

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PSYCHARTICLES  
DATABASE: REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE  
PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED

By

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Abstract: No research has investigated the trends examining people who have been previously incarcerated within psychological literature. This study has aimed to investigate the research on people who have previously been incarcerated published within PsychArticles database. There were a total of 79 articles selected for this study, and the vast majority used quantitative methodologies. Additionally, there appeared to be a significant difference in the number of articles representing women compared to men, and the vast majority of articles did not utilize person first language and instead identified participants by their offense type or history of incarceration. Lastly, ideas related to the disproportionate representation of specific offenses within the articles used for this study compared to actual incarceration rates of offenses are discussed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Incarceration rates are a major public policy issue within the United States. Currently the United States is the world leader of nations for people incarcerated within the criminal justice system. In December 2014, there were 6.8 million people incarcerated and under supervision in the United States (Office of Justice Programs 2015). It is estimated that over 600,000 people are released from prisons annually (Carson & Golinelli 2014). It seems that social policy is beginning to shift as individual states continue to decriminalize marijuana in the United States, which was further supported by the actions of President Obama by commuting the sentences of non-violent people the prison system in 2015 and 2016. The current administration's policies are currently unclear related to non-violent drug offenses, but it appears that arrests for non-violent undocumented immigrants will increase compared to the last two years of the Obama administration ("21,000 Undocumented," 2017). Upon looking into the literature and data on incarcerated individuals it seems that a large portion of persons incarcerated were imprisoned for non-violent offenses. Specifically, in 2014 roughly 50% of federal inmates were imprisoned for drug offenses (Office of Justice Programs 2015).

Durose, Cooper, & Howard (2014) investigated recidivism rates of people for five years after being released from prison in 2005 by using data reported by state departments of corrections. Of the prisoners released in 2005 more than half (56.7%) were rearrested



within the first year of their release (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). Over the span of their investigation 67.8% of people released in 2005 were rearrested within 3 years and 76.6% were rearrested within 5 years (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). This data was collected from 30 states which represented 76% of the United States population and 77% of the total prisoners released from United States prisons (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). These recidivism rates identify a huge issue within the United States criminal justice system by identifying a revolving door that continues to maintain large prison populations.

In no way is it my intent to down play the egregiousness of some criminal actions when examining this topic or to minimize any victimization that has occurred as a result of a crime. The purpose of this study is to investigate, from a Relational Cultural Theoretical perspective, the current body of psychological research on people who have been charged with criminal offenses. Covington (2007) identifies that our current criminal justice system is a microcosm of the larger patriarchal society that supports a dominant/subordinate model of hierarchy. Mental health professionals are cultural beings who are not immune to societal influences, including societal norms associated with people who have committed legal offenses, which could impact their research and work with this population (American Psychological Association, 2002). Specifically, the purpose of this study is to use Relational Cultural Theoretical constructs to examine how people who have been previously incarcerated are being represented within psychological literature in ways that would promote isolation and disempowerment for that population.

## **Relational Cultural Theory**

Frey (2013) identifies relational cultural theory (RCT) as a feminist theory that proposes psychological health is created through meaningful relationships with others. “It seeks to lessen suffering caused by chronic disconnection and isolation, whether at an individual or societal level, to increase the capacity for relational resilience, and to foster social justice” (Jordan, 2010, p. 23). Privilege, marginalization, and cultural forces are central within the psychological developmental model of RCT, and relational development is intertwined with social and cultural identities (Jordan, 2010). RCT complements the multicultural/ social justice movement as a comprehensive counseling and developmental theory that provides a theoretical framework for mental health professionals to explore the effects of power, dominance, and marginalization within the cultural context (Comstock et al., 2008), and it supports the current movement within mental health to provide strengths based approaches when working with people who have been previously incarcerated.

Within the United States, and most other western cultures, the primary focus of personal development is towards separation and individuation from others to achieve independence. RCT aims to shift away from this isolation and move towards greater connection with others, identified within RCT as growth fostering relationships (Banks, 2006; Jordan, 2010). Growth fostering relationships are created through the ability to express mutual engagement and empathy, authenticity, and empowerment within relationships (Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2006; Laing, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Jordan (2010) identified growth-fostering relationships as having five outcomes: a sense of zest; a better understanding of the self, other, and of the relationship; a sense of worth; an enhanced capacity to act or be productive; and an increased desire for more connection. The inability to

express these relationship characteristics can lead to disconnection within relationship and create psychological distress for individuals (Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2006).

Disconnections are considered to be a normal part of relationships, and are not considered pathological if the disconnections are addressed (Jordan, 2010). RCT identifies that addressing and reworking disconnections can be a source of tremendous growth for individuals that can lead to greater relational competence (Jordan, 2010). Reworking disconnections is especially important for people with less power because failing to do so leads to continued disempowerment of the individual and preserves the power hierarchy within the culture (Jordan, 2010). “In this way the personal is political, the political is personal, and the rewriting of a psychological paradigm becomes an act of social justice” (Jordan, 2010, p. 26).

Within RCT, relational images are a person’s expectations of their relationship outcomes and of how others will respond to their attempts to make meaningful connections (Miller, & Striver, 1995; Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar II, 2008). Relational images are internal constructions developed unconsciously throughout a person’s life, and portray what we believe will happen and the meaning derived from interacting with others (Miller 2008). RCT identifies that these images can limit individual and collective relational possibilities which can influence multicultural/social justice counseling competence (Comstock et al., 2008). Additionally, Miller (2008) identifies that relational images are a construct built within the social framework and identifies the concept of controlling images as being the social link within RCT in which relational images are created (Miller, 2008).

Within RCT the cultural force that drives disconnections is identified as controlling images. Controlling images are what define acceptable behaviors for groups within society that create patterns of isolation, disempowerment, and shame (Jordan, 2010). Shame is a powerful tool used to isolate and silence marginalized groups whose “members are strategically, if often invisibly, shamed in order to reinforce their isolation and thus their subordination...” (Jordan, 2010, p. 29). Jordan (2010) identifies that strategies of disconnection typically arise from feeling unworthy and a sense of shame.

It is important to understand the concept of controlling images and the impact they can have on members within a culture because psychologists are cultural beings, and their research, is immersed within the controlling images of the culture. Hanson states, “...counseling approaches are narrative structures that emerged in reaction to the values of the times in which they originated” (Hanson, 2002, p. 317). Simply put, we are all cultural beings, and it is important we use self-reflection in all aspects of our work to help ensure we are not furthering bias and acting against mental health ethical guidelines related to research and practice.

Based within RCT, Covington (2007) identifies that for successful reintegration there needs to be a continuum of care that connects community based programs with correctional institutions to help people previously incarcerated develop connections with community providers as they transition back into society. In an investigation related to evidence based practice of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptomology Harner et al. (2015) identify that many incarcerated persons are not receiving evidenced based mental health services that would benefit them, and that further research needs to be conducted to investigate the use of evidence based practice within prison system and reintegration process. Osher, Steadman, &

Barr (2003) identified there are little outcome based studies to support evidence based reentry planning to connect previously incarcerated people to services.

### **Social Justice Related to Incarceration**

#### **Racial Disparities of Incarceration**

Hetey & Eberhardt (2014) identify that more severe disciplinary policies related to crime have led to an increase in incarceration rates in the United States, and have significantly increased the incarceration rates of Blacks within the United States. Black males represent 37%, White males 32%, and Hispanic males 22% of the inmate population (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). Despite representing the largest racial percentage of people incarcerated, Black/African American people only represent 15 % of the total United States population. Black males are 3.8- 10.5 times more likely to be imprisoned in every age group than their White male counterparts, and 1.4 to 3.1 times more likely than Hispanic males (Office of Justice Programs, 2015).

The racial disparities and systemic marginalization extend beyond Black Americans to include other racial minorities. Fifty-seven percent of Hispanic inmates in federal prisons are sentenced for drug offenses, and twenty-six percent were sentenced for immigration offenses (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). Brennan & Spohn (2008) found that Whites received less severe punishments than Blacks and Hispanics, but Hispanics received more severe punishment than Blacks even in legal jurisdictions with sentencing guidelines. The inequities between People of Color and their White counterparts within prison exposes social justice issues between People of Color and the criminal justice system.

