Summer 2013

Classified Information: a Review of Implemented Offender Classification Models in Colorado

Andrielle Holmes
Regis University

Regis University
College for Professional Studies Graduate Programs
Final Project/Thesis

Disclaimer

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION: A REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTED

OFFENDER CLASSIFICATION MODELS IN COLORADO

by

Andrielle Holmes

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Criminology

REGIS UNIVERSITY

August, 2013

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION: A REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTED

OFFENDER CLASSIFICATION MODELS IN COLORADO

by
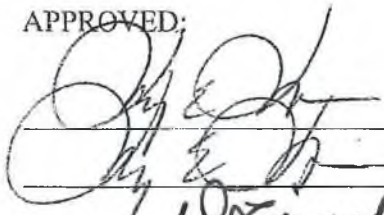
Andrielle Holmes
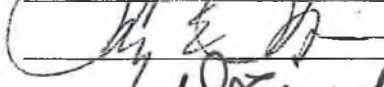
has been approved

August, 2013

APPROVED:

_____, Faculty Facilitator

_____, Thesis Advisor

_____, Faculty Chair

ABSTRACT

Classified Information: A Review of Implemented

Offender Classification Models in Colorado

The focus of this project centers around the large amount of material in regards to objective offender classification models. Research suggests that objective classification models are the most effective means of evaluating the risk and needs of inmates while in custody. Since it is the responsibility of all correctional facilities to keep their inmate population and staff safe, implementing a successful classification tool is crucial. Documentation reviewed for this project suggests most correction facilities across the United States have implemented objective systems into their classification policies and procedures. This project attempted to evaluate classification models implemented in the county jail's throughout Colorado for their objective characteristics. By reviewing public county websites for their classification policies, this project was to determine if Colorado was consistent with national trends in implementing objective classification models. Given the low number of classification policies and procedures located on public domains, this project failed to determine if Colorado, as a whole, was consistent; however, was able to determine the objective qualities of systems implemented in 12 individual counties located throughout Colorado.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It has long since been determined that it is the task of corrections to provide the

punishment and rehabilitation of an offender deemed appropriate by a court of law. In doing so,

corrections officials also have the added responsibility of keeping inmates safe during their

incarceration. In fact, there is a strong constitutional basis for such responsibility dating back to

1976. Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97 1976; "It is but just that the public be required to care for

the prisoner, who cannot by reason of the deprivation of his liberty, care for himself" (Leach &

Sabbatine, 2012). Numerous amounts of case law are available on the matter over a span of

several decades. For instance, Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825 1994; "They (prison officials)

must ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, and must

protect prisoners from violence at the hands of other prisoners" (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

Jails have three primary obligations: housing, supervision and services (Leach &

Sabbatine, 2012). To fulfill housing and supervision responsibilities, classification systems were

developed to assess the risk and needs of offenders. To date, the United States Supreme Court

has yet to mandate classification; however, has made the "Duty to Protect" a fundamental

obligation of correctional facilities (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012). Information gathered during

initial classification processes intend to provide staff with the appropriate means to house and

supervise inmates adequately, while also providing an organizational method to be in correlation

with the constitutional standard of duties.

The benefits of implementing an effective classification system are invaluable. Without

proper classification, incarcerated inmates may be housed inappropriately, which is unsafe to

other inmates and staff alike. "Forewarned is forearmed -- accurate offender classification

information and instruments are vital if agencies are to effectively manage offender populations"

(Bikle & Rice, 1994).

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Correctional facilities have been implementing classification systems into their inmate

assessment processes for many years. The system each facility implements is not universal,

leaving specifics up for debate. However, there does appear to be a general consensus that a

classification process does, in fact, contribute positively to the corrections field as a whole. An

effective classification system will recommend an appropriate security level and housing unit for

an inmate, based on the policies of the facility; thus, making classifications an important factor in

a successfully operated jail or prison (Martin, Kowalski & Schnelle, 2012). The ultimate goal of

corrections must be to facilitate the punishment of an offender; however, the corrections industry

must do so as safely and efficiently as possible.

Research shows that objective classification models provide the most accurate inmate

assessments, while reducing the risk of discrimination (Bellmore, 2011). For a system to be

considered objective, information such as criminal history, current charge, and previous

jail/prison time is evaluated. Many systems also evaluate an offender's age, employment status,

and local support structure; these areas are considered objective stability factors. Just as

important as making sure a system is objective is determining if subjective questions or

judgments are being made. Research also suggests that often times the employee assessing the

inmate will override the objective system; therefore, making it subjective and changing the overall intention of the process (Bellmore, 2011).

Colorado consists of 64 counties, all with their own county jails. The jails in these counties all have a classification process in place. Determining if the systems implemented by these counties are objective was essential in discovering if Colorado is consistent with current trends.

Overview of the Problem

To fully comprehend the need for a classification process, one must first explore what exactly classification entails. Classification is a categorical separation of inmate populations based upon predictive elements of risk and need (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012). Assessing predictive elements is the process which can vary from jail to jail depending on the type of classification model implemented.

The primary goal of any classification system is to categorize inmates that are extremely aggressive into higher security housing areas, while also recognizing those inmates who only require little security and/or are also at risk of being victimized (Austin, 1994). When a classification system is designed to assess inmates based on their current offense, behavior, and any special needs, appropriate housing should be the result. Not only does this correlate with case law pertaining to inmates safety, but it is also provides safety for staff, as the law does dictate a degree of protection to staff whose duty it is to engage in the predictive process of risk and needs assessment (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

Classification specialists are interested in assessing risk and need. Assessing risk will be completed by objectively reviewing information such as current charge, previous arrests, prior time incarcerated, and observed behavior during intake. However, to assess needs, an interview with the detainee is essential. Classification specialists must also be concerned with "keep separate" requests, escape history, noted behavior problems, and protective custody needs. Therefore, it is the task of staff to not only house inmates based on their predicated risks and needs, but also the risks and needs of other inmates.

