

2021

African American Male Ex-Felons' Perspectives Regarding Felon Disenfranchisement

Tymesha Alegra Whitehead
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tymesha Alegra Whitehead

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Review Committee

Dr. Clarence Williamson, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Grace Telesco, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Tamara Mouras, University Reviewer,
Criminal Justice Faculty

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

Walden University
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Abstract

African American Male Ex-Felons' Perspectives Regarding Felon Disenfranchisement

by

Tymesha Alegra Whitehead

MS Criminal Justice, Kaplan University, 2014

BA Criminal Justice, Suny Empire State College, 2008

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

The tradition of disenfranchising those convicted in the United States of felony crimes has profound historical racial roots that have persisted for decades in the United States. The persistent practice of felon disenfranchisement in the 21st century challenges the essence of democracy, with over six million people disenfranchised. The need for major reform efforts to restore voting rights to ex-felons has been exposed due to this issue. The literature revealed no studies have been undertaken regarding this phenomenon in terms of those directly affected by it. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the effect of felon disenfranchisement from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons. The theoretical framework used for this study was the labeling theory. Interview data were obtained from 15 African American male ex-felons who had direct experiences with felon disenfranchisement. Participants were recruited using a nonpurposeful snowball sampling technique. Moustakas' modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's data analysis led to the identification of key themes among participants. The themes were rejection, politics, obstacles, cultural values, lack of knowledge, participation, inclusion, lack of self-worth, alienism, suppression, and democracy. Results showed the destructive effects of felon disenfranchisement extending beyond political enslavement. Through adopting the Maine and Vermont model of never taking a person's right to vote away, positive social change could result in terms of abolishing felon disenfranchisement practices and restoring ex-felons' voting rights.

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Dedication

I have to first give honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because of his love, mercy, and grace I was able to persevere. It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother Pauline Whitehead. She was my rock always right by my side cheering me on, and encouraging me through scripture, that I can do all things through GOD who strengthens me. My father Tommy Lee Jackson, my son Devontae Cosme, my daughter Tinaya Arline, grandchildren Ava and Aden Jackson, Devontae Shameer Cosme Jr., and my siblings Samatra Jones, Deyjuan Whitehead, and Samuel Speed Jr., My family and friends thank you all for being tremendously supportive and riding this journey out with me. I love each and every one of you.

Acknowledgements

I once again give thanks and honor GOD without you nothing is possible. To Dr. Clarence Williamson, thank you for your keen guidance without it I would still be struggling to polish the problem statement; and for that I thank you. Thank you for the pep talks when I was feeling less than motivated, thank you always saying “if you take my advice and do what I suggest I promise you will be Dr. Whitehead” and here we are! Thank you for believing in me.

To Dr. Grace Telesco thank you for all of your support and guidance.

To Dr. Tamara Mouras thank you for all of your support and guidance.

Lastly, to the participants who trusted me to capture and report your personal views and experiences, I thank you abundantly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

Introduction

The term felony originated from English common law to describe a crime that resulted in the forfeiture of a convicted person's land and property to which certain punishments, including capital punishment, could be extended. A felony is commonly defined as a crime involving violence which is considered more severe than a misdemeanor and is normally punishable by more than a year of imprisonment or death (Adler, Mueller, & Laufer, 2017). Crimes that constitute felonies include but are not limited to murder, aggravated assault and battery, manslaughter, animal cruelty, vehicular abuse, larceny, robbery, stealing, and rape/sexual misconduct (FindLaw, 2019).

Disenfranchisement is the reaction to derogatory labels which consequently form self-identification problems. Both were examined in this study. Felon disenfranchisement prohibits voting rights to convicted felons (Inderbitzin, 2019), and in some states a permanent voting ban is imposed on convicted felons (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). Felon disenfranchisement hinders the process of democracy by undermining the equal expression of the desires of the people, a vital component of a working democracy.

Felon disenfranchisement has prohibited nearly 6.1 million Americans from voting. Disenfranchised individuals are ex-felons with completed sentences (The Sentencing Initiative, 2016). Statutory regulations in the United States have a disproportionate impact on African Americans (Taylor, 2018). African American males are four times more likely to have their voting rights forfeited relative to the rest of the voting age population (Jean, 2019). About 7.4% of African American male citizens are

disqualified from voting because of felony convictions. Meanwhile, 1.8% of non-African Americans cannot vote (Uggen et al., 2016). However, felon disenfranchisement is not the first attempt to prevent African Americans from voting; this restrictive right was preceded by grandfather clauses, election taxes, and hasty literacy testing (Root & Barclay, 2018). During the era of Civil Rights, the implementation of these intimidation techniques was standard. The strength of democracy is calculated by the people's willingness to vote; any contingencies placed on the ballot are contradictory. Voting for elected leaders, legislation, and policies that affect society is a human right and key component of a working democracy (Evans & Cuevas Ingram, 2014).

Problem Statement

Felon disenfranchisement is the deprivation of the right of a person to register and vote as a result of a felony conviction (Democracy Imprisoned, 2013). Citizens forfeit the right to vote in all but two states (Maine and Vermont) following a felony conviction. All individuals with a felony conviction are automatically and indefinitely barred from voting in four states. Twenty states forbid voting for all individuals with a felony conviction before they have served their sentence including imprisonment, parole, and probation. Six states allow sentences to be completed and impose post-sentence limits, such as a waiting period, before restoring voting rights. Four states prohibit voting while in prison or on parole to those with a felony conviction. Fourteen states bar voting while incarcerated (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Felon disenfranchisement severely alters the democratic model. Consequently, an unprecedented fragmentation in the African American community has emerged due to disenfranchisement tactics (Turok, 2018). Alexander

(2010) said disenfranchisement is a bureaucratic maze that prohibits ex-felons from reclaiming the right to vote, which in turn could be equivalent to poll taxes and literacy tests that prevented African American eligible voters from voting. Given the inevitable and detrimental political impact of felon disenfranchisement, there have been few systematic attempts to empirically analyze such consequences. Imposing felon disenfranchisement which targets African American communities by withdrawing their votes leads to continuing social injustices (Poulos, 2019).

Although research has explored the viewpoints of elected officials as well as advocates for and against felon disenfranchisement, no study has included a detailed analysis of how African American male ex-felons view felon disenfranchisement and how their perspectives affect their attitudes towards politics and public involvement. Additionally, there are no studies that explicitly investigate how felon disenfranchisement impacts other races. This research will make significant contributions to literature regarding felon disenfranchisement.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand felon disenfranchisement from African American male ex-felons' perspectives. Although not a significant factor in this study, the study was diverse and consisted of African American male ex-felons from several different counties in a Northeastern region in the United States. The term felon disenfranchisement refers to denying the right to vote to any person that have been convicted of felony offenses (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Further insights into how African American male ex-felons view the effects of felon

disenfranchisement could provide policymakers with direction and advice regarding reform measures to help restore voting rights.

Research Questions

For this qualitative phenomenological study, the central research questions were

RQ1: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

RQ2: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about labeling stigmatization?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the labeling theory developed by Howard Becker. The labeling theory involves a distinctly sociological perspective that emphasizes the importance of social labeling in generating crime and deviance. Deviant behavior frequently leads to new problems arising from other responses to negative stereotyping reactions attached to the deviant label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). In addition, these problems can increase the probability that deviant criminal behavior will become chronic and stable.

According to Lemert (1967), deviant conduct may turn into "means of defense, attack, or adaptation" (p. 17) to the problems produced by deviant labeling. Elements of labeling include laws, those who set the law, and others who follow or breach the law (Becker, 1963). Any conduct that goes against the dominant social norms may be regarded as deviant (Crossman, 2019). However, the social context in which the action is

carried out plays a great role in terms of labeling the action. Before an act can be deemed to be deviant, it has to be regarded as dangerous to the existing moral order.

The labeling theory is a significant theory in studies involving crime and delinquency. The internalization of criminal labels is necessary when connecting legal penalties with increased criminal activity (Scheff, 1966; Schur, 1971). People who internalize the label as an accurate representation refuse to change their opinions about the labeled individual, even though evidence is provided that contradicts the knowledge they internalize (Becker, 1963).

Continuing to deny those considered deviant the right to solidify their status as citizens would continue to encourage deviant behavior. When ex-felons are barred from voting, consequently, they are disenfranchised from society. Berk (2015) found that irrespective of when ex-felons complete their sentences, if they have not been restored to full citizenship, society will continue to judge them on the basis of past criminal convictions.

Nature of the Study

For this study, a qualitative methodological approach was used to analyze the effects of felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion according to African American male ex-felons. The qualitative approach was the best method for this study, as it better served the research objective of expanding understanding of felon disenfranchisement from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons experiencing the phenomenon. The qualitative approach is best when open-ended questions are used.

For this study, the research design was the phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research is carried out when little or no inquiry regarding the phenomenon exist (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). A nonprobability snowball sampling technique was used to select participants. Snowball sampling is a screening technique that allows the researcher to get feedback from participants and helps to identify those who may have experiences involving the phenomenon under investigation (TenHouten, 2017). The sample population consisted of 15 African American male ex-felons who have completed sentencing requirements and remain disenfranchised. Participants were interviewed using semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Definition of Terms

A brief description of terms was given to explain language used during analysis.

African American: Also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans, these are an ethnic group of Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The term African American generally denotes descendants of enslaved black people who are from the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Citizen: Individuals entitled to rights and privileges.

Conviction: the act or process of finding a person guilty of a crime especially in a court of law.

Criminal Sentence: Formally pronounced by a court or judge in a criminal proceeding which specifies the punishment to be inflicted upon the convict.

Disenfranchised: A term used to refer to a person deprived of the right to vote

Ex-Felon: An ex-felon is someone who has served his or her entire sentence and is no longer under any other form of correctional supervision

Felon: A person is a felon if he or she has been convicted of a felony and is currently incarcerated or under correctional supervision (i.e., probation or parole).

Felony: A grave crime as opposed to a misdemeanor.

Labels: Occurs when someone's offending behavior increases after involvement in the criminal justice system.

Stigma: A state of disgrace, shame, or dishonor. Stigma impacts how individuals view themselves and perceive they are perceived by others

Vote: A usually formal expression of opinion or will in response to a proposed decision.

Assumptions

The first assumption for this study was that my education in criminal justice and current employment working with incarcerated inmates and African American male ex-felons, as well as my African American ethnicity would lead to credibility, which could potentially foster participation in the research. The second assumption was that participants were completely cooperative when participating in interviews and all answers to the questions were real, truthful, and reliable. The third assumption was that participants understood interview questions in a natural and safe environment. The fourth assumption was participants believed their viewpoints regarding disenfranchisement would not make any difference with respect to restoration of voting rights. Finally, it was

assumed all information relating to the perspectives of African American male ex-felons was unbiased analysis and data were accurately collected.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was limited to examining felon disenfranchisement from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons of voting age. Additionally, this study involved qualitative interviews and therefore did not require quantitative methods for data collection. This study also lacked currently incarcerated individuals or individuals who were actively on probation or parole, as well other races and women. Issues of transferability and phenomenology do not allow for empirical generalizations or the establishment of functional relationships in terms of matters of transferability. However, diversity as well as a thick analysis was used to address transferability issues, while also acknowledging the uniqueness of phenomenological science.

The theoretical foundation for this study was limited to the labeling theory; however, consideration was given to the social distance theory. However, after further review, the theory did not align with the goal for this study.

A delimitation of this study was that transferability of this study was limited to the perspectives of a small sample size of 15 African American male ex-felons currently disenfranchised from voting after sentencing completion in a Northeast region of the United States.

Therefore, the outcomes may not be generalized to the entire African American male ex-felon population as it is impossible to interview the whole Northeast region of the United States because of the geographical differences.

Limitations

This study involved a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the perspectives of African American male ex-felons regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion. Qualitative research offers a unique opportunity to explore fields otherwise restricted to quantitative analysis. However, limitations in qualitative research exist. According to Simon (2011), a limitation is a research weakness which could have an effect on outcomes. A limitation related to qualitative studies is that research is conducted in natural settings (Norum, 2008). Therefore, findings may differ if collected in an environment unfamiliar to the participant and results usually cannot be generalized, and a challenge is presented when attempting to repeat the research (McLeod, 2019).

This study involved using a phenomenological design. The phenomenological approach was best suited for this study to acquire responses from interviews with African American male ex-felons. Subjectivity is one limitation of phenomenology. Subjectivity is not without biases, which can make it difficult to consider outcomes. The presence of the researcher could influence the responses of study participants. Another limitation of this study was the personal and professional connections I had with the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, I was acutely aware of the possibilities of bias. To manage my bias, a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) data analysis method originally modified by Moustakas was used. The procedures for the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method are as follows:

1. The researcher starts by obtaining a full description of their own experiences

regarding the phenomenon.

