

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

THE MONSTER IN OUR MIDST:  
SOCIETY'S PERSPECTIVES OF CONVICTED FELONS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES PROGRAM  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JOSE PEREZ

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
MAY 2021

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Contents   |          |
| <b>Abstract</b>  | <b>i</b> |
| <b>Chapter 1: The monster in our midst: Society's perspectives of Convicted felons</b> | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction   | 1        |
| Frankenstein, criminality and the convicted felon                                      | 3        |
| Mass incarceration in the US   | 5        |
| Victor Frankenstein and the U.S. criminal justice system                               | 8        |
| The creation of the monster by the Society   | 11       |
| Being a convicted felon in today's technological society                               | 15       |
| Research Questions   | 16       |
| Significance of the Study  | 18       |
| Working Hypothesis   | 18       |
| <b>Chapter 2: The journey to Re-integration</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction   | 1        |
| Reintegration of ex-felons   | 2        |
| Reintegration of the Monster vs convicted felon  | 3        |
| History of reintegration   | 5        |
| Reintegrative shaming  | 6        |
| Degradation ceremonies   | 7        |
| Labeling theory  | 8        |
| Reintegration within the community   | 10       |
| Eligibility in the reintegration of ex-felons  | 12       |
| Does reintegration work?   | 16       |
| Communicating reintegration  | 18       |
| <b>Chapter 3: Social inclusion of ex-felons upon release from prison</b>               | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction   | 1        |
| Relationship between Frankenstein and the convicted felon                              | 1        |
| Social exclusion of convicted felons   | 5        |
| Employment   | 6        |
| Voting rights  | 10       |
| Political participation  | 15       |
| Housing  | 16       |

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Access to education .....  | 20       |
| Expungement and sealing of criminal records .....  | 23       |
| Re-integration experiences of ex-felons within the domains of social inclusion.....                                    | 25       |
| <b>Chapter 4: Community Support Towards Re-Integration of Ex-Felons.....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 1        |
| Community knowledge of crime and justice.....  | 2        |
| Society's attitude towards crime and justice .....   | 8        |
| Models of community reintegration of ex-felons.....  | 12       |
| Ex-felons' reintegration and the community readiness model.....  | 17       |
| <b>Chapter 5: The role of the community in reintegration through the Civic engagement model of reintegration .....</b> | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 1        |
| Community engagement of ex-felons .....  | 2        |
| Conceptualizing community readiness to accept felons .....   | 4        |
| Civic engagement model of reintegration .....  | 7        |
| Community role in reintegration .....  | 8        |
| Re-integration experiences of ex-felons: Contemporary perspective .....  | 11       |
| Employment barriers .....  | 12       |
| Housing barriers .....   | 14       |
| Education barriers .....   | 15       |
| Resources and health barriers.....   | 16       |
| Family support.....  | 18       |
| Ex-felons' responsibility .....  | 19       |
| Employer's perspective .....   | 20       |
| Conclusion.....  | 22       |
| <b>Chapter 6: Consequences of Prisonization on Reintegration .....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....   | 1        |
| Prisonization and re-integration .....   | 5        |
| The consequences of prisonization on Reintegration.....  | 8        |
| The lived experiences of prerelease expectations .....   | 10       |
| Preparation for post-Incarceration.....  | 11       |
| Long-term pre-release expectations of felons .....   | 12       |

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Lived experiences of the stigma of a criminal record .....                                      | 14       |
| The Impact of Prisonization on Reintegration .....  | 20       |
| Conclusion.....   | 21       |
| <b>Chapter 7: The community’s lived experiences with ex-felons’ reintegration process .....</b> | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 1        |
| The role of the community in crime prevention.....  | 3        |
| Community Strategies towards successful reintegration .....                                     | 5        |
| Employers’ perspective towards ex-felons .....  | 8        |
| Barriers to employment among ex-felons .....  | 10       |
| Employers perceptions and attitudes about their willingness to hire ex-felons .....             | 11       |
| Housing officers’ attitudes and perceptions towards ex-felons .....                             | 14       |
| Community attitudes and perceptions towards ex-felons .....                                     | 15       |
| Ex-felons reentry during the COVID-19 Pandemic.....   | 18       |
| Summary .....   | 19       |
| <b>Chapter 8: The perceived role of media in reintegration.....</b>                             | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 1        |
| The reintegration situation .....   | 3        |
| The re-integration experience.....  | 6        |
| The damaging role of Media on ex-felons .....   | 9        |
| The positive influence of Mass media on the post-prison situation of ex-felons.....             | 14       |
| Ex-felons’ perceptions on the role of media in their re-entry experience .....                  | 15       |
| Summary .....   | 18       |
| <b>Chapter 9: Policies and programs supporting reintegration of ex-felons .....</b>             | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 1        |
| Ex-felon reintegration: Policies, Practices and their shortcomings.....                         | 2        |
| Housing.....  | 2        |
| Employment.....   | 5        |
| Substance abuse treatment.....  | 12       |
| Mental health Treatment.....  | 14       |
| Other alternative programs and policies that are in place .....                                 | 16       |
| What Can Policy-Makers do to Improve Prisoner Reentry Outcomes?.....                            | 18       |
| Summary .....   | 19       |