This is where security housing levels become important. Since there is no mandated housing jail policy, individual jail administrators set up their facilities as they see fit, and also how space dictates. For the most part, jails have minimum, medium and maximum housing levels. Classification specialists must have a clear understanding of the population of each housing area before assigning an inmate to such. This comes from proper training, effective jail policies, and ultimately, a successfully implemented classification system (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

The need for effective classification seems evident, and was accepted long ago. More recently, debate has focused on the specific type of classification system. Research shows systems that are objective in nature tend to more appropriately house inmates given their predictive measures. This belief has even been adopted by organizations such as the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and the American Jail Association (AJA) (Austin, 1998; Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

The shift from subjective classification models that rely on informal criteria that often leads to staff error or inconsistencies in decision-making, to objective classification models that

depend on a narrow set of well-defined legal factors (e.g., severity of current offense, prior

convictions, etc.) and personal characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, etc.), is well documented

(Austin, 1998). As mentioned, objective classification systems decrease the likelihood of

discrimination, while also focusing on fairness and constancy. While the main goal of objective

classification systems is to appropriately house inmates for safety and security, the subsequent

benefits of the process cannot be denied. These resulting benefits lend themselves to the

successful running of a high-functioning facility.

Purpose of the Project

The importance of effective classification systems is clear. National trends suggest jails

and prisons all throughout the United States are implementing objective classification models

into their inmate risk/needs assessment practices. The NIC Prisons Division continues to receive

requests for validation studies and staff training opportunities (Brown, 2000). Studies are

conducted on a regular basis of implemented classification systems all over the nation by the

NIC. Over the years, several NIC projects have been able provide assistance and tools for

departments of corrections to evaluate and improve implemented classification systems (Brown,

2000). Efforts to meet the ultimate goal of effective inmate classification are always being

addressed.

Colorado is comprised of 64 counties, as mentioned above. Twelve of the 64 counties

have information on implemented offender classification systems available to the public. The

public domain websites of Adams, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, El Paso,

Elbert, Jefferson, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld counties were reviewed in regards to their

implemented offender classification systems. Many studies concerning classification have

centered on particular prison or jail systems; however, this project focused only on implemented

jail offender classification systems in Colorado county jails.

Determining if Colorado county jails are consistent with national trends in implementing

objective classification models will add to already documented research on other systems utilized

throughout the country. This project aimed to discover if Colorado county jails, as a whole, could

be determined objective in their classification processes. Ultimately, this project's purpose was

to review those implemented systems and determine their objective characteristics.

Definitions

Corrections

Corrections is the section of the criminal justice system responsible for the punishment

portion of an offenders sentence. Correctional facilities can be operated by many different

government entities or even private organizations.

Jail- Jails can be operated by county or municipal jurisdictions. Jail inmates are typically

incarcerated for the short-term. Jail inmates usually have a sentence of less than 1 year or

are being held pending a trial, awaiting sentencing, or awaiting transfer to other facilities

after a conviction (Corrections, 2012).

Prison- Prisons are longer-term facilities owned and operated by a state or by the Federal

Government. Prisons typically hold felons and persons with sentences of more than a

year. Prison facilities do not hold pre-trial inmates at any time (Corrections, 2012).

Offender Classification

Offender classification is a categorical system which is implemented, typically during the initial intake process, to assess an inmate's risk and needs. The ultimate goal of offender classification is to assign a suitable security level and house them appropriately (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012). However, a sound classification system has many benefits. The safety of staff, inmates and the public, orderly processing, discipline, protection and liability, equity, consistency and fairness are all results of an effective classification system (Wells & Brennan, 1995).

Objective Classification Models

Objective classification models are a particular type of classification system that strives to be a more reliable and consistent form of assessment (Brown, 2000). Objective classification systems seek information such as current charge, previous assaultive history, prior felony arrests, time incarcerated, escape history, and known past institutional behavior. Objective classification models provide a more accurate picture of the offender; thereby providing management with more accurate data upon which to base classification decision-making (Sabbatine & Leach, 2010).

Sabbatine and Leach (2010) suggest many necessary elements of an objective classification system. To be considered objective, the system must adhere to the following principals (Sabbatine & Leach, 2010):

Reliability- All users classifying the same offender should have a high level of agreement in their classification finding.

Validity- The primary classification instrument accurately predicts the likelihood of institutional behavior incidents.

Equitable- Both the offender and the staff sense a fairness in the classification process.

User Friendly- The instrument should be easy to both teach and use.

Custody Oriented- The classification process matches the assessment of risk and need with appropriate supervision and care.

Security Oriented- The classification process matches the risk and needs of the offender.

Least Restrictive Housing- Housing assignments will reflect the least restrictive housing choice consistent with the offender's risk and need. A violent, assaultive offender requires the most restrictive housing – a single, hardened cell – while a non-violent, compliant offender can be housed in a less restrictive housing – an open dormitory setting.

Program Based- The classification process encourages self improvement through participation in programming. The goal of programming is to provide opportunities for constructive use of an offender's time.

Behaviorally Based- The classification process encourages positive behavior through a system of reward and discourages negative behaviors through the withdrawal of benefits and the imposition of a more restrictive environment.

Subjective Classification Characteristics

Although most adult correctional facilities implemented objective classification during the 1980s (Brown, 2000), it is important to review subjective characteristics to fully comprehend the benefits of objective classification. Subjective classification would base housing needs and security level on perceptions of those interviewing the offender. Where this could be useful in certain circumstances, it is a less reliable, consistent, and effective method of achieving the ultimate goal of offender classification (Brown, 2000).

