2021

Reentry Challenges of Formerly Incarcerated African American Adult Men in Louisiana

Marquita Higgins
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Marquita D. Higgins

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. Tony Gaskew, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Melanye Smith, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Dianne Williams, University Reviewer,
Criminal Justice Faculty

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

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Reentry Challenges of Formerly Incarcerated African American Adult Men in Louisiana

by

Marquita D. Higgins

MA, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 2012

BS, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

Although African Americans make up most of the habitual offender population in Louisiana state prisons, there is a dearth of information about the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana and how they perceive those challenges to impact their reentry into the community after imprisonment. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand how formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana perceive their challenges when they transition back into their communities and how they make sense of those challenges in relation to recidivism. The theoretical framework for the study was critical race theory. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult men from southern Louisiana. Analysis of the data show that the participants perceive race, stigma, and lack of support to exacerbate their reentry challenges. For RQ1, 3 major themes emerged: feelings of restricted opportunities (subthemes: stigma, employment, and housing), feelings of restricted opportunities because of race, and relationships. For RQ2, 4 major themes emerged from the study: community lacks opportunities, racial discrimination, community lacks improvement (subthemes: community does not support youth and people in the community are also struggling) and supporting reentry (subthemes: self-support and social support). Understanding and addressing the phenomenon under study can assist criminal justice officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders to generate policies, laws, and practices that address and meet the needs of formerly incarcerated African American men and communities of people of color.

Reentry Challenges of Formerly Incarcerated African American Adult Men in Louisiana

by

Marquita D. Higgins

MA, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 2012

BS, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

January 2021

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to all those who have experienced the struggle of life after incarceration, especially formerly incarcerated African American men who feel as if their first strike was being born a Black boy. I would also like to dedicate my study to the families affected by the incarceration and reentry challenges of their loved ones. I want to dedicate this study to my family who are a major part of this accomplishment. They have motivated me in so many ways. Thank you for listening to me go on and on about my topic, as I have even before this study. Finally, I want to dedicate my study to all researchers of any race who acknowledge a problem with life after incarceration and feel their purpose in the topic. We must continue to educate ourselves and do what we can to help those who are trying to help themselves but may be hindered because of their inability to shed their Black skin. Even after incarceration, they deserve the same respect and equality as those who have not experienced incarceration or incarceration as a Black man.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for being my guiding light throughout life and especially throughout my doctoral journey. Second, I would like to thank my family for their everlasting support. Also, I would like to thank my family for practicing the utmost patience with me. This journey has not been easy for me or them. They pushed me further when I felt like giving up (I quit 100 times in my mind). I am so appreciative of my friends who listened to me vent almost daily about my doctoral journey and provided me with so much encouragement. I would also like to thank my chairperson, Dr. Tony Gaskew, for his guidance and support throughout my dissertation journey. I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Melanye Smith, for her support. They have been beyond amazing. Finally, but definitely not least, I would like to thank the men who participated in my study. They provided me with so much insight. Thank you for allowing me into your world. Best wishes to you all!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Study

While African Americans make up about 32% of the general population in

Louisiana (Louisiana Population, 2019), African American men make up 68.2% of the

incarcerated population (Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration

of Criminal Justice [LCLE], 2019, p. 17). Formerly incarcerated African American men

are a vulnerable population who face discrimination daily because of their criminal and

incarceration history combined with their race (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). There is a

critical need for all formerly incarcerated individuals to successfully reintegrate into

society after their release from prison (Turney, Lee, & Comfort, 2013) so they may

become law-abiding citizens who contribute to their communities.

When successfully reintegrated, formerly incarcerated individuals may be less

likely to recidivate, which may decrease the incarceration rate for African American men.

African American men are incarcerated disproportionately to their Caucasian

counterparts (Harris & Keller, 2005; Tyler & Brockman, 2017), and African American

men are disproportionately homeless, economically challenged, and undereducated (Tyler

& Brockman, 2017). Moreover, an individual's incarceration history can lead to difficulty

in obtaining employment, which may lead to homelessness and financial challenges.

Also, lack of education among this population may contribute to difficulty in obtaining

employment **(**Lockwood, Nally, & Ho, 2016). These stigmatizing conditions outside the

criminal justice system coupled with a criminal and incarceration history and race, are

preventing formerly incarcerated African American men from successful reintegrating

back into their communities (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). Unfortunately, legally created

barriers continue to promote racism and contribute to the prevention of advancement for African American families (Harris & Keller, 2005). Formerly incarcerated African American men are less likely to obtain employment than their Caucasian counterparts. Incarceration history exacerbates the unlikelihood of formerly incarcerated African American men obtaining absolute freedom.

The reentry challenges that formerly incarcerated African American men face after imprisonment may result in recidivism. Therefore, policymakers must make recommendations that consider race and racism as key factors that impact the ability of formerly incarcerated African American men to reenter society. Policymakers, criminal justice professionals, and other stakeholders can use results of this study to highlight the need to dismantle a criminal justice system that does not serve and protect everyone equally. Instead, this system exacerbates racism through laws, policies, and ideologies that disproportionately affect African Americans. In Chapter 1, I include a synopsis of the background of the study topic, problem statement, purpose of the study, and the significance of the study. In this chapter, I briefly discuss the theoretical framework, methodology, and assumptions. I also discuss the limitations and challenges of the study.

Background

Formerly incarcerated African American men are a vulnerable population, as they may be discriminated against because of their race and criminal history (Turney et al., 2013). Although the United States makes up 5% of the world's population, it holds 25% of the world's incarcerated population (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). Additionally, after nearly 20 years of having the highest incarceration rate, Louisiana is now second to Oklahoma (Gelba & Compa, 2018). By the end of 2016, Louisiana's incarceration rate

was 712 per 100,000 residents, and Oklahoma's rate was 719 per 100,000 residents; the

nation's rate was 450 per 100,000 residents. African Americans are imprisoned

disproportionately to their Caucasian peers (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). Furthermore,

African American men make up most of the incarcerated population (LCLE, 2019).

African American men are also disproportionately homeless, undereducated, and

economically challenged (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). Bell (1990) argued that racism is

deeply embedded in criminal justice policies as well as U.S. laws, which were created to

maintain White privilege in America.

Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) demonstrated how White

supremacy was constructed and maintained in the United States against African

Americans and other people of color. The authors referred to Derrick Bell's critical race

theory (CRT) movement in efforts to explain how racial power is represented in the

United States. Crutchfield and Weeks (2015) discussed the overrepresentation of African

Americans in U.S. jails and prisons and the collateral damages that formerly incarcerated

individuals suffer after their release from incarceration. Decker, Ortiz, Spohn, and

Hedberg (2015) found a strong effect on incarceration history for African Americans and

unemployment.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) used CRT to discuss the works of legal scholars

and activists to promote community empowerment to seek strategies to combat various

forms of racism. Grant (2018) studied the experiences of formerly incarcerated African

American men in the northeastern United States. Grant explored the effect that the

Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 had on formerly incarcerated

African Americans. Hagstrom (2017) reported that at least 43% of the individuals

released from prison would return within 5 years. It is essential for scholars, criminal justice officials, and practitioners, as well as policymakers, to collaborate to dismantle the system of racial injustice and address the persistent social destruction of racial minorities. One method for this collaboration is establishing criminal justice policies and practices that promote the advancement of African Americans. Doing so is fundamental to the life course of African Americans because criminal justice policies and practices negatively impact many institutions that contribute to Caucasian subordination over African Americans.

Problem Statement

Louisiana had the highest incarceration rate in the world for nearly 20 years until recently. Now, Louisiana has the second-highest incarceration rate after Oklahoma (Gelb & Compa, 2018). In 2018, Louisiana's incarceration rate was 712 per 100,000 (Gelb & Compa, 2018, para. 2), which is greater than the incarceration rates of Russia, China, and Iran combined (Graybill, 2018). Even more problematic is the evidence of racial disparities in Louisiana's incarcerated population. Although African Americans make up about 32% of the general population in Louisiana (Louisiana Population, 2019), African American adults (men and women) make up nearly 67% of its total incarcerated population (LCLE, 2019, p. 11). African Americans make up 78.7% of the total habitual offender population (LCLE, 2019, p. 74). Of the total of African American adults (men and women) incarcerated in Louisiana, African American men make up 68.2% of the incarcerated population compared to Caucasian (31%) and other races (.05%; LCLE, 2019, p. 17). According to Nellis (2016), "One in twenty African American adult males in Louisiana are incarcerated" (p. 5). The updated 2018 status report showed that 43.7%

of the individuals released from incarceration in 2012 were rearrested and reincarcerated during the fifth year after their release date (LCLE, 2019, pp. 83–84). However, LCLE does not provide a breakdown of information for recidivism rates for race alone or race by gender, as Louisiana does not keep track of such information. The Bureau of Justice (2018) defined *recidivism* as when a person is released from incarceration and is rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated for either the same crime or a different crime. According to Mitchell, Cochran, Mears, and Bales (2017), the number of researchers who assessed incarceration and recidivism is relatively substantial (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2015).

Although there is a myriad of literature and sources concerning reentry, there is a dearth of information on the lived experiences and reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana and how they perceive the challenges they face when returning to their communities. Understanding the perceived challenges is critical to reducing the incarceration rate and the recidivism rate of African American men in Louisiana. Because African Americans and African American men make up most of the total population, it is important to understand the reentry challenges that lead to African American men recidivating. Also, it is important to review an issue that, according to existing research, is beyond their control and its possible connection to reentry—their race. Finding humanistic avenues for reducing the social constructs that lead to the rearrest and reincarceration of Black male adults in Louisiana is central to building a community on the aboriginal tenets of truth, justice, and reciprocity. This study aimed to fill the gap in this scholarship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand the perspectives of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana on the challenges they face when transitioning back into their communities and their perceptions of how reentry challenges may impact recidivism. This study consisted of semistructured interviews, which involved 10 participants who had been incarcerated in a Louisiana state prison. Researchers use qualitative research methods to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon as it is perceived by the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers may use a phenomenological research study to identify the phenomenon under study and how it is perceived by the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative phenomenological research approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to obtain in-depth, thick descriptions for a better understanding of the challenges and barriers the participants faced after their release from incarceration and the way the participants perceived those challenges.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study aimed to answer the following central research questions:

RQ1: What are some of the challenges formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana face during their reintegration back into their community?

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated African American men perceive the likelihood of their reentry challenges resulting in recidivism?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on CRT. In 1994, scholars used CRT as an analytical framework for inequality in education (Caldwell, 1996). Legal

scholars have used CRT to explain crime and delinquency (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

For this study, I employed CRT to examine how race and racism were represented in the

criminal justice system. CRT is applicable to reentry because it can help explain how

social injustice continued to marginalize disadvantaged communities of color further

while making it difficult for formerly incarcerated African Americans to reenter society

and receive the necessary tools to prevent them from recidivating. I also employed CRT

to examine social constructs and criminal justice practices that made matters worse for

African Americans. When I examined the connection between CRT and the reentry of

formerly incarcerated African American adult men back into society, I reflected on

Racial Reflections, where renowned scholar and creator of CRT Derrick Bell (1990)

stated, "New definitions and new insights, especially those grounded in the lived

experiences of people of color, are essential to the project of rethinking civil rights issues

and objectives" (p. 1042). Bell (1990) argued that racism could be found on every level

of the criminal justice system. I used the CRT framework to better understand the

connection between the reentry of formerly incarcerated African American men and

racial disparities that exacerbate the challenges and barriers they faced after being

released from incarceration. Because racism exists across various institutions that

contribute to the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men, CRT

was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it challenges the racial

power that exists across institutions.

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative phenomenological research study that

consisted of in-depth, semistructured interviews conducted online using Skype and Zoom

with 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult male participants who were

rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated after being released from a Louisiana

correctional institution. Conducting a phenomenological research study can allow a

researcher to obtain thick descriptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this research study, I

conducted individual interviews to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions that provided the

study with lived experiences that could not be obtained using numerical data. Analyzing

the data using patterns, categories, and themes enabled me to reach a better understanding

of the recidivism factors that were common among the sample to allow for a greater

focus on those factors. When conducting in-depth interviews, I retrieved the study's data

needed to be transferable, credible, dependable, and confirmable.

Definitions

African American: Black American; Americans of Black African descent

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

Collateral consequences: Disqualifications and sanctions that can burden

individuals during their reentry into society post incarceration (Berson, 2013).

Incarceration: Confinement in jail or prison; the act of imprisonment (Merriam-

Webster's Dictionary, n.d.).

Mass incarceration: Refers to the extreme imprisonment rate that is concentrated

particularly on African American men who typically reside in disadvantaged

communities (Wildeman & Wang, 2017).

Prison: State or federal correctional facility that confines convicted felons for

typically longer than a 1-year sentence (National Institute of Justice, n.d.-a).

Racial disparity: When referring to the criminal justice system, racial disparity refers to the proportion of the racial/ethnic population in the system that is greater than the population number outside the system; the proportion of a racial/ethnic group in the criminal justice system is significantly greater than other racial/ethnic groups (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2017).

Racism: The belief that race is key to human traits and capacities, and one race is superior to another (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

Reentry: Refers to the transition of offenders from prison to community (Bureau of Justice, n.d.; Miller, 2014).

Recidivism: When a person is released from incarceration and is rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated for either the same crime or a different crime (Bureau of Justice, 2018; National Institute of Justice, n.d.-b).

Possible Types and Sources of Data

Data for this study were collected from in-depth, semistructured interviews conducted online using Skype and Zoom with 10 African American adult male participants who had rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated in a Louisiana correctional institution. I had planned to recruit participants in person, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to recruit participants via Facebook. I employed a purposive sampling technique that allowed me to recruit participants who met the criteria for formerly incarcerated African American adult men to allow the study to answer the research questions effectively. I applied the snowballing technique, a form of purposive sampling, to reach my goal for the number of participants by asking some participants to direct me to other potential participants who met the participant criteria. For this study, I

used NVivo coding software to organize the patterns, themes, and categories of the participants' descriptions. For triangulation, I used data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Louisiana Statistical Analysis Center. I also used prior research articles about the current topic.

Assumptions

I had several assumptions about this study. The primary assumption in this study was that all participants would be honest in their efforts to share their lived experiences. Furthermore, I assumed they would be reluctant to participate in the study because of the lack of trust. Potential participants may have viewed a researcher with a criminal justice background similar to how they view criminal justice officials. Another assumption in this study was that all formerly incarcerated African American men experience reentry challenges and share similar experiences. I also assumed that all formerly incarcerated African American men believe that racism exacerbates reentry challenges after imprisonment. An individual's experience can vary according to their social support, location, or social and economic status before incarceration. Lastly, an assumption in this study was that the phenomenological method was the most appropriate qualitative research method to obtain information that would thoroughly answer the research questions for the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was a purposeful criterion-based sample of formerly incarcerated African American adult men because adult men are more likely to experience some reentry challenges that affect their families and communities. For this study, I did not include formerly incarcerated women of any race. I did not include the

perceptions of formerly incarcerated men of other racial groups. Another delimitation of the study was the geographical area. This study may or may not be applied to a similar population who resides in areas where there are more opportunities available for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the data collection method used in this qualitative research study. This study included the use of semistructured interviews via online video conferencing through Skype and Zoom, to which participants may or may not have provided honest responses. Also, qualitative research studies are time-consuming. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes; therefore, some participants may not have provided in-depth responses to all questions if they felt like the interview was too long. It was challenging to recruit participants because individuals incarcerated in state correctional institutions in Louisiana may currently reside in the most southern parts of Louisiana or in some other areas, which caused an inconvenience because of the distance from my location of residence. Also, I conducted the recruitment and interviews for the study during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was not safe to meet participants in person. Fortunately, all participants had access to Skype and Zoom, and they were aware of how to operate both social platforms. Another limitation was the criticality of building a rapport with the participants because the participants may lack trust in anyone who attempts to question them about their circumstances. To mitigate possible issues concerning researcher-participant trust, I ensured the participants that their information was confidential and that there would be no identifying information included in the study.

Also, to mitigate some issues regarding the interview duration, I listened carefully as some responses answered multiple interview questions.

Significance

Formerly incarcerated individuals experience collateral damages including lack of access to education funding, public housing assistance, voting rights, employment, and disconnected family ties (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015). The collateral effects not only affect the formerly incarcerated individual but the community as well. Formerly incarcerated individuals often return as felons to the communities where they were before imprisonment. The community may view them as criminals. They may feel disconnected from the law-abiding citizens of the community. When formerly incarcerated individuals reenter society, it is important that they receive support from family. The family may be willing to help them with their job search; however, broken family ties between the individuals and their families can diminish their employment chances. Therefore, disadvantaged communities of African Americans are further marginalized as they suffer socially and economically. This study does not insinuate that all formerly incarcerated African American men do not successfully reintegrate back into their communities after imprisonment, but rather the goal of this study was to shed light on the reentry challenges this population faces and how they perceive those challenges. Researchers should study why formerly incarcerated African American adult men in Louisiana believe Louisiana's recidivism rate is high because understanding the phenomenon and how it affects African American communities is essential for advancement in minority communities. Risk factors for African American adult male recidivism can lead policymakers, criminal justice agencies, and other stakeholders toward mitigating risk factors, improving

police/community interaction, and making necessary policy revisions to improve the social and economic aspects of minority communities.

