, and time spent watching these shows on the perceptions of female ex-offenders who are returning to their communities. Participation in this study was voluntary and as such presented a challenge for determining if the sample was genuinely generalizable to the larger population. In addition, individuals below the age of 18 years were not a part of this study because the content matter of some of the shows was geared toward an adult population.

The purpose of this research study was to determine if there was a relationship between the types of drama shows that were viewed and the public's attitude toward parolees. Delimiting factors for this study include the shows that were selected for inclusion in this study. Because of the volume of this kind of programming as well as the constant addition of new shows and documentaries, it was not feasible to include all possible drama shows. Also, since most studies focused on the reentry of male offenders and how they are treated by the community, a gap in the literature was identified, and this study intended to address that weakness by limiting the study to female offenders. This was a quantitative study aimed at supporting replicability. A qualitative research method was not considered because it is harder to replicate since it is usually conducted in a naturalistic setting (Simon & Goes, 2013).

### **Limitations**

Regardless of the rigor that is involved in designing and conducting a study, limitations can exist (Simon & Goes, 2013). This study only looked at television documentaries and drama shows, and it did not consider the influence of other forms of media consumption such as newspapers, television news, and reality shows on viewers' perception of ex-offenders.

Another limitation was that the shows used in this research were restrictive and respondents may have preferred different shows, which may limit respondents. Also, this research did not explore why viewers chose to watch these crime-related shows and did not differentiate whether the shows influenced their feelings of ex-offenders or whether it was their emotions toward ex-offenders that influenced their choice of drama shows and documentaries. Some people who are afraid of individuals who engage in criminal activities may choose to watch crime drama shows. These viewers may want to do so to reinforce their attitudes that offenders need to remain incarcerated. Therefore, the drama shows, regardless of how the offenders are portrayed, may not play a role in changing their views to be accepting of offenders when they are released (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). Since the proposed research study was not experimental or longitudinal a cause and effect relationship cannot be examined.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of conducting the proposed study will be presented in this section. The contributions that this study will make in support of existing theoretical framework, shaping policy development, and the role in influencing social change were



explored. There was a need to assist ex-offenders in reintegrating into their communities, and this research study may help in determining if watching prison related drama shows can have a positive or an adverse effect on ex-offender acceptance.

Few studies have focused on female ex-offenders and their challenges with reintegration back into their communities because of society's perception of them (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014). It is vital to explore whether drama and documentary shows depicting female offenders positively influenced the public's perception of these offenders, thus making their reentry into their communities easier. Most female offenders are single parents and are responsible for the welfare and well-being of their families, sometimes even from behind bars (Macklin, 2013). If paroled female offenders are unable to find adequate housing and jobs to support their families when they return to their communities, they are more likely to continue to engage in criminal activities resulting in re-incarceration (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011).

Individuals who have been convicted of criminal activity are subjected to policy restrictions that may continue even after serving their sentences. Social ideologies drive policies, and the media provide an impetus for public discussion—especially when motivated by fear—as to what restrictions should be imposed on ex-offenders (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). These restrictions may apply to housing, employment, public assistance, the ability to serve as jurors, and the right to vote (Hoskins, 2014). Proponents of these restrictive policies contend that individuals who have been convicted of criminal activities have rejected the rule of law, and have therefore forfeited their

rights to equal consideration of the benefits that are afforded the rest of society. In contrast, opponents argue that these offenders have paid their debt to society by serving their sentences, and therefore, they should have their rights restored (Hoskins, 2014).

Group A shows, such as the new popular shows *Orange is the New Black* and *Wentworth*, are criminal drama shows that portray female offenders. These shows also depict crimes that are perpetrated by female offenders in a more realistic manner (Badham, 2014; Steuver, 2013). It is implied that these shows are representative of life behind bars for female inmates. They show a need for remorse, re-examining values, helping others in similar situations, and sense of family even though they are behind bars. Even though the reality is that a criminal act resulted in the incarceration of these women, there is a degree of sympathy extended to some of these women, especially when they are abandoned by their families. *Orange is the New Black* has many entertaining situations, but there are instances when the human emotions and characteristics of the inmates mirror society outside of the prison walls. In the *Orange is the New Black* cast there is an activist nun, lesbians, heterosexuals, and women from different nationalities (Steuver, 2013).

In contrast, Group B drama shows such as *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* and *Law and Order*, which focus on getting the lawbreakers with forensic science. In these shows, the analysis of forensic evidence is integral to the investigative process for identifying the offenders, and in presenting the evidence during the trials (Maeder & Corbett, 2015). Other shows that are included in Group B, such as *Wives with Knives*, *Deadly Women*, and *Evil*, emphasize offenders who have committed crimes because of

greed, jealousy, or malice. As criminal drama shows continue to evolve, it is essential that these shows are investigated as to the reason individuals view them and how they impact their perception of reality.

Previous studies have found that there is an association between the amount of time spent on watching television, the genre of the shows, and public misconceptions about offenders (Goldberg et al., 2011; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014). Conclusions drawn from these studies can be beneficial for policy development and programs to help at-risk females to decrease their likelihood to recidivate (Surette, 2013).

It is anticipated that the findings from this research study would support previous research done and add to the narrative about recommendations and policy changes to help offenders reintegrate into society. It is also anticipated that the results of this study would show that viewing crime drama shows could make members of the community more accepting of offenders returning to their communities, that shows portraying offenders in a more positive light could help with program development for re-entry since the communities will be more tolerant. Should the findings not support acceptance for the offenders there are still questions that need to be addressed as to the best way to reintegrate ex-offenders since they will return to their communities and there need to be targeted efforts among the community members, law enforcement, and elected officials to help mitigate recidivism.

### **Significance to Theory**

This study desired to add to the existing empirical inquiry that considered the impact of age, gender, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), television show genres, and time spent watching these shows on the perceptions of female parolees. Female offenders' reentry into their communities can be problematic if they are not accepted because it can affect their ability to find jobs. If ex-offenders are not able to find jobs to provide for their families they are more likely to engage in criminal activities again and be re-arrested (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011). Members of the public are also employers and therefore can play a role in hiring these offenders. This study sought to investigate if viewing drama shows that portray incarcerated women in a positive manner will affect how the public views them upon their release and help facilitate their employment and make societal re-entry less difficult for them.

### **Significance to Practice**

The findings from this study could help in shaping policies and programs that affect ex-offenders. Media can play a role in how these ex-offenders are viewed within the community. In their study, Ashikali et al. (2014) found that when viewers are repeatedly exposed to a specific genre of television shows they tend to accept what they are viewing as synonymous with reality. Therefore, if popular drama shows portray ex-offenders as redeemable, they could influence policymakers to introduce programs that would make returning to their communities easier for these individuals. Implications for practice is the ability for these programs to reduce recidivism and psychology professionals could play a role by researching the efficacy of these programs and provide

empirical data to support or reject these programs, and, in doing so, effect change in a positive manner.

### **Significance to Social Change**

The influence of social change can be achieved at both the individual and societal levels. Effective change can be achieved through personal reflection and the understanding and acceptance of individuals' diversities, thus enabling positive change at a societal level. This study explored how watching certain shows influences public opinions about female offenders. The shows that were considered were Group A shows such as *Orange is the New Black*, which are favorable to offenders, versus Group B shows such as *Deadly Women* that portray women as depraved. When female offenders are released, they are expected to change their behavior, but there are limited resources available to facilitate this behavioral change. Support from the community, such as tolerance and understanding, can assist the female offenders in successfully transitioning back into society. It is important to explore whether watching television shows about female offenders will result in compassion for these offenders, thus making the return to their communities easier, or will they invoke fear and indifference for the female offenders making reintegration challenging.

Understanding female offenders and some of the offenses they are more likely to engage in, as well as some of the mitigating factors such as abuse and mental issues, can be beneficial in strengthening community support. Failure to address gender-specific issues increases the odds of recidivism (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013). Offenders who establish prosocial identities through family, employment, educational and supportive

programs can successfully resist offending behaviors (Macklin, 2013). Findings from this study can be helpful in policy development and shape criminal behavior programs to help with offender reentry into the community, thereby decreasing the likelihood of recidivism. With the decrease in recidivism, there may be a strengthened acceptance of these ex-offenders within the community that can further support community reintegration.

The importance and rationale for conducting the proposed study including empirical support were discussed. Information about the categorization for the shows under consideration was included. The contributions that this study will make in support of existing theoretical framework, shaping policy development and its role in influencing social change were explored.

### **Summary and Transition**

Mass media plays a significant role in the lives of Americans. The content of television shows may influence how members of society perceive their communities. If the length of time spent watching drama shows plays a role in how reality is identified, the more time spent watching prison drama show of incarcerated women may impact how these women are treated when they return to their communities. Despite the punitive approach to punishment for criminal behavior, most offenders will eventually return to their communities. Hopefully, these television shows will play a role in increasing understanding and compassion for offenders when they are released and help reduce the risk of recidivism.

In this chapter, historical perspectives of crime and punishment in the United States were presented. Efforts that were used to help ex-offenders re-enter and re-integrate into their communities were discussed, and the key terminologies relevant to this study were defined. Furthermore, the purpose, theoretical framework, and significance for conducting the current study were examined.

In chapter 2, the current literature relating to the theoretical framework guiding this research will be provided. Also, a review of the literature and the gap about challenges of female offenders' reentry into society and the influence of the media on the acceptance of these ex-offenders within their communities will be discussed in more detail. Relevant research in support of the current study, such as the challenges that female offenders experience, as well as the influence of the media on the acceptance of these ex-offenders upon their release, will be summarized. Also, demographic factors impacting public attitudes toward female offenders will be described.

Chapter 3 will be a comprehensive discussion of the methodology for this study. This discussion will include the purpose of conducting the current research, the research design, and an in-depth discussion of the methodology to include the sample population, the demographics of the participants, and the reason for the statistical methods under consideration for the quantitative assessment of the research questions.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the statistical results of the study organized and described by the research question. I will also explain the demographic data and responses to the Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale, and summarize the key findings drawn from the study.

In Chapter 5, I will address the conclusions gleaned from the results of the research study. This discussion will include interpreting the results, implications of the study to aid in offender reintegration, conclusions drawn, and possible recommendations for future research. Any unanticipated findings or limitations will also be analyzed and presented with possible rationale. This chapter will conclude with an account of any insights gained from doing this study.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The public's knowledge about criminal behavior and its subsequent punishment is shaped by the information gathered through various forms of media. Most crime shows portray victims as weak and criminals as aggressive and different from the general population. As such, offenders are viewed as monsters to be feared with little emphasis on the extenuating circumstances that may be related to some criminal activities. Understanding how the public regards offenders who are incarcerated and then released may help ex-offenders re-engage with their communities.

In this study, I sought to explore and expand the knowledge of how age, gender, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), television show genres, and time spent watching these shows affected the public's view of previously incarcerated women. This study contributed to the current empirical inquiry since there are few studies done with the focus on female ex-offenders (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014). It is important to explore whether viewing prison dramas and documentary programs that focused on female offenders will affect the public's perception of these individuals, thus influencing their ability to return to their communities successfully. Many women who are incarcerated have dependent children and are heads of households and are therefore responsible for the welfare and well-being of their families—sometimes even from behind bars (Macklin, 2013). If female offenders experience difficulties, with regards to employment, housing, education, or

acceptance upon their release back into their communities, they are more likely to recidivate (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011).

A review of the literature revealed studies that addressed some of these issues using cultivation theory and evaluated the effect of mass media on the public's opinion on offenders and ex-offenders. However, several of these studies, such as Atkin and Armstrong (2011), Cheliotis (2010), Garland et al. (2015), Gibson (2014), Gray (2014), Hetsroni (2014), Hoskins (2014), Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011), LeBel (2012), Maruna (2011), May et al. (2014), Morgan and Shanahan (2010), Neuendorf, Skalski, Jeffres, and Atkin (2014), Stavrositu (2014), Surette (2013), and Wellman (2012) did not focus on women. This lack of specific focus illustrated a gap in the literature that warranted investigation. Therefore, I investigated the effect of television drama shows on the public's opinion of female offenders and ex-offenders. An examination of the existing relevant literature is discussed below.

