


Full-Time Students With Part-Time Benefits: How Being Denied On-Campus Housing Affects College Students With Criminal Records

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Abstract

There are major assumptions that housing opportunities in higher education are equally accessible and available to all students. However, these accessible housing opportunities are not available to current and prospective students who possess a criminal record. Many college students with criminal records are deemed ineligible for adequate housing opportunities even before their applications are submitted. This study uses a qualitative layered analysis approach to explore how denials from on-campus housing affect college students with criminal records. Using the perspectives of this marginalized and invisible student population, we draw the reader's attention to how students with criminal records are affected as a result of being denied on-campus housing, and we provide tangible recommendations for future research, housing practices, and housing policies in higher education.

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Prospective college students with criminal records are pursuing higher education for better life opportunities. However, those abovementioned students are often met with practices (e.g., criminal screening, policies) that are in opposition of their presence on campus (Custer, 2013, 2018; Dickerson, 2007). College students with criminal records who are granted the opportunity to make it into the institution are often limited in what they can do and the resources they can participate in. For instance, research suggests that college students with criminal records are typically denied on-campus federal work-study or employment opportunities (McTier et al., 2017). The students are often deprived of intern and externships (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010), and they are often prohibited from pursuing certain academic courses or entering specific academic buildings because of their criminal records (Rubenstein et al., 2019). Essentially, college students with criminal records are treated as full-time students with part-time benefits.

Despite the known oppositions of college students with criminal records on college campuses, there are still areas (e.g., on-campus housing, student life, athletics) as it pertains to the population mentioned above that hasn't been addressed in depth. In fact, very little is known about college students with criminal records experiences with on-campus housing or how denials from on-campus housing affect them. We also don't have any reliable data on how many current and prospective college students are denied on-campus housing opportunities because of their criminal history. However, we know that several states (e.g., Texas, South Carolina, Tennessee, South Dakota) have created stringent policies that deliberately ban college students with criminal records from living on-campus. According to Custer (2018), these strict housing policies forbid students with sexual-related offenses, violent felony convictions, or felony convictions for drug sale or usage from living on their campuses. Other higher education institutions don't have any on-campus housing policies precluding the student population from living on campus.

Seeing how there is little to no empirical research investigating on-campus housing experiences for college students with criminal records, we seek to focus on the gap mentioned above because we believe that college students with criminal records sense of belonging are affected when they are denied on-campus housing options and opportunities. As such, our purpose for this study seeks to understand how denial from on-campus housing affects college students with criminal records. To address this study's purpose, we employ the following

research question: How does a denial from on-campus housing affect college students with criminal records experiences on campus? The next section of this paper draws our attention to pertinent literature.

Literature Review

People With Criminal Records and Public Housing

Research suggests that food, housing, and clothing are vital necessities for any human being to survive (Pogge, 2007). Unfortunately, those necessities (i.e., food, housing, & clothing), especially housing, are difficult to acquire if you have a criminal record. In fact, finding adequate housing opportunities post-incarceration is one of the most challenging tasks for a person with a criminal record because society believes these individuals will somehow commit crimes on their property (Leasure & Martin, 2017), there are federal and state housing laws (Silva, 2015), or they have no means to pay rent because of employment barriers (Solomon, 2012).

It is estimated that 7,000 people with criminal records are released from state and federal prisons each year (Lutze et al., 2014; Silva, 2015). However, their integration back into the community is often stifled by a lack of employment opportunities (Flake, 2015), a lack of education (Stewart, 2016), very little familial support (Denney et al., 2014), and inadequate housing options (Silva, 2015). Roughly 20% of people returning to society from prison have no housing plan (Kras et al., 2016), and approximately 66% of property managers will not rent to people with criminal records (Leasure & Martin, 2017). Consequently, many people with criminal records who return to society post-incarceration end up returning back to jail or prison because of housing inequities (Carey, 2004; Roman & Travis, 2006), or they end up homeless because no one will rent to them (Maguire & Nolan, 2012).

Research also suggests that homelessness and residential insecurity are considered the two most challenging aspects of reentering society post-incarceration (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011; Pettus-Davis, 2012). At least 10% of incarcerated individuals have experienced some form of homelessness (Roman & Travis, 2006), while formerly incarcerated individuals make up the most substantial portion of the homelessness population at almost six times the rate of the general population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008; Roman and Travis, 2006). Many individuals return to communities that lack affordable housing options, gives landlords the right to ban people with criminal records in those same communities, and are impoverished (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Lutze et al., 2014; Silva, 2015).

Federal housing laws make it legal for landlords to discriminate against any person with a criminal record. This is made possible by laws such as the one-strike eviction law, which “allows local Public Housing Authorities to deny

admission or to evict people accused of engaging in criminal activity including convictions, accusations, or simply suspicion” (Evans, 2007, p. 302). Laws such as the one-strike eviction law disproportionately impact people with sexual and drug-related offenses (Evans, 2007), people of color (Crowell, 2016), and women (Salem et al., 2013). According to Silva (2015), there are four significant housing policies that serve as the foundation for the legal housing discrimination towards people with criminal records. Those policies include the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996, and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998. These outlined laws, according to Silva (2015), allows landlords to screen and use a person’s criminal history to ban them from federal public housing. Essentially, the communities that they once belonged to now push them out and make it impossible for reintegration to occur successfully (Lutze et al., 2014).