2. Using verbatim transcripts of experiences, complete the following steps:
 - a) Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
 - b) Record relevant statements.
 - c) List each nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or the meaning units of the experience.
 - d) Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
 - e) Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Include verbatim examples.
 - f) Reflect on your own textural descriptions. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of the experience.
 - g) Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience.
3. Using the verbatim transcripts of the experience of each research participant, complete the above steps, a through g.
4. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all participants' experiences, construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience. All the individual textural-structural descriptions are integrated into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121-122).

Significance

There are no studies that examine the impact of felon disenfranchisement from African American male ex-felons' perspectives. Findings may be used to assist in the elimination of felon disenfranchisement as it continues to restrict ex-felons from voting after sentencing completion. Felon disenfranchisement remains a current problem among ex-felons, but in particular, African American male ex-felons (The Sentencing Project, 2019).

The study's objective was to record voices and perspectives of African American male ex-felons. This research has potential for meaningful social change by promoting the reevaluation of state-level disenfranchisement to better define ways to allow ex-felons to vote.

Summary

African American male ex-felons' perspectives regarding felon disenfranchisement have the potential to possibly broaden ideas about how best to guide efforts to restore voting rights. Lack of support from those in political power can delay efforts to restore voting rights. It is necessary for those in positions of power to effectively explore viewpoints of African American male ex-felons regarding felon disenfranchisement after completion of sentences, which could possibly facilitate reforms that grant voting rights to all. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature which guided this study. Additionally, Chapter 2 includes literature research strategies, theoretical foundations, definitions of relevant terms used throughout this study, and information related to felon disenfranchisement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Felon disenfranchisement is vital in the US legal system. While most states do not allow ex-felons the right to vote, in some states, ex-felons maintain this right. Different legal approaches in terms of treatment of ex-felons leads to the question of whether disenfranchisement can be legally justified. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine felon disenfranchisement from African American male ex-felons' perspectives. Felon disenfranchisement is the result of a felony conviction and is significantly changing the paradigm of democracy. As a result, unprecedented divisions within African American communities have arisen due to strategies of disenfranchisement (Turok, 2018). Two states permit ex-felons to maintain their right to vote. This study examined felon disenfranchisement and its racial impact. Thirteen percent of African American men (1.4 million) are disenfranchised, representing just 36% of the total disenfranchised population. Florida and Texas disenfranchises almost one in three African American males is disenfranchised. Consequently, in eleven states, (Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) one in four African American males is disenfranchised. Therefore, if current trends continue, the rate of disenfranchisement for African American males could reach 40% in states that disenfranchise ex-felons (The Sentencing Project, 2019).

Chapter 2 includes a critical evaluation of previous research studies regarding the issue of felon disenfranchisement. No conceptual or empirical studies are available that

examine felon disenfranchisement from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons. The literature review began with a discussion of Becker's labeling theory. Chapter 2 also includes literature search strategies and a discussion of felon disenfranchisement and its current status in the United States, the phenomenological rationale for disenfranchisement, issues involving why voting is connected to criminal punishment, and analyses of legal challenges to felon disenfranchisement. I describe the impact of felon disenfranchisement as well as international practices and public support for felon disenfranchisement. Furthermore, Chapter 2 includes explanations of felon disenfranchisement as well as the labeling theory and gaps in the literature.

Literature Research Strategy

For this study, literature was searched through Walden Library databases such as *Criminal Justice Database, Criminological highlights, Laws and Codes, Political Science Complete* using the following search terms: *definition of felony disenfranchisement, history of felony disenfranchisement, Jim crow laws, voting poll taxes, consequences of voting bans, consequences of felony disenfranchisement, felony disenfranchisement by state, criminal Justice and disenfranchisement, felony disenfranchisement laws, ex-felon, voting restrictions, restoration of voting after a felony conviction, labeling theory, U.S. Constitution, African American males felony convictions, felony disenfranchisement, labeling theory, inmate voting rights, African American males, and disenfranchisement.* Books, government websites, and reports were reviewed.

Theoretical Foundation

The primary theoretical framework for this literature review was Howard Becker's labeling theory. Becker (1963) viewed deviance as the cultural product of interactions between people whose occupations involved either committing crimes or catching criminals. The labeling theory in criminology is a theory involving symbolic interactionism.

Social interaction through communication involves language and symbols. According to Blumer (1969), powerful individuals and the state create crime by labeling some behaviors as inappropriate. Lemert (1951) said even though some criminological efforts to reduce crime are meant to help the offender, such as rehabilitation efforts, these efforts may in fact move offenders closer to lives of crime because of labels assigned to those engaging in the behaviors. As they begin to treat these individuals on the basis of labels, offenders begin to accept this label. An individual engages in a behavior that is deemed by others as inappropriate, others label that person to be deviant, and eventually the individual internalizes and accepts this label. This notion of social reaction or response by others to the behavior or individual is central to the labeling theory. Critical to this theory is that the negative reactions of others to a particular behavior is what causes that behavior to be labeled as criminal or deviant.

This review of literature identified several reactions to deviance, including collective rule making, organizational processing, and interpersonal reactions. Becker (1963) characterized deviance as a social development in which social groups provoke deviance by establishing laws whose violation constitutes deviance and applying

those laws to specific individuals and labeling them as outsiders. Becker grouped behavior into four categories: falsely accused, conforming, pure deviant, and secret deviant. Falsely accused represents those individuals who have engaged in obedient behavior but have been perceived as deviant; therefore, they would be falsely labeled as deviant. Conforming represents those individuals who have engaged in obedient behavior that has been viewed as obedient behavior (or not deviant). Pure deviant represents those individuals who have engaged in rule-breaking or deviant behavior that has been recognized as such; therefore, they would be labeled as deviant by society. Secret deviant represents those individuals who have engaged in rule-breaking or deviant behavior, but have not been perceived as deviant by society; therefore, they have not been labeled as deviant.

The results of this stigmatization are a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the offender comes to view him or herself in the same ways society does. which implies that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others (Cooley, 1902) Therefore, when labels are placed on individuals, there is a greater likelihood the deviant label will be internalized, and thus amplify deviant behavior (Lemert, 1951). Cicourel (1968) said that it was the societal reaction to the delinquency label that differed rather than the acts themselves.

Key concepts involving the labeling theory include primary and secondary deviance, as well as the importance of being stigmatized (Lemert, 1951). According to Lemert (1967), primary deviance is defined as episodes in which many people participate in deviant behavior. Secondary deviance is when someone makes something out of that

deviant behavior, creating a negative social label that changes the self-concept and social identity of a person (Lemert, 1951). This is also referred to as a stigma.

Lemert's (1951), offers an example to illustrate his point: that of a schoolboy who plays a prank in class and is mildly punished by his teacher (primary deviance). Later, he accidentally causes another disturbance and is again reprimanded (again, primary deviance). However, because of these repeated disturbances, the teacher begins using terms such as "bad boy" and "mischief maker" toward the child. The child then becomes resentful of the labels and may act out, fulfilling the role that he sees as expected of him, especially if he discovers that there is a certain status among a certain group of peers in playing that role (secondary deviance). That group of peers then may form their own subculture within which the behavior deemed deviant by the larger society is accepted and encouraged. This illustration ties into felon disenfranchisement, because the stigma associated with being labeled a felon and societal reactions to that label, impedes on ex-felons identifying as citizens in a democratic world.

According to Berk (2017), labeling ex-offenders has damaging effects on their lives and social relationships. Although the theory assumes, deviant behavior can develop from various causes and conditions, when people are characterized as deviants, they regularly face new issues emerging from self as well as other people responses to adverse generalizations that are associated with the deviant label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). Therefore, these problems may increase the risk of stable and persistent deviant and criminal behavior. In the words of Lemert (1967), deviant behavior can become "means of protection, attack, or adaptation" (p. 17) to the problems created by deviant labeling

(Bernburg, 2006). Berk (2015) adds that analysts who study anomaly, view it differently and this affects the way deviance is exploited.

Background

Legal provisions have been made in the USA to protect people's rights irrespective of their ethnicity, skin color or status. Bryan and da Cruz (2016) conducted a historical analysis of felon disenfranchisement by examining the Voting Rights Act since its enactment fifty years ago. The study discussed significant decisions regarding who can vote in general elections as many people are denied this fundamental constitutional right. The study revealed that disenfranchisement laws against ex-felons have been part of the US legal system from as early as independence. The authors observe that continued felon disenfranchisement is justified. The reason is that other legal frameworks generally protect all citizens' rights, but voting cannot be regarded as a natural right; hence, it can be taken away if an individual takes part in deliberate activities that harm others. Further, the study stressed the racial undertones and constructs influencing felon disenfranchisement. In this context, the study identified that the Act has been unable to prevent policies of the state from undue disenfranchisement. Similarly, the researchers evaluated the US and policies' election processes denying citizens an opportunity to engage in suffrage. The discussion on the social ramifications of limiting Americans' voting rights, legal bottlenecks in enforcing the Voting Rights Act, and restoration of felons' right to vote to provide a holistic understanding of the subject area.

Felon disenfranchisement has been found to have strong links with labeling theory. According to Bernburg (2019), labeling theory posits that despite the fact that

deviant behavior is caused by a wide range of factors, defining a person as deviant in society generally leads to the reinforcement of antisocial behavior. The assumption of labeling theory presupposes that acts such as denying ex-felons the right to vote is detrimental to society, as presented by Bernburg (2019). Based on Bernburg (2019), assumption it can be concluded that ex-felons will be more likely to repeat their crimes when they are disenfranchised and ostracized by society. Felon disenfranchisement becomes exaggerated when the perceptions of racial profiling are observed in ex-felon disenfranchisement, as highlighted by Schaefer and Kraska (2012), conducted a study on felon disenfranchisement by focusing on the judiciary's role in attempting to renegotiate racial divisions. The researchers adopted a socio-legal approach to demonstrate how the federal court system perpetuates and maintains ethno-racial-based divisions in the US by rationalizing and validating felon disenfranchisement laws. The study revealed over 5 million Americans are politically disenfranchised as a result of a felony conviction, and African Americans constitute the largest percentage. The authors report overrepresentation of African Americans is a culmination of unjust laws and policies. Similarly, they raise important questions as to whether there is a need for such draconian laws. The study reports felon disenfranchisement has been used as a means of depriving African American people in the US their voting rights. From this racial perspective, it emerges that ex-felons of different races are treated differently. Felon disenfranchisement can be looked at in the lens of racial profiling by evaluating whether there are disparities in the voting rights of African American ex-felons. The findings are reinforced by the in-depth illustrations of how several disenfranchised policies have validated eliminating the

notions of racially motivated tendencies and practices, such as controlling minority populations, hence reflecting the labeling theory constructs. However, the study fails to discuss how felon disenfranchisement affects their socio-political wellbeing in the US.

Bernburg (2019), published a book on labeling theory to show how it applies in various societal situations. Felon disenfranchisement has strong links with the theory. The author argues labeling theory presents the assumption that despite deviant behavior being caused by a wide range of factors, defining a person as deviant in society leads to the reinforcement of antisocial behavior. In the specific context of ex-felon disenfranchisement, this assumption presupposes that acts like denying ex-felons the right to vote are detrimental to society. Ex-felons are more likely to be repeat offenders when disenfranchised, as opposed to when they are not. In this case, labeling an entire population deviant by denying a significant proportion of people their right to vote can cause rises in antisocial behavior among members within their group. Labeling theory provides useful insights for making essential predictions in the context of ex-felon disenfranchisement.

Phenomenological Rationale for Disenfranchisement

A phenomenological approach is useful in social research since it allows a researcher to collect information about a phenomenon from individuals that have actually experienced it Hopkins et al. (2016), conducted a qualitative study to develop an appropriate framework for the positionality negotiation in the phenomenological investigation. The authors emphasize that a phenomenological approach is useful in social research because it allows researchers to collect information about a situation from

individuals experiencing it. The researchers assert that phenomenology contributes substantially to understanding human experiences and perspectives. Comprehending implications of disenfranchisement among ex- felons is critical to developing appropriate policy remedies to reverse voting rights denial. The use of phenomenology allows researchers to adopt different approaches to gather information, analyze, and report results. In this regard, the authors observe the need to manage pre-understandings by utilizing reflexivity or reduction. Further, the findings show that engaging participants helps collect factual data upon which meaning generalization can be made regarding a phenomenon under study. The study offers a broader lens through which social events and actions can be viewed to explain felon disenfranchisement. The authors have also attempted to provide a remedy for shifting across different positions based on context and purpose. However, this study fails to address the shortcomings of applying phenomenology, such as subjectivity.

