REALITY AND PERCEPTION:
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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In the present study, 14 representatives from various faith-based organizations (FBOs) participated in focus groups in which they explored the interactions of FBOs with the criminal justice system (CJS). Through the present study, 10 themes emerged from the data: (1) FBOs' programming difficulties and concerns, (2) perceptions regarding church involvement in the lives of offenders and the CJS, (3) lack of collaboration between the CJS and FBO treatment providers, (4) lack of offender family reunification, (5) FBOs' staff credentialing and associated myths, (6) community misperceptions about the CJS, (7) stigma and stereotypes associated with offenders and the CJS, (8) collaboration with other organizations, (9) perceptions of false religion in the CJS, and (10) dependence on the church as a social change agent. As the call for more community-based criminal justice related programming increases, the ability of communities to identify the role FBOs will play will assist communities in developing an accurate plan in order to meet their programming needs.

Historically, the majority of American society has had the view that faith-based organizations (FBOs) take care of our neediest people (Wuthnow, 2004). Individuals in the criminal justice system (CJS) are included in those groups that need additional support. Many members of the American society also have the perspective that "the church" will assist ex-offenders and at-risk youth. Some FBOs do try to reach out to at-risk individuals and assist the local police with efforts in order to control crime (DiIulio, 2001; Johnson, 2011). However, we the researchers questioned whether FBOs still provide services in conjunction with the CJS in ways that meet current perceptions. In the present study, we assessed the perceived and actual roles of FBOs in their community and in relation to working with offenders and the CJS. We evaluated this issue at the local level in order to ascertain whether FBOs still do what they have historically been perceived to do or whether their involvement with the CJS has shifted in any way.

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Religion and Crime

Several studies exist regarding the effects that religion has on the criminal intentions of an individual. Baier and Wright (2001) used the hellfire and beyond theory (first proposed by Hirschi and Stark in 1969) in order to formulate the three hypotheses of their meta-analysis. This theory states that people will behave based on the consequences of going to hell or heaven (Hirschi & Stark, as cited in Baier & Wright, 2001). The three hypotheses tested in this meta-analysis are the moral-community hypothesis, type-of-crime hypothesis, and group-level hypothesis (Baier & Wright, 2001). The moral-community hypothesis states that religion will have a deterrent effect on crime. The type-of-crime hypothesis states that religion has a stronger deterrent effect on lesser crimes than more severe crimes. The group-level hypothesis states that the deterrent effect of religion increases the longer an individual remains connected to that group. Baier and Wright (2001) discovered that religion did have a deterrent effect on crime, being more effective on less severe crimes; however, they did not find any significant support for the group-level hypothesis. Johnson, Larson, De Li, and Jang (2000) examined the effects of religion on various delinquent acts. In their study, Johnson et al. measured religiosity by using church attendance and religious salience. They found that the probability of criminal involvement decreased the more an individual visited church (Johnson et al., 2000). Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, and Burton (1995) found similar results but believe that actions of others within the community affect personal religious behavior.

Studies have shown that the African American church plays an important role in the African American community, acting as a means of social control (Johnson, 2008). Johnson (2008) examined the role of the church in the Black community. In Johnson's study, almost 90% of the 2,096 participants responded that they had affiliations with a religion and almost all of them responded that they were Christians. Johnson's study found that increased church involvement decreased the effects of neighborly disorders; however, the study did not find significance of religion having a buffer effect on general crime (Johnson, 2008).

FBOs, Programmatic Efforts, and Evidence-Based Policy

Crisp (2014) observed that, in some instances, FBOs have been broadly defined as "faith-related voluntary associations" (p. 11). This definition allows for the inclusion of churches, congregations, synagogues, and mosques that do not use social service provision as the primary method for serving their community (Crisp, 2014). DiIulio (2001) noted that during George W. Bush's presidency, the president addressed the definition of FBOs and their roles as partners with the government in the provision of social programs to their communities. Former president George W. Bush stated:

> Government cannot be replaced by charities, but it can and should welcome them as partners. We must heed the growing consensus across America that successful government social programs work in fruitful partnership with community-serving and faith-based organizations - whether run by Methodists, Muslims, Mormons, or good people of no faith at all. (p. 273)

Traditionally, FBOs "have been involved in many different types of crime prevention efforts. These include primary prevention, secondary prevention or intervention, and tertiary prevention or correction/reformation" (McGarrell, Brinker, & Etindi, 1999, p. 10). Primary intervention involves any technique used in order to prevent crime such as building a stronger community (McGarrell et al., 1999). Secondary intervention involves crime prevention in areas where involvement in crime is increasing. Tertiary intervention involves targeting individuals who are previous offenders with reformation as the primary goal (McGarrell et al., 1999).