### **Literature Search Approach**

I used peer-reviewed journals and other acceptable sources for this literature review. Searches in databases identified relevant sources for the study such as (a) PsychINFO; (b) EBSCOhost; (c) Walden University Library; (d) Google Scholar; and (e) books and articles. Searches were limited to within the past five years through keyword searches. However, in instances when relevant seminal articles were required, I used material published before 2014. Peer-reviewed articles were searched using keywords including: *media stereotypes, racial identity, racial socialization, ex-offenders, reentry, popular culture, public attitudes toward offenders, female offenders' reintegration,*

*woman offenders*, and *cultivation theory*. In this chapter I discussed the following: conclusions about cultivation and social cognitive theories as they relate to the current study, and a summary of research about the public's attitude and the influence of the media toward ex-offenders.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Cultivation theory suggests that the way a person perceives reality can be distorted by the amount of time spent watching television drama shows. Violent shows are likely to intensify feelings of mistrust, and viewers may perceive the world as dangerous and draw parallels from the show and their reality. This could be due to the repetitive nature of the stories and messages (Gerbner, 1998; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Morgan and Shanahan (2010), and Neuendorf et al. (2014) used undergraduate students in their samples and presented a theoretical approach that was relevant to the current study and as such supports the validity and reliability of its use. In previous research, scholars have used the cultivation theory to investigate television shows, but no effort was made to distinguish between genres. More current studies, such as Ashikali et al. (2014), Gibson (2014), and Hetsroni (2014), have expanded this theory to include genre-specific studies of medical dramas, reality shows, and crime dramas within the United States and internationally. Even though the cultivation theory has focused on society's fear of violence, most studies have focused on criminal behavior portrayed in the news genre (Grabe & Drew, 2007).

Opponents of cultivation theory have stated that the theory does not consider the diversity of television programs, nor does it differentiate between individual and

community differences (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). There is also the issue of viewer bias since individuals tend to watch television channels that reflect their ideologies (Kaye & Johnson, 2016). For example, viewers who have identified as conservative indicated preferences for Fox News as a source of their political news while those that identified as liberals chose Cable News Network (CNN; Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley, & Matsa, 2014). Indeed, viewers will tend to be attracted to programs that support their worldview, but cultivation theory has traditionally looked at television viewing in aggregate, looking at commonalities across different television shows and genres, with insufficient attention paid to genre-specific viewing. Looking at genre-specific viewing using a micro versus a macro-lens could distort the original argument of the cultivation theory (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

Papathanassopoulos et al. (2013) used an aggregate view in their study and found that despite having numerous choices available, their participants preferred television viewing as the primary method for consuming the news and watching movies. The television has traditionally been the source for news and movies for consumers, but there are debates within the research community as to how cultivation theory will deal with the addition of more diversity in television channels and evolving media (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). However, as technology has expanded, there are growing concerns by some members of the research community that the cultivation theory may no longer be relevant and adaptable to the growing numbers of television channels and new forms of media (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Proponents of the theory suggest that this could be done through refinement of the theory to incorporate a genre-specific modification as the

effects of cultivation can differ based on the television genres (Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). With the proliferation of streaming services such as Hulu and Netflix, more time is spent watching shows such as *Orange is the New Black*, which indicates that cultivation theory will continue to be pertinent (Papathanassopoulos, et al., 2013). Even though Lee and Niederdeppe (2011) proposed that genre-specific modifications to the original cultivation theory could be used to explain variances among the variables better, they agree that the cultivation theory as it was originally developed is still valid.

A second theory that relates to individuals' perceptions of others is Bandura's SCT, which suggests that individuals can obtain information from observing others through media influences (Bandura, 2001). These influences can impact thoughts and actions. The more individuals are exposed to media the more it influences their patterns of behavior because they can view both the negative and positive consequence of their actions (Bandura, 2001). However, these influences may be contingent upon environmental factors and individual differences such as age, race, and gender. Shows with high levels of aggression may lead to aggressive behaviors in some viewers (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). In their research, Nelson, Fife, and Woo (2016) found that the length of time devoted to watching aggressive television shows did not show that it caused negative behaviors in the viewers. The authors noted that viewers looked for cues for pro-social behaviors and mimicked those behaviors rather than behaviors that were not socially accepted. Therefore, Nelson, et al (2016) findings suggest that the length of time devoted to watching television does not influence

behaviors negatively if the viewing audience believes that the negative behaviors are in direct conflict with what is considered morally acceptable behavior within society and that adheres to social norms.

### **Literature Review of Associated Variables**

In the review of the literature, some researchers used cultivation theory to evaluate the effect of mass media on the public's opinion of offenders and ex-offenders. Even though a few studies did focus on female ex-offenders, including Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014), LeBel (2012), and Neuendorf et al. (2014), most did not. Several of these studies, such as Atkin and Armstrong (2011), Garland et al. (2015), Gibson (2014), Gray (2014), Hetsroni (2014), Hoskins (2014), Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011), Maruna (2011), May et al. (2014), Morgan and Shanahan (2010), Stavrositu (2014), Surette (2013), and Wellman (2012) did not focus on shows specifically related to women. This lack of specific research evaluating the impact of television dramas on the public's opinion of women who are incarcerated or released on parole illustrates a gap in the literature that warrants further investigation.

Gender differences play a role in criminal behavior, with men being more likely to engage in criminal activities than women (Rebellon, Manasse, Agnew, Van Gundy, & Cohn, 2016). In 2014 men were responsible for 79.8% of violent crimes in the United States per statistics released by the Federal Bureau of Investigations Uniform Crime Report. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014). Another report that looked at homicide trends between 1980 and 2008 has this percentage even higher at 90% (Cooper & Smith, 2011). Researchers argue that this is because men are less likely to condemn criminal

behavior in others. They theorize that the degree of guilt that was experienced by women when they do not adhere to prosocial behaviors as the reason they are less likely to participate in criminal activity (Rebellion et al., 2016). Women were stereotyped as displaying more emotional qualities such as shame, guilt, and embarrassment than men. This was supported by Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, and Morton (2012) who found that women were more likely to experience these moral emotions, which are great motivators for socially acceptable behaviors. In the current study, the author investigated if the gender of television viewers affected the way they regard paroled female offenders.

### **Review of the Gap in the Literature**

Offenders are faced with many challenges when they are released from prison, but few studies have looked at factors that may impact female offenders' successful reentry into their communities. In the study by Garland et al. (2015), the authors focused their research on the issue of gender-neutral ex-offender reentry. The study was done in a single Midwestern state using 1000 randomly selected residents. Their sample consisted of participants who were White, college educated, 59% male, and a median age of 55 years. They believe for re-entry strategies to work there must be support from the public. In their opinion, there has not been enough research done to look at the public's attitude and treatment of ex-offenders when they return to their communities.

Nevertheless, in evaluating the study by Garland et al. (2015), there was no distinction made between male and female ex-offenders, so it was hard to determine if gender played a role in how the ex-offenders were perceived. Female ex-offenders were the focus of the current study, and the survey was available to male and female viewers in

all states. As such, it would be easier to generalize the findings to the larger population, which was a limitation of the study done by Garland et al. (2015). The more members of the public see offenders as individuals and not just their past criminal activities may result in these offenders being viewed less negatively, and the community more embracing.

### **Public Attitudes toward Female Offenders**

Before incarceration, some women may have unsteady work histories because of some of the industries in which they are employed (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011). Women are usually employed in service-sector jobs and, with the increased outsourcing of these jobs, women are more often impacted resulting in criminal activities (Allen & Savigny, 2012; Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Macklin, 2013; Maruna, 2011). Strategies for successful community reintegration have been explored with male ex-offenders, but the experiences of women post-incarceration have often been overlooked (Opsal, 2012). Instead of being accepting of women who have been incarcerated females into society, members of the public are generally afraid of them and treat them with suspicion (Goldberg, Smith-Adcock, & Dixon, 2011).

In the study by Scott, Grella, Dennis, and Funk (2014), the authors examined the predictive factors that were responsible for female offenders' recidivism. Participants for this study were 83% black women from the Chicago area. Individuals who have been convicted of crimes often have difficulty integrating back into society, especially if they lack the necessary education and understanding required to complete job applications, develop interviewing skills, and be aware of appropriate conduct in the workplace. With



these weaknesses, they may not be successful in obtaining employment, thus leading to a higher likelihood of recidivism. This is even more likely to occur if they return to an environment that perpetuates criminal behavior.

Bui and Morash (2010) investigated factors that influence the successful return to the community after incarceration and reviewed predictors that could lead to reoffending in female offenders. There has been a steady increase in the number of women who are incarcerated and then released on parole within the last decade. Tougher drug laws and illicit substance-related crimes have been credited to this increase (Bui & Morash, 2010). Even though there are programs aimed at assisting women return to their communities, they will only be successful if members within the communities are tolerant and accept the ex-offenders' return. Previous research indicates that when female offenders are freed they must cope with unique challenges, such as the difficulties finding employment because of limited education and their incarceration records. Formerly incarcerated women may face other issues including the loss of their children, under poorly defined 'best interest of the child' standards, so they may turn to substance abuse once again and return to prison. The recidivism rates for female ex-offenders that are reincarcerated post release is high at 44.9 % (Markman, Durose, Rantala, & Tiedt, 2016).

Interventions that have been deemed successful in helping women reintegrate into society while reducing recidivism include emotional support from family and friends, and avoiding situations where individuals are engaging in criminal behavior. Participants for the study done by Bui and Morash (2010) were women who were incarcerated for at least a year. Even though the results from this study may have limited generalizability, it does

provide some insight into the needs of women as they try to re-engage with society. Other research with limited generalizability to the larger population were the studies done by LeBel (2012) and Opsal (2012). LeBel (2012) looked at the effect of stigma on the perception of acceptance from ex-offenders and how these perceptions affect their reintegration efforts. On the other hand, Opsal (2012) studied factors preventing recidivism and adherence to pro-social behaviors in women recently released in the Denver area.

In these studies discussed factors impacting successful recidivism from the perspective of the ex-offenders in specific areas were discussed. However, the use of these particular geographic regions limits generalizability to all populations. Also, Atkin and Armstrong (2011) targeted business owners to get their views about the hiring of ex-offenders and mailed out surveys to participants. But they had low response rates because of invalid addresses and disconnected phone numbers when they tried follow-up calls. In the current study online surveys were used and had a broader scope since it used participants from multiple states. With this methodological approach, this study had the potential to include employers as well as their employees who will need to work with the ex-offenders. Employment is an important factor for ex-offenders who are seeking successful re-integration into their communities.

### **Public Attitudes toward Punishment and Rehabilitation**

Even though ex-offenders may face challenges in finding work and a place to live after their release from prison. There are factors that make these challenges even more difficult such as the type of offenses, homicide versus theft, that may also influence

employers' hiring practices (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011). Ex-offenders need to find employment that will allow them to meet their needs and those of their families to prevent recidivism. If employers are not willing to hire ex-offenders, or if individuals working within these companies are not receptive to ex-offenders, it will be discouraging for female ex-offenders. Despite efforts to address inmate reentry back into their communities, there was a lack of empirical data to address the challenges that they face from members of the community, and the factors that may contribute to these challenges (Maruna, 2011).

There are public policies that have negatively impacted the reintegration efforts of ex-offenders. Policymakers often take the opinions of the public into consideration when making decisions. However, in some instances they sway the public opinion. Individuals are more likely to believe what they hear through the media they most often use. If these viewers believe the source to be highly credible and the media provides biased coverage, the viewers are more apt to trust what they hear (Linos & Twist, 2016). Because of some of these policies, ex-offenders can lose some rights and privileges that are provided to the rest of society.

The rights and privileges that are not extended to ex-offenders are such things as federal student loans like Pell Grants, access to public housing, the ability to hold public office, and the right to vote (Garland et al., 2015; Hoskins, 2014). For example, current laws prohibit individuals with felonies from voting. This exclusion disproportionately affects non-white individuals because they are more likely to be incarcerated for felonies (King & Erickson, 2016). Upon release from prison, attempts by these individuals to re-

engage into society is hampered by their inability to participate in political activities such as being able to vote (Miller & Agnich, 2016). The way these ex-offenders are regarded by the public could influence policies that affect them after they have successfully reintegrated into society. In this study, I wanted to determine if the positive or negative media portrayal of ex-offenders influenced how they are viewed.

### **Media Influence**

Cheliotis (2010) provided arguments regarding the role of films that focus on the prison environment and their influence on the public's views about individuals who have engaged in criminal activities from both opponents and proponents. Apart from representatives in law enforcement, the judicial system, and offenders' families, and victims of crimes, most people are not very knowledgeable about the criminal justice system. Cheliotis (2010) asserted that the way media information is interpreted could influence public opinions. There are several televised shows currently available with an emphasis on prison drama, but most portray offenders as evil, depraved, and beyond redemption. One such show is the drama *Oz*, which showed inmates engaging in violent and reprehensible behaviors. There were also instances in which the guards condoned behaviors that could put the public's well-being at risk if the inmates were to engage in similar actions when released.

With the abundance of crime-related shows currently available, individuals can decide which shows they prefer to watch. Some members of society believe that it is necessary to punish lawbreakers with incarceration, and prison shows can give viewers a glimpse of what it is like to be in a prison system. Non-fiction crime shows offer an

opportunity to learn about crime and how offenders are treated inside the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, it has been proposed that the non-fiction drama shows, like fiction dramas, also sensationalize criminal activities and so intensify levels of concern within members of the public (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011).