## **Employability**

After being released people previously incarcerated have numerous barriers to overcome. Notably, previously incarcerated people are stigmatized during the hiring process because of their incarceration history, but can also face other stigmatizations during the hiring process based on race, ethnicity, or the stigmatization of mental health issues (Varghese, Hardin, & Bauer, 2009; Sneed, Koch, Estes, & Quinn, 2006). Seeking employment is an example of how stigmatization surrounding incarceration can intersect with social justice and mental health issues, but this is an area that has received little attention from the field of psychology within its body of research (Shivy et al., 2007).

Harrison & Schehr (2004) identify legally mandated restrictions as having a significant impact, on people who have been previously incarcerated, to gain access to employment. Despite enacting laws to help employment discrimination against people who have been previously incarcerated there has been considerable leeway given to states on the implementation of the discrimination laws, which has restricted people previously incarcerated in finding employment (Harrison & Shivey, 2004). Whitley, Kostick, & Bush (2009) identified that within subgroups, like registered sex offenders, legal, temporal, and spatial restrictions can significantly reduce the already limited employment opportunities for people with an incarceration history. There is little research investigating the public perception of people reintegrating into society after being incarcerated, and the primary focus of the limited amount of literature is on people who committed sex offenses.

People who have been charged with sex offense are a highly-stigmatized group within the United States, and receive considerable attention from media and law makers on local, state, and national levels. By looking at the research on public perceptions of people who

have committed sex offenses, and the effectiveness of legislation and policies aimed at reducing recidivism after their release, will provide an example to help demonstrate the cultural forces being used to disenfranchise and create feelings of shame based on their offense.

### **Public Perceptions of People Committing Sex Offenses**

In general, people who have committed sex offenses are one of the most prominent groups that are affected by controlling images as demonstrated by the aforementioned laws and the attention in the media. Despite the amount of attention the public is poorly informed about people who have committed sex offenses in the United States, and inaccurate beliefs and myths continue to be the driving force for the creation of increasingly restrictive policies for those charged with sex offenses (Levenson et al., 2007). Specifically, people believe that individuals charged with sex offenses are the most likely to reoffend among incarcerated people, but research actually shows those charged with sex offense have lower recidivism rates than other types of offenders (Levenson et al., 2007).

Pickett, Mancini, & Mears (2013) found that people generally believe that rates of sex offenses are on the rise, and believe that treatment is typically ineffective because people who commit sex offenses cannot be rehabilitated. These beliefs are held by the public despite empirical evidence showing a decrease in the number of sexual offenses being committed, and empirical support of treatment programs being effective in reducing recidivism rates for people who have previously committed sex offenses (Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013).

These myths and other stereotypes associated with committing sex offenses are identified as controlling images within Relational Cultural Theory.

Schiavone and Jeglic (2008) examined the public's perception of policies to combat sex offenses, and the impact those policies have on people charged with sex offenses. Specifically, the study identified Megan's Law by name, but also included polices and legislation on residential restrictions. The results showed that the majority of people supported notification laws despite believing they were ineffective at reducing recidivism rates (Schiavone & Jeglic, 2008). Additionally, participants reported being sympathetic toward the negative impacts of community notification laws (i.e. vigilantism, shame, isolation), but only a small percentage of those sampled acknowledged that these negative impacts make recovery more difficult (Schiavone & Jeglic, 2008). Overall, implementing laws that do not work and dismissing the negative effects of those laws seems to support the notion that this group is stigmatized and marginalized within society, especially from a Relational Cultural theoretical perspective.

### **Homelessness and Poverty**

Greenberg & Rosenheck (2008) identify a history of homelessness and incarceration reciprocally increase the risk of each other occurring. However, there has been a lack of research to examine the effects of housing on those reintegrating from the criminal justice system (Herbert, Morenoff, & Harding, 2015). Recent homelessness was 7.5-11.3 times more common among those incarcerated than the general population, and people who were recently homeless (homelessness within a year of being incarcerated) comprised 15.3% of the inmate population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). Metraux & Culhane (2006) found that 23.1% of people surveyed in New York City shelters for homelessness identified being incarcerated within the previous two years of their current stay in the shelters. Wakefield & Uggen (2010) identify that the disadvantaged and vulnerable populations within the United



States are more likely to be imprisoned, but also identify that incarceration can cause future disadvantages for those incarcerated.

A high percentage of employers are not willing to hire, and have implemented policies, like background checks, to significantly discriminate against and limit employment opportunities for people previously incarcerated (Westerling, Koch, Mitchell, & Clark, 2015; Lam & Harcourt, 2003). Only 40% of employers reported that they would be willing to hire a person with a history of incarceration in a 2004 survey of businesses, and the implementation of public registries which document individual's incarceration history has led to limited options for previously incarcerated people seeking employment (Holzer, Raphael, & Stroll, 2004).

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### **Mental Health and Incarceration**

It was estimated in 2007 that 2.1 million mentally ill persons were incarcerated (Hawthorne et al., 2012). Glaze and James (2006) found that more than half of all inmates, including those at the state and federal levels, have mental health issues, and nearly one fourth of those with mental health issues had been imprisoned three or more times. Disparities have been shown with mental health treatment including gaps in access, questionable diagnostic practices, and limited provisions for optimal treatments for racial and ethnic minorities (Snowden, 2003).

Within the current literature investigating the aspects of the prison environment and their impact on mental health it was identified that prisons do not appropriately meet the needs of those with existing mental health issues (Goomany & Dickinson, 2015). Anestis & Carbonell (2014) found evidence to suggest that mental health counseling can be an effective tool in reducing recidivism among people with mental health issues who have been previously incarcerated. In 2003, The National Alliance on Mental Illness recognized failures within the mental health system, and reported that 40% of persons surveyed were arrested for reasons related to mental health (Hall, 2004). Skeem & Loudon (2006) identify that at least a half a million people with mental illness are placed on probation and parole each year, and people with mental health issues are twice as likely to recidivate.

Snowden (2003) identified that when assistance for mental health issues is sought out in the community setting it is likely to come from the general medical sector. Evidence suggests that health care practitioners have implicit negative attitudes and stereotypes about many marginalized groups (i.e. racial minorities, low SES, LGBT groups, overweight, injecting drug users, and wheelchair users) despite having an explicit commitment of providing care to all groups (Zestcott, Blair, & Stone, 2016). Zestcott, Blair, & Stone (2016) report that since Green (2007) there have been mixed results on whether the bias negatively impacts judgments made by providers, and more research is needed to examine how biases affect treatment which could include mental health referrals.

It is important to examine the biases and barriers people previously incarcerated face when interacting with healthcare as they attempt to reintegrate back into society, because it allows helping professionals knowledge to better serve this population as they seek mental health services. Evidence suggests that psychiatric disorders are more debilitating to people

who were previously incarcerated than people who have not been incarcerated (Schnittker, 2014). Cardarelli et al. (2015) found that 13% of people currently on probation were at a high risk of suicide, and those who also screened positive for a mental health condition were two to eight times more likely to screen positive for suicide risk.

## **APA Guidelines and Research Gaps**

### **Reducing Bias Language**

The American Psychological Association (2010) identifies general guidelines to reduce biased language within psychological publications. American Psychological Association (2010):

...APA is committed both to science and to the fair treatment of individuals and groups, and this policy requires that authors who write for APA publications avoid perpetuating demeaning attitudes and biased assumptions about people in their writing. Constructions that might imply bias against persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age are unacceptable (p.70-71).

Similar to controlling images from RCT the APA identified that cultural practices can have powerful influences over the most conscientious authors, and advise that authors should be conscientious about bias in a similar manner to checking grammar within their written work (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Using person first language has been identified to help maintain the integrity and worth of individuals as human beings (American Psychological Association, 2010). It is recommended when writing about people with disabilities to not use excessive negative labels, labels that could be regarded as a slur, or labels that objectify a people based on their

condition (American Psychological Association, 2010). The same cultural forces are at play when discussing people who have been previously incarcerated.

Psychologists are encouraged to develop cultural awareness among global communities because globalization is making the interactions and relocation of people easier than ever before. Psychologists also need to develop skills and knowledge to work with various groups within their own culture, which would include people with an incarceration history (Balcazar, et al., 2009). The language psychologists use in their professional communication shapes how they feel, think, and act towards those in diverse groups, and has a great impact on how others perceive those groups (Caplan, 1995; Dunn & Andrews, 2015).