In support of Hopkins et al., (2016) argument, Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016), conducted a qualitative hermeneutical interpretive research to understand the critical tenets of interpretive phenomenological investigation. Using the approach, the authors explored teenage parent participants' experiences and views from an emic perspective. For accurate descriptions of happenings in society, there cannot be a separation between the object and the subject. In that regard, phenomenology combines both the object and the subject by sourcing information from individuals directly affected by the investigated phenomenon. Similarly, the study reports phenomenology is critical because it helps in accessing first-hand information, hence leading to accurate findings on the issue being

investigated compared to other philosophical approaches. The study emphasizes reflexivity in undertaking interpretive phenomenological investigations about human experiences within a social context. However, it does not provide further insights into how the phenomenological approach could be applied alongside other methodologies to yield plausible results. Moreover, the sample size used is small; therefore, the findings might not be generalizable.

Additionally, Dominguez (2018), investigated the lived experiences of clients having disenfranchised grief using a transcendental phenomenological methodology. The researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews from four participants. The study revealed four crucial textural themes regarding disenfranchisement, including disconnection, which is distinct from grief; it is characterized by exacerbated grief and involves inconsistencies in the movement of goals and biopsychosocial focus. The study delineates how the experience relating to disenfranchised grief affects individuals from various social backgrounds. Any form of disenfranchisement poses severe social and political impacts on the target group. The study comprehensively examined the role of social context in furthering felon disenfranchisement and limiting an individual's psychosocial capabilities, including denying fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution. The author identified pertinent cultural and societal underpinnings of disenfranchisement grief. This study is plausible due to the well-illustrated data collection and analysis methodology. Similarly, the use of semi-structured interviews provided in-depth data for analysis. However, to some extent, the findings of the researcher were

affected by subjective responses from participants. Further, they used a small number of participants, hence affecting the results' generalizability.

In a similar fashion Lewthwaite et al. (2017), employed the phenomenological approach in establishing the experiences of students who choose to attend alternative schools, as opposed to participating in mainstream education in regular schools. The authors used experiences from 12 teenagers attending flexible learning options in the Australian context. The study reports that individuals' lived experiences are essential in discovering the truth about the perceptions of disenfranchised groups. The use of phenomenological approach enabled the researchers to draw attention to assumptions that are predetermined about students' disengagement. Similarly, it provides an in-depth analysis and evidence regarding the utility of the approach in offering clues on how macro-system policies influence schooling and learner experiences. The study revealed that felon disenfranchisement causes serious social ramifications. The phenomenological approach provides first-hand insights into how labeling through the denial of voting rights affects ex-felons' lives. The researchers succinctly discuss the nexus between policy and methodology, stressing phenomenology as a qualitative strategy that gives a way of agency for disenfranchised people to challenge existing public and policy assumptions. However, the study failed to include a large sample size to collect divergent views of teenage students. If the researchers adopted a longitudinal approach, they would have obtained sufficient data to explain directional and period changes in perceptions.

Voting and Criminal Punishment?

According to Brettschneider (2020), conducted a qualitative review of the 1958 Supreme Court ruling in *Trop v Dulles's* case. The Court held that citizens should not be denied their democratic rights as a means of punishment for crimes committed regarding the Eighth Amendment. All citizens should be accorded equal rights as any limitation unfairly subjects them to social and political sufferings. The “Trop principle” justifies why the state ought to institute such form of punishment as a means for deterrence based on citizenship. The argument is that if citizenship forms the basis for any legal punishment, such punishment must not deny the citizens their fundamental rights. The Trop principle does not advocate for subordination and perception of prisoners as lesser citizens. The research shows prisoners should retain voting rights to exercise their participatory rights. It provides the precedent that no kind of crime should deprive an individual of their democratic rights. These democratic rights include the right to vote and freedom of speech. Therefore, felons and ex-felons should be involved in all decision-making processes, including the right to elect their leaders and participate in all democratic initiatives. This study is relevant and supported by facts drawn from various jurisprudences; it provides a broader perspective for examining and evaluating policies and laws guiding judicial decision on voting by felons and ex-felons. However, the study relied substantially on secondary information instead of analyzing primary data. The use of a phenomenological approach would have provided more in-depth insights.

According to Heath (2017), conducted a case study on unusual and cruel punishment meted on ex-felons by denying them the right to vote after sentencing. The

research presented cases of ex-felons who have been denied the opportunity to vote and vie for national leadership positions. The study revealed an increasing number of felons and ex-felons denied the right to vote in the US. For instance, an estimated 6.1 million American citizens cannot participate in elections in any way due to their previous crimes. Some of the affected states include Tennessee, Florida, and Pennsylvania, among others. Moreover, it is not within the courts' purview to interfere with inherent individual rights and freedoms. The disenfranchisement policies in the US vary from state to state, hence creating an unequal application. The study observes that the continued validation and application of disenfranchisement policies hinder civil liberty in the US. Ex-felons face challenges in expressing their democratic rights. The study collected and analyzed data from various states in the US and compared the existing policies. However, it relied on secondary data and benefitted from first-hand information to a small degree. Data triangulation would have yielded compelling results for comparative purposes.

Additionally, Miller and Agnich (2015), carried out a qualitative study to explore how ex-felons perceive voting restrictions after sentence completion. The research used 54 semi-structured interviews involving felony convicted men. The respondents had lost their voting rights despite completing the sentencing obligations imposed by the state. The Supreme Court asserts disenfranchisement should not be considered an extension of the punishment for previous crimes committed by ex-felons. Barring ex-felons from voting is justified because their decisions cannot be trusted due to their antisocial tendencies. However, in the labeling theory, this argument assumes individuals maintain their criminal tendencies, even convictions. The authors assert that former offenders

perceive this type of punishment as illegitimate and disillusioned by the inability to engage in democratic life and the complex system of restoration. The study used a concise methodology to gather, analyze, interpret, and report results. The use of semi-structured interviews permitted the collection of in-depth qualitative data. However, this study fails to provide generalizable findings as it only involved male ex-felons.

Furthermore, Whitt (2017), conducted a qualitative review of arguments and policies denying convicted felons the right to vote. The author uses data from various political theorists to support why denying ex-felons the right to vote is appropriate during the current political and democratic dispensation. The study argues political theorists have been criticizing felon disenfranchisement without considering the ever-changing democratic environment. The application of democratic theory supports disenfranchisement strengthens self-determination. The author reveals that democratic theory justifies disenfranchisement. Democracy demands that all people have the right to collective self-determination, which includes the right to determine who can and cannot participate in the selection of leaders. The study stresses that felon disenfranchisement should be practiced in any democratic society in which most people think it is right. The research is significantly grounded on democratic theory to explain why the state needs to undertake felon disenfranchisement. However, the author does not present any statistics showing the support the practice receives in the US population. From the findings, it is difficult to conclusively consider felon disenfranchisement as a representation of the American people's democratic will.

Aviram et al. (2017), added to the body of research by conducting a qualitative review of cases and policies relating to felon disenfranchisement from 2002 to 2016 to understand people's perceptions about the practice. The authors observe that prisons and crime control feature significantly in electoral campaigns, but ex-felons are denied the right to vote. This widespread habit in the US creates discontent amongst this group of individuals. Evidence suggests that felons and ex-felons are increasingly excluded from electoral politics in the US. The study reports felon disenfranchisement is problematic as it is linked to underlying issues, such as racial exclusion. The article provides rich data on felon disenfranchisement in the US based on comparative views, policies, and eligibility to vie for an electoral position with a criminal record. However, this study over-relied on secondary data rather than primary information from felons for analysis.

Legal Challenges to Felon Disenfranchisement

Unlike laws that have prevented citizens from voting on the basis of race, gender, literacy, or the ability to speak English, laws that prevent people from voting on existing or completed criminal sentences are generally considered constitutional to this day. Brettschneider (2020), has suggested that while there are legal precedents in the US Supreme Court that present felon disenfranchisement as being against citizens' democratic rights, little has been done in protecting the voting rights of ex-felons. The Trop principle is against felon disenfranchisement because it limits an individual's freedom of speech and the right to vote. In other words, citizenship cannot be subjected to the National Government's general powers. Democracy requires equal involvement and participation in all democratic processes. Citizenship cannot be divested when

exercising the general powers of the National Government. However, should the state decide to divest citizenship when exercising certain governmental powers, it fundamentally violates the Eighth Amendment since it prescribes unusual and cruel punishment.

Jackson (2017), conducted a qualitative study to understand the dilution of the African American vote. The author revisited the oppressive techniques of restoring voting rights for ex-felons. The study asserts that ex-felons being denied the right to vote is controversial since voting is not a natural right; it is one of the fundamental political rights because through it, all other rights are preserved. More specifically, the investigation indicates that through voting, people elect leaders to protect their rights. Therefore, denying the right to vote takes away the ability to engage in such democratic processes. The Fifteenth Amendment provided that all male citizens in the US be allowed to vote regardless of their past criminal records. The data and information presented offer a clear understanding of felon disenfranchisement practices. Further, the study delineates the cross-state differences in the application of felon disenfranchisement in the US. However, the investigation is limited due to overreliance on secondary data based on self-reporting, hence affecting the plausibility of the findings.

Cain and Parker (2019), investigated the future of disenfranchised felons in the US. The authors note criminals represent many disenfranchised Americans, who are unable to vote despite serving their jail terms in full. The researchers gathered polling data to gauge if Americans are willing to end felon disenfranchisement. Voter eligibility is increasingly becoming a contested issue, with the fate of those affected remaining

unclear. The study further discusses the prospects for legislative action and actions for challenging the practice. The researchers contend ex-felon disenfranchisement violates several current legal provisions, including the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Eighth Amendment. Similarly, ex-felon disenfranchisement violates legal provisions in the country throughout US history. The authors employed academic rigor in identifying data sources as well as producing a systematic analysis.

Impact of Felon Disenfranchisement

One of the most important impacts of felon disenfranchisement that emerges throughout the literature is that the African American population is disproportionately affected. Also, the postulates of labeling theory as presented by Bernburg (2019), conducted a qualitative review of the labeling theory in the context of social relationships. Deviant behavior might originate from various conditions and causes, especially once labeled by agents of criminal justice. Labeling occurs disproportionately to individuals from disadvantaged social groups. The author contends that such people experience new problems stemming from self and others, leading to negative stereotypes. The unjust treatment of denying ex-felons the right to vote alienate them from the general population, leading to an increased likelihood of re-offending. Felon disenfranchisement can lead to some form of social stratification in which ex-felons view themselves as a minority group with no right to participate in the country's democracy. Continued felon disenfranchisement increases the chances of re-offending, hence upsetting the criminal justice system. The study provides coherent illustrations of ideas on labeling and its

association with felon disenfranchisement. However, it relied on self-reported data from other studies, which could be misleading.

Whitt's (2017), qualitative review of felon disenfranchisement reveals that unlike other forms of punishment, felon disenfranchisement does not contribute to the rehabilitation of ex-felons, neither does it deter criminal activity. The labeling theory's application to felon disenfranchisement suggests the denial of voting rights to ex-felons only leads to adverse outcomes. However, to ascertain this statement, the evaluation of more research studies is necessary. Perceiving disenfranchisement in terms of a punitive practice, the author argued it could not be justified by the normative theories of punishment. Evidence shows that felon disenfranchisement does not curb crime and does not help rehabilitate ex-felons or incapacitate likely offenders. Although felon disenfranchisement might be justified based on the retributivist ground, such justification fails because it imposes temporally and excessive open-ended losses to both offender and their communities. The study uses recent data to trace the trends in felon disenfranchisement and applies a broader scope in delineating these facts. However, the study lacked in-depth primary data analysis.

Accordingly, Demleitner (2019), conducted a qualitative review on felon disenfranchisement to understand its impact on society. Felon disenfranchisement enables citizens to be barred legally from voting due to a felony record. The study reports the practice has a substantial effect as an estimated 19 million Americans have a felony record. The state decided the duration that felons will be denied voting rights. Felon disenfranchisement bars even individuals who have long been rehabilitated from

participating in elections. For fully reformed persons, disenfranchisement seems unfair since it subjects them to some form of punishment for mistakes, they have already served a sentence. Felon disenfranchisement imposes the felon label to reformed individuals, thus amounting to some level of discrimination that cannot be justified. In this regard, marginalization of African Americans is found to be among the important outcomes of felon disenfranchisement observed in the contemporary American society. A deeper dive into felon disenfranchisement and what consideration the international community gives to felon disenfranchisement will be addressed in the next section.

International Practices and Public Support for Felon Disenfranchisement

It has been disclosed from the literature reviewed for this study that US support for felon disenfranchisement is not unanimous. This assertion is based on the differing of political, and citizens perceptions, and the fact that 49 out of 51 states have varying policies regarding the implementation of felon disenfranchisement (Chung, 2019). Based on this observation, a similar divergence in perception is expected to be observed at international level among countries. This argument is confirmed by Lineberger (2020), in which a qualitative review of felon disenfranchisement in the US to compare international trends was performed. Comparative evidence shows countries adopting different strategies to deal with the issue. The study reports that different countries have applied different approaches to handling felon disenfranchisement. Similarly, almost all countries worldwide agree that the participation of all individuals in voting is vital in all democracies. International laws, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), provide the general framework for promoting democratic rights. Under

the ICCPR provisions, countries like Australia and Canada have completely abolished felon disenfranchisement. The author stresses that countries such as the US, which allow felon disenfranchisement, have been criticized. The international community does not favor disenfranchisement. The study underwent a rigorous review process. However, its failed to delineate a clear methodology for collecting and analyzing data.

