

2020

## Perceived employment barriers involving program managers assisting unemployed young african american males

Michael P. Williams  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Public Administration Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Michael Williams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

## Review Committee

Dr. Jessie Lee, Committee Chairperson,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Tanya Settles, Committee Member,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Victoria Landu-Adams, University Reviewer,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Perceived Employment Barriers Involving Program Managers Assisting Unemployed

Young, African American Males

by

Michael Williams

MPA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011

BS, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Public Administration

Walden University

June 2020

## Abstract

For unemployed, young, African American males who face significant barriers to jobs, public employment training centers have become a critical last option. For 2016, the U.S. federal government appropriated more than \$6.9 billion to states for Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act programs and approximately \$3.4 billion in federal formula funding for partner programs. The research problem in this study concerns the lack of adequate employment-based policies and programs that guide the workforce employment process between program managers and recipients, in particular, young, African American males. Guided by Ingram, Schneider, and deLeon's theory of social construction and policy design, this study examined the perceptions of public workforce employment professionals involved with assisting these recipients. Research questions for this qualitative case study were designed to investigate how the perception of program professionals assisted recipients. In this case study, data were triangulated through the use of in-depth interviews, the researcher's notebook, and member checking. Thematic analysis of the data revealed 5 emergent themes: (a) perceived barriers and stereotypes, (b) strategies for securing employment, (c) managing change and new technology, (d) perceptions of job search benefits and burdens, and (e) politics of the organization. Participants encouraged recipients to prepare for a changing labor market by using training workshops. The implications for positive social change include recommendations to policymakers that focus on strategies to encourage a greater sense of independence, autonomy, and use of new technology for recipients involved in public employment training to help them find and sustain meaningful employment.

Perceived Employment Barriers Involving Program Managers Assisting Unemployed

Young, African American Males

by

Michael Williams

MPA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2011

BS, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Public Administration

Walden University

June 2020

## Dedication

Most affectionately, I dedicate this research dissertation to my family. To my daughter Maxine, I am grateful for her high self-esteem and her commitment to being a single parent. I truly appreciate your faith in me, and for all of your assistance with my dissertation. To my daughter Juleah, I am thankful for all the love and support. To my four grandchildren, Arianna, Tatyanna, Jayden, and Dayden, I dedicate this dissertation to all of you because of the constant hugs and kisses while I studied to complete this project. Without the support and love of my family, it would have been impossible for me to accomplish this goal.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the faculty members at Walden University for their support of my research and the study participants whose sharing of their experiences was not only informative but inspiring. I would like to express my gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Jessie Lee for his mentorship, insightful feedback, and constant encouragement to make my dissertation meaningful as a scholar and to the community. I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Victoria Landu-Adams, for her assistance and input during the completion of this project. I am hopeful and eager to make some positive contributions to this field of study.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Guiding/Research Questions.....	11
Nature of the Study.....	11
Definitions.....	12
Assumptions.....	14
Scope and Delimitations.....	15
Limitations.....	16
Significance.....	16
Summary.....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	19
Introduction.....	19



Theoretical Framework: Social Construction and Policy Design Theory .....	22
Professional Literature: Employment and Job Training .....	28
African American Males: Prolonged Joblessness.....	30
Public Workforce Literature: Unemployed African American Males.....	33
Public Workforce Employment Training: Young, African American Males.....	34
Public Workforce Program Professionals: Strategies and Intervention.....	36
African American Males: The Hidden Unemployed .....	37
African American Males Unemployment: Current Statistics .....	39
African American Male Unemployment: Explanation Theories .....	41
African American Males: Education .....	44
African American Males: Job Mismatch & Employment Skills .....	45
African American Males: Racial Discrimination .....	46
African American Males: Employer Discrimination.....	47
Young, African American Males: Incarceration and Child Support Policy .....	48
Summary .....	49
Chapter 3: Methods .....	51
Introduction.....	51
Research Design and Approach .....	53

Case Study .....	55
Recruitment of Participants.....	57
Research Question Alignment .....	60
Data Collection .....	60
Data Analysis .....	62
Coding Procedures and Thematic Analysis .....	64
Computer Software and Data Analysis.....	67
Trustworthiness.....	68
Transferability.....	69
Dependability.....	69
Ethical Considerations .....	70
Researcher’s Role .....	71
Chapter 4: Results.....	74
Introduction.....	74
Description of the Participants.....	75
Data Collection .....	79
Data Analysis .....	84
Level One Coding.....	85

Level Two Coding .....	86
Level Three Coding .....	86
Findings.....	87
Emergent Themes .....	87
Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes .....	89
Managing Change and New Technology.....	91
Strategies for Securing Employment .....	94
Perceptions of Benefits and Burden.....	96
Politics of the Organization .....	99
Results of Research Interview Questions .....	101
Findings for Research Question 1.....	101
Discrepant Cases and Non-Conforming Data.....	115
Evidence of Quality .....	116
Summary of Findings.....	116
Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusion. ....	1189
Introduction.....	118
Interpretation of the Findings.....	120
Emergent Themes .....	122

Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes .....	123
Strategies for Securing Employment .....	124
Managing Change and New Technology.....	125
Perceptions of Benefits and Burdens .....	126
Politics of the Organization .....	127
Response to Research Question 1 .....	129
Response to Research Question 2 .....	130
Limitations of the Study.....	131
Social Change Implications .....	131
Recommendation for Action.....	133
Recommendation for Future Study.....	135
Reflection of the Researcher's Experience.....	136
Conclusion .....	138
References.....	140
Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide .....	150
Appendix B: The Workforce Agency Employment Training Organizer.....	152
Appendix C: Emergent Themes.....	153

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Emergent Themes and Codes ..... 81

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

African American men have struggled with the process of obtaining employment in ways significantly different from other major racial or ethnic groups. In particular, young, African American males continue to face periods of long-term unemployment despite significant economic and political change over the past 5 decades. To enter the labor markets many young, African American males turn to public workforce agencies and community-based employment programs as a pathway to employment (Spaulding, Lerman, Holzer, & Eyster, 2015). Studies have shown that public workforce programs may help some participants achieve modest increases in earnings, yet further research is needed to see how public workforce agency can align policies and practices more strategically to improve employment opportunities for young, African American males (Spaulding et al., 2015; Heinrich, 2016).

In this case study, I examined the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males at one public workforce agency. The workforce organization has dedicated significant resources and personnel to the task of assisting young, African American males secure a pathway to employment. However, the workforce employment training policies and practices that guide the process for young, African American males tend to focus on low wages work, or jobs that have become obsolete or overlook employment opportunities resulting from advances in technology (Spaulding et al., 2015).

Researchers cite limitations imposed by policy design, limited discussion of the misalignments of policies and practices that can lead to missed employment opportunities, and lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process as factors affecting these participants (Francis, 2013; Heinrich, C., 2016; McConnell et al. , 2016; Spaulding et al., 2015). A better understanding of the perceptions of public workforce professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males may improve policy design, improve understanding of the impact of social constructions for this population, and help address the uneven quality of the public employment training experience for these individuals. Schneider, Ingram, and deLeon's (2009) social construction of target population and policy design provided the framework and insight into how positive and negative social constructions of target populations affect public policies designed to address matters relevant to these groups. This chapter is divided into nine sections, which cover the background of the problem, statement of the problem, literature regarding the scope of the problem, key terms and definitions, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, and summary.

## **Background**

Although African Americans are in many ways better off in absolute terms than they were 5 decades ago, they continue to face significant barriers to employment, particularly young, males (Spaulding et al., 2015; Jones, Schmitt, & Wilson, 2018). In 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that among major racial and ethnic groups, African American males (20 to 24 years of age) experienced nearly 30% higher rates of joblessness in cities such as New York and Los Angeles in 2015 (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2016). Edin's (2015) study linked joblessness of African American men to family breakup, and multi-partner fertility for black mothers. Biological fathers who are jobless consistently move away and abandon their children. The challenges of collecting data on unemployed, young, African American males are further complicated because traditional employment data counts only those considered "actively seeking employment" (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Cherry (2016) noted that young, African Americans males tend to fall into the category of the "hidden unemployed," because they may want to work and have simply been unsuccessful during the job search process. Research has shown that many young, African American males who turn to public workforce employment services may achieve modest increases in earnings; however, further research is needed to see how public workforce agencies can align policies and practices more strategically to improve employment opportunities for young, African American males (Spaulding et al., 2015). The literature indicated that existing studies do not capture the full effects on participants or society because of the lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices involving public workforce professionals assisting unemployed, African American males during the transition to work process, effects of the limitations imposed by policy design, the limited discussion of the misalignment of policies and practices, which may contribute to missed employment opportunities for young, African American males (Francis, 2013; Heinrich, 2016; McConnell, et al., 2016; Spaulding et al., 2015). There is a gap in the literature concerning understanding the employment barriers involving public workforce program professionals assisting young, African Americans males during the



transition to work process, and the relevance of social constructions and policy design affecting these groups.

In this case study, I examined the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males seeking employment training at one public workforce agency. The public agency has dedicated resources and experienced program professionals with the task of assisting low-income individuals, and young, unemployed, African American males during the transition to work. However, further research was needed to see how public workforce agencies and program professionals can address limitations imposed by policy design, the lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices affecting these target groups, and the factors that may contribute to missed employment opportunities for unemployed, young, African American males. Research has shown that the workforce employment program policies and practices that guide the process for young, African American males tend to focus on low-wage work or on jobs that have become obsolete, or they may overlook employment opportunities created by advancements in technology (Heinrich, 2016; Spaulding et al., 2015).

Technology is rapidly changing how we live and work. Employment opportunities are emerging in customer service, marketing, and data processing that may allow more individuals the option to work from remote locations (McKinney et al., 2015). Previous research indicated that public workforce employment program policies and practices are not aligned to provide young, African American males reasonable access to these types of job opportunities (Spaulding et al., 2015). A better understanding of the perceptions of public workforce professionals assisting unemployed, young,

African American males may contribute to better alignment of policies and practices for public workforce agencies and professionals, and help address factors that may lead to missed employment opportunities. The workforce agency has a mission statement that provided information about a full range of workforce options across several funding streams, including the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. The WIOA (2016) provides for comprehensive realignment of the nation's workforce development programs. For 2016, the U.S. federal government appropriated more than \$6.9 billion to states for WIOA programs and approximately \$3.4 billion in federal formula funding for partner programs, for a total of \$10.5 billion in federal funding. Public workforce agencies, such as workforce development agency (WDA), have dedicated resources and personnel to the task of assisting low-income and less-skilled individuals with gaining a pathway to employment.

New York City, with a population of more than 8.5 million people, is also one of the largest cities involved in public employment-based training and with the largest budget at \$57 million in 2017. In 2015, among New Yorkers ages 18 to 24 years, nearly 140,000 were both out of work and out of school. Research has shown that the race of a young person influences their likelihood of being unemployed; for example, black men and women ages 18 to 24 years are unemployed at respective rates are 1.6 and 2.3 times higher than their unemployed white peers (Josephson, A., 2017). Of the total participants involved in public employment programs, 6,267,506 were in the adult programs, and 174,521 were youth participants. Participants were of different ages (20 to 24 years), and public workforce employment programs may include tutoring, paid and unpaid work

experiences, and employment-based training (Spaulding et al., 2015).

Spaulding et al. (2015) suggested that broader solutions are needed to address disparities in public employment and training experience for young men of color. These solutions should involve multiple institutions in government, nonprofit organizations, and education, as well as interventions that target low-income young, African American males. It is not only important to understand how inadequate employment-based policies and practices affect participants, but also that policymakers gain a better understanding of the effects of the social constructions on the transition to the work process for young, African American males seeking to enter the job market. I reviewed the following literature to establish a framework for the research: Ingram, Schneider, and deLeon's (2009) theory of social construction and policy design proposed that policymakers typically socially construct target groups in positive and negative terms and distribute benefits and burdens as to reflect and perpetuate these constructions, Cherry's (2016) study indicated that negative stereotypes about young, African American males assumed their lack of motivation and limited interpersonal skills explain periods of prolonged joblessness, and Francis' (2013) study indicated that public and private workforce development programs help some participants modestly increase earnings. However, existing studies do not follow participants for long enough to understand the effects of certain interventions, do not follow participants for any significant timeframe to determine effects of interventions, ignore most intervention impacts other than those on earnings, and do not provide insights into the alignment of policies and strategies that may affect participants.

Spaulding et al. (2015) reported that too often, low-income, young, African American males have little opportunity to be exposed to various career paths, gain valuable work experience, and build employment history. Cherry, Robert, and Chun Wang (2015) suggested that for young, African American men having a high school diploma and improved educational attainment can inoculate against unemployment and increase lifetime earnings. Pager (2011) found that along with job search challenges in the labor markets, young, African American males face barriers associated with the lack of work experience, lack of education, racial discrimination, housing situation, involvement in the criminal justice systems, and poor family relationships. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three African American males and one in four Hispanic/Latino males can expect to be incarcerated during their lifetime (Sentencing Project, 2013). Spaulding et al. (2015) stated that a broader solution is needed to improve the employment experience of young, and McKinney et al. (2017) reported that midcareer job training will be essential, as will enhancing the labor market dynamism and enabling worker redeployment. Among its conclusions was that technology destroys jobs, but not work. In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed description of the literature.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Public workforce employment agencies provide critical job training and employment services for many disadvantaged groups who face significant barriers to employment. In particular, young African American males work with public workforce program professionals at public workforce agencies to find a pathway into the labor markets. The research problem concerns the lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices that guide the process for public workforce program professionals assisting

young, African American males during the transition to work process. For young, African American males who face barriers to employment, public workforce employment-based policies and practices tend to focus on low-wage work or on jobs that have become obsolete, or they overlook employment opportunities resulting from advances in technology. McKinsey et al. (2017) found that even the most carefully designed public employment training fails if providers do not address certain barriers that affect many disadvantaged and low-income minority participants.

Many young, African American males working with public workforce employment training professionals, such as WDA, continue to face barriers from limitations imposed by policy design, lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices, and the lack of alignment of workforce program policies and practices resulting in missed employment opportunities (Heinrich, 2016). Policy design tends to affect the social construction of target groups and can create stereotypes used to portray those groups (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Yet, technology is rapidly changing how we live and work. Employment opportunities are emerging that may allow program professional options to address many of the employment barriers facing young, African American males. There is a gap in the literature regarding knowledge of the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males involved in the transition to work process as well as the relevance of social constructions and policy design affecting the process. In this case study, I examined the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males involved in the public workforce employment experience. I also examined the relevance of social constructions and policy design during the transition to work experience.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of public employment workforce professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males involved in the transition to work process guided by theories of policy design and social constructions relevant to the targeted population. Ingram et al. (2009) developed the theory of social construction of targeted populations and policy design to provide insights into policy formation and design by stating that policies can target specific populations, or groups of people, to either benefit from policy or be burdened by the policy. One aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of public workforce professionals assisting young, unemployed, African American males in connection to limitations imposed by policy design, the impact of social constructions, and the factors that may contribute to the lack of employment opportunities.

A better understanding of the perceptions of public workforce professionals can also contribute to improved employment opportunities for young, African American males, which may include employment opportunities in new job sectors. Technology is rapidly changing how we live and work. For young, African American males, the transition to work process in WDA's programs tends to focus on low wage jobs, or overlook new employment opportunities created by advancements in technology. Effective workforce employment training programs recognize that today's training must be appropriate for the jobs of tomorrow. McKinney et al. (2017) stated that although some jobs or industries will no longer exist due to technological advances, others require fundamentally different skills.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical model framing this study was Ingram et al.'s (2009) theory of social construction and policy design. There are several characteristics of social construction and policy design theory relevant to this study, including, that policymakers typically socially construct target groups in positive and negative terms and distribute benefits and burdens as to reflect and perpetuate those constructions. Social constructions of targeted populations are important political attributes that often become embedded in political discourse and the elements of policy design, and policy design for negatively constructed target groups generally result in those group members becoming more marginalized and less active in politics (Ingram, & Schneider, 1993). The theory's core rationale is based on past work on social constructions of knowledge in terms of positive and negative connotations (Edelman, 1964, 1988) and policy designs (Dryzek, 1990). Policy designs shape the experience for the target population and send an implicit message about the level of importance the problem is to the government and whether participation is to be effective (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The social construction of individuals or groups refers to the symbols, images, and stereotypes used about individuals or groups by government officials and society more broadly (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The research questions for this study will align with this framework, in which I explore the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males who faced significant barriers in the transition to work process. The guiding research question: What are public employment-based program professionals' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape social constructions relevant to unemployed, African American

males involved in the transition to work process? Schneider and Ingram (1997) understood social construction to mean the varying ways in which realities are shaped. To understand the development and implications of policy design the theory incorporates the social construction and power of the target population. The theoretical foundation serves to explore the findings of the experiences of public workforce program managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition to work process. In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework and literature.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

The following are the research questions that I used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are public employment program professionals' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape social constructions relevant to unemployed, young, African American males involved in the transition to work process?

RQ2: What are public workforce program managers' perceptions about the relevance of workforce employment policy design and social constructions impacting unemployed, young, African American males during the workforce training experience?

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative with a case study design. The methodological approach included face to face structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and follow-up interviews with public workforce program professionals. Quane, Wilson, and Hwang (2015) found that qualitative research is useful for understanding the perceptions and experiences of individuals in complex research settings, and qualitative research can provide the type of tools that allows the researcher to go "beneath the



surface” of the research problem. Many young, African American males turn to public workforce employment training after experiencing prolonged periods of joblessness (Heinrich, 2016). Also, in the field of public workforce employment training as with other fields of work, policy design tends to affect the social construction of targeted groups, such as young, employed, African American males and can create stereotypes used to portray those groups (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). In this case study, I interviewed public workforce program professionals at one workforce development agency tasked with providing a pathway to employment for young, unemployed, African American males. One aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of how the perceptions of public workforce employment professionals assisting these participants in the transition to work process were relevant to policy design and the social constructions affecting these groups. In Chapter 2, I present a more detailed explanation of the research study and relevant literature. I will use the research questions to consider the workforce development policies and practices that affect the transition to work process involving public employment program professionals and the participants, in particular, young, African American males seeking employment.

### **Definitions**

On the subject of African American male joblessness and workforce employment programs, certain key terms and definitions should be considered to add some perspective on the issue being discussed in the literature. The U.S. Department of Labor utilized the following terms for U.S. citizen’s work behavior and employment-related constructs: The *employed* are those persons who during the reference work week did work for at least one hour as paid employees, worked in their own business, profession, or on their

farm, or worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers in an enterprise operated by a family member. Those temporarily absent from work but who had jobs or businesses to return to are also counted as employed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

The *unemployed* are those not working but available for work in the reference week, and actively seeking work in the past 4 weeks. Those persons waiting to be recalled from layoff need not be seeking work to be classified as unemployed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

The unemployment rate is the ratio of the unemployed to the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

The labor force participation rate is the ratio of the labor force to top the population of working age (ages 16 years and over) in the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

The *nonparticipant rate* is the number of working-age individuals who do not have jobs but are not actively looking for work.

The *employment-to-population ratio* is the fraction of the employed to the population of working-age persons.

*Prolonged joblessness* refers to unemployment and non-participation in the labor market collectively (Wilson, 2003).

*Social construction*: Schneider and Ingram (2008) noted that social construction develops with the use of symbols, interpretation, and discourse in society.

Target populations, or groups of people, are shaped by social construction. There are four types of social constructions described in this study, advantaged groups, contenders, dependants, and deviants (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997, 2005).

*Policy design:* Ingram and Schneider (1993) defined the policy design process as the elements found in the content of the policy that affects target populations and other citizens. Additionally, policy design reflects the various decisions of many different people (Schneider et al., 2014).

*Target population:* Defined as the population, or group, that a researcher is interested in analyzing as part of a study. Ingram and Schneider's (2005) theory of social construction of target populations show that effective policy implementation requires a close examination

*Unemployed, young, African American males:* Defined as individuals engaged in either public workforce training experience or other job search activities.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are elements of the design that may affect the study, but the researcher cannot control them (Barron, 2008). The assumptions that will likely be relevant to the research design concern whether participants will respond honestly and truthfully during the interview process. This assumption holds that interviewees will be provided an opportunity to offer responses in a safe environment, and honest answers are expected. The assumption that by gaining a better understanding of how participants perceive employment barriers and the effects of social constructs on targeted groups can lead to more effective public workforce employment policies and practices. Another assumption of this study is that unemployed, young, African American males involved in the public workforce experience have different transitional experiences during the process of entering the labor market. The final assumption holds that given the

responsibilities of public workforce program professionals, every effort to achieve productive outcomes will be pursued.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study involved collecting data from 10 public workforce program professionals, at which point saturation had been reached. Participants included (a) program employment-training professionals, (b) program managers, and (c) a program director affiliated with one public workforce development agency in New York City. Workforce Agency's workforce site provides employment services and job training to individuals who face barriers to employment. This research involved a qualitative case study approach to allow the researcher to explore the perceptions of public workforce professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males. Workforce Agency's operation has dedicated resources and personnel to the task of assisting these individuals, however, the traditional workforce program policies and practices tend to direct these participants to low wage work, and jobs that have become obsolete, or ignore employment opportunities created by advancement in technology.

The theoretical framework selected for the study (Social Construction and Policy Design Theory) explains why certain targeted populations are overlooked for opportunities as a result of policy design. The scope of the study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of the public workforce program professionals involved in guiding the transition to work process for young, African American males. One of the delimitations that affected the study was participation in programs focused on populations living near or at the poverty level. Ultimately, the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the

organizations and, perhaps, the geographical area in which the fieldwork is carried out (Stake, 1995). This suggests that although each case is unique, it is also an example within a broader group, and, as a result, the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected.