Reclassification

Reclassification is a process of reassessment of risk and needs. Depending on the policy of the facility, reclassification typically takes place 30 days after initial classification. The reclassification process is more subjective in nature. Classification specialists assess inmates for reclassification based on institutional history. Reviewing documented special information and disciplinary infractions, the specialist can then determine if the offender would be appropriate to move down in security levels (Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

Research Question

This project will attempt to answer the following proposed research question:

Do the county jails located in Colorado implement objective classification models into their inmate assessment risk process?

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related mostly to the inability to observe an actual classification process due to IRB restrictions. Theoretically, to fully determine if a classification

system is being utilized in an objective manner, one, with prior knowledge, would be able to just

observe the process; no interviews, and subsequent informed consent, would be necessary.

However, given the limitations, this project was only able to utilize information located on public

domains and therefore was only able to provide a review of the available information.

Chapter Summary

Objective classification is a method that has been adopted by the corrections industry

throughout the nation. Documentation exists showing the implementation of objective

classification systems is in line with case law, and provides a necessary means to appropriate

offender management. The benefits of this type of model are evident in both theory and practice.

Determining if Colorado county jails are consistent with national trends was the primary focus of

this project.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review was accomplished by using the Regis University online library. Various electronic databases, such as Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost and ScienceDirect, were utilized to locate scholarly articles. To search for relevant literature in the above mentioned databases, the terms "offender classification", "inmate classification processes", "objective classification systems", "inmate management", "strain theory", "social learning theory" and "theories of criminal behavior" were queried. As a result, a review of the history and implementation of offender classification and criminological theories of criminal behavior was conducted.

This literature review produced several research studies completed on implemented classification systems all throughout the United States. Previous documentation cited in this report shows the solid foundation for the benefits of an objective classification process. The following material will present information on the effectiveness of such a system, along with a review of the history of classifications within the corrections industry.

However, prior to reviewing classification studies, it is important to understand criminological theory. In particular, theories involved in criminal behavior and inmate management techniques that would lend themselves to the notion of effective classification. This literature review will also include a descriptive account of theories related to the thought processes behind criminal behavior and how they could be related to objective classification.

Theoretical Framework

Strain Theory

In 1957, Robert Merton developed the strain theory (Bartol & Bartol, 2011). Strain theory suggests that humans are compliant beings who are strongly predisposed by the values and attributes of the society in which they are a part of. This theory is consistent with the conformity perspective which believes humans are simply creatures who want to do right (Bartol & Bartol, 2011).

When looking at the relationship between strain theory and criminal behavior, empirical data has been produced to link the two variables (Peter, LaGrange & Silverman, 2003). Although Merton developed the foundation of strain theory, Robert Agnew elaborated on principals and created what is now referred to as the general strain theory. Agnew states "general strain theory employs a diverse array of social-psychological measures that focus on the negative relationships people have with others; relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated" (as cited in Peter et al., 2003).

Using strain theory and viewing a jail or prison setting as its own type of society, would suggest that inmates will conform to their surroundings. This perspective strongly lends itself to the notion of reclassification. Giving inmates incentives to move to lower classification would prove effective using strain theory; once the inmate was reclassified they would conform to their new surroundings, making successful inmate management a result (Bartol & Bartol, 2011; Leach & Sabbatine, 2012).

Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory (SLT) suggests that criminal behavior is a product of an individual's perceptions, thoughts, expectations, competencies and values (Bartol & Bartol, 2011). Based on these factors and their perceived view of the world, individuals will make the decision to get involved in criminal activities. This theory correlates with the learning perspective that sees human beings as born neutral, and then their behavior, in some cases criminal, becomes learned by their perceptions of their environment (Bartol & Bartol, 2011).

Tittle, Antonaccio and Botchkovar (2012) cite several reasons SLT has been used as an explanation of criminal behavior. First, the notion that behavior is learned is prominent among social scientists, especially those concerned with criminal and deviant behavior. Also, such theories claim the highly attractive characteristic of providing universally accepted explanations for all types of behavior among people in many different circumstances. The foundation of SLT makes the belief in regards to criminal behavior plausible (Tittle et al., 2012).

If relating SLT to incarcerated inmates, one would make the connection with the need for appropriate housing. SLT would suggest inmates will behave based on what they learn from their surroundings. Using an objective classification system will place an inmate in the appropriate housing, meaning they will act in a way acceptable for that housing and subsequent security level.

<center>Literature</center>

Objective Classification

The corrections system is responsible for housing all offenders safely and securely. A jail or prison can hold individuals accused, or sentenced on, charges that range from driving without

a license to murder. Correction officials discovered the need to implement a classification system for all inmates, which was more than likely linked to the increase in arrests and subsequent incarceration.

Early methods of classification, if they can be referred to as such, were extremely subjective. Those in charge of housing would simply place an inmate wherever they saw fit. This quickly became an issue when the incarcerated population began to increase. Without a uniform classification approach, housing decisions were biased, important information was either overlooked or overemphasized, and predictions were unsubstantiated (Latessa, 2004).

The first generation of objective classification system, referred to as the Burgess scale, was implemented in 1928 for offender release purposes rather than incarcerated housing needs (Latessa, 2004). This system classified offenders by their perceived criminal and social type. The purpose was to make informed parole releases based on objective information. Criminal types were categorized as first timer, occasional, habitual, and professional; social types were categorized as farm boy, gangster, hobo, ne'er-do well, and drunkard (Latessa, 2004). Although these categories are now out of date and only relied on static predictors, this organized system predicted future behavior based on objective factors. This system was easy to use and reliable in distinguishing levels of risk of reoffending, proving that an objective system was most effective (Latessa, 2004).

