

## Abstract

Title of Dissertation: A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS ON THE US AND GERMAN PRISON MODEL

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There is a large gap in rehabilitative literature comparing cross-national prison systems and programs and their effects on recidivism. To fill this void, this research compares the German prison model ideology of normalization with the American prison model purpose of retribution to assess changes and programming that can lead the US to combat mass incarceration and lower recidivism rates for new crimes committed upon release. A proposed quantitative study will be conducted on the TRUE unit at the Cheshire Correctional Institution of Connecticut to see if their adaptation of normalization lowers participants' recidivism, or if it remains similar or unchanged to the general prison population. Controls will be put in place to account for confounding variables between participants in the general population unit and the TRUE unit, such as only including male inmates in the study and focusing on the emerging adult population. Normalization principles will be operationalized using Hirschi's social control elements in a Likert-scale survey that will test the participants' attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief levels in order to make predictions about whether participation in the TRUE unit will result in lower recidivism rates and is an effective rehabilitative strategy. The

implications of this research include changes to staff training, a possible increase in the use of community-based sanctions, and a possible change in the way the US prison system treats the emerging adult population.

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By

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Table of Contents

*Abstract*..... *i*

***A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS ON THE US AND GERMAN PRISON MODEL*** ..... *iii*

***Chapter 1: Introduction*** ..... ***1***

***Chapter 2: Aspects of The US Legal and Corrections System Compared to Germany*** ..... ***3***

*Sentencing Options*..... ***3***

*Staff training* ..... ***6***

*Human Dignity*..... ***7***

*Theoretical Framework of Normalization* ..... ***8***

***Chapter 3: Normalization through Prison Labor***..... ***8***

*The Importance of Prison Labor* ..... ***8***

*Analysis of German Normalization and Employment*..... ***9***

*Theory behind Prison Labor*..... ***10***

*Normalization and Social Bonds Theory*..... ***11***

***Chapter 4: The Current Study*** ..... ***12***

***The TRUE Unit*** ..... ***12***

        Emerging Adult Prison Populations ..... ***12***

        The TRUE Unit Programming ..... ***15***

***Data*** ..... ***16***

*Sample*..... ***16***

***Measurements*** ..... ***17***

*Dependent Variable* ..... ***17***

*Independent Variables* ..... ***17***

***Methods***..... ***18***

*Delivering the Survey*..... ***18***

*Analytical Strategy*..... ***19***

***Chapter 5: Conclusion*** ..... ***20***

***Discussion*** ..... ***20***

***Limitations*** ..... ***21***

***Implications***..... ***23***

***Appendices***..... ***26***

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Rehabilitation has been the focus of prison reform since the 1930s and had begun to peak in the 1950s (Rotman, 1990). Despite the studies of many researchers supporting rehabilitation models and their effectiveness, retribution and incarceration has remained the primary form of punishment in the US. This can partially be blamed on the groundbreaking “What Works?” study by Robert Martinson et al. in the early 1970s that was quickly coined the “Nothing Works” study. While this paper compiled a plethora of studies on rehabilitative programs, of which Martinson found inconclusive results for the real impact or efficacy of, the damage to the criminal justice system was set in stone and a society based on punishment through incarceration was created. During this time, politicians from both parties began appealing to the public’s fear of victimization and belief that rehabilitation did not work in combating crime in order to implement stricter policies and harsher punishments (Sarre, 2001).

Since the 1970s, the United States prison population has soared, and mass incarceration continues to be an increasing problem as prison conditions worsen due to overcrowding and programs are cut due to lack of funding (Sarre, 2001). The United States has the largest prison population among first world countries (Szmigiera, 2021). With nearly 2.1 million prisoners, researchers continue to question the effectiveness of the US’s carceral system as well as looking into programs that the carceral system can benefit from. Research has shown that a majority of those incarcerated will recidivate, meaning the current carceral system is failing to reintegrate and socialize inmates appropriately to re-enter society. In fact, other studies show that there may be no benefit to incarceration (Rydberg & Clark, 2016). There are also no current theories that provide clear answers to how long a person should be punished to decrease their likelihood of recidivism and other studies show that harsh, punitive sentences do little to decrease crime rates

(Doob & Webster, 2003). Despite this, the US continues to favor incarceration over other crime control approaches as its top public safety measure; however, the US is not the only country struggling with bridging the gap between criminal justice research and current practices. Other Countries in Europe are also seeking solutions to their recidivism rates, despite being much lower than the US's, by improving their prison conditions (O'Connor, 2014). In 2006, the Council of Europe recommended that "the enforcement of custodial sentences and the treatment of prisoners necessitate... prison conditions which do not infringe human dignity, and which offer meaningful occupational activities and treatment programs to inmates, thus preparing them for their reintegration into society" (O'Connor, 2014). While this recommendation was given in the early 2000s, Germany had already conceptualized this principle in 1976. Germany's carceral system was created in the 1950s, but the current principles that guide German "punishment" focus on the idea of rehabilitation. In fact, Germany does not even have a primary focus of punishment in incarceration and does not consider incarceration a public safety measure (Subramanian & Shames, 2013). Germany is a true model of rehabilitative efforts on offenders and due to rehabilitative efforts, Germany has effectively maintained recidivism rates half the size of the US while also avoiding issues with overpopulation and mass incarceration (O'Connor, 2014).