Summary

While being released from incarceration may be an anticipated event, formerly incarcerated African American men face issues beyond the walls of imprisonment. The criminal justice system has played a major role in the reentry challenges for formerly incarcerated African American men through socially constructed barriers and challenges. Reentry challenges, such as employment, housing, family, and community-related concerns are legally constructed challenges that exist to promote African Americans' subordination. African American men are removed from their communities, which places a strain on African American families. When African American men are released from prison, they are released back into disadvantaged communities with little to no resources (Lockwood et al., 2015; Lockwood et al., 2016). Moreover, when they are released, they are even more marginalized than before (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Strickland, 2016), which can lead to recidivism. In Chapter 2, I discuss relevant literature pertaining to the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men. Although I mention some reentry challenges in Chapter 2, the topic of reentry challenges is expansive in the literature. For this study, I gathered data through participants' responses of detailed, thick descriptions of the challenges formerly incarcerated African American men face.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Release from incarceration can be a stressful time for those who are released. Reentry into the community after prison can be stressful for a variety of reasons, including unemployment and disrupted social ties (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Decker et. al, 2015; Pettus-Davis et al., 2017). Unfortunately, these issues are worse for formerly incarcerated African American men because this population can be even more marginalized upon reentry into the communities they came from, which are often disadvantaged (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Strickland, 2016). While criminal justice practitioners and involved stakeholders continue to utilize reentry practices as a means of preparation for incarcerated individuals' return to society, it is not enough for those facing reentry challenges in combination with racial issues (Williams, Wilson, & Bergeson, 2019). The barriers and challenges formerly incarcerated African American men face are heightened when combined with their race (Norris & Billings, 2017). Although reentry practices may seem like a solution to help individuals and prevent recidivism, lawmakers, criminal justice practitioners, and involved program managers must consider the impact of race for those encumbered by the daily challenges of reintegrating into society post incarceration.

While reentry practices seem to work for some formerly incarcerated people, they cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution for reintegrating this population back into society. Formerly incarcerated African American men are usually not released into environmental circumstances that aid their reentry process (Lockwood et. al, 2016; Strickland, 2016). Therefore, it may be difficult for them to utilize what they have learned from reentry

programs when facing the realities in their communities. Some of them may have been

unemployed or had very low income before incarceration (Strickland, 2016; Zaw,

Hamilton, & Darity, 2016), which may have been their reason for committing the crime

that led to incarceration. Furthermore, when they are released from incarceration,

unemployment is likely to continue to be an issue for them (Lockwood et al., 2016).

Formerly incarcerated African American men are released back into neighborhoods that

can be described as poverty-stricken and high-crime areas where the lack of

unemployment can lead to other issues such as homelessness and disrupted relationships

with family and the community (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Egleton, Banigo, McLeod,

& Vakalahi, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). Moreover, their difficulty obtaining and

maintaining gainful employment as well as access to viable resources may lead to

recidivism, which will exacerbate their issues (Brown, 2017; Williams et al., 2019). The

reentry challenges they experience may lead to recidivism (Dyer, 2005), which

contributes to the issue of the mass incarceration of African American men in Louisiana.

     While African Americans make up 32% of the population in Louisiana, African

American men make up 68% of the incarcerated population in the state (LCLE, 2019, p.

17; Louisiana Population, 2019). Although the recidivism rate of Louisiana, and the

United States overall, may fluctuate, recidivism continues to be a permanent issue for

African American men. Formerly incarcerated individuals recidivate for many reasons,

but African Americans, especially African American men, face challenges and barriers

that make their reentry process more difficult than any other race (Norris &

Billings,2017). These challenges and barriers lead to a higher recidivism rate among the

formerly incarcerated African American male population (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015).

Despite the advances in research about reentry, research scholars, criminal justice

practitioners, and lawmakers should focus on how the reentry challenges for formerly

incarcerated African American men serve as a potential etiology for recidivism. While

researchers in extant studies may have failed to isolate race as a barrier against successful

reentry, race is a key factor in reentry challenges for formerly incarcerated African

American men. In Chapter 2, I review the barriers and challenges that formerly

incarcerated African American men face after being released from prison. I review the

role that barriers and challenges play in the reentry process and recidivism for African

American men and the importance of understanding the perspectives of formerly

incarcerated African American men in Louisiana on the reentry challenges they have

faced transitioning back into their communities after a period of imprisonment. In

Chapter 2, I include the topic of reentry challenges for formerly incarcerated African

American men. In this chapter, I present a description of the theoretical foundation and its

relation to reentry challenges and recidivism among the formerly incarcerated African

American male population. Also in this chapter, I present a synopsis of relevant literature

in support of the relevance of this research study. I provide an overview of a scholarly

discussion about the barriers and challenges that formerly incarcerated African American

men face post-release and how the challenges relate to recidivism.

Literature Search Strategy

I used various resources to access literature sources that were relevant to this

research study, such as the Walden University Library, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar,

ProQuest Central, Criminal Justice Database, SAGE Online Journals, Thoreau Multi-

Database, University of Colombia, and JSTOR. During the literature search, I searched

for topic-related sources published within the last 5 years. However, I incorporated some sources published more than five years ago because they remain relevant. There are few research journal articles about reentry and recidivism for Louisiana. Therefore, for this current study, I applied research journal articles about other states that pertain to my study and information from government websites. Because Louisiana held the title of having the highest incarceration rate for some time, the lack of research studies was surprising, especially the lack of qualitative studies conducted in Louisiana. Therefore, I incorporated statistics from government sites in lieu of research results regarding reentry in Louisiana specifically. In this chapter, I discuss emerging perspectives in the literature pertaining to this study. To obtain the results of my literature search, I used the following keywords both in isolation and in combination: *African American men, ex-offenders, incarceration, qualitative study, reentry, Black men, recidivism, Louisiana, criminal justice system, critical race theory, employment, housing, family support,* and *education.*

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is CRT, which challenges race and racial power that exists across various institutions and policies including the educational system, immigration policies, and the criminal justice system. CRT provides an in-depth view of policy decision making and offers theoretical explanations for the emergence of historical events, laws, policies, and practices that promote racism. To rectify issues that rose to prominence during the civil rights era, CRT is used to reexamine how race and racism have been normalized in society among African Americans and people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, 2017). Johnson-Ahorlu (2017) noted that one of the key points of CRT is that racism is socially constructed, and CRT's

guidelines challenge scholars to employ social science research to dismantle racism by understanding how racism functions in society across various institutions.

Policymakers and criminal justice officials have used the criminal justice system to marginalize African Americans, causing further oppression (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). Evidence of racism can be found across institutions that employ economic and social barriers to marginalize formerly incarcerated African American men. When one institution failed to regulate the African American population, the United States constructed another institution to control the population (Wacquant, 2000), and shifts in the criminal justice system represent those changes. These changes transcended the eras of slavery, the Reconstruction Era, Jim Crow Laws, and Black Belts (redlining, modern-day ghettos; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). One institution that hinders the economic and social advancement of African Americans is the criminal justice system. Racism is a socially constructed concept that can be found within various levels of the criminal justice system, such as law enforcement, courts, and corrections (Bell, 1990; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). When considering CRT while reviewing criminal justice policies and practices, criminal justice laws and policies clearly do not reflect the needs of the formerly incarcerated African American population (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). Criminal justice policies and practices were established to promote the agenda of White supremacy while benefitting an elite group of middle-class and upper-class Caucasians (Bell, 1992).

The agenda of White supremacy is to prevent the advancement of racial minorities by continuing oppression through laws, policies, and practices that negatively impact racial minorities (Bell, 1992; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). For example, Louisiana was previously a state that prohibited felons from voting. On March 1, 2019, over 30,000

convicted felons became eligible voters (Watkins, 2019), and for some, it was their first time. The previous law was detrimental to the African American community because they represented a disproportionate number of felons; African Americans, especially African American men, are sentenced at a higher rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Rosenberg, Groves, & Blankenship, 2017). Preventing formerly incarcerated African Americans from voting may have prevented the election of candidates in favor of policies and practices that support the advancement of African Americans.

Another challenge that prevents the advancement of African Americans is that when they are released from incarceration, they struggle to obtain employment because of the stigma connected to their prior incarceration (Flake, 2015; Williams et al., 2019); this lack of employment contributes to the lack of economic security for African Americans. Therefore, African Americans find it difficult to afford housing, especially in communities above the poverty line; in addition to being unemployed, they become homeless (Egleton et al., 2016). When the Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited housing discrimination based on race, the War on Crime, War on Drugs, and mass incarceration were developed as a tool to further marginalize African Americans (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019).

To make matters worse, if an individual was incarcerated on a drug charge, they were disqualified from obtaining Section 8 housing and had difficulty obtaining any public housing. The relationship between the criminal justice system and the promotion of White supremacy mimics the oppression of African Americans post-Civil War. When African American slaves were freed, they had nowhere to go and no resources to support their survival, which created their need for their oppressors. These systems promoted

White supremacy and its suppression of racial minorities; thus, the criminal justice

system can be viewed as a partner with such systems and institutions as it has preserved

this systematic support of White supremacy (Bell, 1990, 1992).

White supremacy has thrived in society for many eras. Research has consistently

shown the U.S. justice system is anything but just; it was created from laws, policies, and

practices that support racial inequality through the mass incarceration of African

Americans (Bell, 1992; Norris & Billings, 2017). Researchers have contested that

criminal justice agencies use reentry as a pretense for reintegrating incarcerated/formerly

incarcerated individuals back into society (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019; Williams et al., 2019).

Researchers have argued that reentry is an extension of a racist criminal justice system

that uses law enforcement, courts, and other criminal justice officials to continue the

oppression of the most marginalized population, African Americans—especially formerly

incarcerated African Americans (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019).

CRT challenges policies and practices that lead to the mass incarceration of

African Americans and reentry practices that do little to decrease the likelihood of

recidivism for formerly incarcerated African American men; CRT exposes racist

ideologies that have existed for centuries (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). One tenet of CRT is

that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, 2017). The theory does not imply

that racism is acceptable, but that African Americans and all other people of color

experience some form of racism daily. Bell (1992) argued that racism has become normal

to such an extent that it is not acknowledged and, therefore, cannot be addressed. Racism

is common across various institutions and highly prevalent throughout the criminal

justice system. Although racism is addressed daily, it is not common for lawmakers to

provide a thorough discussion on this issue and what they can do to eradicate this issue (Bell, 1990, 1992). Another tenet of CRT is the often-proposed policies and strategies that maintain the self-interests of White people rather than helping Black people (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). An example that legal scholars use is Bell's explanation of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Bell believed the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was not an attempt to help Blacks but merely an attempt to maintain the interest of the White elites without hurting middle-class White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, 2017). *Brown v. Board of Education* did little to aid Black people in the way Blacks hoped it would, as they have not been and are not treated equally.

Another example is the War on Drugs. While the War on Drugs is to ostensibly rid society of the harm of drugs, this practice disproportionately affects African Americans and contributes greatly to mass incarceration (Garland, 2018; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019), although more Caucasian Americans have reported drug use than African Americans (Rosenberg et al., 2017). This example exemplified the racial disparities that existed across the criminal justice system. Critical race theory was appropriately applied to this study to examine race across the various legally created barriers and challenges that formerly incarcerated African Americans face. Also, CRT was paramount to understanding how the individuals perceive those challenges and its role in their reentry process. Although racial inequality is found across various government entities, this study focused on the criminal justice system to maintain the focus on reentry and recidivism for formerly incarcerated African American men.

Reviewed Literature

Reentry Challenges

Reentry is one's process of reentering or returning to someplace. While departing from incarceration can be a dream come true for some individuals, reentering into society can be difficult for those returning to impoverished communities. For some incarcerated African American men, incarceration can be an easier journey than their reentry back into society. Formerly incarcerated African American men face seemingly unsurmountable challenges when returning to their communities (Lockwood et al., 2016). Lockwood et al. contend that the challenges that formerly incarcerated African Americans face after their release from incarceration may lead to the disproportionate incarceration of African American men through recidivism. During incarceration, those incarcerated have access to meals, housing, and medical assistance without having to worry if they can afford it. Their successful reentry back into the community depends on many different factors and some factors combined; these factors include employment, housing, and family (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). Williams et al., (2019) utilized critical ethnography and semi-structured interviews to study participants who were oppressed socially, economically, and politically. Using a critical lens for their study, Wilson et al. found that stigma, housing, employment, masculinity, and family support were factors that had a negative impact on formerly incarcerated African American men's reintegration into society.

Sustainable employment is an essential factor in successfully reintegrating back into society (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Power & Nolan, 2017). It is often difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain employment (Williams et al., 2019).

Employment is critical for formerly incarcerated individuals so that they may afford

housing as well as provide for themselves and their families; however, seeking

employment can be an arduous task for formerly incarcerated individuals, even more so

for formerly incarcerated African American men. Therefore, without employment,

formerly incarcerated African American men often experience poverty after their release

just as they did prior to their incarceration (Williams et al., 2019). They may experience

poverty to a greater degree through a lack of post-release employment, which can lead to

reincarceration (Williams et al., 2019). Lockwood et al., (2016) and Berg and Huebner

(2011) argued that employment is a major predictor for recidivism while maintaining that

race alone was not a factor. In an earlier study, Lockwood et. al., (2015) contended that

formerly incarcerated African Americans had a higher recidivism rate than their

Caucasian counterparts. Alpers, Durose, and Markman (2018) also reported that the

recidivism rate for African Americans is greater than the recidivism rate for the

Caucasian population. Extant studies mentioned how lack of employment after being

released from incarceration may lead to more issues for formerly incarcerated African

American men (Lockwood et al., 2015; Lockwood et al., 2016). Lack of post-release

employment will eventually lead to homelessness and many risk factors that can lead to

recidivism (Williams et al., 2019). To prevent homelessness, formerly incarcerated

individuals often rely on social support from family, friends, and other members of their

community (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Pettus-Davis et al.; McNeely, 2018). Studies have

shown that family ties are critical to the reentry process for formerly incarcerated

individuals (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Strickland, 2016; Pettus-Davis et al., 2017).

Berg and Huebner (2011) concluded that social ties were critical to post-release

employment, which is an important mechanism for successful reentry. In sum, formerly incarcerated African American men would be more likely to face the collateral damages of incarceration to a greater degree than their Caucasian counterparts and at a greater risk of hindrance by such challenges during their reentry (Williams et al., 2019). The evidence of a racial disparity in every aspect of the criminal justice system (Decker et al., 2015), especially legally created reentry challenges, exists to ensure that the African American men who are released from incarceration will return only to benefit the agenda of White supremacy.

Considering Race in Reentry Practice

When combined with other challenges of reentry, race as a barrier for formerly incarcerated men is an issue that requires national attention, as well as a conversation among policymakers and practitioners. The issue of racial inequality in reentry does not begin and end with the criminal justice system, as the effects are felt across many institutions, policies, and practices (Bell, 1990). The effects of racial inequality in reentry policies and practices do not end with the formerly incarcerated individual, their household, or their community (Harris & Harding, 2019; Morenoff & Harding, 2014), but it damages the nation as well. Criminal justice policies and practices negatively impact African American families. African American families are destroyed by criminal justice policies and practices that lead to the disproportionate rate of incarceration for African American men (Strickland, 2016; Norris & Billings 2017). To make matters worse, the punishment or collateral damages continue throughout their reintegration. Often the collateral damages produce an ending result of recidivism, which in turn means a disproportionate number of African American men being incarcerated or the mass

incarceration of African American men (Norris & Billings, 2017; Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). While recidivating is not their desired outcome, it is usually a result of them struggling to overcome barriers and legally created challenges that may be latent or manifested consequences of criminal justice policies and practices regarding reentry and recidivism prevention. In a quantitative study, Reisig, Bales, Hay, and Wang (2007) found that racial inequality heightened personal level risk factors for formerly incarcerated African American men.

The racist ideology, known as White supremacy, exist to regulate African American men exist across various institutions (Bell, 1992). White supremacy may begin with promoting birth control to prevent the continued reproduction of African American boys for the fear that they will grow into men that cannot be controlled. When parents need help, they seek assistance from a welfare system that forces them to raise their children without the father in the home if they wish to obtain their assistance. At this moment, a household is destroyed, and now the children must grow up in a single-parent home because the mother agreed that it is better to receive help from the welfare system or the father even while he is away from home. The children come from broken homes in impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods, and their idea of hope is to sell drugs to obtain the basic items they need to survive. Then, there is the school to prison pipeline where minorities are set up to fail because their parents cannot afford to place them in schools where they can obtain the education and skills afforded to those whose parents can afford it. Some teachers are more willing to help students who are not a part of an impoverished community; therefore, the children suffer academically, so they drop out of school. Eventually, they land into a criminal justice system where they have difficulty

finding the word "justice." The racial disparity can be found across various levels of the

criminal justice system, including lawmakers, law enforcement, courts, and corrections

(Bell, 1990; Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). African American men are battling a "justice" system

where criminal justice workers execute the shared responsibilities of the hidden agenda of

White supremacy. Scholars have debated whether the disproportionate number of African

Americans incarcerated was a result of racial bias, implicit bias, or solely crime-type

based decisions. Decker et al., (2015) argued that the racial disparities within the criminal

justice system were evident in many cases; however, this issue continued to be

overlooked, which led to a disproportionate number of African Americans incarcerated

(Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015). Mass incarceration has been used as a legitimate and

effective weapon against disadvantaged communities of people of color (Crutchfield,

2015). Scholars have studied the differentiation in the way cases that involved African

Americans and Caucasians were handled in the court system as well as the difference in

the way law enforcement handled situations between African Americans and Caucasians

(Decker et al., 2015). However, racial motive can be difficult to prove if the accused

person denies any use of race-based discretion.

