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Attitudes of Returning Citizens in Government-Managed Post-Release Programming

Zachary D'jon Weaver
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Walden University

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Attitudes of Returning Citizens in Government-Managed Post-Release Programming

by

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MA, Clark Atlanta University, 2009

BS, Rust College, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

Nearly 700,000 prisoners return to communities annually, and approximately two-thirds are rearrested within 3 years of release. The cyclic pattern of recidivism presents risks to both returning offenders and the communities that accept them. Reentry research tends to include the voice and experiences of juveniles, community members, and service providers, and narrowly focuses on the socioeconomic conditions of adult ex-offender populations pre- and post-release. Few researchers have explored the attitudes of those returning citizens or the perceived impact on treatment success, as related to employment-based, post-release reintegration programs. This study investigated the attitudes of 32 participants of Project Empowerment, the District of Columbia's post-release program. The ecology of public administration theory and empowerment theory provided the theoretical frameworks for understanding offender reentry within employment-based programming. Interview data were coded and analyzed consistent with a modified van Kaam method. A key finding indicates job-readiness training completion is largely contingent upon development of positive attitudes from both public administrators and participants. Additionally, participants were cognizant of the attitudes of community members regarding reentry and employment, and were more likely to see program participation as beneficial if perceived community support was high. The implications for positive social change include recommendations for reentry programs, such as Project Empowerment, to create an empowerment environment conducive to attitude development concerning self and society. Such an environment creates trust and opportunities for successful engagement in employment programs and decreases the risk of recidivism among communities that support individuals returning from incarceration.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mother, Tempia Weaver, and grandmother, Mary Lanier
Weaver.

Acknowledgments

Suddenly, it hit me; attitude had everything to do with my journey in this life. Knowing this has allowed me to understand the most tragic of circumstances. Recidivism in so many cases is a cyclic event, the result of which can be perpetual imprisonment, due in part to an individual not coming to terms with the charges weighed against his or her very nature. The new classification of ex-offender yields perpetual unease as a consequence. Returning citizens view this experience as unjust, and as such there is an unwillingness to accept government-proscribed treatments. They stand in defiance of this mark and refuse to participate fully in any intervention associated with this classification. Continuously, the marks of rebellion are upon them; thus they are never alone. Returning citizens cannot be viewed as a blatant criminal; to the contrary, they merely seek to return to the freedom one has long forgotten and in truth never entirely has known in this human experience. Returning citizens, desire not to be associated with any identification of deviance, for this classification is not within their worldview. One has limited consciousness and cannot allow true-self to gain absolute liberation from the vibration that imprisons them. To this end, one now becomes the conduit for one's cyclic life event, which results in the very certain detention of one's entire being. In dedication to those who exist in this perpetual state, I've gained great awareness and compassion as a result of the many observations of regrettable unintended sacrifice.

Special thanks to the Ever-Present Source of “All Things”; I’ve only come to this point as a result of your divine guidance. My beloved brother, Ashley D. Weaver, your journey in this human experience and unyielding faith in me, has been among my strongest motivations to complete this work. Little brother, you are deeply loved, admired, and respected. My treasured godparents, Rosalyn and Francis Priester, both of you have encouraged me to see the world from the heart of Source; you inspire me to overstand and walk in a higher consciousness. To my countless mentors, your unwavering commitment to me over the years has truly empowered and propelled me towards a hopeful future, filled with endless possibly. The absolute truth is that all of you truly made a difference in my life experience, and for that I am most grateful and thankful. Namaste (I bow to the divine in you).

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

During the past 50 years, the prison population has grown at an explosive rate. By the early 2000s, it was estimated that 11% of American males had a high likelihood of going to prison at some point in their lives (Wildeman & Western, 2010). This statistic is staggering when one considers the fact that the great majority of the 11% consists of African American men (Wildeman & Western, 2010). By 2008, the prison population consisted of 1.5 million persons. Including the 800,000 in local jails brings the total incarcerated population in the United States to an estimated 2.3 million (Wildeman & Western, 2010). According to Wildeman and Western (2010),

Researchers agree on two main causes for rising imprisonment: changes in the economic and social life of urban men with little schooling, and a punitive turn in criminal justice policy. It is helpful to think of the first as providing the raw material for the prison boom and the second as transforming this raw material into a greatly enlarged penal population. (p. 159)

This population increase has a correlation to the almost 700,000 returning citizens released from prison in 2005 (Wildeman & Western, 2010). This number constitutes 4 times as many releases when compared with 1980 averages. This dynamic, in conjunction with the recent economic recession, has caused major federal and state budget pressures, resulting in governments looking for ways to decrease the costly prison population (Hynes, 2010). California and Illinois are examples of this dynamic. Overcrowding in California's prisons has resulted in a court-mandated prison reduction

(Hynes, 2010). This will result in more than 15,000 prison releases. While the state of Illinois is mitigating constraints by implementing an early release program, this method will effectively free an estimated 1,000 inmates in Illinois based on an early-release policy (Hynes, 2010). Governments throughout the United States are choosing to mitigate large prison population counts by increasing the amount of opportunities for early release (Hynes, 2010).