The second generation of classification systems implemented this objective methodology into the task of supervising and managing the criminal population. The Wisconsin Client Management Classification System (CMC) was developed in 1975 (Latessa, 2004). The CMC was designed to identify the adequate level of supervision based on risk and needs of their

clients; high risk individuals were placed at a higher level of surveillance, while those deemed a lower risk were supervised at a lower level.

The success of this program was quickly acknowledged by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). In 1983, the NIC adopted this objective system and began advocating and supporting its use in corrections throughout the United States (Latessa, 2004). The foundation of the first implemented offender classification system is similar to the system still being used in correctional facilities today.

California was the first state to implement a classification system, as we know it today, into their process. The first inmate classification system, as mentioned, was designed in the 1980s and relied on a consensus of opinion rather than on empirical evidence. Since that time, California's system has evolved for many reasons; periodic validation studies designed to improve the association between classification scores and institutional misconduct are conducted regularly and help provide a solid method of effective evaluation (Grattet, Farabee, McCleary, Turner & Raphael, 2011). Classification processes now occur on both the jail and prison levels, and can vary in applied method from one facility to the next.

Determining whether a specific classification process is successful has become the basis of many studies over the years. Most studies on this topic pick one particular jail or prison to focus their resources. Studies include various approaches; some being interested in the details of the classification system itself, others concerned with whether or not the process meets its ultimate goal of appropriate housing for all inmates. In fact, research consistently shows actuarial classification instruments have equal or higher predictive validity than clinical judgment and can lead to more ethical and fair treatment of incarcerated men and women (Bellmore, 2011).

In 2011, an expert panel was created to study the classification system of California's
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to evaluate their system in hopes to
advise CDCR of identifying factors, within the classification process, that justify restrictions on
liberty while avoiding and ultimately eliminating those factors that could lead to unwarranted
impingements on inmate rehabilitation (Grattet et al., 2011).

This CDCR classification system is point based. Using several different factors from an
inmate's criminal history will assign them a score; their score will assign them a security
classification. CDCR's system uses a preliminary score and a Mandatory Minimum score. The
preliminary score predicts risk for misconduct while incarcerated. This preliminary score is
based on several variables such as criminal history and prior incarceration behavior (Grattet et
al., 2011). Mandatory Minimum score are designed to restrict security level scores for the
particular inmates who are considered, based on their history, as a threat to staff and other
inmates. Final classification is determined by whichever score, preliminary or Mandatory
Minimum, is higher. An inmate is then housed in a particular unit based on this final
classification score.

The main purpose of this study was to determine if scoring guidelines and point cutoffs
need to be adjusted. Researchers on the expert panel posed two questions in hopes to address
classification scores. The first question, does the preliminary score predict the behavior of
inmates whose placement scores are constrained by the Mandatory Minimum scores, and the
second, do inmates with large differences between their preliminary and placement scores
behave better than individuals with small differences between their preliminary and placement
scores, were studied to determine the accuracy of the system (Grattet et al., 2011).

The methodology that was implemented to answer the above questions was to design a

Data Analysis Plan. In short, this plan reviewed inmates classifications scores, both preliminary

and Mandatory Minimum, and compared this to documented behavior incidents. Findings

suggest that using the Mandatory Minimum score actually places inmates at a higher

classification level than their behavior dictates; inmates would be better and more appropriately

housed based solely their preliminary classification score (Grattet et al., 2011).

Classification systems were also studied as part of a research conducted in Ohio in 2009.

This entire study looks at many different aspects of the jail. Identifying the best practices for jails

to establish higher-functioning jails is the basis of the empirical research and of this project

(Martin, Kowalski & Schnelle, 2012); including an in-depth look at already implemented

classification processes. Data was collected using a variety of methods, including jail visits and

staff surveys.

In regards to only the classification portion of the study, researchers found that jails that

have written policies in regards to classifications, and a system already in place, are more likely

to be considered a high-functioning jail. Martin et al. state, "in terms of admission and booking

operations, highly effective jails kept the time held in the booking area before bed assignment

under 90 minutes, while utilizing a validated security classification instrument to appropriately

house inmates by security risk" (2012, p. 51). Although specifics about the implemented process

are not included in the study, the authors did conclude that classifications systems do contribute

to the running a successful jail.

Classification policies at Golden Grove Correctional Facility (GGCF), located on the

island of St. Croix, were recently studied as well. This study focuses mostly on the fair treatment

of offenders by way of appropriate security classification. Bellmore suggests that "if objective

prison classification systems are reliable and valid, they have the capacity to significantly

decrease harmful discrimination in jails and prisons" (2011). The importance of a successful

classification system meets many different needs of the corrections system as a whole.

GGCF uses a classification system similar to many. Risk assessment is made based on

several factors. Static variables assessed are severity of current offense, serious offense history,

escape history, prior institutional disciplinary history, and prior felony convictions. Dynamic

variables assessed are drug/alcohol abuse and stability factors. GGCF's system also assesses

stability factors such as current age, employment or involvement in education at time of arrest,

and if the inmate lived in the Virgin Islands for at least twelve months prior to arrest. Older age,

current school enrollment, employment, and residence for at least twelve month in the Virgin

Islands are considered protective factors and reduce the custody score (Bellmore, 2011).

One portion of this study focused on the validity of the implemented classification system.

Using a sample of 200 inmate files, the researcher compared classification score to documented

inmate behavior issues. Again, this study reviews many aspects of GGCF's classification system;

however, when only comparing the variable of security score with disciplinary issues, the

strength of the relationship is not sufficient and indicates an overall problem with the structure of

the scale, even though correlations between the two variables do exist (Bellmore, 2011).