Challenges of Post Incarceration Employment for African American Men

After paying their debt to society through their imprisonment, formerly

incarcerated individuals should be given a second chance; however, that is often not the

case (Brown, 2017). Instead, they are released only to face challenges that may encourage

recidivism. While employment is critical to the reentry process, a formerly incarcerated

individual's incarceration history is a major barrier to employment (Dill et al., 2016;

Williams et al., 2019). It is difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain

gainful employment (Lockwood et al., 2016). Moreover, it is even more difficult for formerly incarcerated African American men to obtain gainful employment as they have two factors working against them—their race and criminal record (Strickland, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). Contrarily, Lockwood et al., (2016) found that post-release unemployment and education to be the most influential factors for recidivism regardless of race. One study found that race alone did not predict recidivism, but race combined with other factors such as age, employment, and education significantly predicted recidivism (Lockwood et al., 2016).

Lockwood et al., (2015) asserted that if formerly incarcerated persons were employed, they were likely to be underemployed with difficulty of maintaining their employment regardless of their race; however, the authors noted that formerly incarcerated African Americans had a higher unemployment rate as well as recidivism rate than their Caucasian counterparts. Some policies and practices serve as a barrier to successful reentry rather than an opportunity for a second chance (Egleton et al., 2016). It is legal for employers to refuse to hire ex-offenders, especially based on their incarceration history, but it is not legal to discriminate against an applicant because of their race. However, *race* in combination with *incarceration history* is often a double-edged sword to post-release employment for formerly incarcerated African American men, which can be detrimental to eradicating the stark disparity in the economic gap between the African American and Caucasian population since race has a recognized but denied correlation to the stagnation of the African Americans.

Employment is critical to the reentry process because it allows formerly incarcerated individuals to provide for themselves and their families (Lockwood et al.,

2016). It is difficult for them to provide for their families without sustainable income. To

fulfill their role in their family, they often accept jobs from employers that treat them like

second class citizens, or worse, treat them as if they are not human at all by disrespecting

them and demanding that they do backbreaking and degrading work for very little pay

(Lockwood et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019). They often fear seeking medical attention

because they lack health insurance, and healthcare is not an option from the employers

that will hire them (Dill et al., 2016). Sometimes when employers hire formerly

incarcerated African Americans, the jobs do not consist of healthcare, sustainable pay,

and other benefits that may be afforded to other employees (Dill et al., 2016).

The most critical period for formerly incarcerated African American men is

immediately after their release from incarceration (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson,

2018). This challenging period is more than likely may lead to recidivism due to

employment, homelessness, familial support, and lack of finances. Skinner-Osei (2016)

refers to social factors as relationships, peers, employment, and neighborhood factors.

The separation of African American men from their families and communities disrupts

the relationships and bonds. African Americans who are least likely to obtain resources

and lack family support are more likely to face employment and housing barriers

immediately after their release from imprisonment. Limited access to employment can

lead to homelessness. Lack of post-release employment contributes to the issue regarding

poverty among African Americans. Cooke (2004) found that prisoners who were self-

employed after their release form imprisonment did well. Also, Cooke affirmed that the

individual's incarceration history determined the type of employment that was available

for them. Cerda, Stafstrom, and Curtis (2015) concluded that criminal and incarceration

history were more likely to determine the employability of formerly incarcerated

individuals than their race. Cerda et al. asserted that race had no bearings on whether

formerly incarcerated individuals were employed.

      Post release unemployment as a precursor to recidivism. There are higher

unemployment and recidivism rate for African Americans who were released from prison

than their Caucasian counterparts (Lockwood et al., 2015). Often unemployment of

formerly incarcerated offenders turns to crimes such as selling drugs and burglary

because they are in dire need of resources to sustain and provide for their families. Thus,

leading to reoffending and recidivism (Williams et al., 2019). The unemployment of

formerly incarcerated African American men may lead to their confinement to

disadvantaged neighborhoods where they are faced with high crime rates (Monk, 2018).

The crime rate in their neighborhood is highly disproportionate to the neighborhoods in

which formerly incarcerated Caucasian men are released (Monk, 2018). They often

continue to reside in such neighborhoods because they cannot afford to move out of the

neighborhood. Upon their release, formerly incarcerated African American men become

acquainted with other formerly incarcerated men in their community of similar situations

who face similar barriers and challenges. Some of them are placed on probation, and they

are not allowed to be among felons, drugs, and other illegal activities; however, it is

nearly impossible to do so in the disadvantaged neighborhoods where they reside.

Stigma

      Formerly incarcerated African American men have paid their debt to society, yet

they are treated as second class citizens. Unemployment, the stigma connected to their

criminal record, and race are barriers to successful reentry (Williams et al., 2019). They

must endure the ridicule attached to them being perceived as "Black ex-cons" from people in their community as well. They carry the stigma that is associated with non-traditional, or less desirable family structure (Strickland, 2016). Formerly incarcerated African American men often face the challenge of the stigma associated with their incarceration history in combination with racial discrimination. Formerly incarcerated African American men are aware of the stigma associated with their incarceration history and worse—their incarceration history combined with their race. The stigma poses as a challenge for them, as their family members and peers look at them differently since their imprisonment. Society may judge individuals by their length of prison stay because one may assume that a lengthier prison stay was determined by the severity of the offense (Williams et al., 2019). However, scholars have conducted studies regarding racial disparity in sentencing in which African Americans, especially African American men, are likely to receive longer sentences than their Caucasian counterparts for similar offenses (Norris & Billings, 2017; Rosenberg et al., 2017). Community members and family members alike may become fearful of them because they may see them as criminals and a danger to the home and the community. Contrarily, Berg and Huebner (2011) argued that although the stigma connected to their incarceration history further penalizes them beyond the prison walls, the family is least likely to focus on the stigma.

Social Support on Reentry

In past studies, researchers have shown that formerly incarcerated Black men are more likely to be released back into the impoverished neighborhoods from which they came (Egleton et al., 2016; Harris & Harding, 2019). Upon their release, they are released back into neighborhoods that receive them differently from person to person as the

attitudes of the members of the community may have changed, especially if the formerly incarcerated individual was incarcerated for several years. These individuals may or may not share similar experiences and perceptions about the challenges that may have attributed to them recidivating. Formerly incarcerated African American men may receive very little to no support from their local criminal justice officials which may have a negative impact on the police/community relationship. Therefore, they often demonstrate distrust in law enforcement and criminal justice officials.

Formerly incarcerated African American men may exhibit a distrust in law enforcement officials as well as all criminal justice officials because of their own experiences with racial disparity throughout their experiences with the criminal justice system. They may also base their distrust from the racism they experience from the reentry challenges they face after their release from incarceration. Their distrust is the result of their awareness of a system that does not appear to have been designed with African Americans in mind. It is common for formerly incarcerated African American men to feel hopeless during their times of distress when seeking to improve their circumstances while remaining under a watchful eye of law enforcement agencies that are awaiting their return to incarceration. Also, their children, as well as racial minority communities, lack trust in the criminal justice system and criminal justice agencies and officials. There is also distrust between the members in the community and formerly incarcerated individuals, leading to very little support from their communities. Sometimes people in their communities are not willing to give them a second chance.

Family support. Strickland (2016) used a snowball sampling strategy that included all formerly incarcerated African American male participants. Although the

interview did not contain questions about fatherhood, half of the participants disclosed that they were fathers. In the study, the participants mentioned the importance of family support for housing, food, and clothing. Without family support, the participants admitted to being transported to interviews and other places by public transportation. Often African American men are removed from their families/communities and imprisoned. During their imprisonment, they lose the connection with some family members and peers. Sometimes they can reconnect those relationships, and other incidents are unfortunate. Consequently, with no support, the formerly incarcerated men may resort to violence and other crimes, which will cause more tension in the community. The population of formerly incarcerated African American men that were economically challenged before they were incarcerated was even more economically challenged after they are released back into an undesirable environment with little to no resources (Harris & Harding, 2019; Morenoff & Harding, 2014). When formerly incarcerated individuals are released from imprisonment, they rely on family support.

The family provides financial and emotional support. Strickland (2016) studied how formerly incarcerated African American men utilized the informal support they received from their families. Family support is an essential part of social capital. Also, family support is important for networking, which can lead to employment opportunities by increasing social ties. Family support can expedite the hiring process for formerly incarcerated African American men by vouching for them when and where opportunities exist (Strickland, 2016). In a study by Strickland (2016), some participants who were employed after incarceration described their employment opportunity as being "hand-delivered" to them. However, this is not always the case. Incarceration may lead to

disrupted social ties between formerly incarcerated individuals and their families and peers.

Families help provide the necessities that formerly incarcerated individuals need for successful reentry. Their families may want to assist them, but they cannot because of their financial circumstances. The social support that formerly incarcerated African American men receive from their families helps them to cope with everyday stresses (Strickland, 2016). However, family support does not eradicate the stigma associated with the combination of their race and incarceration history. Without family support, they may find it extremely difficult to obtain assistance obtaining resources that can aid them in mitigating the reentry challenges and barriers they face. While the lack of family support may cause formerly incarcerated men to face reentry challenges to a greater degree, the consequences from the challenges make it even more difficult for them to provide for their children, which diminishes their perception of their masculinity. The family may provide emotional support to help formerly incarcerated African American men cope with the challenges of reentering into their communities with little to no resources (Strickland, 2016). When family ties are disrupted by incarceration, formerly incarcerated individuals often face challenges obtaining temporary housing until they can meet their own housing needs.

Social support and housing. Housing and employment can provide stability or instability in their lives. Egleton et al., (2016) mentioned that formerly incarcerated African American men are subjected to challenges created by the stigma of homelessness and racism. Formerly incarcerated African American men are overrepresented in the homeless population. Family and community are intrinsic aspects of social capital. Cooke

(2004) and Fontaine (2013) affirmed that there is a correlation between the incarceration history of African American men and homelessness. Homelessness and unemployment are usually mutually inclusive for formerly incarcerated African American men legally created barriers that make it difficult for formerly incarcerated African American men in accessing public housing. Homelessness may also be due to the lack of family support (Egleton et al., 2016). Discriminatory policies and practices, along with criminal and incarceration history minimizes the likelihood of social and economic advancement for formerly incarcerated African American men. Owners of private property tend to deny housing to formerly incarcerated individuals. It is not uncommon for formerly incarcerated individuals to seek shelter at homeless shelters, which tends to be unsafe (Thompson, 2013). For formerly incarcerated African American men, homeless shelters are temporary housing that exacerbates the pre-existing feelings of instability (Thompson, 2013). If formerly incarcerated African American men are given opportunities for housing and gainful employment, some of their reentry challenges may be eradicated (Thompson, 2013). The failure to provide economic stability and housing may decrease the need to return to behaviors that can result in re-incarceration, or recidivism (Thompson, 2013).

One is often taught that a man provides for his family. However, when formerly incarcerated African American men (who are already a part of a marginalized population) cannot provide for their families, it further increases the likelihood of an even more disadvantaged family/disadvantaged community. The collateral effects not only effects formerly incarcerated individuals but their communities as well. Therefore, disadvantaged communities of African Americans are further marginalized as they suffer

both socially and economically (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). Consequently, the community continues to be poverty-stricken and occupied by formerly incarcerated African American men who are unemployed while they are struggling to provide for themselves and their families as well as single mothers who struggle with raising their children alone.

For some of the men, employment is connected to their identity and role as providers (Williams et al., 2019). Those who struggle to maintain their role in their family or lack positive social support (mostly support from their family) are likely to seek and receive support from those who have experienced similar situations as themselves. As a result of their prison stay, their separation from their significant other has caused them to rely on family members and friends for housing. Even worse, formerly incarcerated African American men struggle to provide for their children after being released from incarceration with little resources to alleviate the problem. Their absence in the home may cause their children to resent them, which can be a difficult relationship to mend. Some formerly incarcerated African American fathers are imprisoned while leaving behind children under 18 years of age. They often face issues with the caretakers of the children because of their inability to provide for their children; this may lead to a broken relationship between the father and the child.

In some cases, the relationship between the father and the child may be irreparable, in other cases, not. Their inability to provide for their family can create or continue a cycle in which their children may commit crimes to survive and be subjected to the cruel reality of racial inequality and criminal justice. Without the ability to fulfill this role, formerly incarcerated African American men may feel demasculinized, so it is critical for formerly incarcerated individuals to utilize their second chance to revitalize

their relationship with their family, especially their children. Therefore, social support is vital to the reentry process.

After men are removed from their homes, clothing, food, and adequate housing may cause financial strain (Daniel & Barrett, 1981). While policies created to form legal barriers against African Americans may lean towards the idea of removing criminals from the community, families, and communities are losing men, especially African American men, leaving behind a trail of anger, confusion, and psychological trauma for families and everyone involved. When looking at the historical context behind the reentry challenges for African American men, one can assume that reentry programs are not designed with marginalized groups in mind (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). Reentry program managers and workers may assist incarcerated African Americans through their participation in reentry programs; however, the programs lack the focus on how race may negatively impact their opportunity for successful reentry.

Unsuccessful reintegration for African American men can be connected to various phenomena in which scholars can link to racial inequality in one way or another (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). They are affected by hiring practices to housing regulations (even if the alleged offense committed is not concerning the posted position of employment or the potential housing), as well as difficulty receiving social support. While already being a marginalized population, African American men who were formerly incarcerated have difficulty when trying to thrive in a society that disregards them as first-class citizens. The skills they learn from reentry programs will not be enough if society is not willing to see them as anyone other than a "Black ex-con" and "drug dealers," even if they have never sold any drugs or committed the said crime. Also,

they find it difficult accessing resources just as prior to their incarceration, which results in a short-lived reintegration process of which recidivism is the outcome. Policymakers and criminal justice officials continue the pretense of reintegration for all prisoners and former prisoners while disregarding the structural challenges of reentry for formerly incarcerated African American men.

Summary

Research has shown that African Americans are arrested and receive more sentences as well as longer sentences than Caucasians (Rosenberg et al., 2017). More specifically, African American men are imprisoned disproportionately to Caucasian men (Rosenberg et al., 2017). The mass incarceration of African American men is a result of racial inequality fueled by events, policies, and practices that support White supremacy (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019). One of the many effects of racial inequality in the criminal justice system is that the damages subsist far beyond the prison walls (Williams et al., 2019). Upon release from incarceration, African American men face may reentry challenges, including employment and gaining social support along with just being a 'Black man in America.'

Regardless of the skills incarcerated African American men obtain during their enrollment in reentry programs, successful completion of the program does not prevent them from facing structural, legally created challenges (Ortiz & Jackey, 2019); therefore, it will be even more difficult for them to obtain post-release employment. The reentry challenges for formerly incarcerated African American men extend beyond employment. Although social support and family ties are important (Strickland, 2016; Pettus-Davis et al., 2017), obtaining social support can be challenging. One challenge of obtaining social

support is that removing them from their homes and communities disrupts African

American families; consequently, formerly incarcerated African American men face the

difficult task of mending relationships. However, some relationships are irreparable.

Social support is critical to achieving social capital that can support their reintegration

process (Strickland, 2016). Unemployment and the lack of social support for formerly

incarcerated African American men may lead to recidivism, which is a manifest

consequence of the legally created barriers of the criminal justice policies and an entire

criminal justice system that operates on racism.

Previous research studies suggest a connection between employment, social

support, and successful reentry; however, the studies do not suggest race alone as a

factor. Although the current study did not suggest race as a single factor, I demonstrated

how racism is the driving force behind the criminal justice system as well as beyond the

prison walls. I discussed the ramifications of being a formerly incarcerated African

American man. To achieve true reform, policymakers and criminal justice officials must

acknowledge the existence of racial disparity within the criminal justice system, policies,

and practices. They must also recognize the social factors that may lead to recidivism.

Then they must utilize race-specific research to develop reentry programs that are

responsive to the differentiation among formerly incarcerated African American men and

formerly incarcerated Caucasian men. I could not locate any research about the lived

experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana, which I

believed was an important matter since Louisiana had the highest incarceration rate in the

world for nearly two decades. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design, the role of a

researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. In detail, I discuss the logic for

the selection of the research participants, instrumentation, data analysis plan, as well as

verification of trustworthiness, and potential biases, and other ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine formerly incarcerated African American men's perceptions of their reentry challenges in Louisiana. I conducted this study to better understand the challenges this population face during reintegration into their community post incarceration and how they make sense of their challenges regarding recidivism. For this study, my recruitment goal was a criterion-based purposeful sample selection of 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult male participants to participate in semistructured interviews. I employed the snowball sampling technique until data saturation was reached. Semistructured interviews involve asking the participants open-ended questions to receive rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The in-depth interview allowed me the opportunity to obtain in-depth, rich textual information. Examining the phenomenon through the lens of the participants helped me grasp the details of the participants' perceptions, which was needed to inform researchers and policymakers in race-specific studies. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the research method I used in this study and other research methods used for similar studies. For this chapter, I discuss the details of research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, sample criteria, and sample size, data collection and data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was influenced by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are some of the challenges formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana face during their reintegration back into their community?

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated African American men perceive the

likelihood of their reentry challenges resulting in recidivism?