### **Research Gaps**

Research has suggested that the therapeutic relationship serves as a microcosm of the larger society's cultural relations, specifically with minority populations (Sue et al., 2007), but it appears little research has been done to investigate the effects of potential bias related to incarceration within the therapeutic relationship. Aldridge (2014) believes that traditional research approaches are often in conflict with qualitative approaches; he further identifies challenges when working with vulnerable populations which are difficult to recruit for research, which could result in a lack of research for that population. Marrow (2007) identifies qualitative research as a promising tool to help further multicultural and social justice agendas, and could be an effective bridge between academia and the community. However, there is some evidence that suggests there is pressure within the academic settings to publish larger numbers of research articles for job security, and qualitative research practices are typically longer in duration than quantitative designs.

Multiple disciplines have gravitated towards strengths based approaches and away from deficit driven approaches when conceptualizing and implementing interventions for those previously incarcerated (Hunter et al., 2016; Maruna & Lebel, 2003). By examining current literature presented within PsychArticles database the current study identifies relational images and controlling images within the culture of psychology that could influence the relationship between practitioner and client that is an essential part of a strengths based/RCT approach. This examination could be used to better inform mental health professionals on their multicultural competency and to better promote the principles outlined by the American Psychology Association's social justice movement. Additionally, because RCT is a feminist research approach it can be used to examine what is missing from the mainstream publications or journal articles to understand the implications of the missing research (Reinharz & Kulick, 2007).

This study investigates the focus of research areas on people who have previously been incarcerated within journals on the PsychArticles database. Additionally, this study investigates pathologizing language used within the current research on people who have been previously incarcerated, and identifies gender differences within the research. Specifically, this study investigates if PsychArticles journals are addressing issues related to reintegration of those previously incarcerated, and are the PsychArticles journal articles using perpetuating bias and reinforcing controlling images for people who have been previously incarcerated?

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Content Analysis**

Examining the representation of people previously incarcerated within psychology research is best done using a qualitative approach because the project's primary focus is to discover hypotheses throughout the analysis of the data (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). Content analysis is a hybrid approach that can qualitatively or quantitatively analyze text, oral, or visual information to make inferences about the messages and trends within the text (Wilson, 2011). Content analysis has been used to identify trends over time within journal articles to identify gaps and focal points within the literature (Buboltz, Deemer, & Hoffmann, 2010; Arredondo, Rosen, Rice, Perez, & Tovar-Gamero, 2005). More specifically content analysis of journals has been used within counseling psychology research to investigate the representation of other underserved populations within the literature like military communities, people who are differently abled, LGBTQ populations, and acculturation of minorities (Daniels, Spero, Leonard, & Schimmel, 2015; Foley-Nicpon & Lee, 2012; Singh & Shelton, 2011; Yoon, Langrehr, & Ong, 2011). However, at this time it does not appear this type of research has been conducted for the population of previously incarcerated individuals.

## **Study Design.**

The journals were accessed using the PsychArticles database through Oklahoma State University's library subscription to the database. Articles published from 2006 to 2016 were examined to ensure relevancy to current social policy within the United States and the current ethical guidelines of the APA. The year range for the search criteria was selected because in 2002 the APA approved the Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists, and by starting in 2006 we should expect to see an implementation of the guidelines within the research being published. The APA developed this set of guidelines which "recognize that there are multiple identity factors such as language, gender, biracial/multiracial heritage, spiritual/ religious orientations, sexual orientation, age, disability, socioeconomic situation, and historical life experience (e.g., immigration and refugee status) that have an impact on the socialization process" (American Psychological Association 2008, p. 4). Specifically, these guidelines are aimed to address the needs of groups and individuals who have been marginalized or disenfranchised by psychology as a discipline based on group identity (American Psychological Association 2008), which should include people previously incarcerated.

The APA PsychArticles Thesaurus was used to identify useful keywords within the database, and additional search words were included that yielded relevant articles about people previously incarcerated. The search terms that were used are as follows: "Forensic Psychology", "Parole", "Probation", "Exonerees", "Ex-offender", "Reintegration", and "Recidivism". Limiters were applied to only select articles published between the years of 2006 and 2016, and to only select articles from scholarly

journals. The PsychArticles database contains full text journal articles from the 38 journals published by the APA and 4 published by allied organizations.

The methodology of how the articles were selected and the coding process has been adapted from Phillips et al. (2003) and Huang et al. (2010) uses of content analysis. The abstracts and publication information provided by the PsychArticles database were reviewed for all journal articles by the primary researcher in order to examine if the articles met qualifications to be included or excluded from the content analysis. Abstracts that did not discuss issues pertaining to people previously incarcerated (e.g. the results yielded some articles pertaining to military personnel) were eliminated from the dataset. A total of 79 articles were identified to meet the selection criteria, and were included into the dataset to be coded. Initially, articles were going to be excluded if the primary focus was on people previously incarcerated outside of the United States criminal justice system. However, it was decided by the investigators, during the data gathering process, to not exclude these articles because the purpose of this investigation is to examine how this population is being represented within psychological literature, and publications outside the United States could provide more diverse perspectives and research projects.

### **Coding Form**

Content categories were developed based on previous literature that examined content from specific journals over time (Buboltz, et al., 2010), and developed by deconstructive methods to answer the specific research questions. First, the articles were coded based on the research design: conceptual, qualitative, quantitative, or other (Buboltz, et al., 2010; Foley-Nicpon & Lee, 2012). Articles were then coded based on



demographic information of the participants within each study (Phillips et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2010). Next, the language used around the participants within each study was coded to identify if pathologizing language is being used within the article. Lastly, the analysis of each article was examined (e.g. group comparison, single group focus) (Phillips et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2010).

The articles were coded by the primary investigator based on the article review sheet which can be found in Appendix B of this paper. However, initially the primary and a secondary researcher independently coded 15% of the total articles with the coding review sheet which resulted in a 92% inter-rater reliability during the initial coding process (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). The primary and secondary researchers met to discuss the initial development major categories, and decided that the primary researcher would code independently the remaining articles because inter-rater reliability exceeded 90% which is the precedent set by previous studies (Berrios & Lucca, 2006).

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### **Description of Sample**

The sampling methodology produced 726 journal articles as a result the aforementioned search criteria. Of the total articles identified only 11% focused on issues pertaining to people with a history of incarceration (n=79). There is a total of 177 journals that are represented within the PsychArticles database of which only 15% (n=18) produced the 79 articles represented in this study. Table 1 shows the overall distribution of included articles by publication journals.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Previously Incarcerated Related Publications by Journal

Journal Title	n	%
Law and Human Behavior	32	41
Psychological Assessment	12	15
Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology	7	9
Psychological Service	5	6
Psychology, Public Policy, and Law	4	5
International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy	3	4
American Journal of Orthopsychiatry	3	4
Journal of Behavioral Analysis of Offender and Victim Treatment	2	3
Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention	2	3
Archives of Scientific Psychology	1	1
Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal	1	1
Journal of Abnormal Psychology	1	1
Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice	1	1
Traumatology	1	1
Psychology of Addictive Behaviors	1	1
Journal of Counseling Psychology	1	1
Neuropsychology	1	1
Behavior Analysis: Research and Practice	1	1

Note N = 79

The vast majority of journal articles included within the sample utilized quantitative methodologies (n=69, 87%), followed by articles using both quantitative and qualitative methodology (n=4, 5%), conceptual (n=3, 4%), and qualitative only (n=3, 4%). As represented in table 2 two-thirds of the 79 entries were published between 2012 and 2016.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Articles by Year

Publication Year	n	%
2006	1	1
2007	3	4
2008	2	3
2009	9	11
2010	6	8
2011	6	8
2012	9	11
2013	12	15
2014	10	13
2015	12	15
2016	9	11
Total	79	100

Among the 79 articles, participants from the United States were represented in more than half of all the articles (n=49, 62%), with nine countries represented total. Of the studies that included participants from the United States, 28 identified specific states in which the data was collected, the others did not identify a specific location, of those that identified, 21 states were included in sampling locations (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Study Sampling Locations

Location	n	%
States		
California	4	5
New York	4	5
Texas	4	5
Kentucky	3	4
	21	

Pennsylvania	2	3
Massachusetts	2	3
Ohio	2	3
Arizona	1	1
Illinois	1	1
Rhode Island	1	1
Nevada	1	1
Louisiana	1	1
Nebraska	1	1
Washington D.C.	1	1
Missouri	1	1
Minnesota	1	1
North Carolina	1	1
Alabama	1	1
Washington State	1	1
Iowa	1	1
Alaska	1	1
Countries	1	1
United States	49	62
Canada	18	23
United Kingdom	3	4
Australia	2	3
Netherlands	2	3
Austria	1	1
Japan	1	1
Germany	1	1
Denmark	1	1

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Note: percentages do not equal 100 because some studies recruited from more than one location.