Through researching the components of Germany's prison model and comparing it to the United States, it begs the question: would remodeling America's carceral system to adopt more of Germany's theoretical model be effective in reducing recidivism and incarceration rates?

Some researchers have thoroughly studied the German rehabilitation model and have operationalized some of the components into participating US facilities. Currently, there are two active institutions that are modeling some policies and practices after Germany: the TRUE unit at

the Cheshire Correctional Institute in Connecticut and P.A.C.T. at Middlesex County Correctional Institution in Massachusetts. This proposal will only focus on the TRUE unit due to the program being older and having more literature. Recidivism rates will be used in order to assess the effectiveness of this program. Recidivism is a very broad and vague term because there are many channels for someone to recidivate. A technical parole violation, such as missing curfew, could be considered recidivism; however, this form of recidivism does not indicate a failed rehabilitation model. For this reason, the study will define recidivism as reincarceration for a new crime after release. In order to assess the success of the TRUE unit, there will first be an analysis on prison and justice system differences between the US and Germany, followed by an analysis on the rehabilitative theoretical framework. Next, there will be a proposed analysis on the TRUE unit, in order to determine if changes to the current theoretical prison model will be effective in combating recidivism rates and mass incarceration. This proposal will be a quantitative study that focuses on three participant groups that will produce a correlation between the TRUE unit's relationship of desistance to crime compared to the traditional American carceral systems relationship of desistance to crime.

## Chapter 2: Aspects of The US Legal and Corrections System Compared to Germany

### *Sentencing Options*

The United States uses criminal deterrence theory during the sentencing portion of contact between an individual and the criminal justice system, which can be deemed a large contributor to the current mass incarceration crisis. This theory states that negative punishments or consequences will discourage criminal behavior and will set an example for the population to abstain from crime (Pathinayake, 2019). There are two components to this theory: general deterrence and specific deterrence. General deterrence is the publicity of punishments for crimes that a criminal can be subjected to if caught, while specific deterrence refers to the punishment

given to a specific individual in order to disincentivize recidivism. While specific deterrence is good in theory, the US fails to bring it to fruition as the US sentences individuals to harsh punishments in large frequencies for large durations of time. Instead of looking at community sanctions and the specific needs of the offender, the US uses incarceration as a one-size fits all model that has led to mass incarceration and high recidivism rates.

Germany is much more successful in operationalizing specific deterrence into their sentencing practices and behaviors. Specific deterrence in Germany can be seen as researching the background of each offender to effectively address the needs of socialization, cognitivebehavioral interventions, education, life skills, and treatment of mental illness, which contributes to their much lower incarceration and recidivism rates (Subramanian & Shames, 2013). The needs of the offender are heavily considered in Germany during the sentencing period, which accounts for the large gap in effectiveness compared to the United States.

While there is a large emphasis on catering the punishment to the individual, there are some guidelines in place that German judges must adhere to; however, there is still a heavy reliance on discretion in order to properly utilize criminal deterrence theory. Germany's sentencing guidelines are highly discretionary in that the judge can impose a sentence ranging from six months to fifteen years (Pakuschert, 1976). Any violent crime will earn an offender a stay in prison; however, there is no federal or specified length of time the sentence must achieve. It relies on the discretion of the judge. Petty or property crimes may warrant incarceration, but it is rare that these crimes receive a sentence outside of a fine or probation. In addition to imposing the initial length of a sentence, judges may also defer release in order to ensure that the offender has been properly and fully rehabilitated and is ready to re-enter society. This is imperative for Germany as their primary goal of punishment is rehabilitation.



Conversely, nearly every crime in the United States, except for public order cases, may be punishable by incarceration (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). The average federal prison sentence is twenty-nine years, which is almost double the maximum sentence for murder in Germany (O'Connor, 2013). While the US tries to utilize fines, probation, and restitution as other forms of punishment, the amount of community sanctions permitted by the federal government is limited, and with studies showing that parole has no impact on recidivism rates, prisons are beginning to eliminate these programs leaving offenders incarcerated for longer (See Appendix A).

The differences in sentencing and their impact on incarceration and recidivism rates have caused researchers to do cross-national analyses on sentencing guidelines through the courts, and through prison discipline. In one study, Correctional officers from Colorado, Georgia, and Pennsylvania went to Germany to study their prison system and inmate interactions to implement possible policy changes that will positively affect the US carceral system. They found that through expanding prosecutorial discretion to divert offenders (which is commonly only used on first time offenders in the states) and to divert cases that are not high-risk individuals to other sanctions, such as community supervision, the expansion of community supervisions lessens the burdens of mass incarceration, including the negative consequences that individuals and families face on long sentences (Subramanian & Shames, 2013). In conclusion, the US carceral system has the potential to increase its effectiveness through offering community sanctions to a larger portion of offenders. (Subramanian & Shames, 2013). It is important to also note that sentences of punishment do not halt at the judge's orders but continue within prison walls. Disciplinary repercussions within the prison need to be altered as well to better suit the offender so that any resocialization or rehabilitative measures are not being hindered. In order to better assess the dosage and length of punishments, correctional officers and prison staff need to be well trained.