With the growing prevalence of violent crimes in communities, there exists an ever-increasing need to augment social control mechanisms with evidence-based policy and programming (Johnson, 2011). Central to the policy debate on crime prevention efforts is the argument of whether to build additional prisons in order to incapacitate offenders or offer more rehabilitation and/or diversion programs in order to decrease overcrowding in inmate populations. Moreover, current efforts have focused on the use of restorative justice and accountability courts as viable alternatives. Increasingly, both

state and federal policies are focusing on the development of restorative justice and reentry programs that are community-based. Among community-based efforts to address the growing prevalence of crime, there also exists the use of faith-based initiatives in order to meet the needs of offenders (Johnson, 2011).

Research continues to demonstrate that FBOs provide a variety of services to their communities (Johnson, 2011; McGarrell et al., 1999; Wuthnow, 2004). The types of services FBOs provide, as well as the extent of their engagement with the CJS, vary. These variations continue to raise questions related to FBOs' involvement with the CJS within communities. More specifically, questions about the real and perceived roles of FBOs regarding their involvement with the CJS need further investigation.

Theoretical Paradigms

Researchers use the interpretative paradigm as a way of understanding how participants or respondents define their social reality or lived experience (Malterud, 2016). Rooted within the tenets of the sociological perspective of symbolic interactionism, research that uses the interpretative paradigm should focus on how participants or respondents socially construct and give meaning to behavior within their social context. Unlike positivism, in which an objective understanding of underlying patterns of social behavior is achieved through the use of qualitative measures, the interpretative paradigm uses rich, detailed, descriptive data for subjectively understanding the underlying patterns of social behavior. Malterud (2016) proposed that the interpretative paradigm is the most suitable framework for qualitative studies. When using an interpretative paradigm, researchers gather data based on the subjective meaning of the respondents' experiences which enriches general practice in a real-world context. Furthermore, researchers can use an interpretative paradigm in order to (1) emphasize how social reality is subjectively constructed through the lived experiences of the respondents and (2) foster a dialogue between community members in negotiating meanings and definitions derived from their perceptions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Within the framework of the interpretative paradigm, grounded theory can be viewed as a methodological approach for collecting and analyzing data (Hughes & Jones, 2003). In this approach, the analysis of qualitative data is the basis of theory. As such, grounded theory went against the traditional notion in the 1960s that it is necessary for a definite theory to exist before a research study begins (Robson, 2002). Therefore, researchers using the grounded theory approach employ inductive logic as opposed to deductive reasoning in which a hypothesis derives from an abstract theoretical or conceptual framework. Glaser and Strauss (1967) first proposed grounded theory in reaction to the challenge in sociological research of testing "grand theories" without regard for the underlying or ambiguous phenomena characteristic of the participants' lived experiences. Thus, researchers who were interested in investigating the inherent descriptive qualities of social life were insufficiently scientific. Therefore, grounded theory was developed in order to establish systematic guidelines that ensure rigorous construction of theories of social processes from raw data, improve the quality of research, and increase credibility in the face of criticism from the proponents of quantitative research.

Dunne (2011) noted that, according to Glaser and Strauss, the development of grounded theory was "an attempt to bridge 'the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research'" (p. 211). Researchers using the grounded theory approach are enabled to generate new theories through direct engagement with qualitative data (Tucker, 2016). Additionally, researchers can use the grounded theory approach in order to facilitate the use of theoretical sensitivity and sampling. Theoretical sensitivity is applied by researchers in order to be open and flexible to new theoretical leads while engaged in the systematic and ongoing process of concurrent data generation and analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Theoretical sampling involves the process in which new sources of data are extrapolated based on codes and categories developed from earlier data generation and collection (Szabo & Strang, 1997; Charmaz, 2014). Moreover, one of the most distinguishing features of the grounded theory approach is the dynamic interplay between data collection and data analysis (Payne, 2007). In the present study, we utilized a grounded theory approach in which researchers and participants engaged in dialogue in order to understand and delineate

(negotiate meanings and definitions) the perceived versus actual roles of FBOs in the CJS.