### **Gender Representation**

About half of all the articles focused solely on participants that were identified as male (n=39, 49%) and an additional 31 articles included male participants along with female participants together, which totaled almost 90% of male representation within the included articles. On the other hand, less than 5% of the articles coded focused solely on participants that identified as female (n=3, 4%) and less than 50% when combining these articles those that represent both male and female genders (n=34, 43%). This is significant because it is estimated that roughly 219,000 youth and adult women are

incarcerated in the United States which represents only 16% of women under correction supervision, with the remainder in communities on probation or parole (Kajstura, 2017).

### **Types of Offenses**

Articles solely focused on sex offenses comprised 35% (n=28) of all the articles coded, and increased to 46% (n=36) of total articles when sex offenses were identified along with other offenses within the articles. This is significant because people who have committed sex offenses only comprise 9.4% of those incarcerated in federal prisons (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2018). This disproportionate representation of sex offenses within the psychological research could largely be accredited to the stigmatization and controlling images related to sex offenses compared to other less stigmatized sentences. This seemed further reinforced by the lack of representation of articles focusing solely on substance related crimes (n=2, 3%) despite representing 46%, the largest proportion by offense, within the federal prison system (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2018).

### **Pathologizing Language and Focus**

The vast majority of articles did not use person first language (n=61, 77%) and referred to the research participants by their specific offenses (i.e. sex offenders, rapist, child molester) or more generally by current status or history of incarceration (i.e. offender and parolees). Of the articles that did use person first language ten journals published the articles, and the vast majority (n=14, 78%) were published between 2012-2016.

A little over one third of articles (n=28, 35%) focused on assessing the predictive validity of various assessments on recidivism rates among those who have been

previously incarcerated, while 11% focused on treatment efficacy to reduce recidivism rates (n=9). The proportion of content focusing on treatment efficacy to reduce recidivism and the proportion of content focusing on predictive validity of assessments to predict recidivism is concerning because using assessments to identify individuals at higher risk of recidivism to target treatment interventions is only valuable if we know what treatment interventions successfully deter recidivism.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

This study examined the research trends within PsychArticles database of people who have been previously incarcerated. Specifically, is psychological literature examining issues surrounding reintegration in a socially just manner as outlined by APA guidelines? Based on the pathologizing nature of the data gathered from this study it could be argued that the majority of research gathered does not meet these standards set by APA guidelines and is perpetuating controlling images of the dominant culture.

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals were not represented in any of the articles reviewed in this study. The lack of representation within the sample is probably because the United States correctional system is largely organized with the assumption of a gender binary and researchers largely relying on archival data from these institutions. However, it does raise concerns that the data available and being used by psychology researchers is shaped by the controlling images of an unjust system for minorities in the United States, largely for convenient sampling of participants. This is consistent with the idea behind the construct of controlling images in that those in power want to remain in power and maintain the status quo (Walker, 2005).



As identified the vast majority of the articles within the sample did not use person first language, and identified this population by their specific offenses or by their general incarceration history/status. When referring to study participants as “sex offenders” or “child molesters” one can identify potential relational images developed unconsciously throughout life that portray what people believe will happen, and subsequently the meaning derived from interacting with others when this language is used. This type of language can reinforce bias and lead to chronic disconnection (Miller, 2008). The language used by researchers and mental health professionals could have a profound impact on those they aim to help. Jordan (2010) states, “RCT practitioners believe in the validation of the client’s experience, including naming the power of contextual factors to create psychological suffering” (p. 57). Language has tremendous power to influence our perceptions of marginalized populations by objectifying them based on their type of offense or their incarceration status.

The relationship between language and the perceptions of marginalized populations can also be demonstrated through examining the articles that did not identify participants by their offense type or incarceration history. A significant portion of these articles focused on preventative intervention measures to reduce recidivism for people previously incarcerated. For example, a little over 25% of these articles examined the use of mental health treatment to reduce recidivism rates compared to 10% of articles using pathologizing language when referring to people with an incarceration history. It appears that authors who are cognizant of their language are also creating research projects that address mental health needs and bolster preventative factors to reduce isolation of those within this marginalized group.

“Condemned isolation” is a term used within RCT to capture relational images that keep people out of relationship and without hope (Jordan, 2010). The person often feels responsible for their feelings of hopelessness and intrinsically believe something is wrong with themselves (Jordan, 2010). People desire connection but are afraid of what might happen when they make themselves vulnerable for the desired connection, and therefore develop strategies of disconnection to protect themselves from the threat of vulnerability (Jordan, 2010). The focus of Relational Cultural Therapy is to identify and rework these strategies of disconnection with the therapeutic relationship itself. Based on the importance of the therapeutic relationship as a treatment tool one can see the importance of relational images within therapeutic relationships, but this also extends to how social forces impact relationship.

The use of biased and pathologizing language extends beyond the relational images that might be present within relationships of those previously incarcerated and mental health or legal professionals. Controlling images are ways society shames and disempowers certain groups that inevitably lead to patterns of isolation (Jordan, 2010). The immobilization of chronic disconnection is often times centered around shame and unworthiness which are grounded in stereotypes, disinformation, and distortions to normalize inequalities between the dominant culture and marginalized groups (Jordan, 2010). Creating and consuming literature about marginalized populations referred to in ways that reinforce the power over culture could negatively impact helping professionals by reinforcing controlling images that could impact the helping relationships themselves and the types of research questions/projects being created under these social forces.

To demonstrate this phenomenon, the content themes and focus of the articles within this sample should be discussed further. The most consistent content theme of this sample was examining the predictive validity of various assessments to predict future recidivism. The intentions and potential uses of investigating predictive validity varied greatly throughout the sample among the researchers. Some articles challenged previous assertions about the predicative validity of the assessments, and cautioned making major decisions based on the results of those assessments. Some focused on how to use the predicative validity to better target more individuals at greater risk of recidivism to better utilize limited treatment resources. However, some provided data and arguments to use these tools in the opposite manner, for instance a tool that could be used for preventative detention to incarcerate high risk individuals for longer periods of time based on the results (Blais & Bonta, 2015). The use of assessments in this manner could be used as a tool by those in power to further marginalize groups already in power down positions, and using assessments as tools to incarcerate is not operating from a strengths based approach.

The disproportionate representation of sex offenses within the articles gathered for this study could be best explained by the controlling images surrounding sex offenses, and those who commit them, compared to other less stigmatized offenses within the countries represented. As previously identified most people believe that those who have committed sex offenses are going to reoffend, and that treatment is largely unsuccessful (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). Additionally, there is a myth that the most people who commit sex offenses are strangers who act upon moments of opportunity. In reality most sexual offenses are committed by acquaintances to the victims and used grooming

methods over time to to gain access and trust to their victims. A large percentage of the research represented within this study focused solely on sex offenses despite empirical evidence that people charged with violent crimes, including sex offenses, are not the most likely to recidivate. Alper, Durose, & Markman (2018) found that released people charged with property offenses were more likely to be re-arrested than released people charged with all violent offenses, and that more than three-quarters of people released after being incarcerated for drug offenses will be re-arrested for a non drug crime within nine years after their release. It seems that a large portion of the psychological research resources is being overly directed on one group, and might be more useful spreading the resources to focus on other areas with higher rates of recidivism.

In light of the aforementioned recidivism rates for drug crimes another disproportion of representation within the sample of articles was the minimal representation of articles focusing on people with a history of substance offenses. As previously stated, people convicted of substance offenses comprise almost half of those currently incarcerated within the federal prison system in the United States, but were only solely represented in two articles. One would expect to see higher representation of articles focusing on drug offenses because of such high incarceration rates. Another facet that should be discussed related to the proportion of representation by prior offenses is racial/ethnic characteristics that comprise each group. Taxy, Samuels, and Adams (2015) identify that the vast majority of people incarcerated, roughly 76%, in the United States with their most serious offense classified as a drug offenses were identified as either Hispanic/Latino or Black/African American. The majority, roughly 57%, of sex offenses are perpetrated by white males in the United States (Department of Justice, 2013).

When examining the results from a Relational Cultural Perspective the disproportionate representation between the prevalence of offenses within the literature and current incarceration rates of those offenses could be explained by controlling images of the larger culture. The representation of articles focusing on sex offenses is a significant finding, but was not unexpected based on the attention this subgroup receives within the dominant culture. However, the lack of representation of substance offenses was significant and unexpected, and it is unclear why this group was underrepresented within the sample. However, the majority racial/ethnic demographic makeup of the substance offense subgroups are people of color, and the lack of representation of this group could be an effect of the power dynamics of race and ethnicity within the larger culture.

