



Copyright © 2023 *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*
All rights reserved.
ISSN: 1070-8286

Netflix and Crime: The Influence of Modern Media on Barriers to Re-entry

Kathleen Knoll-Frey

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Tess Mattison

John Carroll University

Abstract

Television has become a major part of our lives, with the average person in the United States watching on average 3 hours of television per day (Krantz-Kent, 2018). With the increase in streaming services, many people now have access to a larger diversity of programming. Crime shows have become super popular on these streaming services from documentaries on serial killers to shows about prisons. When *Orange is the New Black* season two was released, it was reported that 5.9 million people watched the episode over a two day period (Ockerman, 2016). This high rate of viewership shows the level of appeal crime shows has on the general population. The current study seeks to understand how viewing these crime shows, particularly ones that humanize offenders, affects the general public's attitudes towards those with criminal records. Using a survey distributed through social media, respondents were asked about their personal viewing behaviors and their attitudes towards people with a criminal record. Results indicated that those who watched crime shows were more likely to hold favorable attitudes towards those who have a criminal record. Results reveal that popular culture could be used to help reduce punitive attitudes and shape public attitudes towards helping those returning to society successfully reintegrate.

Keywords: popular culture, re-entry, perceptions of crime, crime shows

Introduction

The United States of America has the highest number of incarcerated people in the world, with over 2 million people locked up (The Sentencing Project, n.d.) while another 4.5 million serve a sentence under community supervision (Pew, 2018). These 6.5 million individuals all share one thing in common: a criminal record. Once a person has a criminal record, they face barriers that few others have to endure such as finding housing or a job. There is a stigma attached to the word “criminal” that implies a bad or undeserving person who broke the law. People in the general public often hold negative views of people with a criminal record, leading to an overall rejection of those deemed as ‘criminals.’ For example, there is ample evidence that those with a criminal record are less likely to get hired than someone without a record (Pager, 2003). The treatment of those with a criminal record stem from a belief that the person is dangerous, cannot be trusted, and may cause harm (Warr, 1994).

In the past, television shows, both fiction and non-fiction, often exemplified crime and criminogenic individuals in a stereotypical and dehumanizing manner (Cecil, 2015). As a result, public perception of individuals who engaged in deviant behavior were simply seen as such: deviant, thugs, and any other dehumanizing label associated with committing a crime. Fortunately, modern television and media have expanded their storytelling abilities past the status quo of crime television into a new era. Despite public perceptions against those labelled criminals, shows and series glamorizing criminals have exploded across television and streaming platforms. Pop culture has churned out a slew of serial killer documentaries, prison shows, and other series/movies about crime and criminals. Many of these modern series have taken on a different role from the past; instead of showing all the negatives of crime, many have highlighted the humanity behind criminals (Cecil, 2015).

This new era of media humanizes those who engage in deviant behavior (Cecil, 2015; Cecil, 2017), shedding light on the circumstances that may have led to their arrest or incarceration, as well as the situations and struggles they face while incarcerated and upon their release (Pager, 2003; Agan & Starr, 2017; Chin, 2017; Kirk & Wakefield, 2018). Today, there are many more shows that depict the humanity behind offenders, bringing audiences a deeper understanding of the harsh realities offenders face in their daily lives. While prior generations of prison and criminal media has depicted the violent nature of offenders, today there is a range of crime shows that vary allowing for more depictions of humanity within pop culture (Cecil, 2015). For example, *Orange is the New Black*, a popular Netflix series, focuses on highlighting the hardships in each woman’s life, showing what unfortunate circumstances led to them being incarcerated. These types of series show that people with a criminal record are not necessarily bad, but rather people who have faced hardships and difficult choices. By highlighting the humanity behind someone with a criminal record and making the audience empathetic towards these people, these shows may help foster a more positive view of people who have committed crime.

Television plays a large role in the lives of people; the images seen on a daily basis in the media shape the way we view the world. Images in television shows and movies have been shown to have a great effect on viewers from fostering stereotypes to creating bias and prejudice. The average American watches almost 3 hours of television per day (Krantz-Kent, 2018), potentially even up to 8 hours per day (Pinsker, 2018). Research has shown that television shows can influence viewers through shaping real life attitudes and beliefs, particularly in creating and influencing stereotypes (Cecil, 2015). While many of these beliefs may lead to negative prejudice, it is also just as likely that certain media may help remove bias and prejudice. The current study seeks to add to the literature to understand if individuals who watch shows and movies that humanize those that committed crimes for example, may be more empathetic and understanding of people with a criminal record. Dowler (2003) argued that it’s important to understand different types of programming on perceptions of criminals, as different types of shows could have different effects.

The current study seeks to understand if watching shows that humanize people who have committed crimes affects the stigma associated with criminality through decisions to hire or rent to a person with a criminal record. Understanding the role media could play in reducing stigma could have positive effects in the future for people reentering society with a criminal record attached to their applications. Efforts to help reduce stigma may make future employers more willing to hire those with a criminal record, landlords more willing to rent to these individuals, and potentially reduce other barriers as public opinion shifts.

Literature Review

Consequences of a Criminal Conviction

Once a person is released from criminal justice supervision, the punishment has technically ended. However, many people who have been convicted of a crime find that their sentence never truly ends. A host of barriers to successful reentry exist as a result of an individual's criminal conviction. These 'collateral consequences of incarceration' impede a released offenders likelihood for success, often increasing the likelihood of recidivism. These consequences include, but are not limited to, employment, housing, government assistance, financial aid, obtaining professional licenses, voting rights, health, and finances¹. In general, these barriers or consequences aid in preventing a person with a criminal record from living a productive law-abiding life.

Becoming employed is an incredibly important component of successful re-entry once a person is released from prison and has been shown to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. However, people with a criminal conviction on their record often have difficulty finding and maintaining employment (La Vigne *et al*, 2004). Numerous studies have found that those who have a criminal record are significantly less likely to be hired than those without a record (Agan & Starr, 2017; Leasure & Kaminski, 2020; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009). For example, Uggen and colleagues (2014) found a negative effect on employment for those with an arrest for a misdemeanor on employment prospects. This finding exemplifies the ways in which stigma is associated with crime regardless of the severity of the crime. While the ban-the-box movement has pushed for employers to stop asking applicants if they have a criminal record, a vast number of employers continue to ask this question. In fact, over 30 million people reported in the United States reported being asked about a criminal record on a job application in a single year (Denver, Pickett, & Bushway, 2018).