When shows depict negative behaviors by both offenders and correctional officials, these behaviors may have a negative effect on the public's perceptions of offenders and correctional officers. These shows may forfeit opportunities to decrease the marginalization of offenders through public education about the prison system. However, when lawbreakers—as well as those who were tasked with upholding the law—are portrayed as not likable, the conclusions that the viewers draw from these television programs are ambivalent. The public may doubt that the oversight would result in offender rehabilitation, or that offenders would not break the law again when they were released from prison (Cheliotis, 2010).

The persuasive aspects of television dramas are usually realized over some time, and the current culture is saturated by television shows of varying genres. Drama shows may exert some influence on viewers in different ways, viewers of shows that are not violent may experience a positive influence, while violent shows may negatively influence viewers. Nelson et al. (2016) suggest that individuals who spend a lot of time watching negative dramas may perceive the world as an uncaring place. Alternatively, watching shows that allow viewers to glean something positive may present a different view, and as such, shows about female inmates that feature a bit of humor may have a positive impact on viewers.

The cultivation theory framework suggests that repeated exposure to drama shows, although fictional, leads viewers to accept what they see as real. As such, the portrayal of criminal and violent subject matter will result in viewers accepting what they see as factual. This inaccurate portrayal may cause some viewers to experience fear, while others may believe it is okay to engage in similar behavior because it is acceptable to do so (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Television viewing audiences tend to prefer certain television genres, and therefore, viewers of long-running drama shows that are laced with violence could experience a distorted reality over time because of the repeated exposure (Ashikali et al., 2014).

In further analysis of media exposure, Stavrositu (2014) explored the relationship between the number of hours spent watching long-running, genre-specific television shows such as *American Idol* and *Project Runway*, and the viewers' perception of personal fulfillment and lifetime achievements. The study found a positive relationship between the number of hours spent watching these television shows and the feeling of personal well-being. This finding contrasts with other studies using similar theories that have reported a negative relationship. However, the researcher credited her use of genre-specific-shows for her result, which was lacking in other studies.

The studies reviewed were not only limited to specific geographical areas, but they were also limited in the number of shows they examined. For example, Ashikali et al. (2014) only looked at one show while other studies such as Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011), Kahlor and Eastin (2011), and Nelson et al. (2016) did not focus on specific shows but instead chose to look at television channels. Lacking in other research, the

current study allowed for comparative data by looking at both drama shows and non-fiction documentaries that focus on female offenders. Also, the sample did not focus on one state but was more nationally representative.

### **Television Viewing and Public Policy**

May et al. (2014) and Surette (2013) examined patterns of public behavior based on viewing and interpretation of crime-centric television shows, and their impact on policymaking. Policy makers tend to base their decisions on perceived public opinions and personal assumptions more readily than empirical data. Therefore, it is important to have research that examines public perceptions about social issues, especially those that provoke public anxiety. The public's perceptions garnered from television shows that depict violence can result in fear, thereby influencing social policies such as capital punishment to maintain social control (Britto & Noga-Styron, 2014).

### **International Perspectives of Crime Drama Shows**

Custers and Van den Bulck (2012) offered a global perspective on crime drama and compared American television crime dramas to those from other countries. Shows depicting violence against women are frequently televised in fiction as well as non-fiction shows. Some researchers propose that viewing these shows with graphic depictions of violent acts can result in elevated fear in viewers (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011; Surette, 2013). Researchers within the United States determined the findings mentioned above, but similar results have been reported by researchers in other countries, such as Belgium. Women who viewed shows depicting violence were more likely to believe that they might also experience similar crimes. Nevertheless, Custers and Van den Bulck

(2012) cautioned that although most of the shows viewed in Belgium were produced in America, there may be cultural differences in how shows are perceived.

In addition to cultural differences, there are variances in law. Gray (2014) discussed the legal protections of ex-cons in countries such as the United States and Australia. In Australia, individuals serving sentences less than three years can vote. There were multiple amendments to the electoral legislation, but the Australian Human Rights Commission argued that allowing these inmates to vote might serve to assist with rehabilitation and societal reintegration. The Australian government maintains that incarcerated individuals are still citizens, and are members of their communities post-incarceration. This approach is in line with judicial decisions made in Canada and the United Kingdom. Unlike Australia, the United States has strict laws denying individuals who have felony convictions the right to vote. However, this is not consistently applied in all states. In addition to legal protections, privacy laws in other countries are stricter than those in the United States. These countries have adopted more restrictive policies to prevent the indiscriminate use of private information (Myers, 2014). Some degree of privacy can be beneficial for ex-offenders who are trying to reintegrate into society.

### **Ex-offender Disenfranchisement**

When ex-offenders do not have that privacy, their reintegration may be more difficult. Garland et al. (2015), Hoskins (2014), and Wellman (2012) discussed the continued punishment of offenders even after they have completed their sentences. Wellman (2012) argued that it is appropriate to punish individuals for engaging in criminal acts because they have forfeited the right not to be punished. However, the



breadth and duration of the punishment can become problematic. As evidenced by support for the felony disenfranchisement laws that restrict activities such as the ability to vote, punitive views may not change when offenders are released (Garland et al., 2015).

Hoskins (2014) maintained that when offenders have completed their sentence, they have been adequately punished and should therefore have their status restored with full benefits, and they should not continue to be punished. Restrictions that are levied against these ex-offenders might be considered unwarranted, especially if it is assumed that these restrictions will not play a role in reducing the risk of continued bad behavior. For the restrictions on ex-offenders to be justified there need to be compelling reasons to assume that the public is at risk, and there may be alternatives to these restrictions that could be implemented to keep the public safe (Hoskins, 2014).

In the United States, felony convictions hindering the right to vote can result in voter suppression because it disproportionately affects African American and Latino citizens and weakens the voting power of this group. Even though it would appear that there is no racial bias attached to felony disenfranchisement as all felons, regardless of race, are not able to participate in the voting process, it disproportionately affects people of color (King & Erickson, 2016). Differences in arrests, prosecutions, and incarcerations are skewed against African Americans and Latinos, which suggests that it is racially motivated. These differences affect the communities where these offenders live because there will be fewer votes coming out of those communities (King & Erickson, 2016).

### **Constitutional impact.**

In the 15th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, attempts were made to give African Americans the right to vote in the post-slavery era, thus preventing the denial of the vote for former slaves. However, the language is so ambiguous that some states successfully circumvented it and could decide who could vote (Manza, 2015). Southern states such as Mississippi defined crimes that would be impacted by the 15th Amendment to ensure that the definitions would not impact whites. For example, crimes committed by blacks were classified as ‘infamous,’ which was excluded from the 15th Amendment, but crimes committed by whites were classified as ‘robust’ and thus worthy of exclusion from any disenfranchisement constraints (Manza, 2015).

### **Factors Affecting Public Attitudes toward Prisoners**

While voting restrictions are one form of disenfranchisement, issues with housing and employment may also be related to recidivism. Boag and Wilson (2014) did not evaluate the influence of media on attitudes related to offenders but rather examined how individuals who work with offenders viewed them versus those that had no experience with offenders. Parolees who experience prejudice pertaining to jobs and housing when they are released usually recidivate or revert to drug abuse, which makes it challenging for them to return to their communities. When offenders are excluded by society from fully engaging in activities it can result in a cycle of repeat offending (Boag & Wilson, 2014). However, there is limited research that examines if there is any recourse available to influence tolerance for ex-offenders within society. This author seeks to address the current gap in the literature regarding the reintegration challenges of female offenders. In their study, Boag and Wilson (2014) used the Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale to

measure prejudice and found that the more empathetic the participants were, the less prejudicial they were against ex-offenders. The limitation of this study was that the participants were Caucasian, women, and predominately religious. This current study included all races.

Attitudes toward prisoners and ex-offenders may also be related to media consumption. The frequency in which individuals spend viewing dramatic television shows the more apt they are to believe the content of these shows, and this belief may, in turn, influence their attitudes (Appel, 2008; Maeder & Corbett, 2015). In his study, Appel (2008) used both male and female participants from the community to study news, talk shows, and documentaries. Appel found that individuals who watched fictional shows believed that people got what they deserved and usually good prevailed over bad (Appel, 2008). However, most viewers did not feel a sense of superiority from watching these shows because the feelings of fear dominated. Viewers believed in a just world but did not think that the world treats one justly since bad things can happen to good people.

The genre that is watched also has an impact on how viewers feel. They agree that individuals who engage in criminal activities and were prosecuted were treated in a manner that was just, since good behavior should be rewarded, and bad behavior punished. On the other hand, individuals who watched non-fiction shows saw the world as a scary place and thought that people were not to be trusted (Appel, 2008). However, Appel (2008) did not investigate whether differences existed between individuals from different backgrounds, or whether individuals chose shows that support their beliefs or are the shows influencing their beliefs.

In their study, Maeder and Corbett (2015) examined the role of crime shows on individuals' expectations and attitudes to the extent that they see these shows as an extension of their reality. In the study, the authors questioned whether it was the amount of time spent watching certain shows that influenced the viewers' attitudes and beliefs, rather than their perception of the accuracy of the content. However, the result of their study did not support previous research by Grabe and Drew (2007) that indicated that there was no difference between the length of time spent watching crime shows and the impact on their reality and how they perceived crime. Grabe and Drew (2007) found that the frequency of watching crime shows did not alter viewers' preexisting perceptions or attitudes for the individuals portrayed in these shows. Evaluating different genres can produce varying results. The basis for these conflicting findings could be explained by the lack of specificity that was used in evaluating the drama shows (Grabe & Drew, 2007). The researchers suggested that the violent characteristics of some drama shows may elicit strong defensive feelings in some viewers. This means that if these viewers think offenders should not be rehabilitated, they may not be as likely to accept ex-offenders even if the shows portray them as friendly.

It has been theorized that watching drama shows, such as *CSI*, could influence how individuals view forensic evidence, as well as how they see offenders (Baskin & Sommers, 2010). Mancini (2013) refuted Baskins and Sommers (2010) who found that viewers of crime shows such as *CSI* did not have an impact on whether jurors convicted defendants. On the other hand, Tyler (2006) suggested that because of advances in technology, there is an overdependence on the scientific evidence as seen in these crime

shows, and defendants were sometimes convicted because of it. Also, Ashikali et al. (2014) found that the extent of individuals' perceptions of physical appearance was more dependent upon individuals' level of self-worth than the number of cosmetic surgery shows they watched. The purpose of the current study was to determine if the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries, and how they portrayed female offenders, had an impact on how they are perceived by society.

### **Impact of crime shows.**

Viewing crime dramas and documentaries may also result in more intense fear of being victimized in women than men and women who are socio-demographically like the victims portrayed on television and may cause a heightened sense of concern. Callanan and Rosenberger (2015) studied this phenomenon in their research using multiple crime-related media such as newspapers, television dramas, television news, and they separated their participants by gender. Their findings show that crime drama shows did not increase fear of crime in women or men, but, for women, there was an increase in fear of crime with reading the newspaper. This finding led the researchers to conclude that respondents did not perceive the drama shows as realistic, so they provoked no fear.

This research by Callanan and Rosenberger (2015) contrasts with the findings of other researchers such as Ashikali et al. (2014) and Kleck and Jackson (2016), who found that prolonged viewing of drama shows distorted the viewers' sense of reality and that viewers saw the shows as an accurate depiction of reality. These findings have implications for the study at hand because viewers of drama shows that portray offenders as friendly will be more accepting of female parolees, which may aid in their successful

assimilation back into their communities. This acceptance will make it easier for ex-offenders to conform to society's norms and prevent recidivism.

Allen and Savigny (2012) suggested that the coverage of criminal behavior is related to increased levels of fear in citizens because it is implied that criminal behavior is usually committed by individuals with lower socioeconomic status. In contrast, white collar crimes are not covered to the same extent because they are generally committed by respectable members of society (Allen & Savigny, 2012). Nevertheless, the media can play an important role in getting members of society to engage in dialogue that may not otherwise happen, which includes subjects such as whether previously incarcerated individuals should be included back into society.

### **Race.**

Socioeconomic status is not the only factor in viewers' perceptions of crime. Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) examined whether African American youths, who viewed predominantly black TV shows, believe these shows accurately represent that ethnic group and how it impacts their identity development. Media can be used as a source of socialization, but a negative portrayal can influence how that group is viewed by most members of society. Even though society has progressed socially, some stereotypes are still pervasive, especially within the television industry since there are more negative than positive portrayals (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014). However, the findings from this study done by Adams-Bass et al. (2014) suggest that the media, especially television, can be strong influencing factors. Also, the findings from

this study indicate that negative stereotypes are related to how these youths are socialized.

### **Gender.**

The incarceration rate of female offenders within the criminal justice system is increasing (Carson, 2018; Minton & Golinelli, 2014). When these female offenders are released, they return to their communities and often face challenges reintegrating into society. How formerly incarcerated women are portrayed by the media may have a role in how these ex-offenders can reintegrate into society (Gibson, 2014). However, few studies have investigated how the media, specifically television programming, influences society's perception, and acceptance of female ex-offenders (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012).

Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014), investigated the impact of gender-specific cultivation research on successful ex-offender reentry into their communities. These researchers thought that through evidence-based research, reentry programs that have demonstrated positive outcomes could help mitigate the re-entry challenges that ex-offenders face. Their study was predicated on the assumption that with behavioral changes that start while the offenders are still incarcerated will adequately prepare them to re-assimilate within their communities when they are released. If these ex-offenders are viewed positively and are accepted within their communities, this may prevent them from re-offending. Any reason that could encourage that influence should be explored.

The current research explored if, and to what extent, the type of program or the amount of time spent watching these shows will influence how female ex-offenders are

perceived and accepted within their communities upon their release. Even though women usually commit less violent crimes than male offenders, their rate of incarceration continues to increase (Carson, 2018; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). Understanding female offenders and the offenses they are more likely to commit, as well as some of the mitigating factors such as abuse and mental issues, can be beneficial in strengthening community support. Failure to address gender-specific issues increases the odds of recidivism (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014).

### **Religion.**

Attitudes toward ex-offenders may also be influenced by one's religious affiliation. In their study, Chui and Cheng (2014) studied Christians and Buddhists and found that religious affiliation does play a role in how offenders are viewed by some members of society. Surprisingly, the findings showed that regardless of whether the participants were Christian or Buddhist, they were more accepting of the ex-offenders than individuals who identified as not having any religious identification. The results contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the relationship between attitudes toward ex-offenders and religious affiliation. Regardless of the religion of individuals, they had positive feelings and were more empathetic towards ex-offenders. This could explain the importance of engaging religious organizations in the reintegration of offenders back into their communities. However, the degree of acceptance will impact how smooth and successful the reintegration process is for these offenders.

### **Sociodemographic.**



Acceptance of offenders may be associated with media consumption. The effect of media on the perception of criminal behavior is affected by how the programs present messages and the characteristics of the audience. Since crime dramas, reality shows, and news media can have different focuses, one of the limitations of most studies is that specific show genres are not addressed in the research (Dowler, 2003). The violence presented in news media has a different impact on the community where the incident occurred than on communities that are removed from the incident. The reporting of crimes in local news is related to an increase in the level of fear versus news that is non-local (Dowler, 2003). This is also true of demographics; individuals who live in areas of high crime activities and view large amounts of criminal drama shows are more likely to be afraid. The more intense the fear, the more the public pressures officials to find solutions to minimize crime in their specific neighborhoods.

However, Kleck and Jackson (2016) found that the number of hours spent watching the local news resulted in increased support for harsh punishment for perpetrators more so than a perceived fear of victimization. They posited that the increased viewing of crime in the news elicited anger in the viewers toward the offenders. They questioned whether the increase in policies for harsher punishments was as a result of society's fear rather than the conservatism of policymakers.

Heavy viewers of drama shows will begin to consider what is portrayed in the shows as the real state of the world and less so about the world around them (Mutz & Nir, 2010). Viewers who watch drama shows usually do so as a source of relaxation that can result in empathetic reactions if the shows are positive and exert greater influence on

viewers' emotions (Slater et al., 2006). In contrast, Holbert and Hansen (2006) found that the Republicans within their study who had viewed Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* expressed high levels of ambivalence toward the Republican president in office at the time.

### **Summary**

Mass media plays a significant role in the lives of American citizens. This review of the literature suggests that the length of time spent viewing certain television shows, as well as the genre of the shows, can influence viewers' perceptions toward the individuals portrayed in the shows. The United States has the highest incarceration rate for women in the world, with most of these incarcerations attributed to substance use (Bui & Morash, 2010; Minton & Golinelli, 2014). When these women are released, they return to their communities because that is where their support systems are located. If society is accepting of these female offenders when they integrate back into their communities, recidivation can be reduced. This study hoped to add to the current empirical inquiry because few studies have focused on female ex-offenders (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014). It was worthy to explore if viewing prison dramas and documentary programs that feature female offenders will positively influence the public's perception of them, thus making the return to their communities easier for these offenders.

The research studies outlined above have identified a gap in the literature that this research tried to address. No research to date has specifically looked at the influence of cultivation on gender as it relates to the perception and acceptance of a gender specific

group of ex-offenders as they try to re-enter their communities. The findings could have a broad impact on addressing the needs of female offenders as they try to reintegrate into their communities through tolerance, acceptance, and policy modifications. The findings could also contribute to positive social change that would make it easier for these ex-offenders and give them another chance at being successful within society.

In chapter 2, relevant research concerning the challenges that female offenders face when they return to their communities, the influence of media on society's opinions of these offenders, and associated theories were summarized. Chapter 3 will be a comprehensive discussion of the methodology for this study. This discussion will include the sample population, the demographics of the participants, and the statistical methods under consideration for the quantitative assessment of the research questions.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to determine if a relationship existed between the viewing of certain television shows and the public's attitude toward parolees. In this chapter, an in-depth discussion of the research design including the reason for the study, research questions, the target population, sampling procedures, and ethical considerations was presented. I reviewed the data collection instrumentation for its reliability and validity for use in this research. The theoretical framework underpinning this research was Gerbner's cultivation theory. This theory proposed that individuals' attitudes can be influenced by the amount of time they spend watching television. The cultivation theory has been used in studies such as Hetsroni (2014), Morgan and Shanahan (2010), and Neuendorf, Skalski, Jeffres, and Atkin (2014), to support the understanding of the role of cultivation theory research. Hetsroni (2014) concluded that there is a direct relationship between the hours spent watching television and the viewer's reaction. Hestroni (2014) found that the more television individuals watched, the more they believed what they saw as applicable to their own environment. Gerber's cultivation theory suggested that the frequency of viewing television shows can affect the viewer's perception and they can begin to see these shows as true representations, and as such may influence their behavior (Appel, 2008; Maeder & Corbett, 2015). Violent shows are likely to intensify feelings of fear in viewers, and they see the world as dangerous and therefore draw parallels from the show and what they believe to be real (Gerbner, 1998; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

The focus of this study was on incarcerated women and the public's attitudes towards them when they are released, to determine what impact drama shows may have on their perception and subsequent attitudes about ex-offenders. Even though most of their crimes are drug-related, the number of women who are incarcerated is growing (Bui & Morash, 2010; Carson, 2018; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014). Upon the completion of their sentences, these women return to their communities, but without the understanding and support of the communities, these women are at higher risk to recidivate (Atkin & Armstrong, 2011; LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011). However, how these offenders are viewed by their communities may be linked to how they are portrayed in the media. The more time spent watching television may influence individuals' attitudes and tolerance (Appel, 2008; Maeder & Corbett, 2015).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The single group design used in the present study addressed the effect of age, gender, demographic location (urban, suburban or rural), the genre, and the frequency of watching television shows depicting offenders would have on the perception and acceptance of female parolees. Creswell (2009) stated that a cross-sectional design occurs when the researcher collects data at one point in time. Therefore, I will use a quantitative cross-sectional research design. The quantitative research design can be used to convert the data obtained from surveys into numerical values to be analyzed, and so was used in this study. (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2013). Quantitative research is important to furthering the theoretical knowledge within the discipline of psychology because of its ability to analyze the relationship between the variables under study, and

its potential for generalization toward a broader population (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Since the design was not experimental, neither a control group nor a cause and effect relationship was required. This design did not result in any time or resource constraints. As stated, the purpose of the study was to examine the effect of demographics such as age and gender as well as the genre and frequency of watching certain television drama shows on the perception and acceptance of ex-offenders.

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was initially selected for this study since it makes it possible to analyze for any differences between the variables as it accommodates simultaneous testing of independent and dependent variables. However, test was later modified to the multiple linear regression statistical test because there is a single dependent variable for RQ1. Upon subsequent evaluation of the research questions and variables for the current study, I changed the statistical tests to logistic regression for RQ2, TQ3, RQ4, and RQ5.

Nelson et al. (2016) used multiple regression testing in their research to evaluate if television exposure could predict the use of a conflict management message style. Also, Ashikali et al. (2014) used both multiple regression and logistic regression in their study to examine the impact on body image and the attitudes of adolescent girls towards cosmetic surgery.

### **Research Hypotheses Testing**

To facilitate calculating the sample size the parameters were the statistical power of 0.95, the alpha of 0.05, and a medium effect size of 0.25 (Buchner, Faul, & Erdfelder, 2013; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). To provide the required computations

the G\*Power program was used. For this study, the significance level was 0.05, which is the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true. The significance level of 0.05 denotes a 5% risk of assuming that there is a difference when none exists. Rejecting a null hypothesis that is true is a Type I error (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The intent of this research is to investigate the effects of age, gender, genre, and the frequency of watching television shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus shows that portray them as hostile (Group B), on public perceptions of female parolees. The research questions that will be investigated are as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_01$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a1}$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does the age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_02$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a2}$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Does the gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_03$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a3}$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Do the location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_04$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a4}$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 5 (RQ5): Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_05$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows has no significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a5}$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows does have a significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.



## **Methodology**

The intent of this section was to communicate the process used to conduct this study including the population under consideration, the procedure for population recruitment, and the tool used to collect and compute the data. In scientific inquiry, the methodology section is important since it facilitates the exchange of information about the process and procedure of a study between researchers with common interests (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

I used the Survey Monkey email generator to solicit participation from individuals over the age of 18 years. Volunteers were asked via email to take the online survey that consisted of demographic questions and questions from the Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale. Included in the email was a consent letter outlining the purpose of the study. There was also information explaining the participant's rights, the confidentiality of responses, and a statement that participation was voluntary. The survey was password protected and available for at least 30 days until the required number of participants were achieved, and participants were granted a single use link. The target population selection, sampling, and requirement procedures will be discussed below.

### **Population**

The participation in the current study was voluntary, and the population consisted of men and women 18 years of age or older as the mature content of the shows was not appropriate for individuals under the age of 18 years. The participants for the study was a convenience sample obtained through Survey Monkey's participants' pool. For this research study, the use of the G\*Power tool calculated the sample size as 150 participants

with the medium effect size of 0.25, 0.05 alpha, and the statistical power of 0.95 with the G\*Power tool. Invitation to participate in the study was sent out via emails using Survey Monkey's invitation generator, and if they were over age 18 and resided in any state, they were able to complete the survey.

### **Sampling Procedures.**

The specific sample that is selected for any study determines whether the results can be generalized to the larger group. Therefore, the sample should be a good representation of the larger population so that inferences can be made (Stangor, 2011). A convenience sample provided the participants used in the current study. Individuals over the age of 18, since the content of the shows is more appropriate for the adult population, will be invited to participate. Participants received their emails from Survey Monkey's invitation generator. Even though participation was totally voluntary, the target size was 150 participants. There was no control group, so this study had a single group design.

### **Sample size.**

The statistical power is the value used to determine the probability that the null hypothesis would be rejected. The acceptable value is 80%, which means that the null hypothesis would be rejected 80% of the time that the study is conducted. The value for the alpha is predetermined and is set up by the researcher. Alpha values can either be (.05) or (.01). Alpha (.05) provides a larger value and specifies a 95% chance that the null hypothesis would be rejected. The sample size of 150 participants was determined by the G\*Power program using a statistical power of 0.95, the alpha of 0.05, and a medium effect size of 0.25 (Buchner, Faul, & Erdfelder, 2013; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner,

& Lang, 2009). I anticipated that the use of Survey Monkey could generate many participants since the survey has not geographically restricted to any specific state within the United States, but the target sample size was 150 subjects. Survey Monkey's survey tools were used to prepare the survey. Survey Monkey has templates that are certified by their resident methodologists that could be customized with this research specific questions. Survey monkey also facilitates closing the survey when the required responses are met.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

The online services of Survey Monkey were used to conduct this study using its survey pool. Participants were limited to adults over the age of 18, and involvement in the study was voluntary. As part of the recruitment process, participants were told about the purpose of the study so that they are aware of the requirements of the study. There was no misleading information or any language that made the participant believe that they were required to participate in the survey. Prior to participating in the study, participants were required to electronically sign an informed consent document attesting to understanding the requirements for completing the survey. Findings from this study will be summarized and posted to Facebook's Walden group.

One benefit of using online surveys is the ability to maintain participants' anonymity, and because of the availability of virtual communities, it is easier to recruit specific populations for research (Alessi & Martin, 2010). Participants were asked about their viewing preferences for the preselected drama shows and documentaries divided

into two groups (friendly versus hostile), and responses were grouped based on demographic descriptors such as age and gender.