These trends have resulted in returning citizens returning to communities that are then faced with the challenge of absorbing this population and providing the critical services necessary for successful reentry into society. Having access to those programmatic treatments is of great importance to the community, especially when faced with the statistical reality of more than two-thirds of inmates being released annually (Hynes, 2010). Many of those inmates are being rearrested based upon an entirely new offense, and more than half are reincarcerated based upon a new conviction or having violated the conditions of his or her parole, all occurring within three years of release (Hynes, 2010). When returning citizens are released back into the community, they require an interrelated degree of attention due to the complicated challenges faced with lifestyle reintegration. These citizens may suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, debt and housing problems, and psychological challenges. In 2003, 29% of those released had no accommodations arranged upon release (Rhodes, 2008).

When addressing these factors, governments are challenged to develop meaningful treatments that address the current problems of reintegration. One method that is being considered involves evidence-based reentry programs that are designed to

address the specific needs of returning citizens (Hynes, 2010). This effort has been adopted by various stakeholders, including correctional institutions, nonprofit organizations, and government entities (Haynes, 2010).

Shrinking government budgets, increased prison releases, increased community demands, and public safety concerns speak to the need for a well-balanced approach that benefits all stakeholders and further builds on the society as a whole. I seek to add to the field of research regarding recidivism and reintegration by understanding more about returning citizens' attitudes in relation to government-managed, employment-based reentry programs and job-readiness training completion.

Statement of the Problem

In order to provide returning citizens with successful employment-based reintegration treatment with excellent completion rates, programming should be guided by a holistic, true needs-based assessment that takes into account the life experiences of returning citizens, specific to government-provided programming. Currently, ex-offender recidivism rates are disproportionately high among African American males. A combination of diminishing labor markets for low skilled labor and a largely punitive shift specific to criminal justice policy exists, resulting in increased rates of incarceration. The success of reintegration programs for returning citizens is dependent upon the ability of the government officials to provide services appropriate for returning citizens education, work experiences, and state of physical and mental health (Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013). Some believe that fundamental inequalities exist as a result of racial bias in American society at large; as such, public administrators (governmental actors)

are often viewed with a level of skepticism by minorities due to their fundamental belief of being treated unfairly and inequitably.

Real attitude differences exist among racial groups when it comes to the legitimacy of public institutions. African Americans have been found to be less trusting of the criminal justice system than their White counterparts (Western & Muller, 2013). Sixty percent of Whites have more confidence in the police, whereas 34% of African Americans have confidence in the police. Seventy-one percent of African Americans also believe that police bias is a major reason for the racial disparity in incarceration (Western & Muller, 2013). African Americans who feel that they have been discriminated against as a result of race are more likely to attribute their incarceration to this experience, in addition to their education and career opportunities (Western & Muller, 2013). If government programming did not account for the life experiences that shape the attitudes of returning citizens, programmatic issues affecting government-provided treatment rates of completion would exist, resulting in a disproportionate level of increased recidivism.

As a void in the literature exists, I investigated the attitudes of ex-offender participants toward publicly managed, employment-based post-release reintegration stimuli and completion of job-readiness training through this study. I explored the perceived relationships between attitudes (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative) and job-readiness training completion. In order to gain a deeper understanding, I assessed the attitudes of ex-offender participants of Project Empowerment, the District of Columbia's government-managed, employment-based post-release reentry program.

In light of the research already done on juvenile justice recidivism, I specifically focused on adult participants. The study targeted the District of Columbia because of this area's increasing number of minority incarcerations and releases, high unemployment rates, and subsequent reincarcerations.

Project Empowerment Overview

Project Empowerment (PE) is a program designed to provide supportive services, adult basic education courses, job-readiness, employability training, life-skills coaching, vocational training, and career-search assistance to the residents of the District of Columbia. PE helps alleviate widespread joblessness among district residents dealing with multiple barriers to employment. Participants are primarily referred by DC Works Career Centers (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). However, participants may be referred through the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) of the District of Columbia, Office of Returning Citizens Affairs, with a new cohort beginning every 3 weeks. Eligibility for the program is determined by the following criteria:

- 22–54 years old;
- District of Columbia resident;
- not currently employed;
- not receiving government assistance, such as TANF, SSI, or unemployment benefits; and
- not currently using any illegal substances.