Method

In an attempt to assess the real and perceived roles of FBOs in the CJS within a small Southern community, a combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used as the sampling design for the present study. We used criterion sampling in order to select two types of participants for the present study: (1) individuals who were affiliated with an FBO that interacted with the CJS and (2) individuals that were affiliated with a criminal justice agency that interacted with an FBO. However, there were a few participants who, because of their profession and their volunteer activities, fell into multiple categories. For example, a participant could work as a probation officer and serve as a pastor whose church runs a prison ministry.

This combination of convenience and snowball sampling resulted in an initial list of 40 possible participants. The individuals on this list lived and worked within a 50-mile radius of the center of the community. Several of the individuals on the list were clergy who had participated in some form of prison ministry. Many of the participants on the list directed or worked for nonprofits that provided some form of social service to the community. A few individuals on the list also had some form of advanced credentialing such as licensed therapist or social worker. There were also a few individuals who, in addition to being able to represent an FBO, also worked in the CJS. For most of the potential participants, we did not know their self-identified race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, or level of education.

Potential participants were informally asked in person whether or not they would be interested in participating in a study that discussed the role of FBOs in their community. Only those individuals who agreed to participate in the present study were formally asked to participate in the focus groups. Formal requests to participate in the present study included an initial phone call and two follow-ups via phone and/or email. Of those individuals recruited, 14 people agreed to participate in the present study which resulted in the collection of a sufficient amount of data in order for themes to be

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Sex	Race	Role
Afami	Male	African-American	Clergy
Ballo	Male	African-American	Clergy
Cameo	Male	African-American	Clergy
Demi	Male	Caucasian	Program Administrator
Ecko	Male	Caucasian	Program Administrator
Fella	Male	Caucasian	Community Activist
Gazi	Male	African-American	Clergy
Blessing	Female	Caucasian	Program Administrator
Hidom	Male	African-American	Counselor/Therapist
Cule	Female	Caucasian	Clergy
Dorkas	Female	Caucasian	Program Administrator
Esse	Female	Caucasian	Community Activist
Ijem	Male	Caucasian	Community Activist
Kalo	Male	Caucasian	Counselor/Therapist

fully fleshed out. Saturation was attained since adding additional participants to the present study did not result in the coding of additional themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Approximately 71 % of participants were male and 29 % were female. Furthermore, 64 % were Caucasian and 29 % were African American with 36 % serving as clergy, 29 % serving as program administrators, 21 % serving as community activists, and 14 % serving as counselors/therapists. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' demographics. It should be noted that pseudonyms were used in order to protect participant privacy.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held on three days in a university conference room. Group sizes ranged from two to five participants. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour and refreshments were provided. At the start of each focus group, we informed participants that their participation was voluntary and that the focus group would be recorded. During the focus groups, participants were asked to answer the following questions: (1) What myths or misconceptions exist about the role of FBOs in the community in relation to offenders and in relation to the CJS (courts, corrections, law enforcement, and juvenile justice)?, (2) What do you see as the role of FBOs in the community in relation to working with offenders and the CJS?, and (3) What is your agency doing to fulfill the role of FBOs in the community in relation to offenders and in relation to the CJS? In order to facilitate the focus groups, we read each question individually and allowed the discussion to continue until it reached a natural stopping point before reading the next question. During instances in which a question was addressed when answering the previous question, we would summarize what we heard the participants say in relation to the subsequent question and ask if there were any additional comments participants wanted to make in order to further address the question. If there were no additional comments, we proceeded to the next question or opened the discussion to closing thoughts. At the conclusion of each focus group, participants received a small "goodie bag" in appreciation for their participation.

Internal Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2014) stated that "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (p. 201). In order to enhance reliability, we used the following procedures in the present study: (1) we checked transcripts for mistakes made during transcription, (2) ensured the absence of drift in the definition and/or meaning of codes during coding, (3) coordinated communication between coders through regular documented meetings and the sharing of analysis, and (4) cross-checked codes for intercoder agreement. In order to enhance internal validity, we also used member checking and peer debriefing strategies (Creswell, 2014).