### **Data Collection**

Since most prisoners most likely return to their communities upon their release, the attitudes toward these offenders by the public become important. Shows that depict criminal violence, prisoners, and parolees negatively may result in undesirable perceptions against offenders trying to reenter the community (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012). On the other hand, fictional shows are less likely to cultivate perceptions of fear (Grabe & Drew, 2007). Shows such as *Orange is the New Black*, which humanizes prisoners and their struggles, may have a positive effect on the viewers. The way viewers interpret the content of the shows may affect how they regard prisoners and how they treat them when they are released.

This study used primary sources to collect the data from members of the public who have watched prison drama shows and documentaries. The variables that were used in the study were operationalized as follows: the frequency of which participants watch prison drama shows and documentaries were measured with a rating scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

Before conducting this study, approval was to be obtained from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process required a formal application to the IRB. When approval was obtained from the IRB, data collection using Survey Monkey's invitation generator was used to solicit participants. Survey Monkey has a premium service that strives to maintain the privacy of individuals taking the surveys and is Health

Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant. While not technically required, the protection provided by the HIPAA standards was used to protect any possible private information. In addition to the tools that build the surveys and analyze the data, Survey Monkey uses privacy and security experts to ensure that their tools follow HIPAA's requirements (Survey Monkey, 2015). The service only collects information that is pertinent to the specific study, and there is the ability to disable Internet Protocol address tracking to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the surveys.

This service was used to collect data for this study, and the survey was created using the available template. The survey was populated with demographic questions as well as items from the Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale. Using Survey Monkey's available tools to build surveys and analyze the data made the tool easy to learn and cost effective (Survey Monkey, 2015). Web survey host sites such as Survey Monkey are also able to provide lists of potential respondents that match the required aspects of the study (Sue & Ritter, 2012). Survey instrument questions were created for each show to ask the following questions - To what degree does watching the show *Orange is the New Black* affect your acceptance of female parolees? and - Was this effect negative or positive? A positive score indicated that the respondents are willing to accept female parolees back within the community, but a negative score indicated that they would have difficulty accepting female parolees as part of their communities.

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

It is beneficial to the researcher that the instrument used in the study accurately measures the variables it was designed to measure. In this study, perception was measured using the Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale (See Appendix B). The ATP scale was developed by Melvin, Gramling, and Gardner in 1985. This is a 36-item Likert scale with responses scored within a 5-point range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The score of 1 represents the most negative attitude, and a score of 5 represents the most positive attitude (Melvin, Gramling, & Gardner, 1985). It is important to ensure that the instrument that is used is valid and reliable and has been vetted by independent subject matter experts. The Mental Measurement Yearbook (MMY), which is considered the gold standard for the field of psychology, evaluates research instruments and provides feedback to help researchers make informed decisions while selecting their instrument. The MMY was evaluated for feedback on the ATP scale. However, the MMY only reviews scales that are open source, and the ATP scale is proprietary; thus, it is not included in the MMY (Buros Center for Testing, 2015). Consent to use the ATP scale in the current study was obtained from SAGE Publishing (See Appendix C).

The ATP scale has been used in other peer-reviewed studies with acceptable validity and reliability. The scale has been reported to have an internal consistency coefficient ranging from .84 to .92. In their research, Boag and Wilson (2014), used the ATP scale to assess prejudice and reported a reliability of 0.90. Gallavan and Newman (2013), also used the ATP scale to measure individuals' attitudes toward prisoners and

reported a reliability range of .84 to .92. In their study to investigate the attitudes toward prisoners by both prison employees and college students, Kjelsberg, Skoglund, and Rustad (2007) reported a reliability score of .82 and reported validity as acceptable when compared with the mean ATP scores in the study conducted by Melvin et al. (1985). The scores were .91 and .90 respectively without evidence of response distortion. In another study in which the ATP scale was used the Cronbach's alpha was reported to be .91 (Mandracchia, Shaw, & Morgan, 2013).

The validity of an instrument can be measured through its content. Construct validity is the degree to which the questions in the instrument adequately measure the attributes that they are intended to measure. Reliability is the consistency of results from a test, and the split-half reliability was used to evaluate the reliability of this tool. Split-half reliability is used to determine to what extent the error in a test score is because of poor test administration. The test is administered, and then the reliability index is calculated using coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha), or the Spearman-Brown formula. A questionnaire can be divided into two sets, scored independently and then correlated with each other. The use of a Likert scale is supported by this reliability method (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Reliability data and information about the ATP scale is in the Health and Psychosocial Instruments (HaPI) database. The Spearman-Brown reliability coefficients were .84 and .90 when used in two research studies with students and correctional officers (Melvin et al., 1985).

A background survey was used to get demographic information about the participants of the study (See Appendix A). The survey contained questions about age,

gender, and television viewing habits based on genre. This survey was then loaded into Survey Monkey's survey generator. The format allowed for the building, administration, and management of the survey while maintaining the privacy of the participants.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used to compute the data in this study. SPSS is the most commonly used data analysis software in the social sciences and is frequently updated. The benefits of using SPSS is its ability to perform statistical computations and the number of statistical procedures that are required by researchers. In addition, SPSS facilitates easy importing and editing of data from various sources such as online surveys (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Before analyzing the data, it was cleaned and any surveys that were not correctly completed were removed. Table 2 provides details of the research questions under consideration, associated variables and data types, and the statistical tests that will be used.

The alternative hypothesis under inquiry for research question one is that the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries from Group A versus Group B will influence how female parolees are perceived by members of society. The statistical analysis that was used for this research question was multiple linear regression. The independent variable is the frequency of watching the prison drama shows and is measured on a continuous scale. The dependent variable, measured with an ordinal scale, is the perception of the female parolees that is derived from watching shows that portray female offenders as either friendly or hostile. Both variables will be measured using the



26-item (ATP) scale and a demographic survey that will ask participants to select the number of hours spent watching a preselected group of prison drama shows. These shows are Group A - *Orange is the new Black* (Steuver, 2013), *Wentworth* (Badham, 2014), *Beyond Scared Straight* (Vignati, 2011), and Group B drama shows - *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)*, *Law and Order* (Maeder & Corbett, 2015), *Deadly Women* (Discovery Press Web, 2011). Responses were measured with choices – 0 (never), 1 (once a week), 2 (once a month), 3 (once every three months), and 4 (at least once in 6 months) for each show. The way the content of the shows were interpreted may affect how incarcerated females are regarded by the public and subsequently how they are treated when they are released on parole.

The alternative hypothesis for the second question is that the age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries will influence the acceptance of female parolees. This research question will be analyzed using multiple logistic regression statistical tests. The independent variable is age, and the dependent variable is the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees. Age will be measured on a nominal scale and stratified into four groups: 18–29 years; 30–44 years; 45–60 years; >60 years. The influence of the prison drama shows on the participants' acceptance of ex-offenders will be measured with the following questions – Has watching these shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community? If so, how (1) View them more positively and will accept them, (2) View them more negatively and will not accept them.

The alternative hypothesis for research question three is that both genders of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries will influence the acceptance of female parolees. Gender was measured on a nominal scale as male and female and will be labeled as 0 and 1. This research questions was analyzed using logistic regression statistical tests. The independent variable is gender, and the dependent variable is the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees. The participants' acceptance of female parolees was measured on an ordinal scale and the responses will be obtained using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each show.

The alternative hypothesis for research question four is that the location of viewers who watch drama shows and documentaries will influence the acceptance of female parolees. Location was measured on a nominal scale as urban, suburban or rural and was labeled as 0, 1 and 2. This research question was analyzed using logistic regression statistical tests. The independent variable is demographic location, and the dependent variable is the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees. The participants' acceptance of female parolees was measured on an ordinal scale and the responses will be obtained using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each show.

The alternative hypothesis for the fifth research question is that the genre of Group A versus Group B television shows will influence public opinion toward female parolees. The genre of the television shows is ordinal with two levels (drama and documentary). This research question was analyzed using logistic regression statistical

tests. The independent variable is the genre of the television shows, and the dependent variable is the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees. Genre will be measured using the demographic survey and the ATP scale. The participants' acceptance of female parolees will be measured on an ordinal scale and the responses will be obtained using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each show.

Table 2

*Research questions, data types and statistical test*

Research questions	Variables	Data type	Assessment tool	Statistical test
<b>RQ1</b> - What effect does frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?	IV: frequency of watching the prison drama shows DV: perception of the female parolees as either friendly or hostile	Continuous Ordinal	Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP), demographic survey	Multiple linear regression
<b>RQ2</b> - Does the age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries influence how female parolees are perceived?	IV: 18 – 29 years; 30 – 44 years; 45 – 60 years; > 60 years. DV: the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of female parolees	Nominal	Demographic survey	Logistic regression
<b>RQ3</b> - Does the gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries influence how female parolees are perceived?	IV: male and female DV: the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of female parolees	Nominal	Demographic survey	Logistic regression
<b>RQ4</b> - Does the location of individuals who watch drama shows and influence how female parolees are perceived?	IV: urban, suburban or rural DV: the influence of drama shows on public opinion; acceptance of female parolees	Nominal	Demographic survey	Logistic regression
<b>RQ5</b> – Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole?	IV: drama and documentary DV: the influence of drama shows on public opinion; acceptance of female parolees	Ordinal	Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) Demographic survey	Logistic regression

## **Analysis methods**

Data were imported into and analyzed using SPSS version 23 for Windows (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY). Data were then examined for missing and erroneous responses. Erroneous responses (such as “Never” and “Once a week” where both were selected for “How often do you watch the following drama shows?” and were recoded as missing. Frequency tables and descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey responses. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was computed for ATP to determine the reliability of the construct. The general guidelines for alpha values are: 0.90 to 1.0 are excellent, 0.80 to 0.89 are good, 0.70 to 0.79 are acceptable, 0.60 to 0.69 are questionable, 0.50 to 0.59 are poor, and below 0.50 are unacceptable (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis procedures utilized to answer each RQ are discussed as follows; For any tests, a p-value less than 0.05 was considered significant, and all p-values were two-sided.

### **Analysis methods for RQ1.**

The question used for RQ1 is “What effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?” Multiple linear regression was utilized to answer RQ1. The dependent variable was the perception of the female parolees measured as the overall score of ATP, which was computed by summing the responses of the 36 ATP items after the negatively worded items were reversed scored. The overall ATP scores ranged from 36 to 180, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions of female parolees. The two independent variables were the frequencies of

watching the prison drama where offenders were portrayed as friendly (i.e., *Orange is the new Black*, *Wentworth*, and *Beyond Scared Straight*) versus hostile (i.e., *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)*, *Law and Order*, and *Deadly Women*). The responses for the survey question “How often do you watch the following drama shows?” for each group were averaged to obtain the frequency of watching the prison drama shows for each group (friendly vs. hostile). The frequency scores ranged from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating more frequent watching of the shows.

Normality of the three study variables were assessed via the Shapiro-Wilk tests (Field, 2013). As the data were not normally distributed, multiple linear regression justified by the bootstrap technique was utilized in this study to answer RQ1. The bootstrap technique involves repeatedly resampling the sample instead of resampling the population, which enables application of statistical inference without distributional assumptions, such as homoscedasticity and normality (Vogt and Johnson, 2011). The bootstrap technique is recommended for testing of results of parametric statistical tests when model assumptions of the parametric tests are violated (Lavrakas, 2008). The bootstrap technique with 1000 resamplings was implemented in SPSS version 23.

#### **Analysis methods for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.**

The question used for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 is “Do the age, gender, and location of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?” The dependent variable was the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees, which was measured by the survey question

“How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community?”. The independent variables were age, gender, and location. As the dependent variable was a categorical variable with two levels (View them more positively and will accept them vs. View them more negatively and will not accept them), logistic regression was utilized to answer these three research questions (Agresti, 2002). The strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables was measured using odds ratio estimates for the independent variable and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test was used to determine the model adequacy (Agresti, 2002).

#### **Analysis methods for RQ5.**

The question used for RQ5 is “Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence the public’s opinion about female offenders on parole?” The dependent variable was public opinion about female offenders on parole, which was measured by the survey question “Watching the following shows have made me more accepting of female parolees (select as many as applicable).” This question was asked for each participant for five shows, including Orange is the New Black, Wentworth, Crime Scene Investigation (CSI), Law and Order, and Beyond Scared Straight. The responses of the survey questions were 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. The independent variables were group (2 levels: friendly vs. hostile) and genre (2 levels: drama vs. documentary). Since (1) the same question was asked five times for each participant, the responses for the five shows within each participant were correlated, and

(2) the responses were ordinal, ordinal logistic regression for repeated measures (Agresti, 2002) was utilized to answer RQ5.

### **Threats to Validity**

Researchers are diligent in their efforts to mitigate threats to validity since these threats could affect the ability to draw conclusions from the data. Construct validity describes how well an instrument measures the constructs it was designed to measure. This study used the 36-item Likert ATP scale to assess self-reported behavior. The ATP scale was developed for the adult population and has been used in studies such as Boag and Wilson (2014), Gallavan and Newman (2013), and Kjelsberg et al. (2007). Since respondents were self-reporting, there was a risk that they might not be truthful in their responses.