### **Limitations**

This case study was limited to one public workforce employment agency in New York City. As a case study, the sample size was small and, therefore, the results should not be generalized representation of other populations. However, because this was a case study of one public workforce employment agency in New York City, I could provide more detail about the perceptions and experiences of the participants involved in the study. I did take into consideration those features of the study that concern dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability as criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of the findings. Guba (1981) suggested that researchers address concerns about neutrality, and consistency in the research. I will provide a more detailed description in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

The significance of this study concerns the potential to inform policymakers and managers involved in public workforce employment initiatives that focus on creating a career pathway for young, African American males. This study may also contribute to social change by improving policies and practices involving public workforce professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process. Cherry et al. (2015) suggested that high rates of joblessness and unemployment for young, African American males are disproportionate, and mask the fact that prolonged joblessness is often influenced by cultural, behavioral, political, and societal

factors. A study that provides insights into the perceptions and experiences of public workforce professionals assisting unemployed, African American males can contribute to better alignment of the policies and practices that guide the process.

Gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of public employment-based program professionals involved in the transition to work process for young, African American males may improve both the length of employment as well as job opportunities. Also, developing a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of employment-based program managers about how participants approach the transition into the workplace allows policymakers the opportunity to develop more positive and effective interventions. Technology is rapidly changing how we live and work. Employment opportunities are emerging in areas of customer service, marketing, and data processing which may allow individuals options to work from remote locations. However, public workforce program policies and practices tend to guide some participants, particularly, young, African American males towards low-wage work. This research aimed to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of public employment program professionals assisting young, African American males during the process of obtaining work.

### **Summary**

The labor markets in the 21st century will face a myriad of global challenges, which affect the work experiences of most people. In particular, individuals facing employment barriers into the labor markets face another set of challenges. Public workforce agencies, such as the agency involved in the study, play a key role in

providing a pathway to employment for disadvantaged groups, particularly young, African American males.

Interventions and policies focused on improving the pathway to employment for unemployed, young, African American males can contribute to more productive and successful experiences in the workplace. Understanding the perceptions of the public workforce professionals tasked with implementing these interventions designed to assist may be an important step toward promoting positive social change. In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of the problem and the study, and in Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature and the theoretical framework involved in the case study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of public employment-based program professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition into the New York City workforce, and to gain a better understanding of the relevance to policy design and the social constructions impacting these targeted groups. In this study, I explored how the perceptions of public workforce employment professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to the work process were relevant to the misalignments of workforce policies and practices. Previous research has shown that some participants experience modest earnings increases during the transition into the workforce, yet further research is needed to see how workforce development agencies can align policies and practices more strategically to improve employment opportunities for young, African American males (Spaulding et al., 2015). A better understanding of the perceptions of public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males can improve policy design, and address misalignments that can lead to missed employment opportunities. The perceived employment barriers in this study concerned cultural, behavioral, political, and societal factors. In this study, I addressed the gap in the literature regarding the impact of inadequate workforce policies and practices involving public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process, and the relevance of policy design and social constructions impacting these target populations. This review of the literature focused on public workforce program professionals, program participants, policies and practices involved in the employment



process, the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, themes used in the literature concerning the experiences of unemployed, young African American males, and factors which can influence the perceptions of public workforce employment-based program professionals. The theoretical framework for the study included Ingram, Schneider, and deLeon's (2007) social construction and policy design theory, which focused on socially constructed values applied to the knowledge of target populations and the consequent effects these values have on people. Ingram and Schneider (1993) developed the theory of social construction of target populations to provide explanations into agenda-setting, and policy formation and design by illustrating how policies target certain populations to either provide benefits or impose burdens from the policy.

The theory of social construction of target populations also provided a model to examine the positive and negative social constructions used by policymakers to distribute benefits and burdens reflective of such constructions (Ingram et al., 2007). Policy designs shape the experience for the target population and send an implicit message about the level of importance the problem is to the government (Ingram et al., 2007). Policy design is important because of the implications for reinforcing negative or positive social constructions. Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted that language, metaphors, and stories are also utilized to create positive and negative images of target populations in the policy design process. Coleman (1986) suggested that whether on a large or small scale, individuals engage in some form of social theory daily through their interactions with one another. Social theory can explain ideas about power and social structures, class, gender, and ethnicity. Coleman found that social theory grounded in institutional and structural

settings makes possible a connection between the individual and society and the ideas about how social systems are shaped. I reviewed the literature for definitions and concepts that inform the study.

Saporta and Medina (2014) found that to realize the economic promise of the nation's diversity, workforce training programs are needed for entry-level health-care jobs that address job placement challenges faced by hard-to-employ individuals, and young men of color. Challenges faced by these targeted groups, such as lack of stable housing, limited transportation, criminal justice history, as well as strong negative stereotypes by employers of young, African American males prevent full inclusion into society (Saporta & Medina, 2014). Sherman (2017) explained that barriers to employment for young, African American males are structural and arise from systems and policies- like discrimination, segregation, unstable and low-quality jobs, and lack of investment in education, child care, and other crucial support, not an individual choice. The federal government is crucial to addressing barriers to employment- in partnership with states, communities, and businesses. Recent studies confirm that hiring discrimination against Blacks and Latinos has remained virtually unchanged in the last 25 years. A persistent history of employment discrimination, along with segregation, has kept people of color, and in particular young, African American males, either out of the labor market entirely, trapped in low-wage jobs, or reliant on the informal economies (Sherman, 2017).

Darity (2005) described the enslavement of Africans, and its relevance to the beliefs that black males were hyper-sexed, lazy, and uneducable, Murray (1984) described views which attribute the increase of male unemployment to programs

designed to eliminate poverty, Whitehead (2005) explained views on human capital and cultural capital theories which attribute the lower-income and joblessness of African American men to their supposed below-average productivity, Holzer and Offner's (2004) arguments on incarceration and child support enforcement exacerbating the employment problems of African American males, Spaulding et al. (2015) views that public workforce programs and models should be expanded to reach young men of color, and address the quality of jobs and wages, and Cherry's (2016) views that young, African American males experience periods of prolonged joblessness despite a willingness to seek work. Sources for the literature include peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, websites of federal and state organizations, and books.

The databases utilized for this study include (a) EBSCO, (b) Academic Search Premier, (c) Sage Journal Online, (d) Google Scholar Search, and (e) the Walden University Library. This review discussed the literature which contributes to the theoretical framework used in this study. This literature review utilized the following keywords and phrases: Young, African American males, social construction and policy design theory, employment training, public workforce program, prolonged joblessness, public workforce professionals, work transition process, targeted populations, the long-term unemployed, the hidden unemployed and public workforce agencies.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Construction and Policy Design Theory**

A theoretical framework will provide a base for this study. Helen Ingram, Anne Schneider, and Peter DeLeon (2009) provided the framework for the social construction of target populations and policy design theory to help explain how individual groups are constructed as targeted populations. Public policymakers typically socially construct

target populations in positive and negative terms and distribute benefits and burdens as to reflect and perpetuate these constructions (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2009). Since the 1980s, policy theorists turned to the policy design approach that was initially proposed to address the mass of variables that affect the design, selection, implementation, and evaluation of public policy (Simon, 1981; Schneider and Ingram, 1988). The theory's core rationale is based upon past work on the social construction of knowledge in terms of positive or negative connotations (Edelman, 1964, 1988) and policy designs (Dryzek, 1990). For public employment-based program managers who are assisting young, African American males in the transition to work process, the theory proposes that while all citizens are supposed to be equal before the law, there is ample evidence that they receive very different treatment in the public policy process (Ingram, et al., 2009). Policy designs are observable phenomena found in statutes, administrative guidelines, programs, and even the practices and procedures of street-level bureaucrats (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Policy designs are difficult to overcome, because a sequence of previous policies, based on a particular framing of target populations, helps produce hegemony; the public, media, and policymakers take this set of values for granted, as normal or natural, and rarely question them when engaging in politics (Pierce et al., 2014). For example, if most people assume that people in poverty deserve little government help because they are largely responsible for their fate, policymakers have little incentive to intervene (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Policy design sends a signal to the recipients of benefits or burdens, who participate more or less according to how they are treated or characterized by the government (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). This view may help explain why public workforce policies and practices at some agencies, such as

WDA Workforce Agency, tend to direct young, African American males to job training in the maintenance department as opposed to customer service support.

Schneider and Ingram (1997) found that many well-intentioned policies reinforce problematic social constructions and fail to address major socio-economic inequalities. For example, the “War on Poverty” in 1965 reinforced black stereotypes without solving poverty, and policy change built on an amnesty for, or positive constructions of, some immigrants suggest that others are the wrong kinds of immigrants (Newton, 2005; Bensonsmith, 2005). Ingram et al. (2007) depict these dynamics by describing two spectrums, one describes the positive or negative ways in which groups are portrayed by policymakers, and the other describes the resources available to groups to challenge or reinforce that image. There are four categories to describe target populations: the powerful and positively constructed are the advantaged groups, the powerful and negatively constructed are the contenders, the powerless and positively constructed are the dependents, and the powerless and negatively constructed are the deviants. The advantaged groups are treated positively in public and receiving benefits (retired seniors, the elderly), the contenders are negatively constructed in public but negotiating benefits privately (big banks and corporations), the dependents are constructed as deserving and powerless (students, children, the handicapped), and finally, the deviants are constructed as underserving (welfare cheats, sex offenders, young, minority males).

Schneider and Ingram (1997) argue that, although the US political system may meet some standards of fairness or openness, the policies they produce may not be conducive to democracy. They describe an increasingly individualistic US system with declining rates of collective political participation, a tendency for actors to seek benefits

for their populations, and a ‘degenerative’ policy that produces major inequalities along with sex, race, and ethnicity lines (Schneider & Ingram, 2005). In particular, Ingram, et al. (2009) outlined three essential factors significant to socially constructed target populations. First, social constructions of target populations are important political attributes that often become embedded in political discourse and the elements of policy design. Policymakers respond to and manipulate social constructions in building their political base (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2009). Second, there are many cases of research revealing the long-term impact of policy design on group identities, political orientations, and political participation, and that groups receiving positive messages and resources from the public policy are more politically active than others with similar characteristics (Campbell, 2013). Lastly, public policy design for negatively constructed target groups generally results in those group members becoming more marginalized and less active in politics. The message that socially constructed target groups are undeserving of the benefits being allocated is embedded in the policy design and reinforced in the employment-based transition to work experience. Ingram, et al. (2009) indicated that scholars have not only shown that policy design affects individuals’ political participation and orientations toward government but that policy designs may inhibit or encourage the mobilization of grassroots organizations (Mettler and Welch, 2004; Sidney, 2005). For example, Mara Sidney (2005) found that the design of the Community Reinvestment Act, which focused on economic development in low-income, inner-city, high-minority population neighborhoods, discouraging mobilization (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2009).

Suzanne Mettler's (2002) study of policy design through which GI educational benefits were conferred demonstrated that many elements of the policy reinforced the message that these groups were especially deserving of benefits. Mara Sidney's (2003) study of fair housing policy shows that policymakers subdivided target populations by separating the "black middle class" from the "black urban class" to justify providing benefits for the former. Crowley and Watson (2005) found that policy designs for so-called "deadbeat dads" who fail to make child support payments to their former spouses for dependent children differ depending on whether the children are supported by public assistance. The policy design for fathers whose children require public assistance is punitive, punishing them for having children, as opposed to "dead beat dads" who do not have children receiving public assistance (Crowley and Watson, 2005). Schneider and Ingram (1993) articulated the application of social construction within their approach to understanding the policy process. While they understand social construction to mean the "varying ways in which realities are shaped", this view does not embrace the more common relativistic conception of social construction advocated by those closely aligned to constructivism (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Rather, Schneider and Ingram's brand of social construction relies on a variant of bounded relativity where meaning varies by context but does so in a systemic and generalizable fashion (Sabatier, 2007). In specifying the generalizable constructs of their theory, Schneider and Ingram (1993,1997) seek to illuminate how policy designs shape the social construction of a policy's targeted population, the role of power in this relationship, and how policy design shape politics and democracy (Pierce, Siddiki, Jones, Schumacher, Pattison, & Peterson, 2014).

Ingram, et al. (2009) explained that social construction and policy design theory were developed to gain a better understanding of why public policies sometimes fail to meet their purpose of solving public problems, supporting democratic institutions, or producing greater equality of citizenship. To that end, the theory addressed the socially constructed values applied to targeted populations, and knowledge, and the consequent impact these values have on people and democracy (Pierce et. al., 2014).

The theory generally conceives of power as having three dimensions. The first is primarily concerned with observable behavior, influence, and conflict. The second dimension is broader, concerned with not only what can be observed, but also with what is not present, such as, the ability to keep policies off the agenda and the third dimension of power is concerned with the ideology and the potential for entities to influence the very rationale for the creation of preferences. The third set of assumptions related to the political environment, and concern how policies send messages to citizens that affect orientations and participation, and how policies are created in an environment of political uncertainty (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Kingdon 1984). According to Schneider and Ingram (1997), the theory of social construction and policy design includes all three dimensions of power. Consequently, studies examining the third assumption of power are likely better suited for in-depth case study approaches (Pierce et al. 2014). The assumptions described in these categories-the model of the individual, power, and the political environment- interact to inform two core propositions within social construction and policy design theory, the target population, and recipients of policy benefits or burdens (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). For young, African American males who turn to public employment-based programs to address prolonged joblessness, policy design has



significant impacts on the transition to the employment process. In this case study, the goal is to explore the perceptions of public workforce professionals at one public workforce agency to gain insights into the impact of social constructions, policy design, and the implications of policy misalignments.

Ingram, et al. (2007) found that policy design affects participants through the rules of participation, messages conveyed to individuals, resources such as funding. Ingram, et al. (2007) suggest that policy design structure opportunities and sending varying messages to differently constructed target groups about how governments behave and how they are likely to be treated by the government. The allocation of benefits and burdens to target groups in public policy depends upon the extent of political power and their positive or negative social construction on the deserving and undeserving axis (Ingram et al., 2007). According to Ingram, et al. (2007), those who are advantaged have a relatively high amount of power and are positively constructed. They are expected to receive a disproportionate share of benefits and few burdens. The term “target populations” identify those groups who receive benefits and burdens through the various elements of policy design to achieve some public purpose (Schneider, & Ingram, 2014).

### **Professional Literature: Employment and Job Training**

Despite the recognition that public employment agencies and workforce training initiatives influence social, political, and economic factors concerning the world of work for many, very little research exist that fully examines the perceptions and experiences of public workforce professionals involved in the transition to work process with target populations (Heinrich, 2016 ). Thus, the employment-based and job training literature continues to rely on traditional models of workforce development strategies and

perceived social, economic, and cultural factors. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2016) provides for comprehensive realignment of the nation's workforce development programs. For 2016, the U.S. federal government appropriated more than \$6.9 billion to states for WIOA programs and approximately \$3.4 billion in federal formula funding for partner programs, for a total of \$10.5 billion in federal funding. Public workforce agencies, such as WDA have dedicated resources and personnel to the task of assisting low-income and minority populations during the process of obtaining employment.

For young, African American males who request assistance finding a job, but lack basic skills or face significant barriers to employment, many can access employment-based training and other resources under the Adult Services Education and Literacy program (WIOA, 2016). A study by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University shows that, in 2013, the three most common jobs for young men of color were cooks, retail sales clerk, and non-construction labor. Francis (2013) found that public employment-based programs may help participants achieve modest increases in earnings, however, research indicated that existing studies do not capture the full impact on participants or society because of lack of understanding of different interventions, and limitations imposed by policy designs (Heinrich, 2016; McConnell, et. al.,2016). Research has also shown that negative stereotypes and perceptions about young, African American males suggest that they lack the motivation, resilience, and interpersonal skills required to obtain meaningful employment (Quane, Wilson, and Hwang, 2015).

Due to employment disparities, young, African American males are unemployed out of proportion to their numbers. In many cities, their share of joblessness exceeds 40 percent (Cherry, 2015). When young, African American males make up such a high proportion of the jobless, racial stereotypes among employers and the police are significantly reinforced (Cherry, 2015). In most cases, these factors compound already existing employment barriers facing young, African American males. Understanding perceived employment barriers facing both young, African American males and program professionals during the transition to employment process can improve both the quality of work as well as the length of employment. What has greatly limited our understanding of perceived employment barriers facing young, African American males may concern the perceptions of program professionals and the social construction and policy designs impacting these populations (Ingram, et al., 2009). There is a gap in the literature regarding the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of public employment program professionals who are assisting young, African American males involved in the transition to work process.

### **African American Males: Prolonged Joblessness**

American firms have become far more diverse than any time in our nation's history, and yet it has become clear that certain racial groups continue to experience significantly higher rates of prolonged joblessness and unemployment (Quane, et al., 2015). Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) data indicated that among major racial groups, African American men, particularly young, black males, continue to show significantly higher employment disparities and periods of prolonged joblessness than any other racial or ethnic group (BLS, 2015). Kathryn Edin's (2015) study linked joblessness of African

American males to family breakup, and multi-partner fertility for black mothers. Biological fathers who are jobless consistently move away and abandon their children. Pager's (2011) study found that along with job search challenges in the labor markets, young, African American males face barriers associated with lack of work experience, lack of education, racial discrimination, housing conditions, demographics, involvement in the criminal justice system, and poor family relationship. Spaulding et al. (2015) reported that all too often, low-income, young, African American males have little opportunity to be exposed to various career paths, gain valuable work experience, or build employment histories.

Cherry, Robert, and Chun (2015) explained that high rates of joblessness and unemployment for young, African American males are disproportionate, and mask the fact that prolonged joblessness is often influenced by other factors including cultural, behavioral, political, and societal factors. Cherry, et al. (2015) found that inner-city neighborhoods are often where many of these dynamics collide, and yet young, African American males exposed to these conditions are expected to share the aspirations and expectations of their counterparts in better-off communities (p. 197). To address these gaps, and obtain employment many, young, African American males turn to the community and public employment-based development services (WIOA, 2016).

Cherry (2016) explained that rioting in Milwaukee over the police killing of an African American male has reanimated the issue of longstanding black joblessness. Between 2010 and 2014, Milwaukee's average rate of black joblessness was 54 percent, compared to rates of only 17 and 26 percent, respectively, among the city's white and Latino young male population. However, the pervasive prolonged unemployment of

young, African American males goes well beyond such deindustrialized cities, and its effects are devastating on both the individuals themselves and their families (Cherry, et al., 2016). Additionally, research has shown that prolonged joblessness of young, African American males is strongly linked to child maltreatment (Cherry, et al., 2016). Using state-level data, Cherry, et al. (2016) found that for each one percent increase in the black male jobless rate, the overall child maltreatment rate for their families increased by almost one percent. The differential joblessness rates among racial groups help to explain the racial disparities in child maltreatment rates. The large disparities for young, African Americans males are also an index of the impact of social isolation for these populations (Cherry, et al., 2016). For young, African American males the impact of living in high poverty neighborhoods results in a deficient network of contacts related to employment opportunities.

The combined impact of racial discrimination and lack of social networks help explain why young, African American males experience substantially higher rates of prolonged joblessness than any other major racial group (Cherry, et al., 2016). The impact of involvement in the justice system contributed to employment barriers facing young, African American males. According to the Bureau of Justice (BJS, 2003), one in three African American males and one in four Hispanic / Latino males can expect to be incarcerated during their lifetime (Sentencing Project, 2013). Research has shown that the “ban the box” initiative, i.e. not checking criminal justice information until the end of the hiring process, has improved employment prospects for black men seeking jobs (Cherry, et al., 2016).

### **Public Workforce Literature: Unemployed African American Males**

The advancement of African Americans in corporate America has been remarkable over the past five decades, and yet certain groups among African American populations still face significant barriers to employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). To obtain employment many, young, African American males turn to public employment-based initiatives and community-based workforce development services (WIOA, 2016). Studies have indicated that public employment-based initiatives and programs may help some participants achieve modest increases in earnings, however, research shows that for negatively socially constructed target groups the long-term impact of policy designs also influenced group identities, political orientations, and political participation (Francis, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Esping-Anderson, 2006).

Public workforce program studies show that very little research has examined the perceptions, interactions, and experiences of employment-based program professionals assisting young, African American males during the job placement process, and may have overlooked the impact of workforce policies and practices on the transition to work process for these participants (Francis, 2013; Heinrich, 2016). African American males, particularly, young men, continue to show significantly higher employment disparities than any other racial or ethnic groups, despite changes in technology and significant improvements in the economy (BLS, 2015). The WIOA was signed by President Obama in 2014, becoming the first update to the nation's core employment-based and workforce training program in the 16 years since the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). A deal great has changed in the labor markets over the past two decades, and

evidence has shown that the workforce system has not kept up with demand (Heinrich, 2016). Low-skilled and low-income workers face more barriers than ever to securing a job. This study will focus on the interactions of public workforce professionals at one public workforce agency in New York City. The focus of WDA Workforce's policies concerned serving the most vulnerable individuals entering the workforce. The WDA organization has programs designed to improve employment-based training, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs that can benefit workers and their families.

Research has shown that over 36 million adults in the U.S. have low skills (e.g. limited work experience, education) particularly African American males (WIOA, 2016). The rate of low-skills and literacy among African Americans is two times higher than it is among adults generally, and the gap is even higher among Hispanic adults at 43 percent having low levels of literacy and 56 percent having low skills (WIOA, 2016). WDA Workforce programs and policies explicitly state that low-income people and those with barriers to employment are priority populations for funding and services. Ingram, et al. (2009) suggested that terms such as "target population" or "target groups" are often used through the various elements of policy design to identify those groups chosen to receive benefits or burdens during the policy implementation process.

### **Public Workforce Employment Training: Young, African American Males**

Studies have indicated that public employment-based programs may help some participants achieve modest increases in earnings. Numerous researchers believe that existing studies do not capture the full impact on participants or society because of the time limits imposed by the policy designs, lack of understanding of perceived

employment barriers involving public workforce professionals and participants, or the fact that they ignore most impacts other than those on earnings (Francis, 2013; McoConnel et. al.,2016). These factors are profound concerning conditions and barriers facing young, African American males who participate in public employment-based initiatives to obtain employment. Research shows that more and more African American males turn to public workforce training programs, such as (WDA) as a means of creating a pathway to employment (WIOA, 2016).