Marginalized Student Populations and On-Campus Housing

On-campus housing has a growing body of literature surrounding marginalized student populations in higher education. Due to a lack of research on college students with criminal records experiences with on-campus housing, we briefly highlight two other marginalized student populations (i.e., LGBT students and housing insecure students) and their experiences with on-campus housing. The two previously mentioned marginalized populations were chosen because of the prevalence of data on these two student populations related to on-campus housing.

There is currently very little data on how many students are homeless because many students do not report that they are (Harris, 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). However, one study, which surveyed 167,000 students across 101 community colleges and 68 four-year institutions in the US, found that 60% of survey respondents at community colleges and 48% at four-year institutions experienced housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). The invisibility of homeless college students on college campuses and policies means they do not benefit much from the much-needed services available on campus (Gupton, 2017). Another study found that during scheduled school breaks, homeless students would often sleep in their cars, shower at truck stops, and eat at local shelters because all students were required to leave the residence halls during this time (Bowers & O’Neill, 2019). These lack of housing options and strict housing rules have led to their underperformance, the incompleteness of their programs, and a lack of engagement in the educational process (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Hallett, 2010).

Another population affected by housing and residence issues in American colleges and universities are LGBT+ students (Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Research has found that gay and lesbian students

have higher rates of homelessness than heterosexual students. In contrast, trans* and gender nonconforming students have higher rates of homelessness compared to students who identify as female and male (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Traditionally most universities and colleges in the United States assign on-campus housing based on students' gender or sex at birth (Krum et al., 2013). However, scholars have found that "not all trans* people biomedically transition or change their body morphology via hormones and/or surgeries" (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015, p. 161), which creates privacy and safety concerns for trans* or gender nonconforming students on campus (Wagner et al., 2018). Additionally, the research found that trans* women experienced higher victimization rates from denial of on-campus housing and bathroom options (Seelman, 2016). These experiences have led to high trans* suicide rates compared to other student populations (Effrig et al., 2011; Seelman, 2016; Sutton, 2016).

As it relates to college students with criminal records, the data around how many college students with criminal records are denied on-campus housing options or how many of those students live on campus with their criminal record is scant and not readily available to the public. However, we know that college students with criminal records are applying to live on college campuses because several public higher education institutions across the United States have implemented policies that deter or ban them from living on their campuses (Custer, 2018). One example can be seen in Texas, where the Governor passed a law, Senate Bill 146, allowing campus housing and campus police to perform these background checks on students interested in living on campus property (Custer, 2013). This policy is especially concerning because many colleges and universities in Texas required students to live on campus. Another example can be seen in West Virginia, where a similar bill, House Bill 4009, was being proposed to allow state higher education institutions to also perform background checks on students residing on campus (Barajas, 2014). The policy's implementation was done to deter prospective college students with criminal records from applying to live on-campus.

The empirical research around on-campus housing policies, practices, and issues addresses various marginalized student populations. However, that same empirical research doesn't explore the practices and issues relating to on-campus housing for college students with criminal records, which we consider as a marginalized student population. Knowing that higher education institutions have virtually ignored this particular student population, their experiences, and their needs because of societies and higher education's negative views (McTier et al., 2020; Ott & McTier, 2019), we believe it is important to examine areas of contention surrounding college students with criminal records. We also think there is an urgent need to investigate higher education housing inequalities as it relates specifically to college students with criminal records

because we know through research that many people with criminal records return to prison when they have no place to work or live (Petersilia, 2003).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

A sense of belonging is not a new concept within higher education. Strayhorn (2012) contends that a sense of belonging is a single phrase with a myriad of different meanings. For example, some scholars use a sense of belonging to connote a sense of community—the sense of mattering and belonging as a member in their respective communities (McMillian & Chavis, 1986; Rovai & Jordan, 2004). While others, such as Hurtado and Carter (1997), suggest that sense of belonging “contains both cognitive and affective elements in that the individual’s cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in an affective response” (p. 328). Over time, scholars such as Strayhorn (2012) have synthesized the concept of sense of belonging.

Strayhorn (2012) considers a sense of belonging to be a basic human need and motivation, which are needed to influence behavior. Although a sense of belonging can be applied to all human beings, he argues that a sense of belonging may take on a more significant meaning for college students who are still developing while in college or understanding the experiences of marginalized and minoritized individuals within the college context. Opposite of sense of belonging is alienation, which Strayhorn (2012) acknowledges as the “chilly cousin” (p. 17). He argues that alienation is the privation of belonging, which equates to marginalization, isolation, or alienation from various experiences, individuals, or groups of people. He also posits that alienation may refer to or consist of a student’s resistance to or rejection of their affections from an object or society they have previously or aspire to belong to.