The program serves recently incarcerated and homeless individuals without a high school diploma or GED, former substance abuse victims, and the chronically unemployed or underemployed. Based upon the demographic data already published regarding returning citizens, this population is faced with a combination of, if not all of the aforementioned eligibility criteria. The program offers individuals assistance in obtaining jobs in the maintenance and janitorial, administrative, healthcare, information technology, transportation and hospitality, and food service industries (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). In preparation for those opportunities, the program components include GED courses, which are free for participants seeking a high school equivalent education. The courses are offered onsite, and active PE participants receive subsidized pay while taking the classes. Securing unsubsidized employment is the main goal of PE, and basic computer skills are necessary for returning citizens (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). Because technology plays such a significant role in obtaining a job, basic computer training and Internet job application training are provided to all PE customers. Additionally, PE provides occupational skills training opportunities to participants seeking employment or additional skills in various employment fields. PE offers free training opportunities, which citizens can obtain from a multitude of vendors (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012).

Project Empowerment Orientation

The orientation session is the participant's first significant exposure to PE. Orientation plays a crucial role in setting the tone for the program as a whole. Program staff lay down the groundwork for a successful program experience. Orientation sessions

are held every 4 weeks. The average cohort is 25 participants per class. PE prepares for a minimum of two cohorts every 3 weeks. The sessions last approximately 2 hours. A brief overview of the program is given, focusing on the goals, objectives, and program expectations (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). After staff members have provided a comprehensive overview of the program, representatives may make brief presentations from PE partner agencies detailing the programs and services they have to offer. The orientation session concludes with a drug screening and the scheduling of participants' intake sessions. Each participant is given an appointment form that indicates who the participant's intake specialist will be, as well as the time and date when the participant should return to the office for intake and assessment (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). Participants receive their drug-screening results at intake sessions. Participants who do not participate in the drug screening or fail to schedule or attend intake sessions will not be enrolled in or admitted to the job-readiness training class (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012). The job-readiness component normally begins on a Monday with a welcome and introduction session that consists of the following:

- greetings and an introduction of the facilitator;
- an explanation of the purpose of the program and, in particular, the job-readiness component, with an emphasis that all aspects of the program are employment-focused;
- a discussion of participants' expectations of the program;
- an overview of the different activities and learning opportunities that will be

offered during this component; and

- a firm statement of the expectations of participants during the job-readiness component, stressing punctuality, attendance, commitment, positive attitudes and behavior, and the importance of treating fellow participants and staff members with respect and consideration (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012).

The training adheres to a set curriculum. As the participant progresses, the following activities and learning modules represent some of the materials and topics that PE entails:

- mock job interviews;
- self-inventory of career interests and current skills;
- CASAS appraisal and examination of scores;
- preparation of an effective resume and completion of employment applications, including Internet-based applications. A well-prepared resume presents the participant as a potential employee by including positive attributes;
- goal setting;
- anger management and conflict resolution, including self-control mechanisms to sublimate and manage anger and effective strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict;
- building and presenting a positive self-image;
- how to dress for success;

- effective communication skills, both verbal and written;
- networking;
- using computers and the Internet to support a job search and enhance professional skills;
- preparing for the job interview;
- characteristics of good personnel; and
- interactive learning modules to the maximum extent possible.

The program length varies; however, once a participant is placed in unsubsidized employment, the participant will receive 12 months of retention services. The program has two primary goals for participants. The first goal, which is short term, is successful completion of job-readiness training. The second goal, which is long term, is for participants to attain employment (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012).

PE does not provide direct housing assistance for homeless participants. However, PE arranges coordinated case-management services with shelter homes and the like. Through the program's partnership with DC Department of Mental Health, participants are provided assistance, referrals, and housing support. DC Department of Mental Health keeps a full-time mental health specialist to administer psychosocial evaluations as requested by Project Empowerment staff. The specialist is also available to meet with and counsel participants experiencing personal or psychological challenges and can refer participants to additional resources if necessary (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012).