A web-based software called "transcribe" was used in order to transcribe the audio recordings after the completion of the focus groups. The transcripts were prepared using a combination of edited and intelligent transcription techniques. After the transcription process, we checked the transcripts in order to make sure they did not contain obvious mistakes such as word omissions and misspellings that were made by the researchers during transcription. We used peer debriefing in order to enhance the accuracy of the data collected during the focus groups. A criminal justice graduate assistant who was familiar with the present study served as the peer debriefer. The graduate student reviewed and asked questions about the present qualitative study, reviewed the transcripts, and provided feedback in order to ensure that all of the accounts of the focus groups resonated with each other. This peer debriefing process added validity to the transcribed accounts of the focus group participants' statements.

During the coding process, we ensured that there was not a drift in the definition of codes or shift in the meaning. Intercoder agreement or cross-checking was reached when two or more of us agreed on the codes used for the same passages in the text. We thoroughly coded various passages of the text and then met in order to determine if either of us had employed similar coding strategies. Once we established consistency in coding various sections of the text, we then proceeded to go through and

code the entire set of transcripts. Throughout the coding process, we continued cross-checking codes and comparing results in order to ensure that there was consistency in coding. After the completion of coding and data analysis, we used member checking in order to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by sharing the final report with focus group participants via email and requesting their feedback. In addition, during an informal debriefing session that took place before a related community forum, we asked participants to discuss their perceptions of the accuracy of the findings.

Results

We developed themes based on what Creswell (2014) described as "emerging information collected from participants" that focused on issues related to the perceived and real roles of FBOs in relation to the CJS (p. 199). First, we reviewed the transcriptions for recurring themes and identified 24 initial themes. Then, we reviewed the themes and the related quotes in the transcript in order to identify similar themes that could be combined into a single theme. This process resulted in the 10 revised themes which are discussed below.

Through the themes that emerged in the present study, the present study's participants demonstrated (1) they had a very clear understanding of the role of FBOs in relation to the CJS and (2) they had serious concerns about the barriers to interaction between the CJS and FBOs. In addition, several community factors, organizational dynamics, and criminal justice policies were determinants in relation to how they negatively influenced the ability of FBOs to work with the CJS and, in some instances, the willingness of the CJS to work with FBOs. In the present study, 10 themes emerged from the data: (1) FBOs' programming difficulties and concerns, (2) perceptions regarding church involvement in the lives of offenders and the CJS, (3) lack of collaboration between the CJS and FBO treatment providers, (4) lack of offender family reunification, (5) FBOs' staff credentialing and associated myths, (6) community misperceptions about the CJS, (7) stigma and stereotypes associated with offenders and the CJS, (8) collaboration with other organizations, (9) perceptions of false religion in the CJS, and (10) dependence on the church as a social change agent.

FBO Programming Difficulties and Concerns

FBO programming difficulties and concerns were the most frequently recurring theme. Participants discussed difficulties associated with operating programs using limited resources and the related concerns such as program longevity, program quality, paying fair and appropriate staff salaries, client placement, and follow-up capacities. The majority of participants expressed concerns regarding the unwillingness of church members to volunteer to participate in groups that provide services outside of the church. Participants noted that obtaining the financial support of church members is easier than obtaining their physical support. The inability to maintain a robust and consistent volunteer base increased participants' concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the programs they provided. Fella's response summarized many of the other participants experiences when he stated: "Once you get people inside the church involved, they will support you but they won't come with you. They will support you financially. Volunteers is what we need, and we need boots on the ground." Participants who directed a treatment or residential program expressed similar concerns regarding the inability to obtain volunteers. However, their concerns included considerations about how the level of support received from the community impacted the hours worked by staff, the volume of the services provided, and the amount of funding needed to sustain the program.