There are seven core elements that Strayhorn (2012) recognizes. Due to the constraints of this paper, we provide a brief summation of each element. First, a sense of belonging is an essential human need that derived from Maslow’s (1962) work on motivation. Strayhorn contends that in order to satisfy a student’s higher-order needs (e.g., knowledge, self-actualization), the satisfying of a student’s needs (i.e., belonging) must first take place. Secondly, a sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human (i.e., a student’s) behavior “to or against academic achievement norms” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 19). Thirdly, sense of belonging takes on heightened importance depending on: (a) the context (e.g., classroom, housing community), (b) the times when individuals are still discovering who they are (e.g., late adolescence & early adulthood), and (c) amongst specific populations (e.g., college students with criminal records) whose basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, safety) and sense of belonging are threatened. These instances can significantly impact a student’s academic outcome and trajectory towards completion (Johnson et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2012).

As a fourth element, Strayhorn (2012) suggests that a sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering. When a student feels as if they matter or as if the people in their community care about them, their sense of belonging is then satisfied. Fifth, social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging. For example, a student's race, gender, age, criminal record, and crime type can intersect and profoundly influence a student's sense of belonging in the academy. The sixth element, sense of belonging, engenders other positive outcomes such as a level of achievement, continued rehabilitation, engagement, and positive relationships, which are extremely important for ensuring college students with criminal records are successful post-involvement with the injustice system (McTier et al., 2017; Strayhorn et al., 2013). Lastly, according to Strayhorn (2012), a student's sense of belonging must be satisfied consistently. However, that need for belonging is likely to change as the student's surroundings, environments, or situations change. Specifically, a student's need for belonging has to be strengthened and reinforced continually. Failure to do so can have dire consequences for that individual or group of students (e.g., returning to criminal behavior, disconnecting from the academic setting).

Strayhorn's (2012) approach to sense of belonging fosters an anti-deficit strength-based perspective, which produces compelling insights for understanding various college student populations, refining college programs and institutional services, as well as augmenting various institutional policies. While his approach expounds upon the social and emotional aspects of belonging, his work also considers the various aspects of the concept, which has been used by many scholars across various disciplines (Johnson et al., 2020). Together, the seven core elements of Strayhorn's model provide us with the foundation for understanding and addressing how a student's lack of housing options shapes and molds their educational career and their sense of belonging in the academic space.

Methods

Reflexivity

For this study, we offer a brief reflexive statement about who we are and our connection to this study. The research team is made up of five research team members (i.e., one assistant professor and four doctoral students). Three of the researchers identify as African American, one identifies as African, and one identifies as White. There are three self-identifying cis-women and two self-identifying cis-men. Only one of the research team members have been incarcerated and homeless. However, none of the research team members have been denied on-campus housing because of having a criminal record. We, as a team, approach this study with an open mind and with procedures to collectively and

individually check our biases, which is outlined in the trustworthiness section of the paper.

Participants and Recruitment

To recruit participants for this study, we used criterion sampling (i.e., a set of predetermined criteria outlined on a flier) to recruit participants for this study (Patton, 2002). This flier, which was approved by Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board, was distributed to various social media accounts (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and various listservs (e.g., Higher Ed in Prison). The criteria to participate in this study included: (1) participants being 18 years of age or older, (2) having a juvenile or adult criminal record, (3) a current student or recent graduate (not to exceed six months), and (4) had to have been denied on-campus housing because of their record. Prospective participants who met the criteria for the study and participated in all of the study activities (i.e., pre-questionnaire form, photo-elicitation, one-on-one interview) were eligible to receive up to \$75 in Amazon e-gift cards.

We had a large number of prospective participants who were impacted by housing outside of higher education and, therefore, did not apply to on-campus housing in higher education because they feared they would be denied as they have in the community. Because of the scope of our study, we did not include them in this particular study. We did, however, have only four participants who inquired, met our criteria, and participated fully in our study (see Table 1). We consider our study to be diverse as it relates to crime type. However, we acknowledge that our study was void of salient identities (e.g., women, LGBT, or Black participants). Our participants consisted of one Asian, one Chicano, and two White cis-gendered males. Three participants are currently

Table 1. Description of Participants.

Pseudonym	Candide	Donald	Rocky	Larry
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male
Race/ethnicity	Chicano	White	Asian	White
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Married
Number of children	0	0	0	1
Crime(s) convicted of	AR, HIR, UOA	UCFCSC	SA	RB, POD
Current living arrangements	Shares Living Room with Nephew	Lives in Solidarity House	Lives with a Friend	Rental Property Under Wife’s Name

Note. Abbreviations for the table are listed in alphabetical order as follows: AR = Armed Robbery. HIR = Home Invasion Robbery. PISIS = Possession of illegal substances with intent to sell. POD = Possession of Drugs. RB = Residential Burglary. SA = Sexual Assault. UCFCSC = Use of computer to facilitate a child sex crime. UOA = Use of a Firearm.

pursuing an undergraduate degree, and one recently graduated and is applying to graduate school.