Not only is the likelihood of employment reduced through criminal record histories, but wages have been shown to be disproportionate for those with a criminal record. Western (2002) argued that income generally increases through stable long-term employment, which is often denied to those with a criminal record. Due to the belief that a person who has committed a crime is untrustworthy, they are not likely to be hired in high-income occupations (Western, 2002). In addition, a criminal record also bars individuals from certain occupations due to license restrictions. There are over 25,000 known license restrictions in the United States preventing those with a criminal record from seeking certain occupations such as teaching, nursing, management, and other various occupations (Rodriguez & Avery, 2016).

Consequently, research has shown that those with a criminal conviction are more likely to suffer from wage disparities. Pettit and Lyons (2009) found that formerly incarcerated men earned lower wages overall. Moreover, Western (2002) not only found that those formerly incarcerated earn lower wages, but that the wage-gap between those who have been incarcerated and those who have never been incarcerated increases with time.

¹ For a comprehensive list of collateral consequences please visit the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction: <https://niccc.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/>

Ultimately, those who have been labelled as criminal not only face a lack of employment opportunities, but also a loss of income due to the conviction.

In addition to a lower likelihood of finding employment, a person with a criminal conviction also has difficulty in finding housing. Housing, like employment, significantly reduces the likelihood of recidivism and is the first most important step to successful re-entry (LaVigne *et al*, 2004). While some people who have imprisonment and a criminal record may be able to return home to family, others are not as fortunate. Prior literature has found that landlords are less likely to rent to someone who has a criminal record (Evans *et al*, 2019; Evans & Porter, 2015; Leasure & Martin, 2019). In addition, some landlords have ‘crime-free’ clauses in their advertisements allowing them to run criminal history checks to prevent someone with a criminal record from renting their property (Archer, 2019).

Public housing was created to provide a place for low-income people to afford rent, however, there are several restrictions to living in public housing, including not having a criminal record. These low-income residencies are often denied to anyone with a criminal conviction and also prevent those with a record from living with family in public housing (Archer, 2019; Silva, 2015; Curtis *et al*, 2013; Carey, 2005). Regardless of criminal record, stigma still affects everyone. In other words, whether someone has minor criminal record or a severe one, both types of offenders face the same stigma associated with employment and housing (Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016).

Labelling: Symbolic Interactionism

Once a person has a criminal record, they have undergone a formal degradation ceremony via the criminal justice system. According to labelling theory, this formal label of criminal will foster future deviance as a person accepts their role as criminal. This role comes from society through symbolic interactionism. In other words, as people view a person as criminal, they begin to treat them as such; thus, the person takes on the master status of deviant and acts as others expect them to (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Schur, 1971). People often view those who have committed a crime as different, shaming and punishing them for their behavior rather than working to understand the underlying factors which may have led to their deviant behavior.

Few studies actually examine the public's perceptions of criminals; however Hirschfield and Piquero (2010) surveyed Americans across four regions to understand perceptions of offenders. Overall, they found that the public holds less favorable views of those who have been incarcerated. However, some mediating factors have been found that reduce the stigma associated with offending, particularly knowing a person who has offended. Lagesom and colleagues (2019), found that when someone knows a person with an arrest record and has a quality relationship with that person, they are less likely to support public release of arrest records. These findings indicate that having a more intimate understanding of someone who has committed a crime reduces the stigmatization that occurs. In relation to the purpose of the current study, it is apparent that those who have a greater connection or understanding of offenders hold more favorable views towards offenders.

Prior literature has also shown that if people find criminals to be redeemable, they are less likely to hold punitive views. In a replication study, Burton and colleagues (2020) found that individuals who believed that offenders could change and maintain productive lives generally were in favor of policies that helped reintegrate offenders and were less in favor of harsh punitive policies targeted against offenders (Burton *et al*, 2020; Maruna & King, 2009). Finding ways to show that offenders are redeemable may have profound effects on individuals by minimizing their negative attitudes towards offenders.

Media and Public Perception

Television can help shape our perceptions of others, including, but not limited to, offenders. Through watching television shows, news, and other forms of media, stereotypes and ideas about others are formed. According to the cultivation theory, there is clear evidence that TV consumption has a direct influence on people's attitudes and stereotypes towards others (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner (1998) argued that when a person is exposed to media and television at higher rates, they are more likely to internalize those perceptions about individuals believe those television portrayals as true.

Several studies have examined how media, particularly television consumption, affects the creation of stereotypes. Lee and colleagues (2009) found that college students who watched shows that portray certain negative racial and ethnic stereotypes were more likely to adopt those stereotypes. Dong and Murrillo (2007) showed that white Americans who view TV shows about Hispanic Americans tend to generate views about the latter group based on the TV portrayal, usually leading to negative stereotypes. However, these negative views are mitigated through real-life interactions with Hispanic Americans. Consequently, news media exposure results in the development of negative stereotypes of African Americans, thus increasing racist attitudes among viewers (Dixon, 2008; Entman, 1992).

It has been argued that media has a strong influence on public perceptions surrounding criminal justice as it is the only direct experience many people have with the criminal justice system (Frost, 2010). Few studies have examined the effects of media on criminals in general, however several studies have looked at how media affects fear of crime. Watching news related to crime and crime dramas have been shown to increase a person's fear of crime (Lowry *et al.*, 2003; Romer *et al.*, 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005) and even increase self-protective measures (Custers *et al.*, 2017). Despite actual crime trends declining in the 1990's due to news media coverage of crime, people indicated a higher concern for crime than trends would indicate (Lowry *et al.*, 2003).

Further, type of programming has been shown to affect these outcomes differently regarding public perceptions of crime. Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011) found that perceptions around crime varied depending on whether the viewers consumed news, crime drama shows, or nonfiction crime programs. Those who watched nonfiction programs reported higher levels of fear of crime, likely due to the fact that these were real crimes being portrayed, as opposed to fictional series which had no effect on fear of crime and do not represent actual crimes. Similarly, Dowler (2003) found that those who watched crime shows displayed higher levels of fear of crime and more punitive attitudes towards criminals.