Several participants also spoke about funding as a prevalent issue within FBO programming. Issues with funding took two different directions: (1) community perceptions that FBO programs should be free to participants and (2) the difficulties FBOs face in order to secure funding compared to government programming. Dorkas' response summarized many of the other participants experiences when she stated that many individuals are not willing to pay for services provided by FBOs and expect that FBOs will provide even better services than non-faith-based agencies. In addition, this inability to obtain sufficient funding also affects the ability of FBOs to pay their staff. This inability of FBOs to consistently pay their staff results in high turnover and a sense of "in-kind"

donations of their time by staff who do remain with the organization.

Another difficulty faced by FBOs deals with the bureaucratic nature of running an organization. One of the issues that many of the participants faced was in regard to a lack of funding from the state due to being faith-oriented and the CJS not referring participants to these programs because they are faith-based. Many participants stated that their organization's program would not be preferred over others because it draws from a faith-based orientation.

Finding ways to meet the needs of the increasing number of mentally diagnosed persons facing incarceration as well as being prepared to provide services to such persons when they return to community was also a concern raised by the present study's participants. Participants who were certified or who had staff who were certified to provide counseling or therapy services were confident in their ability to provide mental-health related services. However, they expressed concern about whether they would receive the opportunity to provide the services and whether they would receive adequate compensation in order to provide the services.

Perceptions Regarding Church Involvement in the Lives of Offenders and the CJS

Participants discussed the perception by the community that FBOs, or "the church," is only interested in showing up when something happens in the community but, when it comes to really investing time in the community for the long-term, FBOs are not interested. Participants asserted that the faith-based community should be the entity by which offenders experience reintegration back into the wider society since the CJS cannot provide them with sufficient funding or resources in order to do so. The disconnect between the community's perception of what FBOs are doing and what representatives of FBOs agree they (the FBOs) should be doing is evident in this theme.

In addition, participants discussed the unwillingness of clergy and their parishioners to give of their time in order to interact with offenders. Many participants spoke about the disproportionate participation from the minority community. Fella's response summarized many of the other participants experiences, when he stated:

One of the things I'll say, and these boys will back me up, 90% or 95% of our volunteers are White but we don't only serve a White population. There's lacking in our faith-based group and it's not that we don't try to recruit; we try to recruit Black people more than White people.

Participants also discussed the need for more participation of clergy of color in prison programming.

In addition, participants spoke about how others interact with offenders and ex-offenders, including how clergy interact with these individuals. Many participants discussed the stigma that people have toward offenders and ex-offenders. Participants who volunteered within the prison stated that people are reluctant to volunteer within the prison because they do not feel comfortable talking to offenders.

Other participants suggested reasons for FBOs not getting involved with ex-offenders. The predominant reason for involvement was the stigma associated with ex-offenders and people judging them after their release from prison. Other participants suggested that clergy would not interact with offenders within the prison because there was no offering within the prison. Fella's response concerning his opinion of the church regarding helping offenders within prison summarized many of the other participants experiences when he stated: "So many times what they are interested in is how much money can come into this pot. How I can control the people that are here and how can I get some more of them?"

Lack of Collaboration Between the CJS and FBO Treatment Providers

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was an absence of collaboration between CJS and FBO treatment providers. Of particular concern was the definition of long-term treatment. Members of the FBOs argued that six months is insufficient time in order to address the types of issues for which they received court referrals. Not allowing sufficient time for participants to complete treatment programs has the potential to lead them to the conclusion that nothing works since even a faith-based program did not have an impact on them in relation to addressing their issues. Participants discussed

the need for collaboration between law enforcement, the courts, and FBOs in order to devise treatment plans that allow participants to complete programs and are coupled with the possibility of receiving specified sanctions if the treatment plan is not completed.

Lack of Reunification of Offenders with their Families

The inability of offenders to interact with their families was another emergent theme. There were numerous discussions by participants regarding how many offenders have never received a visitation while others have received sporadic visitations; others experienced uncertainties regarding their family members being alive. Participants also discussed concerns about the distance between correctional facilities and the location of the families of inmates. Moreover, participants discussed concerns about transportation for family members and creating environments in prison in which young visitors (e.g., children of prisoners) can interact with their incarcerated family member in a nonthreatening environment. Participants suggested that, for many inmates and ex-offenders, the staff of FBOs became their family since they are the only people who interact with them in a manner that encourages self-improvement and provides resources for them once they return to the community. Participants agreed that this sense of family, established between FBO staff and inmates, is critical since most inmates will return to their communities and positive family support is a key factor in successful reintegration. Interestingly, participants also asserted that family interaction with inmates who may never return to the community is equally as important since it has a positive impact on their behavior in the institution and, subsequently, the behavior of those individuals around them who do have the opportunity to return to the community.