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Chapter 10: Conclusion of the Monster.....</b>                   | <b>1</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 1        |
| Summary of findings .....   | 3        |
| Consequences of a criminal record in the context of the study ..... | 3        |
| Society exclusion of ex-felons.....                                 | 5        |
| Barriers towards successful re-integration of Ex-felons .....       | 6        |
| Employment opportunities for ex-felons .....                        | 6        |
| Ex-felons right to vote .....                                       | 8        |
| The need for decent housing for ex-felons.....                      | 10       |
| Ex-felons need access to education opportunities.....               | 11       |
| Why do we need society re-integration of ex-felons?.....            | 12       |
| Society support for reintegration.....                              | 13       |
| Strengths and limitations of the study .....                        | 16       |
| Study Implications and conclusion .....                             | 17       |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>   | <b>i</b> |

## List of Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. The three-part Ecological Model (Chapter 4).....  | 14 |
| Figure 2. The Community Readiness Model (Chapter 4) .....   | 18 |
| Figure 3. A continuum of Community engagement in re-integration based on stakeholders' involvement (Chapter 5). ..... | 10 |
| Figure 4. The Post-Prison Situation Placed (Chapter 8) .....  | 4  |

## **Abstract**

Convicted felons are dubbed "monsters", and according to society, they lack the qualifications for being considered human. This relates to the prevalent issue of mass incarceration, the stigmatization of convicted offenders, and the labels that society bestows upon them. Similarly, society excludes, and caricatures convicted felons, assuming they will never change or improve their life. This study explored society's perception of convicted felons as "monsters" which can be compared to Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel to exemplify society's error. In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the creature's identification as a monster is linked to isolation, misperception, and societal rejection, and this plays a major role in the development of the creature's identity as a monster. This study finds that policymakers across the United States have proposed several strategies to reintegrate ex-felons into their local communities, however, these policies have resulted in mixed effects. Besides, it is easier said than done to increase community involvement and supporting the reintegration of ex-felons. Yet, this study contends that similar to Frankenstein, ex-felons recidivate as a result of the social marginalization they face after being released from jail. Thus, ex-felons' criminal behavior is strongly intertwined with social rejection, which, according to society, is only related to their earlier misdeeds and not their outward appearances. As a result, as long as society continues to criticize ex-felons by labeling them as monsters, any initiatives put in place will not improve recidivism rates, because ex-felons will continue to commit crimes as a result of the rejection they experience in society. In conclusion, this shows that the reality of the problem is at the community level and that policymakers should focus their attention on educating the community on the importance of forgiving ex-felons, accepting them back into society, and not judging or labeling them based on their previous criminal activities, for successful reintegration.

## **Chapter 1: The monster in our midst: Society's perspectives of Convicted felons**

### **Introduction**

Convicted felons have been labelled as “monsters” in current society. This is especially true with convicted felons who have committed offences such as rape, murder, robbery with violence among others. Monsters have been used as metaphors to reveal what society finds to be abhorrent about its people as well as representing their fears and ways of coping with these fears (Beasley, Chris, and Heather Brook 2019, 1). Monsters embody some of the elements within society that are antisocial and those that have been pushed to the fringes either by law, justice or even reason (Baldick 1987, 15-23). Society considers a monster as lacking the requirements that are necessary for one to be considered as being human. On the other hand, a convicted felon is a person who is convicted following the committing of a felony (Moore et al. 2016, 1). Note that a felony, in the United States, is a serious crime or offense causing harm to society and its punishment is by death or imprisonment exceeding one year. Brockman (2010, 819-833), while studying the perceptions and responses of convicted sex offenders to their social status, noted that society has labelled them as deviant and generally sees them as “monsters”. Another study by Simon (1998, 456) states: “sex offenders are our modern-day monsters, producing tidal waves of public demand”. This study, however, argues for the labelling of felons who have committed crimes that are not sexually related, violent, and causing death. Yet, the study remains mindful that if a person is a convicted felon, it's because they did something wrong. There is no objection towards punishment, but what they believe is that just like in any other system, the U.S. criminal justice system has flaws. If one commits a crime and violates the law, they should be punished without any exceptions. However,