External validity allows for the replication of the results of a study in another population with similar characteristics. Because participation is solely voluntary and not drawn from a random sample, it will be difficult to ensure that the participants' characteristics are equally distributed and truly representative of the population of the United States (Creswell, 2009). This is a non-experimental study and random assignment of participants was not possible, which creates a potential for threats to the study's internal validity.

### **Ethical Procedures**

This study provided no direct interventions, and therefore there was little risk of physical harm to the participants. There was no anticipated psychological or emotional harm to participants taking part in this study. All participants were adults and not a



member of a high-risk group. IRB approval was obtained before the beginning of data collection. The final approval documents are included as an appendix. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and therefore individuals may choose not to participate. Individuals who choose to participate were required to electronically sign a consent form that described the purpose and scope of the study, and my contact information if there were questions. In addition, information concerning the risks and benefits as well as the process for maintaining participants' confidentiality were provided.

Confidentiality, as well as anonymity of the participants, was assured through the tools provided by Survey Monkey. These tools conform to HIPAA's standards and allow for the researcher to configure the surveys to allow respondents to remain anonymous, not have their IP addresses tracked, and to be Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encrypted (Survey Monkey, 2015). Confidentiality of the participants was ensured using unique code numbers generated by the Survey Money tool for each participant. Security of the survey data will be stored on a laptop that is only used by the researcher and is password protected. A backup copy of this data will be stored on an external data storage device and secured in a locked drawer in the home of the researcher. A password protected off-site copy will also be used. The data and the storage device will be kept for five years after which time they will be destroyed.

### **Summary**

In chapter 3, the methodology that supported this study was presented. The purpose of the study and Gerbner's cultivation theory in support of it was reviewed. The intent of this quantitative research was to study the impact of viewers' gender, age,

location, and the genre and frequency of watching the selected television shows, on the perceptions of female parolees. The research questions, variables, proposed assessment tools, and the rationale for selecting the statistical tests proposed for the study were described. The associated research design, research variables, and the study's contribution to current research investigations were also discussed. It is important to clearly document the process used in the selection and the sampling procedures for participants, as this will have an impact on the quality of the research. This documentation was provided in chapter 3.

The selection of the population and the merits of using Survey Monkey to distribute the study survey were discussed. Survey Monkey has preconfigured templates that made the application easy to use, allowed for fast results, and was cost effective. The ATP was the instrument used in this study and the reliability and validity data for this instrument was included in the discussion. Research studies that have used the ATP and their findings were included in the analysis. Also, any potential threats to validity were explored.

Chapter 4 will be a narrative of the statistical results of the study. This will include the data collection process and a full discussion of the results and analysis organized by the research question. Also, demographic characteristics of the participants of the study, responses to the survey questions, and an in-depth examination and discussion of the results will be included.

In chapter 5 conclusions about the research study, interpretation of the findings, and limitations of the study will be discussed. Recommendations for professional practice and potential role in influencing positive social change will be provided.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to determine if there is a relationship between the viewing of certain television shows and the public's attitude toward parolees. In this chapter, a full description of the results and analysis organized by research questions will be discussed. Also, included in the discussion is information on the data collection process, participants' response rates, the statistical analysis used, and tables summarizing the results. The research questions guiding the research are presented below.

There were five research questions in this study.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_01$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a1}$ ): The frequency of viewing Group A versus Group B drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does the age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_02$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a2}$ ): The age of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Does the gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_03$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a3}$ ): The gender of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Do the location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_04$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries has no significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a4}$ ): The location of the individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries does have a significant effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Research Question 5 (RQ5): Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_05$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows has no significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_{a5}$ ): The genre of Group A versus Group B television shows does have a significant effect on public opinion toward female parolees.

### **Data Collection**

This data for this study were collected from members of the public who have watched prison drama shows and documentaries. Data collection was initially conducted using Survey Monkey's pool of participants and was open for 2 weeks to obtain the required number of participants. Analysis of the data revealed incomplete responses which required a second phase of data collection from the Walden University Ph.D. Facebook page. This second phase was open for an additional 8 weeks with twenty additional completed surveys. How survey monkey configured age ranges differed from the original proposal, subsequently, the age ranges used in the analysis was modified from 10 groups to four groups. For RQ1, a MANOVA was initially considered, but since there was only one dependent variable, a multiple linear regression statistical test was more applicable. For RQ 2, 3, 4, and 5 the logistic regression test was used instead of multiple regression since logistic regression is more suited to explain the relationship between one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Participants were asked to complete a survey populated with demographic questions as well as questions from the ATP scale. Participants were required to be over the age of 18 to take the survey, and 285 participants were asked to participate in the study. Among them, 267 participants had given their consent to participate in the study. After excluding four participants who only answered the three demographic questions (gender, age, and location), the final sample size for the study was 263. Table 3 shows the demographics of the 263 participants. Slightly over half of the participants were female (56.5%). Over

40% (43.1%) of the participants were between 30 and 44 years old. The majority of the participants lived either in urban (41.4%) or suburban (43.3%).

Table 3

*Demographics*

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	143	56.5
	Male	110	43.5
Age	18-29	48	19.0
	30-44	109	43.1
	45-60	56	22.1
	>60	40	15.8
Location	Urban	119	41.4
	Suburban	114	43.3
	Rural	40	15.2

*Note.* 10 missing responses for gender and age.

Of the 100 participants who completed the demographic questions and survey question “How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community?” 76 indicated that they would view the ex-offenders in the community more positively and would accept them. Women viewed female ex-offenders more positively than men, 30–44-year-old viewed them more positively than the other age groups, and individuals who identified as suburban also viewed them more positively (Table 4)

Table 4

*How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community*

Variable	Level	Frequency	Perception of ex-offenders	
			More negatively	More positively
Gender	Female	66	19 (24.2)	47 (75.8)
	Male	34	5(12.7)	29 (87.3)
Age	18-29	18	4 (21.7)	14 (78.3)
	30-44	34	6 (12.3)	28 (87.7)
	45-60	26	5 (19.4)	21 (80.6)
	>60	22	9 (38.5)	13 (61.5)
Location	Urban	31	5 (12.2)	26 (87.8)
	Suburban	55	13 (20.2)	42 (79.8)
	Rural	14	6 (41.2)	8 (58.8)

*Note.* N=100

Table 5 presents the survey responses for how often participants watched Orange is the New Black, Wentworth, Beyond Scared Straight, Crime Scene Investigation, Law and Order, and Deadly Women. The frequency scores of watching the 6 drama shows ranged from 0.62 ( $SD = 1.17$ ; Wentworth) to 1.39 ( $SD = 1.38$ ; Law and Order), indicating participants on average watched these shows once a week.

Table 5

*How Often Do You Watch the Following Shows*

	Frequency (%) of survey responses					<i>M (SD)</i>
	0	1	2	3	4	
Orange is the New Black ( $N = 231$ )	116 (50.2)	55 (23.8)	21 (9.1)	16 (6.9)	23 (10.0)	1.03 (1.33)
Wentworth ( $N = 226$ )	158 (69.9)	34 (15.0)	10 (4.4)	9 (4.0)	15 (6.6)	0.62 (1.17)
Beyond Scared Straight ( $N = 222$ )	133 (59.9)	39 (17.6)	28 (12.6)	15 (6.8)	7 (3.2)	0.76 (1.11)
Crime Scene Investigation ( $N = 226$ )	83 (36.7)	77 (34.1)	27 (11.9)	20 (8.8)	19 (8.4)	1.18 (1.25)
Law and Order ( $N = 225$ )	71 (31.6)	80 (35.6)	21 (9.3)	21 (9.3)	32 (14.2)	1.39 (1.38)
Deadly Women ( $N = 218$ )	141 (64.7)	33 (15.1)	20 (9.2)	12 (5.5)	12 (5.5)	0.72 (1.18)

*Note.* 0 = never, 1 = once a week, 2 = once a month, 3 = once every three months, and 4 = at least once in 6 months.



Table 6 summarizes the survey responses regarding whether watching *Orange is the New Black*, *Wentworth*, *Beyond Scared Straight*, *Crime Scene Investigation*, *Law and Order*, and *Deadly Women*, has made the participants more accepting of female parolees. Only the 162 participants (61.6%) who indicated that they had watched the shows answered this question. The response scores ranged from 2.81 ( $SD = 1.04$ ; *Wentworth*) to 3.28 ( $SD = 1.13$ ; *Law and Order*), indicating watching these shows only slightly made the participants more accepting of female parolees. Only the 162 participants (61.6%) who indicated that they had watched the shows answered this question. The response scores ranged from 2.81 ( $SD = 1.04$ ; *Wentworth*) to 3.28 ( $SD = 1.13$ ; *Law and Order*), indicating watching these shows only slightly made the participants more accepting of female parolees.

Table 6

*Watching the Following Shows Has Made Me More Accepting of Female Parolees*

	Frequency (%) of survey responses					M (SD)
	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Orange is the New Black</i> (N = 146)	27 (18.5)	10 (6.8)	49 (33.6)	33 (22.6)	27 (18.5)	3.16 (1.33)
<i>Wentworth</i> (N = 132)	23 (17.4)	9 (6.8)	76 (59.1)	14 (10.6)	8 (6.1)	2.81 (1.04)
<i>Beyond Scared Straight</i> (N = 131)	20 (15.3)	16 (12.2)	64 (48.9)	17 (13.0)	14 (10.7)	2.92 (1.14)
<i>Crime Scene Investigation</i> (N = 134)	19 (14.2)	14 (10.4)	55 (41.0)	29 (21.6)	17 (12.7)	3.08 (1.18)
<i>Law and Order</i> (N = 134)	14 (10.4)	10 (7.5)	55 (41.0)	35 (26.1)	20 (14.9)	3.28 (1.13)

*Note.* 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Table 7 summarizes the survey responses of the 36 ATP items. Of the 17 positively worded items, the mean response scores ranged from 3.11 ( $SD = 1.16$ ; item 23) to 4.24 ( $SD = 0.94$ ; item 5); of the 19 negatively worded items, the mean response scores ranged from 2.37 ( $SD = 1.29$ ; item 10) to 3.52 ( $SD = 1.07$ ; item 16), indicating participants had mixed attitudes towards prisoners in terms of the individual 36 ATP

items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for ATP was 0.934, indicating excellent reliability of the construct.