### *Staff training*

The work of a correctional officer (CO) is especially hard because they are constantly interacting with ideas of punishment and rehabilitation (Mollenhauer, 1955). They must differentiate between when to use disciplinary force, or when to allow a more relaxed approach (Mollenhauer, 1955). Interactions between inmates and prisoners are very complex in that practice and immersion into relationship building is the only guarantee to a smoother rehabilitative process; however, the line between disciplinary punishment, rehabilitation, and relaxed approaches is not clearly drawn, which emphasizes the importance on proper and thorough training of staff (Mollenhauer 1955).

In the United States, correctional officer training lasts anywhere from several weeks to several months depending on the facility's policy (York, 2019). There is an emphasis on professional purpose and team loyalty during training that ensures officers work as a team, which has proven to reduce the occurrence of violence (York, 2019). The areas of training include "restraint techniques, identifying/locating contraband, strip searches, cell search, riot control, booking/receiving, prisoner transport, ethics, emergency operations, and first aid and CPR" (York, 2019). While all these areas are important to train for the safety of the facility, none train on how to effectively de-escalate or rehabilitate an offender. This is important because the United States still participates in outdated punishment practices, such as solitary confinement, that have negative effects on both the rehabilitative process of an offender and a more difficult reentry process.

On the other hand, basic training for correctional officers in Germany lasts two years (York, 2019). For the first phase of training, potential correctional officers will learn about

prisons, their organization, and the basic duties of a CO (York, 2019). The next phase will give these trainees limited responsibilities inside prisons while they shadow other COs (York, 2019). In the final phase of training, the trainees must pass a written exam on prison policies and an oral exam on prisoner-guard interactions in order to become a CO (York, 2019). This training is much more effective in allowing rookie correctional officers to practice their profession and develop the proper skills necessary to interact with the inmates and to act as an aid to their rehabilitation. It also helps create bonds within the prison community, which improves the safety and security of the facility while also making staff feel more fulfilling and satisfied by their job (York, 2019). The difference in these training methods has an imperative impact on recidivism. While one training method creates an atmosphere of punishment, the other creates an atmosphere that contributes to the concept of normalization.

#### *Human Dignity*

Germany's Constitution states "human dignity shall be inviolable" which extends to all aspects of life- including prisons (Nesbitt, 2015). Prison conditions in Germany have much higher standards than the US, with nearly each inmate having their own space, clean sheets, personalized decoration, and anything that may emphasize the value of human life (Nesbitt, 2015). While many prisons in the US allow inmates to have pictures of family, approved personal belongings, and commissary pamphlets to buy more luxurious items, it is the emphasis on human dignity in Germany's carceral system that separates it from the US. The reasoning behind this emphasis is that "when a high value is placed on human dignity, ... prisoners are more likely to improve and, upon release, never return to their old lifestyle" (Nesbitt, 2015). This concept and emphasis of human dignity is the supporting argument for normalization.

### *Theoretical Framework of Normalization*

Normalization is defined as creating a prison system that allows inmates to have as much individuality and human dignity as they would have outside of prison (Subramanian & Shames, 2013). Moreover, normalization can be conceptualized into any policy or activity that supports “normal” activities or needs in the free world. These activities can be as basic as choosing their apparel for the day, creating their own daily schedule, decorating their room to their own discretion, and more. The United States does not have a well-established aspect of normalization because the inmates are automatically ripped of their independence due to the rigid schedule that the prison creates for them, the assigned clothing they are mandated to wear, and other lifestyle choices that would not mimic a successful and independent lifestyle outside of prison walls. The main argument for this theory states that by allowing inmates to make these daily decisions, they will remain partially integrated into society which will help aid the reentry process. One of the key components to this theory is the operationalization of normalization in employment.

Germany uses normalization through employment to specifically keep inmates integrated and socialized in the community through employment opportunities, whereas the US infantilizes the inmate population by creating strict and rigid schedules and codes of conduct that do not adhere to societal norms, thus creating a larger issue with resocialization into the free world.