Project Empowerment employs several strategies to support participants in the

unsubsidized workplace and increase job retention. The program emphasizes job-retention skills throughout all phases, in particular during job-readiness and professional development. The retention specialist and the participant review any issues including recidivism that may interfere with workplace success, and the specialist makes appropriate referrals to supportive services providers (C. Jones, personal communication, August 29, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated persons specific to publicly managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia, and to determine to what extent, if any, attitudes affect the completion of job-readiness training. By understanding the attitudes held by ex-offender participants of Project Empowerment, it may be possible to better evaluate the program and provide to the District of Columbia government a framework by which current and future reintegration programs can be tailored toward the specific needs of the returning citizens. This data can assist with creating an environment conducive to successful reintegration back into society, which would lead to a decline in recidivistic behavior in DC.

Primary Research Question

How would current Project Empowerment participants describe their attitude toward government-managed, employment-based post-release reintegration programming, and is there a perceived relationship between those attitudes and job-readiness training completion?

Significance of the Study

Limited knowledge is available specific to this area of inquiry, and studies have indicated that the time following release is critical for returning citizens to experience successful reentry (Rhodes, 2008). Governmental treatments developed to address post-release needs present a unique opportunity for improved post-release outcomes for returning citizens. It is hoped that the results of this study add to the field of knowledge concerning this specific population. Additionally, the research may yield a greater understanding of the triggers of recidivism and allow for improvements in current reintegration policies and programs offered in the District of Columbia. The outcomes of this study can encourage better evaluation of post-release programs, affecting program missions, objectives, and resource allocations.

Theoretical Framework

The study was designed to gain a greater understanding of returning citizens attitudes toward government-managed, employment-based post-release reintegration programs and to show to what extent, if any, attitude affects job-readiness training completion. Three theoretical frameworks primarily guided this research—the tri-component attitude model (Pickens, 2005), Gaus’s ecology of public administration theory (Gaus, 2010), and empowerment theory (Lord, 1993) (see Figure 1).

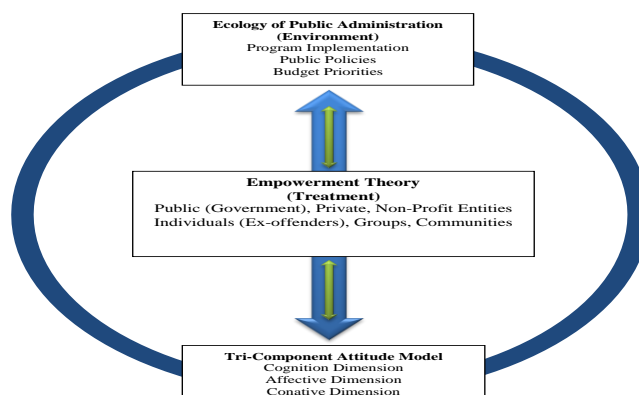


Figure 3. Theoretical interaction model.

The tri-component attitude model speaks to the paradigm of attitudes and behavior. The theory can be used to argue that the attitude of returning citizens will have an influence on their behavior (Pickens, 2005). Adler (as cited in Pickens, 2005) believed that a person’s thoughts, feelings, and subsequent behaviors are outcomes of the person’s interaction with the physical and social environment. Therefore, state-developed policy actions are a direct response to the behaviors of citizens, and the attitudes held by citizens are a result of ecological factors.

The second theoretical framework applied was Gaus’s ecology of public administration theory. Gaus (2010) stated that elements of the environment significantly influence behavior. This theoretical framework established a concrete linkage between social environment and the policies addressing all citizens’ actions (Gaus, 2010).

Empowerment is a relatively new concept that has been used by those aiming to inspire a high sense of awareness and to change the current state of affairs for people (Lord, 1993). Lord (1993) defined empowerment from the lens of “power and powerlessness” (p. 2). Lord said that power is viewed as the capacity of an individual or

group of individual to enforce direct or indirect effects to an individual or group of individuals. In contrast, Lord said that powerlessness is seen as

The expectation of the person, that their action will be ineffective influencing the outcome of life events. This belief is either institutional or an internal belief that change cannot occur. This mindset creates an apathetic consciousness and creates an unwillingness to advance an agenda aimed at *control and influence*. (p. 2)

To define empowerment, authors of related studies have looked at upward change from the perspective of personal control (Lord, 1993). The literature indicates that people are familiar with their personal needs and should have the ability to define and act upon those needs. In Lord's (1993) definition, empowerment is based on the concept that an individual or group has the ability to voice opinions during the decision-making process, especially in relation to those issues that affect the individual or group.