the punishment should fit the crime and the sentence should only last until it is mandated by law. Upon successful completion of the sentence or punishment, the person should be free to begin a new life without any obstacles or judgments. Reprimanding and rehabilitating criminal offenders should aim to help them become better people in society. Society has an obligation to the felons to help them get back on track with their lives and help them become productive members of society.

Unfortunately, society excludes convicted felons, stereotypes them, and assumes they will never change or better their lives. *The case of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.*" (Lamb 1992, 303) displays this error by society. The society's views of convicted felons as "monsters" can be compared to the Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel. In the book by Lamb, *"Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's monstrous myth."* (Lamb 1992, 303), the society turns the creature into a monster due to its reactions towards its physical appearance. It is rejected by the creators, hence suffers exclusion from society. Crook (2012, 115-118) indicates that the monster is an indicator of how society alienates people based on specific characteristics that they possess. The convicted felon faces rejection by all; people he loves, and the entire society. Similarly, to how Frankenstein's creature is depicted as a monster, convicted felons face similar predicaments when trying to reintegrate back into society after incarceration. They suffer discrimination in all aspects of their lives; from serving on juries to the right to vote, finding proper housing and finding the right employment (Pogorzelski et al. 2005, 1719).

In current society, this relates to the widespread issue of massive incarceration, the stigmatization of convicted felons and the labels that society places upon them. Similarly, society's relating of crime to monstrosity underlines that convicted felons are modern-day monsters (Reitz 2005, 1787). The felon's appearance causes society to reject him and deprives him of the opportunity to display



his inner goodness. This hurts the felon and chases them away from society. Using Frankenstein's creature as an example, Mary Shelley guides society through a process entailing miscreants' development of an immoral character (Aguirre 2013, 4-15; Lamb 1992, 305). Through Frankenstein's, she desires that society realizes that there exists more to a delinquent than a desire to do the wrong thing (Brook 1993, 200-204). This study will explore how society conceptualizes the human nature of the convicted felon based on their appearance before examining their human nature. In this regard, the convicted felon is viewed as a monster and has been socially alienated from society. Society seems to forget that convicted felons have a past, they have endured hardships that led them to commit the crimes (Kim et al. 2015, 598). This is similar to how Frankenstein was driven to resentment and murder due to constant rejection from society. Frankenstein, therefore, symbolizes today's convicted felon and the adversities which they face that results in their moral downfall.

### **Frankenstein, criminality and the convicted felon**

Frankenstein is a novel that was composed by Mary Shelley and presents the story of a scientist Victor Frankenstein who during one of his trials made a creation in the form of a beast (Lamb 1992, 307). Unfortunately, this beast that Victor makes ends up being an inconvenience to him. Interestingly, this creation was depicted as a human and had all the feelings and emotions even though due to his beast-like appearance the people dreaded and abhorred him (Marshall 2001, 98). In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the identification of the creature as a monster is related to isolation, misinterpretation and societal rejection (Frankenstein 1979). The facing of societal rejection plays a major role in the development of the creature's identity as a monster. Frankenstein is horrified when he sees the dull and yellow eye of this creature. He further tries to describe how horrifying the creature looked ... "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of

muscles and arteries beneath”. The hair and teeth are described as having “formed a horrid contrast with his watery eyes, which seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight, black lips”. On arriving at the villages, the creature roused everyone in the village. Some women fainted while children shrieked, others ran away and some attacked the creature. The creature was attacked using stones and other missiles while resisted in bruises. This led to his running away, and the desire to gain revenge increased in the creature.

Mary Shelley indicates that “He ran away and “fearfully took refuge in a low hovel”. (p. 83). At this point, the creature is aware that not only his creator, Frankenstein, rejects him, but also the entire village is against him. The creature felt miserable due to the barbarity of the people he thought he could trust. He realizes two things, first that society hates him. Second, that attacking others in the villages is considered to be normal. Since his creation, he has not witnessed any form of kindness and does not even realize that kindness exists. This is because whenever he comes into contact with people, they are violent towards him.