This research project has examined the ways social and cultural forces impact psychological literature as it pertains to people previously incarcerated. The clinical implications are two-fold. First, as researchers it is important to understand how cultural forces impact every facet of research projects. “Psychologists’ pre-existing beliefs and assumptions influence the ways in which they respond to clinical and research data. Both conscious and unconscious factors may lead psychologists toward unwarranted assumptions about the client or data” (American Psychological Association, 2017 p. 27). This influence can be examined by the types of participant groups chosen for large proportions of studies represented in the data set, arguably based on social stigma. Cultural forces can also influence the methodology or study design chosen to investigate people previously incarcerated. For example, within academia a publish or perish culture has developed as professional’s attempt to achieve tenure. The publish or perish culture

does not provide much benefit to more time consuming qualitative methodologies needed to examine the complexities of intersectionality for those previously incarcerated.

The second clinical implication is the potential influences cultural forces have on the dialogical relationship between practitioner and client. Specifically, this research project aimed to identify trends and biases within psychological research, and by doing so to extrapolate how consuming this information could impact psychologists in the many roles they have as practitioners. For example, what impact does consuming research that does not use person first language when discussing people previously incarcerated have on a clinical practitioner with their work with those previously incarcerated in a private practice or consultation capacity? I think the impact would be significant, especially for clinicians in private practice roles because unless they take a proactive role to seek out regular consultation with colleagues the influence of these biases could go unchecked.

During the course of conducting this research project the American Psychological Association (2017) has adopted “Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality” that outlines the competencies necessary to practice in all domains as a psychologist with intersectionality as its primary scope. Within these guidelines the American Psychological Association (2017) developed the “Layered Ecological Model of the Multicultural Guidelines” which at its center has two different circles described as:

One circle represents the self-definition of the individual that refers to respective roles as client, student, research participant, or consultee. The second circle represents the self-definition of the individual that refers to the clinician, educator,

researcher, or consultant. The bidirectional arrows pointing between the two circles represent the dynamic interactions between these two individuals and their respective roles (e.g., interactions between clinician and client; educator and student; researcher and research participant; consultant and consultee) (p. 10).

Based on this description the American Psychological Association is highlighting the importance of the bi-directional relationships between client and practitioner. Within the model these two circles are surrounded by four additional circles that represent sources of social influence on that relationship. This model stresses the importance that social influences can have on the relationship of client and practitioner, but also identifies how the bidirectional relationship can influence social forces.

Based on the development of these new guidelines it appears a need has been identified among psychologists to expand the multicultural and social justice paradigm. Based on the findings from the present study it appears that incarceration history has not been traditionally viewed within the scope of multiculturalism, that primarily focused on race and ethnicity (American Psychological Association, 2017). The hope of the development of these new guidelines is to expand on the term multiculturalism to its broadest conceptualization with domestic and international variables and human rights (American Psychological Association, 2017). This article starts that conversation of how this group (people previously incarcerated) has not been adequately represented within the literature, and how the representation impacts their relationship with practitioners, in the form of researcher, and client, as research participant.

The hope of the new guidelines would be to raise researchers' awareness of how they are representing participants within their works so as to not further isolate marginalized groups based on misunderstandings and bias. Under these new guidelines researchers would take into account the complexities of identity development, and fully investigate the contexts within the cultural sphere that continue to perpetuate longstanding patterns of marginalization. As a training psychologist, my immediate community is at the heart of this epidemic. Oklahoma is the leading state of incarceration in the United States, and has been in the national spotlight for many political issues that contribute to the complex issues surrounding high incarceration rates. My hope is that these new guidelines spur an expansion of what is considered multiculturalism to include incarceration history to better help my community and communities like mine around the world.

### **Limitations**

One limitation present for this study is the use of the PsychArticles database versus a larger more comprehensive database (i.e. Psych Info) that incorporates articles from various disciplines within the social sciences. However, this database was chosen with the intention to gain a sample of psychological literature with access to the full documents online. The methodology from study may serve as an outline, or pilot study, to examine if the trends observed in this sample of articles extends to a larger sample of multiple disciplines of the social sciences literature.

Another limitation of the current study was the exclusion of articles that focused on participants who were currently incarcerated. We might have found a broader range of



professional perspectives if we included articles that focused on participants currently within the prison system as well.

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

The results of this study can allow psychological professionals to better assess the areas of research that are being adequately studied (sex offenses) and areas that need further attention (offenses related to drugs) to better serve people previously incarcerated as they reintegrate back into communities. As stated, this study could serve as a pilot study and provide a direction to readers for future publications to better serve those previously incarcerated. Also, it identified potential stigma that people previously incarcerated may receive within psychological literature, and is a step towards bringing awareness to current and future psychologists about the social justice issues people previously incarcerated experience.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Extended Review of the Literature**

Incarceration rates are a major public policy issue within the United States. Currently the United States is the world leader of nations for people incarcerated within the criminal justice system. In December 2014, there were 6.8 million people incarcerated and under supervision in the United States (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). It is estimated that over 600,000 people are released from prisons annually (Carson & Golinelli, 2014). It seems that social policy is beginning to shift as individual states continue to decriminalize marijuana in the United States, was further supported by the actions of President Obama by commuting the sentences of non-violent people in the prison system in 2015 and 2016. The current administration's policies are currently unclear related to non-violent drug offenses, but it appears that arrests for non-violent undocumented immigrants will increase compared to the last two years of the Obama administration ("21,000 Undocumented", 2017). Upon looking into the literature and data on incarcerated individuals it seems that a large portion of persons incarcerated were imprisoned for non-violent offenses. Specifically, in 2014 roughly 50% of federal inmates were imprisoned for drug offenses (Office of Justice Programs, 2015).

Durose, Cooper, & Howard (2014) investigated recidivism rates of people for five years after being released from prison in 2005 by using data reported by state departments of corrections. Of the prisoners released in 2005 more than half (56.7%) were rearrested within the first year of their release (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). Over the span of their investigation 67.8% of people released in 2005 were rearrested within 3 years and 76.6% were rearrested within 5 years (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). This data was collected from 30 states which represented 76% of the United States population and 77% of the total prisoners released from United States prisons (Durose, Cooper, & Howard, 2014). These recidivism rates identify a huge issue within the United States criminal justice system by identifying a revolving door that continues to maintain large prison populations.

In no way is it my intent to down play the egregiousness of some criminal actions when examining this topic or to minimize any victimization that has occurred as a result of a crime. The purpose of this study is to investigate, from a Relational Cultural Theoretical perspective, the current body of psychological research on people who have been charged with criminal offenses. Covington (2007) identifies that our current criminal justice system is a microcosm of the larger patriarchal society that supports a dominant/subordinate model of hierarchy. Mental health professionals are cultural beings who are not immune to societal influences, including societal norms associated with people who have committed legal offenses, which could impact their research and work with this population (American Psychological Association, 2002). Specifically, the propose of this study is to use Relational Cultural Theoretical constructs to examine how

people who have been previously incarcerated are being represented within psychological literature in ways that would promote isolation and disempowerment for that population.

### **Relational Cultural Theory**

Frey (2013) identifies relational cultural theory (RCT) as a feminist theory that proposes psychological health is created through meaningful relationships with others. “It seeks to lessen suffering caused by chronic disconnection and isolation, whether at an individual or societal level, to increase the capacity for relational resilience, and to foster social justice” (Jordan, 2010, p. 23). Privilege, marginalization, and cultural forces are central within the psychological developmental model of RCT, and relational development is intertwined with social and cultural identities (Jordan, 2010). RCT complements the multicultural/ social justice movement as a comprehensive counseling and developmental theory that provides a theoretical framework for mental health professionals to explore the effects of power, dominance, and marginalization within the cultural context (Comstock, et al., 2008), and it supports the current movement within mental to provide strengths based approaches when working with people who have been previously incarcerated.

Within the United States, and most other western cultures, the primary focus of personal development is towards separation and individuation from others to achieve independence, and RCT aims to shift away from isolation and towards greater connection identified within RCT as growth fostering relationships (Banks, 2006; Jordan, 2010). Growth fostering relationships are created through the ability to express mutual engagement and empathy, authenticity, and empowerment within relationships (Frey,

2013; Jordan, 2006; Laing, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Jordan (2010) identified growth-fostering relationships as having five outcomes: a sense of zest; a better understanding of the self, other, and of the relationship; a sense of worth; an enhanced capacity to act or be productive; and an increased desire for more connection. The inability to express these relationship characteristics can lead to disconnection within relationship and create psychological distress (Frey, 2103; Jordan, 2006).