Table 7

*Summary Responses of the ATP Items*

Item	Frequency (%) of survey responses					<i>M (SD)</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	
1*	21 (8.3)	70 (27.8)	36 (15.1)	73 (29.0)	50 (19.8)	3.24 (1.28)
2	21 (8.3)	44 (17.5)	43 (17.1)	101 (40.1)	43 (17.1)	3.40 (1.20)
3*	56 (22.2)	85 (33.7)	50 (19.6)	42 (16.7)	19 (7.5)	2.54 (1.22)
4	17 (6.7)	24 (9.5)	71 (28.2)	95 (37.7)	45 (17.9)	3.50 (1.10)
5	8 (3.2)	6 (2.4)	23 (9.1)	96 (38.1)	119 (47.2)	4.24 (0.94)
6*	13 (5.2)	31 (12.3)	93 (36.9)	70 (27.8)	45 (17.9)	3.41 (1.08)
7	30 (11.9)	35 (13.9)	83 (32.9)	73 (29.0)	31 (12.3)	3.16 (1.17)
8	8 (3.2)	14 (5.6)	32 (12.7)	102 (40.6)	95 (37.8)	4.04 (1.01)
9*	19 (7.6)	44 (17.5)	77 (30.7)	78 (31.1)	33 (13.1)	3.25 (1.12)
10*	76 (30.3)	82 (32.7)	41 (16.3)	27 (10.8)	25 (10.0)	2.37 (1.29)
11	8 (3.2)	16 (6.4)	38 (15.1)	105 (41.8)	84 (33.5)	3.96 (1.02)
12*	34 (13.5)	74 (29.5)	64 (25.5)	38 (15.1)	41 (16.3)	2.91 (1.28)
13*	80 (31.9)	71 (28.3)	39 (15.5)	29 (11.6)	32 (12.7)	2.45 (1.37)
14*	18 (7.2)	42 (16.7)	84 (33.5)	74 (29.5)	33 (13.1)	3.25 (1.10)
15	21 (8.4)	45 (18.0)	56 (22.4)	85 (34.0)	43 (17.2)	3.34 (1.20)
16*	7 (2.8)	41 (16.4)	67 (26.8)	86 (34.4)	49 (19.6)	3.52 (1.07)
17*	37 (14.8)	83 (33.2)	57 (22.8)	50 (20.0)	23 (9.2)	2.76 (1.20)
18	8 (3.2)	21 (8.4)	61 (24.4)	120 (48.0)	40 (16.0)	3.65 (0.95)
19*	22 (8.8)	76 (30.4)	67 (26.8)	53 (21.2)	32 (12.8)	2.99 (1.18)
20	26 (10.4)	35 (14.0)	60 (24.0)	86 (34.4)	43 (17.2)	3.34 (1.22)
21	8 (3.2)	30 (12.0)	74 (29.6)	97 (38.6)	41 (16.4)	3.53 (1.01)
22*	47 (18.8)	95 (38.0)	45 (18.0)	38 (15.2)	25 (10.0)	2.60 (1.24)
23	28 (11.2)	40 (16.0)	89 (35.6)	62 (24.8)	31 (12.4)	3.11 (1.16)
24*	45 (18.0)	85 (34.0)	56 (22.4)	43 (17.2)	21 (8.4)	2.64 (1.20)
25*	32 (12.8)	70 (28.0)	65 (26.0)	47 (18.8)	36 (14.4)	2.94 (1.25)
26	14 (5.6)	37 (14.8)	66 (26.4)	94 (37.6)	39 (15.6)	3.43 (1.09)
27*	12 (4.8)	39 (15.6)	77 (30.8)	64 (25.6)	58 (23.2)	3.47 (1.15)
28	8 (3.2)	13 (5.2)	48 (19.2)	106 (42.4)	75 (30.0)	3.91 (0.99)
29*	45 (18.1)	77 (30.9)	59 (23.7)	36 (14.5)	32 (12.9)	2.73 (1.27)
30*	29 (11.6)	59 (23.7)	64 (25.7)	61 (24.5)	36 (14.5)	3.06 (1.24)
31*	39 (15.7)	88 (35.3)	38 (15.3)	47 (18.9)	37 (14.9)	2.82 (1.32)
32	7 (2.8)	17 (6.8)	70 (28.1)	103 (41.4)	52 (20.9)	3.71 (0.97)
33	13 (5.2)	14 (5.6)	52 (20.9)	107 (43.0)	63 (25.3)	3.78 (1.05)
34	20 (8.0)	35 (14.1)	74 (29.7)	83 (33.3)	37 (14.9)	3.33 (1.13)
35*	58 (23.3)	81 (32.5)	51 (20.5)	27 (10.8)	32 (12.9)	2.57 (1.31)
36	11 (4.4)	15 (6.0)	75 (30.1)	100 (40.2)	48 (19.3)	3.64 (1.00)

*Note.* 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. *N* = 252 for items 1-7, *N* = 251 for items 8-14, *N* = 250 for items 15-28, and *N* = 249 for items 29-36. \* indicates negatively worded item. Cronbach's alpha = 0.934.

## Results Section

### Assumptions

SPSS version 23 for Windows (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) was used to import and analyze the data. I examined the data for missing and erroneous responses. Erroneous responses (ex: “Never” and “Once a week” were both selected for “How often do you watch the following drama shows?”) were recoded as missing. Frequency tables and descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey responses. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was computed for ATP to determine the reliability of the construct. The general guidelines for alpha values are: 0.90 to 1.0 are excellent, 0.80 to 0.89 are good, 0.70 to 0.79 are acceptable, 0.60 to 0.69 are questionable, 0.50 to 0.59 are poor, and below 0.50 are unacceptable (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis procedures utilized to answer each RQ are discussed as follows. For any tests, a  $p$ -value less than 0.05 was considered significance. All  $p$ -values were two-sided.

### Analysis methods for RQ1.

The question used for RQ1 is “What effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?” Multiple linear regression was utilized to answer RQ1. The dependent variable was the perception of the female parolees measured as the overall score of ATP, which was computed by summing the responses of the 36 ATP items after reverse scored the negatively worded items. The overall ATP scores ranged from 36 to 180, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions of female parolees. The two independent variables were the frequencies of watching the

prison drama where offenders were portrayed as friendly (i.e., *Orange is the new Black*, *Wentworth*, and *Beyond Scared Straight*) versus hostile (i.e., *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)*, *Law and Order*, and *Deadly Women*). The responses for the survey question “How often do you watch the following drama shows?” for each group were averaged to obtain the frequency of watching the prison drama shows for each group (friendly vs. hostile). The frequency scores ranged from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating more frequent watching of the shows.

Normality of the three study variables were assessed via the Shapiro-Wilk tests (Field, 2013). As the data were not normally distributed, multiple linear regression justified by the bootstrap technique was utilized in this study to answer RQ1. The bootstrap technique involves repeatedly resampling the sample instead of resampling the population, which enables application of statistical inference without distributional assumptions, such as homoscedasticity and normality (Vogt and Johnson, 2011). The bootstrap technique is recommended for testing of results of parametric statistical tests when model assumptions of the parametric tests are violated (Lavrakas, 2008). The bootstrap technique with 1000 resamplings was implemented in SPSS version 23.

#### **Analysis methods for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.**

The question used for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 is “Do the age, gender, and location of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have an effect on how female parolees are perceived?” The dependent variable was the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees, which was measured by the survey question

“How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community?”. The independent variables were age, gender, and location. As the dependent variable was a categorical variable with two levels (View them more positively and will accept them vs. View them more negatively and will not accept them), logistic regression (Agresti, 2002) was utilized to answer these three research questions. The strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables were measured using odds ratio estimates for the independent variable and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test (Agresti, 2002) was used to determine the model adequacy.

#### **Analysis methods for RQ5.**

The question used for RQ5 is “Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole?” The dependent variable was public opinion about female offenders on parole, which was measured by the survey question “Watching the following shows have made me more accepting of female parolees (select as many as applicable)”. This question was asked for each participant for 5 shows, including Orange is the New Black, Wentworth, Crime Scene Investigation (CSI), Law and Order, and Beyond Scared Straight. The responses of the survey questions were 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. The independent variables were group (2 levels: friendly vs. hostile) and genre (2 levels: drama vs. documentary). Since (1) the same question was asked 5 times for each participant, the responses for the 5 shows within each participant were correlated, and (2)

the responses were ordinal, ordinal logistic regression for repeated measures (Agresti, 2002) was utilized to answer RQ5.

#### **Analysis results for RQ1.**

RQ1: ‘what effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees?’ Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics of the three study variables for RQ1, including frequency score of watching friendly shows, frequency score of watching hostile shows, and total score of ATP. The mean total score of ATP was 119.57 ( $SD = 22.88$ ), indicating participants had moderately neutral attitudes towards prisoners in terms of total score of ATP. The mean frequency scores were 0.86 and 1.11 for friendly shows and hostile shows, respectively, indicating participants did not frequently watch either type of shows. According to the results of Shapiro-Wilk test, frequency score of watching friendly shows, frequency score of watching hostile shows, and total score of ATP, were not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics of Total Score of ATP*

Variable	Possible range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SW</i>	<i>p</i>
Frequency score of watching friendly shows	0-4	0.86	0.93	0.843	< 0.001
Frequency score of watching hostile shows	0-4	1.11	0.97	0.911	< 0.001
ATP	36-180	119.57	22.88	0.978	0.002

*Note.* *N* = 224. *SW* = Shapiro-Wilk test statistic. *p* = p-value for the Shapiro-Wilk normality test.

Table 9 shows the results of multiple linear regression for RQ1. RQ1 what effect does the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have on the perception of female parolees? Multiple linear regression with frequency score of watching friendly shows and frequency score of watching hostile shows as the two independent variables and total score of ATP as the dependent variable was performed to answer RQ1. The analysis results of the multiple linear regression are presented in Table 9. The  $R^2 = 0.165$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.117$ ) indicated 16.5% of the total variation in the dependent variable, total score of ATP, can be explained by the two independent variables, frequency score of watching friendly shows and frequency score of watching hostile shows. The variance inflation factors were less than 10, indicating there was no multi-collinearity of the independent variables. The *F*-test of the overall significance indicated that, overall, the regression model statistically significantly predicted the dependent variable, i.e., it is a good fit for the data ( $F(2, 221) = 3.081, p < 0.048$ ). However, according to the analysis results of the multiple linear regression presented in Table 9, (1) the independent



variable, frequency score of watching friendly shows, did not contribute statistically significantly to the model ( $t(221) = -1.682, p = 0.094$ ); (2) the independent variable, frequency score of watching hostile shows, did not contribute statistically significantly to the model ( $t(221) = -0.888, p = 0.376$ ). Therefore, it was concluded that there was no statistically significant relationship between frequency of viewing drama shows (as measured by the frequency score of watching friendly shows and frequency score of watching hostile shows) and perception of female parolees (as measured by the total score of ATP).

Table 9

*Results of Multiple Linear Regression*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Constant	124.288	2.436		51.028	< 0.001	
Friendly	-3.092	1.838	-0.125	-1.682	0.094	1.246
Hostile	-1.565	1.762	-0.066	-0.888	0.376	1.246

*Note.*  $R^2 = 0.165$  (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.027$ ); F-test of the overall significance:  $F(2, 221) = 3.081, p < 0.048$ . *B* = Unstandardized regression coefficient; *Beta* = Standardized regression coefficient; *VIF* = variance inflation factor. Friendly = Frequency score of watching friendly shows; Hostile = Frequency score of watching hostile shows.

**Analysis results for RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.**

RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4: Do the age, gender, and location of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) have an effect on how female parolees are perceived? The dependent variable was the influence of drama shows on public opinion and the acceptance of the female parolees, which was measured by the survey question “How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community?” The

independent variables were age, gender, and location. As the dependent variable was a categorical variable with two levels (view them more positively and will accept them vs. view them more negatively and will not accept them). Table 10 shows the cross-tabulation of the dependent variable, perception of ex-offenders, and the three independent variables, gender, age, and location. The total sample size included for the analysis was 150.

Table 10

*Cross-tabulation of Perception of Ex-offenders and, Gender, Age, and Location*

Variable	Level	Perception % of ex-offenders		Total
		More negatively	More positively	
Gender	Female	23 (24.2)	72 (75.8)	95
	Male	7 (12.7)	48 (87.3)	55
Age	18-29	5 (21.7)	18 (78.3)	23
	30-44	8 (12.3)	57 (87.7)	65
	45-60	7 (19.4)	29 (80.6)	36
	>60	10 (38.5)	16 (61.5)	26
Location	Urban	6 (12.2)	43 (87.8)	49
	Suburban	17 (20.2)	67 (79.8)	84
	Rural	7 (41.2)	10 (58.8)	17
	Total	30 (20.0)	120 (80.0)	150

Tables 10 and 11 present the results of the logistic regression for answering RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. The results of the Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test indicated the model fit was adequate ( $\chi^2(7) = 4.409, p = 0.732$ ). According to the results of the logistic regression, there was no statistically significant relationship between perception of ex-offenders, and gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 2.746, p = 0.098$ ), age ( $\chi^2(3) = 5.625, p = 0.131$ ), and location ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.205, p = 0.122$ ) (Table 11). The 95% confidence intervals for the odds

ratios all included 0, indicating all odds ratios were not statistically significantly different from 1, which was also an indication of insignificant relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables (Table 12). Therefore, it was concluded that age, gender, and location of individuals who watch drama shows and documentaries that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) did not have an effect on how female parolees are perceived.

Table 11

*Results of Logistic Regression - Wald Chi square Tests for Model Effects*

Variable	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	2.746	1	0.098
Age	5.625	3	0.131
Location	4.205	2	0.122

*Note.* *Wald* = Wald chi-square statistic, *df* = degrees of freedom, *p* = p-value.

Table 12

*Results of Logistic Regression – Parameter Estimates and Odds Ratios*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>EXP(B)</i>	
							Lower	Upper
Gender								
Male	0.822	0.496	2.746	1	0.098	2.275	0.860	6.017
Female	Ref							
Age								
30-44	0.613	0.652	0.886	1	0.347	1.847	0.515	6.622
45-60	0.358	0.689	0.271	1	0.603	1.431	0.371	5.518
>60	-0.683	0.672	1.033	1	0.310	0.505	0.135	1.886
18-29	Ref							
Location								
Urban	0.405	0.533	0.578	1	0.447	1.499	0.528	4.261
Rural	-1.008	0.603	2.795	1	0.095	0.365	0.112	1.190
Suburban	Ref							
Constant	1.003	0.561	3.201	1	0.074	2.728		

*Note.* *N* = 150. Dependent variable = perception of ex-offenders (View them more positively and will accept them vs. View them more negatively and will not accept them). The logistic regression modeled probability of “View them more positively and will accept them”. *B* = parameter estimate, *SE* = standard error, *Wald* = Wald chi-square statistic, *df* = degrees of freedom, *p* = p-value; *Exp(B)* = odds ratio; *CI* = confidence interval. Ref = the reference group.