Credentialing of FBO Staff and Associated Myths

The credentialing of staff employed by FBOs was another theme that emerged during the focus groups. Several participants' comments reiterated that accreditation of programs or credentialing of program staff does not equate to program quality or success. There was a perception among participants that many people in the CJS believe the myths that only state accredited programs can be successful, that FBOs cannot obtain accreditation, and that staff employed by FBOs do not hold credentials. Participants reiterated that many of them have possessed credentials for many years and that the absence of state accreditation is not a good indicator of program quality or success. Some participants argued that it has been their experience that programs provided by FBOs often offer a higher quality of programming than state accredited programs.

Misperceptions of the CJS by the Community

During a conversation about interactions between pastors and judges, a theme regarding the misperceptions of the CJS by the community emerged. Participants told stories regarding how law enforcement, courts, and corrections personnel are very interested in giving people opportunities to desist from criminal behavior. Often the "second chance" that is provided to offenders is a result of the rapport that FBO staff have with agents who work in the CJS. Community members are aware of the rapport that exists between some FBO staff and CJS agents and will approach those FBO staff for assistance in obtaining a "second chance." Participants discussed concerns about increases in requests from family members who have a direct association with an FBO that FBO staff petition CJS personnel for leniency on behalf of their family members or friends who do not have any association with the FBO. Due to the disconnection between the family member or friend and the FBO staff, when the criteria for a "second chance" are agreed upon by the criminal justice agent and the family member or friend is released, that family member or friend refuses to interact with the FBO staff. Thus, the FBO staff is unable to ensure that the criteria set by the criminal justice agent is satisfied and, subsequently, that family member or friend would face arrest again. What the community does not see is that, as this pattern continues to happen, the rapport between the FBO staff and the criminal justice agents deteriorates to the point that the FBO staff is no longer able to negotiate "second chances." Then, when the CJS is no

longer willing to allow "second chances," the community views such a decision as proof of myths regarding the CJS such as fear of minorities, distrusting of the community, perpetuating a culture of violence, and disinterest in bringing about positive change in the community.

Stigma and Stereotypes Associated with Offenders and the CJS

Stigmatization of ex-offenders in connection to successful reentry and avoidance of recidivism was another theme that emerged during the focus groups. The stigmatization was two-sided: (1) members of the FBOs reported that ex-offenders stereotyped FBOs as being judgmental of persons with criminal and/or prison records and (2) ex-offenders felt as if, once they returned to the community, they were being stereotyped by FBOs as being unacceptable or worthless. Participants asserted that there are FBOs to which the stereotype does apply. However, many FBOs are willing and able to assist persons with a criminal and/or prison record and welcome them back to the community. Participants also emphasized that there needs to be a movement toward ensuring that ex-offenders do not feel as if they have a "scarlet letter" on them and that they are able to return to society. Once they return, they need to be able to engage in meaningful interactions and activities that reinforce their reintegration back into the community.

Collaboration with Other Organizations

Having representatives from various FBOs talk about their programs led to the realization that several participants were unaware of the services provided by their fellow FBOs. The same realization existed about the awareness of the CJS regarding the services provided by FBOs. Participants suggested that organizations should continue a dialogue regarding the services they provide and that such dialogue include representatives from the CJS. Participants asserted that if the CJS were aware of the types and quality of programs provided by FBOs as well as how FBO programs meet their programmatic needs, FBOs would have a greater probability for selection as service providers.

Perceptions of False Religion in the CJS

"Jailhouse religion" is a term often associated with the description of faith conversions experienced by persons while incarcerated. The nuances behind this myth are the basis for another theme identified from the focus groups. Several participants made it clear that the religious experiences of those individuals in jail and prison are not different compared to the religious experiences of those individuals who worship in churches on Sunday. Participants reiterated that many of the same ministers who preach in the community churches also preach within the prison. Therefore, if inmates are receiving a "jailhouse religion," then so are citizens in the community. Participants did not deny that some individuals pretend to have had a faith experience but the notion that all persons who have faith experiences in jail or prison are false was unsupported by the experiences of FBO staff. In addition to debunking the "jailhouse religion" myth, there was also discussion regarding the misperception that most prison riots pertain to specific religious groups.