Disconnections are considered to be a normal part of relationships, and are not considered pathological if the disconnections are addressed (Jordan, 2010). RCT identifies that addressing and reworking disconnections can be a source of tremendous growth for an individual leading to greater relational competence (Jordan, 2010). Reworking disconnections is especially important for people with less power because failing to do so leads to continued disempowerment of the individual and preserves the power hierarchy within the culture (Jordan, 2010). Jordan (2010) identifies, “In this way the personal is political, the political is personal, and the rewriting of a psychological paradigm becomes an act of social justice” (p.26).

Within RCT, relational images are a person’s expectations of their relationship outcomes and of how others will respond to their attempts to make meaningful connections (Miller, & Striver, 1995; Comstock et al., 2008). Relational images are internal constructions developed unconsciously throughout a person’s life, and portray what we believe will happen and the meaning derived from interacting with others (Miller, 2008). RCT identifies that these images can limit individual and collective relational possibilities which can influence multicultural/social justice counseling

competence (Comstock, et al., 2008). Additionally, Miller (2008) identifies that relational images are a construct built within the social framework and identifies the concept of controlling images as being the social link within RCT in which relational images are created (Miller, 2008).

Within RCT the cultural force that drives disconnections is identified as controlling images. Controlling images are what define as acceptable behavior for groups within society that create patterns of isolation, disempowerment, and shame (Jordan 2010). Shame is a powerful tool used to isolate and silence marginalized groups whose “members are strategically, if often invisibly, shamed in order to reinforce their isolation and thus their subordination...” (Jordan, 2010 p.29). Jordan (2010) identifies that strategies of disconnection typically arise from feeling unworthy and a sense of shame.

It is important to understand the concept of controlling images and the impact they can have within a culture because psychologists, and their research, are immersed within culture and the controlling images of the culture. Hanson states, “...counseling approaches are narrative structures that emerged in reaction to the values of the times in which they originated” (Hanson, 2002, p. 317). Simply put, we are all cultural beings, and it is important we use self-reflection in all aspects of our work to help ensure we are not furthering bias and acting against mental health ethical guidelines.

Based within RCT, Covington (2007) identifies that for successful reintegration there needs to be a continuum of care that connects community based programs with correctional institutions to help people previously incarcerated develop connections with community providers as they transition back into society. In an investigation related to

evidence based practice of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptomology Harner et al. (2015) identify that many incarcerated persons are not receiving evidenced based mental health services that would benefit them, and that further research needs to be conducted to investigate the use of evidence based practice within prison system and reintegration process. Osher, Steadman, & Barr (2003) identified there are little outcome based studies to support evidence based reentry planning to connect previously incarcerated people to services.

## **Social Justice Related to Incarceration**

### **Racial Disparities of Incarceration**

Hetey & Eberhardt (2014) identify that more severe disciplinary policies related to crime have led to an increase in incarceration rates in the United States, and have significantly increased the incarceration rates of Blacks within the United States. Black males represent 37%, White males 32%, and Hispanic males 22% of the inmate population (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). Despite representing the largest racial percentage of people incarcerated, Black/African American people only represent 15 % of the total United States population. Black males are 3.8- 10.5 times more likely to be imprisoned in every age group than their White male counterparts, and 1.4 to 3.1 times more likely than Hispanic males (Office of Justice Programs, 2015).

The racial disparities and systemic marginalization extend beyond Black Americans to include other racial minorities. Fifty-seven percent of Hispanic inmates in federal prisons are sentenced for drug offenses, and twenty-six percent were sentenced for immigration offenses (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). Brennan & Spohn (2008) found that Whites received less severe punishments than Blacks and Hispanics, but

Hispanics received more severe punishment than Blacks even in legal jurisdictions with sentencing guidelines. The inequities between People of Color and their White counterparts within prison exposes social justice issues between People of Color and the criminal justice system.

### **Employability**

After being released people previously incarcerated have numerous barriers to overcome. Notably, previously incarcerated people are stigmatized during the hiring process because of their incarceration history, but can also face other stigmatizations during the hiring process based on race and ethnicity or the stigmatization of mental health issues (Varghese, Hardin, & Bauer, 2009; Sneed, Koch, Estes, & Quinn, 2006). Seeking employment is an example of how stigmatization surrounding incarceration can intersect with social justice and mental health issues, but this is an area that has received little attention from the field of psychology within its body of research (Shivy et al., 2007).

Relational Cultural Theory identifies shame and feelings of unworthiness as being central components that perpetuate disconnection and isolation among marginalized groups. Westerling, Koch, Mitchell, & Clark (2015) designed a study to investigate the Career Decision Self Efficacy among people who have been previously incarcerated. Career Decision Self Efficacy is a person's confidence to complete tasks related to career decision making (Westerling et al., 2015). Before attending a weeklong career-development workshop those with a history of incarceration showed lower confidence with Occupational Information than those participating in the workshop who had not been incarcerated (Westerling et al., 2015). However, after completion of the workshop



those with an incarceration history still showed lower confidence scores on Occupational Information, but the difference did not meet statistical significance at the completion of the workshop (Westerling et al., 2015). Overall, it was shown that in a matter of five days all members who participated in the program, showed an increase in Career Decision Self Efficacy (Westerling et al., 2015).

Harrison & Schehr (2004) identify legally mandated restrictions as having a significant impact, on people who have been previously incarcerated, to gain access to employment. Despite enacting laws to help employment discrimination against people who have been previously incarcerated there has been considerable leeway given to states on the implementation of the discrimination laws, which has restricted people previously incarcerated in finding employment (Harrison & Shivey, 2004). Whitley, Kostick, & Bush (2009) identified that within subgroups, like registered sex offenders, legal, temporal, and spatial restrictions can significantly reduce the already limited employment opportunities for people with an incarceration history. There is little research investigating the public perception of people reintegrating into society after being incarcerated, and the primary focus of the limited amount of literature is on people who committed sex offenses.

People who have been charged with sex offense are a highly-stigmatized group within the United States, and receive considerable attention from media and law makers on local, state, and national levels. By looking at the research on public perceptions of people who have committed sex offenses, and the effectiveness of legislation and policies aimed at reducing recidivism after their release, this study will provide an example to

help demonstrate the cultural forces being used to disenfranchise and create feelings of shame based on their offense.

### **Public Perceptions of People Committing Sex Offenses**

In general, the public is poorly informed about people who have committed sex offenses in the United States, and inaccurate beliefs and myths continue to be the driving force for the creation of increasingly restrictive policies for those charged with sex offenses (Levenson et al., 2007). Specifically, people believe that individuals charged with sex offenses are the most likely to reoffend among incarcerated people, but research actually shows those charged with sex offense have lower recidivism rates than other types of offenders (Levenson et al., 2007).

Pickett, Mancini, & Mears (2013) found that people generally believe that rates of sex offenses are on the rise, and believe that treatment was typically ineffective because people who committed sex offense cannot be rehabilitated. These beliefs are held by the public despite empirical evidence showing a decrease in the number of sexual offenses being committed, and empirical support of treatment programs being effective in reducing recidivism rates for people who have previously committed sex offenses (Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013). These myths and other stereotypes associated with committing sex offense are identified as controlling images within Relational Cultural Theory. These findings associated with the promotion of misinformation are associated with the perceptions of the general public, but are these myths influencing the lawmakers who construct and implement the laws themselves?

Sample and Kadleck (2008) aimed to investigate the perceptions of people who have committed sex offenses by policy makers, and to see which of these perceptions

influenced the development and content of sex offense legislation. It appears that lawmaker's personal perceptions heavily influence the passage and content of the laws, but it also appears that the public plays a role by informing and soliciting legislators on the events that demand action (Sample & Kadleck, 2008). Media coverage has been suggested to spur the previously identified misconceptions and myths, and that policy makers believe that the content and frequency of media coverage reflects issues that are important to the public (Levenson et al., 2007; Sample & Kadleck, 2008). Additionally, policy makers identified that they rely on media coverage to inform them on criminal justice statistics and important criminal justice events (Sample & Kadleck, 2008).