### **Analysis results for RQ5.**

RQ5: Does the genre of shows that portray offenders as friendly (Group A) versus hostile (Group B) influence public opinion about female offenders on parole? Table 13 shows the cross-tabulation of acceptance of female parolees and, group (friendly vs. hostile) and genre (drama vs. documentary) of the shows. The total number of observations included for the data analysis of RQ5 was 595, which corresponding to 119 participants.

Table 13

*Cross-tabulation of Acceptance of Female Parolees and, Group and Genre*

Variable	Level	Made me more accepting of female parolees					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Group	Friendly	62 (17.4)	27 (7.6)	171 (47.9)	58 (16.2)	39 (10.9)	357
	Hostile	32 (13.4)	20 (8.4)	99 (41.6)	54 (22.7)	33 (13.9)	238
Genre	Drama	75 (15.8)	36 (7.6)	211 (44.3)	95 (20.0)	59 (12.4)	476
	Documentary	19 (16.0)	11 (9.2)	59 (49.6)	17 (14.3)	13 (10.9)	119
	Total	94	47	270	112	72	595

*Note.* 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Numbers in parentheses are %.

Table 14

*Results of Logistic Regression – Wald Chi square Tests for Model Effects*

Variable	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Group	7.691	1	0.006
Genre	0.003	1	0.953

*Note.* *Wald* = Wald chi-square statistic, *df* = degrees of freedom, *p* = p-value.

Table 15

*Results of Logistic Regression – Parameter Estimates and Odds Ratios*

Parameter	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Hypothesis Test			<i>Exp(B)</i>	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>Exp(B)</i>	
			<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>		Lower	Upper
Threshold Accepting = 5.00	-1.813	0.2468	53.937	1	<0.001	0.163	0.101	0.265
Accepting = 4.00	-0.609	0.2032	8.988	1	0.003	0.544	0.365	0.810
Accepting = 3.00	1.383	0.2326	35.354	1	<0.001	3.988	2.528	6.292
Accepting = 2.00	1.869	0.2593	51.958	1	<0.001	6.482	3.899	10.775
Group = Friendly	0.311	0.1120	7.691	1	0.006	1.364	1.095	1.699
Group = Hostile	Ref							
Genre = Drama	-0.007	0.1166	0.003	1	0.953	0.993	0.790	1.248
Genre = Documentary	Ref							

*Note.* The dependent variable “accepting” was measured by the survey item “Watching the following shows have made me more accepting of female parolees”, with 5-point Likert scale responses (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree). The logistic regression applied the cumulative link function to the dependent variable values in descending order (high (5 = strongly agree) to low (1 = strongly disagree)). *B* = parameter estimate, *SE* = standard error, *Wald* = Wald chi-square statistic, *df* = degrees of freedom, *p* = p-value; *Exp(B)* = odds ratio; *CI* = confidence interval. Ref = the reference group.

Tables 13 and 14 present the results of the ordinal logistic regression for repeated measures for answering RQ5. According to the results of the ordinal logistic regression, there was a statistically significant relationship between acceptance of female parolees and group ( $\chi^2(1) = 7.691, p = 0.006$ ; Table 14). In particular, watching friendly shows was more likely to have made participants more accepting of female parolees than watching hostile shows ( $OR = 1.364, 95\% CI = (1.095, 1.699)$ ) as represented in Table 15). There was no statistically significant relationship between acceptance of female parolees and genre ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.003, p = 0.953$ ; Table 14).

## Summary

The purpose of this research study was to determine if there was a relationship between the types of drama shows individuals watched and their attitudes toward parolees. The findings showed that respondents on average watched the shows once a week, and 79.9% agreed that they viewed the ex-offenders in the community more positively and would accept them. Over half the respondents were female, most were between the ages of 30 and 44 years old and identified as either urban or suburban. For RQ1 the frequency of watching the drama shows and the perception of female parolees was not significant. For RQ2, RQ3, RQ3 the respondents' age, gender, or location did not affect how they perceived female parolees. For RQ5 the relationship between genre and acceptance of female paroles was not statistically significant, but the relationship between the group, friendly versus hostile, was significantly significant (Table 13).

In chapter 5, the conclusions gathered from the analysis, and interpretations of the findings will be discussed. The discussion will also include implications of the study to aid in offender reintegration, possible recommendations for future research, and suggestions for social change. Limitations to the study will also be analyzed and presented with possible rationale. Any insights gained from doing this study will also be explored.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I summarize and interpret the findings, address limitations, present conclusions and suggest recommendations for future studies. In this research I explored whether certain drama shows, or documentaries influenced public opinions about female offenders. In addition, I examined whether the frequency of viewing drama shows and documentaries, viewers' age, gender, geographical location, or the genre of the shows influenced how female are perceived and accepted. The relationship between the independent variables (a) frequency of watching the prison drama shows, (b) age, (c) gender, (d) geographical location, and (e) genre and the dependent variables perception of the female as determined by ATP assessment tool and the influence of the shows on society's acceptance of female parolees was explored with the quantitative study. There are few studies done with the focus on female ex-offenders, and the influence of media on their acceptance back into society (Boag & Wilson, 2014; Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2014; LeBel, 2012; Neuendorf et al., 2014).

Most respondents to the survey were women between the ages of 30 and 44 years and the results of the study indicated that the frequency of watching the selected shows and their perception of the ex-offenders were not statistically significant. This may have been because the respondents had preconceived notions about the ex-offenders and chose to watch the selected shows. Therefore, the shows in the study would not have had an impact, or maybe there was a barrier to viewing some of the shows since a subscription to Netflix is required for some of the shows. Other key findings of the study were that age,



gender, and location of the respondents did not affect how they perceived female parolees. This finding could be because the viewers chose to watch the shows presented in the study regardless of whether they were friendly or hostile, and therefore the shows did not significantly influence the way they felt about the female parolees. However, the shows that were categorized as friendly were more apt to make participants more accepting to ex-offenders than the hostile shows but the genre of the shows, drama versus documentary had no impact on viewers' acceptance of ex-offenders. Respondents were limited to the shows presented in the survey and may have preferred different shows that were not included.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Cultivation theory was used in this study since it proposed that prolonged television viewing could influence the attitudes of the viewers and how they interpret the information presented. In addition, the opinion of Bandura's SCT is that the media can influence individuals through observation. In their study Valkenburg, Peter, and Walther (2016) suggested that viewers of shows with high levels of aggression may behave in a similar manner if they view the behavior as justified, indicating that television viewing can influence behavior. Also, the time spent exploring media, including television, has increased.

However, the conclusions from this study did not support that. The researchers concluded that the frequency of watching the drama shows did not influence how the viewers perceived female parolees. This finding is consistent with those of Nelson, Fife, and Woo (2016) who found that the time spent watching hostile television shows did not

result in negative behaviors in the viewers. The authors surmised that the viewers focused on any positive behaviors observed in the shows that were socially accepted rather than the negative ones. They further suggested that if the behavior was in conflict with their beliefs and social norms, they focused on the behaviors that represented those principals.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sheer volume of existing, and newly added, drama shows made it challenging to include them all in this study so only a subset of drama and documentary shows were included. This study only included five television drama shows and one documentary show and did not look at any other types of media. Another limitation of this study is that it did not investigate whether respondents chose to watch crime shows because of preconceived feelings towards ex-offenders and they would routinely watch these shows anyway, or whether watching the shows made a difference in how they felt about the ex-offenders.

Viewers who feel that individuals engaged in criminal activities should be punished may choose to watch the crime drama shows to reinforce their belief that these individuals deserve the punishment they received and may be resistant to welcoming them back into their communities. Therefore, regardless of how the offenders are portrayed in the drama shows their feelings towards these offenders may not change upon their release because of underlying fear (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). Kaye and Johnson (2016) suggested that there is some degree of viewer bias because individuals tend to choose to watch shows that represent their beliefs, and in the current study respondents were limited to the shows presented in the survey. A cause and effect

relationship was not examined because the current research study was not experimental or longitudinal. In addition, the geographical location was self-reported and despite the inclusion of a definition individuals decided how they wanted to determine their location.

### **Recommendations**

In future studies researchers should consider a larger selection of shows to include shows that feature more reality content and shows that do not require paid subscriptions. Shows with reality content may provide a greater impact to viewers because of the degree of realism involved such as actual interviews with the individuals involved. The setting for non-fiction shows are usually small or suburban cities (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011). In the current study 80% of the shows were fiction and individuals who self-identified as suburban had a more positive perception of offenders but a larger sample is needed to corroborate this finding. Media content and consumption has become more selective and mobile (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). Perhaps future studies may benefit from the inclusion of social media's impact on the acceptance of ex-offenders. To further examine the specificity of the relationship between the variables used in this study future researchers may consider the use of an experimental or longitudinal research design.

### **Implications**

#### **Positive Social Change**

Social change can be achieved at both the individual and societal levels through introspection and acceptance of diversities. When individuals demonstrate understanding and acceptance of others who have been released from incarceration, effective change

can be realized at a societal level. Society expects ex-offenders to exhibit pro-societal behaviors such as adhering to lawful expectations upon their release, but limited resources are made available to these individuals thus making it difficult for them to smoothly reenter their communities.

Ex-offenders have challenges getting employment to support their families so employers who are willing to hire and train them will help reduce recidivism. Acceptance by co-workers will also help make the female ex-offenders become productive and provide for their families. Media can play a role in how ex-offenders are seen and accepted by members of the community. Some drama shows highlight the issues that women who are incarcerated and later released must cope with upon their release from incarceration, such as mental and physical abuse, substance addiction, and lack of suitable employment. Watching these shows that draw attention to these issues may change the public's view about them when they are released. The respondents in the current study indicated that watching the shows included in this study only slightly made the participants more accepting of female parolees. This could be because viewers did not believe that television could influence how they viewed these parolees. It would be interesting to see if the results are different in future research with more shows and a larger sample.

Additional research studies are required to refute or validate the importance of the drama shows on the acceptance of female parolees within their communities. Individual and societal views are important catalysts for changes in policies that can benefit these females when they are released. Introduction of programs that aid with interviewing

skills, mentoring, and internships can be very beneficial and aid with reintegration into society. In 2012, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission published a directive stating that if applicants for jobs are disqualified based on their criminal history, this will violate Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Callahan, Siegel, Wiedbusch, Dovale, Isler, Norris, et al., 2018). In addition, psychology professionals can play a role in aiding parolees to reenter society by continued research to show the benefits of tolerance and acceptance through the evaluation of re-entry efforts and policies. Also, they can help parolees deal with negative people like those who criticize them to thwart their successful re-entry. Empirical data derived from these inquiries can effect change in a positive manner.

### **Conclusion**

Reintegration of ex-offenders back into the community is ongoing for the ex-offenders as well as members of their community (Rade, Desmarais, & Burnette, 2018). The results of this study illustrate the complexities involved in determining factors such as the types of shows that would influence individuals' acceptance of ex-offenders. The shows used in this study did not provide a significant impact on the acceptance of females with findings indicating watching these shows only slightly made the participants more accepting of female parolees. The ATP scale showed that the participants had mixed feelings towards prisoners which could mean that when they are released, they may have some ambivalence about accepting them. Without the help of members of society reintegration of parolees will continue to be a daunting task. Continued research is needed to examine what factors would provide the impetus for education in an

acceptable format to members of society, and influence acceptance of ex-offenders by those members.

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## Appendix A: Demographics Questions

What is your gender?

Male  
 Female

What is your age?

18 – 29 years  
 30 – 44 years  
 45 – 60 years  
 >60 years

Where is your location?

Urban  
 Suburban  
 Rural

Definitions:

Rural is described as areas outside of cities and towns with less than 2,500 people (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

Suburban: is described as areas surrounding larger cities and metropolitan areas with 2500 but less than 50,000 people (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

Urban: is described as metropolitan areas consisting of 50,000 or more people (Ratcliffe et al., 2016).

Do you subscribe to Netflix?

Yes  
 No

How often do you watch the following drama shows?

0 (never), 1 (once a week), 2 (once a month), 3 (once every three months), 4 (at least once in 6 months)

- Orange is the New Black,  
 Wentworth  
 Beyond Scared Straight  
 Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)  
 Law and Order  
 Deadly Women

I have never watched any of the above shows

Yes [*If yes, survey skips to appendix B*]

Watching the following shows have made me more accepting of female parolees (select as many as applicable).

(1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

- Orange is the New Black,  
 Wentworth  
 Beyond Scared Straight  
 Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)  
 Law and Order  
 Deadly Women

How have watching the above shows influenced how you view ex-offenders in your community?

- View them more positively and will accept them  
 View them more negatively and will not accept them.

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## Appendix B: Request for Permission

Dear Annette Smith Durette,

Thank you for your email. As this material will be password-protected for use as a survey for your dissertation research, we are able to grant you gratis permission on this occasion for this reuse of the ATP Scale in "A scale to measure attitudes toward prisoners," in *Criminal Justice and Behavior*.

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