It is important for a researcher to consider what motivates them to conduct the study

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, it is essential for a researcher to know and understand their

goals for their research study in the beginning as it helps them consider the possible uses,

intended audience, and significance of their study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Knowing the

motivation for the research allows a researcher to decide the direction they want to go

with the study and who can benefit from the study. A rationale is a reason the study is

significant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). African Americans represent a disproportionate

number of those incarcerated in Louisiana; furthermore, African American men make up

the majority of those imprisoned in Louisiana. While African American adults make up

nearly 67% of the incarcerated population (LCLE, 2019, p. 11), African American men

make up 68% of this population (LCLE, 2019, p.17). Although the LCLE (2019)

presented the percentage of those who were rearrested and reincarcerated by the fifth year

of their release date, LCLE does not break down information for race alone or race and

gender combined. While this information is necessary to answer questions that require

statistical data—such as a quantitative study—regarding the recidivism of formerly

incarcerated African American men, it is also necessary to understand the influence their

reentry challenges may have had on their recidivism. Understanding the challenges that

formerly incarcerated African American men face is essential to informing policies that

will initiate positive social change to the marginalized population. Therefore, a

qualitative research approach using qualitative interviews was necessary to obtain data

that could help to understand these challenges through the eyes of those who experience them.

The primary goal of qualitative interviews is to gain insight into the participant's lived experiences and understand how the interviewee makes sense of the experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research helps researchers and others to better understand how people interpret and understand their lived experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Conducting a qualitative interview allows a researcher to gain in-depth, rich information beneficial to their fulfillment of the qualitative research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For a qualitative interview, the interviewer asked open-ended questions that allow in-depth responses rather than simple *yes* or *no* responses. This research tradition covers a variety of research methods that provide an in-depth description of complex events and the interpretive nature of the social world (Herrera, 2010). Qualitative research involves nonnumerical data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers do not believe in universal truths; rather, they believe there are many truths and perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative researchers are interested in knowing how people make sense of their lived experiences and the meaning people create from the experienced phenomenon. Qualitative research methods and methodologies are ideal when conducting a research study that pertains to social justice. For this study, I used a phenomenology research method.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that allows a researcher to collect and analyze participants' perceptions of the phenomenon they experience (Creswell, 2013). Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology as a philosophical movement that included various approaches (Welton, 1999). Researchers may use

phenomenology to understand why people do what they do or how people associate with a phenomenon (Welton, 1999). Since phenomenology is a qualitative method, it was an appropriate method for obtaining rich, in-depth information rather than breadth on the perceptions of people in this case, the perceptions of formerly incarcerated African American men on the reentry challenges in Louisiana. Using a phenomenology approach allowed me to focus on participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, under this approach, my data collection involved participants' own words regarding their lived experiences (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; Dukes, 1984).

Role of the Researcher

For observations, researchers may position themselves as outsiders, insiders, or both (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Yuba, 1985; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). For this study, I conducted interviews online via Skype. Although researchers conduct a study while having their own identities, they should be self-reflexive and consider their roles and positions in the study. Researchers must engage in a reflexive process that helps them examine any potential biases that may influence their study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While engaging in the reflexive process, researchers examine their attitudes and how they make sense of the phenomenon. It can be difficult to eliminate qualitative bias, and researchers should state their assumptions and positionality.

Positionality refers to a researcher's role in the study and relationship to the subject and the participants. A researcher must build a rapport with the participants to establish a trustful relationship with them (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016); doing so helps participants feel comfortable enough to answer each question thoroughly. My role as the researcher for this study was to collect,

interpret, and analyze data to attempt to answer the research questions. I analyzed and sorted the data to develop patterns and themes. Being a resident of Louisiana has allowed me to witness many arrests, incarcerations, releases, and rearrests of African American men. I have also witnessed the economic and social issues that exist within many Louisiana communities. I was interested in examining how formerly incarcerated African American men perceive reentry challenges and whether they perceive those challenges to have influenced recidivism. I was previously employed at a juvenile detention center where African American male youth made up most of the detention population. As a former juvenile detention officer, I recall many cases where the youth discussed a lack of relationship with their father because their father was going back and forth to jail. I am concerned about the reentry challenges formerly incarcerated African American men face when released back into their communities. As an African American woman, I have insight into some of the barriers and challenges for African Americans. However, viewing the challenges formerly incarcerated African American face using a critical lens allows me to better understand such challenges.

I had an ethical responsibility to be open and honest with the participants about my role as the researcher and my purpose for the research study. I also had a responsibility to allow my participants to be open and honest in their responses to the interview questions and not assume that, as an African American woman, I would know their perceptions about the topic already. I did not subject participants to any preconceived notions or findings of the topic. I professionally conducted my research. I had no relationship with the sample population, nor was there a conflict of interest. Also, the sample for this study did not include anyone from my work environment. To manage

researcher bias, I conducted semistructured interviews so the participants could willingly expand on their responses to the interview questions. I did not share any information with the participants from the literature I have read; the findings from previous studies would not have caused them to reconsider their thoughts and responses.

Methodology

Setting

I conducted this study in Louisiana. The geographical area for the study was the southern region of Louisiana. From this population, I selected a sample of willing participants. African Americans make up 32% of the population in Louisiana and 67% of the incarcerated population (Louisiana Population, 2019). Louisiana Population (2019) shows that Louisiana has a poverty rate of nearly 19%, of which African Americans make up nearly 33% of the population below the poverty line; Caucasians make up 12% of the population below the poverty line. About 35% of formerly incarcerated African American men between the ages of 35 and 44 were unemployed compared to their Caucasian counterparts, who made up 18% (Couloute & Kopf, 2018).

Participant Selection

A *sample* is a representation of the population under study (Huck, Beavers, & Esquivel, 2010). Researchers examine a sample of a broader population of potential participants (Huck et al., 2010). The findings from a study may be used to develop statements that are transferable to a larger similar population. Sample selection is important because a poor sample can result in biased, meaningless findings. I chose the sample selection that would allow me greater access to participants who could engage in an interview wherein I could identify the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated

African American men. The representativeness of the intended sample was relevant to the interest of my study.

For this study, I was interested in the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana and how they made sense of their challenges regarding the likelihood of recidivism. I sought participants who would potentially benefit the study through the description of their lived experiences. Also, I was interested in participants who met the eligibility criteria; therefore, a purposeful sampling strategy was appropriate to answer the research questions for this study. Criterion-based purposeful sampling is a qualitative approach to sample selection (Patton, 2015). The power of purposeful sampling is based on information-rich cases for in-depth studies (Patton, 2015). The logic behind purposeful sampling is to focus on a sample that aligns with the purpose of the study (Patton, 2015). Information-rich cases are cases in which a researcher can gain an abundance of valuable information from those who are knowledgeable about the study's inquiry.

The criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy allowed me to select participants based on their criteria eligibility. I used this sampling strategy to attract 10 formerly incarcerated African American men who reside in Louisiana. Although I am aware of some of the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men by reviewing past and previous literature sources regarding the phenomenon, I am not aware of the exact reentry challenges specific to southern Louisiana. Therefore, I applied a criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy because it was important for the participants to represent those who experienced the phenomenon under study. This

sample selection strategy allowed me to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

Sample Size and Eligibility Criteria

Qualitative research is more concerned with meaning than generalization (Mason, 2010). Rather than statistical data, qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning behind the numbers. Unlike quantitative research studies that contain large sample sizes, in qualitative studies, the samples are small because the study is labor-intensive. Large samples for qualitative studies can be time-consuming. A qualitative researcher's productivity quality may decrease if they utilized a large sample size for a qualitative research study due to their desire to decrease the time spent on the study. There have been many discussions about the appropriate sample size for phenomenological studies (Beitin, 2012).

While Thomas and Pollio (2002) contended that 6-12 participants were an appropriate sample size for phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommended 5-25 participants. Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggest phenomenological studies should consist of 10 interviews or fewer. My recruitment strategy consisted of the recruitment of participants via Facebook. For this study, I had a recruitment goal of 5-7 participants; however, since data saturation was not reached, I included more participants to reach data saturation. I interviewed 10 participants from which data saturation was reached. Although the sample is small, the information obtained must be transferable to a larger, similar population. For this study, the participants met the criteria of the intended sample eligibility criteria.

It is critical that the sample represents those who have experienced the phenomenon because they will be able to provide me rich, thick descriptions about information related to my study topic. The participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon under study is the most important criterion for the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, the sample must meet the criteria of participants who have knowledge about the phenomenon and who are most suitable to fulfill the needs of the study. Although my recruitment goal consists of 5-7 formerly incarcerated African American men who reside in Louisiana, I interviewed 10 participants of which data saturation was reached. The targeted population self-identified as (a) formerly incarcerated African American adult male (b) living in south Louisiana (c) who had been incarcerated for a year or more in a Louisiana prison (d) for non-violent offenses. I did not focus on a time range for the first incarceration sentence because I was more interested in their perceived challenges rather than the year of their first imprisonment. However, I received information about the total number of years they had been incarcerated. My role as the researcher made me a valuable instrument for this study.

Instrumentation

I was the instrument for the study. I collected data by conducting individual semi-structured interviews with the participants, analyze, and interpret the data. For qualitative research studies, the researcher is the primary instrument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher must observe people's interactions with the phenomenon in their environment and conduct interviews to obtain information about the meaning people create from their lived experiences. The researcher's positionality and the meaning they make from the participants' experiences shape the findings of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), which is

essential to the research process. The researcher as an instrument may bring forth some ethical issues if the researcher is not aware of their views and assumptions about the topic if they allow their biases to overshadow the newfound information that they obtain from the participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative research studies are necessary to capture the lived experiences of the participants, in this case, reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana. Interviews via Skype and Zoom was the data collection method for this current study. Interviews help the researcher to understand the meaning of the participant's lived experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This data collection method was appropriate because I planned to elicit the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. I conducted individual in-depth interviews with 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult male participants from Louisiana about their perceived reentry challenges and how they made sense of their challenges regarding recidivism. I sent the participants directions on how to use Skype and Zoom via email. However, all participants had knowledge about the use of both social platforms. The researcher and participants were still able to speak while seeing each other's face, but via video conference instead. My questions will not be focused on specific reentry challenges as the individuals face different challenges, and what is challenging for one person may not be challenging for someone else. While reflexivity should be rigorous and examined throughout the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), researchers should remember that the participants are experts in their own lives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Participant Recruitment Procedure

I recruited 10 formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana as participants for this research study via Facebook. I used the snowballing technique to obtain information regarding potential participants until I reached data saturation. When the recruitment of 7 participants results revealed that data saturation had not been reached, I recruited more participants in the same fashion that I recruited the original participant sample until data saturation was reached. I introduced myself to the potential participants and informed them of the topic of the study. I used the snowballing technique to gain more participants for the study. I asked the participants if they knew of anyone else who met the sample criteria for the study. Also, I informed them of my intended length of duration for the interviews as well as a time frame of when I planned to conduct the interviews. I also discussed with the individuals the participant criteria for the study to ensure they met the criteria; otherwise, it would be time-consuming to have to eliminate an interview and recruit another participant due to discovering the participant's ineligibility later in the interview.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate to gain insight into the research topic. In semi-structured interviews, researchers ask prepared open-ended questions as well as follow-up questions about their topic of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I conducted the interviews by asking open-ended questions to gain insight on the topic and transferred the insight to my research study. I asked each participant 10 main questions as well as probing questions for 20-42 minutes. Although 10 questions may not seem like enough questions to obtain the answers to my research questions, I chose this number

because I intended to ask probing follow-up questions that was included within the interview. I did not want to conduct a very long interview and subject my participants to unnecessary repetition. I asked each participant the questions in the same order while including follow-up questions based on their responses, allowing them to elaborate. It is imperative that the interviewer use language that the participant, or interviewee, understands and allows them to answer in their way (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using research terminology or other terms that may not be understood by the participant can hinder them from answering the question or cause them to feel subordinate to the interviewer. During the first interview, for some unknown reason, Zoom did not record the interview. However, I took excellent notes during the interview, which I was able to use during the transcription process. For the remainder of the interviews, I used multiple devices to record the interview. I used an audio recorder to record the interview. The recorded responses made it easier for me to focus on the participant without writing their responses throughout the entire interview. Using an audio recorder made it easier for me to transcribe the interview notes.

Researchers must be able to communicate effectively to the participants the goals of the study. Also, during the data collection process, interviewers should consider their communication and listening skills. It is important for the interviewer to practice appropriate body language. The interviewer should not display any facial expressions, body language, or gestures that can cause them to appear to be nonchalant about the participants' responses as well as the topic. The interviewer should avoid mockery and sarcasm; furthermore, they should be respectful and let the participant know that their time is greatly appreciated. If the participant needs to take a break or is reluctant to

answer a question, the interviewer should not attempt to force them to continue or answer the question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It is crucial for the participants to feel like you care about the phenomenon under study. When the interview ended, I debriefed with the participants again about the purpose of the study and briefly discussed their responses. I explained to the participants my method of contacting them if they are needed for an additional interview. I informed the participants that if follow-up interviews were needed, it would not last as long as the initial interview, which would be no longer than 60 minutes. I conducted a brief follow-up interview with 3 participants to ask follow-up questions for elaboration purposes.

Informed Consent

I presented full disclosure information about the study to the potential participants. This was crucial to the participants' ability to decide whether they wanted to participate. The information included the purpose of the study, methods, as well as the timeline. As the researcher, I informed the potential participants that their participation was voluntary. I informed them that if they were willing to participate, I would email them an informed consent form to keep for their records. Also, I requested that the potential participants type "I consent" in the email if they consent to participating in the study. Although I have verbally disclosed information to the individuals about the research study, the information was also listed on the informed consent form. I asked the participants for consent to record the interview. Also, the informed consent form consisted of information regarding voluntary participation. Voluntary participation does not pertain solely to their initial decision to participate, but participants may drop out of

the study at any time. The informed consent form should also include the potential risks

and benefits of participating in the research study.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Researchers are obligated to anticipate the outcomes of the study to weigh the

benefits and potential harm (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010). Researchers

should not harm the interviewee in any way. Some ways the researcher can minimize

harm are by not exploiting the interviewee and not publishing any material that can cause

them harm, job loss, or financial loss. Not only is physical harm off-limits, but

psychological harm as well. One potential risk that could be identified with this study

was the psychological harm that may occur from the participants reliving their traumatic

experiences. Reliving their negative post-incarceration experiences may elicit feelings of

depression and anxiety. One way of preventing such risk is to inform the participants of

the potential risks before conducting the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Another risk-

prevention method is to inform the participants that the voluntary aspect of their

participation extends throughout the entire interview. Also, if I saw them getting

distressed, I would remind them that they do not have to answer the question, take a

break, or end the interview if it were necessary. Researchers can omit any information

that may cause the interviewee harm (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, if the information

is essential to the study, the researcher can determine ways to include the information in

the study without identifying information of the participants for the study.

If there is a case where the researcher feels like they cannot avoid harm, they

should consider the risk-benefit ratio. The risk-benefit ratio refers to the researcher

determining whether the benefits outweigh the harm that may be caused. Not only did I

inform the participants of any potential risks, but I also informed them of any benefits of their participation in the study. One benefit is that the participants can share their lived experiences with a broader audience. Also, I made them aware of the possibility of their shared experiences influencing positive social change.

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative method I chose for this study was a phenomenological method. Phenomenology emphasizes the lived experiences of people (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, I utilized a phenomenological method to obtain rich, thick descriptions of formerly incarcerated African American men's perceived reentry challenges and how they made sense of these challenges concerning recidivism. I conducted semi-structured interviews via Skype and Zoom with 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult male participants in Louisiana. The video interviews allowed the researcher and the participants to see each other's face without being in the same space.

I constructed 10 questions that allowed me to obtain rich, in-depth responses from the participants. I also asked probing questions to obtain detailed information when elaboration was necessary. With the participant's consent, I used an audio recorder to record the interview to review later and alleviate the tedious task of transcribing. I kept a journal where I document the interview site, topic, date, time, and interaction with the participants. I also noted any relevant thoughts that came to mind after reviewing the participants' responses. I used probing questions to obtain thick descriptions that I hoped would eliminate the need to conduct a second round of interviews. However, I conducted a brief follow-up interview with three participants. There were no discrepancies that emerged during the study.

Qualitative data analysis involves the organization and management of data, data interpretation, and data presentation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I stored the transcripts of the interviews on multiple hard drives. Also, I stored the interviews on multiple storage devices. The transcripts included an accurate word-for-word transcription of the interview. Coding requires one to see through the analytic lens of the researcher (Saldaña, 2016). However, coding also depends on how the researcher interprets the data. Coding also depends on how the researcher interprets the data. For this study, I used NVivo to code and analyze data from the interview. NVivo coding can be used with any qualitative study, and it is especially appropriate for those who are beginners in coding (Saldaᶇa, 2016). The *verbatim principle* of NVivo coding allowed me to elicit the terms and concepts to convey the meaning of the participants' exact words and phrases. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or phrase that is a summative used to condense, summarize, or distill data (Saldaña, 2016). During the coding process, I eliminated phrases that did not reflect the lived experiences of the participants. For phenomenological studies, the analysis remains close to the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016); this was crucial since the researcher captured the participants' lived experiences. I employed qualitative data analysis to seek patterns and construct themes. Although I planned to address any discrepancies that emerged during this process, there were no discrepancies within the data collection process and methodology.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Although it may seem difficult to prove trustworthiness in a qualitative study, trustworthiness is important and can be established. There are four ways to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Two

criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research design is credibility and

transferability. The researcher must accurately report the participants' responses and their

analysis procedure (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It is important for the researcher to consider

and practice strategies that will ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Some strategies

that can be applied to ensure credibility and trustworthiness are:

- Well-established research methods and prolonged engagement in the field.

- Member checks

- Triangulation- involve different data collection methods such as observations,
  individual interviews, focus groups, as well as data sources. Triangulation can
  be used to seek or compare the information.

- Follow ethical guidelines for research studies.