Collection of Participant Perspectives

The collection of participant perspectives, a term used in place of data (see e.g., McTier et al., 2017), consisted of several steps. The first step consisted of participants reviewing an informed consent form detailing the study's aims and goals along with their rights as it relates to their participation in this study. Next, participants completed an online pre-questionnaire form, which included closed-ended questions pertaining to their individual demographics, specific information about their criminal history, current housing arrangements, and the participant's educational background. The subsequent step consisted of participants voluntarily participating in a photo-elicitation exercise, which is a process of incorporating creative images or photographs into the research process (Harper, 2002). For this particular study, participants selected and submitted three to five photos that represented their housing experiences or lack thereof. A total of 22 photos were collected from all of the participants. Following the photo-elicitation exercise, each of the four participants participated in one semi-structured interview to discuss how they were affected by a denial from on-campus housing. Each interview lasted between 35 minutes to one hour. The collection of participants' perspectives spanned a 30-day period.

Analysis of Participants Perspectives

For the secondary analysis of participant perspectives, we utilize Covert and Koro-Ljungberg's (2015) layered textual analysis approach, which consists of: (1) a structural analysis and (2) a thematic analysis approach. For the structural analysis process, the research team read through each of the participant's transcribed transcripts two times. During our read through, we made sure to pay attention to any of the participants' perspectives that related to our research question and to any text that appeared as a narrative (Riessman, 1993). Similar to Riessman (2008) and Covert and Koro-Ljungberg (2015), we consider a narrative to be a focused subject, with occasional turns at talk (e.g., loosely connected turns of events), that relate to how participants experience housing inequities during their college experience. Each narrative included a description of the participants perceived housing inequality experienced within higher education and some type of opinion, reaction, or evaluation of the housing inequalities they believed they have experienced. We then proceeded to analyze participants' narratives using Labov's (1997) six elements of narrative structure. Those elements include the (1) abstract (summary of the narrative), (2) orientation (explicit details about the narrative), (3) complicating action (the plot or sequence of events), (4) evaluation (the narrator's interpretation or opinions),

(5) resolution (an outcome of the narrative), and (6) coda (a conclusion of the narrative).

According to Covert and Koro-Ljungberg (2015), two elements must be present in order to form a narrative. Those elements include: (1) a complicating action describing the various types of housing inequities experienced by the participants and (2) and evaluation of the housing inequalities that the participants experienced. In order to identify the elements of a participant's narrative, we first read each participant's transcribed transcript several times while noting and locating the beginning and end of each element found. The research team also took extensive notes of the "function, content, and relationship" across all of the participants' narratives (Covert & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 309). We also engaged in extensive notetaking about the structural patterns that were taking place throughout all the participant's narratives. We made notes about the function, content, and relationship of the various elements for each participant's narratives. Similarly, we wrote memos about the structural patterns in all the narratives while keeping a log of any analytic decisions and procedures that were made.

For the thematic analysis process, we used Riessman (2008) thematic analysis of narratives as suggested by Covert and Koro-Ljungberg (2015). Here we created additional analytical questions such as:

- What is the participant's stance vis-à-vis the housing inequities experienced?
- How did the participant encounter housing inequities?
- What role did the participants' crime play in their encounter with housing inequities?

Thereafter, we begin to identify patterns across the participants' narratives while also searching for overarching topics and ideas that may constitute as a theme. For the display of findings in this paper, we highlighted the narratives relating specifically to the study's purpose.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, we employ criteria suggested by Guba (1981). The first set of criteria that we employ is credibility. To establish credibility, we engage in a process called triangulation, which involves using multiple researchers to investigate the same problem, and it involves using various methods to enhance the quality of information being collected (Shenton, 2004). Specifically, we use interviews, photo-elicitation, and a pre-questionnaire form as forms of triangulation. We also employ frequent member checking and peer debriefing sessions to ensure our biases are being recognized and checked, to serve as a sounding board for ideas, and to check for the accuracy of the information being collected and presented in the final writeup (Shenton, 2004). We ensure

that all participants have the opportunity to read through their individual transcripts and findings for edits, clarifications, redactions, or comments. In addition to establishing credibility, we also establish transferability, which suggests, “all social/behavioral phenomena are context bound” (Guba, 1981, p. 86). Specifically, we provide complete details and thick descriptions of our participants and the methods that we use throughout this study.

Findings

In this article, we demonstrate how participants were affected by denials from on-campus housing opportunities as a result of having a criminal record. The first finding focuses on the participant’s ability to connect to others (e.g., students, the campus community, institution) because of being denied housing opportunities. The second finding addresses how the participant’s finances were affected, and the decisions they had to make as a result of being denied housing opportunities. The final finding draws our attention to how denial from on-campus housing affects the participant’s emotional and mental state.

Ability to Connect to Others

Participants in this study described how denials from on-campus housing, as a result of having a criminal record(s), affected their ability to connect to their peers (i.e., other students), to the campus community vis-a-vis student life, and the overall campus. Part of the reason, according to the participants, had to do with not being able to find affordable and livable housing options in the immediate vicinity of the institution because of the housing discrimination laws that often deterred, banned, or prohibited people with criminal records from living there. As a result, all of the participants had to live further away from campus, which had a profound impact on their ability to connect and develop healthy relationships with others. To reflect this finding, we share several examples starting with Candide.