Workforce Development Agency (WDA) originally focused on the need for strategies and employment training, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, 2015). The focus of public workforce policies and programs tend to concern improving employment and training opportunities for low-skilled and low-income workers that will lead to economic prosperity for themselves and their families (WIOA, 2016). Those policies include increases to the focus on low-income adults and youth who have limited skills, lack of work experience, and face other barriers to employment. As well as, policies and programs to expand education and training options and help disadvantaged and unemployed adults earn while they learn through community-based employment training (WIOA, 2016). Public workforce policies created opportunities for leaders and advocates in state and local communities to rethink, reshape, and expand current employment-based, and workforce systems that are grounded in research and experience to improve the employability of disadvantaged individuals.

These public workforce policies and programs also create an opportunity to leverage systemic change across currently disconnected training systems, and better



enable state and local government to implement cross-systems approaches to tackle prolonged joblessness among unemployed, African American males, as well as low-skilled, low-income disadvantaged groups (WIOA, 2016). Public workforce objectives show that low-income people and those with barriers to employment are considered priority populations for funding and services. Public workforce policies and programs take into account that many young, African American males living in high-poverty communities have less access to employment, as well as fewer opportunities to gain early work experience and develop the skills needed to advance in the current workplace. One of the WDA's programs (2016) provided an array of work-based training strategies and employment-based approaches to benefit disadvantaged and low-income individuals.

Public workforce employment-based training allows underprepared adults and young people the opportunity to earn income while also developing essential skills that are best learned on the job. Research has shown that individuals with barriers to employment often need a comprehensive set of supports that involve multiple public and private systems to help earn secondary and postsecondary credentials and with the transition to employment process (WIOA, 2016, U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2016).

### **Public Workforce Program Professionals: Strategies and Intervention**

The major objectives of public workforce programs are to give employment-based training professionals the support in assisting targeted groups, such as young, African American males, involved in the transition to work process. Few of WDA's policies and programs direct resources to employment program professionals to ensure that strategies to address the problem of joblessness are comprehensive in design as well as access to participants. The role of an employment-based program manager has been debated over

the past decade (Holzer, 2009). The role of the employment-based training manager as defined by WIOA standards entails addressing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing strategies that promote participant success in the transition to work process (WIOA, 2016). Public employment-based program professionals are also in a position to serve as advocates for unemployed participants, such as young, African American males, in areas of social development. They can implement strategies designed to help unemployed, African American males develop skills needed to address challenges and barriers involved in the transition to work process.

### **African American Males: The Hidden Unemployed**

Cherry's (2016) study of unemployed, young, African American males paints a grim picture, particularly in certain cities, like Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and D.C. The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey gathered data on the jobless rate of non-institutional men, 20 to 34 years old, averaged over the period, from 2010-2014, for 34 major cities. In these cities, there were more African American males either jobless or imprisoned than employed (Cherry, 2016). The national jobless rate for young, African American males was 39 percent, versus about 22 percent for both white and Latino young men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Cherry (2016) noted that these statistics show that weak labor markets cannot be the most important reason for the prolonged joblessness of young, African American males. These large disparities illustrate the impact of the social isolation affecting young, African American males.

Cherry (2016) argued that simply expanding employment and job training opportunities would likely have only a modest effect on the jobless rates for these

participants. Francis' (2013) reported that a large body of evidence indicated that employment-based and job training programs help participants modestly increase their earnings., however, researchers believe that existing studies do not capture the full impact of employment-based experiences on participants or society, because they do not follow participants for long enough periods, or ignore most impacts other than those on earning (Francis, 2013; King, & Heinrich, 2012; Heinrich, 2016).

Kathryn Edin's (2015) study found that prolonged joblessness for African American males had direct ramifications for the black family. Edin's (2015) linked joblessness to family break-up, causing many mothers to enter into sequential sexual relationships. Biological fathers who are jobless move away, and abandon their children, which had particularly harmful effects on their children. A growing number of black mothers are having children with more than one partner. The men who enter into these new relationships, often father additional children. These new fathers are caring towards their biological children, however harsh with children from previous relationships (Edin, 2015). Terms such as "black male unemployment", puzzle and epidemic have been used to describe the current unemployment woes of African American males (Cherry, 2016).

The most recent calculated national unemployment rate for black men ages 16 to 24 years and is twice that of their white counterparts (12.0% compared to 5.5%; U.S. Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Cherry (2016) also found that the labor force participation rate for African American men was even more critical, which continues to lag at least 7 percentage points behind the rates of all men. Cherry (2016) noted that the limitation of such traditional unemployment data was that they do not

count the “hidden unemployed”, those who want to work and need a job but who do not actively seek employment. Research has shown that many young, African American males join the ranks of the hidden unemployed because of barriers to employment and from growing discouragement during the transition to work process (Cherry, 2016; Bowman, 2014). Cherry found that individuals who become “discouraged” and who are not actively looking for a job are not considered part of the official labor force and are not counted in official unemployment data. He suggests that many young, African American males join the ranks of the hidden unemployed because they believe that no work is available related to their employment experiences, believe that they lack the necessary schooling, training, or work experience to obtain work, experienced discrimination or barriers related to the justice system, or had tried but could not find a job (Cherry, 2016).

### **African American Males Unemployment: Current Statistics**

The U.S. Department of Labor reported that the most recently calculated national unemployment rate for black males ages 20 to 24, is nearly twice that of white males (14.3% compared to 8.1%; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The same is true among the 25 years and older population, with the unemployment rate for black men at 5.6% compared to 3.3% for white men. Higher unemployment and lower labor force participation means that the percentage of black males with a job is significantly lower than the percentage of all males with a job (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). The overall unemployment rate was 4.4%, including 7.5% for Black or African American, and 5.1 percent for people of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

U.S. Department of Labor reported that about one-quarter of blacks in the labor force in 1976 was in the 20-to-24-year-old group. The share of blacks in that group declined in 2017 and is projected to continue declining over the next decade. Wilson (2014) suggested that black unemployment is high for several reasons, including that African Americans have become more resilient at maintaining their job search. The key to understanding Wilson's point is keeping in mind that unemployment doesn't measure the number of people who are "unemployed" or without a job (Rosen, 2014). What the unemployment rate measures are how many people are considered "actively" seeking work. If individuals temporarily give up the search for work, he or she is no longer counted as part of the population of the unemployed (Rosen, 2014). According to the data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) not only is a greater share of African American males out of work, but they seem to continue to seek work longer than their white counterparts. Wilson (2015) suggested that these data points indicate when blacks lose their jobs, they stick to their job search longer than white Americans, and yet many fall into the category of the "hidden unemployed". It is well known among labor-market analysts that African Americans are less likely to be employed than members of other major racial groups (Rosen, 2014). One possible cause would be lower levels of education: only 23 % of African American adults have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 36 % of whites (Cherry, 2016). However, a study by Cajner, Radler, Ratner, and Vidangos (2017) found that differences in education alone are not significant enough to account for the size of the disparity. Using data from 1976 to 2016, Cajner's group designed a statistical model based on four factors they expected to account for variations in unemployment between African Americans and whites: education, age, marital status,

and the state where individuals reside. Among African American males and whites, these variables collectively explained about one-fifth of the differences in joblessness between these populations (Cajner, et al., 2017). A report by Caleb Gayle (2018) found that despite the booming economy, one major racial group has been left behind: African American males. Gayle (2018) reported that every month, seemingly, Donald Trump uses Twitter to trumpet how well black people have done under his presidency. However, national numbers in a nation as large as the United States can be misleading. The impact of all things racial has left many neighborhoods divided and segregated and that leads to a perpetuation of things like poverty and lack of opportunity, and the real African American unemployment situation remains hidden (Gayle, 2018).

### **African American Male Unemployment: Explanation Theories**

Research has shown that biological, socioeconomic, and cultural factors have been attributed to African American male unemployment (Darity, 2005; Murray, 1984; Bowman, 1991). These theories presented arguments regarding African American unemployment that ranged from biological to human capital and often suggested that African American males are systemically discriminated upon in the labor market, in education and job training, and the criminal justice system (Murray, 1994; Whitehead, 2005). Darity's (2005) study found that anti-black racism can be traced back to the enslavement of Africans in the sixteenth century and the central attributes of anti-black racism are the beliefs in the intellectual, moral, and cultural inferiority of black people (p.16). Yancy (2004) found that white imagery constructed the black body as flesh and blood upon which white myths and desires could be projected. Yancy (2004) implied that the idea of "African American servitude" was not socially constructed by black

oppression, but rather servitude was believed to be the result of traits due to natural selection (p.339). Yancy (2004) argued that the enslavement of African males, in particular, made the socially constructed division of labor appear written into the very framework of biological and social reality (p.339). These theories about African American males continue to influence society and labor markets and are used in discussions regarding prolonged joblessness and unemployment involved African American males

One of the most widely known human capital arguments has been linked to Charles Murray's (1984) study on poverty and unemployment of minority groups. Murray's (1984) book "Losing Ground" attributed the increases of African American male unemployment to the Great Society programs of the 1960s which were expected to eliminate poverty. Murray (1984) argued that the increased availability of welfare benefits to low-income individuals created incentives for young, black men to embrace unemployment. African American males could now "survive" from welfare benefits provided to their female partners while seeking illegal means or informal means of acquiring income (p.48). These views expanded the "culture of poverty" perspective, which suggested that programs designed to assist the poor instead increased dependency on government and encouraged dysfunctional behavioral problems (Murray, 1984).

Lawrence Mead's study (1992) suggested that poor black people, particularly black males, acclimatize to a state of helplessness and engaged in self-defeating behavior. Mead argued that "Great Society" programs did little to address poverty, and in effect, created a dysfunctional culture for black people. Mead implied that black culture in America illustrates how social construction creates employment barriers, and influenced

the attitude of African American males about the reality of obtaining employment (p.148). Human capital generally defined as investments in education, employment training, and other activities that raise the productive capacity of people (Whitehead, 2005). Therefore, the human capital model explains joblessness in terms of deficits that reduce individual productivity as related to education, skills, and motivation Whitehead (2005) implied that the human capital model attributes the lower-income and joblessness of African American males to their supposed below-average productivity and lower investment in human capital development (p. 94). However, this human capital perspective on joblessness for African American males fails to consider the impact of racial discrimination and employment barriers on human capital development.

Cherry (2016) found that African American male unemployment and joblessness are caused by the unequal distribution of human capital resulting from discriminatory practices in job training and labor markets. Several theorists have implied that African American males choose not to work long term and that their resistance to working consistently is embedded in the nature and culture of the black experience (Harrison, 1992; Murray, 1984). Harrison (1992) suggested that negative attitudes towards employment are rooted in the experience of slavery, and are infused in African American values about work, education, and human capital development. Harrison implied that African Americans who migrated from the south brought these attitudes and behavioral traits with them to the urban North, where they were reinforced by the social construction of minority populations. He also suggested that African American males do not suffer as much from poverty in general as they do from “moral poverty” (Harrison, 1992).



### **African American Males: Education**

Levin (2014) indicated that there are multiple determinants of economic progress however few single factors can have the same impact as education. Education prepares individuals to lead productive lives in society and develops skills essential for participation in the labor force. According to Fuller (2005), higher levels of educational achievement provides for greater access to better employment opportunity and greater security. Those who fail to graduate from high school face very bleak prospects because the basic skills developed during the educational process are essential in the workforce (Levin, 2014). McElroy and Andrews (2000) implied that African American males have been blamed for their prolonged joblessness because they have not prepared themselves for the workforce. However, studies have shown that African American males have made significant progress in education over the past five decades (McElroy & Andrews, 2000). The idea, that lack of investment in education alone explains African American male joblessness fails to tell the full story.

Gordon, Gordon, and Nembbard (2004) found that the issue of African American male education is much broader than the attainment of a degree or completion of higher levels of education. Their research has shown that African American male college graduates continue to earn much less than their white counterparts. McElroy and Andrews (2000) reported that in 1964, only 24% of black males age 25 and over had completed high school. However, by 1998, that figure had tripled to 75%, and yet, African American males continued to earn significantly less than their white counterparts. The primary issues related to African American male education continue to concern poor quality of schools, the unequal access to facilities for formal education, poor academic

socialization, the lack of family support for education, and the lack of appropriate job training (Whitehead, 2005). According to Whitehead (2005), African American male joblessness, the lack of employment experience, and low-educational achievement are largely caused by social, cultural, and economic factors. Whitehead found that low funding of schools in black neighborhoods, and soft curriculum that does not prepare students for college contribute significantly to challenges facing unemployed, African American males. Additional research has shown that teachers in the U.S. have negative expectations of African American male students in general and that they have even lower expectations for non-submissive, African American male students (Ross & Jackson, 1991).

### **African American Males: Job Mismatch & Employment Skills**

Research has shown that shifts in employment hiring within growing sectors primarily benefited those individuals with formal education aligning with professional, technical, and managerial positions that were created (Wilson, 2004; Moss, & Tilly, 1996). For young, African American males, who tend to be less educated than their white counterparts, these shifts resulted in the loss of employment opportunities. Wilson (2004) suggested that these shifts in staffing tend to benefit individuals who could obtain formal training and had at least some years of post-secondary education. Wilson noted “skills mismatch” dramatically hurt employment prospects for young, African American males (p.154). Wilson added that the expanded suburbanization of employment resulting from industrial restructuring has also exacerbated the problem of prolonged joblessness for young, African American males. Expanding industries continue to locate in areas where inner-city residents, particularly, young, African American males face significant

geographical barriers related to lengthy commute time or even gaining access to transportation (Wilson, 2004).

The job mismatch results in many young, African American males being deprived of role models, as the more skilled and educated in the workforce move out of the inner city to areas where better opportunities can be obtained (Wilson, 2004). The polarization of the African American community has contributed to the barriers facing young, African American males who seek to enter the labor markets. Research has shown that changes in the economy, affirmative action programming, and anti-discrimination policy have resulted in vastly different employment opportunities for segments of the African American community (Wilson, 2004). While some African Americans are achieving economic prosperity, many in these socially constructed or “targeted populations” are falling deeper into poverty. Wilson suggests that labor markets remain stratified by race and for many young, African American males educational attainment has not reduced prolonged joblessness (Wilson, 2004).

### **African American Males: Racial Discrimination**

Wilson (2015) implied that even with all the economic and employment process African Americans have made in the last 25 years, they are still not on par with their counterparts. In particular, young, African American males face a series of unique problems from the design of workforce policies and the practices of the organizations or the actions of management. African American males were not allowed to participate in the most desirable jobs and institutions for many decades. Barriers to employment for African American males include the lack of access to networks and the complex interactions of racially motivated negative attitudes (Weller & Fields, 2011). Wilson

(2015) suggested that anti-black racism in hiring has been unchanged since at least 1989, while anti-Latino racism may have decreased modestly. Wilson indicated that on average white applicants receive 36% more callbacks than equally qualified African Americans while Latinos receive a 10% higher rate of callbacks. Discrimination can be difficult to measure in different situations, and until recently they have been limited information that could be used to reliably assess changes in discrimination (Wilson, 2015). What the evidence has indicated is that at the initial point of entry-hiring decisions- African Americans remain substantially disadvantaged relative to white applicants (Wilson, 2015).

Research has shown that assessments of subtle forms of racial discrimination and unconscious bias have only indicated modest changes over time (Bucknor, 2015). African American males face employment discrimination as requirements for soft skills, such as interaction ability and motivation skills are high (Desilver, 2013). African American males face challenges from informal social networks, assumption of incompetence from white co-workers, clients, supervisors and face many forms of racial bias. Similar findings were found regarding African American female workers (Desilver, 2013).

### **African American Males: Employer Discrimination**

African American males have experienced a long history of direct racial discrimination in the workplace (Stoll, 2005). Stoll suggested that racial discrimination of young, African American males demonstrates that employer discrimination takes place either through statistical discrimination or racial animus (p. 301). Neckerman and Kirscherman (1991) found that during recruitment stages, employers tend to avoid inner-city populations. The evidence suggests that employers avoided these populations or

groups because they expected to find lower quality workers who lacked the necessary skills. The perceptions of employers were based on ideas that inner-city African American males lacked work ethic, had a poor attitude about work, and were unreliable. Neckerman and Kirscherman (1991) also suggested that racial discrimination during the interview phase was so prevalent that evidence indicated employers used subjective tests of productivity and character to eliminate applicants who were black or poor. Their study suggested that many employers perceived young, African American males to be dishonest about their work records and skills. Kirscherman (1991) stated that employers complained that young, African American males were consistently unprepared for work, and lacked the enthusiasm to do the job. Some employers even suggested that young, African American males were not willing to “play by the rule” or “go along with the game” (Neckerman, & Kirscherman, 1991, p. 442). Mead (1992) noted that for young, African American males, institutions outside of the welfare system tend to present the most significant challenges to the transition to the employment process.

### **Young, African American Males: Incarceration and Child Support Policy**

Selvaggi (2016) reported that African Americans males account for up to 15% of the population in New Jersey, yet account for 60% of individuals incarcerated. It is critical when discussing incarceration and how it affects support payments, more importantly, child support debt, to identify if there are any predetermined racially discriminatory guidelines. Krul (2013) found that 1 in 29 children has a parent behind bars, and 1 in 9 African American children (11%) had a parent behind bars. Holzer and Offner (2004) found that child support enforcement and incarceration has not improved the problem of joblessness for young, African American males, and in fact, has

exacerbated the problem of prolonged unemployment for these populations. Krul (2013) further found that incarceration significantly reduces the life chances for young, African American males, and increases recidivism as a result of barriers created by the criminal justice system. For example, parole guidelines require individuals to find work, pay child support, and yet many prison release programs do not provide adequate skills training or even work resources to non-custodial fathers to help address child support demands (Holzer & Offner, 2004). Research has shown that child support enforcement has become more of a barrier to employment than means to provide an incentive for young, African American males to find work (Holzer & Offner, 2004; Western, 2007).

### **Summary**

As evidenced in the literature review, much has been written about the experiences of unemployed, African American males, and in some cases, the public program professionals assisting during the transition to work process. However, researchers have focused attention on individuals who obtain employment at the end of the process. What the research lacks is information relevant to the perceived employment barriers involving public workforce program professionals assisting young, African American males, and the factors that can lead to missed opportunities between program workforce professionals and these participants. While public workforce program interventions have been researched and indicate that some participants modestly increased their earnings, yet further research is needed to see how government, community, and business institutions can align policies to improve employment opportunities for unemployed, young, African American males (Spaulding et al., 2015). Researchers found that studies do not capture the full impact on participants or society, because they do not

follow participants for long enough periods, lack understanding of the perceptions and interactions between program professionals and participants, or ignore impacts other than those related to earnings (Francis, 2013; Heinrich, 2016). While this literature is valuable in our understanding of the employment experiences of young, African American males, we have yet to analyze the perceptions of the public program professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process.

This study explored how perceived employment barriers, misalignments of policies and practices, and policy design factors, impacted the experiences and intervention efforts of employment program professionals assisting individuals with the transition into the labor market. This section provided an overview of the literature and conceptual framework relevant to the research study. Chapter 3 will describe the research methodology, research design and approach, rationale for the case study approach, research questions, data collection and analysis, ethical consideration, and summary.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### **Introduction**

This qualitative case study explored the perceptions and experiences of public program workforce professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition to work process guided by theories of the social construction of target populations and policy design. The literature has shown that public workforce programs help some participants modestly increase earnings, yet further research is needed to see how government, community, and business institutions can align policies and practices more strategically to improve employment opportunities for young, African American males (McConnell et al., 2016; Spaulding et al., 2015). By viewing policy changes in public workforce employment organizations in the context of social change and policy design, as it relates to disadvantaged groups, such as young, African American males, policymakers can better understand, appreciate, and address the needs of these individuals. However, researchers found that existing studies do not capture the full impact on participants or society because of limitations imposed by policy design, the lack of adequate employment-based policies and practices which guide the transition to work process, limited discussion of the misalignment of policies and practices, and because studies ignore most impacts other than those on earnings (Heinrich, 2016; McConnell, et.al., 2016). As a result, unemployed, young, African American males remain an underserved, and underrepresented subpopulation in the public workforce employment training environment. Schneider et al. (2009) found that policies typically carve out certain populations to receive benefits or burdens and often embed positive and negative social constructions of targeted groups. These constructions serve to justify the



allocation of rewards and penalties within the policy and are critical to an understanding of the way democracy functions (Schneider, & Ingram, 2014). Schneider and Ingram (1997) sought to illuminate how policy design shapes the social construction of a policy's target population, the role of power in the relationship, and how policy design "feed forward" to shape future policies and democracy (Schneider, & Ingram, 2014). The groups' designed classification ranges from those who are viewed as advantaged, contenders, defendants, or deviants. Ingram, et al. (2014) argued there are various target groups that such policies are either designed to benefit or burden. Social construction and policy design also support the notion that target populations receive benefits and burdens based on the strength of their political power and social construction as positive or negative (Schneider et al., 2014). The theory of social construction of target populations and policy design served to assist in exploring the research question and provide a lens for examining the interplay of social construction and policy design within the context of the public workforce experiences of public employment program manager assisting unemployed, young, African American males.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of public workforce professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process guided by theories of social constructions and policy design as it is relevant to these groups. Information obtained from this research can be important towards shaping how public workforce agencies and professionals address issues concerning policy design and employment practices involving public workforce professionals assisting young, African American males. Another intended purpose of the study was to fill a gap in the scholarly literature to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of

public workforce employment managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the process of transition into the job market. This chapter is divided into eight sections which include the methodology of the study, participants involved in the case study, data collection, research question alignment, data analysis, coding procedures, ethical considerations, and summary. I describe the methodology of the study, explain why a case study approach is appropriate, describe the participants involved in the case study, discuss data collection and research questions, discuss data analysis, describe coding procedures, discuss trustworthiness, explain ethical considerations, and provide the summary of Chapter 3.