On the other hand, some researchers have viewed empowerment as a collective social action process. One example is Rappaport's (1987) concept of empowerment, which involves the psychological concept of control in social and political dimensions. As such, empowerment exists on three levels: the personal level, where the individual is gaining control over his or her daily life (Keiffer, 1984); the small group level, where shared experiences happen (Presby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990); and the community level, where every resource is used to improve community control (Pilisuk, McAllister, & Rothman, 1996). Labonte (as cited in Pilisuk et al., 1996) said that empowerment involves actions to develop the capacity of an individual or group of individuals to identify, analyze, and implement solutions to potential problems. The

underlying assumption in empowerment theory is that in order to achieve social change, one must first address the issue of individual and community psychological disempowerment (Pilisuk et al., 1996). It was hoped that the application of all three theoretical foundations to the present study would produce results that would cause the state to make adequate resources available to address the true reintegration needs of returning citizens, which would positively affect job-readiness training completion rates and recidivistic behavior.

Assumptions

A major assumption of this study was that all participants would answer questions truthfully. It was assumed that the questions rendered would be easily understood with a high completion rate. Further, it was assumed that participants in the study would be eligible to complete the instrument based on the criteria established for the study population.

Limitations of the Study

In consideration of the potential cost, access, and time constraints, this study was limited to current participants of Project Empowerment; as such, the study did not include past participants of the program. Therefore, I had a relatively small sample to draw from, and the generalizability of the findings might be in question. The very nature of the target population brings some level of limitation. The program under study not only serves returning citizens, but also serves the homeless population, individuals without a high school diploma or GED, former substance abuse victims, and the chronically underemployed and unemployed, with these groups not being mutually exclusive. One

potential weakness of the study was unwillingness of participants to indicate any likelihood of recidivist behavior, especially if they were recently released from incarceration, on parole, and looking for employment opportunities. I sought to mitigate this concern through the confidentiality of the program and research design.

Delimitations of Study

This study was limited to District of Columbia residents who were current participants in Project Empowerment and had been previously charged with an offense. I anticipated having all steps associated with the research process complete within a 3-month time period; this time frame limited the overall scope of the study.

This chapter has addressed the overarching purpose and intended direction for this study. Chapter 2 outlines the key research and literature that have been developed in this area of inquiry.

Definition of Terms

Affective: The affective component includes feelings and emotional states (Pickens, 2005).

Attitude: “A learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975, p. 6).

Cognitive: The cognitive component is a reasonable belief based on knowledge concerning whether something is true or false (Pickens, 2005).

Conative: The conative component is composed of purposeful intentions, natural tendencies, and the decision to act in a certain manner (Pickens, 2005).

Returning citizen: A term ascribed to a person or persons who has been released from incarceration after completing a criminal sentence and returns back to communities (Nally, Lockwood, & Ho, 2011). Returning citizens indicates an affirmative social identity that reestablishes one's humanity in the context of the society. The term provides a degree of confidence that the community has a positive and supportive perspective, relative to those individuals leaving correctional institutions. The term establishes a mutual confidence between returning citizens and the communities that absorb them. The term returning citizens is an affirmative social identification meant to establish an unbiased perception, create trust and acceptability, and the recognition of the benefits of citizenship.

Job-readiness training: The initial component of Project Empowerment. Job-Readiness Training is a 3-week course that focuses on interviewing, resume development, workplace ethics and behavior, goal setting, dress standards, introductory computer skills, social networking, and effective communication techniques. Program participants attend the training Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., and receive subsidized payment during the training period.

Non-violent offense: Any offense that does not involve the use of any physical force or injury to another individual (Travis, 1996).

Publicly-managed, employment-based reintegration program: A government-designed, managed, and financed reintegration treatment, designed for the purpose of employment readiness training and employment opportunity placement assistance (Zhang, Roberts, & Callanan, 2006).

Recidivist behavior: The criminal act of repeating an undesirable behavior that results in rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison (Maltz, 1984).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Deindustrialization and Low-Skilled Joblessness

Prior to the late 1960s, low-skilled residents in urban manufacturing communities could rely on the manufacturing industry to provide work and wages. While unemployment relative to this labor force was still high by comparison to those with more advanced education, low-skilled laborers still had more opportunities than today to gain a wage capable of supporting a family. Not only did these opportunities provide a means to support basic needs, but they also established daily routines, institutional attachment, and community bonds. The advent of deindustrialization created great challenges for this low-skilled community, and the effect on the unemployment rate was catastrophic. The pressure of crime, drug trade, and increased addictions resulted in young men from urban communities becoming more vulnerable to being arrested and prosecuted by the state (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