Candide, an undergraduate student with a criminal record, shared his story of wanting to be around knowledge producers and people who wanted to see him grow, hence his reason for pursuing college. He states,

While in prison, I got placed in solitary confinement for seven years while serving my sentence. I started to pursue education, got into college [in prison]. I was surrounded by people who took an interest in wanting to see me grow as a human being. But basically, I was going to this university looking for the same things that I found in solitary confinement, which was that nurturing environment of knowledge producers.

In order to obtain that nurturing environment (i.e., sense of connection to others), he applied to places that were centralized on campus, offered multiple roommates, and provided a large community of students he could interact with. Unfortunately, due to his criminal record, he was denied the premier location on-campus housing because of his criminal record. Instead, he was given housing that was on the outskirts of campus and more expensive because they were single rooms. He makes the connection of being isolated from his peers and living further away from campus to living in solitary confinement for seven years while in prison. He expounds upon his experience and says,

I just got robbed of the experience of being around other students . . . Now at the end of the day, I still had to walk back to my apartment and enter by myself, and I was really hoping for the experience of more community feeling, a reason to partner, not just on campus but also off-campus. To be honest with you, it wasn't that far away; it was probably like another five-minute walk. I think my complaint about that environment or that space with that it just seemed it wasn't somewhere where I could build or create community, or be part of a community because a lot of the students, one were law students, so they were always very busy, and two people would just kind of find it odd like I was 36 years old and undergrad student, and I was in an apartment for students that was 24 or 25 and in law school.

Not being able to live where he wanted to on-campus sent a chilling message that he was unwanted. It also favored being isolated in prison. This is one example of how denial from on-campus housing affects participants' ability to connect to others.

Another example of how on-campus housing affects the ability of participants to connect to others can be seen in Donald's experience. Donald, an undergraduate student with a criminal record, described how being denied on-campus housing affected his ability to join social groups and be involved on campus. When he was taking in-person classes on campus, Donald had to report to an official in Student Affairs for approval to be in certain classes and places on campus or to join certain student life activities. Needless to say, Donald wasn't able to join or partake in a lot of student life activities. He states, "it was weird. I felt like I was a student, but I wasn't a student." He further explains and states,

I felt like I was in a protective bubble, and it was counterproductive to what they wanted me to do. Yeah, it was weird. I really didn't take part in student life. I wasn't part of any groups or anything. It definitely felt like a different form of High School. It was a little bigger campus, but it wasn't anything political, any activism going on, or anything. They said, "Well, join groups." There's really nothing

here. I was in a writing group, but that's done. I write poetry because I do; I don't learn much. That's my own puzzle. But yeah, it was like I was there, but I wasn't there.

Because of Donald's specific crime type (i.e., sexually related offense) and his inability to live on campus, he often struggled to find appropriate and long-lasting connections with people. The few groups (i.e., writing and poetry) that he did join had very limited interaction with people. Additionally, he often had to commute to campus, which limited his ability to connect to others on campus. Had he been able to live on campus, Donald believed he would have better connections to the campus community and more established relationships with his peers.

As a final example, we share how Rocky's ability to connect to others on campus was affected by his on-campus housing denial. Rocky, an undergraduate student with a criminal record, described how being denied on-campus housing made him feel as if he wasn't a part of the campus community. He shares how his denial on campus felt similar to being ostracized within the community, which resulted in him feeling as if he didn't belong. Here is what he shared,

No, of course, I did not feel a part of the campus community when I was denied housing. Because you feel like you're that picture with the shame, you're ostracized from society, you don't belong. You're judged and tagged! And like I said, if I had a clean record, normal, you're considered quote on quote normal, whatever . . . In high school, I wanted to be like certain people . . . You're called a gunner, you're a nerd, whatever, teacher's pet, you want to get good grades. And now, after getting a criminal conviction, I'm a (C) student. I just want to be normal. A (C) is average, right? That's what they say. Can I be normal? Can I be average? Can I be treated like somebody else without being, "Let me see your past? Oh yeah." That kind of thing. So, yeah. No, I do not feel part of [the campus community]. Getting denied did not make me feel welcome.

For Rocky, being denied on-campus housing stripped away his ability to connect to his institution. It stripped away his ability to feel as if he was an ordinary student or as if he belonged. Instead, he felt shame and alienation from the institution he chose to pursue, which was similar to the other participants in this study. This example, along with the others presented in this finding, reflects the narratives about how the participants were unable to build or foster healthy relationships because of having a criminal record.

A Financial Strain

Several participants (i.e., Donald, Larry, and Candide) in this study described how denials from on-campus housing, as a result of having a criminal record,

affected them financially. While describing how they were affected, the participants explained that employment was often hard to come by because of having a criminal record. This reality often meant that participants had very little money to spend on housing applications, decent living environments, and basic necessities. As a result, participants either lived in community homes for cheaper rent, went into debt, or they ended up not applying to institutions because they couldn't afford to spend money on applications without housing options. To reflect this finding, we share several examples starting with Larry.