Media portrayal of the black criminal stereotype has also been shown to have a large effect on creating and sustaining stereotypes about criminals. Media has a tendency to portray black criminal as opposed to white criminals and blacks suspects as more dangerous and violent than white suspects (Oliver, 2003). Whites who have been exposed to these images are more likely to show more prejudiced attitudes towards blacks; these prejudices include believing black suspects as more guilty, more likely to recidivate, more deserving of being punished, and more likely to be feared than white suspects (Peffley *et al.*, 1996). Images from media have created prejudices in viewers by creating the notion of a black criminal that has been internalized by viewers; blacks are significantly more likely to be viewed as criminal compared to whites (Pager, 2003).

Ultimately, media has a clear impact on creating and sustaining stereotypes. Traditionally, media has shown the negative side of criminals, resulting in a greater fear of crime. However, today many television shows have been created to show the human side of offenders, potentially negating some of those deep-seated negative stereotypes portrayed in generations past. Individuals who view these shows that reduce negative stereotypes of offenders may be less likely to label and stigmatize offenders. These same individuals may be more likely to be accepting of those with a record and therefore be more willing to hire or rent to these individuals, reducing the collateral consequences of incarceration.

Data & Methods

In order to understand the role of media on attitudes towards criminality, a survey was administered asking questions regarding television viewing behaviors and perceptions of those with a criminal record. The survey was disseminated on several social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit) via a Qualtrics² survey in order to obtain a wide range of respondents. The survey was posted in groups for various localities such as local organizational groups across states like New York, Ohio, Florida, Maryland, and Washington D.C., among friends and family who shared to their networks, and in survey collection groups across these platforms. Of course, there are limitations with using personal social networks to increase visibility, which could bias the sample towards individuals similar to the authors, however using survey groups and local organizational groups reduces some of that bias by moving beyond the immediate social network. Responses ended up coming from 31 different states as well as Washington D.C.

Respondents needed to give informed consent in order to participate in the study. Only adults aged 18 and older were included in the survey collection since parental consent could not reliably be collected via an internet survey for those under 18. Initially, 523 responses were collected, however, due to incomplete responses, the final sample was 390. Eight respondents were not from the United States and were excluded from the analysis because the survey was specifically focused on American attitudes towards criminals.

Dependent Variables

There were two dependent variables for this study that were analyzed separately. The first asked respondents “How likely would you be to hire someone with a criminal record?” while the second question asked “Assuming you had housing to rent, how likely would you be to rent your apartment to someone with a criminal record.” The responses to these questions included a seven point Likert scale from extremely likely to extremely unlikely. The questions were specifically kept vague as to what type of crime in order to capture whatever the respondent initially thinks when they hear that a person has a criminal record. Oftentimes, employers or landlords will only see that a person has a criminal record and not proceed further to determine what the crime was (Vuolo et al., 2017); this thought process would greatly affect the decision to hire/rent. Answers for these questions were coded as 0 to 6 with 0 being extremely unlikely and 6 being extremely likely.

Independent Variables

In order to understand how shows that humanize criminality affect individuals, the authors extensively examined multiple streaming and television platforms to find shows that fit this description. Respondents were asked to indicate any show that they watched more than three episodes of, which included *Orange is the New Black*, *Prison Break*, *Wentworth*, *Girls Incarcerated*, *When They See Us*, *The Fear of 13*, *Good Girls*, *Mind Hunter*, *Shameless*, *Making a Murderer*, *The Wire*, *Ozark*, *60 Days In*, *American Crime Story*, and *Oz*. The number of shows a person has watched was added together to create a count variable of the number of prison/crime shows a person has watched ranging from 0 to 15. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of how many respondents reported watching each show. *Orange is the New Black* was the most popular show with 52.56% of the sample having seen the show.

These shows were chosen strategically to show different forms of humanity for criminal offenders. An internet search of crime shows was conducted to get an initial list of media; however many of these shows did not meet the authors criteria for selection. The shows must include storylines about incarcerated people or

² https://johncarroll.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eCzAEITgJHGg6N

people committing crimes. These shows were watched in order to determine how they portrayed offenders. Some shows, such as *Orange is the New Black*, were obvious in their humanization of offenders; these portrayals showed the hardships incarcerated people experience in their lives through strong narratives from individual offenders prior to their time in prison. Other shows were chosen for displaying the harsh reality that these inmates face while incarcerated, such of *Oz*. Understanding the realities of prison and what incarcerated people face on a daily basis could possibly elicit sympathy for these people. In addition, shows like *Shameless* were included because it shows the hard lives of characters that lead them to crime even if they do not become incarcerated. Reality shows and fictional shows were also included to account for the idea that some people may not be swayed by fictional portrayals but would be more sympathetic to hearing the stories of real offenders. These shows had relatively high viewership when they were released and focused on different humanizing aspects of criminals, incarcerated people, and formerly incarcerated people.

Table 1. Respondent Viewership

Show	N	%
60 Days In	28	7.18
American Crime Story	54	13.85
Girls Incarcerated	17	4.36
Good Girls	50	12.82
Making a Murderer	114	29.23
Mind Hunter	94	24.10
Orange is the New Black	205	52.56
Oz	28	7.18
Ozark	115	29.49
Prison Break	69	17.69
Shameless	128	32.82
The Fear of 13	5	1.28
The Wire	51	13.08
Wentworth	14	3.59
When They See Us	57	14.62

Measures to account for other media influences and time spent on media were also included in the survey. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of hours of television they watched per week. If a respondent gave a range instead of a single response, the average was taken between the minimum and maximum. A question also asked which streaming sites they used to account for access to many of the shows included in this study; these responses included Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, HBO, Starz, Showtime, along with an option for none or other services. A count variable was created for the number of streaming services a person has. While many of the popular crime series are on streaming sites, respondents were asked if they have a cable plan. A question also asked whether the respondent watches cable or streaming more. These variables capture the nature of how viewers consume media to account for differences in availability of programming.