At this particular facility, classification specialists, or those conducting initial classification

screenings, are given the opportunity to override the suggested security level based on the

assessment score. The ability to do so ultimately affects the overall intention of the score based

system. As previously noted, using a classification assessment tool typically proves to be more

reliable than scoring based on clinical judgment. Bellmore (2011) suggests this reasoning again

for a possible cause as to why validity was not found in this study. Bellmore (2011), reports in

her findings that the GGCF classification officer overrides the system at a high rate, rendering

the actual process in practice subjective rather than objective. Overall, findings show the

classification system at Golden Grove is not functioning as intended and therefore Bellmore

(2011) recommends improvements. Further research into whether this habit of overriding on

behalf of the classification officer is in fact correlated to the ineffectiveness of the system should

be explored.

Some studies relating to classifications get very specific as to gender and the needs of

systems to recognize such. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC), along with researchers

from the University of Cincinnati (UC), recently completed two Women's Risk/Needs

Assessments (WRNAs). These two institutions acknowledge the fact that in the 1990s, risk

assessment processes began recognizing the need of including offender specific information into

classification screenings. This innovation was essential since risk/needs assessment not only

identified offender risk, but also alerted correctional practitioners to the needs and problems that

would likely bring offenders back into the system if not treated (Van Voorhis, Bauman, Wright

& Salisbury, 2009, p. 81).

Research presented by the NIC and UC show that when other factors besides criminal

history, even personal areas of the offender's life are assessed, more accurate scoring can be

achieved. Subsequent research showed that when dynamic risk/need factors such as, criminal

thinking, criminal associates, financial needs, employment, education, accommodations, family

issues, and use of leisure time, were addressed successfully through correctional programming,

some even being identified though a classification process, reduction of offender risks scores were the result (Van Voorhis et al., 2009).

The study found, when looking at women in particular, reviewing specific personal attributes could more accurately classify female offenders. The fact, findings suggest, that these populations are primarily non-dangerous and very short-term (a year or less) recommends a thorough review of correctional policies regarding women offenders and their classification. Most importantly, such findings advocate for the possibility of different classification methods for women offenders, especially in regards to those scoring a higher custody (Van Voorhis et al., 2009). Further research should be completed on whether there is another population set that would benefit from specialized and very specific classification process.

Chapter Summary

The research studies reviewed in this literature review show the broad scope of classification systems. The studies touch on many different areas where classification processes can be considered relevant, while remaining focused on issues still evident within implementation. It is clear that the issues left to research in regards to classification systems are no longer why they are needed. More specifically, researchers are now concerned with whether they are meeting the intended goal, and if not, what modifications need to be put in place to make the system more successful.

Chapter 3

METHOD

Research Design

This study proposal was reviewed and approved by the Regis University Institutional Review Board (IRB). A qualitative case study design was used for this project, as results are recorded in a nonnumerical fashion (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This project also gathered qualitative data in the form of a public domain review, which is a standard of a qualitative research study (Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research, 2012). The findings of this project are specific to the studied sample and are not able to be generalized to other county jail facilities located in Colorado or other states.

Sample

A sample refers to the actual units selected to participate in a study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Purposive sampling was used for this project, as the samples were chosen with a purpose, based on the needs of representation. The county jails of interest for this study are all located in the Colorado. The sizes of the jails in these counties vary; however, all have implemented classification systems in place.

The Colorado 2012 census lists 64 counties located in Colorado (State & County QuickFacts, 2013). Of the 64 counties, 12 county websites mention offender classification. To show the county jails, located in the 12 counties of Adams, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld serve a diverse population,

and as an illustration of the utilized equal probability of selection method (EPSEM), county 2012
census facts are as follows (State & County QuickFacts, 2013):

Adams: 459,598 total population; 87.6% White persons; 3.5% Black persons; 38.2%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 3.8% Asian persons; 2.1% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Boulder: 305,318 total population; 91.2% White persons; 1.0% Black persons; 13.5%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 4.3% Asian persons; 0.8% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Broomfield: 58,298 total population; 89.0% White persons; 1.5% Black persons; 11.6%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 6.1% Asian persons; 0.9% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Denver: 634,265 total population; 80.8% White persons; 10.3% Black persons; 31.8%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 3.6% Asian persons; 2.1% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Douglas: 298,215 total population; 91.8% White persons; 1.4% Black persons; 7.8%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 3.9% Asian persons; 0.5% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Eagle: 51,874 total population; 95.4% White persons; 1.0% Black persons; 30.3%

Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 1.2% Asian persons; 1.2% American Indian and

Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

El Paso: 644,964 total population; 84.1% White persons; 6.8% Black persons; 15.6% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 2.9% Asian persons; 1.3% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.4% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Elbert: 23,383 total population; 96.0% White persons; 0.7% Black persons; 6.0% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 0.9% Asian persons; 0.7% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Jefferson: 545,358 total population; 92.4% White persons; 1.3% Black persons; 14.6% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 2.7% Asian persons; 1.2% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Mesa: 147,848 total population; 94.4% White persons; 0.9% Black persons; 13.7% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 0.9% Asian persons; 1.6% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Pueblo: 160,852 total population; 91.1% White persons; 2.4% Black persons; 42.0% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 1.0% Asian persons; 2.9% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Weld: 263,691 total population; 93.4% White persons; 1.3% Black persons; 28.4% Hispanic or Latino origin persons; 1.4% Asian persons; 1.7% American Indian and Alaska Native persons; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons.

Measures

Retrieving qualitative data for this project was essential and required the use of several

different methods to answer the proposed research question. First, this project reviewed Sheriff's

Office websites with the focus on documented detention facility classification policies. All

reviewed information is available on a public domain. The purpose of this review was consistent

with proper qualitative data collection methods in that they will focus solely on the

characteristics of each implemented classification system at each location (Trochim & Donnelly,

2008).