### **Research Design and Approach**

I used a qualitative case study approach to explore the perceptions of public workforce employment professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition into the job market. The guiding research question: What are public employment program professionals' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape social constructions relevant to unemployed, young, African American males involved in the transition to work process? One goal of the study was to determine whether there are existing gaps in the programs and policies that guide the public workforce experience of program managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males. The research questions provided a link to the theoretical foundation used in this study. Ingram et al. (2007) observed that public policy may fail to solve important public problems, perpetuate injustice, fail to support democratic institutions, and produce unequal citizenship. The incorporation of the social construction of targeted population as part of policy design helped to explain why policies sometimes

deliberately fail in its nominal purpose (Ingram et al., 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explained that researchers use a case study approach when there is a need to explore a problem from the perspective of the identified local population. Case studies involve the exploration of issues within a bounded system (Stake, 1995). The case study approach was considered after several other qualitative research methods were explored. For example, the ethnographic approach was not considered because of the focus on the behavior of a particular group of people. The narrative approach was given some consideration, however, the narrative approach focuses on the first-person account of experience told in the form of a story, which was not the goal of the study.

Lincoln (1995) explained the goal of qualitative research work as an exploration of the behaviors of humans within the context of their natural setting. The researcher explored the perceptions of public workforce professionals at one public agency in New York City. This agency (WDA) has dedicated and experienced program professionals assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition to work process. The agency (WDA) also provided a full range of workforce capabilities across many funding streams, including WIOA, and SSI. Public workforce employment program professionals were interviewed to discuss their perceptions of how policies and practices impact young, African American males during the transition to work process. The researcher aimed to interview public workforce professionals during off-hours (e.g. before or after working hours) near the organizational setting. The case study approach was appropriate to the research topic, as data can be collected from participants during off-hours near their natural setting and in their own words.

The literature has shown that public workforce programs and community-based employment organizations help some participants modestly increase earnings, however, the existing studies do not capture the full impact of the workforce experience on these participants or society in general due to limitations imposed by policy design, and the lack of understanding of the perceptions of the program professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process (Francis, 2013; Heinrich, 2016; McConnell et al., 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges involving public workforce employment professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process. Information obtained from this research can be significant in shaping how community-based employment managers implement policies and practices to assist young, African American males during the transition into the job market. The following research objectives have also been identified: To identify factors that contribute to misalignments, skills mismatch, and lost job opportunities between public workforce employment managers assisting young, African American males. One important aim of the study was to explore how the perceptions, experiences, strategies, interactions, and challenges involving public workforce employment professionals assisting young, African American males impact the transition to work process.

### **Case Study**

Mendoza (2007) explained that case studies are a form of qualitative research designed to gather information about a setting or individuals to inform professional practice or evidence-informed decision making in the policy realm (p. 544). A case study

approach in a study should be considered under several conditions, including (1) when the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions because he or she believes they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, and (2) when the boundaries are unclear between the phenomenon and context. For this case study, I interviewed program directors, employment program managers, employment program trainers, and workforce program professionals to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of the alignment of policies impacting the transition to work process for young, African American males.

Hathaway (1995) stated that qualitative research is most useful when participants' voice and perceptions about their environment is presented. Silverman (2001) implied that researchers who employ qualitative research for their work commonly believe they can provide a deeper understanding of how the world is constructed (p. 32). The public workforce employment managers involved in the study were interviewed to discuss their perceptions of how policies and practices impact the transition to work process for young, African American males. I wrote field notes on what he discussed with managers and how they perceived these employment workshops. Braun and Clarke (2006) provided the data analysis framework based on a six-step guide for data and thematic analysis. Out of the data, several themes emerged which provided insights into the impact of experiences and interactions of public workforce professionals with young, African American males. Schneider et al.'s (2009) framework provided insight into viewing policy changes within the context of the social construction of target population and policy design and how benefits and burdens are allocated to some groups. Schneider, et al. (2014) observed that the theory of social construction of target population and policy design seeks to explain why some groups receive advantageous recognition and others do not. The researcher

selected one agency (WDA) location specifically for the following reasons: (1) researcher had previously observed employment-based workshops involving young, African American males at WDA, and (2) the researcher was aware of the economic impact of joblessness on young, African American males in New York City. The review of data such as internal memoranda, public statements, policy, financial records, state and federal filing, and procedures was also used for the study.

My past work experience with the unemployed assisted in the study by enabling me to gather data and understand the nuisances involved in the public workforce transition to the work process. I used a triangulated research strategy. Stake (1995) explained triangulation as protocols utilized in a study to ensure accuracy and alternate explanations. Triangulation is needed in research in case ethical issues arise to help confirm the validity of the process. Stake (1995) stated in research, utilizing multiple data sources, such as annual reports, grant proposals, and program surveys would help eliminate any ethical issues. In this study, I interviewed the public workforce managers, employment program trainers, and workforce program professionals of WDA to learn how they perceived the policies and practices that had impacted the transition to work process for young, African American males.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited from one public workforce employment agency operating in New York City. WDA has provided public employment-based training and community services for over three decades. WDA provided a full range of workforce strategies across several funding streams, including WIOA, and Supplemental Security Income. The selection of WDA location was based largely on the high rate of

joblessness and unemployment among young, African American males. New York City was also considered because of the number of community-based employment agencies tasked with assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process. The participants for the project study were drawn from the number of workforce program professionals, employment-training managers, and program directors involved in WDA. All participants for the study were contacted initially by social media or by email. Each participant received an email invitation to participate and some information about the nature of the study. To ensure the inclusion of good informants, snowball sampling techniques were used to select a group of public workforce program professionals. All participants selected for the study were considered based on years of work experience, and direct workforce training experience.

All participants were required to sign an informed consent form. All participants agreed to meet with the researcher during off-hours from work (for example, during lunchtime, and before and after work schedule -at their office location). The public workforce employment program managers assisting young, African American males during the transition to the work process provided valuable insights regarding perspectives and strategies related to employment experience. One of the objectives of this study was to recruit and interview the public employment-based program managers and professionals who assisted young, African American males during employment placement. I also utilized the snowball sampling and convenience sampling technique to recruit employment-training participants.

First, I identified public workforce program professionals from social media, program directories, articles, and local newspapers. Warren and Karner (2010) noted that

the snowball sampling technique is useful to find participants who are socially networked to the researcher's initial contact. This technique is helpful because it allowed the interviewee to connect another participant from his or her network to the researcher (Warren, & Karner, 2010). Convenience sampling is one of the easiest methods of sampling because participants are selected based on availability, and willingness to take part. Participants will be contacted by social media and email. Only participants with more than two years of work experience will be considered. One aim of the recruitment process is to find participants who have experience working with disadvantaged and low-income populations. The purpose of the recruitment of participants with experience working with disadvantaged groups was to yield information relevant to policy design and the social construction of target populations. The decision to include participants with public workforce development experience and experience working with disadvantaged populations is important in terms of gaining insight into the policies and practices that guide the transition to the work process. Throughout the recruitment and selection process, all identities of participants were kept confidential. During the entire research project, all participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Ten public employment-based program professionals were selected to participate in the research project, at which time saturation had been reached. The group consisted of program professionals, managers, and directors. All participants selected were required to have worked for public employment-based workforce agencies, and have some direct experience assisting young, African American males during the transition to the employment process. One important attribute of the ten participants selected for this study was their commitment to assist young, African American males during the



transition to the work process and assist in gaining meaningful employment in New York City.

### **Research Question Alignment**

The interview questions were prepared to align with the guiding research questions in Chapter 1. The researcher used the interview questions to guide the interview and the follow-up interviews (Appendix A).

Research Questions: What are public employment program professionals' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape the social constructions relevant to unemployed, young, African American males involved in the transition to work process?

What are public workforce program managers' perceptions about the relevance of workforce policy design and social constructions impacting unemployed, young, African American males during the workforce training experience?

The Research Questions will guide the Interview Questions (Appendix A)

### **Data Collection**

The primary method for data collection was in the form of in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Each participant was asked a series of questions during the interview sessions. Interviews were conducted near the office of participants (during lunch, before and after the start of the workday) and some follow up interviews were conducted by phone. The strength of the general interview guide approach is dependent on the researcher's ability to ensure that the same areas of information are collected from each interviewee. The sample size in a qualitative study is important. A researcher wants to reach saturation, which will be realized once no new information or themes are

observed (Kuzel, 1992). For this study, saturation was reached after ten participants were interviewed. The initial interviews ranged from one hour to ninety minutes. An interview process was utilized to maintain some level of consistency. For example, before each interview, an email confirmation of time and location sent, and the time frame for the interview was clarified. The research design included one interview per participant, and one follow up interviews (if necessary). Audiotape recorders were used during all interview sessions, including phone interviews, with the consent of the participant. It was beneficial for the interviewer, to begin with neutral, descriptive information about the phenomenon of interest, be it a program, activity, or experience with the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002). During interviews, all information about participants should be documented via audio, video, and backup notes (Merriam, 2002). All data were transcribed within two days of each interview. Merriam (2002) found that analyzing the data shortly after the interviews gives the researcher the opportunity allows the researcher to gather more reliable and valid data. Research suggests an audit trail be implemented in such a case study to reduce the chance of biases in the data analysis (Guiffrida, 2003). All interview data were audio-recorded with a microphone. The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed, verbatim by the researcher. The data were analyzed by the researcher to examine potential patterns or outcomes emerging from participants' responses. The researcher also analyzed data collected from internal memoranda, agency websites, public statements, policy statements, state and federal filings, financial records, and procedures.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was implemented during the same period as the data collection process. Merriam (2002) found that simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher the ability to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting the data collection process, and allows comparisons of emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data (p.15). This type of data analysis process allows the researcher an opportunity to gather and develop more reliable data (Merriam, 2002). To assist with the data analysis process the following strategy was implemented: all audio-taped interviews were transcribed at the end of each interview, and a written journal of each interview with the researcher's impressions of the experience was maintained. Field notes also contributed to the data analysis process. These notes contained written accounts of the researchers' experiences during the entire research process. Data gathered from the research was later verified by participants. I used participant verification to increase the credibility and validity of the qualitative study by allowing the participants to review the transcripts at the end of each interview session (Cohen, & Crabtree, 2006). There are several reasons for the researcher to consider verification by participants, including (1) it provides the opportunity for a researcher to understand and assess what the respondent intended to do through his or her actions, (2) it provides respondents the opportunity to correct mistakes or misunderstandings, (3) it provides the opportunity to provide more details which were spurred on by the playback process, (4) it provides respondents the opportunity to assess the adequacy of data and preliminary results or aspects of the data, and (5) It provides the opportunity to summarize preliminary findings (Cohen, & Crabtree, 2006). The data analysis process followed a strategy to further

develop the research. That process involved steps to become familiar with the data, steps to organize the data into codes, steps to develop themes from the data, steps to modify and develop preliminary themes into more refined themes, and steps to identify the essence of what each theme represents.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a six-phase guide that was useful for conducting data analysis for this study. The six-phase framework described by Braun & Clarke include (1) become familiar with the data- read and re-read the transcripts, and become familiar with data corpus (2) Generate initial codes- use of open coding, line-by-line coding, which means to develop and modify codes as you work through the data, (3) search for themes and for patterns that capture significant about the data, (codes that fit together can become themes), (4) review themes, modify and develop the preliminary themes identified earlier, and determine whether the data support the theme (5) Define the themes, and identify the essence of what the theme is about, and (6) writing up the analysis of the data, (usually the endpoint of the research results into a report).

For this qualitative study, the same framework was utilized and included reading and re-reading the transcripts from the interviews. The data also included early notes and impressions from the research. The coding phase helps to reduce lots of data into small chunks of data to provide insight into the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive process was used to analyze the data. During the inductive process, the researcher searched for patterns of meaning in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A coding process was used to reduce data and to categorize the data simultaneously. First, open coding was used for the research, which means that pre-set codes will not be used. Open coding was used to first carefully read the data, and condense the data into preliminary analytic

categories. Important terms and themes were developed during this stage, including confronting barriers and stereotypes, managing change and technology, securing employment, and politics of the organizations.

Open coding is a process of analyzing textual content and includes labeling concepts, and defining and developing categories. There are several ways to do open coding, including line-by-line coding. Open coding is generally the initial stage of Qualitative Data Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After completing the open coding, the next steps involved identifying patterns or themes, modify and develop more refined themes, and finally refinement to identify meaning within the themes. The data analysis process also incorporated the use of computer-assisted software, NVivo to aid in organizing the large quantity of textual data. The process was on-going, and new codes were generated and sometimes existing codes are modified. In the end, the researcher provided opportunities to respondents to provide their follow-up feedback, add to their perceptions and interpretations concerning his or her interview.

### **Coding Procedures and Thematic Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguished between a top-down or theoretical thematic analysis, that is driven by the specific research questions and analyst's focus, and a bottom-up or inductive one that is more driven by the data itself. The analysis for this study was driven by the research questions and followed more of the top-down than a bottom-up approach. An inductive process was used to analyze the data. The researcher searched for patterns of meaning in the data so that general statements about the phenomena under investigation were made. The inductive approach was not based on a structured or predetermined framework. The first important step in qualitative research is

to read and re-read the data. The process of collecting and analyzing data involved several important steps, including transcribing data, organizing data, and coding of data. The coding process involved reducing the data to analytically categorize the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process is important in terms of creating a system for the researcher to combine themes, ideas, and categories. This process allows the researcher the means of marking each passage of the text with a code to easily retrieve it at a later time. Most typically, when coding, researchers have some codes in mind and are looking for ideas that seem to arise out of the data. Researchers tend to question “what is going on” and “what are people doing” to start the coding process. A coding pattern can be characterized by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, and causation of things that happen, different ways things happen, order that things happen, and how often things happen. Coding is simply a structure on which reflection (via memo writing) happens. Saldana (2011) suggested that no one can claim final authority on the best method to code qualitative data. General introductory texts in qualitative inquiry are so numerous and well-written that it becomes a challenge to find the one to use as the primary textbook. Coding is not a precise science, and codes can sometimes summarize or condense data, not simply reduce it. It is also important to think of patterns not just as stable regularities, but as varying forms, such as similarities, differences, frequency, sequence, and causation (Saldana, 2011). In this study, ten participants were selected, and their responses to the questions were used to create the coding and themes. Since the study was based on the participants' perceptions, codes and themes were created from the interview data and included topics such as work environment, motivation in workshops, barriers to employment, workplace politics, motivation toward training, mentoring as an intervention,

counseling as an intervention, developing soft skills, and communication skills. The coding process also involved developing categories, and color coding, which links participant responses to the research questions.

Thematic analysis was used for this study and assisted in reducing the data in a flexible way that dovetails with other data analysis methods. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is the first qualitative method that should be learned as it provides core skills that will be important for conducting many other kinds of analysis. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes and patterns in important data and can be used to address the research or inform an issue. A good thematic analysis will not only summarize the data however it may also help to interpret and make sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher can use the answers of each participant to demonstrate how the themes develop during the process. The themes most likely to emerge may focus on the participant role as an intervention, and the interactions between participants.

Saldana (2011) explained that rarely will anyone get coding right the first time. Recoding can occur with a more attuned perspective using First Cycle methods again, while Second Cycle methods describe those processes that might be employed during the second and third review of the data (p.12). Some categories may contain clusters of coded data that merit further refinement and subcategories. And, when the major categories are compared with each other and consolidated in various ways, one can begin to transcend the “reality” of your data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical (Saldana, 2011, p.12). In this research study, additional methods were considered including the use of Vivo coding as a first cycle coding method. In vivo coding refers to coding with a word or

short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record. Saldana (2011) noted that NVivo and AnSWR all import and handle documents saved in rich text format, enabling the researcher to employ supplemental cosmetic coding devices such as colored fonts, bolding, and italicizing in your data. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process which involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to organize data into codes and themes, reducing the data to make meaning of the data, modify the data into preliminary themes, then data was compared to refine themes and codes, and finally, steps were taken to identify the essence of what each theme represents. For this study, the interview transcripts were read in conjunction with the theory, social construction of target populations, and policy design. I developed a preliminary coding framework to capture themes essential to the research questions and study. From the initial codes previously developed from the interview transcripts, the remaining interviews were read and analyzed. At this stage, the goal was to refine existing codes and take note of those codes that remained constant across the review of all of the data. The coding process in case study research can use the text and data from the research to later create themes.

### **Computer Software and Data Analysis**

NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer-assisted software program was utilized to analyze the data collected, organize the data, and separate data into smaller units of text. The use of NVivo provided more robust segments of data which were later labeled and developed into themes. Qualitative data analysis computer-assisted software programs can be quite invaluable in coding, archiving, and retrieving qualitative data in the analysis process, yet, the software cannot read the text, interpret the text, or decide what the data means ( American University, 2016). The use of NVivo provided a very



useful tool in handling large quantities of textual data, and for grouping vast volumes of data and developing themes more effectively and efficiently for this study.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to investigate the realm of meaning and strives for results that can be trusted (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Trustworthiness implies that the processes of the research will be carried out fairly and the conclusions will be reported in a manner that is reflective of the experiences of the participants involved in the study (Ely, 1997). For this study, the researcher worked to establish trustworthiness using procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba. The researcher focused on developing rapport with the participants, maintained detailed notes, and accurately audiotaped each interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described credibility as a means for establishing validity and truth in research finding by providing the steps taken to check for accuracy and reliability on ethical questions, and overall use of information. For this study, the researcher explored prolonged engagement with the phenomena and participants, used triangulation, and member checking to enhance the credibility of the case study. The researcher increased the credibility of the qualitative study by allowing the participants to review their transcripts. Triangulation for this study involved viewing different aspects of the public workforce employment experience from the perspective of interactions between program professionals and participants, member checking, and document

analysis. For this study, participants were allowed to discuss their stories, address any misinterpretations, clarify any responses, or add additional data.

### **Transferability**

Merriam (2002) writes that since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions apply to other situations and populations. Stake (1995) suggests that although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and, as a result, the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that since the researcher knows only the sending context, he or she cannot make transferability inferences. Ultimately, the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organization or organizations, and perhaps, the geographical area in which the fieldwork is carried out (Stake, 1995).

### **Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that in addressing the issue of reliability, the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained. Stake (1995) note, that the changing nature of the phenomena scrutinized by qualitative researchers renders such provisions problematic in research. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. This may be achieved through the use of overlapping methods, such as individual interviews and the focus group.

**Confirmability**

Patton (2002) associates objectivity in science with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skill and perception. The concept of confirmability is the researcher's comparable concern to objectivity. Patton (2002) implies that steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. The role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasized, in this context to reduce the effect of investigator bias (Patton, 2002). One more, detailed methodological description enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from the study may be accepted. Critical to this process is the 'audit trail', which allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described (Patton, 2002).

**Ethical Considerations**

This research project followed the ethical standards mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) which emphasizes the importance of the welfare of the participants involved in the study. Participants were named using only pseudonyms and employers mentioned in the study will have names omitted or changed. All personal information, such as names, phone numbers, and addresses will be kept in the researchers' files. Audio recordings of these interviews will also be stored in the researchers' file cabinets. Transcribed data files of all interviews will be stored on my personal computer in a password-protected file. All participants involved in this research project were advised that transcribed interview information will be kept for historical purposes. Participants were advised that the future publication of this study

will continue to protect the identities of participants by the use of pseudonyms. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form. Participants were advised that they could stop the interview at any time, and every measure was taken to avoid creating any stress on participants for the study. Glesne (1999) suggests that the research code of ethics is generally concerned with aspirations as well as avoidances; it represents our desire and attempts to respect the rights of others, fulfill obligations, avoid harm and augment benefits to those we interact with. Each participant must understand the ethical principles of the study, including that confidential will be maintained at all times, that their participation is explained in clear terms, and all research transcripts relevant to their participation will be made available for their review.

### **Researcher's Role**

As a human resource recruiter with over thirty years of experience in the field of employment-based training, I understood the importance of the interactions, and perceptions which develop between managers and the individuals seeking employment. I also understood how important it is to maintain procedural safeguards to lessen any personal bias and to promote a climate of comfort towards all participants. The researcher needs to have strict safeguards in place to protect the confidentiality of all information regarding the names and identities of all participants. I informed all participants of these safeguards to maintain a clear separation of my role as a researcher and that of human resource training and recruitment manager. It is, important to maintain these safeguards while at the same time attempt to give voice to the participants and gain a better understanding of their perceptions and experiences. For qualitative researchers, topics for

research typically mesh intimately with their deepest professional and social commitments (Ely, 1991).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of public employment-based program professionals assisting young, African American males during the transition to the work process at one public workforce development agency. Objectives of the study concerned with understanding the implications of employment-based policies and the impact of policy design which guides the transition to work process for young, African American males. Ten public employment-based program professionals were selected for the interviews to explore their perceptions about assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process, as well as gain a better understanding of the impact of the workforce program policy design. The research developed from this study may provide insights regarding perceived employment barriers, the impact of policy design, and misalignments which can lead to missed employment opportunities for young, African American males. Coding was used for the data analysis process to categorize the data into correlated themes. Precautions were taken to safeguard participants, to ensure credibility, to ensure trustworthiness, and to maintain the reliability of the study. To ensure good quality levels within the research, findings were correlated to other related research to explore any relationship between them.

This research considered aspects of personal judgment to guard against any bias, and also the triangulation method was used to ensure high-quality levels within the research. Four main methods will be used, which included in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, data analysis, and member checking. The deficiencies of using one

research method can be minimized by the strength in the use of other methods (Patton, 2014).