The criminology aspect of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* relates to Dr Victor Frankenstein’s physiognomic prejudice and the discourse of the creature which illustrates social exclusion as the main cause of it being mischievous. However, Frankenstein associates the creature’s behaviour with its appearance. This is supported by Christian Wolf’s self-analysis in Schiller’s short story “Der Verbrecher aus Verlorene Ehre”, whereby the creature counteracts its creators’ presumptions and opts to interpret its criminal behaviour (2017). The creature’s criminal behaviour is deeply interlocked with social rejection which according to the creator have been caused by its appearance. While relating this to current society, it is evident that the criminal and monstrous nature of the creature has been created by those it vengefully hurts. Frankenstein’s

creature can be regarded as a recidivist criminal. The creature is introduced as a murderer and the people treat it differently.

Frankenstein's monster who is socially alienated and in isolation can be reasonably compared to a convicted felon who is in a prison having been isolated from society. One of the worst cruelties that humans can face is isolation. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one of the major themes is that of isolation. Frankenstein creation experiences isolation and some of its decisions and actions are rooted in its isolation. The negative consequences of the isolation of Frankenstein creation are the death of loved ones. Marshall (2001, 104) in his article "Not Forgotten: Eliza Fenning, Frankenstein, and Victorian Chivalry" noted that the reason we are making such a comparison is that society has reinforced certain stereotypes about convicted felons and well prison life. In our current society, convicted felons are considered outcasts who lack a voice. Like the convicted felon, the monster in Frankenstein as described by Marshall has no voice and is considered a monster because that is what society has defined him to be. In real life the monster is created based on people's assumptions and had he not been made to look so bad he could have been a good person (Marshall 2001, 106). Interestingly, the monster is judged by society even before it can reveal its real nature. The monster in Frankenstein resonates with a convicted felon where society has failed the convicted felon which has driven him to develop behaviors that do not match his real nature. Like the monster who is judged based on his appearance, the convicted felon may have committed a felony due to similar rejection by society.

### **Mass incarceration in the US**

Globally the U.S. leads in incarceration with over 2.2 million people in the country's prisons and jails (Shannon 2012, 1795). This increase is not explained by changes in the crime rate but rather

by changes in law and policy. The enactment of laws for incarceration for small offenses, drug-related offenses and lengthy sentences for violent offenses and other career criminals has increased incarceration rates. There has been increasing evidence stating that large-scale incarceration does not necessarily achieve public safety. Cullen et al (2011, 48S-65S) in their article “Prisons do not reduce recidivism: The high cost of ignoring science” noted that incarceration has been ineffective in certain types of crimes, yet people go to jail for these crimes.

Through mass incarceration, the county is experiencing an increased rate of recidivism with offenders re-entering the criminal justice system over and over again without the possibility of becoming productive members of society. In 2016, the cost of our corrections system was roughly \$80 billion annually (ed.gov 2016, 2), with our numbers only increasing instead of decreasing. By labeling convicted felons, we have managed to increase the unemployment rate and the re-offending rate of this group of people. Convicted felons face fewer chances of finding employment since they are stigmatized by having a criminal/violent past and being unproductive members of society (Doleac 2018). These same felons end up re-offending since their life opportunities become limited and they are forced to relapse to old habits and unwise decisions that led them to commit a crime (Durose 2014). The felon population suffer since they do not receive house assistance, financial aid, or food stamps and in some states, they are not even allowed to vote. Offenders should have the opportunity to be productive, working members of society that can take advantages of the privileges offered to other citizens. These issues have bigger implications since the criminal justice system by 2016 had more than 2.3 million people incarcerated (Wagner and Rabuy 2016, 14) for misdemeanor and felony convictions. In addition, 1 out of 7 adults have been or will be under the criminal justice system in their lifetime.