A stronger evaluation of the arguments by Smith (2019), carried out descriptive qualitative research on collateral effects and imminent failure of international human rights law. Some countries exploit the lacuna in international law to marginalize persons having criminal backgrounds. Similarly, international laws on human rights, such as the ICCPR, do not receive much support at the national level, hence increasing felon disenfranchisement in most countries, including the US. Although international laws ensure the voting rights of all people, such laws are weak or inadequate. Just like international law, these state-level legal provisions do not influence the treatment of felon disenfranchisement. The international human rights law is against the deprivation of voting rights; the differential treatment of ex-felons leads to multiple violations of their rights, including denying them employment and public benefits. In this regard, ex-felons are denied the ability to vote for individuals fighting against ex-felon stigmatization. The study relied on credible sources of data as well as a compelling methodology. However, it failed to discuss the findings with a grounded theory to reveal the link between felon disenfranchisement investigation.

Bearing in mind the weaknesses of international law in dealing with felon disenfranchisement, it is imperative to investigate how the public views the matter; in

particular, sources linking felon disenfranchisement with race connotations. Jackson (2017), and Phillips and Deckard (2016), argue that minority populations in the US do not support felon disenfranchisement because, apart from denying ex-felons their right to self-determination, felon disenfranchisement continues to keep ex-felons in perpetual remembrance of the mistakes they have already been punished for. As described in the labeling theory, this kind of stigmatization could be detrimental to such individuals' reformation as the labels attached to them increase their chances of committing offenses again. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that disenfranchised ex-felons will be against the action, it would be more important to look at the viewpoints of the general population when deciding if there is support for disenfranchisement in the general democratic arena.

In this regard, Karpf (2020), presents survey findings that revealed most people in the study population were not aware of felon disenfranchisement. However, while being educated on disenfranchisement, most study participants showed strong opposition to the practice, regardless of their gender, race, or political ideology. The findings are supported by Aviram et al. (2017), who present an argument for the negative perceptions most communities in the US have towards the denial of voting rights to ex-felons. Therefore, it is noted that felon disenfranchisement is opposed at the international level, as by Lineberger (2020). At the public level, in the US context, Karpf (2020), shows that the general citizen population is opposed to the practice regardless of their political affiliations or race. From these findings at both the international and local levels, it is evident that felon disenfranchisement policies do not receive sufficient support. Felon

disenfranchisement in the US contravenes international human rights laws and goes against the general public opinion.

Felon Disenfranchisement and Labeling Theory

Based on the study of previous research studies that demonstrate clear connections between crime in general and the labeling theory, a research study presented by Besemer et al. (2017), in which qualitative research on the impacts of parental incarceration on international research was conducted. The study used longitudinal datasets obtained from different sources. The analysis revealed a higher likelihood of criminal conviction for children brought up by convicted parents because the attached labels strongly influence children brought up by convicted parents. This influence pushes children towards criminal activity, heightening their chances of actually engaging in one form of crime or another. The denial of voting rights to previously convicted parents makes children perceive their families as being different from others. This alienation from the rest of society could be one reason why such children are likely to have criminal tendencies. The study uses various longitudinal datasets to support its arguments. However, it fails to provide a clear methodology for obtaining the requisite data for analysis. Given the significant results of this study, however, the link between labeling and disenfranchisement does not exist.

According to Bernburg (2019), in which a qualitative analysis of the labeling theory and its influence on individual behavior was performed. The author argues labels make ex-felons create an identity around their criminal past, thus increasing their chances

of re-offending. Nevertheless, since there are no specific research studies linking disenfranchisement to labeling theory, there are no conclusive findings in this direction.

Additionally, Payne et al. (2019), examined the use of labeling theory in explaining cybercrime and felon across diverse social groups. Ambiguity in understanding emerging criminal patterns potentially hinders intervention and prevention strategies for crimes. The authors present compelling findings that labeling theory explains the dynamics of cybercrimes. Similarly, evidence from the study show there are more male cybercriminals than females. Media releases present males as being more likely to engage in different forms of crime than females. Further, the high number of male convicts disenfranchised for being involved in the vice gives them a constant label, similar to that of conventional criminals. The study is well-grounded on theory and uses information from different sources to support the arguments. However, it lacks a clear methodology and offers no counterarguments on the association between labeling theory and felon disenfranchisement.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature review shows much interest in felon disenfranchisement. This interest has led to the establishment of multiple perspectives on the issue, including the investigation of a racial angle by researchers, such as Jackson (2017), and Schaefer and Kraska (2012), and the evaluation of the issue through the democratic theory by Whitt (2017). From these varying perspectives, previous research has shown how felon disenfranchisement has led to conflicting arguments in different contexts. Little evidence exists on why some states in the US have chosen to maintain felon disenfranchisement

policies, while others do not. Based on the theoretical argument, disenfranchised ex-felons feel victimized because they have completed their sentencing. In this case, the labeling theory suggests that victimization increases the chances of such individuals re-offending. While it gives some critical insights on how ex-felons would be affected by disenfranchisement, its individual-level outcomes are not adequately addressed in the evaluated research studies.

The literature review has revealed that a phenomenological approach is useful in the acquisition of first-hand insights concerning a wide range of social issues. What makes the approach helpful is that it aids in the acquisition of comprehensive details about any phenomena from the individuals who have directly experienced it. However, there are no research studies explicitly employing the approach in determining the African American male ex-felon's perspective about the labeling and stigmatization associated with disenfranchisement. Thus, this research study will seek to bridge the identified gaps by applying the labeling theory to investigate the perspectives of African American male ex-felons towards disenfranchisement policies using a phenomenological approach. The main aim of applying labeling theory and phenomenology will be to discover how disenfranchisement affects African American male's ex-felons' ability to identify as citizens in the US.

Summary

From the literature review, several legal provisions in the US address the issue of felon disenfranchisement. While the Voting Rights Act protects all citizens' democratic rights to elect the leaders of their choice, the Equal Protection Clause gives the states the

power to determine a person to be denied the right to vote due to their conduct. Since it is the prerogative of each country to enact disenfranchisement policies, the review has shown that while disenfranchisement is allowed in some states, it is not permitted in others. Similarly, the situation is replicated internationally, where some countries have felon disenfranchisement policies despite the international laws that seem to be against the practice. The mixed opinions about disenfranchisement policies indicate there is no consensus on the issue.

An evaluation of public perceptions towards felon disenfranchisement shows that most Americans do not support the policy, implying it has been used as a tool of racial profiling since there seems to be a significantly higher proportion of disenfranchised African Americans compared to whites. Although previous research addresses essential aspects of disenfranchisement, several gaps have been identified. Hardly any source applies the labeling theory in linking disenfranchisement to ex-felon citizens' identity. No sources employ the phenomenological approach in the acquisition of details from African American male ex-felons about their perspective towards disenfranchisement policies. Chapter 3 will include a detailed plan for applying the phenomenological approach and the labeling theory in addressing the research questions. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary and preview of Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine felon disenfranchisement from African American male ex-felons' perspectives. The findings of

this study could lead to positive social change by restoring the voting rights of African American male ex-felons. In addition, this study will provide policy makers with relevant information to better address revising policies regarding felon disenfranchisement. Chapter 3 includes the methodology and research design. The following are discussed: research design and justification, role of the researcher, selection of participants, instrument, data collection, data analysis, confidentiality issues, and ethical procedures. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary and preview of Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative phenomenological approach was necessary for this study in order to address the key research questions, which are as follows:

RQ1: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

RQ2: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about labeling stigmatization?

According to Patton (2015), qualitative research involves examining people's behavior-shaping experiences. Qualitative research also involves considering various facts and perspectives when analyzing phenomena in order for a better understanding of individuals and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative approach allows for investigating the phenomenon through open-ended interview questions (Yin, 2014). However, a limitation of qualitative research is that it is not generalizable (Patton, 2015). Thus, qualitative research findings can only be related to the sample under analysis, but

qualitative research provides opportunities for future studies and a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, for this study, a qualitative approach was sufficient to analyze felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion from African American male ex-felons' perspectives.

. Qualitative phenomenological research is carried out when there is little or no research on a phenomenon (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). A previous review of literature revealed no studies regarding felon disenfranchisement according to African American male ex-felons. Phenomenology is described as a research approach that involves explaining the nature of a phenomenon through analysis according to those who have encountered it (Martimianakis et al., 2019). The goal of phenomenology is to describe meaning of experiences both in terms of what and how it was experienced (Teherani et al., 2019). Therefore, a phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because in particular, phenomenological approaches are useful in bringing people's experiences and attitudes to the fore from their own viewpoints, and thus in questioning systemic or normative assumptions. Adding and allowing an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research Used as the basis for realistic theory, it enables policy and action to be educated, embraced or called into question (Lester, 1999).

Role of the Researcher

My role was to engage study participants through professional interviews that led to full disclosure regarding their experience and feelings with respect to felon disenfranchisement. The researcher's role in qualitative research is to be an instrument for gathering data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In qualitative research, data are obtained

through a human instrument. In addition, the researcher's goal is to identify social or nonverbal signals to be interpreted during data processing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I participated actively during interviews to recognize possibilities of evolving themes. For this reason, I encouraged participants to clarify their responses for accurate interpretation and contexts in order to uncover new themes.

Applicable issues related to my role include my knowledge of the criminal justice system, as I hold a Master's degree in criminal justice and work for the Department of Corrections. However, those incarcerated where I work were exempt from this study. No perennial or current relationships with any participants in this study existed. Regardless of my educational background and professional experience, this study focused on participants' perspectives. Asking follow-up questions also helped to clarify views, feelings, terminology used, responses, and lived experiences. Open-ended and probing questions were used in nonthreatening and noncoercive manners during interviews. Furthermore, it was important to refrain from leading participants to certain responses through indirect or implied agreement or disagreement with responses. Additionally, there were no exchanges of personal memories, opinions, or interactions with participants.

Finally, as the researcher, I was aware of bias regarding the phenomenon of interest and participants in the study. Ellefson (2017) said that bias is any deviation from validity that influences of study outcomes. Therefore, I conducted self-reflections to ensure that my personal opinions and professional experiences did not dominate data collection. A research journal was used to record and further reflect on findings and

views that arose during the data collection. A modified version of SCK was used to manage bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants selected for this study were African American male ex-felons in a northeastern region of the U.S. who were disenfranchised after completion of sentence. A nonprobability snowball sampling technique was used to select participants. Snowball sampling, according to TenHouten (2017), is a screening strategy that helps the researcher get input from participants, helping to identify and recruit others who may have experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. Snowball sampling was best suited for this study because this technique helped me discover characteristics about a population that were previously unknown and I was able to interview participants that was unaware the study was being conducted. Participants were African American male ex-felons who had experience relating to disenfranchisement after sentencing completion and experienced negative impacts because of labeling stigmatization. Flyers were posted at various locations where they would most likely be seen by African American male ex-felons.

I contacted various community resource agencies via telephone or email before distributing recruitment material. An explanation regarding the purpose of the research was provided and permission was obtained to post research flyers within various agencies. Once the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval 10-25-20-0743045T, a recruitment flyer for study participants was created and

posted throughout community resource agencies. The recruitment flyer included information regarding the research purpose and my contact information, which included an email address and telephone number. Once contact had been with potential participants, I further explained the study criteria. After each participant was selected, I scheduled times and places for interviews to be conducted. All study participants received an informed consent form, which was reviewed and signed prior to interviews. Interviews with selected study participants were conducted in locations that were convenient for participants. Data saturation was achieved through interviews to the extent that new themes did not emerge (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Saturation means the data from a sample are sufficient to establish a reliable and accurate understanding of the research phenomenon. Saturation is applied to nonprobability samples widely used in qualitative investigations.

Consequently, as a minimum for most qualitative interview studies a sample size of 15 works very well when the participants are homogeneous. It has previously been recommended that qualitative studies require a minimum sample size of at least 12 to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, a sample of 15 was sufficient for this qualitative analysis and scale of this study (Vasileiou, et al., 2018).

Instrumentation

I was the main research instrument used to collect the data for this qualitative phenomenological study. However, in addition to the main researcher an interview guide created by me was used to conduct the in-depth semistructured interviews. The interview

guide developed consisted of 10 predetermined neutral, open-ended interview questions, each of which were centered around the purpose of the research and the research questions (Knight, 2013). The interview questions were developed to collect the necessary knowledge and experiences of the participants. To assess validity of the interview I checked my personal bias and expectations prior to conducting the interviews. Next, I remained neutral throughout the process of data collection. Validity was also established by employing triangulation. Triangulation for this study consisted of conducting individual in-depth interviews (IDI). Interviews are useful when exploring a particular phenomenon experiences, views, opinions, or beliefs. Interviews provide self-report information from the participants' of the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Lastly, for this study participant member checks were used that ensured the accuracy of responses as they relate to the interview questions.