Chapter 3 described the methodology, research design, case study approach, trustworthiness, and summary. In Chapter 4, the researcher presented the data from all interviews and the themes that emerged from the interviews. In the final chapter, the researcher presented recommendations related to the findings from the interviews with public workforce program professionals. The researcher also made recommendations and suggestions for best practices for public program managers, program workforce professionals, and policymakers.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience and perception of 10 public workforce employment training managers, regarding the transition to the work process for young, unemployed, African American males. Public workforce development agencies provide important employment services and job development resources to individuals and populations that face significant barriers when entering the job market. In 2016, the U.S. federal government appropriated more than \$6.9 billion to states for WOIA programs and approximately \$3.4 billion in federal formula funding for partner programs. The literature demonstrated that public workforce development agencies, particularly those providing employment services to disadvantaged populations, play a critical role in determining the pathway to employment for many among the long-term unemployed, including young, African American males (Heinrich, 2016; Cherry, 2009).

I contacted several public workforce employment training managers at a community-based agency in New York City using social media. From those contacts, I developed the first list of participants and began the initial invitation and informed consent process. Through referrals from the first group, I developed a second group of participants, totaling 10 public workforce employment training managers in all. I conducted interviews, developed field notes, reviewed documents, and material relevant to the study. The focus of the research study was on understanding the perceptions and experiences of public workforce employment program managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males and the impact of social construction and policy design on the workforce employment experience. The incorporation of the social construction of

target populations as part of policy design helped to explain why public policy, which can have both positive and negative effects on society, oftentimes fails in its purpose when relevant to a particular population (Schneider et al., 2009). Data resulting from this qualitative case study was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework to answer the research questions. The data analysis process also incorporated the use of qualitative data analysis computer software (QDA) to aid in organizing large quantities of textual data. This study's findings described the practices and policies that were significant to the research, and understanding of how the perception of the participants impacted policies, and practices, and the transition to work process for young, unemployed, African American males involved in public workforce employment training.

### **Description of the Participants**

The participants involved in the study work directly with unemployed African American males, single mothers with children, and married couples. The participants' work experiences ranged from 1 to 10 years of public workforce employment training experience. 4 of the 10 public workforce employment training managers held master's degrees. The others were college graduates or had 2 or more years of college. All of the participants were assigned a pseudonym for this study. I did not recruit participants or begin data collection until I obtained the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval to conduct the study. Walden University's IRB approved the research study allowed the project to move forward and assigned the following IRB number: 11-07-19-0885077.

Please note the brief description of the participants. Manager 1 was a veteran workforce development trainer with over 10 years of experience. His main focus was



providing employment training programs for individuals entering retail, food services, and secure employment. He also oversees the operations in Staten Island and Queens. He was one of the few workforce development trainers who did not think the sanctions on recipients were strong enough and advocated for program changes that could enhance employment training programs.

Manager 2, veteran workforce development trainer with more than 5 years of experience whose main focus was on call-center training and retail staffing worked with both single mothers and young black men in the employment training programs. During the last year, he has been a part of the expansion in Queens and the Bronx. He was one of the workforce development trainers who found that the young minority men face much more significant barriers than single mothers with children. He was an advocate for the expansion of the independent job search function, which provides a greater degree of autonomy for the recipients. Manager 3 was a veteran workforce development employment trainer with over 5 years of experience in the fields of customer service staffing, private security staffing, and call center training. She has spent much of her time working with single mothers and young black men seeking to enter the job market. The focus of her workshops was on computer training skills, resume writing, and interview preparation. She also advocates expanding the independent job search function. One of her main goals was to incorporate seeing the individual as a whole person into the workshops.

Manager 4 worked as a workforce development employment trainer for over 2 years and was a resident of the Bronx for over 30 years. He has worked in the Bronx in the workforce development programs that mainly assist young men of color with

preparing to enter the job market. The main focus of his workshops has been on improving interviewing skills, resume writing, and communication skills. He did express the view that many of the young men focus on the need for survival, and in many cases, they see the employee training programs as a means to an end. He stated that for many of the young men involved in the programs, the only concern they have is maintaining benefits. He stated that in some ways, the training and the workshops have become the job. Manager 5 was a workforce development employment trainer with over three years of experience working mainly in Manhattan and the Bronx. He has dedicated much of his time to working with men of color, primarily young black men, who are preparing to enter the job market. He has helped developed workshops that focus on more effective communication skills and resume writing. He was one of the few workforce development trainers who stated that the sanctions imposed on recipients may contribute to the barriers that they face as they attempt to enter the job market. He has been an advocate for improving parts of the programs that help individuals make the transition into the job market. Manager 6 was a workforce development trainer with over two years of experience working with young men of color in retail, food services, and call center staffing. He has worked at the WDA location for the entire 3 years as an employee of the agency. He has also stated that the young minority men, in particular young black men, face a complex set of challenges to enter the job market. Some of the barriers present are the result of rules associated with background checks and the screening process. He has been an advocate for changes in the program to address the needs and the challenges of young minority men who prepare to enter the job market.

Manager 7 has been employed as a workforce development trainer for 3.5 years and mainly focused on staffing in food services, retail, and customer service. He has been involved mainly with workshops that focus on developing interviewing skills, computer skills, and the independent job search function. He has also been an advocate for expanding the independent job search function, which would give recipients more autonomy. He has also stated that the program needs to be enhanced to comprehend the demands in retail and food services such as job hours and changing job shifts. Manager 8 stated that many young men lose out on job opportunities due to scheduling conflicts. He worked as a workforce development trainer for 2.5 years and has focused mainly on customer service staffing and security guard services.

Some of the challenges that faced recipients involved policies that created barriers, in particular, for young African American males, including work experience and the request for background checks. Manager 8 had spent much of his time working with individuals on the independent job search function and call center staffing. He has advocated for developing more effective workshops to address or improve communication skills. He also advocated for programs that help young black men prepare for the initial stages of the employment placement process. He indicated more resources should be applied to develop interviewing workshops, to improve interviewing skills. He also indicated more attention needs to be paid to preparing individuals for job readiness. Manager 9 has worked as a workforce development trainer for a year and a half. He has mainly worked at the locations in New York. His focus has been working with individuals to improve computer skills and resume writing. He has helped developed computer labs and writing workshops at the New York location. He has also indicated

that young minority men, in particular young black men, face a different set of challenges as they prepare to enter the job market. He is an advocate for stronger sanctions and for workshops to help prepare individuals to be job-ready on day one. He found that the sanctions are not strong enough and create a revolving door type situation. Manager 10 has worked as a job workforce development trainer for one year and has mainly worked with single mothers with children and young minority men. Her focus has been workshops that develop skills for retail employment, call center staffing, and customer service placements. She has also indicated young minority men face much more significant barriers to employment as opposed to single mothers with children. She indicated that it is possible that young men may have less responsibility, unlike single mothers with children, and that they tend to not take the process of preparing for entering the job market as a serious matter.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data during a period of 10 weeks from November 2019 to January 2020. The data collected during that period focused on the communication and interaction between public workforce development trainers, public workforce development managers, and unemployed young African-American males. I was able to record information and write descriptive narratives of each participant's interview data. The data was then organized to answer the research questions. Data was described thematically to provide a better understanding of the interactions between public workforce development managers and recipients involved in employment in the employee training process.

Braun & Clarke (2006) provided the six-phase framework for the thematic analysis of this study. The process includes (1) first become familiar with the data, by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, (2) then, use of open-coding to develop and modify codes for sections of data, (3) next was a search for themes and patterns that emerge from the codes, (4) then, a process of review of themes, to determine whether the data supports the themes, (5) is a key process that involved the refinement of the themes, and identify the essence of what the themes were about, and (6) involved the process of writing up the results of the process. For example, during the data collection and analysis process, several codes emerged that were relevant to finding work, required work experience, being job-ready, having flexible hours, getting the interview, using the internet, dealing with transportation, maintaining benefits, avoiding sanctions, avoiding penalties, dealing with background checks, managing child support enforcement, maintaining transportation vouchers, extending housing vouchers, extending metro card use, maintaining work attire, and understanding office politics. I did cross-comparisons of the data from one category to the next. To ensure that coded information was sorted and moved under the right theme and category, multiple cross-comparisons were implemented. The data was read and re-read to capture more codes, and then develop more themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that a good thematic analysis will not only code and summarize the data, it will also help to interpret and make sense of the data. During level one and level two coding, data was again read and re-read, and open coding was conducted for a second time. The coding labels were assigned using NVivo codes or words that participants stated in the interview transcripts,

By following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process several themes emerged from the data. As a result, the five major emergent themes that were developed included (a) perceived barriers and stereotypes, (b) strategies for securing employment, (c) managing change and technological advancement, (d) perceptions of benefits and burdens, and (e) politics of the organization. Once the emerging themes were explored, data was analyzed using each of the research questions to provide useful insights relevant to the interactions between public workforce development managers and the recipients, unemployed, young, African-American males. Table 1 provides examples of how the codes and themes emerged.

Table 1

*Emergent Themes and Codes*

Emergent Themes	Codes	Sample Statements	Participants
Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes	Only low-wage work available, need past work experience, we need a mature person, We require background checks, We require more education, We want workers with soft skills, want to avoid workers with child support issues, Need workers who learn quickly, Need workers with flexibility, workers must have a positive attitude, want motivated workers,	3 Managers indicated that the job requires 2 years of work experience. They told the agency to find a more polished worker.	Managers 2, 3, 7

Strategies for Securing Employment	Must be job-ready, Being available for all shifts, Getting the interview, career coaching, Need workers who follow dress code, require workers maintain work attire, We can use more mentors, We need to add more employers, We can add more career development, We need more mock interview workshop, upgrade the interview guidelines,	2 Managers indicated that recipients must have job training, must be well-groomed, always on time	Managers 4, 6,
Perceptions of Benefits and Burdens	We need to expand the sanctions, Extension of a housing voucher, getting flexible program schedule, add unlimited Metro cards, avoid loss of transit voucher, avoid loss of food stamp benefits, They indicated some recipients are negatively impacted by sanctions,, They indicated that some recipients loss housing voucher,	2 Managers indicated that recipients could avoid sanctions, the process of sanctions need more rules and enforcement.	Managers, 1, 9,

Managing Change and New Technology	Use the internet, Finding tech jobs online, Jobs are available remote, Use the computer labs, Data entry jobs are available online, the remote work often more flexible, more entry-level jobs are online, more resources can be found online, workshops can be completed online	2 Managers indicated a need for one to one time, and it helps to have a coach or mentor, Noted, It is time to learn about the internet	Manager 8, 10
Politics of the Organization	Following the agency rules, maintain the benefits. Avoid any sanctions, understanding office politics, make recipients aware of resources available, inform recipients of ways to find resources.	3 they indicated that workers need to have a metro card, cannot afford FTC (Failure To Comply). Workers need to avoid sanctions, workers need to keep benefits.	Managers 1,3,7

---

After analyzing the data for each of the public workforce development employment managers interviewed, I reviewed the data to examine group similarities and the relevance to each of the research questions. The theoretical framework for the study guided understanding the relevance of the emerging themes and the importance of how these social constructions impacted these populations.



Ingram, et al. (2007) explained how socially constructed values applied to the knowledge of targeted populations and the consequent impact these values have on people. Ingram and Schneider (1993) developed the theory of social construction of target populations to explain agenda-setting, and policy formation and design by illustrating how policies and target certain populations to either provide benefits or impose burdens from the policy. The theory of social construction of target populations also provides a model to examine the positive and negative social constructions used by policymakers to distribute benefits and burdens reflective of such social constructions (Ingram, et al., 2007).

The six-step theoretical lens by which the data was analyzed through helped to identify the links between the implementation of policies, either to provide benefits or impose burdens on recipients; and relevance of social constructions on the interactions of public workforce program managers assisting young, unemployed, African American males during the transition to work process. Spaulding et al. (2015) explained that all too often, low-income, young, African American males have little opportunity to be exposed to various career paths, build employment histories, or even gain any valuable work experience despite the efforts of public workforce employment training agencies.

### **Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that data analysis involves the gathering of information about the study, interpretation of categories of information, and the synthesis of the data. After the collection of data, it was arranged and classified using the six-phase process. I searched for concepts, commonalities, and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I wrote descriptions of data collected and in some cases found similarities. Once the data

was coded in smaller units, and interpretation of the codes resulted in emerging themes, which lead to the creation of categories to help better understand the data. By looking for patterns or themes relevant to employment, job training, benefits, burdens, barriers, stereotypes, new technology, and organizational politics, several overriding themes emerged. The themes that emerged were defined as confronting barriers and stereotypes. Ingram and Schneider (1997) noted that social constructions are about particular groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, history, the media, literature, religion, and the like. Positive constructions include images such as deserving, and honest, and so forth. Negative constructions include images such as undeserving, dishonest, and selfish. The emergent themes provided insight into the relevance of social construction of targeted populations within the context of the public workforce experience of program managers assisting, young, unemployed, African American males during the transition into the job market. The data analysis process incorporated the use of qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. NVivo aided in the analysis process by organizing large quantities of textual data collected from each of the participants' interview transcripts. The process also involved the use of Level One Coding, Level Two Coding, and Level Three Coding, as detailed below.

### **Level One Coding**

In level one of the coding process, I imported the interview transcripts into the NVivo software program for coding. The NVivo program provided functions for word frequency queries, broader coding options, text search queries, and functions to identify themes. This stage of the level one coding included reading through the entire set of the 10 interview transcript responses to develop preliminary coding categories. I re-read the

data using open coding for text and sentence analysis. Primary, first-level codes were generated based on research questions and coding the interview transcript. I assigned codes directly from the text imported into the NVivo software program. NVivo provided options to import large segments of data, run word frequency queries, examine what people are saying and find meaning in the data.

### **Level Two Coding**

For level two coding, each of the 10 interview transcripts was read again, and open coding was conducted again. The second level codes were generated from the data in the interview transcripts that were associated with responses to the first level primary codes. Coding labels were created and assigned using NVivo to further develop codes from words, or phrases from the text. During the level- two coding process data were coded and grouped according to similarities. For example, during the first level coding, one response to the question regarding strategies for securing employment, participants stated that “one of the most critical functions for a manager continues to be finding new employers”( p.78). As a result, The NVivo code “finding new employers” was assigned to the passage of text.

### **Level Three Coding**

During the level three coding process, the data was reviewed to ensure that NVivo codes were properly assigned. Most similar codes were collapsed and merged into consistent themes. After the conclusion of the level three coding process, a total of 60 codes emerged from data and were collapsed into themes. To ensure that coded information was properly sorted and moved under the appropriate themes, a cross-comparison of the data analysis was conducted within and across each category of

themes. The information was synthesized producing five thematic categories that supported the research questions and explored the experiences and perceptions of public workforce program managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition into the labor market. In the next section, a description of the findings and emergent themes were explained within the context of the framework of the social construction of target populations and policy design. The data analysis process provided the framework to develop the findings and themes for the study. The emergent themes were contemplated again and where they were found to be connected, were further condensed, culminating in the five themes noted below.

## Findings

### **Emergent Themes**

Public workforce development managers were interviewed during the period of the study to gain a better understanding of their perception regarding interactions between themselves and the unemployed young African-American men seeking to enter the job market. I found that public workforce development managers were strongly committed to assisting these recipients during the transition to the work process, however, the policies and practices that guided the process contributed to the lack of autonomy that recipients gained during the transition into the job market.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis provided the model used to identify patterns and themes in the data. A good thematic analysis may help summarize the data, however, it can also help to interpret and make sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the interview process managers oftentimes used similar terms to describe situations and circumstances. That information was first organized into codes, which later developed into themes. The emergent themes for this study included

confronting barriers and stereotypes, managing change and new technological advancement, securing employment and organizational politics, tell the story of the relationship and interactions between public workforce development managers and the program recipients, including unemployed, young, African-American males who were seeking to enter the job market. (Appendix C). Based on the interview data themes emerged as described in the following section.

### **Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes**

I found that each participant focused on the importance of following certain program guidelines for job placement. However, the overall process was influenced by policies and practices implemented through New York City's Human Resource Agency (HRA). The participants recognized that the policies and practices implemented through HRA contributed to some of the barriers facing recipients during the transition to the work process in particular young, African American males. Participants, however, did not express any desire to change these policies or practices. The managers acknowledged the importance of the responsibility to prepare individuals for the job search function and placement into the job market. Manager 1 remarked, "we have found that when we direct individuals to conduct an online job search, that we found the results were impressive". Many of the participants described how different programs and workshops impacted recipients in the programs. In most cases, the public workforce employment training managers described how the independent job search workshops were most effective. However, these workshops contributed to recipients gaining more autonomy over the process.

Manager 2, stated that “recipients make more progress during the independent job search function than at any other time or any other workshop in the entire program”, and noted that many of the other workforce development trainers agreed with. He described how recipients appeared to be more engaged during the independent job search workshops, however, he implied that the process makes my job as a public workforce employment trainer less relevant. HRA policy supported a stricter and more structured workforce employment training process. The public workforce managers acknowledged the process guiding the transition to the work process also created barriers to employment for many individuals. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analytical process helped combine codes from the data, which in which assisted in the themes emerging. During the interview process, it was not uncommon for participants to reveal that employers perceived recipients as low-wage workers. Often it appeared that employers used terms like "we need a person with work experience" to avoid selecting one of the recipients. Public workforce development managers acknowledged that more effective strategies were available for recipients during the transition to the work process. However, there was a greater need to control and monitor the activity of recipients under HRA guidelines. Manager 4, stated that “the rules of the organization direct managers to maintain control of groups”. He implied that recipients were at a disadvantage in terms of accessing better programs or resources to prepare to enter the job market.

The theoretical framework for this study provided insight into some of the complexities involving public workforce program managers assisting young, African American males during the transition to work process. The question concerning the need for enhanced programs and the use of resources can be understood within the framework

of the theory. Ingram, et al. (2007) noted the theory of social construction and policy design provides a lens to examine the positive and negative social constructions used by policymakers to distribute benefits and burdens.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted policies that have detrimental impacts on or are ineffective in solving important problems for certain types of target populations may not produce citizen participation directed towards policy change because messages received by these target populations encourage withdrawal. The theory is important because it helps explain why some groups are advantaged and others disadvantaged, and how those policy designs can reinforce or alter advantages for target populations (Schneider, & Ingram, 1993). In this study, participants acknowledged most recipients in the programs face barriers to employment that included transportation, lack of work experience, and confronting background checks. However, some of the policies (e.g. requirements for recipients to attend multiple workshops per week, requirements for recipients to log 30 hours per week for training classes) and practices (sanctions imposed by managers for missing workshops) implemented under HRA mandate also contributed to the barriers to employment for many of the recipients in the programs. These policies and practices also included the sanctions imposed on recipients during the workforce employment training process and job search process. One manager explained that it is important to keep up with technology and a changing workforce environment, and that includes upgrades to equipment and strategies. I discovered public workforce development managers see changes in technology as a useful tool to prepare individuals for the transition into the workforce. However, the organizational structure of the public workforce agency is structured to maintain control and to allow for stricter monitoring of

individuals' activities and behavior. Spaulding et al. (2015) found that many young, African American males who turn to public workforce employment training are impacted by a lack of adequate employment-based policies that guide the process.

### **Managing Change and New Technology**

During the interview process, seven of the ten public workforce development managers stated it was important for individuals preparing to enter the job market to become more independent during the job search function. These participants acknowledged the importance of expanding the independent job search function within the agency. However, the policies and practices that guided the process did not allow for that level of flexibility. One manager explained that it is vital to keep up with changing technology, and when you see signs of progress, it is critical to building on that progress. However, within a public workforce agency, it is necessary to follow the standard practices that have been in place for a very long time, and many simply do not want to rock the boat. He acknowledged that people are resistant to change, even when we see something that could work better for us, we sometimes continue what a process that is more familiar to us. I noted in my research journal that all of the participants acknowledged that recipients appear to welcome change and made progress when allowed more autonomy and more independence over the process. However, when I questioned the participants about why recipients were not allowed more autonomy during the transition to the work process, the response was the same in each case. It was a question of maintaining control, which was guided by the HRA process. Manager 5, remarked that “at times the work that we do could be more effective if we change our strategies”. He explained that individuals involved in the independent job search function



may gain entrance into the job market much quicker than recipients involved in other programs and workshops. However, He stated that the job search function tends to make his job obsolete. Recipients work in groups of 20-50 in each workshop, and much of the materials used in the workshops have not been updated over the last decade. Many of the workshops focus on developing interview skills, computer skills, and preparing for the early stages of job placement. Many of the workshops are designed to prepare individuals for jobs in retail, call centers, security personnel, and customer service. However, participants involved in the job training process acknowledged that many of these jobs have been replaced by automation and changing technology. In some cases, individuals are spending many months and years training for jobs that will likely be obsolete. I discovered public workforce development managers were aware of other types of training programs that could provide some benefit, however, the urgency to make policy changes was not supported across the board.

Mckinney et. al., (2015) found that technology is changing how we live and work, ( working remote has created additional options to enter the job market) yet research shows that public workforce employment programs are not aligned to provide young, African American males with reasonable access to these types of job opportunities. Braun and Clarke (2007) provided the thematic analysis process that showed the patterns that developed around the topic of managing changing technology. Managers implied that employment opportunities could be available for these recipients. However, the thematic analysis revealed resistance within the WDA organization to seeking employment opportunities for young, African American males regarding the use of the internet or

based on advancement in technology. Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted that policy may not favor groups who have been negatively constructed, or who have little or no power.

During the interview process, one manager received a call from one of the recipients who were very upset about the sanctions that were imposed suspending benefits and transportation. He acknowledged some changes were needed in terms of how sanctions were used to discipline recipients in the program. This particular recipient was very upset about losing benefits because of not attending a workshop, the individual complained about losing a Metro card voucher and possibly a childcare voucher. The individual explained the benefits were needed to maintain compliance with the program. The sanctions were being imposed because the individual failed to report to a workshop. The individual described a catch 22 situation.