### Chapter 3: Normalization through Prison Labor

#### *The Importance of Prison Labor*

Prison labor has been utilized for centuries as a means of cheap labor, but it holds a lot of positive aspects. There is a symbiotic relationship between prison administrators and inmates where prison admins have a source of cheap labor with large production yields, and inmates receive a necessary source of income, training, and work experience (Duran, 2018). It also creates a sense of community for the inmates. Prisoner employment is a necessary program

because “work is the best warranty to ensure order and peace” and it does this because labor is able to control for several variables (Shae, 2007). These variables include the ability to reach the greatest number of inmates by keeping them busy, keeping cell blocks easily manageable because they are less populated during work hours and after work hours inmates are tired, satisfied, and less likely to cause problems (Shae, 2017). Lastly, it allows wages to be earned which in turn relieves frustrations because more goods become available (Duwe, 2018). Although prison labor relieves a lot of stresses on correctional officers and creates benefits for the prison economy, the main goal of prison labor remains being able to increase employability of inmates which in turn lowers recidivism (Duwe, 2018); however, there are factors that hinder this process. These factors are the shortage of work and training places, a disproportionate number of “low skill and mind-numbing jobs,” and unacceptable pay levels (Shae, 2007). All these factors have shined a dim light on the effectiveness of prison labor reducing recidivism and has led many countries, including the United States, to adopt the “nothing works” mantra; however, other countries, such as Germany, have chosen to reform their programs to ensure their rehabilitative goals remain effective (Duran, 2018).

#### *Analysis of German Normalization and Employment*

It is important to highlight the difference in the achievement of capital between both German prison facilities and the United States. In the United States, inmates may work for their money through job programs, or family members may wire money into their accounts. This practice is prohibited in German prisons. With an emphasis on normalization, German prisons believe that inmates need to work for their income to model life outside prison walls (Knaebel, 2015). This forces prisoners in these countries to obtain employment through prison programs because they need money to buy hygiene products, commissary items, and more (Knaebel,

2015). Although the work found in German prisons is mundane and resembles the same tasks American prisoners are hired for, such as “packing vacuum cleaner bags, assembling electrical fittings, and filing off aluminum castings,” there is a difference in purpose for employment at the economic level (Shae, 2007). While American prisons utilize mass production lines, Germany is more focused on creating employment for the inmates, which boosts employment satisfaction (Fulton, 1996). German prisoners work similar hours to the general public and are paid very generously with a salary of approximately \$40 to \$65 a week (Fulton, 1996).

In addition, many German prisons are partnered with external businesses that employ prisoners and contribute to the local economy (Fulton, 1996). Altogether, these aspects help rehabilitate offenders in maintaining normalcy during their sentences because they are expected to work for their survival and creates a daily routine that will also be utilized during re-entry. Furthermore, prisoners in Germany are better equipped for re-entry because many of the prisoners already have income sources through these partnerships with local businesses (Fulton, 1996). Reasoning behind Germany’s success with prison employment programs contributing to lower recidivism rates relies on Germany’s dedication to improving their theories and practices regarding prison labor compared to the United States.

#### *Theory behind Prison Labor*

There are two schools of thought that control prison labor. Both schools understand the importance of employment. Studies have shown that there is a significant correlation between unemployment and deviant behavior and that many offenders arrive in prison with multiple handicaps that jeopardize their attractiveness in the job market (Duwe, 2018). These handicaps come in the form of no previous relevant job experience, no professional qualifications,

psychological, psychiatric problems, poor health, and a high amount of social exclusion experienced compared to the general public (Shae, 2007).

While the first school considers regular work the best means of preparing inmates for future employment, which helps aid in reducing recidivism, The second school relies on social bonds theory to elicit personal growth and social integration (Duran, 2018). Social bonds theory was created by Travis Hirschi, and it examines how an individual's attachment, involvement, commitment, and communal beliefs either helps an individual abstain from crime or how the lack of bonds facilitates crime. By using social bonds theory to create a positive social environment for the inmates, where individual effort and responsibility are valued, a sense of community is created which helps give meaning to the period of incarceration where these individuals often feel that time has been wasted.

#### *Normalization and Social Bonds Theory*

Normalization is a very broad theoretical concept to guide prisons, but it is not yet obtainable for the US prison system. While normalization has the main goal of creating an environment that closely mimics the free world, it inherently maintains and enhances the bonds between the offender and their community. Germany's extensive use of work and recreational furlough programs gives offenders the opportunity to gain employment within their community and maintain strong bonds with family members. The employment aspect allows the offenders to create work relationships, peer relationships with other members of the community that can lead to creating an attachment. Attachments to family members and peers through prosocial bonds is also beneficial for the individual because these attachments and bonds have the potential to evoke a protective factor from the individual. Instead of persisting a life of crime, the individual will want to maintain these bonds and protect them, thus decreasing crime.

This type of freedom for offenders is not yet compatible with the punitive US model, so normalization will have to be operationalized. Because the normalization model has a second, more discrete pillar of maintaining social bonds, Hirschi's Social Bonds theory can be used to evaluate the impacts of aspects of normalization in US prisons. Social Bonds theory is a crime control theory that states that a relationship with family, education, and other aspects of society can diminish one's propensity to engage in criminal behavior (Hirschi, 2017). There are four elements involved in this theory: attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs. If these areas of bonds are enhanced or maintained during incarceration, the likelihood of recidivating should be significantly lower. The TRUE unit at the Cheshire Institute of Connecticut has been exceptional in observing these relationships and operationalizing normalization into social bonds theory.