News can also play a major role in how respondents view criminality. There has been ample evidence that news can affect the way viewers see the world, especially criminals. It has been shown that watching news regarding crime can increase fear of crime (Lowry *et al*, 2003; Romer *et al*, 2003), therefore accounting for news was important in how it may influence attitudes towards people with criminal records. Respondents were asked if they watched different primetime news sources including ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, MSNBC, and CNN.

These sources were coded as liberal or conservative based on the Media Bias chart³, therefore only Fox news was coded as conservative. A binary variable of whether or not they watched the news was also included. While evidence indicates more people are getting their news from digital sources (Forman-Katz & Matsa 2022), the current study included television news since the research was focused on television viewing behaviors. According to Forman-Katz and Matsa (2022), 65% of people get at least some of their news from television.

In addition to media viewing, other questions were asked regarding the respondents current perceptions and attitudes towards criminality. Respondents were asked “Do you know anyone who has ever been arrested?;” and “Do you know anyone who has ever been incarcerated?” These questions included a yes/no or prefer not to answer response category. These questions were included to understand individual connections to people who have committed a crime. If people know someone who has been arrested or incarcerated, they may be more empathetic towards offenders than those who have do not know anyone involved in the criminal justice system (Cecil, 2015).

Control Variables

Controls were included to account for other influences that may affect one's attitudes towards criminal records. Gender was included as studies have shown differences in punitive attitudes towards offenders across genders. However, the relationship between gender and punitiveness has been unclear (Adriaenssen & Aertsen, 2015). Three binary variable were included for males, females, and non-identifying individuals. Similarly, age was included as age has been shown to affect punitive attitudes (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Race was also included as whites have been shown to be more punitive than nonwhites (Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Four binary variables were included for white, black, Hispanic, and other race. Respondents were asked what state they lived in, so state was recoded into region variables for the north, Midwest, south, and west to account for regional differences; southern states have been shown to hold more punitive attitudes than other regions (Kutateladze, 2011; Borg, 1997).

Political affiliation was included to control for differences in attitudes based on political ideology. Conservatives and republicans generally tend to show more punitive attitudes than those who identify as liberal or democrat (Gerber & Jackson, 2015; Burton *et al*, 2020). Similar to Burton *et al* (2020), two measures were included to measure political affiliation, the first being a scale from 1 through 6, ranging from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. The second, “liberal” was a more binary measure of whether a person was liberal (1) or conservative (0). Finally, a measure for highest level of education was included to account for differences in punitive attitudes based on education. Those with higher levels of education tend to hold less punitive attitudes overall (Spiranovic *et al*, 2011; Armbrorst, 2017). Highest level of education was measured on a scale from 1 to 6: some high school, completed high school, some college, associates degree, bachelors degree, post graduate degree.

Analytic Plan

In order to analyze the effects of media on perceptions about criminals, an ordinal logistic regression with odds ratios was conducted. This method allows for analysis of an ordinal dependent variable, with coefficients interpreted as an odds ratio. Ordinal logistic regression assumes that the outcome is rank ordered and can be used to model the relationship between an ordinal response and multiple explanatory variables. Since the dependent variables are measured on a scale from 1 to 6, methods that assume a continuous variable would not accurately measure these relationships and would be subject to measuring error.

³ <https://adfontesmedia.com/>

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (N=390)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Hire	3.379487	1.430332	0	6
Rent	3.202564	1.594494	0	6
Number of Crime Shows	2.674359	2.304374	0	15
Age	37.9359	15.16248	18	83
Male	0.2487179	0.4328252	0	1
Female	0.7384615	0.440037	0	1
Other Sex	0.0128205	0.1126441	0	1
White	0.825641	0.3799052	0	1
Black	0.0615385	0.2406241	0	1
Hispanic	0.0641026	0.2452502	0	1
Other Race	0.0487179	0.2155543	0	1
Education Level	5.089744	1.026461	1	6
Democrat	0.7641026	0.4251038	0	1
Political Affiliation	4.417949	1.361304	1	6
South	0.2282051	0.4202146	0	1
North	0.2051282	0.404314	0	1
West	0.0589744	0.2358793	0	1
Midwest	0.5076923	0.500583	0	1
Number of Streaming Services	3.061538	1.3011	0	7
Use Streaming Sites	0.1051282	0.3071125	0	1
Cable	0.4615385	0.4991589	0	1
Cable More	0.1307692	0.3375809	0	1
Stream More	0.7076923	0.4554072	0	1
Cable and Streaming Equal	0.1615385	0.3684996	0	1
Hours Watched	14.52051	11.43742	0	70
News	0.4538462	0.4985048	0	1
Liberal News	0.3871795	0.487731	0	1
Arrest	0.828205	0.377687	0	1
Incarcerate	0.623077	0.485238	0	1

Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics for the data. Some important points to note are that the majority of respondents fell in the middle, where they neither were likely or unlikely to support hiring or renting, on the Likert scale. 168 respondents were in the middle for likelihood to hire while 122 respondents were in the middle for likelihood to rent. Figures one and two show the distribution for each of these independent variables. Additionally, it is important to note that almost three quarters of the sample is female and 86% is white, which does not genuinely reflect the larger population. Respondents also only reported an average of 2.64 shows watched out of 15 popular options at the time the survey was conducted.