Interestingly, many politicians and leaders have profited from mass incarceration. They have promised and assured many people that mass incarceration would ensure that the streets are safer (Wagner and Rabuy 2016, 14). Yet, what they've neglected to do is pay attention to their results and outcomes. The war on drugs and the declaration of war on crime has skyrocketed our prison population and affected many families. Getting "tough on crime" not only ruined many homes but also created a bad financial situation for the country that is left to deal with people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Today, the crime policy has cost billions of dollars and irreparable damage to our criminal justice system (Western 2001, 412). If we incarcerate at a rapid rate, we should also rehabilitate and release at the same rate. This is because we are currently facing a problem with overcrowding in our prison system. For example, once these individuals are released, go home, and try to do well they are restrained and constrained due to their limited resources and endless restrictions (Western 2001, 415). Criminals and convicted felons are more likely to re-offend and go back to jail, which ends up becoming a continuing cycle that never stops. This continuing cycle keeps on occurring due to recidivism and the shortage of resources and rehabilitation services offered to newly released offenders. Gendreau, et al (2000, 11) in their article "The effects of community sanctions and incarceration on recidivism", noted that the effects of incarceration and society's labeling, and rejection linger in the lives of the felons throughout their lifespans. In current society, people do not give much thought to the humanity of a convict once the guilty verdict is issued in a courtroom. According to society, they were served with justice and since the person broke the law they have now been removed from society. Society believes that the convict is a monster and the rest of us are humans and can hence move on with our lives. However, this can be described as short-sightedness (Lockwood 2016, 57).

## **Victor Frankenstein and the U.S. criminal justice system**

Lamb (1992, 310) noted that Dr Victor's experiment resonates with the correctional process and the monster is an equivalent of the convicted felons. Victor Frankenstein creates his monster to create an invention although it ends up becoming a failure. Similarly, in 1994, Bill Clinton signed into law a bill called *Violent Crime and Control Law Enforcement Act*, which has ended up contributing to mass incarceration and longer sentencing for non-violent offenders (Merica 2015). In both examples, each creator imagined a more positive outcome for their creation. However, they both failed since these creations ended up causing major disruption and chaos. In "*Frankenstein*", Victor Frankenstein ends up abandoning his creation without any regard for his wrongdoing, while people in the United States are still dealing with the negative consequences of the signing crime bill that has fueled mass incarceration. Both creations negatively impacted the respective societies (Lamb 1992, 312). In "*Frankenstein*," Victor, wanted to recreate and reanimate the dead body. By doing so, he created the "monster" but neglected to create a purpose or direction for the monster. Victor ultimately became so disgusted with his creation that he decided to give up and abandon his creation by running away and letting his monster wander into the woods (Lamb 1992, 314). When the monster was let loose, it started causing harm to society. Later, the monster begins to feel anger and resentment towards his creator for abandoning him, which leads the monster to become aggressive towards society. The monster ends up becoming a murderer and kills Victor's wife and others.

Like in *Victor Frankenstein*, Bill Clinton signed the legislation that would allow massive incarceration in the United States, without thinking clearly about the major implications and consequences it would cause (Merica 2015). The only difference between the two is that Bill Clinton's monster is not fictional but a real problem and issue we are dealing with today. This bill

also made way for the three-strike law, longer sentences for drug offenders, 85% of total sentences to be served by federal inmates, and funding for thousands of police officers and courts (Farley, 2016). As a result, the prison populations rapidly increased causing a new epidemic that was not foreseen and is unmanageable to this day. Mass incarceration currently dominates our criminal justice system as we incarcerate more people than any other country in the world and our prisons are overpopulated (Campbell 2019, 54).

When identifying the moral issues of Bill Clinton and Victor Frankenstein, Victor was able to accomplish his goal although he failed miserably by neglecting to provide the necessary support for his creation (Merica 2015). Victor felt embarrassed that he had created something so ugly and imperfect that he decided to abandon and deny it. The monster felt anger and resentment because he did not receive any love from his peers and was abandoned by the one who created him. In comparison, after more than twenty years, Bill Clinton finally recognized that his bill was a failure and stated, "I signed a bill that made the problem worse (Merica 2015)." Mr Clinton recognized that his bill separated many families and targeted minorities and non-violent offenders. As a result, many people have been imprisoned and sentenced to long prison sentences. Yet, their classification of violence or offender history qualified them for the maximum sentence available instead of fair and reasonable punishment. Bill Clinton's initiative started as a good and sincere way to reduce the crime rate, however, the outcomes were not taken into consideration and his bill ended up causing major problems and dysfunction in our society. The sentencing and incarceration policies of the crime bill are cruel and cause unusual punishment. For example, Loretta Lumar was sentenced to life in prison for stealing a jacket (Democracy Now 2013). In the state of California, where Loretta is from, theft over \$250 is considered a felony and is punishable for up to five years in prison. Ms Lumar, who had two prior felony convictions ended up with a life sentence, without

the possibility of parole, because of her third conviction for theft. Many cases like these have occurred over the years with taxpayers, families of the offender, and the offender paying the consequences.