Consequently, as a result of my active participation during the interviews; I was able to identify opportunities that were suitable for asking follow-up questions that added more depth to participants responses regarding the impact of felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion from the African American male ex-felons perspective.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

As previously mentioned, the recruitment of participants was based on a non-probability snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling allowed study participants to help identify others who had experiences that related to the study's phenomenon of interest. Approval from Walden's IRB was received before the study participants were recruited, following the approval a recruitment flyer was created. The flyer provided

details about the purpose of the study, and that participation in the study was voluntarily. Participants interested in the study contacted this researcher via e-mail or telephone, both methods were listed on the flyer. For this study, the primary method of data collection was interviews. According to Seidman (2012), interviews are the primary method of collecting data in phenomenological research. Individual, semistructured interviews were conducted in-depth to understand felon disenfranchisement from the African American male ex-felons perspective. Collecting data from the participants by interview gave me the ability to collect richer data for analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were guided by a predetermined set of questions that I developed. Likewise, Kaplowitz (2001), indicates that interviews allow for the opportunity to gather detailed descriptions of events and to probe additional information via follow-up questions. Therefore, semistructured interviews guided me and the predetermined set of questions were used to in the data collection process. The interview questions were aligned with the qualitative phenomenological research design by using open-ended questions, and subsequent sampling questions were asked when necessary.

The informed consent forms were reviewed with each study participant prior to conducting interviews. Each study participant was given a copy of the informed consent. The study's goal was explained, and all questions were answered prior the start if the interview. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, therefore, if for any reason the participant need to withdraw from the study; no adverse consequences would follow was also explained to the participants. To guaranteed confidentiality of participants identity a unique identifier was assigned to the participants,

for example (Participant 1 or P1). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the use of a pseudo impedes the possibility of identifying participants during data collection and with direct quotes if any inside the study. Study participants were informed the duration of the interview would last approximately 60 minutes and consisted of 10 questions.

I obtained permission from each participant to record the interviews. During the interview, an audio recorder was used. Recording the interviews coupled with notetaking enabled me to establish transcript accuracy and interpretation (Opdenakker, 2006). During the interview, the tone and speech of the participants were observed and noted to assess comfortability and to address later for further clarity. After completion of the interview participants were debriefed and given the opportunity to ask additional questions. Participants were informed, study results are available upon request and would be delivered via email or postal mail. Mailing addresses and email address were obtained.

Data Analysis Plan

A modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis (SCK) originally modified by Moustakas (1994), and subsequently simplified by Creswell (2013), was used for this qualitative phenomenological study. As a result of my know biases, I engaged in self-reflection and Epoch to manage these biases prior to conducting the interviews (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). After, I identified my biases they were bracketed to reduce the negative influences that could have impacted the study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). The reduction of my biases was made possible because I was constantly reflecting and noting these biases prior to conducting research as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Additionally, I kept a research journal of any biases that arose throughout this study and

checked daily until a true sense of closure was reached (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89; see also Colaizzi, 1978).

The interview questions were organized according to the research questions. Organizing the interview inquiries according to the research questions helped to ensure the data analysis was aligned with the research purpose, which was consistent with the research design (Creswell, 2013 & Yin, 2014). Data validity was determined using member checking. Participants were informed this necessary step was a part of the data collection process and a way to verify all data collected and transcribe, were accurately being represented. A further explanation was given to the participants that informed this process did not include another face-to face interview. Participants received a copy of the transcribed data via email (email addresses were provided). After receiving the email transcript, I informed participants to review the transcript and return within 24 hours to the email address listed for researcher. This respondent validation added credibility and validity of the study (Creswell, 1998). NVivo 12, a computer-assisted software for qualitative data analysis, transcribed, organized, and analyzed the data collected. NVivo 12 accurately transcribed outputs before the data was organized and analyzed. This researcher read over the interview transcripts several times for familiarity purposes, note-taking and to spot any inconsistencies.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established at the beginning of this qualitative research and was carried out throughout the entirety of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Developing trustworthiness required credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research.

Credibility

Credibility applies to the confidence of truth in the research findings (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). To state another way, credibility refers to whether the research results accurately represented the study participants account of the phenomenon. Credibility for this study, was established through reflexivity, member checks, and a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. A modified SCK method of analysis was employed to help remove my personal bias, beliefs, and views of the phenomenon of interest as mentioned previously. Member checking was a process that provided the research participants an opportunity to check their responses and fill in any gaps from their interview responses (DeVault, 2019).

For this qualitative phenomenological study, participants reviewed the data collected from interviews and my interpretations of the data. Each study participant was provided their interview transcripts to edit for clarification and to build upon or take away from their original answers. Recordings of the interviews with study participants 'permission and notetaking were used to capture all interview responses and to document all non-verbal cues, which was used later to validate the accuracy of the data collected and to interpret participants' responses and quotes.

Transferability

Transferability does not seek generalizations in qualitative research, it therefore, applies to the reader 's ability to use the research findings (Anney, 2014, Macnee &

McCabe, 2008). Transferability was established through thick description of the research purpose, methodology, and data collection and analysis for this study. In addition, a non-probability snowball sampling technique was used that ensured selected study participants provided appropriate, useful, and abundant information about the phenomenon for the creation of the themes. Providing a thick description made it possible for non-study individuals to interpret and identify with the study findings.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are similar in that both assesses if the results of the study are reliable and can be replicated by other investigators. MAXQDA a coding software that codes and recodes to recognize emerging codes and themes to create dependability. Coding and recoding are a necessary stage of the qualitative data analysis process according to Lacey and Luff (2009). Anney (2014), argues that reliability is improved by agreeable codes. In addition, an audit trail strategy was used to establish reliability and confirmability. Anney (2014), say's audit trail is the ongoing documentation process in research, precisely the data collecting and analysis decisions.

Ethical Procedures

In any type of research, ethical issues are present. Therefore, it is imperative to protect participants in any research study. The IRB was developed to help students review data collection for ethical purposes. Approval of Walden 's University IRB was received before study participants were recruited and before was data collected. The ethical review of this study by IRB helped to protect the researcher and the participants. A thorough explanation of data collection was given in this chapter's methods section. As

explained earlier in this chapter's data collection session, study participants received and the reviewed informed consent, prior to interviews being conducted a hard copy of the consent form was given to each participant. Recruitment material included a brief explanation of the research purposes, a short professional biography of research, and contact information, i.e. telephone number and email address. Participation in this study was purely voluntary, therefore no monetary gifts were mentioned, promised, or given for participation. No participants withdrew from the study; however, each participant was informed if they decided to withdrawal from the study their decision would not be impeded by any adverse consequences. Additionally, participants were asked for their permission to have the interviews audio recorded. Permission was granted by each participant. All study participants were assured confidentiality of their identity, and no unnecessary personal information was requested.

Throughout the research process, which completely complied with IRB guidelines, all participants were treated with respect and dignity. No vulnerable populations were included in this study as specified by the IRB standards. In addition, participants had the opportunity to review transcribed interviews; at such time they were given the opportunity to explain or modify responses from their interview, as well as recant any information previously given. Results of the study were presented using unique identifiers i.e. (P1) to protect the identity of participants. Access to all data was privileged to the researcher and dissertation committee. All data security was maintained in a combination locked storage box and placed in a secure location picked by researcher. All data will be maintained for a minimum of five years according to the requirement of

the Walden University. Finally, a copy of the study results will be available to participants per request.

Summary

Chapter 3 included the projected research design along with its rationale. The role of the researcher and applicable ethical concerns were discussed. In addition, open-ended questions were used during interviews, which gave participants the opportunity to expand on their responses. Information pertaining to participants, instrumentation, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures were also included in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also included an outline of the methodology for this study. A qualitative method with a phenomenological design was best suited for addressing felon disenfranchisement from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons. For this study, all ethical standards were adhered to, and confidentiality of study participants was addressed. The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and examine the impact of felon disenfranchisement in terms of voting rights for persons convicted of felony crime from the perspectives of African American male ex-felons. Fifteen African American male ex-felons expressed their opinions regarding felon disenfranchisement in semi-structured interviews. This study could contribute to positive social change by highlighting the effects of restoring voting rights for African American male ex-felons. Furthermore, this report will provide policy makers with helpful

knowledge to better address revising felon disenfranchisement policies. Key research questions were:

RQ1: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

RQ2: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about labeling stigmatization?

Data were analyzed to explain the experiences of 15 African American male ex-felons regarding the effects of felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion. I used NVivo 12 to assist with transcribing, organizing, and analyzing collected data. NVivo 12 was also used to code data to help identify themes, phrases, patterns, and insights into the perspectives of participants regarding voting restrictions placed on ex-felons after felony convictions and associated stigmas.

Chapter 4 includes results of this qualitative phenomenological study. This chapter also contains a discussion of the study environment, demographics of the 15 participants and analysis, including codes, categories, and themes.. Finally, I answer the research questions and provide supporting evidence.

Research Setting

The sampling strategy used for this study was a nonprobability snowball sampling technique to recruit study participants in a northeast region of the U.S. Fifteen semistructured in-depth face-to face interviews were conducted in suitable public venues that myself and participants agreed upon. Interview settings were private, convenient, and comfortable to help ensure each interview was successful. Each participant who called

the telephone number listed on the flyer was prescreened over the telephone. Every caller was asked the same questions to determine their eligibility for the study. Each participant received an explanation of the interview process and how data were going to be used. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and no monetary compensation was offered. I was able to establish a rapport with each participant during the screening process and again before conducting interviews.

Furthermore, I explained to each participant that if the need arose, withdrawal from the study could occur at any point, and refusing to answer any question would not lead to any adverse outcomes. An audio recorder was used to record each interview, and I requested permission from each participant to record the interview. Each participant was asked whether he had any documented conditions that would prevent him from participating in the research prior to the interview, and prior to interviews, each participant signed the consent form. After interviews, participants received a debriefing administered by myself and given an opportunity to ask any questions about their role in the study. In addition, in case participants felt some anxiety due to their participation in the study, a referral to a crisis center in the Northeast United States was issued.

Demographics

The sample consisted of 15 African American male ex-felons recruited from a northeast region in the U.S. who met the sample criteria. Total years of disenfranchise varied. Participants with 10-20 years of disenfranchisement were 50% of the sample size. Participants with 15-20 years of disenfranchisement represented 33% of the sample. The remaining 17% of the sample ranged from 3-10 years.

All participants shared the same race information, with 100% of the sample identifying as African American. Ages of participants fluctuated. Participants whose age ranged between 30 and 40 represented 50% of the sample size; 33% of participants were 50 or over, and 17% of participants were between 18 and 20. I had a duty to protect the identities of the study participants. Participants were identified using pseudonymous descriptors (P1-P15). Demographics of participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Total participants	15
Total Participants Disenfranchised	15
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	15
<u>Race</u>	
African American	15
<u>Age</u>	
18-27	3
30-40	7
40-50+	5
<u>Years Disenfranchised</u>	
3-5	2
5-10	3
10-15	6
15-20+	4
<u>Voting</u>	
Wants to vote	13
Does not want to vote	0
Unsure	2

Data Collection

The data collection process started after I obtained Walden University IRB approval (approval #10-25-20-0743045T). I began by contacting numerous community resource organizations by phone and email to clarify the intent of my research and receive permission to post recruitment flyers within the different agencies and encourage African American male ex-felon volunteers to participate in the study (see Appendix D). Before recruitment, 25 prospective study participants were prescreened. Fifteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data regarding felon disenfranchisement in order to reach saturation, which included a series of 10 open-ended questions involving perspectives of felon disenfranchisement.

Participants were recruited for the study through recruitment invitation flyers. Initially, the data collection process started with each participant contacting me with a call or by email as specified on the flyer. Thereafter, participants were recruited using a nonpurposeful snowball sampling technique. This enabled me to extend the study to individuals who may have been unlikely to come forward and share their perspectives.