- Use of probes to gain thick, detailed information to reduce the risk of
  dishonesty from participants.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth of the data and the interpretation by the researcher

(Cope, 2014). In a qualitative study, the study is considered to be credible if the

experiences are recognized by others (Cope, 2014). To enhance credibility, the researcher

can demonstrate their engagement by sharing their experiences as a researcher while

verifying their findings with the participants. To ensure credibility, the researcher should

make sure the true picture is represented by the phenomena of study (Shenton, 2004). The

researcher must make sure the information they receive is like the information that is

received from other participants. Credibility in qualitative research may be difficult to

determine because of the method in which the data is obtained. However, credibility is

necessary for any research approach. Credibility may be difficult to prove when conducting interviews because it will be difficult for the researcher to separate biased responses from non-biased responses. However, researchers can achieve credibility in part by interviewing participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). There is no single correct answer when conducting research using human responses. The findings should reflect the responses of the participants in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, I provided rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon through the lens of the participants. Providing detailed descriptions will allow the researcher to achieve some credibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For a research topic to amenable to scientific study using the qualitative approach, there must credibility within the study. The data and the findings must be credible to inform other researchers and inform policies.

Transferability

Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other settings (Cope, 2014; Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). The researcher should provide enough details, so the reader can decide if the information is similar to another situation and whether the findings can be applied to another setting. Qualitative studies should be transferable to a broader context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers can achieve transferability by providing thick descriptions of the data that can be compared to other contexts.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the findings emerged from data rather than their perceptions (Shenton, 2004). Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers seek subjectivity rather than objectivity. The data

must be confirmable and based on neutrality and free of unacknowledged biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One goal to achieve confirmability is that researchers should explore and consider the ways their biases shape their interpretation of the data.

Dependability

Dependability refers to consistent data over time (Cope, 2014). Dependability is difficult to prove in qualitative studies. The researcher may repeat the study to ensure dependability. Qualitative research studies are considered dependable if the findings are consistent over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability refers to whether your data is consistent with your argument. Researchers can achieve dependability through triangulation. Triangulation entails the use of multiple sources to show consistent stability over time.

Ethical Concerns and Procedures

Although ethics require individuals to comply with standard guidelines (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), what individuals perceive as unethical, or immoral, may vary among a group of people (Staller, 2010). Most researchers would consider themselves to be ethical; however, ethical considerations in research are not as apparent as one would hope. Researchers should obtain informed consent from the participant before beginning any aspect of an interview with them (Rubin & Rubin et al., 2016). Also, researchers should make it clear to participants that their participation is voluntary, and they may end the interview at any point. Another ethical consideration is that the researcher must cause no harm to the participants. One ethical consideration that may be overlooked is deception. It is unethical for a researcher to deceive the participants about the purpose of

their study, their role in the research study, or any part of the study. Researchers should provide thick descriptions based on the participants' responses.

While I may desire that this research will facilitate positive change in the criminal justice system and positive social change, I did not alter the participants' responses to change the outcome of the study. Utilizing various research literature and data can helped me understand the perceptions of the participants regarding how they perceived the phenomenon under study. Confidentiality in research studies is very crucial. The researcher should not include any identifying information about the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016); doing so can result in the loss of employment, psychological harm, as well as physical harm to the participants. For this study, I listed the participants as *Participant 1*, *Participant 2*, etc., along with a pseudonym to protect the participants' confidentiality. I stored the information in a secure location. I reminded the participants how important it was for them to be open and honest with me. I also reciprocated their honesty.

Summary

The methodology is a crucial aspect of research. In fact, social research cannot occur without methodology. Therefore, choosing the appropriate research method can define one's study. Choosing the most appropriate methodology occurs using research alignment. Researchers must first focus on the questions of which they want to be answered. Then, they must ask themselves why they want to know. Next, researchers must ask themselves how they will know. In qualitative research, methodology answers the question of how the information is known. For Chapter 3, I included a description of the methodology that was used for this research study. In this chapter, I included a justification for the use of the phenomenological research method and the goal sample

size. Chapter 3 contained the description of my role as the researcher, data collection

methods, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns, as well as my

intended ways to mitigate the issues and concerns. In Chapter 4, I provide an

interpretation of the findings from the data collection. For the next chapter, I include a

detailed description of the data about the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated

African American men in Louisiana and how they perceived their experiences about

recidivism.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand the perceptions of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana about their reentry challenges and their thoughts of the likelihood of their challenges impacting their recidivism. I used the following questions to guide this research study:

RQ1: What are some of the challenges formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana face during their reintegration back into their community?

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated African American men perceive the likelihood of their reentry challenges resulting in recidivism?

To answer the research questions, I collected data through qualitative interviews. The interview questions were aligned to answer the research questions. For Chapter 4, I include a description of the setting for this research study, participants' demographics, data collection methods, data analysis, and data results. This chapter also includes evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting of my study took place via Skype and Zoom, which are applications used for communication through online video conferencing. Although I interviewed the participants via Skype and Zoom, the participants attended the video interview while being in the comfort of their vehicles or homes. After I obtained IRB approval (approval # 04-21-20-0380767), I scheduled the interviews. I conducted the interviews in a private room in my home. I conducted the interviews during the hours when I had the most privacy.

Demographics

The participants were formerly incarcerated African American men from southern Louisiana who had been incarcerated for nonviolent offenses in a state prison in Louisiana for more than 1 year. The geographical areas included New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette. Their years of incarceration ranged from 2 to 18 years. The participants were between the ages of 32 and 49 years. The participants had been incarcerated two to five times for nonviolent offenses.

Data Collection

Before collecting data, I posted a flyer for my study on Facebook (Appendix B). I received three potential participants, to whom I emailed a consent form for their review. After the participants consented to participate in the study, I scheduled their interviews. I encouraged the participants to share my flyer with others. I verbalized to the potential participants the sample criteria for the study to ensure they met the criteria. The participants shared the information; therefore, I received more participants. I continued to interview participants until I reached data saturation. I reached data saturation after I interviewed 10 participants. I scheduled the interviews with participants during times they were not busy, so their preoccupation with other tasks would not compromise their responses.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I established rapport with the participants to ensure their comfort. Before the interviews, I verbally informed the participants that their participation was voluntary. The participants gave me verbal consent for their participation in the study. To answer the research questions, I collected data through qualitative interviews via Skype and Zoom. Although I conducted the interviews via

Skype and Zoom, it did not affect the quality of the responses I received from the participants and did not compromise the overall quality of the interviews. Using video interviews, the participants and I were able to view one another without being in the same space, which was the safer alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I used semistructured interviews to obtain rich, in-depth responses from 10 participants. The semistructured interviews included 10 open-ended interview questions (Appendix A). Also, I asked probing questions to encourage participants to elaborate on some of their responses, which provided more in-depth information. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. After some of the interviews ended, some of the participants continued to discuss the topic. I asked them if I could use the information for the study; they gave me consent to use the information. I took detailed notes of the discussions after the interviews. Some participants insisted that I use the information they provided to me after the interviews. For the first interview, Zoom did not record the interview, but I took notes throughout the interview.

I emailed participants a copy of the notes I took to ensure the participants observed no discrepancies between my notes and what they recalled saying. For the remainder of the interviews, I used two recording devices to record the interviews. I also took notes during each interview. I completed 10 interviews over the course of a 5-week period. There were no variations for the way I collected data from how I planned to collect the data. Each interview was transcribed using a professional transcription service. While reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, I listened to the recordings to check for any discrepancies between the recordings and the transcripts. I conducted member checks by providing the participants with the data I collected from them to ensure the data I

collected were correct. When each participant informed me that the data I collected and noted from their interview were true and correct, I began the process coding the data. I used the NVivo software to code the data.

Data Analysis

For this study, I reported themes that emerged from the transcripts of 10 interviews. The interviews for the study were transcribed using a professional transcription service. I read each transcript multiple times during different times of the day and, on some occasions, different days with the purpose of finding patterns among the participants' responses. I read each transcript multiple times to see if I would gain a different perspective of the information. While coding each interview transcript by paragraphs, I conducted preliminary coding in which I jotted down codes from the transcript. Although there is no rule on how many codes a researcher can use per text (Saldaña, 2016), I highlighted many key phrases that I could apply as codes. Then, I reread the transcripts and coded the data by paragraphs. I coded using the lumper coding method because it was more suitable for the larger segments to have one code opposed to several codes. While coding the data, I identified new codes, eliminated some codes, and combined some codes to create categories. During the process, I began searching ahead for emerging themes. I placed several codes into categories. NVivo software allowed me to input the participants' segments of the dialogue from the interview into multiple categories. NVivo adheres to the *verbatim principle* (Saldaña, 2016), so it is a useful tool to extract concepts and common words from the data. NVivo was helpful in verifying the themes and subthemes for this study.

There were seven themes that emerged from the data. Three themes (Table 1) that emerged from the study that answered RQ1: (a) feelings of restricted opportunities due to incarceration history, (b) feelings of restricted opportunities because of race, and (c) relationships. From the theme *feelings of restricted opportunities due to incarceration history*, three subthemes emerged: (a) stigma, (b) employment, and (c) housing. There were four themes (Table 2) that emerged from the study that answered RQ2: (a) community lacks opportunities, (b) racial discrimination, (c) community lacks improvement, and (d) supporting reentry. A codebook was created for the initial codes as well as the revised codes. There were no cases of discrepancies identified in the data as there was no evidence of contradiction in the findings. I analyzed all data as the obtained data were related to the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There are four ways a researcher can demonstrate trustworthiness in a study: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. A researcher must report the participants' responses and their analysis procedure (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A researcher should consider and practice strategies that ensure credibility and trustworthiness in their research study.

Credibility

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness for this study: I conducted member checks, followed ethical guidelines, demonstrated triangulation through interviews and data sources, and used probing questions to obtain rich, detailed information to reduce dishonesty from the participants. There were no right or wrong responses as the study was based on the perceptions of the participants. However, I conducted member checks

to ensure that I documented the correct information. I also allowed the participants to review their interview transcripts to ensure the information was correct. I referred to data sources to see whether some responses regarding certain laws and practices were true and correct.

Transferability

The goal of transferability is not to make the results generalizable but transferable to a similar population. Although the sample size for this study is small, this study may be transferable to a similar population. However, the findings may vary depending on the participants' responses. On the contrary, there may be other factors that can determine the findings. The findings are based on the participants' responses, and the participants' responses can differ from those of this study if they reside in a location where there are greater job opportunities, different laws, or other factors that may alleviate their reentry challenges or the effects of their reentry challenges.

Dependability

Each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcript for their interview. Also, I made them aware that I could remove any information in their transcript that they did not want me to use in the study. All participants confirmed their satisfaction of the transcribed responses.

Confirmability

I demonstrated that the findings emerged from the data rather than my own perceptions about the topic. The interpretations/meanings of the data were not shaped by any potential researcher's bias. Prior to conducting the study, I acknowledged and

addressed any potential biases. Throughout the study, I conducted reflexive journaling. There were no deviations from the methods I listed in Chapter 3.

Results

Data analysis was completed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 Pro. The first step of data analysis was in vivo coding. I read and reread the interview transcripts line by line while highlighting participant statements relevant to the research questions. The relevant statements were assigned into codes labeled with a descriptive word or phrase referring to the coded text. The codes represent the smallest unit of meaning of the participants' experiences. Next, codes with similar meanings were grouped together under a hierarchy that represented initial themes. Third, the initial themes were reviewed and compared with the transcripts to check that the themes represent the participants' experiences. In this stage, subthemes emerged to represent specific concepts narrower than themes. Fourth, the themes and subthemes were finalized.

RQ1: Challenges Formerly Incarcerated African American Men in Louisiana Face during their reintegration back into their community?
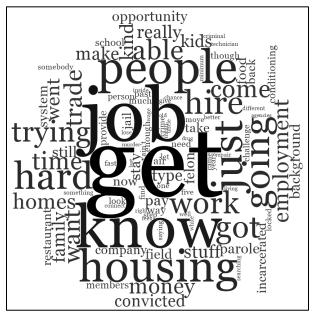

Figure 1. Word cloud for RQ1.

Three themes emerged from the data in response to RQ1: (a) feelings of restricted opportunities due to incarceration history, (b) feeling of restricted opportunities because of race, and (c) relationships.

Table 1

Challenges Faced During Reintegration Back into the Community

Themes	Subthemes	Codes	# Contributing participants	# References
Feelings of restricted opportunities due to incarceration history			10	45
	Stigma		6	11
		Facing the stigma on being incarcerated	6	11
	Employment		10	22
		Despite qualifications	3	4
		Low-paying job	2	4
		No connections	1	1
	Housing		9	12
		Can't buy a house with low wage	2	2
		Moving and travel restrictions	2	3
		Renting an apartment	1	1
		Staying with other people	6	6
Feelings of restricted opportunities because of race			7	12
		Marginalized	2	2
		No privilege	1	1
		Typically low-income families	1	1
		Upbringing and family background	2	2
Relationships			6	8
		Being around people	1	1
		Forgotten about	1	1

Feelings of restricted opportunities due to incarceration history. In the data collected, participants discussed challenging experiences resulting from limited opportunities due to being incarcerated. Three subthemes emerged from the data: stigma, employment, and housing. The participants described their challenges and experiences with feeling restricted because of their incarceration history.

Stigma. Participants discussed the way they are viewed by employers, community members, and family members. Most of the participants stated that they experienced stigma after being incarcerated. They expressed the idea of their past always haunting them regardless of how much they changed their lives. Participant 1 explained the stigma of incarceration history: "When you have a criminal background, people are scared of you, so they don't hire you. Or they'll hire you to do jobs for very little pay and no benefits because they know you need them." Participant 1 also stated,

> They're basically throwing us out on the streets and saying, 'I'll see you later' as
> if we're coming back. And a lot of times we do go back. It's crazy but that's the
> way it is. It don't mean we have to accept it though.

Participant 2 discussed being looked at differently. When asked what some hardships were, he experienced when seeking employment, he responded,

> I'm no different. I didn't want to feel like—nine times out of 10, they're going to
> look at you different. In today's society anyway, they going to look at you
> different, even though it's a non-aggravated crime, by you being incarcerated or
> by you being on parole, you are automatically looked at like you're judged off
> top.

Participant 4 described the stigma of past incarceration history and the way formerly incarcerated people are seen by employers. Participant 4 stated that he perceived that employers saw people with an incarceration background as "monsters":

Going in there and you got that on your background, they looking at the person who got a clean background. They ain't looking at the person who got that on their background, so it's always going to carry weight. I mean, nobody would want a convicted felon in their house—they don't want to give you a second chance.

Participant 7 spoke about how some employers view formerly incarcerated African American men. "People look at background records and say, 'Oh, you went to jail.' Or 'he had a charge in 2000.'" Participant 8 described a feeling of hopelessness, feeling judged because of the stigma society has placed on formerly incarcerated African American men. Participant 8 explained, "It's like my past experience kind of tainted my integrity or they assumed that whatever I had going on—there was judgement, stuff like that."

Participant 9 expressed himself using an aggressive tone, "Judge! They like to judge you. There's quite a lot of people that are really judgmental. They're judgmental on certain things and certain people. They got their picks and chooses, their likes, and dislikes." Participant 10 explained, "No support because people be scared of you. They don't know who you are, what you're going to do next."

Employment. This subtheme refers to the participants' challenging experiences of seeking employment during their reintegration back into the community. The

participants generally described having "no choice" but to work in fast food, as employers typically did not want to hire formerly incarcerated individuals.

Participant 1 stated, "I had a hard time finding a job. It's hard for someone who has been locked up. If I don't make money, I don't eat! Simple as that!"

When Participant 2 was asked about the reentry challenges he faced after being released from incarceration, he responded, "Being able to work when I got out. I had two kids and it was hard to provide for my kids and pay parole fees. Some people have four, five kids. It's hard to provide for them when you work in a fast-food restaurant—minimum wage."

Participant 7 obtained employment, but had difficulty maintaining employment when the employers found out he was a convicted felon. He stated, "I would get a job because of my personality and past and current credentials, but then once they found out I was a convicted felon, people began acting like they were afraid of me."

He continued,

You come off as a nice person and they hire you. They like the way you wear your clothes, how you accentuate your verbiage and how you accentuate yourself. When they find out about your incarceration history, they fire you or let you go for any reason, regardless of your credentials. They won't tell you the truth, but you know why.

Participant 8 answered the same interview question by replying, "A lot of people where I come from, we go to these staffing agencies because if you've been locked up for so long, you really can't go to the companies directly because of your background, because of your history." He described feeling like he did not have a chance.

Participant 9 stated, "Job wise, it was kind of a struggle, because of people. Well I ain't gone say people. It's like the job, they're picky about certain people that they hire, depending on what they were locked up for." He went on to say, "It's like they really don't want to hire those type of people because they seem to focus on what the person had done in the past rather than what a person is trying to do now."

When asked about the challenges he faced when seeking employment after being released from incarceration, Participant 10 responded,

Seeking employment. Background checks. The background checks in the Human Resources just does not allow you to do your time for your crime and be able to get hired as a regular citizen. They'll ask you to tell the truth, you tell the truth, and still won't get the job.

Sometimes when individuals have been incarcerated multiple times, their experiences during reentry may vary. When Participant 6 described his reentry experience during one of the times he was released,

It was around Christmas and I needed to take care of Christmas things and I didn't have a job. And me, myself, when I needed something for the family, I'd go get it. At the time I didn't have a job and couldn't get one, but I knew I had to get my kids something for Christmas.

He continued while describing a different perception after serving another prison sentence,

Well the first time it was not being able to get a job, but I learned. Being out and saying what you did, you can still get a job. A lot of people was just scared to tell people what they did and what they been through, but I ain't never been the one. I

just told the truth, what I been through, and what were my qualifications, and I found a job.