Larry, an undergraduate student who is currently applying to Law School with a family, shared how he was financially affected by on-campus housing denials because of having a criminal. He explained how he would often apply to several institutions and their on-campus housing only to find that he would be denied because of his criminal record. After realizing he was wasting a significant amount of money during the application process for both housing and admission to his chosen institution, he opted to inquire about the housing options prior to wasting his money. However, to no avail, on-campus housing often required admission to the institution for him to even receive any information about housing options for people with criminal records and families. Here's his narrative,

I think this is an overall problem with criminal history in general. There's got to be a way that people can know what's going to happen, but in a lot of cases, it was like, "Oh, I had to apply, I had paid \$70 for my law school application, I had to go all the way through that process, I had to accept. . . The dictum was I would have to accept admission and give a \$250 deposit." Basically, I had to go through all these processes before we could see if I could qualify for student housing. I would imagine it would not be very hard to implement a process to give somebody a preliminary acceptance, or to understand what's available to them. In my perfect world, acceptances would be greatly increased, but regardless of what it is, you're going to put in process for screening, and I think this goes for a lot of different things besides just housing. It gives someone a "yes" or "no" before they spend all their time and jump through all the other hoops they're going to have to go through.

Donald, an undergraduate student, shares what he had to do and what he had to settle for after being denied on-campus housing because of his criminal record. Due to Donald's crime type, he was often denied on-campus housing by the institutions he applied to and employment opportunities. Under the circumstances, Donald had to resort to going into debt by taking out additional student loans to pay for a halfway house turned solidarity home.

Solidarity, according to Donald, means “we believe in solidarity or charity and everything.” He shares his narrative,

Okay. So, I moved up here in 2016. I lived at my parents’ house when I got on probation, and I got up here after probation, about a year after probation ended. It’s cheap rent. It’s, like, \$200.00. I lived here before when everything went down in 2006 in regards to my crime, and I live with three other people. It’s \$200.00 a month, and it’s a house. When I moved up here, I’ve had a history of trying to find housing, and there are places, and I had to be so many yards from this, and whatever feet from that. For me, after two years of looking in [city redacted], when I was going to school for undergrad and for my Masters, it was so much easier for me to live in a solidarity house because it was cheap and affordable.

As a final example, Candide shares how he was affected financially after being denied on-campus housing. Notably, he shares how he was looking for on-campus housing that would fit into his financial budget and keep him out of debt. However, after being denied on-campus housing because of his criminal record, he had to move further away from campus, take out emergency loans to account for the hike in housing expenses, and move to a place where he did not want to live. He shares his story and says,

I had received a scholarship, which I think it was \$7,000 for two years. But the first funding doesn’t kick in until the end of the year, and that was going to fund my following semester. So because the rent was a little higher than what I could afford, I need like an additional \$350, so I had to take out an emergency loan. And so that just . . . and one of my goals as an undergrad was to graduate with no debt, but unfortunately that didn’t happen because life happened and other types of emergencies happened, I had to take a loan. For me, it was really not being able to build community or be in a community. And then after that, there was the funding or taking out the loan to pay for housing that I don’t want to be in, right? So I was in that housing that I was assigned only for one semester, and believe me once I was in there I started looking for housing for another location, and I sought off-campus housing through . . . it was a co-ed fraternity that made certain space available in the house that they were renting, it was a two-story house. Whenever they couldn’t rent out all the space to their members, they’ll open up to the regular student body. And so I ended up going there because . . . I ended up holding it for one semester, but it wasn’t also the kind of space that I was looking for. It was just, it was one big house with a bunch of people. I was looking for an apartment maybe with like two people, that was just too much. I was expecting to pay like \$700, but my rent increased to \$1034.

The narratives of Larry, Donald, and Candide highlight how the participants were financially affected after being denied on-campus housing as a result of having a criminal record. These economic effects, according to the participants, caused them to miss out on attending institutions, caused them to increase their debt, and caused them to live in places that were less than ideal. Had the opportunity for on-campus housing been available, perhaps they could have avoided some of these financial burdens.

Mental and Emotional State

After conducting the analysis for this study, we found that being denied on-campus housing affected all of the participant's emotional and mental state. Participants in this study would often go through a number of emotions and feelings, which often triggered an array of emotional and mental anguish because of their housing denial. These emotions and feelings would then lead to participants questioning or thinking ill of themselves and becoming depressed or stressed about the situation.

For example, Larry mentions how he felt when he would always run across verbiage in the on-campus housing application that mentioned that students with criminal records would be denied housing. He stated,

I was really . . . Honestly, I was depressed. That's probably the best way I would put it would be depression. It's like you get . . . You're just limited. I feel like there's limitations, and so it's like . . . The first thing I would do is, I would look at that school, and then I would review, and once you hit that line, there's just depression and hopelessness.