Schiavone and Jeglic (2008) examined the public's perception of policies to combat sex offenses, and the impact those policies have on people charged with sex offenses. Specifically, the study identified Megan's Law by name, but also included policies and legislation on residential restrictions. The results showed that the majority of people supported notification laws despite believing they were ineffective at reducing recidivism rates (Schiavone & Jeglic, 2008). Additionally, participants reported being sympathetic toward the negative impacts of community notification laws (i.e. vigilantism, shame, isolation), but only a small percentage of those sampled acknowledged that these negative impacts make recovery more difficult (Schiavone & Jeglic, 2008). Overall, implementing laws that you do not believe work and dismissing the negative effects of those laws seems to support the notion that this group is stigmatized and marginalized within society, especially from a Relational Cultural theoretical perspective.

## **Effectiveness Sex Offending Legislation**

In 1994, the federal Sexual Offender Act, also called the Jacob Westerling Act, was passed and requires people charged with a sex offense to provide their current address to law enforcement for a public registry (Turner et al., 2015; Levenson & Hern, 2007). The Jacob Westerling Act was added to by the passing of Megan's Law and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act. These additional laws mandated that all states must develop and implement a notification system to inform the community of people charged with sex crimes living in the area, and to provide grant money and other funding to help improve state registries in order to meet federal requirements (Turner et al., 2015; Levenson & Cotter, 2005).

People charged with sex offenses have been restricted from living in close proximity to areas in which children frequently congregate, and these changes are attributed to the visibility provided by aforementioned registry legislation by local and state governments (Levenson & Hern, 2007). Levenson and Hern (2007) aimed to examine what effects various residence restriction legislation had on people who have been charged with sex offenses to reintegrate back into society, and found that residence restriction laws seemed to have unintended consequences that negatively impact the reintegration process. The participants in their study identified that these laws created transience, financial burdens, had significant emotional effects on their well-being, and often times forced them to relocate to more rural areas (Levenson & Hern, 2007). As a result of the rural relocation they identified decreased access to steady employment, social support systems, mental health care, and social services (Levenson & Hern, 2007). All of which are identified as protective factors that reduce risks to reoffending.

The issues related to residential restriction legislation for people who have committed sex offenses seem to affect the younger offending population to a larger extent than older offending population (Levenson & Hern, 2007). This is supported by Durose, Cooper, & Howard (2014) who found that 80.4% of violent offenders under the age of 24 who were released from prison in 2005 were rearrested within five years, and had the highest overall recidivism rates compared to all other age groups. Securing housing was identified by younger participants to be extremely difficult, and these disproportional affects are attributed to having the legal restrictions in conjunction with being less developmentally and financially independent (Levenson & Hern, 2007). Younger people who have committed sexual offenses are at greater risk for recidivism, and lifestyle instability caused by these restrictions could increase that risk (Levenson & Hern, 2007).

Levenson & D'Amora (2007) reviewed federal and state policies aimed at reducing sex offenses, and found that most policies fail to incorporate research based evidence in the development and implementation of the policies. "In summary, sex offender policies are often created on the basis of the myths that all sex offenders reoffend, that treatment does not work, and that children are most at risk from strangers who lurk playgrounds" (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007, p. 180). This is not to say that some aspects of the policies do not work or should not be implemented, but rather the development of these policies seem to be based on controlling images of the dominant culture rather than on empirical evidence. An example of this, is recent policies that target people who abuse children, but excludes those who have been charged with rape, despite higher rates of recidivism among those who rape (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). Generally, those who rape are more likely to target strangers, and those who rape cause

more severe physical injuries to their victims than people who have sexual abuse children (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). Levenson & D'Amora (2007) identify that people see what they want to see, and people who may observe contrary information seem afraid to discuss a socially undesirable opinion in a public forum.

Levenson, Grady, & Leibowitz (2016) identify a need for evidence base reform of sex offender registries within the United States because most empirical evidence does not show them to be an effective tool to reduce sex crimes or reduce recidivism rates for people who have been convicted of sexual crimes. Levenson, Grady, & Leibowitz state in their rationale for reform, “the exclusionary practices activated by shaming labels can isolate stigmatized groups from mainstream social life solidifying one’s deviant identity and fortifying criminal behavior” (Levenson, Grady, & Leibowitz, 2016, p. 9).

Relational Cultural Theory identifies shame as arising when people feel that they are unworthy, and shame is imposed on people to control and disempower those who are marginalized (Jordan, 2010).

### **Homelessness and Poverty**

Greenberg & Rosenheck (2008) identify a history of homelessness and/or incarceration reciprocally increase the risk of each other occurring. However, there has been a lack of research to examine the effects of housing on those reintegrating from the criminal justice system (Herbert, Morenoff, & Harding, 2015). Recent homelessness was 7.5-11.3 times more common among those incarcerated than the general population, and people who were recently homeless (homelessness within a year of being incarcerated) comprised 15.3% of the inmate population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). Metraux & Culhane (2006) found that 23.1% of people surveyed in New York City shelters for

homelessness identified being incarcerated within the previous two years of their current stay in the shelters. Wakefield & Uggen (2010) identify that the disadvantaged and vulnerable populations within the United States are more likely to be imprisoned, but also identify that incarceration can cause future disadvantage for those incarcerated.

Defina & Hannon (2013) have identified that incarceration rates have played a direct role on increasing poverty rates within the United States since 1980. The increased incarceration rates mean fewer earners for the families of those incarcerated, and they estimate overall poverty rates within the United States would have decreased if the mass incarceration that resulted from strict drug laws had not occurred (Defina & Hannon, 2013). Incarceration is not a factor that is taken into account in traditional analysis of poverty despite poverty and incarceration having a two-way causal relationship (Defina & Hannon, 2013). Simply put, increasing incarceration rates create conditions that lead to higher rates of incarceration (Defina & Hannon, 2013).

Harrison & Schehr (2004) identify that recidivism rates are high because people released from prison have a difficult time gaining sustainable jobs because most lack the education and skills necessary to for employment opportunities. Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, (2004) found a large portion of people with an incarceration history did not complete high school, and roughly 75% have had substance use or other health problems. These issues when taken into consideration along with the attitudes and potential biases held by employers create high rates of unemployment or inconsistent employment for those who have been previously incarcerated.

A high percentage of employers are not willing and have implemented policies, like background checks, to significantly discriminate against and limit employment

opportunities for people previously incarcerated (Westerling, et al., 2015; Lam & Harcourt, 2003). Only 40% of employers reported that they would be willing to hire a person with a history of incarceration in a 2004 survey of businesses, and the implementation of public registries which document individual's incarceration history has led to limited options for previously incarcerated people seeking employment (Holzer, Raphael, & Stroll, 2004).

After being released people previously incarcerated have numerous barriers to overcome. Seeking employment is an example of how stigmatization surrounding incarceration can intersect social justice and mental health issues, but this is an area that has received little attention within psychological research (Shivy et al., 2007). Notably, previously incarcerated people are stigmatized during the hiring process because of their incarceration history, but can also face other stigmatization during the hiring process based on race, ethnicity, or mental health issues (Varghese, Hardin, & Bauer, 2009) (Sneed, et al., 2006).

### **Mental Health and Incarceration**

It was estimated in 2007 that 2.1 million mentally ill persons were incarcerated (Hawthorne et al., 2012). Glaze and James (2006) found that more than half of all inmates, including those at the state and federal levels, have mental health issues, and nearly one fourth of those with mental health issues had been imprisoned three or more times. Disparities have been shown with mental health treatment including gaps in access, questionable diagnostic practices, and limited provisions for optimal treatments for racial and ethnic minorities (Snowden, 2003).



Within the current literature investigating the aspects of the prison environment and their impact on mental health it was identified that prisons do not appropriately meet the needs of those with existing mental health issues (Goomany & Dickinson, 2015). Anestis & Carbonell (2014) found evidence to suggest that mental health counseling can be an effective tool in reducing recidivism among people with mental health issues who have been previously incarcerated. In 2003, The National Alliance on Mental Illness identified failures within the mental health system, and reported that forty percent of persons surveyed were arrested for reasons related to mental health (Hall, 2004). Skeem and Loudon (2006) identify that at least a half a million people with mental illness are placed on probation and parole each year, and people with mental health issues are twice as likely to recidivate.

Snowden (2003) identified that when assistance for mental health issues is sought out in the community setting it is likely to come from the general medical sector. Evidence suggests that health care practitioners have implicit negative attitudes and stereotypes about many marginalized groups (i.e. racial minorities, low SES, LGBT groups, overweight, injecting drug users, and wheelchair users) despite having an explicit commitment of providing care to all groups (Zestcott, Blair, & Stone, 2016). Zestcott, Blair, & Stone (2016) report that since Green (2007) there have been mixed results on whether the bias negatively impacts judgments made by providers, and more research is needed to examine how biases affect treatment which could include mental health referrals.