The decrease in opportunities relative to employment led to an increase in activity in the underground market. From the mid-1970s onward, states established a more punitive response to criminal justice, in which imprisonment was the principal tool to address felony convictions. The strengthened drug-sentencing guidelines and limits on sentencing added to increases in imprisonment rates and duration of time incarcerated. In the 1980s, local and state policing intensified and, among the African American population, arrests for drug offenses increased dramatically. This was because of a combination of diminishing labor markets for low-skilled labor and a largely punishment-based approach in sentencing measures relative to criminal justice policy, resulting in

increased rates of incarceration (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

In addition, by the year 2000, almost 10% of all African American children had a parent incarcerated daily, whereas only 1% of White children had a parent incarcerated under the same conditions. This staggering statistic emphasizes the racial disparities that exist and the effect employment, or lack thereof, can have on a group of people (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Incarceration Experience of African Americans

As indicated above, 14 years ago, nearly 10% of African American children had a parent incarcerated on any given day versus only 1% of White children. This statistic further substantiates the reality of racial disparities when it comes to criminal incarceration rates. In a society with a history of hostility and inequity toward the African American community, it is not inconceivable that African Americans would view this statistic as indicative of an assault on their community. The prison industrial complex has now become the mechanism shown to diminish the life chances of offenders, resulting in the generational degradation of the lives, opportunities, and basic family support structure of the minority community. The literature shows an unquestionable reality of increasing trends in incarceration, high school dropout, and unemployment rates (Wildeman & Western, 2010). This reality is seen, by a large degree, as a destruction of the African American community from the inside out. The affected generations face undeniable challenges, and the life chances and risk assessments of their progeny are even dire (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

According to the Pew Center on the States (2008), 2.3 million people are

incarcerated in the United States. The United States has the largest imprisoned population in the world. This statistic represents at least 1% of the adult population in the United States (The PEW Center on the States, 2008). Incarceration disproportionately affects low-skilled African American individuals. Petit (2012) further found that young African American dropouts represented 37% of those incarcerated on any given day. Petit indicated that one in three African American men will be imprisoned for at least a year, in contrast to one in 20 White men. This cyclic pattern of incarceration results in routine recidivistic life events (Petit, 2012).

Harding, Morenoff, and Herbert (2013) stated that incarceration rates are high in poor urban areas. Statistics indicate that the growth of the penal system in the United States has been concentrated chiefly among African Americans and the poor (Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013). During the advent of the prison boom, African Americans were 7 times more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts. Western and Muller (2013) cited racial inequalities, education disparities, and class as consequential factors. Western and Muller added that these inequalities are evident in the increasing rate of imprisonment among African American and less educated individuals.

In a study of the aggregated risk of imprisonment for men born between 1975 and 1979 between the ages of 30 and 34, around one in five African American men experienced imprisonment, whereas the risk factor was around one in 30 among White men (Wildeman & Western, 2010). When data were further broken down by educational attainment, African American men completing high school had a one in three chance of being institutionalized at some point. Whereas the same cohort of African American men

who dropped out of high school had a two in three chance of being imprisoned (Wildeman & Western, 2010). According to Wildeman and Western (2010),

Imprisonment among White men is significantly lower. Even for the most marginal group of White men, those who did not complete high school, only 15.3 percent went to prison. Thus the consequences of mass imprisonment are concentrated among those already most on the periphery of society, African American and (to a lesser degree) White men with little schooling, the same segments of society in which fragile families are most likely to be formed. (p. 161)

Currently, African American male high school dropouts under the age of 35 are 37% more likely to be incarcerated and 26% more likely to be unemployed compared to Whites (Western & Muller, 2013). Western and Muller (2013) stated that the increase in the prison population was a result of state changes in criminal justice policy. These policy changes equated to longer sentencing standards and state-required mandatory minimums. Ultimately, this policy shift resulted in parole violators being readmitted to prison (Western & Muller, 2013). By 2009, almost 70% of African American male dropouts in their early 30s had experienced time in prison (Western & Muller, 2013).

The literature indicates a flourishing amount of research suggesting that incarceration is correlated with three variables—high risk of unemployment, family instability, and other socially hazardous behavior (Western & Muller, 2013). Males who have a history of being incarcerated are more involved in criminal behavior and are more susceptible to rearrest and incarceration than those males who have never spent time in

prison (Western & Muller, 2013).

Government Policy Shift

Even in spite of cuts to state budgets throughout the United States, partly because of the economic recession, incarceration rates have continued to rise, albeit at a slower pace (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Brown (2013) conducted a study of state reactions to the 2008 economic recession specific to state policies on incarceration. Brown further conducted a quantitative evaluation of the relationship between a state's economic, political, and crime control measures in 2009 and rates of policy changes that reduced state reliance on incarceration measures. Because of the fiscal pressures of today, some states now allow judges the discretion to consider the fiscal cost when imposing penalties on offenders. Brown confirmed that correction spending constitutes the fourth largest line-item expenditure, following spending on transportation, education, and healthcare. This spending trend, mixed with the presence of economic pressures, is now forcing states to reevaluate forms of punishment and terms of detention (Brown, 2013).