That depression and hopelessness would result in Larry not completing that application because he knew, after past experiences, he would be denied housing because of his criminal record. Another illustration can be seen in Rocky's experience. Rocky, who is an undergraduate student, shared how he tried to make sense of being denied on-campus housing. He reflects and says,

So then, then the no vacancy. That's in general. That's not even just in the student housing. It's housing in general. Most apartment complexes in [state redacted], unless they're in the hood, which I'm going to go further on, but most apartments, well, the nice ones. I can understand if you don't have the money because everything is about money, we live in a capitalistic society. If you don't have the money to pay rent, you can't afford them then you won't be able to live there. However, denying a person based on their background, that's . . . You did something in the past, whatever indiscretion, big or small, you should be allowed to live there if you can afford to. But being denied access when other students can live there who don't have money for . . . All students are poor, right? They're going through school, they

don't have jobs, and they're there full time. Or they're working part-time jobs to help support their tuition and books and etc. So if another student could live there but they have no record, and I'm just as good as the other student, and maybe if not better, I'm denied, I'm unsavory, or whatever excuse they want to say, that's what that image came to my mind.

As Rocky reflects and processes his denial of on-campus housing, he can't help but feel as if he is unsavory or unwanted by his campus community because of his criminal record. His rationale mind doesn't grasp how someone with the means to pay for a place to live is continuously denied, nor can he grasp how his past criminal history continues to be used against him. That feeling of unsavory or unwantedness is also amplified because he also experiences those same housing denials within society.

As a final example, we share how Donald's emotional and mental state was affected as a result of being denied on-campus housing. Donald, who is an undergraduate student, spoke in-depth about how he was virtually denied housing from every place (i.e., on-campus and public housing) he applied to because of his criminal record. Prior to moving into the solidarity house, Donald lived with his parents, which was 6 hours away from campus. He had to move back home because no one would rent to him, and his parents did not want him on the streets. As time went on, Donald began to have this internal blaming battle with himself about the predicament he was in, which caused him to stress and become "ticked." These feelings were also intensified because of his family's feelings. Because of the emotionally charged environment, Donald had to move into a community turned solidarity house. He shares his narrative about the way he was feeling and says,

Well, I'm very used to a lot of ups, and a lot of downs. I feel like It's never going to be good all the time. So, I definitely understood. But my parents were really mad. They felt like they were on probation, too, because I was there as well. So, they got ticked, and I got ticked and super-stressed. It was a very, very difficult time. I did understand some social constructs and labeling theory. I definitely knew . . . I had nothing, really, to look forward to, because I can't pretend I don't know this stuff. Maybe it would be better, like, I could be like, "Hey, I'm just going to hope for the better," blah-blah-blah. "It's my fault. It's my inner determination that's not making this happen."

As displayed in this theme, denial from on-campus housing affects the emotional and mental state of participants in this study. Participants began to experience a number of emotions that often left them thinking ill of themselves or feeling some type of way about the situation at hand. Though the feelings varied, one thing is for sure, participants did not feel good about being denied housing options.

Discussion and Implications

Research on the experiences of college students with criminal records in traditional higher education settings is somewhat limited. Additionally, enrollment and retention data on this student population is scant within every aspect of higher education. We attribute this scarcity to the recent focus on students with criminal records within traditional higher education settings. Within the last few years, this particular student population has begun to pique the interest of various constituents within higher education (see e.g., Custer, 2013; McTier et al., 2017; Strayhorn et al., 2013). As it relates to public data, information collected on the number of students who are admitted or denied access into the institution with a criminal record are infrequent and hard to locate. Similarly, public retention or graduation data on any student who possesses a criminal record within higher education settings are also scarce and hard to trace. With this lack of data and no charge for programs or offices to track this information, it is difficult to obtain an accurate account of how many students are impacted by on-campus housing denials.

Despite this absence of information, we believe our study lays a foundation for exploring the complex issues surrounding on-campus housing for students with criminal records. As such, this study contributes to the literature on college students with criminal records in on-campus housing by generating several critical areas that should be considered by the higher education community (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators, student affairs). Due to our small sample size of four participants, we strongly caution against generalizability.

First, this study revealed that on-campus housing within higher education doesn't care to have students with criminal records living in their housing communities. We know this because participants were denied living arrangements because of their criminal records. As a result of being denied on-campus housing opportunities, participants felt disconnected and alienated (e.g., marginalized or isolated) from the university and its community (Strayhorn, 2012). Based on previous literature, we know that living on campus can have profound effects on a student's sense of belonging, engagement, involvement, retention, and overall development (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Schudde, 2011; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Even with knowing this information, on-campus housing tends to engage in practices that further marginalize this student population. If students are able to physically attend classes and be among a plethora of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, then why aren't they able to live on-campus? The rationale and logic of excluding this student population from living on campus are problematic because it pushes them further away from the campus community while simultaneously impeding on their sense of belonging.

Secondly, our findings suggest that being denied on-campus housing has financial consequences for this student population. Based on this study's findings, we know that participants are going into debt because they are taking out

an excessive amount of student loans to obtain that sense of belonging on campus. Our findings show that participants were taking out student loans to pay for off-campus housing and to pay for places (if they were able to find it) that would put them as close as possible to their campus. In addition to taking out student loans to pay for housing, participants also took out student loans because they longed for a sense of connection and because they aspired to build long-lasting friendships and relationships with their peers. Our participants are essentially relying on student loans, which should be used solely for educational purposes, just to feel included on campus.