#### Chapter 4: The Current Study

##### The TRUE Unit

Inspired by the effectiveness of the German prison model, Warden Semple of the Cheshire Correctional Institute of Connecticut decided to pilot his own research experiment in his prison. Dedicating an entire wing to a program called the TRUE unit, Warden Semple began training correctional officers in a more in-depth way that modeled the training in Germany and began selecting inmates through a very competitive application process to join the unit. The unit only allows inmates between the ages of 18-25 to join. It is important to specifically look at the age group of 18-25 because this is a special group of inmates, known as the emerging adult population.

##### Emerging Adult Prison Populations

Too old to be considered juveniles, but too young to have a fully developed brain, the emerging adult population creates another inconsistency between the German and US prison models.



Germany treats the emerging adult population as a special or unique population that warrants certain privileges and needs. This special treatment began in 1953, after WWII, when Germany sought to help the “fatherless generation”. Many children were orphaned after the war, which led to a high rise in juvenile crime. Instead of resorting to incarceration or other punitive measures, Germany took a compassionate approach in utilizing rehabilitative measures to socialize this population to societal standards (Rollins & Krinsky, 2019). These compassionate standards continue today as Germany sentences people as old as twenty-one in juvenile courts, and on the rare occasions that incarceration is needed, these individuals are often held in juvenile facilities (Schiraldi et al., 2021). Some other special privileges include individualized treatment and a plethora of rehabilitative programming. Today, children under the age of fourteen cannot be prosecuted in Germany, and judges use discretion to determine how to treat offenders in the emerging adult population. Even for severe cases, such as murder, a twenty-year-old offender can be held in a juvenile detention facility. This special privilege allows the offender to receive age-appropriate resources and rehabilitative measures. Germany has seen great success in their sanctions for this population as the recidivism rate for the emerging adult population is a mere 33% compared to the US’s 50% (Rollins & Krinsky, 2019).

Psychological research has corroborated these practices using studies on the brain. These studies show that the emerging adult populations, which are ages 18-25, do not have a fully developed prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain is responsible for decision-making skills and curbing impulsive behavior, an important factor when looking at deviant behavior (Sutton, 2016). Emerging adults are more likely to become emotionally charged and less likely to adhere to appropriate standards set in place when facing challenging situations, and are “overly motivated by reward seeking behavior, more susceptible to peer pressure, and more prone to

risk-taking and impulsive behavior” (Wood et al., 2017). Based on these factors, many researchers have argued that institutionalization can have very dramatic effects on the futures of this population.

While some states are currently debating whether to raise the legal marker of age for juveniles, most states use eighteen as the separation from juvenile to adult. The emerging adult population receives no special treatment or privileges in the US. While emerging adults only account for 10% of the general population of the public, they account for 29% of arrests and 21% of the prison population. A study in 2005 found that 75.9% of the emerging adult population was rearrested within three years after release compared to 69.7% of offenders ages 25 to 29 and 60.3% of offenders aged forty and older (Perker & Chester, 2017). Researchers state that these statistics are not surprising because many members of the emerging adult populations have emotional or physical trauma backgrounds, which is only exacerbated in the toxic adult prison environment (Perker & Chester, 2017). This population is more vulnerable to negative influences and reward seeking behavior, which accounts for their high recidivism rates and failure to successfully reintegrate.

Lastly, incarcerating this population for long periods of time with scarce individualized resources can prevent major life-course milestones from occurring, which can further perpetuate the crime cycle. During this time period, many emerging adults are becoming financially independent through employment, are active in the military, or even beginning to marry. These three life course events have proven to be large turning points in aiding an offender to cease from their involvement in crime (Wood et al, 2017). Isolating this population from society stunts the timeline of these events from occurring, thus creating an easier pathway to a life course of crime and recidivism. Germany’s special population model which does not seek to isolate these

individuals from society, and in the rare cases for less than four years, allows individuals to effectively age out of crime whereas the US provides no substantial resources or rehabilitative measure to aid in this transition. Taking all these factors into account, it is important that the TRUE unit uses the emerging adult population for its participation demographics because it can provide an evaluation on how special programs or treatment for this population can impact recidivism in the future.

### The TRUE Unit Programming

The TRUE unit offers a plethora of rehabilitative programs that the general population does not have access to. Although the programs primarily focus on Hirschi's social bonds theory, there is still the German stress of normalization. Some program examples include Hip Hop Hermeneutics, where "someone plays a song that has a special meaning to them, explains that meaning to the group, then the group expresses what they thought about that song" in an effort to build community bonds and attachments (Frank 2017). Another example is the community town hall meetings where every member of the community, including inmates, correctional officers, the unit manager, counselors, and more, meet and discuss the issues they are having in the cell block and how to resolve the conflicts (Frank 2017). All these programs help to foster a prosocial environment and culture where the importance of maintaining and creating prosocial bonds is heavily emphasized. Aspects of normalization can be seen through the inmates choosing their roommates and decorating their cells with personal quotes and inspirations, as well as programs that include "reflections, conflict resolution, good intentions, bad choices, and money management" (Frank 2017). These programs allow inmates to develop and maintain skills that are necessary in daily life outside of prison, including decision-making skills and money management. Many inmates describe the impact of these programs by stating, "Doing all these

programs really helps me look within myself and see what I need to work on before I get released” (Frank 2017). Although still in its infancy, the TRUE unit serves as a very promising site to conduct research on prison reform and its impact on recidivism.