On the one hand, the recipient stated that it is a requirement to attend each workshop five days a week, however, the metro card required for transportation can be suspended if the individual fails to attend any workshop, and can take up to 30 days to be reinstated. The manager acknowledged that some were changes needed concerning some of the policies and practices that guided the workforce development process, and he stated that many of the recipients are caught in a revolving door. This explains why recipients involved in a six-month training program, will still be involved in the job training placement process four years later.

One manager acknowledged that for many of the recipients involved in the workforce development program, the process has become the job. It is a means to an end. Seven of the ten public workforce development managers expressed concern about the need for making changes within the organization, and how the lack of change will impact

the progress for individuals seeking to enter the job market, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males.

### **Strategies for Securing Employment**

The participants and recipients, including unemployed young, African-American males were focused on any strategy that would lead to a new opportunity in the job market. This was oftentimes directed toward opportunities related to the internet or new technology. The strategies utilized during that process were different for recipients however, the objective was the same. The goal was to find a job. For the public workforce development managers, that process involved seeking out new employers who would consider the candidates-recipients for full-time employment. For the recipients, who were unemployed, young, African-American males the objective was both to maintain current status in the workforce development program and to secure a new employment opportunity. The process was somewhat more complex for the young, African-American males who were seeking employment because it was necessary to maintain status in the workforce development program to receive benefits. I found that all of the public workforce development managers stated the recipients in the programs were faced with a dual challenge because the benefits were impacted by the status in the workforce development training program. Manager 4, stated, "Some recipients are in programs to maintain their benefits, they need that check, and must show up to a workshop". It becomes very important to analyze data to find details and patterns that inform why individuals consider these alternatives.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process provided the framework to explore these patterns in the data which lead to the theme of securing employment.

Participants oftentimes revealed that recipients mainly focused on "getting the job interview" or "use of career coaching" to prepare for the transition into the job market. Manager 4, explained the challenges of securing a full-time position for the recipients, who are focused on maintaining their current status in the workforce development programs including the workshops, and in some ways. It is the program that often becomes a job for these individuals. I found that for the recipients in the program they needed to select the right employment opportunity before making changes to their benefits package. The public workforce employment training managers acknowledged that for the recipients, the young, unemployed, African-American males that they were assisting during this process were at times reluctant to consider accepting employment unless they knew that the impact to the benefits would not be severe. This reluctance to accept any new employment opportunity was one of the challenges for the public workforce development manager to resolve before placing the recipient into a new job. So for the public workforce development manager, the process creates two significant challenges: they must find new employers to accept recipients for full-time work, and they must rule willing to sacrifice the benefits to accept a full-time position. The recipients will need to feel some sense of confidence that the new position is meaningful and worth sacrificing their benefits. In some cases, it appeared that the public workforce development managers agree with the recipients that some available positions were unstable. However, the public workforce development manager was also under pressure to place as many individuals in new jobs as possible. Public workforce development managers work under a quota system, and the progress of each public workforce manager was monitored by HRA.

Another important factor that impacted the process of securing employment for recipients was the interviewing workshops and independent job search workshops. On the one hand, interviewing workshops were encouraged by the public workforce development managers. Yet, the independent job search function was not because public workforce development managers had less control over the recipients during that process. Manager 7, agreed the process was very complex. He explained we have a responsibility to monitor the activities and behavior of the individuals involved in the workforce employment training process, and at the same time, we see indications that many make more progress during the independent job search process. It appeared one of the changes the public workforce development managers were focused on was how to expand the independent job search function. Spaulding, et al. (2015) observed that broader solutions are needed to address disparities in public workforce employment training for young, unemployed, men of color. These solutions should involve multiple institutions in government, education, and non-profit organizations.

### **Perceptions of Benefits and Burden**

During the interview process, 5 of 10 public workforce employment managers found that most recipients are not aware of the resource available from the WDA program. These participants acknowledged that most recipients find that involvement in the programs provides the means of obtaining benefits. All recipients involved in the public workforce employment programs, including unemployed, young, African American males, are referrals from HRA. For recipients to receive benefits, including housing vouchers, daycare vouchers, food stamps vouchers, transportation metro cards, and health care coverage, the individual must attend an in-person workshop at the WDA

public workforce employment training center. Manager 8, noted, “We find that many recipients struggle to maintain the workforce program schedule because it is like having a full-time job”. He explained that each recipient must report to the public workforce center from 9 am-4 pm, from Monday to Friday. Most recipients have children and require daycare, including unemployed, young, African American males. However, in the case of young, African American males, the public workforce program manager must help the individual handle the stress of the Child Enforcement Service (CES), which also requires each recipient to attend the public workforce employment program.

I also found that most of the public workforce program managers shared the perspective that certain aspects of the program could be viewed as a burden or benefit to recipients. For recipients who were allowed to use the independent job search feature, the sense was that for some recipients, particularly, young, African American males, these features provided some benefit to the recipients. Manager 6, noted that most recipients tend to view the sanctions and penalties as challenges within the public workforce program. He stated that “recipients want to see more flexibility in the workforce program format and fewer actions in terms of enforcement of sanctions”. For many recipients, particularly, young, unemployed, African American males, the challenge concerned how to balance the need for benefits with the demands of the programs, and the burden of public workforce program sanctions. Schneider et al. (2009) noted that understanding the positive and negative social construction of target groups helps to explain why it is that while every citizen is presumably equal before the law, policy designs tend to distribute benefits to some people while creating burdens for others. The emotional and value-laden

image of some target groups, and not others, as deserving and entitled is different from the usual notion of political power related to economic resources (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). Policy design includes other elements in addition to the benefits and burden, goals to be achieved or problems to be solved, and the tools intended to change behavior or rules for inclusion and exclusion (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). Policy designs also shape institutions and the broader culture through both the resource effects of policy and the rhetorical/ symbolic effects of public policy (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). The social construction of target groups also refers to the positive and negative social constructions of the groups as worthy and deserving of as less worthy and undeserving and being a burden on the general welfare of society (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). For some groups impacted by negative social constructions, these groups find that labels attempt to convey the image of individuals who are lazy, disrespectful, greedy, disloyal, dangerous, and even immoral. There is almost no debate that racial and ethnic minorities have less positive social construction and that racial discrimination is still deeply embedded in public policy (Schneider, & Ingram, 1997). Policy designs affect participation through rules of participation, messages conveyed to individuals, resources such as money and time, and actual experiences with a policy as it is delivered through caseworkers, or public agencies (Schneider et al., 2014).

### **Politics of the Organization**

I found each participant responded to the policies and practices implemented by HRA with some degree of reservations. I was informed by each of the public workforce development managers that the agency did not determine the actual guidelines for employment training. The guidelines for the agency to operate all of its workshops that

prepared recipients for work, including unemployed, young, African-American males, were mandated by HRA. During my interview with one manager, he described how some of the workshops were repetitive, and public workforce managers were at times limited in terms of how they can change the programs. For example, during a discussion about removing barriers to employment for recipients in the independent job search workshops, the question that emerged focused on giving individuals more authority and responsibility to complete the job search function. He described how the HRA program was designed for monitoring and tracking the activities of each individual. He indicated that some options could remove barriers to the employment process, such as allowing individuals to complete a training workshop from a remote location. However, the guidelines implemented by HRA did not provide this option.

Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that the researcher may combine codes into a single theme. Themes are generally broader than the codes. Participants described how recipients would make extra effort to avoid sanctions at times. They would learn “how to play the game”. At other times participants stated that recipients were less concerned about sanctions. However, a pattern emerged that informed concepts of managing the politics of the organizations. One manager stated that if individuals were able to complete workshops from a remote location, such as a local library or Internet café in their neighborhoods that would remove the burden of transportation costs, additional clothing, and travel time. Other barriers could be removed by allowing individuals to utilize technology in different ways, such as the use of a remote location or a laptop computer at a neighborhood library. Another manager described how each of the employment training workshops was designed to influence the behavior of the individuals.



One manager described how these control mechanisms allowed the workforce development manager to track the progress of each individual. However, she did agree that the option to use a remote location for training programs or to use a local library or Internet café would be a great benefit to the participants in the program. However, the decision to change the policies and practices of the WDA did not follow the politics of the organization. These options would not or could not be considered by HRA for reasons that may be related to social constructions.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) observed that social constructions for powerless groups are viewed as individuals who need direction. "For their own good" is a common reason given for imposing sanctions on recipients similar to the groups involved in public workforce employment programs. I discovered eight out of the ten public workforce development managers described strategies that could remove barriers for individuals who were transitioning into the job market. However, those strategies would not be supported by HRA because they would reduce the amount of control that managers have over the recipient. One of the key strategies that could remove barriers for individuals in the process of completing the workforce development programs would be to implement options that allowed the use of local libraries or Internet cafés to complete employment training workshops. Some recipients had access to laptop computers and some of the training modules could have been completed by the use of a cell phone. However, HRA policy did not support implementing these types of strategies because it removed the control and monitoring mechanisms that are utilized by public workforce development managers. The information listed below describes findings for the research questions

based on responses during the interviews of participants assisting, unemployed, young, African American males.

### **Results of Research Interview Questions**

#### **Findings for Research Question 1**

**What are public employment program professionals' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape social constructions relevant to unemployed, young, African-American males involved in the transition to work?**

Public workforce program professionals reportedly used different strategies to assist young, African-American males during the process of transition into the workforce. The main emphasis was on coaching and the interview workshops utilized by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA). Public workforce employment program professionals were guided by the policies and practices mandated by the WDA. These public workforce professionals did not appear to question HRA policies. 8 of the 10 public workforce professionals interviewed for the study did make suggestions about strategies to improve the alignment of some of the policies, programs and practices (e.g. remove some sanctions, promote independent job search, etc.) that impacted the transition to work process for young, African-American males seeking to enter the job market. However, for the most part, public employment program managers tend to work within the guidelines of HRA policy. I noted that public employment program managers preferred some workshops over other workshops that were designed to assist recipients with the transition to the work process. Public workforce employment professionals expressed the view that more resources could be allocated to independent job search

programs and workshops. They also expressed the view that mentorship was valuable to both public workforce development managers, and successful recipients.

One manager often took on the role of a mentor from the very first interactions with unemployed, young, African-American males. However, most public workforce employment managers did not take on the role of mentor and did not engage in any activities to encourage successful recipients to also act as mentors. Another manager indicated his focus was on the early stages of the transition to work process for young African-American males, and that included all steps that support the first interview and landing the job. He emphasized the importance of recipients attending the first interview to be prepared, to arrive on time, to be punctual, to maintain eye contact, to speak clearly, to communicate well, to avoid complicated issues during the interview, and to show confidence in your abilities and skills. Oddly, he did not see himself as a mentor, only as an instructor and as a guide. He expressed concerns about circumstances that created tension for young, African-American males during the early stages of the transition to the work process. He indicated concerns about preparing individuals like young African-American men to address questions about work experience and not volunteer information that is not relevant to the early stages of the transition to the work process. All of the public workforce development managers expressed views about how resources could be better allocated. Most wanted to see upgrades to the computer centers, and improved options for removing barriers related to transportation and childcare. These managers perceived these factors as being significant in terms of impacting the transition to the work process. They also expressed the view that other factors relevant to policies and practices were less useful to the transition to the work process, such as the sanctions

imposed on recipients involved in the employment training workshops. One manager often acted as both public workforce employment manager and confidante to recipients who struggle with the transition to the work process. Many recipients would turn to him upon the implementation of sanctions that removed benefits and transportation resources. He expressed the view that some changes could be made to improve that process, and that more attention was needed to improve the transition to the work process. He expressed the view that some public workforce training programs and practices contributed to the stereotypes and barriers that recipients face.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted that policies send messages about what government is supposed to do, and which citizens are deserving, and which are not. Different target populations receive quite different messages. One manager expressed the view that more resources should be allocated to prepare individuals for the first months of the transition to the work process, in particular young African-American males. He expressed the view that for young African-American males, being prepared for the first few weeks of the transition to work process was critical. In his view, nearly 70% of the recipients that he assisted during the transition to the work process were often frustrated or terminated from the job during the first 90 days. He expressed the view that more resources for preparing recipients to enter the job market were needed. He was also one of the public employment workforce managers who acted as a mentor. He also agreed that there was value in any program or practice that encouraged successful recipients to engage as mentors. He expressed the view that these types of programs could be further developed and could be incentivized so that successful recipients would be interested in acting as mentors. In his view encouraging individuals to be mentors could have a

significant impact on recipients involved in the transition to work process. He was one of six public workforce employment managers who encouraged recipients, in particular, young, African-American males to use a weekly schedule or organizer to prepare for the first few weeks as they transition into the job market. He explained how the organizer worked for recipients (Appendix B). The organizer was extremely useful for recipients completing the independent job search function or during the first three weeks of transition into the job market. The organizer highlighted key points that each recipient should follow including punctuation, updated resume, travel instructions, and contact information at the job site. The organizer also included instructions about basic details such as dress code, grooming, company guidelines, and interview strategies.

Three managers were part of the first group of public workforce employment managers to encourage recipients to engage in mock interviews. All the public workforce employment managers stressed the value of mock interviews during workforce development training. However, most of the public workforce employment managers described the challenges of arranging for actual employers to engage in mock interviews. Public workforce employment managers agree that mock interviews could benefit recipients, in particular, unemployed, young African-American males. The mock interviews conducted by the workforce development agency were not as effective as interviews conducted at the actual employer's worksite. Public workforce development managers reported difficulty in arranging for employers to agree to mock interviews, and in some cases, the managers would reach out to other companies to volunteer time for recipients to engage in mock interviews.

Public workforce development managers believed that mock interviews played a key role in preparing recipients for the transition into the job market as well as the early stages of the interview process. 6 of the 10 workforce development managers interviewed for the study stressed the need to allocate more resources to developing mock interview workshops. The challenge for public workforce development managers to redirect resources to mock interview workshops was a policy issue. Policy and practices implemented by HRA did not allocate sufficient resources to certain workshops including those programs supporting mock interviews. Public workforce development managers involved in this study revealed that recipients involved in mock interviews demonstrated a high level of confidence during the actual interview process and the early stages of the transition to the work process. Six of the ten managers were among the strongest advocates for combining mentorship workshops and mock interview workshops in the workforce development agency. All the public workforce development managers agreed with programs targeting mentorship, and independent job search functions received greater enthusiasm from the recipients involved in the programs. I discovered during the interviewing process with the public workforce employment managers, recipients responded positively to all of the workshops that encouraged greater levels of autonomy.

The independent job search function and the mock interview workshops allowed recipients more control over the process. In many cases, public workforce employment managers reported a greater success rate for recipients entering the job market who focused time and energy in those workshops and programs. I noticed during the interviewing process public workforce employment managers expressed concerns about

the lack of resources directed at new technology. Six of the ten public workforce employment managers stated that upgrades were needed in the computer labs and equipment. Also, each public workforce employment manager would point out that new technology could allow recipients to gain access to more resources that could lead to permanent employment. Many of the public workforce employment managers revealed that efforts were made internally to make changes in how programs were aligned and how resources were allocated. However, for significant changes to be implemented the process would have to begin from the HRA leadership. Five managers were among the group of public workforce employment managers who stressed the importance of giving the recipients of voice and more independence during the job search process. Each expressed the view that the limitations imposed on the programs and the practices that helped recipients during the transition to the work process could be changed by policymakers.

Four of the ten managers were among the first group of public employment managers who advocated for more motivational workshops. They stressed the need for more resources to support programs and workshops that could motivate recipients, especially, unemployed, young, African-American males. Each of these managers reported to me that it was common practice to give books to recipients that they purchase themselves. These books were intended to be used as a guide to self-improvement and motivation. All of the public workforce employment managers indicated more should be done to allocate resources to workshops that focused on motivation and self-improvement.

## **Findings for Research Question 2**

**What are the public workforce program manager's perceptions about the relevance of workforce employment policy design and social constructions impacting unemployed, young, African American males during the workforce training experience?**

All the public workforce employment program managers interviewed during this study stressed the importance of making changes to address barriers to employment and policies that impact the transition to work process for recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males. Eight of the ten public workforce employment managers indicated that resources were needed to be allocated to additional workshops and that some realignment of policies and practices would be more effective in assisting recipients during the transition to the work process. For example, public workforce employment managers found that individuals involved in independent job search workshops and functions were more proactive during the transition to the work process. These managers indicated that more resources should be allocated to programs that encouraged more independence and provided great autonomy for recipients involved in the transition to the work process.

The view of the managers interviewed during this study was that the HRA policies and guidelines that influence the process needed to adjust to the changing workforce environment and technological climate. These managers perceived that the changing workforce environment had impacted how individuals confront barriers to the job market and gain access to new employment opportunities. Six of the ten public workforce managers interviewed for the study indicated that many of the HRA policies and programs encourage recipients to develop better skills and gain access to the job



market as quickly as possible. However, some of the policies and practices that impact the process of transition into the workforce were somewhat outdated. McKinney et. al., (2015) found that employment opportunities are emerging in different markets as a result of new technology, and these jobs could provide opportunities for young, unemployed, African American males.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) offered the view that social constructions and policy design theory attempt to answer the question, "Who gets what, when, and how?". In this study, public workforce employment managers stated that valuable time and resources were dedicated to functions that it does not link directly to the transition to the work process. For example, many public workforce employment managers devoted significant time and resources to issues related to sanctions and penalties for recipients who were not making progress in the employment training programs. I found that participants implemented several different strategies to assist recipients during the transition to the work process, particularly unemployed young, African-American males. Manager 10, indicated more resources should be applied to the independent job search function for recipients who are preparing to enter the job market. He added by expanding the resources for the independent job search function, then the role of the public workforce employment manager will also change. He indicated that public workforce employment managers were already expanding their roles as coaches, mentors, and advocates for the recipients involved in the transition to work process.

All of the public workforce employment managers agreed that changes in their roles as instructors should be expected because of a changing job market and technological environment. One manager described how the WDA was expanding

locations in Queens and Brooklyn. These new workforce development locations were designed to expand on certain areas of employment, such as call-center staffing, retail services, and food services. The new locations will also expand on computer training and workshops to develop better communication skills. Public workforce employment managers stress the importance of developing new workshops to take advantage of employment opportunities for recipients, especially young, African-American males.

Many of the public workforce employment managers expressed the view that outdated policies and practices that led to training for low-wage jobs could be realigned to address new employment opportunities. These public employment program managers indicated the realignment of resources to workshops such as independent job search, and workshops expanded on the mock interviewing of recipients could be more effective during the transition to the work process. Eight out of ten public employment managers agreed that independent job search workshops and the mock interviewing workshops helped individuals confront barriers and stereotypes that were still present in the job market. Many of the barriers and stereotypes recipients were confronted with resulted from years of ideologies about the long-term unemployed, and young, African-American males. These stereotypes implied a lack of initiative, lack of responsibility, and a lack of commitment to confronting new opportunities. Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted that stereotypes and language are utilized to create negative images of target populations in the policy design process. Public workforce employment managers explained that individuals involved in independent job search functions were given more autonomy over the process, and therefore develop the greatest sense of control and responsibility. This was in contrast to the social constructions impacting these groups. He explained for

public employment program managers to be more effective it was necessary to find different strategies and to realign resources to different workshops and programs. He expressed the view that some internal changes would be helpful to redirect resources for individuals to confront barriers to employment, which include transportation, location of employment, and childcare. All of the public workforce employment managers agreed more resources should be allocated to those programs that address barriers and stereotypes that impacted recipients, particularly young African-American men.

Some public workforce employment managers expressed the view that many recipients involved in employment training programs and the transition to work process were not only confronted by barriers that included transportation, housing, and childcare, many of the recipients in the programs, especially, unemployed, young, African-American males, were confronted by stereotypes that persist in the current job markets. These stereotypes included the presumption that young, African-American males were more likely to be irresponsible, less cooperative, and at times rebellious during their work experience. Many employers would avoid extending a job offer to a young, African-American male. Therefore, it was the job of the public workforce development manager to assist these recipients with the task of not only confronting barriers to employment but also be prepared to address stereotypes. Many of the public workforce employment managers utilized the interviewing workshops, and the coaching workshops to help individuals prepare for these challenges. Public workforce employment managers expressed the view that policies and practices that were designed to guide the transition to work process tend to not take into consideration the significance of some of the

challenges and stereotypes that individuals were confronted by. These public workforce employment managers indicated that workshops and coaching workshops could be utilized to help individuals build greater self-esteem and confidence as they continue the transition to the work process.

Three managers expressed the view that individuals involved in the independent job search workshops were better suited to address some of the challenges in the job market. They also argued that more could be done to assist individuals during the transition to the work process. For example, more use of technology could be effective and creating a pathway to employment. Some of the workshops could be redesigned for recipients to complete from a remote location such as a public library or an Internet café. This change in program structure would also remove barriers such as the need for transportation cost, clothing, and childcare. Such a change would allow individuals to complete part of the training process from a remote location or a virtual worksite would allow recipients more time to prepare for a transition into the job market. This type of change would also allow individuals greater autonomy and independence during the transition to the work process. Four of the ten workforce development managers did not advocate for the approach that would provide more independence to recipients because of the concern about maintaining control over the process. These public workforce program managers expressed concern about giving individuals too much freedom. Three managers implied that experience has shown in the workforce training environment that some individuals will take the freedom but not the responsibility. They expressed the view the control mechanisms implemented by HRA were in place for a reason. They did not advocate for greater independence autonomy for recipients in the workforce training

programs, including unemployed, young, African-American males. These public workforce employment managers expressed the view some policy changes could be made to improve the process for individuals who face barriers to employment. For example, more resources could be allocated for transportation courses, clothing, and childcare. Also, these public workforce employment managers stated some recipients were much more successful working with organizations in their neighborhoods. Therefore, it would be useful to allocate resources and direct program efforts to develop relationships with employers in nearby neighborhoods for these recipients.