Figure 1. Likelihood of Hiring Someone With a Criminal Record

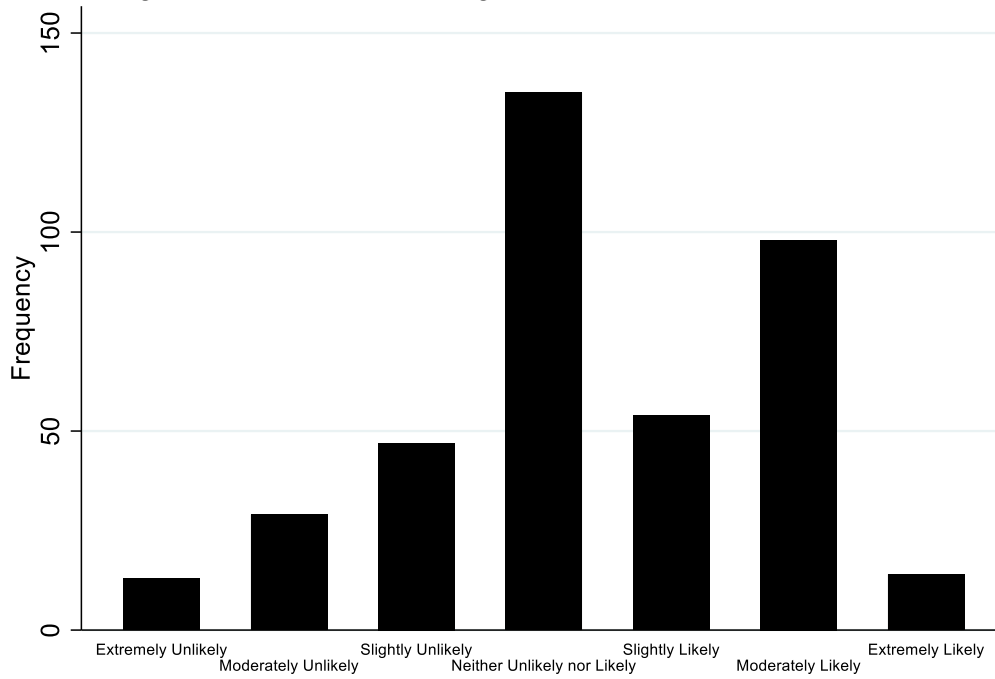
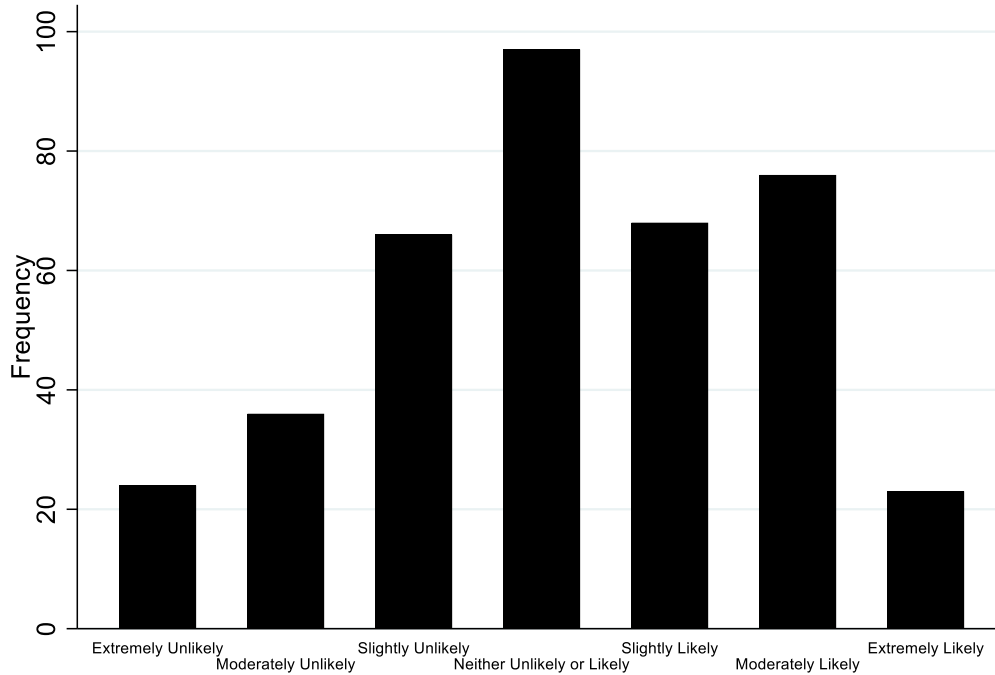


Figure 2. Likelihood of Renting to Someone With a Criminal Record



Results

Using an ordinal logistic regression analysis, two outcomes were analyzed: the likelihood that a person would hire someone with a criminal record and the likelihood that someone would rent to a person with a criminal record. Table 3 displays the odds ratios for how the number of crime shows a person watches affects the likelihood of hiring a person with a criminal record. Model one includes demographic information as well as media consumption variables, while model 2 includes personal interactions with the criminal justice system asking the respondent if they know anyone who has been arrested or incarcerated. Finally, model 3 includes all covariates, adding respondents' own views regarding offenders to measure punitive attitudes.

TABLE 3. ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION PREDICTING THE ODDS OF HIRING SOMEONE WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD (N=390)

HIRE	Odds Ratio Standard Error	Odds Ratio Standard Error
NUMBER OF CRIME SHOWS	1.12** 0.05	1.10* 0.05
AGE	1.00 0.01	1.00 0.01
MALE	--	--
FEMALE	0.64* 0.14	0.70 0.16
OTHER SEX	1.11 1.04	0.78 0.75
WHITE	--	--
BLACK	0.96 0.41	0.87 0.37
HISPANIC	1.04 0.39	0.88 0.33
OTHER RACE	1.46 0.68	1.53 0.72
EDUCATION LEVEL	1.10 0.10	1.04 0.10
DEMOCRAT	0.52 0.23	0.42+ 0.19
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	2.01*** 0.30	2.20*** 0.33
SOUTH	1.77* 0.43	1.65* 0.40
NORTH	1.70* 0.42	1.67* 0.41
WEST	1.31 0.57	1.26 0.55
MIDWEST	--	--

NUMBER OF STREAMING SERVICES	1.07 0.09	1.09 0.09
USE STREAMING SITES	0.89 0.30	0.84 0.28
CABLE	0.56* 0.14	0.51** 0.13
CABLE MORE	1.09 0.41	1.07 0.40
STREAM MORE	0.74 0.24	0.66 0.21
CABLE AND STREAMING EQUAL	--	--
HOURS WATCHED	1.01 0.01	1.01 0.01
NEWS	1.47 0.58	1.24 0.49
LIBERAL NEWS	0.85 0.33	0.85 0.33
ARREST	--	1.11 0.35
INCARCERATE	--	2.17*** 0.52
p <.10⁺; p <.05[*]; p <.01^{**}; p<.001^{***}		

Based on the results from the analysis, as a person watches more crime shows, they are more likely to be willing to hire someone with a criminal record. After controlling for all covariates, with each additional show watched the odds someone would hire a criminal increases by 1.10 in model 3. After controlling for prejudices towards criminals, the odds ratio decreases from 1.12 to 1.10, revealing that prejudice towards criminals plays a role in the likelihood in which a person would hire someone with a criminal record. Those who support a felony check box on employment applications, those who support that those with a criminal record should not receive financial aid or welfare, and those who believe convicted criminals should not be allowed voting rights were at a lower odds of hiring someone with a criminal record, though only the application box and financial aid variables were statistically significant. Interestingly, those who support a public housing ban were at a higher odds of hiring someone with a criminal record, though this could be due to the fact that only 13 respondents favored public housing bans. If a respondent knew a person who has been incarcerated, there is a 2.03 greater odds that they would hire someone with a criminal record. Additionally, when a person is liberal, the odds of hiring someone with a criminal record increases by 1.76.