P1, P2, P3, and P4 were recruited from the flyer, participants five through 15 were referred by other African American male ex-felons that participated in this study. A degree of trust was established with those interviewed prior and this was highlighted when the asking of others to participate in the study was taking place. Before the interviews, an informed consent form was provided to each participant to read and sign in person. Forms were collected personally by me a copy was provided to each participant and uploaded to a hard drive that is password protected. Participants were thanked for

their participation before and after each interview. Each participant received an introduction to the study, the purpose of the study, and a copy of the 10 pre-determined questions to be asked during the interview. I reminded the participants that (a) the interview would be recorded using an audio voice recorder and (b) they would obtain a copy of the transcript to review for completeness and consistency; and (c) they could withdrawal from the study at any time without adverse actions

Interviews were performed in various public places selected by the participants that I agreed to. I thought it was my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that the participants felt relaxed within the environment, so the convenience of interview places were made possible. These accommodations were not difficult to handle. In fact, confidentiality within the atmosphere allowed the respondents to be more blatant and franker with their responses. As indicated on the consent form, each participant was only interviewed once, and each interview was recorded verbatim with permission. Additionally, I provided each participant the interview questions prior to starting the audio recorder. During the interview process I manually documented the nonverbal actions of each participant, this included eye contact, body language, and voice inflections to later describe or clarify the results during the transcription process. Dates to conduct member checks were addressed with each participant upon conclusion of the interview. During the data collection process, each participant was comfortable sharing his perspective, and the responses to the interview questions seemed to be transparent and truthful.

An interview protocol was used that ensured the interview flow was clear. In the same order, a total of 10 interview questions were posed to each participant. The questions from the interview (Appendix C) encouraged participants to provide as much detail as possible. Interview period was about 60 minutes on average. The interviews were conducted over a 4-week period. There was no deviation from the data collection strategy outlined in Chapter 3. In addition, no bizarre circumstances occurred during the collection of data. Later, all of the collected data was transferred to a password-protected computer, then saved on a USB and stored in a lock box secured by a combination lock.

Data Analysis

I read through all the data after completing each interview and made notes about my initial findings. Once the process of data collection was fully completed, I again listened to all audio recordings to ensure that what was recorded from the interviews was properly transcribed. To perform a verbatim transcription of the results, I then used NVivo 12 transcription programming. I listened to the interviews once again and compared what I had transcribed to what NVivo transcribed to ensure that the data was portrayed in a correct account. The transcripts were organized in an excel spreadsheet for better organization after completing the transcription process. Once again, the data was submitted for review and coding to NVivo 12. Table 2 displays the effects of the coding of the interview questions.

Table 2

Interview Questions

Question number	Interview Question
-----------------	--------------------

IQ1:	What does it mean to be disenfranchised?
IQ2:	What perspective do you have regarding felon disenfranchisement?
IQ3:	Is felon disenfranchisement another form of criminal punishment?
IQ4:	What value do you place on voting?
IQ5:	Do you know if you are eligible to vote, if not, why do you not know?
IQ6:	Before losing the right to vote, did you vote?
IQ7:	Has losing the right to vote, made you feel more likely to vote?
IQ8:	How has being labeled an ex-felon and not being allowed to vote impacted your ability to identify as a citizen?
IQ9:	Do you think there is political benefits for disenfranchising African American male ex-felons?
IQ10:	Are you interested in having your voting rights restored? If yes, do you know the process to have your rights restored?

I further used Moustakas (1994), seven step modified Stevick Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis as outline in Chapter 3. Phenomenological reduction is used in the process, including bracketing, horizontalization, arrangement of themes and the creation of textural definition. (Merriam, 2009, p.227). The following analysis was carried out and summed up using the following seven steps:

1. Description of personal experiences with the phenomenon under study.
2. A list of significant statements were developed.
3. The information was grouped into themes.

4. A written textual description of the participant's experience with regards to felon disenfranchisement is incorporated.
5. A written structural description of how participants experience happened that is reflective of the context and setting of where the participant experienced the phenomenon.
6. A written description that incorporates both textual and structural descriptions is represented.
7. Conduct member checking and transcript review by performing a preliminary analysis before returning the transcript to the participants for review.

Data analysis using the modified SCK started with an epoch in which I focused on my prejudices in an attempt to eradicate them. I bracketed my personal and professional experiences following the epoch as they applied to the phenomenon under review. Bracketing is a strategy used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of biases that can contaminate the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I allowed those thoughts to enter and freely leave my mind. When closure was reached, without infecting them with any of my own feelings, I was able to focus on the experiences of the participants. The data was then horizontalized and any claim related to the phenomenon and the research question had the same horizontalization power as Moustakas defined.

The central research questions for this study is (a) What perspective do African American male ex-felons have about felon disenfranchisement after sentencing

completion? and, (b) What perspective do African American male ex-felons have about the labeling stigmatization? After several listening and reading sessions, I considered the feelings of each coresearcher and their relevance to the phenomenon under review. These units of invariant meaning were noted, arranged, synthesized, and all repetitive statements were gradually omitted.

The SCK approach helped me to move inductively from important statements, to codes and themes. For the initial study of the interview outcomes, preliminary codes were used to cluster significant statements into themes. The analysis provided the final themes of (a) rejection, (b) politics, (c) obstacles, (d) cultural values, (e) lack of knowledge, (f) participation, (g) inclusion, (h) lack of self-worth, (i) alienism, (j) suppression, (k) democracy. These segments and themes were then merged into descriptive texture and transmitted. For accuracy and related words, the textural description was analyzed from the data obtained from the 15 interviewed African American male ex-felons.

The textural classification that emerged represented the essence of the experiences of the participants on felon disenfranchisement (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, I continuously compared my handwritten notes to the data collected to ensure that I did not compromise my personal prejudices with the data. By repeating the process for each interview, the textural description for each participant was established. Table 3 shows the patterns that materialized in relation to the participants' viewpoint of felon disenfranchisement during the SCK analysis process. The essence of this phenomenon is shown through these themes in the results section.

Table 3*Final Themes*

Themes	Research Questions
Rejection	RQ1: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?
Politics	RQ1: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?
Obstacles	RQ2: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding the labeling stigmatization?
Cultural Values	RQ1: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?
Lack of Knowledge	RQ1: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have

regarding felon disenfranchisement
after sentencing completion?

Participation

RQ1: What perspective do African
American male ex-felons have
regarding felon disenfranchisement
after sentencing completion?

Inclusion

RQ1: What perspective do African
American male ex-felons have
regarding felon disenfranchisement
after sentencing completion?

Lack of Self-Worth

RQ2: What perspective do African
American male ex-felons have
regarding the labeling
stigmatization?

Alienism

RQ2: What perspective do African
American male ex-felons have
regarding the labeling
stigmatization?

Suppression

RQ2: What perspective do African
American male ex-felons have
regarding the labeling
stigmatization?

Democracy

RQ1: What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are anomalies from most of the data obtained, according to (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). No discrepant cases were presented during the data collection process for this research, and the phenomenon under study from the perspective of African American male ex-felons on felon disenfranchisement. Almost the exact same viewpoints relevant to the phenomenon were shared by the 15 African American male ex-felons who agreed to participate in the member checking process for more clarification. All of the participants' answers were evaluated and found to have equal meaning of importance.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was developed at the outset of this qualitative research and carried out throughout the data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The establishment of trustworthiness in qualitative research requires integrity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

For this study credibility was established during the presentation of results as outlined in chapter 3 of this study, via reflexivity, member checks, and a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. As previously stated, a research journal was

used to reflect and document my personal biases. Following that, a modified SCK method of analysis was used to help eradicate my personal bias, and perceptions of the phenomenon of interest by bracketing those biases. The results of the study were focused solely on the perspectives shared by each participant regarding the disfranchisement of felons. For further clarity and accuracy, participants reviewed a transcript of the data collected from the interviews and the interpretation of that data by this researcher, thus; known as member checking.

Transferability

Transferability was developed by providing a thick description of the purpose of the research methodology, collection of data and analysis for this study. In addition, a non-probability snowball sampling technique was used to ensure that relevant, useful, and abundant information about the phenomenon for the development of the themes was given by the selected study participants. Providing a thick summary helps the outcomes of the research to be understood and identified by non-study individuals.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are similar in that both determine whether the study findings are correct and can be repeated by other researchers. According to Lacey and Luff (2009), coding and recoding were completed as a required stage of the qualitative data analysis method. Anney (2014), argues that through agreeable codes, dependability is enhanced. Moreover, to develop dependability and confirmability; I used an audit trail technique. Anney (2014), says the audit trail is the ongoing analysis documentation process, specifically the decisions to collect and analyze data.

Results

In order to examine the felon disenfranchisement phenomenon from the viewpoints of 15 African American male ex-felons, this phenomenological study was conducted. This segment demonstrates the nature of the perspectives taken from the 15 African American male ex-felons study participants on the disenfranchisement of felons and the 11 themes that arose addressing the research question and responses to the interview questions. In order to solidify the themes and provide a response to the research questions, participant statements are used. Furthermore, the study of themes for distinctive description and the terms devoted to each theme led to the final 11 themes that were identified (see Table 4).

Table 4

Final Themes with Participants Response and Total Associated Terms

Theme	Participants Response (PR=15)	Total terms associated to theme
Rejection	15	4928
Politics	15	6002
Alienism	15	5610
Lack of Self-Worth	14	5950
Inclusion	13	3732
Suppression	13	2005
Obstacles	12	3115
Lack of Knowledge	11	2120
Cultural Values	10	1694

Participation	9	1368
Democracy	9	1191

Themes

Rejection

This theme emerged from responses to IQ1. All of the participants (100%) in one way or another expressed similar feelings of rejection in relation to disenfranchisement. Some of the key phrases that were used to define felon disenfranchisement was; felon disenfranchisement is about taking something away, preventing felons from voting, not becoming a part of something, isolated by society because they are felons, some of the participants said. Disenfranchisement continued to be characterized as not having a voting voice; below are supporting statements worded in participants wording.

P3 being disenfranchised means I'm told not to vote, which makes me feel like I'm not like everyone else who can vote. I don't understand how it is acceptable by the law that my right to vote can just be taken away. My conviction is my conviction what one has to do with the other? I am I'm already a felon but still pushing me away from stuff.

According to P5: disenfranchisement of the felon as taking away his right to vote, but the idea seems hypercritical since voting is a right people get when they are born in America and turn 18, but once a felon the government will prevent you from voting. P5 continues, that this is something that has been going on for many years and they can see that our voices have been blocked from many different areas, not just voting, if someone knows history.

Politics

This theme emerged as a result of responses to IQ2. The consensus from participants were that felon disenfranchisement is more about powerful political influences that are fighting hard to keep the African American vote out. Some of the participants shared their opinion that democracy is what this county was founded upon and that disenfranchisement is contradictory to what democracy mean, to tell a whole lot of felons are overwhelmingly black that they cannot vote is crazy. Another mindset from a participant was that in my opinion, disenfranchisement mostly affects black communities, because not many people can vote where I live.

Other participants commented many individuals fought and died for people to vote, but the fight to prevent democrats from voting is about political power in this country. Another perspective was that candidates are seeking to spin the outcome of the elections; a political game is disenfranchisement. A few more participants described disenfranchisement as unjust, a form of institutional racism, and political racism, similar to the laws of Jim Crow. In addition, it was said that I made a mistake and served my time saying voting is about politics. Below is a presentation of supporting statements from participants.

According to P1: if George Washington and they said that we should vote for presidents why my voice can be taken away by the government. I know I have committed a crime, but why is it that felons are the only group who can't vote instead of all the people who have committed a crime? What about felons is so special?

According to P15: I understand that my criminal record played a role in my life, but I have turned my life around and become a positive member of society since my release. Knowing that I really can't vote for myself after all these years is certainly more than just being a felon. I assume the real problem is politics. P15 continued saying; disenfranchisement has deep roots in prejudice and how can I trust the government who is violating my right to vote.

Obstacles

This theme arose from participants responses to IQ3. Participants answered yes, to felon disenfranchisement being an additional undue punishment, because a sentence was already given and served. Most of the respondents gave thoughts that a war is being waged against felons and therefore, the harder they make it for us to access the things we need to succeed, the easier committing more crimes begins to look. Additionally, statements like, taking my right to vote is a punishment to my citizenship. Below is a supporting statement directly from the participant.

P7 commented, I'm African American that is a punishment all by itself, add being a felon another punishment, add no available resources to help me become successful, punishment take my rights away another punishment. If you ask me the whole criminal justice system is a trap, made to keep people from doing and getting things. They want to see us back in prison.

Cultural Values

This theme represented the responses to IQ4. Most of the participants summed up this question by pointing out how important voting is and has been throughout their

families. Other respondents declared registering to vote was an exciting time for them after turning 18. Furthermore, it was expressed the only way to affect change is to vote. I want to vote again, exclaimed one participant, and I will still consider voting as something that is of great importance. However, one respondent said voting was pointless because he could not vote. Below is a supporting statement directly from the participant.

According to P2, his parents had always voted, and in his house, talking about politics was heavy, actively staying on top of topics that was important to them, and watching the debates on tv. I want to teach the meaning of voting to my children and also be able to explain how voting looks.

Lack of Knowledge

This theme developed because of participants response to IQ5 part (a and b). Most of the participants responded no to this question, two participants responded yes. Words such as nobody told me, I didn't know, no information about it, I didn't read it anywhere, and not knowing they were connected, aided in forming the theme. According to P10: I found out I couldn't vote a year or so after my release. I will never forget the day; it was during election for Obama. TV said go register vote at the DMV if you not registered. So, I went to the DMV to register to vote and waited in line for a long time. It was my turn and fill out the paper it said something about being a felon I said yes. The old lady at the counter said sorry felons are cannot vote and gave me a flyer or something about what to do if you can't vote. I was so hot. I yelled you could have told me about this before.