The correctional system, however, has the opportunity to fix this situation. The courts are one of the main contributors to the issue and therefore there is a need for changes within the court systems. We may not be in a position to change the way sentencing is done but there can be a change in what happens after the sentencing (Dirkzwager et al. 2018, 125). There are millions of people who do not get committed to prison sentences and are sentenced to supervised release, delinquent probation, among other forms of non-secure measurements (Franco 2018). Yet, these people receive the same backlashes due to their offensive record. Sentencing people for any crime, in particular, should be accompanied by the willingness to restore these people into the community after successfully completing their sentence and punishment (Miller 2016, 72). Restoring means that the person has the right to have a decent job, better themselves, receive social benefits and practice their right to vote. Releasing them and sending them home with a letter grade of “F” on their record is simply not what they need. For the country to fix this issue, there is a need to learn how to rehabilitate, forgive, and provide second chances without prejudice or fear.

The corrections system is one of the main contributors to this issue and prisons should emphasize the need not only to incarcerate and punish but to also rehabilitate the individual (Pogrebin 2015, 423). If the country is housing over 2.3 million people in prisons, what are we doing with them besides feeding them and proving to the world that we are a country that is tough on crime? The country needs to take advantage of the opportunity to help the incarcerated population and teach them knowledge and tools on how to be successful (Miller 2016, 74). Otherwise, just housing them is a waste of time, space, and money. Nonetheless, there are current programs within the prison



system that help with the rehabilitation of individuals. However, it seems that these programs are failing due to the many obstacles offenders still face when they are released. This is supported by high recidivism rates. For example, when offenders are released, 50% come back within the first year, and 70% return within the next five years (National Institute of Justice, 2014). If these systems would focus on teaching the convicted felons' skills such as how to start a business, market themselves, use resources to their advantage, and guide them on how to become independent and successful, this would change their mentality and helping them to change and become successful people in the society.

The criminal justice system has a lot to change, otherwise we cannot keep discriminating against convicted felons and individuals with criminal offenses due to their past mistakes (Rothschild 2019, 105). Society needs to work together to restore this population to our communities. By doing so, there would be reduced recidivism, and the country's annual spending on the correctional systems would be greatly reduced (Wright 2018, 652). The criminal justice system, as well as society, should believe in second chances.

### **The creation of the monster by the Society**

The U.S. makes up close to 5% of the world's population and nearly 25% of the global prison population (Rothschild 2019, 103; Wagner and Rabuy 2017, 14). In 2016, 655 people were incarcerated for every 100,000 people and 3% of the total population has been imprisoned at some point in their lives (Rothschild 2019, 103; Shannon et al. 2012, 1795). In broader terms, about 8% of the overall population has had felony convictions (Shannon et al. 2012, 1795). In 2015, Freidman reported that 70 million people had criminal offenses in their records regardless of felonies or misdemeanors. This accounted for 1 out of 37 humans who had a felony conviction.

The United States currently spends more than 70 billion dollars in the corrections system because of the large numbers of people behind bars (Bureau of Justice 2015).

Convicted felons face different types of stigma in society which come as a result of having been incarcerated. When society imagines a convicted felon, they picture a stereotypical individual who has a bunch of tattoos, baggie clothes, a mean demeanor, and someone that is a threat to society (Wagner and Rabuy 2017, 14). The felon is related to violence, dishonesty, drugs, theft, and people consider him/her to be an unaccomplished loser. Society fails to think of this person as a human being who made a mistake and is looking forward to turning his/her life around. The idea of a second chance begins to disappear and what seemed to be a two-year sentence for a felony conviction now ends up becoming a life sentence and a virtual and constant reminder of the mistakes they once committed in the past (Rothschild 2019, 107). Convicted felons today face stigmatization, discrimination, abandonment, lack of resources, and road blockades. For most convicted felons the collateral consequences of punishment are not from incarceration experiences but rather from the felony label which is widely disseminated by society (Wright et al. 2018, 654).

About half of the inmates in the prison system are serving time for nonviolent offenses and African Americans are incarcerated at a rate six times higher than the whites. Discrimination is a hard and difficult thing for one to experience especially for the convicted felon in society. Feeling left out, excluded, and targeted is inhumane (Travis et al. 2014). Convicted felons feel their fair share of discrimination since they are prohibited from voting in some states, not allowed to participate in financial aid, excluded from all federal jobs, banned from becoming jurors, prevented from serving in public office, and in some cases denied the right to enter a foreign country. As Michele Alexander (2010, 141) states, “once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination - employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of

educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service - are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and largely less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it". This type of discrimination has not stopped and won't stop unless we change policy.