When examining the odds that a person would rent to someone with a criminal record, results differ slightly from the former analysis. Results from this model are presented in table 4. In models one and two, the effect of the number of crime shows watched is statistically significant with a positive odds ratio. In other words, as a person watches more crime shows, there is a 1.09 (1.08) greater odds that they will rent to a person with a criminal record. However, after controlling for all of the covariates in the model, model three shows that the odds ratio is no longer statistically significant. Consistent with the first analysis on the likelihood to hire

someone with a criminal record, the same covariates predict the likelihood to rent to someone with a criminal record and in the same direction.

TABLE 4. ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION PREDICTING THE ODDS OF RENTING TO SOMEONE WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD (N=390)

RENT	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
	Standard Error	Standard Error
NUMBER OF CRIME SHOWS	1.09*	1.08 ⁺
	0.05	0.05
AGE	1.00	1.00
	0.01	0.01
MALE	--	--
FEMALE	0.83	0.93
	0.18	0.20
OTHER SEX	1.29	0.99
	1.26	0.99
WHITE	--	--
BLACK	1.49	1.41
	0.59	0.56
HISPANIC	0.57	0.49 ⁺
	0.21	0.18
OTHER RACE	1.36	1.43
	0.59	0.63
EDUCATION LEVEL	0.90	0.87
	0.09	0.08
DEMOCRAT	0.83	0.77
	0.37	0.34
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	1.93***	2.02***
	0.28	0.30
SOUTH	1.66*	1.54 ⁺
	0.39	0.36
NORTH	1.14	1.09
	0.28	0.27
WEST	0.77	0.72
	0.31	0.29
MIDWEST	--	--
NUMBER OF STREAMING SERVICES	1.09	1.10
	0.09	0.09
USE STREAMING SITES	1.08	1.06
	0.35	0.34
CABLE	0.60*	0.57*
	0.15	0.15
CABLE MORE	1.26	1.25

	0.47	0.47
STREAM MORE	1.03	0.96
	0.33	0.31
CABLE AND STREAMING EQUAL	--	--
HOURS WATCHED	1.00	1.00
	0.01	0.01
NEWS	1.87	1.65
	0.75	0.66
LIBERAL NEWS	0.81	0.82
	0.32	0.32
ARREST	--	1.40
		0.41
INCARCERATE	--	1.82***
		0.42
p <.10+; p <.05*; p <.01**; p<.001***		

Discussion

Media often shapes and influences the way people view the world, therefore it is not surprising to find that watching crime shows that portray the human side of criminal offenders affects the way viewers perceive the stigma associated with offending. Many modern crime shows have moved away from showing offenders as dangerous hardened criminals and tend to show the hardships offenders face. *Orange is the New Black* is a show that really highlights the various backgrounds of criminal offenders; in the current study 52.5% of the sample had seen *Orange is the New Black*. Many of these episodes deep dive into the issues facing communities, hardships faced by individuals, and the difficulty of reentering society after incarceration. Seeing these images of people struggling in a system that seems to work against them at every step can create empathy and understanding towards people who have been convicted of a crime and incarcerated. Results from the current study supported this hypothesis revealing that those who watched more of a selected group of crime shows held more favorable views of offenders by being more willing to hire and/or rent to someone with a criminal record.

Females were at a lower likelihood to hire someone with a criminal record. It is possible that females would feel more vulnerable than males when interacting with an offender, particularly in the workplace. There was no difference in gender attitudes regarding renting to someone with a criminal record, which would indicate that the gender effect may only be present when the individual would have to interact regularly with an offender. Those who identified as more liberal were much more willing to hire or rent to someone with a criminal record. In general, those who are more liberal tend to hold more progressive views and tend to be less punitive (Payne *et al*, 2004).

Those who held more punitive beliefs, specifically wanting to keep the felony check box on employment applications and those who believe that financial aid should be banned for those with a criminal record, were less likely to report that they would hire or rent to someone with a criminal record. On the other hand, if a person knew someone who had been incarcerated, they were more likely to be willing to employ or rent to someone with a criminal record; interestingly, there was no effect of knowing someone who has been arrested. It is expected that those who hold more punitive attitudes would hold less favorable views towards offenders, while those who personally know someone who has experienced prison would be more empathetic and

understanding. It is possible that knowing someone who has been arrested did not affect one's willingness to employ or hire someone with a criminal record as arrests may not lead to convictions or may be due to what is considered a minor infraction that respondents did not attribute to what they picture as someone with a criminal record.

Dowler (2003) argued for the need to study different types of television programming; the current trend in modern media has allowed for research to focus on positive images of offenders compared to prior shows that focused more on the negative aspects of criminality. The current study exemplifies the beginning of a much-needed avenue of research that can further understand how humanizing offenders could affect perceptions of criminals. There is clear evidence that media shapes perceptions about groups in society, which can be quite harmful (Cecil, 2015). The findings presented in this study show that those who watch shows like *Orange is the New Black*, are more likely to hold favorable attitudes towards offenders.

Encouraging producers to continue making these types of shows about offenders and increasing the number of documentaries that focus on the hardships incarcerated people have faced could have a potentially large impact on society. With the easy access to streaming platforms that have become increasingly popular today, more people are viewing a diverse set of shows beyond the normal cable television repertoire (Kohli, 2020). Viewers have also been shown to watch streaming shows based on popularity to gain a sense of camaraderie with peers (Lüders, 2022), thus increasing the availability of these humanizing crime shows will likely increase the broader audience due to the need to connect with peers who have seen the shows and are talking about them. Perhaps through the push for streaming services to produce these crime shows and documentaries, opinions towards offenders could be swayed leading to hire rates of employment and housing for offenders.