#### Data

##### *Sample*

The program has been in effect since 2017, but the sample size has remained at 50 male inmates between the ages of 18-25 (Chammah 2018). The Vera Institute of Justice is looking to expand this program to other prisons around the nation, whose data can be combined with this current study if the models remain the same, but at this time only the male TRUE unit can be studied (Chammah 2018). It is important to wait until the participants have been fully immersed in the program. This is because the research is not concerned with the progress of the inmate through the TRUE unit program, but of the end results of how this program will impact the inmates. This program is highly competitive because there are few availability slots, but it is important that inmates who need help but are not necessarily self-motivated to change are chosen to avoid selection bias (Chammah 2018). Warden Semple exemplifies this reasoning by stating, “if I wanted to impact recidivism, I would have picked cupcakes” (Chammah 2018). This ensures the integrity of the program to help both motivated, and unmotivated inmates to yield relevant results of the program; however, a control group should be established to help observe the efficacy of the program. Inmates with differing backgrounds to the inmates in the TRUE unit, or a propensity to continue deviant behavior as well as inmates that are self-motivated to change and have a similar background to the inmates in the TRUE program should be observed to see if the TRUE program really impacts recidivism, or if the self-motivation or the US prison model itself is what drives the success or failure of recidivism rates.

## Measurements

### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable is recidivism specifically through reincarceration for new crimes.

Recidivism can be hard to measure because it is large in scope. This proposed research is interested in how this program acts as a deterrent to committing new crime through maintaining and supporting social bonds. Because of this, only recidivism through reincarceration for new crimes will be counted. Participants from both the TRUE unit and the control group will be contacted six months post-release and then annually for three years to discuss any changes to their criminal histories. Should the participants from either group be difficult to contact, public records will be relied on to determine whether the individual has ceased to commit new crimes, or recidivated. It is important to follow the participants' records for three years because prior research has shown that an individual is less likely to recidivate three years after release (Alper et al., 2018). In fact, most individuals recidivate within the first year, which is why they will also be contacted at the six-month post release mark. This program attempts to rehabilitate the participants by building community bonds, which using social bonds theory should be enough to cause the participants to desist from crime upon release.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variables in this study revolve around the elements of Hirschi's social control theory: attachment, involvement, commitment, and beliefs. These elements all impact the chances of deviating from social norms, so it is important to assess the strength of each type of bond while the participants are incarcerated (Agnew, 1985). This study will use a Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree in order to assess the inmates' bonds to staff, family, peers, programs, and community relations (See Appendix B).

Attachment is the "affection and respect that the individual holds towards significant others

such as parents, teachers, and peers” (Hirschi, 2017). During this section of the survey, participants will be asked questions regarding their relationships to correctional officers and family members. While peers are a large component to the attachment bond, the study will not focus on this aspect because it is possible that these peers may be a negative influence instead of prosocial bonds. If the attachment style is not prosocial, the likelihood of ceasing in deviant behavior decreases. For this reason, the program and study are trying to solely enhance relationships between offenders and family members, and prosocial mentors, such as the prison staff.

Involvement is defined as “the amount of time spent engaged in conventional activities” (Hirschi, 2017). This portion of the survey is evaluating the number of activities and programs that the offender is participating in. Participation in these programs should create community bonds.

Commitment is defined as “individuals actual or anticipated investment in conventional activities” and will also assess the effectiveness of the program on an individual level (Hirschi, 2017). This section of the survey will focus on the actual commitment to these programs through evaluating behaviors outside of programs.

Belief is defined as “commitment to the central value system of society” as individuals who believe that they should obey the rules of society are less likely to engage in deviant behavior (Hirschi, 2017). This portion of the survey will assess if the morals and values of the offenders align with basic morals and principles of the social contract of free society.

## Methods

### *Delivering the Survey*

This survey will be while the participants are still incarcerated, and it is important to emphasize the confidentiality of this survey. The inmates need to be confident that their responses will not

be sent back to staff, other prison officials, or the TRUE unit program because that may skew the overall reliability of the survey. It is also important to reassure the inmates that the researchers and proctors do not know what survey belongs to what inmate so that there is no researcher bias; however, the survey does need to be organized to separate the study group responses from the control responses. The study is assessing the overall effectiveness of the TRUE unit and is not concerned with the individual success level. In addition, proctors need to be able to explain or resolve items that inmates may not understand. The US prison system is a very diverse system in terms of educational attainment, so it is important to make sure that inmates can clearly identify what the survey is asking. It is important that the research proctors are trained to answer questions without leading or influencing the inmates' response to control response bias.