These public workforce employment managers expressed the view that the policies and programs that required enhancement concerns sanctions and penalties imposed on recipients who were found to be non-compliant. The sanctions imposed on individuals deemed to be non-compliant would suspend certain benefits that included food stamps, childcare, and transportation voucher. Once these benefits were suspended, each recipient was required to reapply for benefits through HRA. The process of reapplying for benefits could take between 30 to 90 days. During the time that the individual was reapplying for benefits, they would lose job opportunities that may have been pending. Many public workforce employment managers expressed the view that some policy was required to address issues related to sanctions and penalties. All of the public workforce employment managers indicated that changes to policy and practices within the workforce employment training programs could improve the transition to work process for recipients, in particular, young African-American males. One of the barriers facing young African-American males which also contributed to the stereotypes that these individuals face involved some of the challenges of enforcement policies

implemented through HRA. In cases of child support enforcement activities, HRA works directly with the child support enforcement agencies (CEA) to address the issue of unpaid child support my father's children in the custody of a single mother. For the public workforce employment manager, these policies and practices also create a set of barriers and challenges for recipients in particular, young, African-American males. The public workforce employment manager was now tasked with assisting an individual seeking to enter the job market and at the same time interacting with child enforcement services to address unpaid child support. The recipients in the program, mainly young, African-American males, were under a mandate to participate in the workforce employment training.

For the young African-American male involved in the workforce employment training, the need to find a job was paramount. Public workforce employment managers indicated that many young, African-American males would even accept undesirable employment. Most were faced with employment that was low waged and included an unstable work schedule. The public workforce employment manager was now tasked with assisting individuals seeking to enter the job market while complying with child enforcement agencies' guidelines to resolve child support issues. Public workforce employment training managers expressed the view some policy change was needed and the changes could not only improve conditions for the recipients, including, young African-American males, it would also help resolve the child support issues involved. Public workforce employment managers reveal that the workforce development agency and HRA were seeking ways to work together to resolve these conflicts. I discovered that eight of the ten public workforce employment managers viewed the alignment between

workforce development agency (WDA) and HRA as being out of sequence. These public workforce development managers appeared to advocate for some policy change between the agencies. I found participants in the study were well aware of the need for change. However, they also felt a sense of case overload and did not feel confident that workforce development agency leaders would implement change for the sake of the recipients involved in a program. These public workforce development managers expressed the view that a realignment of resources and some realignment of their roles as public workforce employment instructors could improve the transition to work process for recipients including young, unemployed, African-American males. I also reviewed government documents, agency website material, and internal office memos regarding workforce development policies and practices.

I was able to use these documents as part of triangulation which included interview data, journal notes, articles, and agency documentation. During the interviews eight of the ten public workforce employment managers discussed the importance of maintaining positive communication with recipients, taking the time to understand the needs and challenges of those recipients, and finding more employers who were open to considering these individuals as possible candidates for employment. All of the public workforce employment managers expressed optimism about the prospects for individuals who were working to enter the job market. However, most expressed urgency for the need to reallocate resources to other programs and workshops. These public workforce employment managers did not express concern about their role change which was possible if resources were reallocated to other programs. These public workforce employment managers expressed confidence in their role to assist individuals during the

transition to work process and felt confident that by making better use of new technology great opportunity would be available for these recipients especially, young, African-American males.

### **Discrepant Cases and Non-Conforming Data**

The themes in the research described various views of the experiences and interactions of public workforce development employment managers 'assisting unemployed, young, Africa American males during the transition to work process. Discrepant and nonconforming data from this study expressed the view that public workforce development employment professionals follow traditional workforce agency policy. However, the participants in this study appear to adjust practices for some employment training workshops to further assist recipients who face significant barriers to employment. Although traditional public workforce development policy was important to guide the transition to the work process, participants seemed willing to encourage recipients, such as unemployed, young, African American males, to rely on programs and practices that support independent thinking and action. The time recipients devote to specific employment training workshops also provided non-conforming data for the study. Each of the public workforce employment training managers stated that recipients spend 2 to 4 hours per week on the independent job search function of the workshops. However, there were many cases were recipients spend 4 to 6 hours each week on this function of the workshops. I discovered that some participants encouraged recipients to devote more time to the independent job search function because recipients tend to be better prepared for the transition into the workforce.



### **Evidence of Quality**

Creswell suggests eight strategies that can be used to ensure that a study is valid (Creswell, 2007). I used three of the eight strategies during the research: included triangulation, thick descriptions, and member checking (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2002) found validity is established by using internal and external means of data collection.

### **Summary of Findings**

This qualitative case study was designed to fill a gap in the research literature that focused on the experiences and interactions of public workforce development managers assisting unemployed young, African-American males, during the transition into the job market. Data were collected through the use of individual interviews, researcher's field notes, researcher's journals, and government documents. The ten participants in this study shared their perceptions about the experiences and interactions as they prepared recipients to enter the workforce. They shared their views about policies and practices that guided the transition to the work process for these recipients. The data showed public workforce development managers are committed professionals, and they enthusiastically guided recipients through workshops to develop better communication skills, job search strategies, motivation, and employment opportunities. Guided by Ingram, et al. (2009) theory of social construction and policy design, the study illustrated how public policies impact targeted populations. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process provided key insights into the relevant themes that help explain the data.

Public workforce development managers expressed the view that reallocation of resources where required and new programs developed needed to address the changing job market and changing workforce population. The participants in the study continually look

for ways to assist young, African-American males during the process of preparing for interviews, employment assessment, and transition into the job market. Each participant believed that each recipient could develop the skills to meet a changing job market. They also expressed the view that with some modification of policies and programs within the workforce agency that most recipients could secure meaningful long-term employment. The participants in the study did not hesitate to extend themselves to recipients in the program and expressed the view that an expanded mentorship program and independent job search function could have a positive impact on recipients, in particular, young, African-American males.

Chapter 5 is a review of the study. It highlights the experiences of public workforce employment program managers assisting unemployed, young, African American males during the transition to work process. It provides an interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations. It also discusses social change implications and ends with a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusion.

### **Introduction**

The problem at the selected research site was that unemployed, young, African-American males were deeply involved in public workforce employment training programs, and were not gaining access to meaningful jobs. Public workforce employment managers and trainers at the agency worked diligently with recipients to prepare for the transition into the workforce and used all available resources during that process. The participants at the research site justified the lack of additional resources like an internal policy issue or organizational politics. One aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of how public workforce employment program managers perceived their interactions with individuals that they were assisting with the process of transition into the workforce. Through the use of interviews, field notes, and agency documents, this study explored how public workforce employment managers used policies and practices within the agency to assist recipients of the transition into the workforce.

The participants in the study expressed the view that recipients were eager and capable of transitioning into the labor force, and that some of the available programs were useful for that purpose. However, participants expressed the view that some changes to policies and programs could further improve the process of transition into the workforce for recipients, in particular, young, unemployed, African-American males. To better prepare individuals to be successful during the transition to the work process, participants continued to encourage independent job search activities and strategies to build confidence. The standards for policies and practices at the workforce development

agency were mandated by the Human Resource Administration (HRA). Participants in the study interacted with recipients during the entire transition to the workforce process, however, the policies and practices that guide the process are directed by the HRA organization. I sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding the state of knowledge of the experiences and interactions between public workforce employment managers and recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males involved in the transition into the workforce. One aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of how participants and recipients utilized programs and resources made available through HRA policies to complete the transition into the workforce. Participants answered questions and provided insight into what methods policies and practices were resulting in better job opportunities for recipients involved in the programs.

Guided by Ingram, et al. (2009) social construction of target population and policy design theory, I examined the perception of public workforce employment managers about assisting, unemployed, young, African American males. Social construction and policy design theory indicated that the social construction of target populations has a powerful influence on the policy agenda and the actual design of the policy. Social constructions become embedded in policy as messages that are absorbed by individuals and affect their participation in the benefits and burdens that are involved in the process (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis provided the model to examine and interpret the data. Thematic analysis is a good approach to research that examines people's views, perceptions, knowledge, values, and experiences from a set of qualitative data. The emergent themes provided important insight into the study as well as the relevance of the theoretical framework used for the

research. The public workforce employment program policies and practices that guide the process for young, unemployed, African American males tend to focus on low wage work, jobs that have become obsolete, or overlook employment opportunities resulting from advancement in new technology (Spaulding, et al., 2015; Heinrich, 2016). This study looked at the most effective techniques and methods utilized by public workforce employment managers assisting young, African American males. The study also looked at how the perception of public workforce employment managers impacted the transition into the workforce for these individuals. Findings revealed that public workforce employment managers were more successful in working with recipients in programs that encouraged independent job search activities and provided greater autonomy to individuals.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Once all of the data were collected, I analyzed the data to develop codes and themes, which served as the basis for writing descriptions of the public workforce employment manager's perceptions about assisting recipients for the transition into the workforce. This study's findings support the findings of other research related to the importance of enhancing job skills, communication skills, and employment opportunities (Heinrich, 2016; McConnell et al., 2016). I found that public workforce employment managers implemented informal job search strategies to encourage independent thinking and provide recipients with a greater sense of autonomy during the transition into the job market. Over the past several years, research has shown that young men of color continue to learn how to adjust to a changing labor market, and that new strategy is required by employers to realign with these changes (Heinrich, 2016; Spaulding et al., 2015). I found

that implementation of programs and workshops, such as the independent job search workshop, which encourages the use of new technologies, to be essential to the process of assisting recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males, during the transition into the workforce. Today, public workforce employment managers need to focus on policies and programs designed to assist recipients in activities that support independent job search functions and strategies. However, many public workforce program managers face challenges from the internal organizational politics that guide the process. Schneider and Ingram (1993) suggested that social constructions of the target population can have a powerful influence on the design of the policy. The theory is important because it helps to explain "who gets what, when, and how?". During the interviewing process, I found that the public employment workshops encouraged recipients to be more proactive, to be more creative, and to accept more responsibility during the initial transition into the job market. However, the actual policies and practices that guide the process did not encourage these options. Public workforce employment trainers also indicated that independent job search activities and mock interview workshops had shown signs of being affected. They expressed the view that these types of activities should be expanded and more resources should be allocated to make these programs available to more individuals and recipients. Data confirmed that change was required to address the lack of effective public workforce employment program policies and practices that guided the process for managers, and recipients, particularly, young, unemployed, African American males. The theoretical framework and thematic analysis process helped to illustrate how the perceptions of public workforce employment

managers inform and influence the transition to work process for these individuals.

Changes to WDA policies and programs can improve the employment experiences for this population. The literature indicated that certain target populations can be both negatively perceived and impacted by the policy. When the public workforce employment program has been improved, the outcomes for young, African American males, and others involved with a public agency, are more productive. The interpretations of the emergent themes are described in the next section.

### **Emergent Themes**

During face-to-face interviews, I used open-ended questions to elicit responses about the participants' perceptions regarding the interactions with recipients preparing to enter the job market. All of the participants focused on one or more of the public employment training workshops to prepare recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males to enter the job market. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process provided useful guidance for developing and understanding the emergent themes resulting from the data. During the data collection process, most of the participants focused on addressing barriers to employment facing recipients, strategies to secure employment for recipients, strategies to make better use of new technology, and navigating the politics of the organization. Spaulding et al. (2015) found that broader solutions are needed to address disparities in public workforce employment and training programs, in particular, as it concerns young men of color. Cherry's (2016) study implied that negative stereotypes about young, unemployed, African American males assumed their long periods of joblessness related more to motivation than public workforce

employment initiatives. Schneider, et al. (2014) observed that understanding how groups are positively and negatively socially constructed is useful to understand the choice of policy design and the dynamic of how benefits and burdens are allocated to groups. Policy designs also shape institutions and the broader culture through both the resources and effects of policy and the symbolic effects on groups. This theoretical framework helped to provide insight into the research data and some understanding of the emergent themes that were developed from the research data.

Cherry (2016) also argued that simply expanding public employment and job training opportunities would likely have only a modest effect on joblessness for young, African American males. Cherry found that many young, African American males will join the ranks of the “hidden unemployed” as a result of ineffective workforce employment programs and growing stereotypes. Cherry contends that young, African American males face prolonged joblessness as a result of the unequal distribution of resources in public workforce programs and discriminatory practices in the labor markets. I found that these participants were more focused on strategies and methods that can create a pathway to employment for recipients as opposed to the reality of policy demands. The themes that informed this research study are described below.

### **Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes**

Participants involved in the study initially described the conditions and challenges facing recipients who were preparing to transition into the labor market. Participants involved in assisting recipients, including unemployed, young, African-American males, were focused on addressing issues that present challenges in the very early stages of the process. Participants encouraged recipients to use an organizer during the first few weeks



of the process and to take note of basic steps, which include punctuation, grooming, and motivation. Participants expressed concerns about how recipients can manage challenges that relate to transportation, clothing, and childcare issues. Participants also emphasized the importance of preparing recipients who had experience with the criminal justice system. It was not uncommon for recipients to report experiences to the public workforce employment manager regarding reactions or responses that imply some form of stereotype. Schneider and Ingram (1993) noted that different target populations receive quite different messages from the policies, practices, and programs that guide the process. A policy that have a detrimental impact on, or are ineffective in solving important problems for, certain types of target populations may also encourage withdrawal or passivity (Schneider, & Ingram, 1993). Participants in the study expressed the view that preparing recipients for the challenge of the transition back into the labor market was the main focus and part of that was preparing each individual to deal with these stereotypes. Participants in the study encouraged recipients to be confident and motivated during the transition into the workforce.

### **Strategies for Securing Employment**

The second theme that emerged addressed employment opportunities for recipients, in particular, young, African-American males. Participants expressed the view that more resources and programs should be allocated to engage employers to expand the number of job opportunities available. One of the major challenges facing public workforce employment managers was finding meaningful employment for recipients. Many of the active employer contracts were focused on retail, maintenance, and food services. Recipients were well aware that most of the jobs will low-wage and did not

provide steady work schedules. My findings concurred with McConnell et al. (2016), who noted that more employment opportunities were needed for young men of color. My data also concurred with Heinrich (2016), including that low-wage and low-income workers face more barriers than ever to secure a job. The challenge for recipients involved in the transition into the workforce was further complicated by the HRA sanctions. For many recipients in the program, it was equally important to maintain benefits as it was to secure a job. It was a very complex balancing act to maintain an active role in the programs and workshops and at the same time actively pursue meaningful employment opportunities.

### **Managing Change and New Technology**

A very important theme that emerged was the consistent need to adjust to changes in the job market and to tap into the use of new technology. Participants in the study encouraged recipients to make use of new computer programs, online tutorials, and writing classes. Recipients in the program were encouraged to pursue further education by use of community colleges or working with church groups. The data showed that participants were interested in finding ways to include the use of new technology and to tap into changes in the labor market. Many of the participants expressed frustration about the roadblocks that were created by policies mandated internally. Participants expressed the view that better employment opportunities could be secured for recipients in particular, young, African-American males. McConnell et al., (2016) noted that technology is changing how we work and live.

McConnell et al., (2016) content that new employment opportunities are emerging every day and policymakers are not keeping up with change. For public workforce

employment managers the challenge was complicated by the fact that HRA mandates strict accountability for recipients involved in workforce development programs. Public workforce employment managers are not at liberty to encourage independence and autonomy for individuals involved in the programs. Schneider and Ingram (1993) suggested that social construction of target population helps explain why some groups are considered advantaged, and receive certain messages, and others are not, and it is the policy design that reinforces or alter such advantages. Participants in the study contend that their focus was on the strategies that promised better outcomes. For most managers, the public workforce development programs that showed the most promise were the independent job search functions. Participants expressed a willingness to work with policymakers to change or better align resources and programs to keep pace with changing technology and in the job market.

### **Perceptions of Benefits and Burdens**

The emergent themes regarding public workforce employment managers' perception of benefits and burdens relevant to recipients, particularly, young, African American males, were critical to this study. Many of the benefits and burdens impacting recipients were also the result of many public workforce development policies and practices. These policies provided the framework for the ideologies and attitudes that influenced many of the public program managers who guided the public workforce experience for unemployed, young, African American males. Many of the program recipients, especially, young, African American males, were impacted by sanctions. Manager 9, remarked that "for young, African American males the entire focus of their workforce experience is to avoid the loss of any benefits and avoid any issues with Child

Support Enforcement (CSE). Six of the ten public workforce program managers agreed that the issue of child support enforcement created the most significant challenges for recipients, including, young, African American males in the program. Manager 5, noted that “for most young, black males involved in the workforce program, the problem of child support enforcement explains why many never complete the program”. The problem is so complex that for unemployed, young, African American males, often a decision must be made as to whether to risk involvement with the justice system or compete in the job market. For those recipients who find a balance, many will continue to receive benefits, such as housing vouchers, food stamp vouchers, and transportation metro card vouchers. In some case, young, African American males who cannot resolve child support issues, they must decide between attending a court hearing or a job interview. Manager 3, stated that “for many young, black men in the program, the options are limited, because failure to address child support issues, can lead to time in jail”. Schneider et al. (2007) noted that target groups that lack both political power and positive social construction and tend to receive a disproportionate share of burdens and sanctions. The number of such groups and their significance as targets of policy is growing. Young male minorities, dropouts, illegal immigrants, are sometimes blamed for many of the ills of society that might more accurately be attributed to the broader social and economic system (Schneider et al., 2007).

### **Politics of the Organization**

The public workforce employment managers involved in this study expressed the view that the agency was involved in a partnership with the government. HRA was the governing body for the workforce development agency, and all the major policies and

strategies were guided by the human resource administrative guidelines. For many of the recipients involved in the program, the politics of the organization imply that the priority should be to follow the rules. For many of the recipients, including, young, African-American males, this translated into the program becoming the job. What this means for young, African-American male seeking to enter the job market, it's necessary to balance the two. At the end of the day, that recipient dedicates most of his time and energy to maintain his status in the program. Participants in the study expressed their frustration with this process that influenced the transition into the workforce. These participants understood that most of the recipients involved in the program were simply trying to survive. The experience for many of the recipients was no longer a matter of finding a job-it was more a matter of maintaining your benefits by actively engaged in the program. For the public workforce employment manager, this presented a major dilemma. The focus for the public workforce employment manager was to assist the individual with the process of obtaining a job and yet for the recipient the objective was to maintain an active role in the program to secure benefits. Schneider and Ingram (1993) content that social construction of target populations and policy design provides important insight into the pressures facing policymakers to design policy beneficial to powerful, positively constructed target populations, and to devise punitive, punishment—oriented policy for negatively constructed groups. In this study, public workforce employment managers expressed the need to expand programs that focused on motivation, independence, and building confidence. Public workforce employment managers encouraged recipients to be proactive, to expand on their job search activities,

and to be prepared for the transition into the labor market. The interpretation of findings is outlined in the research questions.

### **Response to Research Question 1**

**What are public employment program managers' perceptions about the alignment of workforce policies and practices that shape social constructions relevant to unemployed young African-American males involved in the transition to work process?**

The data showed that public workforce employment managers were most successful when recipients engaged in the independent job search functions and the mock interview preparation workshops. Participants in the study viewed these functions as the most valuable in the public workforce employment program. Public workforce employment managers revealed that recipients were more engaged and more confident in their ability to enter the job market when they were encouraged to be independent and proactive. Recipients appeared to take a more vested interest in the process when they experienced a greater level of autonomy. My study also revealed that the relationship between public workforce employment managers and recipients, in particular, young, African-American males, was much more aligned and meaningful when both parties were engaged in the independent job search function. Cherry (2016) noted that individuals tend to achieve their goals when supported positively by managers or co-workers. Of the many workforce development employment training programs, the independent job search workshop, and the mock interview workshops appear to be the most effective. Participants expressed the view that more resources should be and could be reallocated to expand on these programs. Participants expressed the view that once resources and

policies were realigned to target these particular workshops that recipients will be more engaged and more productive during this process.

### **Response to Research Question 2**

**What are public workforce program managers' perceptions about the relevance of workforce employment policy design and social constructions impacting unemployed young African-American males during the transition workforce training experience?**

The data showed that participants encouraged recipients involved in the workforce employment training programs to develop greater independence. This suggests that the public employment program (WDA) policy did not encourage greater levels of autonomy for recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males. The public workforce employment managers expressed concerns about the barriers and stereotypes still impacting recipients during the transition into the workforce. Participants expressed the view that modifications to public workforce employment training policy could remove certain barriers and help to diminish some stereotypes impacting recipients. The data showed that recipients involved with certain workshops, including the independent job search function, demonstrated greater levels of creativity, confidence, and independence. The data generated from the second research question showed that all of the recipients involved in the independent job search workshops experienced greater interactions with the public workforce employment community and managers (Cherry, 2016).

It was important to note that recipients involved in the independent job search workshops were more informed about the employer's criteria and guidelines that

supported full-time employment. Recipients must be involved in public workforce employment programs that address barriers to employment and inform recipients about the criteria the employers require during the transition to full-time employment. The theories provided by Ingram, et al. (2009) helps to explain how policy impact target populations and why public workforce development agencies implement policies and practices that guide the public workforce process and the recipients involved in the programs. Changes in the job markets and technology have created a need for realignments of policies and practices and reassessment of how individuals confront barriers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current research study limitations are that it is focused on one public workforce employment program agency and one group of program professionals working with a target population, and the small sample size. The WDA has many participants and disadvantaged recipients in other programs who face challenges in entering the job market. Disadvantaged groups often depend on government agencies and public policy for needed services and resources (Spaulding et al., 2015). For young, unemployed, African American males in the United States, they are most likely to face barriers to employment, and the rates of joblessness can be thirty percent higher as they search for jobs. Public workforce employment programs can be used as a resource, and many other individuals can benefit from improvement in services.