Total Dependence on the Church for Social Change

The final theme that emerged from focus groups was the perception by the community, offenders, and their families that they should solely rely on "the church" for social change. Participants discussed the paradox that exists between the provision of services by FBOs and the long-term sustainability of the community. The FBOs reported no problem in providing services to persons even if the persons were deceptive in their acquisition of the services. However, members of the FBOs reiterated that the church is there to help community members, not to sustain them indefinitely. Cule's response was affirmed by many of the other participants when she implied that the willingness of "the church" to provide services sometimes results in community members never obtaining their own resources to cover necessities such as food, clothing, and utility bills. Gazi's response was also supported by many of the other participants when he stated that, in essence, community members never learn how to "catch their own fish."

In addition, members of the FBOs reiterated their desire is to see life change. Their goal is to see individuals come out of the negative environments which influenced their involvement in at-risk or criminal behavior. Unfortunately, it has been the experience of many FBO staff that the sense of loyalty to old groups is very strong and often it is not until the person finds themselves again at rock-bottom, without any assistance being offered from the group, that they realize the things they were learning from the FBOs were sincere. Participants asserted that many people who have contact with "the church" and engage in at-risk or criminal behavior rely solely upon "the church" to bring about their desired positive life changes such as changing their environment. Participants also argued that it is impossible for the "the church" to accomplish this task alone. They suggested that those individuals who are engaged in at-risk or criminal behavior, when given the opportunity, must also take responsibility for choosing the correct environments in which to place themselves.

Discussion

Ultimately, we sought to answer the following question in the present study: What are the real and perceived roles of FBOs regarding their involvement with the CJS in their communities? Overall, the data seems to suggest that distinct differences exist between those roles. In many ways, when examining the involvement of FBOs with the CJS in their communities, the data revealed that the real roles of FBOs align with the perceived roles of FBOs. However, when misalignment occurs, it seemingly has adverse consequences on the ability of FBOs to work with the CJS and members of their community. The findings of the present study offer support for existing literature.

As the literature demonstrates, the FBOs in the present study varied in the types of services they provided as well as their engagement with the CJS in their communities (DiIulio, 2001; McGarrell et al., 1999). Despite this variation, there were common themes that emerged during the focus groups which highlighted key findings from existing literature. For example, one of the themes that emerged was the total dependence on the church for social change. The data revealed that the perception that FBOs exist to meet the needs of the community is still very prevalent as was noted in the literature (Johnson, 2011; Wuthnow, 2004). The types of needs FBOs are willing to meet and the types of needs actually met by FBOs vary across organizations (Crisp, 2014; Johnson, 2011). The focus group participants provided anecdotal examples of the requests received from the community regarding providing food, clothing, housing, economic assistance, medical assistance, and various forms of counseling (e.g., addiction, familial, marital, etc.).

However, as research has demonstrated, the influence that religion has on criminality varies in the significance and duration of its impact (Baier & Wright, 2001; Johnson, 2008; Johnson et al., 2000). In addition, the extent to which FBOs work with the CJS and/or provide CJS-related programming also varies (DiIulio, 2001; Johnson, 2011; McGarrell et al., 1999). This variation and its impact on the ability of FBOs to serve their communities was evident in two themes that emerged from the data surrounding the programming difficulties and concerns experienced by FBOs as well as the perceptions that exist regarding offenders and the lack of church involvement with offenders and the CJS. The data suggests that programming provided by FBOs is often ineffective or misunderstood by community members because it does not align with the type of programming expected or does not meet the requirements. Findings revealed that many misperceptions about offenders and the level to which they experience reintegration back into the community adversely affects the level of involvement of FBOs within institutional corrections. Misperceptions about offenders and the low level of involvement by FBOs also appears to have a cyclical effect on the types of programming provided by FBOs and, consequently, the programmatic difficulties and concerns experienced and raised by FBOs.