Out of 223 correctional policies enacted by states during 2009, 56% addressed bureaucratic reforms, whereas 43% of those policies focused on reducing the use of incarceration. Brown (2013) concluded that party dominance, revenue sources, and federal funding were instrumental in reducing states' reliance on incarceration. This study showed that in 2009, states spent \$52.3 billion for correction programs, 95% of which was solely state funding, with 2.6% federal funds and 2.4% from bonds (Brown, 2013). This included all forms of criminal corrections. Incarceration is the most expensive of all mechanisms, costing an average of \$29,000 annually per person, versus

\$2,000 annually for probation and parole administration (Brown, 2013). The higher the percentage of federal funds targeted toward correctional spending is, the fewer correctional policy changes are made (Brown, 2013). Brown suggested that racial threat theory provides a positive correlation between the size of minority populations and punitive political and social reactions to crime, which results in higher incarceration rates and spending.

The criminal justice system now uses intermediate sanctions as methods of addressing parolee behavior management, and these sanctions fall short of reincarceration (Harding et al., 2013). Some behavioral offenses are classified as illegal, such as those related to drugs or theft. Others are violations of parole terms, such as alcohol consumption, breaking curfew, and failure to report to the parole officer. These measures are taken with the goal of preventing identified behavior from escalating (Harding et al., 2013).

During 2009, the National Council for State Legislators reported 223 major legislative actions specific to correction policy (Brown, 2013). Forty-nine (22%) actions addressed sentencing and option policy, 68 (31%) addressed community supervision, 36 (16%) addressed facility administration and programming, and 70 (31%) addressed release and transition (Brown, 2013). Of the correctional policies, 47% addressed expanding access to reentry programming, increasing usage of risk assessment, limiting what constitutes a violation of probation and parole, or eliminating automatic incarceration as a result of a violation and expanding release opportunities and community reintegration programming (Brown, 2013). Between the years 1982 and

2007, returning citizens under community supervision increased from 1.3 million to 5.7 million, with a slight decrease to 4.8 million in 2010 (Harding et al., 2013).

Wildeman and Western (2010) stated that reforms to criminal justice policy in isolation cannot totally address the issues that undergird incarceration trends. Policy makers must pay broader attention to those who are high school dropouts, are unemployed, are addicted to drugs, or have a mental disease, which are risk factors for incarceration. Wildeman and Western added that solutions to these problems would require financing the education, health, and labor sectors to build the capacity of low-skilled men and women for employment.

Reintegration Experience of African Americans

Reintegration programs are confronted with several social and economic barriers including education, housing, and employment opportunities (Harding et al., 2013). Returning citizens are socially, economically, and educationally disadvantaged. Cyclic experiences of recidivism have been attributed to socioeconomic inequity (Harding et al., 2013). Further, younger African American males with low skill sets experience this disproportionate cyclic incarceration event. This experience has created major threats to the well-being of the African American community in particular (Harding et al., 2013).

According to Western and Muller (2013), judicial decisions influence the life of poor and ethnic minority offenders. The literature suggests that time in prison is likely to place limitations on a returning citizens ability to obtain suitable employment and compensation (Western & Muller, 2013). In terms of the effects of incarceration on wage income, employment opportunities, and other labor-related components, the overarching

conclusion in this area of inquiry is that returning citizens face major challenges to employment because of employer bias concerning criminal history, or as a result of limited skills and social protocols (Western & Muller, 2013). Also, returning citizens face institutional and social challenges when trying to secure stable housing. The obstacles that returning citizens face, include limited work history, challenged credit history, private landlord discrimination, and public policies that actively exclude returning citizens from accessing public services such as public housing benefits. Furthermore, public housing tenants have the potential of eviction if a house guest or household members have been involved in illegal drug and criminal activity. Those restrictions present clear and alarming conditions that perpetuate homelessness and potentially recidivistic behavior (Harding et al., 2013).