### **Social Change Implications**

According to WIOA (2016), the US federal government appropriated more than \$6.9 billion to states for workforce development programs and approximately \$3.4 billion



in federal formulas for funding partner programs for a total of \$10.5 billion in federal funding. I found that public workforce employment trainers were utilizing workforce employment training programs strategically to assist recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males during the transition to work process. These public workforce employment program professionals expressed different views about how resources can be allocated and how programs can be redesigned for effectiveness. This study can be useful because public workforce employment professionals and recipients involved in the transition to work process may develop successful strategies that can improve the process. This study provides examples of more effective and efficient allocation of resources. Researchers have discovered when using public workforce programs that encourage independence, creative thinking, and strategic planning that the individuals involved experience better outcomes (McKinney et. al., 2017; Spaulding et al., 2015)

Recipients in public workforce employment training programs inherently want to gain obtain employment. These individuals want to achieve full-time employment in a job that is meaningful and provides a living wage. This study was significant because public workforce employment professionals and recipients experienced a much more productive and meaningful connection during specific workshops. Although public workforce employment professionals and recipients dedicate significant time and resources to the transition to work process they are very little information about those interactions. The descriptions about how public workforce employment professionals interact with recipients, in particular, young, unemployed, African-American males can help other public workforce employment professionals implement more effective

strategies. The use of resources by the government on the national, state, and local levels may be greatly enhanced by the results of this study. I intend that the findings of this case study address the need for social change by providing insight for future research and public workforce development professionals. The study also offers a potential impact on social change as organizations seek more effective ways to use new technology to create employment opportunities. It suggests that when public workforce program managers work closely with recipients to locate better employment options, the internet and other technological sources may provide a pathway.

### **Recommendation for Action**

In response to the findings of this study, I have three recommendations for enhancing the public workforce employment training experience between professionals and recipients. The agencies responsible for implementation and the participants, including the public workforce employment professionals and recipients involved in the program, have more of a vested interest. These recommendations can be implemented at public workforce development agencies, by policymakers and managers, and at meetings and workshops. My first recommendation is that public workforce development directors and managers redirect resources to specific workshops, such as the independent job search workshop and the mock interviewing workshops. The data supports the enhancement of these workshops with regards to public workforce employment managers assisting recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males were the transition into the workforce. The independent job search workshops and mock interviewing workshops allow recipients more creativity, greater independence, and enhanced the sense of autonomy. By expanding these workshops, and reallocation of

resources for these workshops, recipients can improve the process of transition into the workforce.

My next recommendation is for public workforce development directors, managers, and professionals to work with policymakers to enhance public workforce employment training workshops to align with the changing job market and focus on new technology. The data supports the use of remote locations, Internet cafés, and local libraries to complete specific employment workshop training. These strategic planning changes will address barriers to employment that recipients face in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males. By realigning the use of new technology, recipients will have additional time and resources to examine employment opportunities in different areas of customer service and data entry staffing. For many recipients involved in the workforce development training programs the barriers that they face are compounded by the requirement for transportation, clothing, and childcare. By allowing recipients to complete specific employment training workshops from a remote location or Internet café, can greatly reduce the burden of these requirements. Another recommendation is that public workforce development directors and managers work with policymakers to enhance HRA policies and practices.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) contend that policy sends messages about what government is supposed to do, which citizens are deserving, (and which are not), and what kinds of participatory patterns are appropriate in a democratic society. The data has indicated that recipients involved in public workforce development training programs are significantly impacted by sanctions and penalties. Participants in this study claimed that most recipients are negatively impacted by the sanctions that are imposed and the

sanctions do not have any positive impact on the progress of that individual in the program. The sanctions that are implemented by way of HRA guidelines appeared to be outdated and antiquated. Participants in this study expressed the view that sanctions simply create a revolving door scenario. They found very little benefit to the sanctions imposed on individuals and found I need to change the guidelines that support the progress of each individual in the programs. The sanctions imposed by HRA tend to suspend benefits such as food stamps, childcare, and transportation vouchers. Participants in this study expressed the view that other measures can be taken to provide guidelines for recipients without suspending benefits. Some of the new guidelines that recommended include enhanced employment training workshops, and allowing individuals involved in the programs to complete specific workshops from a remote location. Because all of the participants in the study expressed the view that changes were needed in the public workforce employment training modules, it is productive for recipients and participants to have more input into the workforce training process

### **Recommendation for Future Study**

This study provided important insights by demonstrating the value of the interactions between public workforce employment managers, and recipients involved in the program, particularly, unemployed, young, African American males. This study focused on the perceptions and experiences of public workforce employment professionals and did not develop any feedback from the recipients. My first recommendation for future research is to conduct a study of the experiences of unemployed, young, African Americans males who are involved in public workforce employment training. Another point of interest would be a study that focused on the use

of public workforce development employment training programs from a remote location for recipients. It would be interesting to note the impact of such a change in terms of the barriers that could be removed within that structure. Finally, other studies could be conducted that explore how recipients respond to independent employment training programs and enhanced mentorship programs. The social relationship between recipients involved in public workforce employment development and public workforce professionals has been regarded as important (Heinrich, 2016; McKinney et al., 2016). Policymakers and public workforce development managers need to gain a better understanding of the relevance of the relationship with recipients, and how greater independence and use of technology can improve the transition to work experience for recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African American males.

### **Reflection of the Researcher's Experience**

My research experience during the study was very rewarding. As I reflect on this study, I believe it addresses the need for policymakers and WDA public workforce development professionals to improve the transition to work process for recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males. Through the implementation of enhanced employment training workshops and strategies, their experience between public workforce development professionals and recipients can be greatly improved. For the individuals who seek a pathway to employment through workforce development programs, these improvements to policies and practices will lead to meaningful employment. I began to view the importance of implementing more effective policies and strategies based on the themes that emerged from the study. I believe that policymakers and workforce development program professionals can

collaborate to develop programs that allow individuals ways to improve options for gaining meaningful employment. By understanding how the enhancement of programs and reallocation of resources can significantly change outcomes for individuals who have faced significant barriers to employment policymakers and public workforce program professionals can maximize the use of resources. I found all of the participants sincerely engaged during the interview process and demonstrated a genuine concern for individuals seeking to enter the job market. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with these professionals and in some way provide information that can be useful to individuals who seek a pathway to employment.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding the perception and experiences of public workforce development professionals assisting recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males who were seeking to enter the job market. The results revealed that public workforce development professionals in the study demonstrated a genuine concern for recipients seeking a pathway to employment. Participants focused on several public workforce employment training workshops to assist recipients during the transition into the workforce. The results revealed that recipients, in particular, unemployed, young, African-American males were more proactive and engaged in the employment training workshops within workforce development programs. Public workforce employment managers assisted recipients during the early stages of the transition process and encouraged creativity while greater autonomy was gained. Participants in the study expressed the view that recipients care more about developing confidence and independence during the transition into the workforce, as opposed to simply securing employment.

All of the participants stressed the view that the policies and practices that guided the process were to some extent outdated and antiquated. These participants expressed a desire to see changes in policies and programs that would encourage the use of new technological advances in the job markets. In conclusion public workforce development professionals and recipients, in particular, young African-American males appeared destined to continue collaborating define a more effective pathway to employment. This qualitative case study has the potential to aid public workforce development professionals in assisting young, African-American males during the transition into the workforce. This case study identified strategies and practices that could improve the employment training

experience for both public workforce program managers and recipients and with further enhancement and reallocation of resources could significantly improve the transition into the work process.



## References

- Bowman, P. J. (1991). Joblessness. In J. S. Jackson (Ed.), *Life in Black America*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational outlook handbook, 2015-17. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/ooh-faq.htm>
- Burjek, A., Dixon, L., Fennessey, G. A., & Gale, S.F. (2017). The new employer-Employer social contract. Talent Economy. Retrieved from <http://talenteconomy.io/2017/05/08/employer-employee-social-contract-2>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a
- Brief, A. P., & Nord, W. R. (1990). Work and meaning: Definitions and interpretations. In A.P. Brief and W.R. Nord (Eds.). *The meaning of occupational work* (pp.1-19). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Carla Saporta and Jordan Medina. (2014). Pathways out of poverty: Boys and men of color and jobs in the health sector. Oakland, CA: Greenlining Institute. Retrieved from <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/pathways-out-of-poverty.pdf>
- Cherry, R, (2016). Race and opportunity: National affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/details/race-and-opportunity>
- Cherry, R., & Chun, W. (2015). Child maltreatment and male unemployment. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 66(2016),117-122.doi:10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.05008
- Colley, R., & Baker, B.. (2013). *Poverty and education: Finding the way forward*. The ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education.

- Cortazzi, M. (2001). Narrative analysis in ethnography. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffee, J. L. Delmont, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 384-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crowder, K., Tolnay, S., & Adelman, R. M. (2001). Inter-metropolitan migration and local improvement for African American males, 1970-1990. *Social Science Research*, 30, 449-472. <https://doi.org/10.1806/ssre.2001.0706>
- Darity, W.A. (2005). African, Europe, and the origins of uneven development: The role of slavery. In C. Conrad, J. Whitehead, P. Mason, & J. Steward (eds.). *African Americans in the U.S. economy* (pp. 14-19). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) (2000). *The handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Ltd.
- Desilver, Drew. (2013). Black Unemployment Rate is consistently twice that of Whites. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Dryzek, J. (1990) The ambitions of policy design. *Policy Studies Review*, 7(4), 705-765. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1988.1600890.x>
- Edelman, M. (1964) *The symbolic uses of politics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois.
- Edelman, P., Holzer, H. J, & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Edin, Kathryn. (2014). "What about the fathers?" The Shriver Report (Jan.12). Retrieved from <http://shriverreport.org/what-about-the-fathers-kathryn.edu/>
- Ely, M. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. New York, NY: Palmer Press.

- Gordon, E.T., Gordon, E. W., & Nembhard, J. G. (1994). Social science literature concerning African American men. *Journal of Negro Education*, 63(4), 508-531.  
Doi:10.2307/2917292
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (1st ed., pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Hamilton, D., Algernon, A., & Darity Jr., W. (2011). *Whiter jobs, higher wages: Occupational segregation and the lower wages of Black men*. Washington, DC: Economy Policy Institute.
- Harrison, L. E. (1992). *Who prospers? How cultural values shape economic and political success*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Heinrich, C. J. (2016). 'Workforce Development in the United States: Changing Public and Private Roles and Program Effectiveness.' Prepared for the book: *Labor Activation in a Time of High Unemployment Encouraging Work while Preserving the Social Safety-Net*, Douglas Besharov and Douglas Call (eds.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Heinrich, C. J., Mueser, P., Troske, K. R., Jeon, K.-S., & Kahvecioglu, D. C. (2013). "Do Public Employment and Training Programs Work? *IZA Journal of Labor Economics*, 2(1), 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-8997-2-6>
- Holzer, H. (2009). Workforce development programs as an anti-poverty strategy: What do we know? What should we do? In Cancian, M. & Danziger, S., eds., *Changing poverty, changing policies*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 301-329 (p. 28).
- Holzer, H. & Offner, P. (2004). The puzzle of black unemployment. *The Public Interest*, 74-84.

- Ingram, Helen, and Anne L. Schneider (1990). "Improving Implementation through Framing Smarter Statutes." *Journal of Public Policy* 10 (1) 66-87. 2005. "How Public Policy Socially Constructs Deservedness" In Anne Schneider and Helen Ingrams, eds., *Deserving and Entitled: Social Construction and Public Policy*.pp.1-34. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Jones, J., Schmitt, J., & Wilson, V. (2018). Fifty years after the Kerner Commission: African Americans are better off in many ways but are still disadvantaged by racial inequality, Economic Policy Institute
- Josselson, R. & Lieblich, A. (2001). Narrative research and humanism. In K. J. Schneider, J. Bugental, & J. R. Pierson (Eds.) *Handbook of humanistic psychology. Leading edges, in theory, research, and practice*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage
- Kruk, E.(2013, April 25). The impact of parental alienation on children- Psychology today Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/co-parenting-after-divorce/201304/the-impact-parental-alienation-children>
- Kuehn, Daniel (2013). *The Labor Market Performance of Young Black Men in the Great Recession*, Urban Institute
- Lieberman, Akiva M. & Jocelyn Fontaine. 2015, *Reducing Harms to Boys and Young Men of Color from Criminal Justice System Involvement*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute
- Lincoln, T. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive inquiry. *Qualitative inquiry*, 1, 275-289
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Mason, P. L. (2005). Persistent racial discrimination in the labor market. In C. Conrad, J. Whitehead, P. Mason, & J. Steward (Eds.), *African*

- Americans in the U.S. economy (pp.141-150)*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
- McConnell, Shenna, Kenneth Fortson, Dana Rotz, Peter Schochet, Paul Burkander, Linda Rosenberg, Annalisa, D'Amico, and Ronald Mastro. "Do Job Seekers Benefit From Services Provided by the WIA Adult and Dislocated Workers Programs? Impacts at 15 Months" Washington, Mathematica Policy Research, May 2016. McKinney & Company, Education to employment: Designing a system that works, December 2016
- McKinney & Company, Digital America: A tale of the haves and have-mores, December 2015
- McKinney & Company, Jobs Lost, Job Gained: Workforce Transition in a Time of Automation, December 2017
- Mead, L. (1992). *The new politics of poverty: the working poor in America*. New York, NY: Free Press
- Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Mettler, Suzanne, and Eric Welch, 2004. "Civic Generation: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill on Political Involvement over the Life Course" *British Journal of Science* 34(3): 497-518
- Mishler, E. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87-123
- Moss, P., & Tilly, C. (1996). "Soft skills and race: An investigation of black men's employment problems. *Work and Occupation*, 23(3), 252-276
- Murray, C. (1984). *Losing Ground: American social policy, 1950-1980*. New York, NY: Basic Books

- Neckerman, K., & Kirschenman, J. (1991). Hiring strategies, racial bias and inner-city workers, *Social Problems*, 38(4), 433-447
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. & Moules, N.J. (2017) Thematic Analysis: Striving to meet the Trustworthiness Criteria, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13
- Pager, D. (2011). Comment: Young Disadvantaged Men. Reaction from the Perspective of Race: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 655(1), 13130. Doi: 10.1177/002716210039332
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Pierce, Jonathan J., Saba Siddiki, Michael D. Jones, Kristin Schumacher, Andrew Pattison, and Holly Peterson. 2014. "Social Construction and Policy Design: A Review of Past Applications." *Policy Studies Journal* 42(1): 1-29
- Pitts, Steven (2011). *Research Brief: Black Workers and the Public Sector*. Center for Labor Research and Education, University of California, Berkeley
- Quanne, James, William Julius Wilson, & Jackelyn, Hwang, 2015 "Black men and the struggle for work" *Education next*, 22-29
- Ratcliffe, C. (2015, September). Child poverty and adult success. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/65766/2000369-Child-Poverty-and-Adult-Success.pdf>
- Rubin, L. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Sabatier, Paul A. 1993. "Policy Change over a Decade or More." In Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, eds. *Policy Change and Learning*, pp.13-39. Boulder, CO Westview

- Press, ed. 1999. *Theories of the Policy Process*: Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Schneider, A.L., & Ingram, H.M. (1997). *Policy design for democracy*. University Press of Kansas
- Schwartz, A. & Leos-Urbel, j. (2014. June). Expanding summer employment opportunities for low-income youth.
- The Sentencing Project (2003). Hispanic prisoners in the United States. Retrieved from The Sentencing Project website:  
[http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publication/inc\\_hispanicprisoners.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publication/inc_hispanicprisoners.pdf)
- Selvaggi, S. (2016, June 15). New Jersey prisons have the highest rates of racial disparity in the U.S. report finds. Retrieved from <http://atlanticblackstar.com/2016/0615/new-jersey-prisons-have-the-highest-rates-of-racial-disparity-in-the-U-S-report-find>
- Sherman, Erik, "Hiring Bias Blacks and Latinos Face Hasn't Improved in 25 Years," Forbes, September 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eriksherman/2017/09/16/job-discrimination-against-blacks-and-Latinos-has-changed-little-or-none-in-25-years#364301b351e3>
- Sidney, Mara (2003). *Unfair Housing: How National Policy Shape Community Action*. Lawrence: University Press of Kanas. 2005. "Contested Images of Race and Place: The Politics of Housing Discrimination." In Anne L. Schneider and Helen M. Ingram, eds., *Deserving and Entitled: Social Construction of Public Policy*, pp.113- 138. Albany: SUNY Press. Simon, Herbert A. (1981). *The Sciences of Artificial*. Cambridge: MIT Press

- Skinner, C. (1995). Urban labor markets and young black men: A literature review, *Journal of Economic Issues*, 29(1), 47-65
- Smith, R., & Joe, T. (1994). *A World without work: Causes and consequences of black male joblessness* (No. 143). Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.
- Spaulding, S., Lerman R., Holzer, H., & Eyster L. (2015, February). Expanding economic opportunity for young men and boys of color through employment and training. Retrieved from Urban Institute website:  
<http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdf/2000097-expanding-economic-opportunity-for-young-men-and-boys-of-color-through-employment-and-training-1pdf>
- Soss, Joe. 1999. "Lessons of Welfare Policy Design, Political Learning, and Political Action" *American Political Science Review* 93(June):363-380
- Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication
- Stoll, M. A. (2002). Stopler (2015) The Black youth employment problem revisited. In C. Conrad, J. Whitehead, P. Mason, & J. Steward (Eds.), *African Americans in the U.S. Economy* (pp.294-305). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Stopler, H. (2016, December). Unpredictable: How Unpredictable Schedules Keep Low-Income New Yorkers from Getting Ahead, Community Service Society. Retrieved from <http://lghhttp:58547.newcesscdn.net/803f44a/images/nucss/images/uploads/pubs/scheduling121916finalweb.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor,(2016). Employment Training, Programs for Young Adults, Washington, DC
- Warren, C., & Tracy Karner (2005). *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Field Research, Interviews, and Analysis*, Los Angeles: Roxbury



- Weller, Christan, and Jaryn, Fields. (2011). *The Black and White Labor Gap in America: Why African Americans Struggle to Find Jobs and Remain Employed Compared to Whites*, Center for American Progress.
- Western, B. (2007). Mass imprisonment and economic inequality. *Social Research*, 74(2), 509-532
- Whitehead, J. (2005). Racial economic inequality and discrimination: Conservative and liberal paradigms revisited. In C. Conrad, J. Whitehead, P. Mason, & J. Steward (Eds.), *African Americans in the U.S. economy (pp.83-94)*, New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Wilson, Valerie. (2015). *Black Unemployment is Significantly Higher than White Unemployment regardless of Educational Attainment*. Economic Policy Institute  
 Wilson, Valerie, and William Rodgers (2016). *Black-White Wage Gaps Expand with Rising Wage Inequality*. Economic Policy Institute
- Wilson, W. J. (1987), *the truly disadvantaged*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Wilson, W. J. (2003). Race, class, and urban poverty: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26(6), 1096-1117
- Workforce Services to Job Seekers: 15- Month Finding on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research  
 Workforce Investment Act: Local Areas Face Challenges Helping Employers Fill Some Types of Skilled Jobs: GOA-14-19, Washington, DC: Dec. 2, 2015

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-stop System Joint Provisions, 81 Fed. Reg. 55791 (Aug. 19, 2016).

Yancy, G. (2004). Historical varieties of African American labor: Sites of agency and resistance. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 28(2), 337-353

Yin, R.K. (1993). *Application of case study research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

## Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my doctoral study about how public workforce employment program professionals interact with participants who face significant barriers to entering the job market. Particularly, the interactions that take place before and during the transition into the job market for young, unemployed, African American males as it concerns workforce policies and practices that provide the pathway to employment. I will ask you some questions for about an hour, and I would very much like to audiotape the interview. I will transcribe the tape after the interview, and you are welcome to review or receive a copy of the transcript. We can stop the interview at any time if you have a concern or question.

Opening Prompt: How long have you been involved in public workforce employment-based training? How long have you been employed at Maximus Workforce Harlem's location?

The following interview questions will guide the initial interview and any possible follow-up interviews. Interview Questions:

1. What impact has the workforce employment policies and practices had on changing social constructions affecting young, unemployed, African American males involved in the transition to work process?
2. What aspects of current employment-based workforce policies and practices tend to be more aligned to assist young, African American males with the transition to work process?

3. What are your perceptions regarding implementing different strategies to change the impact of social constructs relevant to young, African American males involved in the transition to work process?
4. What are your perceptions of the strategies and practices utilized by young, African American males to prepare for the transition into the job market?
5. What are your perceptions of current programs and policies designed to address negative social constructions impacting young, African American males involved in the transition to work process?
6. What is in your opinion is the least effective measure being implemented to assist young, African American males involved in the transition to work process?
7. What is in your opinion the most effective about strategies or interventions currently being implemented to assist young, African American males with the transition to work process?
8. What factors create significant barriers to employment for young, African American males as a result of negative social constructions?
9. What is your perception of the balance of benefits and burdens affecting young, African American males involved in the public workforce employment process?
10. What are your perceptions about employment opportunities created as a result of new technology?

## Appendix B: The Workforce Agency Employment Training Organizer

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Set Clock					
Arrive Early					
Ask Question					
Think Positive					
Check Guidance					
Take Lunch					
Re-Check Duties					
Think Teamwork					
Re-Check					

## Appendix C: Emergent Themes

### Theme 1: Perceived Barriers and Stereotypes

- Requesting a more mature hire
- An offer of part-time hours
- An offer of off-hour schedule
- An offer of minimum wage work
- Request for business attire

### Theme 2: Strategies for Securing Employment

- Prepare for day one
- Get the interview
- Accept any shift
- Request career coaching

### Theme 3: Managing Change and New Technology

- Request time in the lab
- Use the internet/ job search
- Request to work remote
- Use of library or internet café
- Learning to job search

### Theme 4: Perceptions of Benefits and Burdens

- Decide between court or job interview
- How to balance child support
- Setting up a flex schedule
- Extending the vouchers
- Avoid the negative labels

### Theme 5: Organizational Politics

- Avoid FTC ( failure to comply)
- Maintain the program
- Follow the rules
- Play the game
- Maintain the benefits
- Put the time in