Perhaps one of most surprising themes that emerged was the theme regarding FBOs programming difficulties and concerns. The revelation that the credibility of FBOs in the courts is diminished because of the paradox in which FBOs provide services was unexpected. Participants explained that, on one hand, FBOs are serving their members and, on the other hand, they are serving the community. In serving their members, FBOs' services extend to the

family, close relations, and even acquaintances of the members. In serving the community, participants in the present study noted that CJS agents have the misperception that when an FBO speaks on behalf of an individual, they have a close-knit relationship with that individual and they can control that individual's behavior. In reality, people who have no direct connection with FBOs often approach them for assistance. In agreeing to provide that assistance, a dilemma exists. The agency has made agreements on the individual's behalf but has no assurance that the individual will uphold those agreements. Thus, when there is failure to uphold those agreements, the agency receives the perception of being uncreditable. If the agency does not provide the services as requested, the result is members and others within the community look at the agency as being uninvolved in the critical issues that affect the community. Overtime, this paradox or dilemma can result in FBOs ostracizing their members, loosing rapport in the community, or losing credibility with other agencies, such as the courts.

Elements of this finding are supported by research since studies have found that while religion can have a deterrent effect on crime, there is a positive correlation between the salience of that effect and the length of time an individual is connected to a religious group (Baier & Wright, 2001; Johnson et al., 2000). Research has also demonstrated that increased church attendance helped reduce crime (for example, decreasing neighborhood disorder) but did not have an impact on crime in general (Johnson, 2008). Thus, in keeping with the literature, these findings demonstrate that a community member being directly connected to an FBO is significant in the ability of FBOs to impact crime and when FBOs operate outside of these parameters (i.e., direct connection), the outcome could result in negative consequences for all involved.

Limitations and Future Research

In the present study, we examined the role of FBOs in the CJS. We assessed the perceived and actual roles of FBOs in their community and in relation to working with offenders and the CJS. Qualitative data from focus groups was analyzed in order to generate recurring themes which were subsequently categorized and revised. The sample for the present study was comprised of community volunteers and FBO representatives who in some instances also worked in the CJS. In addition, those FBO representatives were from Christian organizations and were primarily male. These characteristics of the sample (entirely Christian FBOs and primarily male participants) is one of the greatest limitations of the present study since there are several missing voices that were not included in the present study. The voices of non-Christian FBOs, other community-based organizations, non-African American racial/ethnic groups, non-Caucasian women, representatives from criminal justice agencies, offenders, and returning citizens were missing. Therefore, it is impossible to know how representatives from those missing groups would have responded to the present study's questions. It is also impossible to know how the presence of representatives of those missing groups may have affected the dynamics of the focus group discussions regarding the real and perceived roles of FBOs.

We also suggest that subsequent studies solicit the participation of persons from groups that were missing and underrepresented in the initial present study such as representatives from criminal justice agencies, community groups, varying religious affiliations, and ex-offenders. Subsequent research should find ways to record the opinions of representatives from the aforementioned groups in a way that allows their individual and collective voices to be included. This type of study may require that small focus groups and/or surveys are conducted with representatives of each group, followed by larger focus groups and/or surveys with the collective group. In addition, it is important that subsequent research include an applied component that allows the participants and their related communities to take part in reviewing the study's findings, identifying issues that the community wants to address, creating action plans in order to address the identified issues, and designing tools in order to evaluate the outcomes of the implemented action plan.

A second limitation of the present study involves the scope of the present study. The present study focused on participants in a small southern community. Thus, the findings from the present study may be applicable to communities with similar characteristics; however, the

findings may not be applicable to communities that fall outside of those parameters. This limitation points to the need for continued studies that look at individual communities and the real and perceived roles of FBOs in the CJS in those communities. Such research can contribute to the development of a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of the role of FBOs in the CJS. On a broader scale, these research studies and subsequent studies may assist the community in identifying the actual role of FBOs in relation to the CJS. Identifying the actual role of FBOs in relation to the CJS remains important as state and federal criminal justice-related policies and practices in the United States increasingly rely on community-based prevention, intervention, and offender reentry programming to address crime. Knowing the variety of services offered by FBOs in the community could increase the potential for FBO collaboration regarding service provision that meets the programmatic needs of the CJS. In addition, knowing what role FBOs will play in the CJS can assist communities in planning and acquiring additional service provisions from other agencies as needed.

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