A case study is the particular measure used to acquire such data. Trochrim and Donnelly

(2008) define a case study as an intensive study of a specific individual or specific context. For

this project, a case study was the applied measure given the review of each implemented

classification system mentioned on each of the 12 county public websites.

Unobtrusive measures were applied for this project as well. As mentioned, after

reviewing the information located on public websites, a content analysis was used. A content

analysis is the systematic analysis of text (Trochrim & Donnelly, 2008). In particular, a thematic

analysis of text was preformed. A thematic analysis of text is simply the identification of themes

(Trochrim & Donnelly, 2008), which concluded if each system was objective, answering the

research question of the project.

Chapter Summary

Answering the proposed research questions of this project was completed using a

qualitative research design. Sampling for the project was conducted not in a random manner, but

rather by using a purposive sampling method. Since only the counties of Adams, Boulder,

Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson, Mesa, Pueblo and Weld mention

offender classification on their public websites, they were the chosen locations for the study.

Reviews of the available information were performed in regards to the foundation of their

implemented initial classification processes as well as their reclassification procedures to

determine objectiveness. Data gathered from the review of public domains was analyzed using

unobtrusive measures such as a content analysis, and in particular a thematic analysis.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

As mentioned, only 12 of the 64 counties located in Colorado mention offender

classification on their public websites. Although each of the 64 county websites was examined,

the 12 county websites mentioning classification and/or inmate housing were thoroughly

reviewed. This results section will provide the documented information available for Adams,

Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, El Paso, Elbert, Jefferson, Mesa, Pueblo and

Weld counties in regards to their classification polices located on public domain. The following

material was located at each counties public website and copied here as documentation of the

results of the methodology used for this project.

Adams: Inmates are classified through use of an Objective Classification system. Classification

shall determine inmate classification in terms of the level of custody required and appropriate

housing. Inmates are not segregated according to race, color, creed, or national origin

(Classifications, 2010).

Boulder: Classifications determine security level of inmates based on the standards established

under the National Institute of Corrections Objective Jail Classification System (Classification

Moves, 2007).

Broomfield: All inmates housed within the facility are initially placed in the intake area for a

minimum of 48 hours. This allows staff the opportunity to observe the inmate and identify any

negative or harmful behavior. Keeping in line with the Detention Center's philosophy of

allowing the inmates to set the tone with regard to their interaction, officers are encouraged to

interact with the inmates on a daily basis. Inmates capable of acceptable interaction with other

inmates and staff are then transferred to the general housing areas as decided by the facility's

Classification Committee (Intake, 2013).

Denver: The County Jail has varying conditions of confinement ranging from minimum security

dormitory housing, maximum security cell blocks to special management "lock-down" areas.

Housing within the facility is determined by the Classification unit (Denver County Jail, 2012).

Douglas: The Douglas County Sheriff's Office is strongly committed to the Objective Jail

Classification system formulated by the National Institute of Corrections. This effective

management system enables the Detention Division to efficiently manage inmates while meeting

its objective of proper assessment and placement of inmates into those housing units to which

they are best suited. It maximizes the safety of both inmates and staff, and enhances overall

inmate behavior management.

Incoming inmates are classified through a series of objective evaluation standards that consider

an inmate's current criminal charges, criminal history, past institutional history, medical history

and needs, and life stability factors. By identifying potential problem issues through these

evaluations, we are able to identify inmates who might require special placement for such issues

as medical needs, statutory requirements, separation due to current charges or past criminal

history, or separation from other inmates and staff because of predatory behavior. Classification

of inmates affects many aspects of their stay at the detention facility, including the cell pod to

which they are assigned, the number of hours allowed outside their cell, and the types of

recreational programs in which they are allowed to participate.

By using the Objective Jail Classification system, we are able to better evaluate inmates' needs

and behaviors while evaluating statistical data that allows us to effectively interpret proper

inmate placement. In addition, the system helps our staff identify specific training needs and

points out areas where increased objective management of the inmate population is needed. This

valuable inmate classification system corroborates the sheriff's office's overall management

concept that good behavior by the inmates is rewarded through enhanced, less-restrictive housing

assignments and participation in positive programs.

The Classification section is responsible for screening all inmates coming into the facility to

determine their housing assignment. The classification of the inmate will determine the

privileges they receive within the facility. Inmates are screened continuously throughout their

stay in the facility, thus minimum, medium and maximum security prisoners are held in the

Douglas County Jail (Inmate Classification Process, 2013).

Eagle: The facility is designed to accommodate inmates in minimum, medium and maximum

security units and special housing areas, with room for male and female inmates in separate

areas. The new addition to the detention facility is a direct supervision, dormitory-style housing

unit.

Those in custody who are classified as minimum-security are housed in the direct supervision

unit. While they are not free to leave the unit, they are free to move about and participate in a

wide range of activities. The two-storey unit includes sleeping areas and a multipurpose room for

meetings and recreation. Through the structural design of the facility, staff members are able to

supervise inmates effectively. With the direct supervision model, a detention deputy is

continually supervising inmates. The deputy works within the "pod" or living area and is in

direct control of the inmates. Positive expectation of conduct is evident in the physical design of the facility. Deviation from the expected positive behavior results in progressive disciplinary loss of privileges. Detention facilities that use direct supervision have significantly lower rates of assaults, extortions and lawsuits than the traditional linear style of detention facility management (Detentions Overview, 2011).

El Paso: Inmate Classification is responsible for assigning a security classification to each inmate after being booked into the Criminal Justice Center (CJC). The CJC contains several types of wards or cells. The Classification Unit considers various factors when determining an inmate's classification and placement; however, an inmate's classification can be changed even after being admitted.

The Classification Unit is responsible for the placement of inmates into the various internal programs such as the Trusty Program, the Reintegration Program and the Progressive and Regressive housing program (Inmate Classification, n.d.).