Participant 3 had a similar perception. Although he experienced difficulty obtaining employment upon his reentry in the community, he shared a different perception of his experience after being incarcerated for the fifth time. He explained, "I got felony convictions and it's not so much the employers, but it's my own personal fear from listening to so many other incarcerated people. My only impediment to success is myself."

Some participants shared their experiences of studying or training prior to or during incarceration to gain additional skills and make themselves more "marketable" when seeking employment. However, they generally had difficulty securing a job despite their qualifications.

Participant 6 stated,

I had skills already that I kept. Before I detailed cars. I've been detailing cars for a long time, so I always had that skill. When I couldn't get anybody to hire me doing what I love and pay me right, I came up with the idea to have my own business, so now I own two businesses.

Participant 3's perception was slightly different. He had been incarcerated several times. After he was released from prison for his last offense, he saw the significance of having a skill. He explained the importance of having a marketable skill. He discussed,

I prepared myself to have a marketable skill. I think the biggest challenge for an incarcerated individual or ex-incarcerated individual trying to enter the working day world is not having a marketable skill that will be accepted in spite of their

incarceration. When you have a skill that people want, they don't care where you been, they want the skill you possess.

One participant mentioned that in relation to being incarcerated and being an African American, he did not have the privilege of having connections to gain employment. Participant 1 stated,

It is hard being surrounded by so many people who seems like they are just as lost as you are. There are only fast-food jobs for us. All the pharmacies and businesses are hiring people in their family and their friends. It is hard to help one another when none of us have anything.

Housing. This subtheme refers to the challenges in housing in terms of renting an apartment or having enough money to buy their own house. Most of the participants had a place to stay after being released; however, most of them had to stay with family. Although, the participants stated that they would have preferred to stay elsewhere, the were not able to because of the restrictions caused by their incarceration history. While staying with family had its benefits, some participants perceived that they had to "walk on eggshells" staying in someone else's home.

When asked about the challenges he faced when seeking housing after being released from prison, Participant 2 responded,

Family don't really want you on their lease because you're a convicted felon. Once you're a convicted felon, it's pretty much hard as far housing, you know--to find a house. You'll be caught up in having to stay with family members and then you're walking on eggshells because you can't really do too much because you're staying with someone else. Staying with family members was hard.

However, Participant 5, was able to live with family members until he was able to obtain housing for himself. Participant 6 was also able to live with family members after the first time of being released from prison. However, he did not consider himself as "fortunate" after the first time of being released from incarceration. Participant 9 resides in a sober living house. He expressed himself in a tone of frustration while stating, "I still haven't found a house. Since I got released way back then, I still haven't found a house." Participant 10 claimed that he could not get a driver's license, which could restrict the places where he could go. Participant 1 emphasized that being on parole, he was not allowed to move out of state.

Feelings of restricted opportunities because of race. This theme refers to the participants' experiences of having less opportunities than individuals from other races. Some participants perceived that there were differences in the advancement opportunities for formerly incarcerated Black men than there were for other races. Some participants discussed how the differences restricted their opportunities for advancement, and the differences occurred before, during, and after incarceration.

Participant 1 perceived that in the criminal justice system and in daily life, African Americans were "oppressed." African American children were often born in low-income families, in which Participant 1 perceived that they have no financial support to "stay out of jail." In addition, they could not afford a "good" lawyer and to post bail. Participant 2 discussed that he did not have a chance as a Black man. He exclaimed, "The color I am, you really don't have too much! You really don't have a chance!"

Participants 3 and 5 believed that being born into African American families restricted them to a certain upbringing and family background. Participant 5 emphasized,

"Just being on the wrong path," stating that he grew up with "both parents on drugs" and that his home was a "messed up environment." The participant believed that he did not get a chance to develop "goals in life." Participant 4 perceived that it was not solely about his criminal background, but just being a Black man. He claimed, "They got more Black people in jail than anybody. We have nothing to start with!"

Participant 8 claimed that "Blacks don't have access or knowledge of information to many resources the way Whites do." Participant 10 articulated that African Americans generally have no privilege. He continued to discuss African American's lack benefits, economic background, and help.

Relationships. The participants generally experienced challenges with relationships during their reintegration back into their community. Some participants had disrupted social ties with their family members, especially their children. The participants had trouble establishing and maintaining relationships as well as continuing relationships with others. One participant stated that he had feelings of "being forgotten about" and they did not want to be around other people. Participant 2 perceived that he was "forgotten about" when did not receive support from friends and family.

Participant 4 had trouble "adapting" and "being around people." When asked what the reentry challenges were that he faced after being released from incarceration, he stated, "Um I would say adapting back to society as in um, um, knowing how to talk to people or being around people. (paused) Just how to adjust, that was the hardest thing."

Participant 1, 7, 8, and 10 had challenges with personal relationships. Participant 8 had 5 children. Participant 8 stated that his youngest child, who was two years old, did not experience him being incarcerated. His other children became used to their father's

absence. Participant 10 revealed that he has a daughter and a son whom he has no relationship with because he has been incarcerated for so long.

Participant 8 spoke about the worst relationship with family was between him and his son. He revealed,

Whenever I did come back, I tried to be in his life, but a lot of things were very uncomfortable. It was uncomfortable for me to try to communicate with him because I was not there for a long time, so how can I come into his life and try to tell him what to do now?

Participant 10 expressed,

My kid's mother don't even respect me enough to let me see my kids. My daughter is 17 years old now. We don't have a relationship. That hurts. It kills me not to have a relationship with my children. This has really affected my relationship with my children.

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated African American men perceive the likelihood

of their reentry challenges resulting in recidivism?

Figure 2. Word cloud for RQ2.

Four themes emerged from the data regarding RQ2: (a) community lacks

opportunities, (b) racial discrimination, (c) community lacks improvement, and (d)

supporting reentry.

Table 2

Likelihood of Reentry Challenges Resulting in Recidivism

Themes	Subthemes	Codes	#Contributing participants	# References
Community lacks opportunities			10	21
		Can't address basic needs	2	2
		modern-day slavery	1	1
		Needs rehabilitation and placement programs	8	9
		Not given a chance	1	1
		People turn to selling illegal drugs	2	2
		Need to be mentally strong	1	4
		Poor lifestyle	2	2
Racial discrimination			9	11
		Biased criminal justice system	5	6
		No way to get out of the system	1	1
		Parole officer not as strict	1	1
		Prejudice	5	5
Community lacks improvement	Community does not support the youth		2	2
		Need to change family model	1	1
	People in the community are also struggling		3	5
		Determined to help out other African American men and youth	2	2
Supporting reentry	Self-support			
		Faith in self	1	1
		Faith in religion	1	1
		New perspective	3	5
		Working on self	3	4
	Social support			
		Moving to a better community	1	1

Rehab	1	1
Support from Encouragement of family	5	8
Support from friends and community	1	1
Small financial support from family	4	4
Having resources and information	1	1

Community lacks opportunities. This theme refers to the lack of opportunities in the community that could likely lead to recidivism among formerly incarcerated African American men. Two participants shared that opportunities to address basic needs would help. Participant 2 explained that "a Black man really don't have a chance." He continued to say, "The only way a Black man have somewhat of a chance is if he has the right people around him; other than that, you have to have strong willpower." While Participant 2 expressed that "one must be mentally strong", other participants revealed some descriptions of their community that made it difficult to establish and maintain mental strength. Participant 1 had difficulty gaining employment, so he started selling drugs again and he was reincarcerated.

Participants 8 described his community as a "poor community" and a "poor area and environment of drugs." He expressed,

> As far as my community, … don't have too much but a lot of liquor stored, a lot of churches, and a lot of people hanging out on corners. It's not a bunch of stuff. It's like the recidivism rate where they are going to jail and prison is very high. If you are a Black male, 9 times out of 10, in a community, you'll either die or go to prison. It's very few people that make it out because a lot of them get caught up in this cycle.

Participant 4 stated,

> When I got out, I did expect to see new things, but I didn't. And then soon the same guy doing the same thing and you know, they were still the same, was even getting worse. Um, I mean, uh, when there's no jobs, there's nothing out there for a person to do when he trying to make better for him and his family.

Participant 5 mentioned being released into the same "poverty-stricken neighborhood." He stated that when he was released after a few times of being incarcerated, he "just had a different mindset." Participant 6 discussed that there was no change in his community upon his release from prison. He stated that before he went to prison there was nothing to do but get in trouble, usually through selling drugs. He mentioned that when he returned home, everything was the same; there was still nothing to do. Participant 9 described the struggle as being so bad that he got back into drugs. He stated,

> I was released back into my hometown. When I got out, I went right back home. Struggle…the struggle was so bad that I got right back into drugs. I fell right back into the addiction and selling drugs because I wasn't given the opportunity for anything else. It's like I went out there and I tried. I put day after day, and I tried, but I wasn't given the opportunity. You know, nobody was really giving me a chance.

Participants 3, 7, and 10 described their community as "the jungle." In fact, they mentioned the community being called "the jungle." They said that it was hard to maintain and be successful when released into a community with no resources. They talked about how people are so used to being poor that they almost seem content and hopeless. Participants 3, 7, and 10 mentioned being raised in similar environments. They were also released from prison into the same environment. They were from the same neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana. Most of their experiences were very similar. Although some participants were from different cities, they shared similar experiences in their communities. They acknowledged and expressed similar issues that they

encountered in their communities. Participant 3 stated that every time he was released from incarceration, he was released back into a "land of no hope and opportunities." He perceived that to be the case for most people who lived in his community and/or who was released back into the community after incarceration.

Participant 7 expressed in a tone of frustration,

What the hell do they expect people to do? They know exactly what the options are in communities like mine. They know exactly what will happen when they send us back to the jungle or hell is what you can call it. Well hell hole is another good name for it! In this jungle, you either eat or be eaten, kill or be killed because people don't mind taking your life. You gotta know how to survive out here.

Racial discrimination. This theme refers to the racial discrimination specific to police profiling and the criminal justice system. The majority of the participants perceived that the criminal justice system was biased against the African American community. African American men tend to experience prejudice, which could get worse after being incarcerated. All participants except one believed the criminal system is biased towards African Americans, especially formerly incarcerated African American men. Participant 3 perceived that the criminal justice system was not unfair to him. He believed that "there are many African American men who avoided the criminal justice system by following the laws." He stated, "Laws are for lawbreakers." However, other participants did not agree. Participant 10 claimed that "Black men don't have to break the law to be considered criminals." He exclaimed, "They treat Black men who've been to

jail like animals. They expect for us to bow down and kiss their ass to be treated equally,

and if we did, we still wouldn't be treated equally."

Participant 1 stated,

Man it's hard out here for a Black man. Just being a Black man in this world is

hard. Being a Black ex-offender is even harder. Everybody knows the criminal

justice system is designed to keep Black people oppressed. People who write

policies know that if you want to oppress the Black community. 'Modern day

slavery' is what they should call it. They want to get rid of the Black man because

that's who they are afraid of.

Participant 2 described the differences between the experiences of Black and White men

in the criminal justice system.

They get out there and (Pause) I hate to say it like this, but they'll get drunk and

run out there and almost kill somebody. I feel like that's a worse offense than us

of color, as far as selling marijuana or whatever. You know what I mean?

He continued,

We sell but they'll get a shorter sentence, and they'll give us, our type, 10-15

years. For their first offense they may get a year or two. Now me, I got 15 years

for my first offense and their offense was worse. It's a big, big difference. They

get a slap on the wrist. They know we can't afford a good lawyer, so we end up

with a lawyer that really don't give a damn about us or our situation." He

expressed his perception that their aim is to "fill the prisons with Black folks,

especially Black men.

Participant 4 claimed, "The lack of economic advancement in his community was part of a plan to promote their agenda to keep White people on top." He stated in a tone of frustration, "The prisons are filled with mostly Black men who may never get out. They're just making money off of them. They got them working for a little of nothing! They're making money off them."

Participant 6 discussed the need for a fair criminal justice system. He discussed dire need for "fairness in sentencing African American men."

He stated,

Being fair with the time they are giving people. There needs to be a big change in being fair in the time that they give people for the same crime. Like the drug dealers. They give a Black man more time than they would a White man. I guess they're gonna change some of this stuff now. Who in the hell knows? The law done changed a little bit. They can't just be giving people all that time, but they'll find a way to screw over Blacks as usual. The criminal justice system is unfair to Blacks. Hell, even the way we're treated when we're released ain't no better.

Participant 8 discussed racial discrimination regarding the lack of resources available to African Americans. He mentioned that "Blacks don't have access or knowledge about various helpful resources like Whites do." At first when I asked him whether/how he perceived the reentry challenges formerly incarcerated African American differed from the challenges of other racial groups, he asked that I move on to the next question while he take some time to think about the question. Eventually, he answered the question and claimed,

The difference is a lot of that information, a lot of them resources that people of

my color, you know (pause) African Americans' needs, but we don't have it. The

information is out there. Different races have this information. They have these

programs, they have substance abuse treatment facilities, and they are going in

and out of treatment while Blacks going in and out of jail and the penitentiary.

The resources are available. They just making the resources available to who they

want it to be available to. I was just fortunate enough that had some people who

had been through things before and they kind of exposed me to some helpful

resources.

He continued,

The criminal justice system is always brought up amongst me and my people. The

only thing we know is that they keep putting us in jail and prison. We don't know

what's going on, how the system work and stuff like that.

While Participant 5 discussed reentry being difficult for a formerly incarcerated

African American man, he acknowledged that reentry for any formerly incarcerated

person can be difficult. When I asked Participant 5 if and how the reentry challenges for

African American men may differ from those of other racial groups, he discussed "being

Black" as a "major threshold", but "incarceration history didn't help." He mentioned the

difficulty of gaining employment was hard for anyone with a history of incarceration;

however, it was even more difficult for Black people, especially Black men.

He explained,

First of all, just being Black, African American is a major threshold, and

incarceration doesn't help it at all really…Well, I know a few White guys that

was locked up that still had problems trying to get employed on their own too. A lot of it is who you know.

While Participant 5 discussed the idea of "difficulty obtaining employment" is true for formerly incarcerated individuals of any race, Participant 10 contends that the "nightmare" of being a Black man is an ongoing phenomenon. He described the existence of racism before, during, and after incarceration. He indicated that "Blacks don't have privileges from the start, even before jail or prison." He then explained that while African American men are incarcerated, "freedom is a fantasy because they will never be free." Participant 5 indicated that African American men are often released back into the communities where "opportunities and resources lack and there seems to be no change."

Community lacks improvement. This theme refers to participants' overall experiences of going back to a community after that has not changed after being released from incarceration. When asked to describe the community where they resided before and after incarceration, Participant 4 stated, "I went from shit to shit. The community is no better when we get out of prison." Participant 2 mentioned that the community where he resided post-incarceration as a poverty-stricken neighborhood. He informed the researcher that not many people in his community graduated from high school, there were a lot of dropouts, and the respect for the community was scarce. Two sub-themes emerged under this theme: (a) community does not support the youth and the people, and (b) people in the community are also struggling.

Community does not support the youth and the people. Two participants perceived that people in the community, including themselves, grew up in an environment that has not improved in terms of education, employment, business, and

youth development opportunities. Thus, the youth end up "going to jail," as perceived by Participant 1. "The community does not have anything positive to offer the youth, so they are going to jail and prison." Participant 3 also believed that the community was not helping the people and the youth in terms of receiving resourceful information. Participant 5 stated that his community has changed. The young people are "taking over." He stated that they have no structure." He indicated that the community is struggling, so it's hard to provide the young people with the guidance they need.

People in the community are also struggling. Three participants supported this sub-theme, stating that most of the people in the community were also facing difficulties. Participant 2 shared, "Ain't nobody really had high school diplomas." Participant 4 discussed the difficulty of obtaining a job or gainful employment. He also mentioned that the people in the community experience financial difficulties daily. He stated, "They don't have good jobs. Hell, most of them don't have a damn job. How in the hell are they supposed to live like that?"

He continued,

Then they'll start selling drugs and robbing each other, which is what is expected of them anyway. The system is not designed for us to succeed. Just because it's a few of us who think we made it we're still messed up.

Participants 2 and 7 realized the struggles of the African Americans in the community after they have been incarcerated. Both participants revealed that they were determined to help educate African Americans to prevent them from being incarcerated.

Participant 7 stated,

I was just trying to get myself out of prison and back into society, back into being

a character in my community, giving back, and teaching and trying to help Black

kids not go to jail. I want to teach them there is a better way than selling drugs

and robbing people. It's sad to me to see the youngsters killing each other over

nothing man.

Supporting reentry. This theme refers to the need to overcome challenges in

order to reduce likelihood of reentry challenges resulting in recidivism. The participants

discussed a need to better themselves and help others to have a successful reentry post-

incarceration. They also discussed how support from others has helped them as well as

the ways they believe they were affected by the lack of support from others. Some

participants described receiving "tough love" from their mothers. Their first time of

incarceration began when they were in their mid-teens. Two participants were housed in a

detention center around the age of 11 years old. They indicated that they did not have

much family support even while being in the detention center. Participant 4 mentioned a

teacher who exhibited the "mother-like qualities" that he needed at that time.

Self-support. Overcoming challenges also included developing oneself in terms

of having a new perspective and adapting a new lifestyle, as well as gaining new skills

and having a new purpose. Developing oneself also included entering rehabilitation if

necessary. Participants 2, 3, 5, and 7 discussed obtaining the skills they felt they needed

to establish successful reentry into society. Participants 3 and 7 stated that they developed

their skills while being incarcerated. Participant 5 discussed that he developed his skill

prior to incarceration; however, he further developed his skill while in prison.