The criminal justice system is not exempt from discrimination either. People of color and Latinos are incarcerated at a higher rate than whites. "Together, African Americans and Hispanics comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately one-quarter of the US population" (NAACP 2016). The odds are turned against them and the "unbiased" eye of the criminal justice system convicts them based on race rather than beyond a reasonable doubt. It is also proven that there are many disparities in convictions. The African American population is receiving longer and harsher punishments when compared to whites (Farbrota 2015). In fact, statistics show that African Americans and Latinos are more likely to go to prison for crimes than whites. Meanwhile, whites are more likely to receive probation, reduced convictions/ sentences, and fines versus Hispanics and African Americans. These findings are alarming especially since Hispanics and African Americans are more likely to be convicted and end up with a criminal record and life-long punishment.

In prisons, convicted felons are both physically and emotionally isolated and this has resulted in physiological and psychological problems and can even trigger many other mental health problems (Bagaric et al. 2018, 73). These problems negatively affect a convicted felon and upon release into society, they carry these with them. These are negative consequences that result in the convicted felons re-offending. Therefore, re-integrating convicted felons should be one of the main concerns of the criminal justice system, while a person is in jail or released from jail. Rehabilitation helps

people to reintegrate themselves into the community successfully (Farbrota 2015). However, it is very hard to become a fully restored member of society if you are constantly struggling to find a job, home, or purpose. The criminal justice system should have the resources to help people get back on their feet in order to begin a new life with a different purpose and meaning (Bagaric et al. 2018, 74). Nevertheless, the reality is that people with criminal offenses are being abandoned and discouraged from achieving the ultimate goal of rehabilitation (Travis et al. 2014). Unfortunately, our government and society spend more time, money, and effort in housing offenders rather than helping them get better and reintegrated back into society.

Society must change the perspective towards convicted felons and provide second chances. Sometimes, the only difference between someone with a criminal record and someone with a clean record is luck. For instance, a person with a criminal record may have been caught by mistake, while someone with a clean record may have avoided getting caught even though they made a similar mistake (Rothschild 2019, 107). Examples of such scenarios are laws that many people have broken such as driving while intoxicated, consuming drugs, shoplifting, and many more offenses that can either land you in jail or not affect you at all if you were lucky and are never caught. A person's background and environment where they live increasingly affect how likely they are to be caught and convicted. Therefore, it is uncertain if one will be among the 7 million people with criminal records and end up dealing with the criminal justice system as a convicted felon (Wagner and Rabuy 2017, 14). Society also needs to provide a fair opportunity for convicted felons who are seeking jobs and give them a chance to prove that their conviction is a thing of the past and that they are ready to commit to a new life. Unfortunately, this is not the case as many convicted felons don't get the chance to successfully reintegrate into normal work life and instead they spend many years or a lifetime working low paying jobs with poor working

conditions (Shannon et al. 2012, 1795). In order for a person to change and feel accepted, they must feel included and feel that they are offered the same opportunities as everyone.

### **Being a convicted felon in today's technological society**

In *Frankenstein*, Victor creates a monster but is so petrified that he ends up leaving the monster. Since we are in a technological era, have we created monsters during our technological advances and what is the effect of this technology in our society and does its positive/negative effect balance out? Within the criminal justice system, technology has continued to impact the system in various ways. Technology has redesigned virtual imprisonment for convicted felons. Our technological world has managed to give an edge to those who choose to oppress convicted felons (Live Science 2017). We constantly design more technologies and procedures to make sure convicted felons are always kept divided. Their opportunities shrink daily and thanks to technology their sentences get longer and unrepairable. The criminal justice system combined with technological advances provides very few options for a person with a criminal background to succeed. Instead, we provide a system that is proven to increase recidivism and continuous life of crime, which only results in longer prison sentences and incapacitation (Wright 2018, 652).

The same way technology has helped to track them, expose them, and keep their record in the public should also help to alleviate some of the sufferings these regular citizens are facing, while they are transitioning into society after completing their time. Bagaric et al (2018, 17) state that today, convicted felons are required to provide explanations to their convictions. There is a box to check if previously convicted, some require self-identification to certain restricted locations and all these have been enabled through technological advances. This has led to convicted felons living with a societal stigma throughout the rest of their lives. Mohammed-Spigner et al (2018, 92) noted

that through technology, information is shared far and wide through set-up systems and even if a felon moves from one state to the other, they are not any more fortunate as their records can be traced through their social security number or even their fingerprints. This can be referred to as virtual imprisonment as one is not physically in prison but lives a life that is limited in all ways.