Elbert: The facility houses adult male and female offenders; most inmates are awaiting trial or sentencing, or are serving terms of less than one year. The inmates housed in the jail are considered escape risks, violent or dangerous, or by the nature of their charges may require intense security housing. The jail also temporarily holds juvenile offenders separate from adult offenders (Elbert County Jail, n.d.).

Jefferson: Counselors are responsible for screening each new inmate to determine whether he or she is mentally unstable, suicidal or has been prescribed psychotropic medications. Counselors

use an interview and a review of each inmate's criminal record to classify the inmate as

maximum, medium or minimum security (Counseling, 2013).

Mesa: Programs staff classifies inmates by conducting interviews and perform background

checks on all inmates 30 and 60 day sanctions reviews (Classification of Inmates, 2005).

Pueblo: Classification is an objective means of identifying and categorizing various offender

traits, characteristics, and potential risks and liabilities in order to detain offenders in a safe,

humane manner. Proper classification ensures secure jail operations and facilitates staff and

public safety. It also allows offenders to be assigned to programs and services that constructively

occupy their time while in custody, which ensures the orderly management of the jail. Offenders

will not be classified by race, color, creed, or national origin but will be separated by gender,

legal status, and for other management reasons (Inmate Classifications, 2013).

Weld: Counselors "classify" prisoners who do not get out of jail within 24 hours to find out

where they should be housed. A prisoner's current charges, past history, behavior and other

factors are checked so only prisoners with similar backgrounds are housed together. That helps

keep everyone safe and secure. Even then, anyone who feels afraid of someone else needs to tell

staff (Procedures-Weld County Jail, 2009).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a concise overview of all documented offender classification and

housing policies for the counties of Adams, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, El

Paso, Elbert, Jefferson, Mesa, Pueblo and Weld. The information listed is the documentation

reviewed for this project. All information was located on the public website of each county jail.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

After completing a content analysis of the information available on public domain in

regards to offender classification, the findings of this project are only able to determine if

individual counties have implemented objective classification models, not Colorado as a whole.

This is mainly because of the low number of counties that have inmate classification policies and

procedures available for public review on their websites. Given this, the research question of this

project is left unanswered.

Even though results of this project cannot be generalized to the entire state of Colorado, a

thematic analysis showed the results did lend themselves to the ability to determine if each

county individually implemented objective classification systems. After reviewing the available

information, seven of the 12 counties that mention inmate classification and housing on their

public websites do implement a form of objective offender classification.

Some county websites simply state that their implemented system is objective. For

example, Adams county jail states clearly that they implement an Objective Classification

system (Classifications, 2010). Boulder county jail's division policy states they utilize an

Objective Jail Classification system established by the National Institute of Corrections

(Classification Moves, 2007). Douglas county jail's website gives a detailed overview of their

entire offender classification system. Not only does it state that their system is objective, the

website also provides the criteria in which they classify an inmate; all essential criteria is

evaluated on their system, resulting in an implemented objective classification model (Inmate

Classification Process, 2013). Finally, information available on Pueblo county's jail website also states their implemented system is considered objective (Inmate Classifications, 2013).

Some county websites only provide information that, after reviewing the essential criteria of objective systems, can be determined objective. For example, Jefferson county's website states counselors use an interview process and a review of each inmate's criminal record to classify the inmate as maximum, medium, or minimum security (Counseling, 2013). Mesa county's website states interviews and background checks are conducted on all inmates. Weld county's website states prisoner's current charges, past history, behavior and other factors are checked so only prisoners with similar backgrounds are housed together (Procedures-Weld County Jail, 2009). Given what this project has determined makes an offender classification system objective, it is concluded, after the completion of a thematic analysis, that these counties do implement objective classification systems.

The information provided on the county websites of Denver, Eagle, El Paso, and Elbert relate mostly to housing policies. Even though this project has determined that appropriate housing is the main goal of objective classification, the available information on these websites is not enough to conclude that these counties implement objective classification systems into their inmate risk/needs assessment procedures. More information about the classification processes for these counties would be necessary to determine if their implemented systems are objective.

It can only be determined that an objective system has not been implemented for one of the 12 counties reviewed. Broomfield county, based on the available description of their intake process, would not be consistent with national trends in implementing an objective classification

model. Observing an inmates behavior for the first 48 hours before placing them in a permanent

housing area is not consistent with objective classification model criteria (Intake, 2013). As this

project has determined, behavior is a subjective factor in inmate risk/needs assessment

procedures. Therefore, it is determined that Broomfield county jail implements a subjective

classification model.

As mentioned, this project related criminal behavior and the need for appropriate

classification to the theoretical frameworks of strain theory and social learning theory (SLT).

Although these theories only lend themselves to criminal behavior, they were both able to be

related to the importance of effective classification. In particular, the foundation of strain theory

was able to explain the thought process behind reclassification. Due to the limitations of this

project, reclassification policies at Colorado county jails were unable to be studied.

However, the philosophy of SLT was able to be related to classification and the need for

appropriate housing. As this project has suggested, objective classification models are the most

effective method of achieving appropriate offender housing. It is concluded that those counties

implementing objective classification systems are also consistent with the foundation of SLT.

To be able to conclude if Colorado was consistent with national trends in implementing

objective offender classification models into their inmate risk/needs assessment procedures all 64

county's classification policies would need to be reviewed. Since each county jail does not

include inmate classification information on their public website, more research would need to

be conducted. Future steps for this project would include in-depth interviews with the

classification supervisors at each county jail. This would include several steps that this project

was not able to achieve such as institutional approval, informed consent from each classification

unit supervisor, and a review of blank classification documentation.