Participants 5 and 7 explained that they did not "just lay around" in prison, they took the

time to learn the things they needed to know to be "okay in society." Participant 2 spoke

of reading several books to obtain knowledge on how to start a business. He read books

and watched YouTube videos until he was comfortable trying to start his own business.

He stated,

You gotta know what you want. You really gotta know what you want. You just

can't be out here wasting time. You gotta know what you want because they're

just gonna throw you back out there. If you don't have a plan, when you get out,

you're gonna be lost, especially if you end up on parole. If you end up on parole,

it's a lose-lose situation. No skill, no job, no money. It's crazy out here.

Having faith in oneself and in religion also helped. Participant 3 spoke a lot about

how religion has helped him to overcome his struggles during reentry. He explained that

he could not have overcome his challenges if it was not for his faith in God.

He explained,

Speaking about the fact of how hard it is to find gainful employment, but I'm

fearless. I trust God. Whatever is gonna happen is gonna happen. I'm gonna go

until I get it. My only impediment to success is myself. If I don't believe in

myself, how can I market myself to anybody.

He continued,

Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity, and so I've prepared myself

to have a marketable skill. I had to help myself. I had nowhere to go, so I went

straight back to the hood. I was homeless. All knowledge, intelligence, any ability

to function and communicate was imputed in me by the holy Spirit by God. I

know I got to be chosen. I'm from New Orleans. I'm from the …. I'm supposed

to be terminally hip and fatally cool. I'm supposed to be saying "Whoa! Whodie!"

How do I talk and function this way? I'm a miracle.

While Participants 2, 3, and 7 discussed how they helped themselves to overcome some of their reentry challenges post-imprisonment, they discussed feeling "left out" when they received no support from others, especially family members. However, some participants received social support from family members.

Social support. Generally, the participants perceived to having some sort of social support could help in overcoming challenges. Most of the participants benefited from encouragement or financial support from their families as well as people in their communities.

Participant 7 indicated that he had no help from family members before, during, or after incarceration. However, he did receive support from a friend after imprisonment. He stated, "I had no help from family members and it's the same thing now." He continued, "Family members did not trust me because of my criminal past. They were saying things like "Don't let him stay at your house. Don't take him in."

Participants 1, 4, and 5 discussed the outpour of support they received from family members. Participant 1 claimed to receive no support from his wife during his incarceration. He stated that he received plenty of support from his mother, father, and siblings. He stated that his imprisonment has "placed a strain on his marriage." Participant 4 described his sister as his "backbone." He stated, "My sister was basically my backbone and still today she's still got my back, and I got hers. My cousin and them would send me mail, money, and stuff like that, but my sister was my number one." Participant 5 was able to live with family members until he could obtain housing for

himself. He stated, "I didn't try to do HUD or low-income housing and stuff like that. I just stayed with my people until I got my money right to get my own place."

He continued,

As far as my family, they looked out for me while I was on the inside and the outside. My homeboys supported me too. It might not have been the right way, but they helped me. They would front me some dope to sell so I could get on my feet because they knew I had responsibilities. I came from a family of pimps, players, and drug dealers. We looked out for one another because we all knew what it felt like to not have anything.

When asked about the social support received during and after imprisonment, Participant 9 stated that her received no support. In fact, he declined to discuss it. He mentioned feeling angry, frustrated, and lonely.

For this study, there were no discrepant cases or non-confirming data.

Summary

For Chapter 4, I included the details of the data collection method that I used to conduct the study. I collected data through 10 semistructured interviews which contained open-ended questions. Then, I repeatedly read the transcripts and conducted member checks to ensure all data collected was correct. I employed the use of NVivo for coding purposes. A total of seven themes emerged from this study. For *RQ*1, three major themes emerged: feelings of restricted opportunities (subthemes: stigma, employment, and housing), feelings of restricted opportunities because of race, and relationships. For *RQ*2, four major themes emerged from the study: community lacks opportunities, racial discrimination, community lacks improvement (subthemes: community does not support

youth and people in the community are also struggling) and supporting reentry

(subthemes: self-support and social support).

In this chapter, I provided results of the research study and I included quotes that

corresponded with the results. All participants stated that after they were released from

prison, they had difficulty obtaining gainful employment and housing. The participants

discussed feeling like they were "looked over" because employers did not want to hire

them because of their incarceration history. They indicated that people were afraid of

them because they spent time in prison. One stated, "People talk about second chances,

but nobody really wants to give you a second chance, especially if you're Black." The

participants mentioned feeling hopeless when trying to obtain public housing as they

knew what would happen if they admitted to having a history of incarceration. Some

participants expressed feelings of loneliness due to lack of familial support while trying

to reintegrate into society.

One participant stated, "It ain't what you know, it's who you know.

Unfortunately, I come from a community that don't have a thing, so they can't help

nobody." They were released back into the poverty-stricken communities from which

they resided prior to imprisonment. There were no resources, community support, or

community improvement. Some participants stated that "there was nothing to do but sell

drugs if you wanted to put some money in your pocket" and "you gotta get it how you

live." One participant expressed, "We just wanna be treated equally. Damn! Are we

asking for too much?"

In Chapter 5, I reiterate the purpose and the nature of this research study. Also, I

discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations and

suggestions for future research, implications for positive social change, and the

conclusion. In the next chapter, I also discuss the findings as the data are compared to the

literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to better understand the perspectives of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana on the challenges they face transitioning back into their communities and their perceptions of how these challenges may impact recidivism. For this research study, I sought to achieve a better understanding of how the participants perceived the phenomenon and their understanding of the phenomenon. While reviewing peer-reviewed literature for this study, I discovered a lack of research on how formerly incarcerated African American men perceive their reentry challenges and those challenges' impact on recidivism. There was little research discussing this phenomenon from the perspectives and understandings of the targeted population.

The key findings in this study enhanced my understanding of the participants' lived experiences and how formerly incarcerated African American men perceive the phenomenon. While analyzing the interview data, I identified key findings: (a) Most of the participants reported feeling like they were restricted from opportunities because of their incarceration history, (b) the stigma of being a formerly incarcerated African American man exacerbated their challenges as they reported feeling discriminated against because of their race, (c) some participants reported that they received little to no support from family members and community members, and (d) some participants explained that they perceived their reentry challenges to have influenced recidivism.

In this chapter, I discuss the key findings, compare the findings to those I reviewed in Chapter 2, discuss the limitations of the study, and provide recommendations

for future research. Also, I discuss the implications for positive social change, theoretical

implications, and recommendations for practice.

Interpretations of the Findings

The results of this phenomenological research study helped me to understand the

lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men regarding their reentry

challenges and the negative impact on recidivism. A phenomenological research study

helped me to understand how they made sense of their experiences. For this research

study, my analysis of the data suggests that formerly incarcerated African American men

often struggle with feeling restricted from opportunities that may be resourceful in their

reentry process. Some participants prided themselves on developing/enhancing their

skills; however, they were still met with the harsh reality of the stigma associated with

formerly incarcerated individuals and, more specifically, formerly incarcerated African

American men.

Feelings of Restricted Opportunities Due to Incarceration History

Stigma, employment, and housing. Among the reentry challenges that African

American men in Louisiana face during their reintegration, the results showed that the

participants mainly struggled with the stigma of being a formerly incarcerated person.

The participants had negative experiences with employers, family, and community

members that were based on the stigma associated with their incarceration history. All

participants described being overlooked for job opportunities after the employers

reviewed their criminal history. They discussed being hesitant to check the box or answer

any questions related to their criminal history. They wanted to be viewed as the person

they believed themselves to be outside of their mistakes.

The participants experienced difficulty obtaining gainful employment. This finding was consistent with a previous research study. As a result, some participants felt forced to settle for low-paying jobs (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015). The participants gained employment in fast-food jobs where they received low wages for working long hours. They struggled to provide for themselves and their families with little income. Some participants believed they were forced to commit acts that led them to be reincarcerated. Obtaining employment was necessary for them to thrive in society. The participants believed that having gainful employment would have solved most of their issues as well as prevented them from reoffending. One of their issues was obtaining housing.

Participants attributed the stigma of being a formerly incarcerated person, especially a formerly incarcerated African American man, to the difficulty of obtaining gainful employment and housing. Research has indicated that obtaining gainful employment is key to successful reentry; it is also key to obtaining housing. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the absence of gainful employment and access to viable sources may lead to recidivism (Brown, 2017; Williams et al., 2019). The literature revealed that formerly incarcerated African American men had difficulty obtaining gainful employment and were also restricted from opportunities of housing because of their incarceration history. The findings in this study support the literature. Participants perceived that these restrictions negatively affected their ability to obtain housing and employment. Few participants had a place to stay after being released; however, some of them could stay with family. While some participants lived with family members and counted on community members for housing, other participants were shunned by family and community members because of their incarceration history. They experienced family

members having conversations with one another about whether to allow a "criminal" to live in their homes. Participants reported feeling betrayed and overlooked by family members and community members they once helped. Findings revealed that some participants felt like family members looked down on them and treated them as if they were no longer a family member. Participants described feeling surprised and disappointed by the way family members treated them.

Feelings of restricted opportunities because of race. Participants believed their challenges associated with the stigma of being formerly incarcerated individuals were exacerbated when combined with race. They expressed that "being Black" made it hard to advance, and "being a formerly incarcerate Black man" made it even harder to successfully reintegrate into society. This key finding supports findings from prior research studies showing that the stigma of being a formerly incarcerated individual was worse among formerly incarcerated African American men. These findings are consistent with prior researchers who found that formerly incarcerated African American men experience difficulty in obtaining gainful employment (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015; Decker et al., 2015). The participants described feeling emotionally confused. They wanted to be excited about being released from prison, but they did not know what to expect outside prison walls. The only hoped that their skills would be good enough to successfully reintegrate into society.

The participants expressed that they wanted to believe many opportunities awaited them. They knew they would be released back into the communities where they lived prior to incarceration, but they did not know if the communities had changed or the extent of the change. Incarceration changed their dynamics of their relationships with

family members and community members. Participants often counted on those relationships for support, housing, and employment. Pettus-Davis et al. (2017) found that formerly incarcerated individuals have trouble obtaining housing post-incarceration, but this is especially true for formerly incarcerated African American men. The stigma associated with formerly incarcerated African American men can multiply the level of difficulty they experience achieving resources to aid in their reentry process. One study showed that race was not the key factor for determining successful reentry for formerly incarcerated African American men; instead, the authors found that education was the key factor in successful reentry for the population (Lockwood et al., 2016). However, only one participant in this study mentioned education. Therefore, the findings from this study neither refute nor validate education as a key factor in reentry challenges and recidivism for formerly incarcerated African American men.

The participants' level of education did not alleviate their negative experiences with reentry challenges. They still encountered obstacles when seeking employment and housing. For this study, the participants level of education ranged from high school or equivalent diploma to associate degree. One participant was an ex-Marine with come college education. The participants had marketing skills and education, and they stated that they hoped their skills and education would be enough to successfully reintegrate into society. However, they reported that their skills and education were not enough as they experienced reentry challenges which they believed were heightened by their criminal history combined with race. Seventy percent of the participants reported feelings of restricted opportunities because of race, and ninety percent reported that they experienced racial discrimination.

The participants described race as a key aspect associated with the stigma. The participants described feelings of hopelessness. They stated that no matter what they did, how hard they tried, being Black men made them feel like targets to the criminal justice system but overlooked by employers. These findings supported the CRT utilized in this study as well as previous studies (Bell, 1992; Strickland, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). The findings from this study are consistent with the CRT which offers "racial realism." The theory informs that racism is real and will continue to exist in the criminal justice system and across various institutions. The CRT explains that race does not exist "just because"; it exists because there are people who lead organizations, policymakers, and lawmakers benefits from its existence.

Majority of the participants perceived that the criminal justice system was biased against the African American community. African American men tend to experience prejudice, which could get worse after being incarcerated. All participants but one acknowledged racial discrimination as a challenge. They discussed African American men being sentenced at a higher rate compared to their Caucasian counterparts, which corroborates a discussion in a prior study reviewed in Chapter 2 (Rosenberg et al., 2017). They also discussed that "the system" does not care about "Black communities." Some participants perceived that there were differences in the advancement opportunities for formerly incarcerated Black men than there were for other races. They mentioned experiencing racial discrimination before, during, and after imprisonment as well as this issue being "really bad in Louisiana." They described Louisiana as an extremely racist state with outdated laws that were not established for African Americans. Participants perceived that laws needed to be changed, so African American communities can receive

the help they desperately need. The Participants felt as if they experienced racial discrimination before, during, and after incarceration. Although they perceived that being a Black man made it hard for them to obtain gainful employment, being a formerly incarcerated African American man made it even more difficult. Without income, obtaining housing can be extremely difficult for anyone, so often people with low income seek low-income housing. Therefore, they tended to reside in communities that were poverty-stricken, higher crime rates, and violence.

The research participants discussed a lack of opportunities in their communities. Although prior research studies show that formerly incarcerated African American men are usually not released back into environments that will aid in successful reentry (Egleton et al., 2016; Lockwood et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2019), this remains true today. The condition of the community generally consisted of low-income minority groups, and community leaders generally did not focus on the development of the youth and the people. There were no resources for the youth in their communities, so the youth participated in crime and violent activities. Most of the participants perceived that the community needed to have programs specific to rehabilitation and job placement. They perceived that "the system" did not care about the communities of people of color, and "they" wanted the Black men to sell drugs so they could "lock them up." All participants agreed that the criminal justice system needs to be changed. They agreed that changes needed to be made about the way Black men are treated before, during, and after incarceration. The participants also agreed that the changes should start with the way communities of people of color are treated by "the system." They believed their needs were not addressed, and they did what they felt was necessary to survive. When their

needs were not addressed, the participants perceived that they would have "no choice" but to sell illegal drugs. Although they were able to provide for their families in an illegal manner, they often left their families behind when being incarcerated for the offense. A few participants describe estranged relationships with their own children because of the pain caused by their incarceration.

Some participants had disrupted social ties with their family members, especially their children. The participants had trouble establishing and maintaining relationships as well as continuing relationships with others. Their relationships with their family and community members were important to their reentry process. While some participants received social support from their family, others did not. The lack of positive relationships with family and community members made it hard for them to receive the social capital they needed to establish and maintain successful reentry. Some formerly incarcerated individuals may access social capital through support from family and community members, others do not because they lack family and community support. When most of the participants expressed their feelings about how difficult it was for them to find a job, their voice produced a sound of anger. However, when they mentioned the lack of familial support, the sadness in their voice was so rich it could be felt through their words.

They perceived they needed support to prevent them from going back to prison; they needed to know someone cared. The participants attributed their inability to obtain gainful employment and the lack of support to their recidivism. Although they believed their problems first began with "being a Black man" and their challenges were heightened by their history of incarceration, the participants agreed upon how helpful

their reintegration into communities would be and could be with support from family members and community members. When feeling they had very few people they could count on, some participants relied on religion and self-support to achieve successful reentry. They sought to develop marketable skills and practiced religion. One participant did not attribute his race to any of his experiences with the criminal justice system; instead, he discussed how God and his religion helped him. He believed that African American's family model was more to blame for the actions of Black men and their experience with the criminal justice system. However, a few other participants reported that a "new perspective" was the key contributor in their successful reentry. They described their outlook on life as being "different" when they were released for the last time. When they changed their outlook on life, their actions also changed.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, I intended to interview 5-7 participants; however, the data seemed to be near data saturation. Therefore, I interviewed more participants in which data saturation was reached after 10 participant interviews. I conducted the interviews via Skype and Zoom, and I was still able to view the participants while interviewing them. The participant selection included 10 formerly incarcerated African American adult men aged 32-49 years old from southern Louisiana who were incarcerated for more than one year in a state prison in Louisiana. Although all participants' education level was either a General Education Diploma (GED), high school diploma, or post-secondary education, I still had to reword some of the interview questions for some participants in a manner to which I would not influence their responses. This was only done when I realized the participant did not understand the question. Another limitation was the research method.

For this study, I collected data through interviews in which participants may not have been honest in their responses. The participants for this study were incarcerated two to five times for nonviolent offenses. Also, another limitation was rapport building with individuals who may not have trusted me; however, I thoroughly explained the purpose of the study to them, and I reiterated to them that every aspect of the study was voluntary.

<div align="center">**Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research**</div>

Some participants in this study began committing offenses during their early teenage years. They mentioned being held in detention centers because of their offenses. Also, they stated discussed the lack of support received from family members and how the support could have made a difference in their lives. For this research study, I focused on formerly incarcerated African American men; however, several issues were not included in the study such as the participants' transition from juvenile detention centers to their first prison sentence. Understanding their perceptions as a juvenile could help others to understand their perceptions about the crimes they committed or allegedly committed. Future research can be used to understand how they make sense of their experiences as well as their perceptions of reentry support and recidivism prevention. Although this research study focused on African American adult men, future research may also include formerly incarcerated African American adult women as well as those of other races.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

Practical Implications

Shedding light on the phenomenon of this research study is paramount to addressing the needs of the formerly incarcerated African American adult male

population when reintegrating into the community as well as minority communities. A qualitative phenomenological research study was appropriate for this study as it best allowed the researcher to delve into the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men and understand how they made sense of their experiences. It is important to understand how formerly incarcerated African American individuals understand their lived experiences to assist criminal justice officials and policymakers in generating laws, policies, and practices that will equally suit all formerly incarcerated individuals. It is also important to understand how successful reentry can have a positive impact on the families of the individuals and their communities. The information can also be applied to various institutions such as the education, health care system, and program evaluation. These institutions have a role in the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated African American men as well as their communities.