#### *Analytical Strategy*

A bivariate analysis using the ANOVA test will be used to assess the relationship between TRUE unit inmate participants and recidivism as well as the relationship between the control general population inmates and recidivism. Both the control group (general population inmates) and the experimental group (TRUE unit inmates) will have their responses to the survey averaged by coding the Likert scale. The Likert scale has a range of strongly agree to strongly disagree, and strongly agree will be coded as five, agree as four, neutral as three, disagree as two, and strongly disagree as 1. Next, group variation will be determined by finding the total deviation of each participant's score from their group average. Then, both the averages for the two groups will be combined to find the overall average. Between group variation will be determined to find the variation between each group mean to the overall mean. Lastly, a ratio using the F statistic will be used to compare the between group variation to the within group variation. This test will determine if there is a significant variation between the control group and

experimental group, meaning there is a statistically significant difference in the social bonds fostered in the TRUE program compared to general population inmates. Recidivism records of each participant will be used in order to determine if the research hypothesis is true or null. The hypothesis states that the inmates in the TRUE unit will have a higher average strength in social bonds which will lead to a decrease in recidivism rates while the general population inmates will have a lower average strength of social bonds and will have recidivism rates consistent with the national average

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### Discussion

The United States has reached the breaking point of mass incarceration and needs to find more effective ways to combat increasing recidivism rates than using retribution and traditional incarceration models. These traditional models of incarceration that are more punitive than rehabilitative do not adequately prepare inmates in their reentry process, which can be reflected in the US recidivism rates. Germany once had similar issues with recidivism rates and incarceration rates reaching staggering heights, but once the theoretical framework that guided the policies and practices of prisons changed, recidivism rates began to decline (Shames and Subramanian, 2013). The new framework, normalization, can be regarded as the reason for these rate decreases because normalization effectively prepares inmates to reintegrate into society with schedules or employment already in place. Normalization also prevents the infantilization of inmates that is often seen in the US because the inmates can be financially supported by others and have every hour of every day planned by the prison officials. In Germany, daily schedules of eating times, employment- which is mostly required- clothing choices, and more “normal” decisions are made much like they would be in society.



Proposing more US prisons to recreate or redesign their institutions to model German frameworks has the potential to lower recidivism rates, specifically recidivism rates of the commitment of new crimes, because the inmates can be rehabilitated into productive society members while incarcerated instead of having their life put on hold. This is especially important in the emerging adult demographic because the changes made at this point in the life course can determine whether the individual will persist in a life of crime or desist.

Using the data from the TRUE unit study, a comparison on the four categories of social bonds will be examined between TRUE unit participants and the control group. Determining the levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs of an individual will act as continuous independent variables and can then create a correlation between the two groups and their persistence or desistance to future crime. It is hypothesized that the TRUE unit will foster high levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs through their program, thus the TRUE participants will have a greater success rate in refraining from committing new crimes. On the other hand, the individuals selected in the control group may have intermediate or lower levels of attachment, commitment, involvement, or beliefs and will have a greater failure rate in desisting from crime in the future than the TRUE unit participants, thus reflecting the national recidivism rate.

#### Limitations

Unfortunately, the sample size of this study will only be 150 participants, which is much too small to provide sufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the efficacy of this program in prison reform. Furthermore, due to the small sample size of the study, it will take a long time for findings to be verified and reliable. There is no requirement that participants in any of the three study groups must be released from the institution within a specified time range. Due to

this, the study could take upwards of ten years or more to complete. This issue would be less substantial if there was more research working concurrently; however, there is a huge gap in the research that specifically studies emerging adult populations and this concept of normalization using social bonds theory. Currently, the Vera Institute of Justice in New York is trying to recreate the TRUE unit in other prisons, but these programs are in the preliminary stages, thus more research for this concept will always be needed, no matter what the outcome the study yields.

In addition, there are many variables that inhibit the growth of this program at the Cheshire Correctional Institution in Connecticut that limit the ability of the researchers to expand their sample size to yield more reliable results. Funding is a huge issue in expanding this program to more participants because the general public of Connecticut is beginning to favor a “tough on crime” agenda (Chammah 2018). This program cost \$500,000, of which was mostly comprised of federal grants, but without real results for a long period of time, the public may lobby that these resources should be spent elsewhere in the prison (Chammah 2018). Prison wardens are elected by government officials and the current opposing political agendas may cause this pilot program to be shut down before results can be finalized (Chammah 2018). Currently, Connecticut has very low approval on how crime is being prevented, and the election of a new governor with more “tough on crime” objectives can replace prison warden Semple with a new warden who has the power to shut down the program (Chammah 2018). Other limitations include the structure and characteristics of the US justice system compared to Germany. Germany’s rehabilitative model successfully rehabilitates and reintegrates offenders back into society in part because these offenders are never truly isolated. During incarceration, extensive furlough programs allow the offenders to leave prison facilities and work in their

communities every day, stay with family on the weekends, and maintain bonds within their community. In conjunction with shorter average prison sentences, a German offender is never truly removed from society. On the other hand, American offenders are completely isolated from society with little-to-no opportunities to return to the community during incarceration, limited family involvement due to distance and prison visitation policies, and sentences six times longer than the average German sentence (Hartney, 2006). These structural differences have the potential to impact the TRUE study because the longevity in supporting, maintaining, and fostering these social bonds may diminish over time. TRUE participants with shorter sentences that correspond more to German sentence lengths may see more success than the participants who are serving more than five or so years.