P11 however, expressed I do not care what my voting status is, if they don't want me to vote I won't vote. Nothing changes anyway, everyone lies and they going to pick the person they want anyway!

Participation

The participation theme emerged from participants responses to IQ6. Terms such as I voted before, were associated to this theme. Voting for the laws, rules, things that shape our communities, and the President is how we express with is best for us in this country was expressed by most of the participants. Below is a supporting statement directly from the participant.

P4, before becoming a felon I voted in past elections. I felt it was my responsibility to choose my leader, I felt like I was helping to push for things that help African Americans. Now that I am a convict, I think I let my people down. But I plan to do whatever it takes to be able to vote again. P4 continued to express, everyone who can vote need to vote all the time because things can change.

Inclusion

This theme developed as a result of responses to IQ7. Phrases like I want to vote, I need to vote, count my vote, my voice matters, don't count me out, all aided towards this theme. Most of the participants reported a strong desire to vote during the interview, they reported all votes should be included, since one vote could alter the outcome. Another stated the Voting Rights Act was placed made to make sure we had a fair shot at voting, but felon disenfranchisement is still here. The general perspective on this question was that since not all voices are heard, the voting process is an imperfect process.

P13 mentioned, when these people understand that my need and the needs of my fellow felons to be part of the voting process are significant. I've written letters to the governor about how much I want to be able to vote in the future asking him to do something about it.

Lack of Self-Worth

This theme emerged as a result of responses to IQ8 (part a) Associated phrases included seeing myself as less, I am reminded every day, treated like a criminal, I feel like nothing, government doesn't care about me, felons are frowned upon. Responses to this question resulted in respondents indicating that being labeled a felon is more damaging than the crime that was committed, because the crime happened and went, but the label last forever. Participants further reported that their mental health and general well-being were impacted by being labeled a felon.

P6 commented, if we continue to be treated like a criminal, then might as well continue act like a like criminal. There is no point to going to prison if when we get out, there is another sentence to serve. P6 continued to express I am not a felon I was committed a felony. I am a dad, a husband, a brother, and uncle but those socially appropriate labels are not used define me. Instead, I am reminded all the time that I'm a felon because society say so is more appropriate than they wonder why life is difficult.

Alienism

This theme also emerged as a result of responses IQ8 (part b). Participants linked citizenship with voting, to being a resident of the state, given to Americans born in America, I have a social security number. Consequently, participants shared not feeling

like they are a part of this country because they can't vote. If the constitution gave voting rights to eligible citizens born in American how can it be that as an American born citizen I can't vote? Was the response of one participant. In addition, participants summed of their perspectives by expressing as felons they have to pay taxes, can own homes, and raise families like citizens; but legally, not one because they don't not vote.

According to P12, I feel like a freak in my own country. One of the rights is in this country is to vote. A person born in America has such rights attached to them. Don't call me a citizen, because you want me to abide by everything else but don't want me to vote. Voting is my responsibility in this country, that's how the leaders in the White House are put there. The constitution doesn't suggest that ex-felons can't vote.

Suppression

Emergence of this them was a result of responses to IQ9. Most of the participants said that their voice was being silenced, politicians are fearful of black voters, wants to keep the poorer communities struggling. Participants responses concluded that voting is express their freedom of speech and it being blocked by lawmakers, by using disenfranchisement to prohibit felons from voting. Other participants stated wars has been waged for blacks to vote, and we still can't vote in 2020. Court challenges to combat blocking felons from voting have all failed. It's not a true democracy, it's a way to keep African Americans from voting.

P8 commented, there is no way that elections are fair because too many voices are not heard. There are several laws in place to circumvent voting prohibitions, but the government has found many ways to get around the legislation by enforcing

disenfranchisement of felons and ex-felons, i.e. "BLACKS." P8 went on to say that if America wants a good democracy, everyone should sit at the voting table.

Democracy

This last and final theme emerged as a result of responses to IQ10. Phrases associated with this theme, restore my vote, hear my voice, tell legislation to get rid of felon disenfranchisement. Any barriers to the principle of democracy contradict the country in which we live were the perspectives offered by the participants. For example, P9 said restoring the right of ex-felons to vote is a necessary improvement that needs to happen now. I want to do more than just watch the election. I have views and opinion on the topic the candidates talk about. P9, continued on by saying that as felon there's not much to look forward to after coming home; I mean with so many things already coming at us, restoring my right to vote will give me confidence that maybe the government can still be trusted to do the right thing. This question was summed up basically with the sentiment that not all of the choices made by ex-felons are bad, restore my vote and I will show them my ability to make good choices.

Summary

In relation to the key research questions, what perspectives do African American male ex-felons have about felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion? and what perspectives do African male ex-felons have about the labeling stigmatization? The results of the study linked the analysis back to the research questions and confirmed that the analysis was aligned with the qualitative approach of phenomenology.

For the purposes of this qualitative phenomenological study, 15 in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out on 15 African American male ex-felons. In order to obtain a greater sense of the phenomenon as it applied to the perspectives of African American male ex-felons, 10 predetermined interview questions were arranged. Responses to the interview questions reflected the views of participants on the disenfranchisement of felons. This researcher analyzed and transcribed the collected data using audio recordings, a modified research method from Stevick Colaizzi-Keen, and a qualitative software program from NVivo 12. 11 Themes arose as a result of the responses of the participants to questions in the interview.

The research setting, demographics of participants, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness were defined in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 summarizes the results. I include the study's limitations, proposals for future studies, implications for social change, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendation, and Conclusion

Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological study examined felon disenfranchisement using the viewpoints of African American male ex-felons. 10 predetermined interview questions were generated, and 15 African American male ex-felons participated in this study to obtain a detailed understanding of contributors or obstacles to acceptance as full citizens for felons. Furthermore, I wanted to explain labeling and the effect it has on ex-felons' ability to normalize in a society that views them negatively.

I chose to research felon disenfranchisement because denying the right to vote to an entire class of citizens is problematic in a democratic society. Currently, 47 states impose felon disenfranchisement. As a result, unprecedented divisions within the African American community have arisen due to strategies of disenfranchisement such as concentrated poverty, substandard housing, limited access to healthcare services, failing public schools, environmental hazards, and lack of political influence to shape policies and laws that govern them.

The two main research questions were:

RQ1: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

RQ2: What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have regarding labeling stigmatization?

To gather rich data as it relates to the phenomenon, 10 predetermined open-ended interview questions were used. Data were obtained through face-to-face semi-structured

interviews. No study has performed a detailed analysis of how African American male ex-felons perceive their disenfranchisement or how their experiences impact their attitudes towards politics and political involvement. In addition, participants reported experiencing self and social identification challenges, a lack of government support, and overall, less than positive post-incarceration adjustment periods.

As a result of data analysis, 11 themes emerged: (a) rejection, (b) politics, (c) obstacles, (d) cultural values, (e) lack of knowledge, (f) participation, (g) inclusion, (h) lack of self-worth, (i) alienism, (j) suppression, and (k) democracy. My research findings may be helpful in terms of eliminating felon disenfranchisement and restoring ex-felons' voting rights.

Interpretation of Findings

My goal for this analysis was to investigate a phenomenon from the perspective of those who encountered it directly. Moustakas' methodology guided this hermeneutic phenomenological study that encouraged participants to share their individual perspectives about felon disenfranchisement. Felon disenfranchisement remains prevalent in this country because it is a political mechanism aimed at reducing the turnout of African American voters, in which the Democratic candidate is affected most by disenfranchisement of felons. Participants said that they would have voted for Biden if they had been allowed to vote in this election. . Member checking was used during data collection to add credibility to the report. A full data analysis of emerging themes and participant response contributions were provided in Chapter 4.

Research Questions

RQ1

Interview questions IQ1, IQ2, IQ4, IQ5, IQ6, IQ7, and IQ10 were used to answer RQ1. Study participants indicated some association with the concept of felon disenfranchisement. Ex-felons were able to express how their right to vote was impaired by their conviction. Subsequently, only P11 misunderstood his inability to vote. Furthermore, the absence of assistance and knowledge given to ex-felons after imprisonment was the fault for not knowing the status of ineligibility voting. In addition, some participants said that other felons with experiences involving being disenfranchised had told them about their voting status. 13 out of the 15 participants grasped the implications of felon disenfranchisement and linked mistrustfulness of politicians and the connection of felon disenfranchisement to a legal framework to disenfranchise the Black vote.

Despite feedback that felon disenfranchisement is part of the Republican agenda, however, respondents still accepted the democratic process and hoped to vote in future elections. A disinterest in potential voting participation was recorded by P6, P11 and, P12 because their rights have been lost for too long and they are uncertain if their vote matters at this point. Participants concluded that no benefit is achieved by felon disenfranchisement on a larger scale. Therefore, disenfranchisement does more harm than good. Consequentially, disenfranchisement adds further challenges to the recovery process of ex-felons.

RQ2

IQ3, IQ8, and IQ9 were used to answer RQ2. Much of the opinions of the respondents gave light to the disenfranchisement of felons being an extra and excessive penalty. Following a felony conviction, which comes with its own collection of losses, i.e., freedom, the sentence of imprisonment acted as the result. Therefore, once the original penalty has been served, what sense does it make to further deprive people a right granted in America at birth? The results have showed that the discernment of participants with being labeled a felon is consistent with the inability to identify as a human being.

In addition, participants showed that the word felon is like being sentenced to a life of struggles, challenges, humiliation, and other people's unjust treatment. Moreover, the participants shared the worst thing about being labeled a felon; comes from the continued adverse descriptions used to define them. In addition, the data exhibited that citizenship recognition challenges were also faced by the participant as citizenship creates a distinctive bond that unites people through democratic values and a belief in U.S. through guaranteed rights and freedoms by the Constitution (USCIS, 2020). Participants felt very detached from the society in which their birth status allowed them the right to exercise their civic duty by voting based on this concept. Alienism was the term that more than half of the participants identified with. The meaning that arises from the alien identity stems from felon disenfranchisement restricting the participation of a number of citizens in the political process, which then leads to a fragmentation of society that allows for the development of a government entity where powerful politicians and

special interest groups that form misrepresentative alliances; in which their agendas, views, and, ideologies is pushed to represent what is best for all.

Finally, suppression was the beliefs that participants presented towards felon disenfranchisement. 75 percent of respondents exemplified by their answers that circled backed to the completion of sentencing conditions and because of previous criminal conduct, remain blocked from voting. Several respondents replied that racial origins foster felon disenfranchisement, which is totally dismantling what democracy is. In order to help the republic party, suppression of the African American voice is yet another tactic. Respondents used examples of this tactic relating to the political divide and racial division that formed during this current election. Overall, the participants summed up the disenfranchisement of ex-felons as being wrapped up in the deeply entrenched past of legal challenges, contentious court cases, the civil war, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and racial inequality; yet, restoration of ex-felons voting rights has only begun to scratch the surface.

This research captured the nature of felon disenfranchisement from the perspective of 15 African American male ex-felons with the use of a qualitative phenomenological design. The rich data that was gathered fulfilled the purpose of this research.

Limitations of the Study

As previously mentioned, the use of qualitative phenomenological design was limited in this analysis, so the methodology was a limiting factor. Consequently, the outcome of this research was limited to the sample size used in this analysis. Qualitative

analysis cannot be generalized, because qualitative research is a method of research focused on insight, the answers given are not calculated (Radu, 2019). For this analysis, however, the use of a qualitative approach was better suited.

In the sample, a limitation was shown. Felon disenfranchisement in the Northeast region of the United States, currently undergoing disenfranchisement, was studied from the perspective of a limited sample size of 15 African American male ex-felons. According to Fusch, and Ness (2015), data saturation can be obtained using a small sample size. The study results are therefore limited to the participants in this study and can therefore not be generalized to the entire population of African American male ex-felons. Time constraints and geographical locations prevented this study from being performed on all the disenfranchised African American male ex-felons in the United States Northeast region. In addition, the results of this research were race-specific, which also limited this analysis.

Lastly, a limitation arose from the use of a modified Stevick Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. As previously noted, before this research was conducted, my awareness and expertise about felon disenfranchisement existed. This recognition was important, as indicated by Moustakas (1994), when examining a phenomenon using a phenomenological approach. The drawback of understanding existing biases is the negative effect that might have hindered my biases from staying objective and reflecting on the study participants' perspectives. Therefore, the modified method of SCK data analysis helped me to handle this bias via bracketing, reflexivity, thick descriptions, and

member checking, but my bias could have tainted the data interpretation and is therefore a limitation of the study.