Theoretical Implications

This study confirms the tenets of the CRT. The results of the study showed that the participants perceived that *the system* did not care about their communities or any communities of people of color. They reported that their community's lack of resources was a purpose act to prevent the advancement of African Americans. This finding was consistent with one of the key points of the CRT which noted that racism is socially constructed, and it exists to prevent the advancement of racial minorities through policies, laws, and practices meant to promote White supremacy (Bell, 1990, 1992; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). Their perceptions of the existence of racism throughout the levels of the criminal justice system confirmed the Derrick Bell's (1990) philosophy of the CRT. This

study can be used to inform policies regarding community funding to encourage the advancement of racial minorities.

Conclusion

For nearly two decades, Louisiana has led the nation with the highest incarceration rate. While African Americans make up 67% of the incarcerated population (LCLE, 2019, p. 11, African American men make up more than 68% of the incarcerated population (LCLE, 2019, p.1 7). Although African American men made up majority of the incarcerated and habitual offender population in Louisiana, there was a dearth of research information about the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men in Louisiana. LCLE showed that African Americans make up 78.2% of the habitual offender population (2019, p.74). However, Louisiana does not keep track of the recidivism rate for African American men. Therefore, there is a critical need for research regarding the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men.

Recidivism damages everyone involved, especially, the children of those who are imprisoned. Thus, causing disrupted social ties between the individuals and their families/communities. Viable resources should be made available to communities of those in need. Empathy is vital as one must empathize with individuals who are seeking a second chance. Employment and social support can aid formerly incarcerated African American men to become an asset in their community. Understanding the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American adult men and how those experiences shape their perception on reentry is an excellent approach towards addressing their individual needs and the needs of the communities of people of color.

References

Adair, K. C. (2017). *Becoming free* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest

    Dissertations & Theses Full-Text database. (UMI no 1912729208).

African American. (n.d.) In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved from

    https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/African%20American

Alper, M., Durose, M. R., & Markman, J. (2018). 2018 Update on prisoner recidivism: A

    9-year follow-up period (2005-2014). Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from

    https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6266

Beitin, B. (2012). Interview and sampling: How many and whom. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A.

    Holstein, & A. B. Marvasti (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research:*

    The complexity of the craft (pp. 243–254). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

    Publications doi:10.4135/9781452218403.n17

Bell, D., Higgins, T., & Suh, S. (1990). Racial reflections: Dialogues in the direction of

    liberation, *UCLA Law Review*, *37,* 1037. Retrieved from

    https://www.uclalawreview.org

Bell, D. (1992). Racial realism. *Connecticut Law Review, 24*(2), 363–379. Retrieved from

    https://www.law.uconn.edu/student-life-resources/law-review-

    journals/connecticut-law-review

Berg, M. T., & Huebner, B. M. (2011). Reentry and the ties that bind: An examination of

    social ties, employment, and recidivism. *Justice Quarterly, 28*(2), 382–410.

    doi:10.1080/07418825.2010.498383

Berson, S. (2013). Beyond the sentence—Understanding collateral consequences.

National Institute of Justice Journal, 272, 24–28. Retrieved from

https://nij.ojp.gov/library/nij-journal

Brown, K. L. (2017). *Black male experiences and perceptions of disenfranchisement*

(Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full-

Text database. (UMI no 10608034).

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2018). *2018 Update on prisoner recidivism: A 9-year*

follow-up period (2005-2014) [press release]. Retrieved from

http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/18upr9yfup0514pr.cfm

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (n.d.). Reentry trends in the U.S.: Definitions. Retrieved from

https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/definition.cfm

Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., & Crawford, L. M. (2016). *The scholar-practitioner's*

guide to research design. Baltimore, MD: Laureate Publishing.

Caldwell, V. F. (1996). Reviewed work: Critical race theory: The key writings that

formed the movement by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. *Columbia Law Review,*

96(5), 1363–1374. doi:10.2307/1123408

Cerda, J., Stenstrom, D., & Curtis, M. (2015). The role of the type of offense and work

qualifications on the perceived employability of former offenders. *American*

Journal of Criminal Justice, 40(2), 317–335. doi:10.1007/s12103-014-9244-8

Cohen, M. Z., Kahn, D. L., & Steeves, R. H. (2000). Hermeneutic phenomenological

research: A practical guide for nurse researchers. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Publications.

Cooke, C. L. (2004). Joblessness and homelessness as precursors of health problems in

formerly incarcerated African American men. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship,*

36(2), 155–160. doi:10.1111/j.1547-5069-2004-04013.x

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative

research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(1), 89–91. doi:10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Couloute, L., & Kopf, D. (2018). Out of prison and out of work: Unemployment among

formerly incarcerated people. *Prison Policy Initiative.* Retrieved from

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The*

key writings that formed the movement. New York, NY: The New Press.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

traditions. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

approaches. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Crutchfield, R. D., & Weeks, G. A. (2015). The effects of mass incarceration on

communities of color. *Issues in Science in Technology, 32*(1), 46–51. Retrieved

from https://www.jstor.org/stable/24727005

Daniel, S. W., & Barrett, C. J. (1981). Needs of prisoner wives: A challenge for the

mental health profession. *Community Mental Health Journal, 14*(4), 310–322.

doi:10.1007/BF00779387

Davis, M. G. (2014). *Exploring the effects of ex-Prisoner reentry on structural factors in*

disorganized communities: Implications for leadership practice (Doctoral

dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full-Text database.

(UMI no 161).

Decker, S. H., Ortiz, N., Spohn, C., & Hedberg, E. (2015). Criminal stigma, race, and

ethnicity: The consequences of imprisonment for employment. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 43*(2), 108–121. doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2015.02.002

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2007). Critical race theory and criminal justice. *Humanity and Society, 31*(2–3), 122–145. doi:10.1177/0160597607031002001

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction (Vol20).* New York, NY: The New Press.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Handbook of quality research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dill, L. J., Mahaffey, C., Mosley, T., Treadwell, H., Barkwell, F., & Barnhill, S. (2016). "I want a second chance": Experiences of African American fathers in reentry. *American Journal of Men's Health, 10*(6), 459-465. doi:10.1177/1557988315569593

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health, 23*(3), 197-203. doi:10.1007/BF00990785

Dyer, W. J. (2005). Prison, fathers, and identity: A theory of how incarceration affects men's paternity identity. *Fathering, 3*(3), 201-219. doi:10.3149/fth.0303.201

Egleton, M. C., Banigo, D. M., McLeod, B. A., & Vakalahi, H. F. (2016). Homelessness among formerly incarcerated African American men: Contributors and consequences. *Contemporary Social Science, 11*(4), 403-413. doi:10.1080/21582041.2016.1258590

Flake, F. D. (2015). When any sentence is a life sentence. Employment discrimination against Ex-Offenders. *Washington Law Review*, *93*(1),45-102. Retrieved from http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview

Fontaine, J. (2013, November). Examining housing as a pathway to successful reentry: A demonstration design process. 1-15. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/projects/reentry-portfolio/index.cfm

Garland, D. (2018). Theoretical advances and problems in the sociology of punishment. *Punishment and Society, 20*(1), 8-33. doi:10.1177/1462474517737274

Gelb, A., & Compa, E. (2018, July 10). Louisiana no longer leads nation in imprisonment rate. *The PEW Charitable Trusts*. Retrieved from The Pew Charitable Trust website: https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/07/10/louisiana-no-longer-leads-nation-in-imprisonment-rate

Grant, J. (2018). *The lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders in the Northeast United States* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6030/

Graybill, L. (2018, June 27). Fight to cut Louisiana's high mass incarceration rate must continue. Retrieved from Southern Poverty Law Center website: https://www.splcenter.org/news/2018/06/27/fight-cut-louisianas-high-mass-incarceration-rate-must-continue

Hagstrom, A. (2017, July 27). Louisiana has one of the worst recidivism rates in the country. *Daily Caller*. Retrieved from https://dailycaller.com/2017/07/27/state-prison-uses-faith-job-training-to-gut-recidivism-rates/

Harris, H., & Harding, D. (2019). Racial inequality in the transition to adulthood after prison. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 5*(1), 223-254. doi:10.7758/rsf.2019.5.5.10

Harris, P. M., & Keller, k. S. (2005). Ex-offenders need not apply. The criminal

    background check in hiring decisions. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice,*

    21(1), 6-30. doi:10.1177/1043986204271678

Heath, J., Williamson, H., Williams, L., & Harcourt, D. (2018). "It's just more personal":

    Using multiple methods of qualitative data collection to facilitate participation in

    research focusing on sensitive subjects. *Applied Nursing Research, 43*, 30-35.

    doi:10.1016/j.apnr.2018.06.015

Herrera, C. (2010). Ethics in research design. In N. J. Salkind (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of*

    research design (pp. 426-430). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

    10.4135/9781412961288.n134

Houghton, C. E., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2010). Ethical challenges in

    qualitative research: Examples from practice. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(1), 15-25.

    doi:10.7748/nr2010.10.18.1.15.c8044

Huck, S., Beavers, A. & Esquivel, S. (2010). Sample. In N. J. Salkind (Ed.),

    Encyclopedia of research design (pp. 1395-1299). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

    Publications, Inc. doi:10.4135/9781412961288.n395

Incarceration. In *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Retrieved December 8, 2019, from

    https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incarceration

Johnson-Ahorlu, R. N. (2017). Efficient social justice: How critical race theory research

    can inform social movement strategy development. Urban Review, 49(5), 729-

    745. doi:10.1007/s11256-017-0419-8

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lockwood, S. K., Nally, J. M., & Ho, T. (2016). Race, Education, Employment, and

Recidivism among offenders in the United States: An exploration of complex

issues in the Indianapolis Metropolitan Area. *International Journal of Criminal

Justice Sciences, 11*(1), 57-74. Retrieved from

https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/180

0742299?accountid=14872

Lockwood, S. K., Nally, J. M., Ho, T., & Knutson, K. (2015). Racial disparities and

similarities in post-release recidivism and employment among ex-prisoners with a

different level of education. *Journal of Prisoner Education, 2*(1), 16-31.

doi:10.15845/jperv2il.703

Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice.

(2019). *2018 Status of state and local corrections facilities and program report

(R. S. 15:1204.1).* Retrieved from the Louisiana Commission on Law

Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice website: www.lcle.state.la.us

Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. (2019). *Reentry overview*.

Retrieved from https://doc.louisiana.gov/reentry-overview

Louisiana Population. (2019, July 7). Retrieved from

https://www.worldpopulationreview.com/states/louisiana

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative

interviews. *Forum Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung, 11*(3), 1-19.

Retreived from https://eds-a-ebscohost

com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=44962c40-

fb05-4b12-b8ea-922881add1aa%40sessionmgr4007

Miller, R. J. (2014). Devolving the carceral state: Race, prisoner reentry, and the micro-

politics of urban poverty management. *Punishment and Society 16*(3), 305-335. doi:0.1177/1462474514527487

Mitchell, O., Cochran, J., Mears, D. P., & Bales, W. D. (2017). The effectiveness of prison for reducing drug offender recidivism: A regression discontinuality analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 13*(1), 1-27. doi:10.1007/s11292-017-9282-6

Monk, E. P. (2018). The color of punishment: African Americans, skin tone, and the criminal justice system. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 42*(10), 1593-1612. doi:10.1080/01419870.2018.1508736

Morenoff, J. D., & Harding, D. J. (2014). Incarceration, prisoner reentry, and communities. *Annual Review Sociology, 40*(1), 411-429. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145511

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection, and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 9-18. doi:10.1080/12814788.2017.1375091

National Criminal Justice Reference Service. (2017). Special feature: Reentry. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/reentry/

National Institute of Justice. (n.d.a). Correctional facilities. Retrieved from https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/correctional-facilities

National Institute of Justice. (n.d.b). Recidivism. Retrieved from https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism

Nellis, A. (2016). *The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*. Retrieved from The Sentencing Project website:

https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/

Norris, A. N., & Billings, J. (2017). Colorblind ideology, mass incarceration, and controlling racial images: An intersectional analysis of presidential rhetoric from 1969-1996. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice, 15*(1), 78-98. doi:10.1080/15377938.2016.1256847

Ortiz, J. M., & Jackey, H. (2019). The system is not broken, it is intentional: The prisoner reentry industry as deliberate structural violence. *The Prison Journal, 99*(4), 484-503. doi:10.1177/0032885519852090

Patton, M. (2015). *Purposeful sampling and case selection: Overview of strategies and options* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pettus-Davis, C., Dunnigan, A., Veeh, C. A., Howard, M. O., Scheyette, A. M., & Roberts-Lewis, A. (2017). enhancing social support and postincarceration: results from a pilot randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 73*(10), 122-1246. doi:10.1002/jclp.22442

Power, J., & Nolan, A. (2017). What makes a "good job" after incarceration? Perceptions of offenders in the community. *The Journal of Correctional Education, 68*(3), 53-71. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/26508033

Racism. In *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Retrieved December 8, 2019, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Reisig, M. D., Bales, W. D., Hay, C., & Wang, X. (2007). Effect of racial inequality on

Black male recidivism. *Justice Quarterly, 24*(3), 408-434.

doi:10.1080/07418820701485387

Rosenberg, A., Groves, A. K., & Blankenship, k. M. (2017). Comparing Black and White

drug offenders: Implications for racial disparities in criminal justice and reentry

policy and programming. *Journal of Drug Issues, 47*(1), 132-142.

doi:10.1177/0022042616678614

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd

ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand

Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research

projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2), 63-75. Walden Library databases

Skinner-Osei, P., & Stepteau-Watson, D. (2018). A qualitative analysis of African

American fathers struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after

participation in re-entry programs. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social

Environment, 28*(2), 240-255. doi:10.1080/10911359.2017.1402724

Staller, K. (2010). Qualitative research. In N. J. Salkind (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of research

design* (pp. 1159-1163). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781412961288.n350

Strickland, J. (2016). Building social capital for stable employment: The postprison

experiences for Black male exprisoners. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation,

55*(3), 129-147. doi:10.1080/10509674.2015.11285086

Thomas, S. P. & Pollio, H. R. (2002). *Listening to patients: A phenomenological

approach to nursing research and practice. New York, NY: Springer.

Turkington, C. H. (2017). Louisiana's addiction to mass incarceration by the numbers. Loyola Law Review, 63(3), 557-591. Retrieved from law.loyno.edu/loyola-law-review

Turney, K., Lee, H., & Comfort, M. (2013). Discrimination and psychological distress among recent released male prisoners. *American Journal of Men's Health, 7*(6), 482-493. doi:10.1177/1557988313484056

Tyler, T. E., & Brockman, B. (2017). Returning home: Incarceration, reentry, stigma and the perpetuation of racial and socioeconomic health inequity. *The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics, 45,* 545-557. doi:10.1177/1073110517750595

Visher, A. C., Lattimore, P. A., Barrick, K., & Tueller, S. (2017). Evaluating the long-term effects of prisoner reentry services on recidivism: What types of services matter?, *Justice Quarterly, 34*(1), 136-165. doi:10.1080/07418825.20151115539

Wacquant, L. (2000). The new peculiar institution: On the prison as surrogate ghetto. *Theoretical Criminology, 4*(3), 377-389. doi:10.1177/1362480600004003007

Watkins, W. (2019, February 26). Thousands become eligible to vote Friday, as Louisiana's new felon voting law takes effect. *New Orleans Public Radio*. doi:https://www.wwno.org/post/thousands-become-eligible-vote-friday-louisianas-new-felon-voting-law-takes-effect

Welton, D. (1999). The essential Husserl: Basic writings in transcendental phenomenology. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Williams, J. M., Wilson, S. K., & Bergeson, C. (2019). "It's hard out here if you're a Black felon": A critical examination of Black male reentry. *The Prison Journal,*

99(4), 437-458. doi:10.1177/0032885519852088

Wildeman, C. & Wang, E. A. (2017). Mass incarceration, public health, and widening inequality in the USA. *The Lancet, 389*(10077), 1464-1474. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(17)302593

Zaw, K., Hamilton, D., & Darity, W. (2016). Race, wealth, and incarceration: Results from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. *Race and Social Problems, 8*(1), 103-115. doi:10.1007/s12552-016-9164-y

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are some of the reentry challenges you faced after being released from incarceration, if any?

2. What were some challenges faced prior to incarceration?

3. What are some challenges you faced when seeking employment after being released from incarceration?

4. What were some challenges you faced when seeking housing after being released from incarceration?

5. How would you describe the support you received during and after incarceration?

6. How would you describe the community where you reside?

7. How do you perceive your reentry challenges to be related to re-incarceration?

8. What challenges do you perceive formerly incarcerated African American men face that may differ from the challenges faced by other racial/ethnic groups?

9. What changes in the criminal justice system do you perceive will promote successful reintegration?

10. What are some necessary aspects that should be included in reentry programs that are specific to formerly incarcerated African American men?

Have you or anyone you know faced the challenges of life after incarceration?

Marquita Higgins is inviting you to participate in a study about the reentry challenges of African American adult males in Louisiana. The purpose of this study is to better understand the reentry challenges of formerly incarcerated African American men. The potential participants must be (a) an African American adult male (b) from southern Louisiana (c) between ages 22 and 49 years old (d) who has been incarcerated in a state prison in Louisiana for non-violent offenses. If you meet the criteria for this study, please contact the researcher using the contact information below.

Marquita Higgins, doctoral student at Walden University