#### Implications

If the TRUE unit yields positive results and proves that participants in this unit are less likely to recidivate, there are a plethora of policy changes that can be made. First, prosecutorial discretion can be expanded in order to divert offenders from prison and retribution as the default punishment (Shames and Subramanian, 2013). Germany already allows their prosecutors to have the utmost powers of discretion because their concept of normalization impacts every level of the criminal justice system. Because normalization wants to keep inmates integrated in society, prosecutors in Germany mainly divert offenders to community sanctions and interventions and preserve incarceration for the most serious crimes. The US could adopt this policy in order to shield offenders from the negative consequences of criminal justice contact, while also performing a risk-needs assessment in order to find the best treatment for each offender (Shames and Subramanian, 2013). Implementing this practice will also effectively lower incarceration rates and help tackle mass incarceration.

An increased reliance on community-based sanctions can also result from this study. The US already utilizes community sanctions, such as parole and probation, but these sanctions are often applied inappropriately (Shames and Subramanian, 2013). Parole and probation programs are very inconsistent and use a lot of discretion, which leads to many parolees or probationers being required to complete extensive surveillance and programs when their risk score is very low. On the other hand, other parolees or probationers have very low commitment programs when their risk score is very high. These programs are not effective working and can account for some recidivism and incarceration rates. This study can demonstrate to policymakers that punishment is individual and that these programs need to be corrected in order to create a shift from institutional to community-based sanctions.

An increase in staff training can also materialize from this study. More staff training is needed for officers, especially rookies, to be able to assess what punishment is appropriate for deviant behavior. Some examples include “mission-based housing units, developing more careful classification schemes, creating alternatives to the almost automatic use of solitary confinement, and expanding the menu of disciplinary (or protective) measures that better respond to offender behavior and need” (Shames and Subramanian, 2013). Adapting to these measures will better equip the offender for rehabilitative treatment. In addition to better training in disciplinary repercussions, incentives and rewards should be more short-term to encourage more beneficial and positive interactions between the institution, staff, and inmates. Most incentives for behavior include reduced incarceration time, but incentives like this can feel unobtainable for some inmates because they require long periods of time to elapse before the reward for good behavior is implemented. This can cause some inmates to cease in their program participation or revert back to deviant behavior.

Lastly, this study can show that young offenders are a special population and need to be treated as such. The developmental stage for young adults (18-25) is more similar to juveniles than adults, thus impacting their decision-making capabilities. This age bracket also has the most potential to be salvaged into law-abiding citizens, so developmental needs such as education, treatment, and social or vocational training should have the most emphasis when contacting this cohort. Laws and policies have the potential to reshape how the US justice system deals with this population and can effectively decrease incarceration and recidivism rates among this population if proper treatment plans are implemented.

Appendices  
Appendix A

US Corrections Model Compared to Germany

	US	Germany
Average CO Training	Approx. 13 weeks	2 years
Average Sentence Length	60 Months	10 Months
Mandatory employment	No	Yes
Furlough Programs	No	Yes
Incarceration rates (per 100,000)	716	79

*NOTES:* CO= Correctional Officer

Appendix B

Likert Scale Questionnaire

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1	I respect my corrections officers					
2	My corrections officers respect me					
3	I enjoy spending time conversing with my corrections officers					
4	My corrections officers are here to help					
5	I communicate with my family regularly					
6	My family members visit regularly					
7	If my family members lived closer, they would visit me					

8	My family members support me					
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9	My family members hold me accountable for my progress while incarcerated					
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10	My family members ask me about the program I am in and the relationships I am forming while incarcerated					
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11	I am honest with my family members and close peers					
----	--	--	--	--	--	--

12	The support of my family members is important to me					
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13	I spend a lot of time working					
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14	I spend a lot of time reflecting on who I am					
----	--	--	--	--	--	--

15	I discuss my progress with peers					
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16	I am involved in a lot of optional activities					
17	I want to change my behavior					

18	I am going to make proactive changes in my lifestyle when I am released					
19	I discuss my setbacks with peers					
20	I take responsibility for my actions					
21	I tell my support system about my misbehavior in the prison when it occurs					
22	I hold myself accountable for my actions					
23	It is wrong to lie					

24	It is never acceptable to break the law					
25	It is acceptable to break the law if it is certain you will not get caught					
26	It is acceptable to break the law in certain emergency situations					
27	Violence is never appropriate					
28	Violence is acceptable in self-defense cases only					
29	It is acceptable to use violence if the other person deserves it					

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