It is important to examine biases and barriers people previously incarcerated face when interacting with healthcare as they attempt to reintegrate back into society, because

it allows helping professionals knowledge to better serve this population as they seek mental health services. Evidence suggests that psychiatric disorders are more debilitating to people who were previously incarcerated than people who have not been incarcerated (Schnittker, 2014). Cardarelli et al., (2015) found that 13% of people currently on probation were at a high risk of suicide, and those who also screened positive for a mental health condition were two to eight times more likely to screen positive for suicide risk.

### **APA Guidelines and Research Gaps**

The most recent movement within sentencing and drug policy appears in alignment with the American Psychological Associations (APA) ethical guidelines that promote change by using a social justice approach on an individual and organizational basis because of the over representation of people of color within the prison system for non-violent offenses (Chen, 2013). The APA Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists is applicable when working with people who have been previously incarcerated. Specifically, the American Psychological Association (2002) 2<sup>nd</sup> Guideline states:

membership in one group helps to shape perceptions of not only one's own group, but also other groups. The link between those perceptions and attitudes are loyalty to and valuing of one's own group, and devaluing the other group. The Minority Identity Development model (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998) is one such example applying to ethnic/racial minority individuals but also to others who have experienced historical oppression and marginalization (p. 25).

Conducting ethical and culturally sensitive research is another aspect that should be addressed when working with people who have been previously incarcerated. The American Psychological Association (2002) 4<sup>th</sup> guideline states:

Culturally sensitive psychological researchers are encouraged to recognize the importance of conducting culture–centered and ethical psychological research among persons from ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority backgrounds (p. 36).

Those who are and who have been previously incarcerated are a protected population under federal policy because of they have been a group that has been historically treated unethically, and their environment places them at greater risk to not be able to make uncoerced decisions (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2009). In 2005, it was recommended that informed consent cannot be voluntary in any environment in which liberty is restricted. In 2006 the definition was expanded to include any institution or the community in which liberty is restricted by the government (Mobley, Henry, & Plemmons, 2007).

The inclusion of incarcerated person within the subparts of the Federal Policy supports including incarcerated persons as a vulnerable population that need further protection (Mobley, Henry, & Plemmons, 2007). One such safeguard is the requirement that representatives of the prison population have input into the IRB process (Mobley, Henry, & Plemmons, 2007). The Institute of Medicine made further recommendations for an increased role for incarcerated persons within the process to make it more collaborative between researchers and people who are incarcerated or were previously incarcerated (Mobley, Henry, & Plemmons, 2007).

RCT at its foundation is in alignment with these guidelines, and the APA has developed unique treatment guidelines to help professionals working with gender minorities, people with disabilities, older populations, and other culturally marginalized populations (American Psychological Association, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2012; American Psychological Association, 2014; American Psychological Association, 2015; American Psychological Association, 2017). However, the APA has not developed a unique set of guidelines for psychologists working with those currently or previously incarcerated, nor does the APA identify this population within the guidelines as a unique multicultural identity despite this population's unique set of challenges caused by an incarceration history. These guidelines focus on accurately representing subsets of people by not overgeneralizing characteristics to groups of people

### **Reducing Bias Language**

The American Psychological Association (2010) identifies general guidelines to reduce biased language within psychological publications. American Psychological Association (2010):

...APA is committed both to science and to the fair treatment of individuals and groups, and this policy requires that authors who write for APA publications avoid perpetuating demeaning attitudes and biased assumptions about people in their writing. Constructions that might imply bias against persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age are unacceptable (p. 70-71).

Similar to controlling images from RCT the APA identified that cultural practices can have powerful influences over the most conscientious authors, and advise that authors

should be conscientious about bias in a similar manner to checking grammar within their written work (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Using person first language has been identified to help maintain the integrity and worth of individuals as human beings (American Psychological Association, 2010). It is recommended when writing about people with disabilities to not use excessive negative labels, labels that could be regarded as a slur, or labels that objectify a people based on their condition (American Psychological Association, 2010). The same cultural forces are at play when discussing people who have been previously incarcerated. Numerous stories have been shared during my work with people who were currently or had previously been incarcerated about the effects labels have had on them based on the type of offenses they had committed.

Psychologists are encouraged to develop cultural awareness among global communities because globalization is making the interactions and relocation of people easier than ever before. Psychologists also need to develop skills and knowledge to work with various groups within their own culture, which would include people with an incarceration history (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009). The language psychologists use in their professional communication shapes how they feel, think, and act towards those in diverse groups, and has a great impact on how others perceive those groups (Caplan, 1995; Dunn & Andrews, 2015).

### **Research Gaps**

Research has suggested that the therapeutic relationship serves as a microcosm of the larger society's cultural relations, specifically with minority populations (Sue et al., 2007), but it appears little research has been done to investigate the effects of potential

bias related to incarceration within the therapeutic relationship. Aldridge (2014) believes that traditional research approaches are often in conflict with qualitative approaches; he further identifies challenges when working with vulnerable populations which are difficult to recruit for research, which could result in a lack of research for that population. Marrow (2007) identifies qualitative research as a promising tool to help further multicultural and social justice agendas, and could be an effective bridge between academia and the community. However, there is some evidence that suggests there is pressure within the academic setting to publish larger numbers of research articles for job security, and qualitative research practices are typically longer in duration than quantitative designs.

Miller, Taylor, and Bedwian (2011) reported that 94% of faculty respondents from accredited research oriented business schools reported experiencing pressure to publish articles in peer reviewed journals, and the pressure to publish deterred researchers from using non-traditional research methods. This pressure could also contribute to a gap within the current literature because of the additional protections prisoners and parolees as an identified vulnerable population which requires researchers to take additional time-consuming measures to help ensure the ethical treatment of people currently and previously incarcerated. An example of one such safeguard is the requirement that representatives of the prison population have input into the IRB process (Mobley, Henry, & Plemmons, 2007).

Multiple disciplines have gravitated towards strengths based approaches and away from deficit driven approaches when conceptualizing and implementing interventions for

those previously incarcerated (Hunter et al., 2016; Maruna & LeBel 2003). By examining current literature presented within PsychArticles journals this article identifies relational images and controlling images within the culture of psychology that potentially influence the relationship between practitioner and client that is an essential part of a strengths based/RCT approach. This examination can be used to better inform mental health professionals on their multicultural competency and to better promote the principles outlined by the American Psychology Association's social justice movement. Additionally, because RCT is a feminist research approach it can be used to examine what is missing from the mainstream publications or journal articles to understand the implications of the missing research (Reinharz & Kulick, 2007).

This study investigates the focus of research areas within the PsychArticle database on people who have been previously incarcerated. Additionally, this study investigates pathologizing language used within the current research on people who have been previously incarcerated, and identifies gender differences within the research. Specifically, this study investigates if APA affiliated journals are addressing issues related to reintegration of those previously incarcerated, and are the APA affiliated journal articles using perpetuating bias and reinforcing controlling images for people who have been previously incarcerated?

APPENDIX B  
ARTICLE REVIEW SHEET

1. Title of article:
2. Year published:
3. Name of APA Journal:
4. Research Methodology:
  - a.  Conceptual     Qualitative     Quantitative  
 Mixed Methods
5. Participant Demographics:
  - a. Sub-groups by prior offenses: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Geographic location: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Gender:
    - i.  Male
    - ii.  Female
    - iii.  Transgender
    - iv.  Gender Non-conforming



d. Ethnicity:

- i. \_\_\_\_\_ African American/Black/African origin
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_ Arab
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_ Asian
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian/White/European Origin
- v. \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino
- vi. \_\_\_\_\_ Native American/American Indian
- vii. \_\_\_\_\_ Pacific Islander
- viii. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

e. Age:

- i. \_\_\_\_\_ <18
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_ 18-19
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_ 20-29
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_ 30-39
- v. \_\_\_\_\_ 40-49
- vi. \_\_\_\_\_ 50-59
- vii. \_\_\_\_\_ 60-69
- viii. \_\_\_\_\_ 70+

6. Was there pathological language used surrounding the participants within the article?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

b. Provide example if pathological language was used:

7. What is the focus of the article?

a. \_\_\_\_\_ Group Comparison

b. \_\_\_\_\_ Single Group Focus

c. Major Theme or Topic

Additional Notes:

VITA

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