Conclusions

The current study adds to the literature by focusing on specific types of crime shows to determine if watching these shows affects attitudes and behaviors towards those with a criminal record. Prior literature on the effects of watching crime shows has typically asked respondents if they watch "crime shows" as a general term with no identification as to what specific shows they do watch (e.g. Dowler, 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Kort-Butler and Hartshorn, 2011). Unlike prior findings that showed how watching crime shows had a negative effect on people, the current study found that watching humanizing crime shows improved individual attitudes towards convicted people.

The current findings suggest that increasing the amount of media present that shows the human side of criminal offenders and fosters empathy towards those who have committed a crime could reduce the negative stigma associated with crime. Two major barriers to successful re-entry into society for a formerly incarcerated person are housing and employment. Respondents who watched crime-related television shows were more likely to be willing to employ and/or hire a person with a criminal record. With two thirds of offenders recidivating after release from a correctional institution (Durose & Antenangeli, 2021), there must be steps taken to help reduce the likelihood of recidivating. By reducing the stigma associated with a criminal record, the reentry process can be smoother and more successful, reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Any and all steps to help eliminate this stigma should be taken, including changing the way media portrays people who have committed a crime.

Future Directions and Limitations

Future research should not only look at whether someone would hire or rent to someone with a criminal record, but should create scenarios for different crime types. Payne *et al* (2004) found that punitive attitudes

vary by crime type. Although this study was intentionally left ambiguous since often employers and landlords do not see the type of crime that was committed before dismissing an applicant for having a criminal record, it would be beneficial to know if type of crime matters. Perhaps if the felony check box never gets removed from applications, an explanation could be required to help understand more about a person before dismissing them.

Additionally, the study should be extended to a larger audience. Social media was used to reach respondents for the survey, leading to a sample that was 75% female, 82% white, and 50% from the Midwest. Generating more diversity and a larger sample would more accurately represent the broader population of the United States.

Finally, research should examine individual changes in attitudes after watching crime shows that humanize offenders. The current study could not access changes in attitudes, therefore there may be selection bias in those who chose to watch these crime shows; those who watch these shows could hold less punitive attitudes initially. Monitoring changes in attitudes can help guide media creators in determining what content to share. If findings confirm the current studies findings that those who watch these shows hold less punitive attitudes, then increasing the quantity of these shows and making them available on multiple platforms could have profound effects on people with a criminal record by increasing the likelihood of employment and finding housing.

References

- Adriaenssen, A. & Aertsen, I. (2015). Punitive attitudes: Towards an operationalization to measure individual punitivity in a multidimensional way. *European Journal of Criminology*, 12(1), 92-112.
- Agan, A., & Starr, S. (2017). The effects of criminal records on access to employment. *American Economic Review*, 105(5), 560-564.
- Archer, D. (2019). The new housing segregation: The Jim Crow effects of crime-free housing ordinances. *Michigan Law Review*, 118-173-231.
- Armborst, A. (2017). How fear of crime affects punitive attitudes. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 23, 461-481.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders; studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press of Glencoe.
- Bobo, L. & Johnson, D. (2004). A taste for punishment: Black and white Americans' views on the death penalty and the war on drugs. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 1(1), 151-180.
- Borg, M. (1997). The Southern subculture of punitiveness? Regional variation in support for capital punishment. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34(1), 25-45.
- Burton, A., Cullen, F., Burton, V., Graham, A., Butler, L., & Thielo, A. (2020). Belief in redeemability and punitive public opinion: "Once a criminal, always a criminal" revisited. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(6), 712-732.
- Butler, L. & Hartshorn, K. (2011). Watching the detectives: Crime programming, fear of crime, and attitudes about the criminal justice system. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 52, 36-55.
- Caret, C. (2005). No second change: People with criminal records denied access to public housing. *University of Toledo Law Review*, 36(3): 545-594.
- Cecil, D. (2015). *Prison life in popular culture: From the Big House to Orange is the New Black*, Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO.
- Cecil, D. (2017). *Prison Life and Popular Culture*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia for Criminology and Criminal Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chin, G. (2017). Collateral consequences of criminal conviction. *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society*, 18(3), 1-16.
- Curtis, M., Garlington, S., Schottenfeld, L. (2013). *Cityscape*, 15(3), 37-52.
- Custers, K., Hall, E., Smith, S., McNallie, J. (2017). The indirect association between television exposure and self-protective behavior as a result of worry about crime: The moderating role of gender. *Mass Communication and Society*, 20, 637-662.
- Denver, M., Pickett, J., & Bushway, S. (2018). *Justice Quarterly*, 35(4), 584-613.
- Dixon, T. (2008). Network news and racial beliefs: Exploring the connection between national television news exposure and stereotypical perceptions of African Americans. *Journal of Communication*, 58(2): 231-337.
- Dong, Q. & Murrillo, A. (2007). The impact of television viewing on young adults' stereotypes towards Hispanic Americans. *Human Communication*, 10(1), 33-44.
- Dowler, K. (2003). Media consumption and public attitudes toward crime and justice: The relationship between fear of crime, punitive attitudes, and perceived police effectiveness. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 10(2), 109-126.
- Durose, M. & Antenangeli, L. (2021). *Recidivism of prisoners released in 34 states in 2012: A 5-year follow-up period (2012-2017)*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/rpr34s125yfup1217.pdf>
- Entman, R. (1992). Blacks in the news: Television, modern racism and cultural chance. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 69(2), 341-361.