Chapter Summary

The research question for this project was left unanswered due to the limitations of this

study. Without being able to review the classification policies of each of the 64 Colorado county

jails, determining if Colorado, as a whole, is consistent with national trends in implementing

objective offender classification models is not possible. However, this project was able to

determine that seven counties do implement objective classification models, four counties

mention housing policies but not classification specifics, and one county implements a subjective

classification system. The counties implementing objective classification models are also

consistent with the foundation of SLT. More research focused on classification policies of each

county would need to be conducted to determine the objective qualities of classification systems

around the state of Colorado.

References

Austin, J. (1994). Objective offender classification is key to proper housing decisions. *Corrections Today, 56(4)*, p. 94.

Austin, J. (1998). Objective jail classification systems: a guide for jail administrators. *National Institute of Corrections.*

Bartol, C.R. & Bartol, A. M. (2011). *Criminal Behavior: A Psychological Approach* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bellmore, A. (2011). Gender, culture, and prison classification: testing the reliability and validity of a prison classification system. *Portland State University*. Retrieved from http://dr.archives.pdx.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/psu/7130/Bellmore_psu_0180D_10384.pdf?sequence=1

Bikle, B. & Rice, R. (1994). Examining new opportunities for corrections professionals. *Corrections Today, 56(4)*, p. 104.

Brown, S. (2000). Into the millennium with comprehensive objective prison classification systems. *Corrections Today.*

Classification Moves. (2007). *Boulder County Sheriff's Office Jail Division.* Retrieved from https://www.bouldercounty.org/doc/sheriff/jailpolicy.pdf

Classification of Inmates. (2005). Programs Staff, Jail Operations Division. *Mesa County Sheriff's Office.* Retrieved from http://sheriff.mesacounty.us/jail/wire10.aspx?pageid=6054

Classifications. (2010). Court Services. *Adams County Sheriff's Office.* Retrieved from

http://apps.adcogov.org/sheriff/jail_court_services.html

Corrections. (2012). Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Office of Justice Programs.* Retrieved from

http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tdtp&tid=1

Counseling. (2013). Inmate Programs, Detention Services. *Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.*

Retrieved from http://jeffco.us/sheriff/detention-services/inmate-programs/

Denver County Jail. (2012). *Denver Sheriff Department.* Retrieved from

http://www.denvergov.org/Sheriff/DenverCountyJail/tabid/393650/Default.aspx

Detentions Overview. (2011). *Eagle County.* Retrieved from

http://www.eaglecounty.us/Sheriff/Detentions/Overview/

Elbert County Jail. (n.d.). Elbert County Sheriff's Office Detention Division. *Elbert County

Sheriff's Office.* Retrieved from http://www.elbertcountysheriff.com/detentions.html

Grattet, R., Farabee, D., McCleary, R., Turner, S. & Raphael, S. (2011, December). Expert panel

study of the inmate classification score system. *Office of Research: Research and

Evaluation Branch, State of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.*

Retrieved from http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports/docs/2010-2011-Classification-Study-

Final-Report-01-10-12.pdf

Inmate Classification. (n.d.). Detention Bureau, Operations Division. *El Paso County Sheriff's

Office.* Retrieved from

http://shr.elpasoco.com/Detentions+Bureau/Operations+Division/Inmate+Classification.h

tm

Inmate Classifications. (2013). Operations, Detention Bureau. *Pueblo County Sheriff's Office.*

Retrieved from http://www.sheriff.co.pueblo.co.us/det/operations.html

Inmate Classification Process. (2013). Detentions. *Douglas County Sheriff.* Retrieved from

http://www.dcsheriff.net/detentions/inmate-classification-process/

Intake. (2013). Virtual Tour. *City and County of Broomfield Colorado.* Retrieved from

http://www.broomfield.org/index.aspx?NID=854

Latessa, E. J. (2004). Best practices of classification and assessment. *Journal of Community

Corrections, Winter 2003-2004.*

Leach, D. & Sabbatine, R. (2012). Objective Jail Classification. *American Jail Association, 2012

Professional Development Seminar.*

Martin, B., Kowalski, B. & Schnelle, S. (2012, June). Findings and recommendations from a

statewide outcome evaluation of Ohio jails. *Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and

Correction.* Retrieved from http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/ohiojailevaluation.pdf

Peter, T., LaGrange, T.C. & Silverman, R.A. (2003). Investigating the interdependence of strain

and self control. *Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice, 45(4),* p. 431-

464.

Procedures-Weld County Jail. (2009). Offender Supervision. *Weld County Sheriff.* Retrieved

from http://www.weldsheriff.com/OffenderSupervision/WeldCountyJail/Procedures.html

Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research. (2012). *Xavier University Library.* Retrieved from

http://www.xavier.edu/library/help/qualitative_quantitative.pdf

Sabbatine, R. & Leach, D. (2010). Objective Jail Classification Manual. *American Jail

Association.*

State & Country QuickFacts. (2013). Colorado. *United States Census Bureau.* Retrieved from

http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08000.html

Tittle, C.R., Antonaccio, O. & Botchkovar, E. (2012). Social learning, reinforcement and crime:

evidence from three European cities. *Social Forces: Oxford University Press/USA, 90(3),*

p. 863-890.

Trochim, W. & Donnelly, J. (2008). *The Research Methods Knowledge Base* (3rd ed.). Mason,

OH: Atomic Dog, Cengage Learning.

Van Voorhis, P., Bauman, A., Wright, E. & Salisbury, E. (2009). Implementing the women's

risk/needs assessment (WRNAs): early lessons from the field. *Women, Girls & Criminal

Justice, 10(6),* p. 81-96. Retrieved from

http://www.uc.edu/content/dam/uc/womenoffenders/docs/WGC.pdf

Wells, D. & Brennan, T. (1995). Jail classification: improving link to intermediate sanctions.

Corrections Today, 57(1), p. 58.