The other piece to consider is the lack of employment opportunities, which means that students rely heavily on their student loans to thrive and make it through. With the already growing balloon of student debt within the United States (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016) and the rise in rent (Ellen & Torrats-Espinosa, 2020), the issue of student debt should be a cause of concern for any administrator or student affairs practitioner interested in eradicating student debt or serving students. Additionally, while it may be easier to say obtain a job, we know via research that people with criminal records are likely to be denied employment, especially if they have violent crimes (Clark et al., 2020). No job means no money to pay for basic necessities such as rent.

Lastly, our findings show the various ways participants were affected mentally and emotionally as a result of being denied on-campus housing. However, the research team only scratched the surface with our understanding of their mental and emotional state. After reflecting on this finding, we know that being alienated or treated differently in higher education can have a profound and long-lasting effect on an individual's mental and emotional state (see, e.g., Elliott et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2016), which is why we believe that practices that result in denials should be followed with some type of support and resources especially since we know that students, particularly marginalized students, have been known to attempt suicide and other modes of self-harm because of being othered or treated negatively by the campus community (Effrig et al., 2011; Seelman, 2016; Sutton, 2016). There is an opportunity for on-campus housing to explore ways to include students with criminal records into the on-campus housing community.

Implications

We offer a set of implications for research and practice that we believe will help create a sense of belonging for current and prospective college students with criminal records interested in obtaining on-campus housing. For research, we suggest conducting studies that examine the experiences of students with violent or sexual related offenses who are denied on-campus housing. This is needed to understand the issues around campus safety, a sense of belonging, and future living opportunities. We also suggest conducting research that investigates

higher education housing policies and state housing laws that specifically target students with criminal records. There are so many nuances as it relates to institutional type, state law, and a student's criminal record that needs to be dissected and understood. Additionally, we need studies to examine housing administrators/practitioners' understanding of the laws and the various nuances of crimes along with their perceptions of students with criminal records being allowed to live on campus. Lastly, we recommend studies that can provide up to date statistical data on enrollment, retention, graduation, and denial trends in every aspect of higher education. This will help researchers to further understand how many people with criminal records being denied educational opportunities because of their records.

For practice, we suggest implementing a living-learning community for students with criminal records. However, we caution against alienating college students with criminal records from other students because they have a record. We believe it is an excellent opportunity to build community, foster and establish relationships, and foster a sense of belonging by creating a living-learning community. The reality is, students with no criminal records will encounter or engage people with criminal records within the community pre- or post-college. So, we believe that college can be used as a gateway to fostering positive relationships and communities. We also suggest creating an opt-in or opt-out option for all students who apply for on-campus housing opportunities. Specifically, there should be a space on the application where all students can indicate whether or not they would want to room with a student who has a criminal record. We do caution against exposing students who have criminal records in the housing process. We want to make sure that college students with criminal records privacy are respected at all times. In the same breadth, if no one wants to room with students who may have a criminal record, then we suggest offering a single room and space for the student in the same building so they can still have access to the many amenities that on-campus housing provides. We also suggest on-campus housing employees create an intentional and up to date alternative housing option list/plan for students with criminal records.

Limitations

There are several limitations that we would like to address in this study. We recognize that this particular study doesn't capture how students with criminal records are affected at other institutional types (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, private institutions, minority-serving institutions, community colleges). Knowing how participants are affected at these other institutions could provide us with a different perspective that hasn't been considered by the participants. Also, participants in this study were diverse with respect to their crime type. We believe that women with criminal records, especially

women with children, and Black people, face unique challenges that are unique. Having their perspectives about how they were affected by on-campus housing denials could provide us with new things to consider as it relates to housing issues for this population. Lastly, our criteria for our study ultimately impacted our findings. Our participants were current students who had been denied on-campus housing options. We were unable to capture how individuals who dropped out or never returned to college because they had no living arrangements were affected. Perhaps, if we had considered this particular population, our study could have yielded more vibrant narratives.

Conclusion

As many research studies have noted, college students with criminal records is a growing student population with a unique set of needs. This study begins to dissect one of those issues (i.e., on-campus housing) and the affects that on-campus housing denials have on students with criminal records sense of belonging in higher education. Based on this study's findings, which centers the voices of college students with criminal records, we think higher education housing administrators should consider implementing some of our recommendations mentioned in our implications section. As a recapitulation of our implications section, we strongly suggest that housing administrators: (1) implement living-learning communities for students with criminal records, (2) create an opt-in or opt-out option for all students who apply for on-campus housing opportunities, (3) offer single rooms and spaces for college students with criminal records, and (4) create an intentional and up to date alternative housing option list/plan for prospective students who possesses a criminal record. By doing so, we believe that current and prospective college students with criminal records will feel as if they belong or matter to our higher education institutions more broadly and the on-campus housing community more specifically.

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