- Evans, D., Blount-Hill, K,m & Cubellis, M. (2019). Examining housing discrimination across race, gender, and felony history. *Housing Studies*, 34(5), 761-778.
- Evans, D., Porter, J. (2015). Criminal history and landlord rental decisions: A New York quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 11(1), 21-42.
- Forman-Katz, N. & Matsa, K. (2022). News Platform Fact Sheer. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet/>
- Forst, N. (2010). Beyond public opinion polls: Punitive public sentiment & criminal justice policy. *Sociology Compass*, 4(3), 156-168.
- Gerber, M. & Jackson, J. (2015). Authority and punishment: On the ideological basis of punitive attitudes towards criminals. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 23(1), 113-134.
- Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication and Society*, 1, 175–194.
- Hirschfield, P., & Piquero, A. (2010). Normalizing and legitimation: Modelling stigmatizing attitudes towards ex-offenders. *Criminology*, 48(1), 27-55.
- Holbrook, R. & Hill, T. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: Crime dramas as political cues, political communication. *Political Communication*, 22, 277-295.
- Ispa-Landa, S. & Loeffler, C. (2016). Indefinite punishment ad the criminal record: Stigma reports among expungement-seekers in Illinois. *Criminology*, 54(3): 384-412.
- Kirk, D. & Wakefield, S. (2018). Collateral consequences of punishment: A critical review and path forward. *Annual Reviews of Criminology*, 1, 171-194.
- Kohli, C. (2020). The Replacement of conventional television by streaming services. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management*, 3(10), 59-67.
- Krantz-Kent, R. (2018). Television, capturing America’s attention at prime time and beyond. *Special Studies and Research*, 7(14): Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-7/television-capturing-americas-attention.htm>
- Kutateladze, B. (2011). Measuring state punitiveness in the United States. In H. Kury & E. Shea (Eds.), *Punitivity- International Developments (Vol.1: Punitiveness- A Global Phenomenon?, pp. 151-177)*. Bochum, Germany.
- Lageson, S., Denver, M., Pickett, J. (2019). Privatizing criminal stigma: Experience, intergroup contact, and public views about publicizing arrest records. *Punishment & Society*, 21(3), 315-341.
- La Vigne, N. G., Visser, C. & Castro, J. L. (2004) Chicago prisoners’ experiences returning home. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42831/311115-Chicago-Prisoners-Experiences-Returning-Home.PDF>
- Leasure, P. & Kaminski, R. (2020). The impact of multiple conviction record on hiring outcomes. *Crime & Delinquency*, 67(6-7), 1022-1045.
- Leasure, P. & Martin, T. (2017). Criminal records and housing: An experimental study. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 13, 537-535.
- Lee, M., Bichard, S., Irely, M., Walt, H., & Carlson, A. (2009). Television viewing and ethnic stereotypes: Do college students form stereotypical perceptions of ethnic groups as a result of heavy television consumption? *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 20, 95-110.
- Lemert, E. (1951). *Social pathology: A systematic approach to the theory of sociopathic behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lowry, D., Nio, T., Leitner, D. (2003). Setting the public fear agenda: A longitudinal analysis of network TV crime reporting, public perceptions of crime, and FBI crime statistics. *Journal of Communication*, 53(1), 61-73.
- Lüders, M. (2022). Self-determined or controlled, seeking pleasure, or meaning? Identifying what makes viewers enjoy watching television on streaming services. *Poetics*, 92(B), 1-12.

- Maruna, S., & King, A. (2009). Once a criminal, always a criminal? “Redeemability” and the psychology of punitive public attitudes. *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research*, 15(1–2), 7–24.
- Ockerman, E. (2016). Nielsen unveils ratings data for Orange Is The New Black. *Time*, retrieved from <https://time.com/4390234/nielsen-orange-is-the-new-black/> on April 5, 2022.
- Oliver, M. (2003). African American men as “criminal and dangerous”: Implications of media portrayals of crime on the “criminalization” of African American men. *Journal of African American Studies*, 7(2), 3-18.
- Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(5), 937-975.
- Pager, D., Western, B., & Sugie, N. (2009). Sequencing disadvantage: Barriers to employment facing young black and white men with criminal records. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 623(1), 195-213.
- Payne, B., Gainey, R., Triplett, R., & Danner, M. (2004). What drives punitive beliefs?: Demographic characteristics and justifications for sentencing. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 32, 195-206.
- Peffley, M., Shields, T., & Williams, B. (1996). The intersection of race and crime in television news stories: An experimental study. *Political Communication*, 13, 309-327.
- Pettit, B. & Lyons, C. Incarceration and the legitimate labor market: Examining age-graded effects on employment and wages. *Law & Society Review*, 43(4), 725-756.
- Pew Charitable Trusts (2018). Probation and parole systems marked by high stakes, missed opportunities. Retrieved from: https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/09/probation_and_parole_systems_marked_by_high_stakes_missed_opportunities_pew.pdf
- Pinsker, J. (December 6, 2018). How do American families have time to watch 8 hours of TV every day? *The Atlantic*, Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/12/tv-popular-americans-free-time/577468/>
- Rodriguez, M.N., & Avery, B. (2016). Unlicensed & untapped: Removing barriers to state occupational licenses for people with records. Retrieved from: <https://www.nelp.org/publication/unlicensed-untapped-removing-barriers-state-occupational-licenses/> December 1, 2021.
- Romer, D., Jamieson, K., Aday, S. (2003). Television news and the cultivation of fear of crime. *Journal of Communication*, 53(1), 88-104.
- Schur, E. (1971). Labeling deviant behavior: Its sociological implications. Harper & Row.
- Silva, L. (2015). Criminal histories in public housing. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 2, 375-398.
- Spiranovic, C., Roberts, L., & Indermaur, D. (2011). What predicts punitiveness? An examination of predictors of punitive attitudes towards offenders in Australia. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 19(2), 249-261.
- The Sentencing Project. (n.d.). Criminal justice facts. Retrieved from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>
- Uggen, C., Vuolo, M., Lageson, S., Ruhland, E., Whitham, H. (2014). The edge of stigma: An experimental audit of the effects of low-level criminal records on employment. *Criminology*, 52(4), 627-654.
- Vuolo, M., Lageson, S., & Uggen, C. (2017). Criminal record questions in the era of “Ban the Box.” *American Society of Criminology*, 16(1), 139-165.
- Warr, M. (1994). Public perceptions and reactions to violent offending and victimization. In Albert J. Reiss, Jr., and Jeffrey A. Roth. (ed.) *Understanding and preventing violence*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press
- Western, B. (2002). The impact of incarceration on wage mobility and inequality. *American Sociological Review*, 67(4), 526-546.