## **Research Questions**

Everyone possesses some degree of morality and this is what guides us into doing what is right and what is wrong. However, based on each person's life experiences, some people disobey their sense of morality and end up doing the wrong thing. Britton (2015, 2) recounts how the desolate monster endures hardship orchestrated by how society views him which is all based on his hideous and disfigured appearance. Lunsford, (2010. 174) describes how the monster is isolated by society and he turns this resentment towards his creator Victor Frankenstein. This causes the monster to become a criminally misguided murderer. Hatch (2008, 36), in his article "Disruptive effects: shame, disgust, and sympathy in Frankenstein "indicates that convicted felons as they relate to Frankenstein and its outsider themes can be considered an outcast who lack a voice since when in prison, they lack access internet, phones, iPad and there is no regular flow of information for them. In Frankenstein, the creature has become a monster since that is what society defines him to be, yet the only things the society has had direct contact with are his physical attributes; enormous height, yellow skin and watery eyes. Adams et al (2017, 23) highlighted how convicted felons are viewed by society for example when in an interview and trying to explain their felony convictions. They are looked at like the monster as they try to explain why they are the best candidates for the position, yet employers offer the job to persons without a conviction. Therefore, society avoids responsibility for the restitution of convicted felons by not giving them the opportunity for decent employment and good housing but rather labelling them as

“monsters”. This leads to the main research question; *Why is there a monstrous perspective of convicted felons within society?*

The monster in Mary Shelley suffers similar consequences as the convicted felon such as resentment towards his creator, in this case, the society which birthed him and therefore becomes a criminally misguided murderer. According to Brockman (2010, 819), in the article, "Freud, Frankenstein, and the art of loss", the feelings of rejection by society for both the convicted felon and the monster are what drives them to their terrible actions. Therefore, in society, convicted felons re-offend due to similar experiences of rejection rather than due to their sinister nature. When released, convicted felons face a society that deters them from becoming active participants in society. They lack opportunities to find gainful employment, good housing and generally function normally within the society. Mary Shelley tries to exhibit this theme throughout the novel *Frankenstein*.

Therefore, within this main research question, the study will consider other sub-research questions such as: *how is the convicted felon other than human? To what extent is the society culpable in the creation of the convict? and How do we get the society to accept the convict?* Based on Mary Shelley *Frankenstein*, we can conclude that the monster is a recidivist criminal when society accuses him of killing a child, man and woman as well as setting a house ablaze. LégerSt-Jean (2012), in the article "A Portrait of the Monster as Criminal, or the Criminal as Outcast: Opposing Aetiologies of Crime in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.", noted that most studies have previously focused on the monstrous nature of the monster in relation to its appearance, humanity, psychoanalysis, and politics but very limited studies have focused on its criminality. He further noted that the criminality of the monster is deeply interlocked with rejection due to its external deformities.

## Significance of the Study

This is a sensitive topic for current society and this study focuses on providing solutions for convicted felons through advocating for their value to society. The ideas suggested from this study may not be easy to accomplish in a rigid society that has a strong belief in being tough on crime but there is a need to realize the mistake society is committing by not giving felons an opportunity, as they too have a human nature just like those who make up society. The office of Justice Program noted that it is important to ignore the previous mistakes that felons committed and were incarcerated for since if this is not done, they are likely to re-offend upon release and be incarcerated within five years (Franco 2018).

This study is important as it serves as a reminder to the society that some of the things that lead to increased recidivism are the simple things like food, employment, housing, financial aid, licenses, voting among others that are denied to convicted felons upon release. Society has entrapped them into a virtual prison for the rest of their lives.

## Working Hypothesis

My working hypothesis: *Society considers a monster as one lacking the requirements that are necessary for one to be considered as being human. Yet this monster resonates with how the society views a convicted felon. Society has terribly failed the convicted felon and this has driven him to develop behaviors that do not match his real nature. Like the monster who is judged based on his appearance, the convicted felon may have committed a felony due to similar rejection by the society since neglect and abuse often result in people committing crimes and evil actions. Society does not give much thought to the humanity of a convict once the guilty verdict is issued in a courtroom and believes that the convict is a monster and the rest of us are the humans.*