Recommendations for Future Study

A question is posed on the basis of the findings of this phenomenological analysis when attempting to discern whether a particular perspective would be expressed if other races were interviewed. Therefore, it is my recommendation to obtain a better sense of felon disenfranchisement from the viewpoints of ex-felons males and females from various races of voting age for deeper outcome analysis to be considered. In order to attract different research participants, I also suggest future studies to employ a random snowball sampling technique. The sampling technique is more targeted than that of a non-probability snowball sampling technique but remains consistent with participants recognizing those that match the requirements of the research. Lastly, I recommend future research should consider extending the area in which participants are recruited to decide whether based on geographical areas, common perspectives and experiences differ.

Implications for Social Change

Felon disenfranchisement and other tactics to suppress the African American vote is not a new phenomenon. However, what is new based on the results of this study is the message that felon disenfranchisement sends to ex-felons which is they do not matter; and the degree to which ex-felons find this outdated practice damaging. These damaging effects comes in the form of approximately six million citizens being blocked from voting, the disproportionate impact on the African American communities, and the racist

legacy surrounding felon disenfranchisement. Voting is one of citizenship's most essential advantages, as it affirms one's sense of patriotism and provides an opportunity to influence public policies. This right should never be contingent upon a person's criminal record; thus, the discrepancy with felon disenfranchisement practices.

Therefore, if positive social change is to occur legislation must first acknowledge the profound impact that disenfranchisement have on ex-felons. Which in turn, could lead to great debates surrounding restoring voting rights to ex-felons.

Considering the fairly natural significance of guaranteeing that those most needing social change have a political voice, the current state level of disenfranchisement has almost 5.2 million ex-felons banned from casting a ballot, based on a felony conviction (The Sentencing Project, 2020). This figure equates to one of every 16 African American of voting age makes up this disenfranchised populace. Additionally, around 43% of the disenfranchised populace are those that have finished their sentences. In addition, at a rate of 3.7%, African American males are overwhelming disenfranchised, which is even greater than non-African Americans. (The Sentencing Project, 2020). Once released from custody, ex-felons face insurmountable obstacles, i.e. (employment, housing, educational services, and government assistance), felon disenfranchisement creates another obstacle for an already disadvantaged population (The Greenlining Institute, 2015). The continued practice of felon disenfranchisement in America adds to the racial inequality in this nation and continues to suppress the political voice of African Americans (Purtle, 2013).

Ex-felons would benefit from state-level legislation restoring their voting rights, based on existing evidence from this report. According to Regoli (2019), franchising ex-felons completes the act of reformation, implying that after prison citizens should seek the life they hope can help them get back on track, however denying felons the right to vote exemplifies a message that ex-felons should not be trusted to cast a ballot due to a criminal conviction; and thus unable to be rehabilitated. Therefore, by encouraging responsible political engagement, enabling ex-felons to vote builds social relations and a devotion to the common good. Moreover, in seeking to further condemn people from voting due to a felony conviction, ex-felons would benefit from voting restoration measures in that there is no sufficient justification why the right to vote is linked to criminal punishment and denied to so many because of their criminal background. Finally, ex-felons could benefit from restoration measures in that if permitted to vote, they could potentially provide a different cultural viewpoint (Regoli, 2019).

Voting is habit-forming while we are still too young to vote, is in part fostered by the habits and rituals of our parents (Klass, 2016); thus, implying that voting is a learned behavior. Learned behavior is characterized as conduct that occurs only after experience or practice (Gray, 2019). Political science and public policy research demonstrate that permanent voting habits are shaped during childhood and adolescence periods, and that routine and habit can be important when analyzing voting behavior and thus election results (Neundorf, and Smets, 2017). A majority of participants reported seeing family members vote well before they were of voting age, according to the findings of this research. So inevitably, as election time rolled around the learned behavior of voting was

a normal response. Felon disenfranchisement, therefore, creates a routine that induces adaptation, which is contrary to learned behavior.

Consequently, if the conduct of voting is to be influential in African American households, it is much more important for people with children to restore voting rights to ex-felons. Moreover, social status also influences lifelong voting habits. As individuals, those who are usually well educated and financially wealthy are perceived to be more likely to vote. Felon disenfranchisement thus affects poorly educated communities with low wages, political power is at best mediocre, and there are futile tools to assist in successful growth. Ex-felons regaining their right to vote is a step in the right direction to achieve a meaningful social partnership.

Historically, felon disenfranchisement in America has faced legal scrutiny, constitutional scrutiny, the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and despite these attempts to flatten the curve on the disenfranchisement of felons; it remains a prominent trending issue in America. Giving the current political climate, and an effort to protect the purity of democracy; ensuring that all voting voices is heard regarding selection of the future leaders of this country is more important than ever.

Few reform efforts have made considerable headway in recent years, but the vast majority of ex-felons remain disenfranchised. This could be contributed to inequalities in punishment, the age of mass incarceration, and a lack of awareness. It is a potential argument that a portion of disenfranchised felons might in fact be able to vote, but they remain disenfranchised due to a lack of educational knowledge of voting status. A variety of non-profit entities, such as The Sentencing Project, founded in 1986, the American

Civil Liberties Union, founded in 1920, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, formed in 1963, have a dedicated mission to fight felon disenfranchisement. The only true way to fully eliminate felon disenfranchisement has been to regain voting rights for ex-felons, literature has shown.

If the intent of public policies promoting the continued practice of felon disenfranchisement was intended to be racially motivated, a way to manipulate election results, or a platform to advance the political agenda of a specific candidate, then their efforts were effective. At the political level, there is a positive social implication to consider the harsh effect these obsolete policies have on the general well-being of ex-felons and how citizenship is related to voting. To deny any class of people the right to vote is contrary to the spirit of democracy. The findings of this study could also educate policy makers to reassess disenfranchisement policies and consider returning ex-felon to full citizens by enabling them to vote. Additionally, positive social implications could emerge by Congress passing the Democracy Restoration Act of 2019 (S. 1068) introduced by U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md).

Methodological Implications

A qualitative phenomenological approach led the research outcomes within this study, as illustrated in Chapter 1 of this study. This research gave way to study participants sharing their perspectives on felon disenfranchisement openly and honestly. The methodological implications of this study are those of Moustakas, 1994 Modified method of analysis by Stevick Colaizzi-Keen; recommendations for methods used for data analysis permitted a more focused analysis that led to a detailed explanation from the

perspective of disenfranchised African American male ex-felons. From their perspective, the data obtained, and the research approach used offered a more detailed account of the experiences of these individuals.

Theoretical Implications

Becker's labeling theory was used to explain the societal labels that are used as negative descriptors towards felons and the lifelong stigma of such labels. Societal labeling fosters an isolation between felons and non-felons and creates self-identification challenges when attempting to bond and connect with other members in society. The data used in this study on the perspectives of African American male ex-felons coined with the theoretical framework could generate a way for more positive descriptors to emerge. Implications from this research are expected to provide a road map to field of academia's critical understanding on how felon disenfranchisement negatively strips African American male ex-felons of their citizenship identity as well as how they respond to the labels assigned to them.

Recommendations for Practice

Felon disenfranchisement continues to threaten the nature of democracy, and state level legislation needs to by any means necessary overturn this outdate practice. The information provided by the African American male ex-felon participants in the study was invaluable information on how ex-felons care about their voting rights and want their voting rights restored. The data from this current research can provide legislation with the knowledge on how ex-felons voting voice has a vital place at the ballot. The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to legislation that the time has come to end felon

disenfranchisement and restore ex-felons voting rights. The policymakers in this region must begin to acknowledge the racial legacy and the damaging effects that emerged as a result of felon disenfranchisement, and do better by dismantling all state policies that impose felon disenfranchisement as a punishment resulting from a felony conviction.

Conclusion

The U.S. continues to struggle coping with the racial roots of felon disenfranchisement. While some states have been gaining traction over the years to lift some of the more restrictive disenfranchisement policies, however, multiple setbacks have prevailed that has circumvented full progression. A more profound shift is desperately needed. In our democracy, felon disenfranchisement statutes continuously perpetuate inequity. Their model never rescinds a person's voting rights regardless of their past or current criminal record. There is much to be said about this model that chooses to uphold the meaning of democracy, all disenfranchising states should consider adopting this model.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological analysis was to investigate felon disenfranchisement from the perspective of African America male ex-felons. This study provided a forum for 15 people to respond to the growing issue that disenfranchisement of felons overwhelmingly affects African Americans far more than non-African Americans. This issue led to the disenfranchisement of approximately one in every 16 African American male ex-felons due to a felony conviction. In addition, separation anxiety, alienation, rejection, self- and citizenship problems have been triggered by this rising problem.

Becker's labeling theory supports the theoretical basis of this study by acknowledging the findings of this phenomenon. The labeling theory describes how those in a powerful position determine when the action of a person is deviant, establishment of negative labeling of individuals; therefore, creating the label and applying disenfranchisement to the punishment. Felon disenfranchisement is a way to ensure that African Americans do not rise to the prospect of being politically impactful and restricting chances of overcoming adversity. The byproduct of the disenfranchisement of felons is political enslavement. It is with great optimism that the knowledge gathered from the common perspectives of African American male ex-felons would encourage legislation and political leaders to generate meaningful social change.

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Appendix A: RQ1 and Interview Questions

Research Question 1

What perspective do African American male ex-felons have regarding felon disenfranchisement after sentencing completion?

Interview Questions

IQ1 What does it mean to be disenfranchised?

IQ2 What perspectives do you have regarding felon disenfranchisement?

IQ4 What value do you place on voting?

IQ 5 What do you know if you are eligible to vote, if not why do you not know?

IQ6 Before losing the right to vote, did you vote?

IQ7 Has losing the right to vote made you feel more likely to want to vote?

IQ10 Are you interested in having your voting rights restored? If yes do you know the process to have your rights restored?

Appendix B: RQ2 and Interview Questions

Research Question 2

What perspectives do African American male ex-felons have regarding labeling stigmatization?

Interview Questions

IQ3 Is felon disenfranchisement another form of criminal punishment?

IQ8 How has being labeled an ex-felon and not being allowed to vote impacted your identify as a citizen?

IQ9 Do you think there is political benefits for disenfranchising African American male ex-felons?

Appendix C: Interview Guide Protocol

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Participant Code:

Hi, and thank you for today's participation. I'm a doctoral student at Walden University, and the purpose of your participation in this study is for me to understand your view of the felon disenfranchisement. Felon disenfranchisement means getting your voting rights stripped away because of a felony conviction. Your experience will help to serve the intent of this research, which explores felon disenfranchisement from the perspective of African America male ex-felons. This interview will last about 30-60 minutes; only one face-to-face interview will be needed. Please note that you will be able to withdraw from this research at any time and that your identity will be kept confidential. At the end of this research, I will be the only person with access to your information and the information will be destroyed. Using an audio recorder, I will record your interview to ensure that your answers are documented and accurately reflected in the interview. The data collected from your interview will be transcribed by me and reviewed for clarity and precision by you. If you would like a copy of the research study's results, I will give you a copy via mail or email upon request. Let us start if there are not any questions.

Interview questions

1. What does it mean to be disenfranchised?
2. What perspective do you have regarding felon disenfranchisement?
3. Is felony disenfranchisement another form of criminal punishment?
4. What value do you place on voting?
5. Do you know if you are eligible to vote, if not why do you not know?
6. Before losing the right to vote, did you vote?
7. Has losing the right to vote, made you feel more likely to want to vote?
8. How has being labeled an ex-felon and not being allowed to vote impacted your ability to identify as a citizen?
9. Are there any political benefits for disenfranchising African American male ex-felons?
10. Are you interested in having your voting of your voting rights restored?

Conclusion: Again, I would like to thank you for taking time out of your day to be a participant in research. As a reminder, you will receive a copy of the interview for your review and final approval. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone should you have any questions.

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

**AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE EX-FELON PERSPECTIVE
ON FELON DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

Lead Researcher: Doctoral Student

I am a doctoral student at Walden University Department of Criminal Justice Law and Public Policy, is recruiting participants for a research study about African American Male Ex-felon Perspective on Felon Disenfranchisement. Felon Disenfranchisement means to have your voting rights taken away because of a felony conviction.

Purpose of Study: This study seeks the viewpoints from African American male ex-felons whose voting rights have been affected because of a felony conviction.

Study Criteria: You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older, African American male ex-felon, banned from voting because of a felony conviction, no pending or additional charges, and completion of all sentencing requirements.

Location: The study will take place in a public venue to be determined if selected to participate in the study. Your participation will require two days. Day one is a 1-hour face to face interview, and day two you will conduct a review of all collected data for accuracy. This process will be conducted via email. Please understand that the location where this flyer is displayed has no connection to the current research study.

Interview: As part of participating, you will be interviewed face to face with researcher and 10 interview questions regarding the topic will asked of you.

Volunteer: You will not be paid for your participation in this research, participation is completely voluntarily, and no consequences will follow should you chose to withdraw from the study.

Contact: If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the lead researcher using the contact information that will be provided.