Disadvantaged neighborhoods, social disorder, and access to social services can be predictors of recidivism (Harding et al., 2013). Harding cited a study in New Orleans, Louisiana focusing on prisoner reentry that indicated that returning citizens who return to their home location are more likely to reoffend than those who move to other locations (Harding et al., 2013). Returning citizens on parole and probation are concentrated in impoverished urban communities (Harding et al., 2013). Recent research has generally indicated that returning citizens come back to their previous communities, and the percentage of recidivism is increased because of the same criminogenic influences that existed and contributed to the previous offense (Harding et al., 2013). Harding et al. (2013) further investigated how common it is for offenders to return home after incarceration and to what extent a relationship between high-poverty communities

and recidivism exists. The authors additionally looked at the type of housing returning citizens obtain, ranging from private to institutional housing (Harding et al., 2013). The study by Harding et al. indicated that 70% of returning citizens, upon release, lived in private residences. Twelve percent were housed in correctional centers, where they were sometimes subjected to electronic monitoring and curfew constraints; however, they were afforded the freedom to leave the facility to perform work, pursue employment opportunities, and visit with family members (Harding et al., 2013).

Based upon Harding et al. (2013) research, a corrective perspective exists specific to the longstanding thought that a majority of returning citizens return to their neighborhoods. The study indicated that 41% of returning citizens returned to their preprison neighborhoods. The data indicated that a majority of returning citizens did not return, and many lived far from their former homes. At least 56% lived more than two miles from their old residence, whereas 38% lived more than five miles away (Harding et al., 2013). While returning citizens are not returning to their old neighborhoods, the members of the group in this study were returning to almost identical neighborhoods where the economic conditions were almost exactly the same as in their preprison lives. Breaking down the statistics, 66% of African Americans released return to neighborhoods of high poverty, compared to 56% of the White population (Harding et al., 2013). The disproportionate level of poverty was a significant factor in the study (Harding et al., 2013). In terms of the distribution of neighborhood poverty among White and Black populations, 63% of Blacks lived in high-poverty areas before and after prison, whereas 19% of Whites did (Harding et al., 2013).

Harding et al. (2013) concluded that contrary to popular belief, those in the sample generally did not return back to their original communities. This was a result of several factors, including the realization that elements of a criminogenic environment exist that are not conducive to successful reintegration, family relocation, family disengagement of support, and access to resources (Harding et al., 2013). Stahler et al. (2013) sampled 5,354 returning citizens. The study investigated the influence of individual and neighborhood demographics and spatial contagion on the likelihood of reincarceration. The results of the study indicated that the likelihood of reincarceration increased among males and depended on drug use, the nature of the offense, and the proximity to areas of high statistics of recidivism (Stahler et al., 2013).

This study further complements Harding et al. (2013) position that a relationship exists between recidivistic behavior and neighborhood environment. If mass incarceration is disproportionately experienced by poor minority men, this phenomenon affects not only individuals, but also the communities they are from and the communities they return to upon release (Harding et al., 2013).

African American Perspective of Government Legitimacy

Western and Muller (2013) stated that real attitude differences among racial groups exist when it comes to the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. African Americans have been found to be less trusting of the criminal justice system than their White counterparts (Western & Muller, 2013). Sixty percent of Whites have confidence in the police, whereas 34% of African Americans express such confidence (Western & Muller, 2013). About 71% of African Americans believe that police bias is a major

reason for the racial disparity in incarceration (Western & Muller, 2013). African Americans who feel that they have been discriminated against because of race are more likely to attribute their incarceration to this experience in addition to their education and career opportunities (Western & Muller, 2013). The previously mentioned statistics indicate that African Americans have a similar confidence level in government-provided treatments because of their level of distrust in government institutions.

African Americans believed that a fundamental inequality exists because of racial bias existing in American society at large; as such, governmental actors are often viewed with a level of skepticism by minorities because of their fundamental belief of being treated unfair and inequitable (Western & Muller, 2013).

For a social group whose relationship to American society is defined by a history of forced confinement, from slavery to the ghetto, mass incarceration represents the latest chapter . . . Though the political significance of mass incarceration is profound; the empirical claims sustaining this significance are quite limited. The collective injury to black America and the republic to which African Americans are sometimes tenuously connected are produced largely by the pure fact of penal confinement. (Western & Muller, 2013, p. 175)

LeBel (2012a) looked at a sample of formerly incarcerated persons and their perceptions of stigma. The results of that study proved that those who received multiple parole violations have a stronger perception of stigma (LeBel, 2012a). LeBel (2012b) further looked at former offenders' perceptions of discrimination because of their membership to 10 disadvantaged groups, and if former offenders' perceptions were related to self-

esteem. The study showed that of those sampled, a majority felt discriminated against for one or multiple reasons (LeBel, 2012b).

Understanding Recidivism

Recidivism is a term that has various measures and interpretations; the characteristics specific to the points of departure include extent of time monitored, categories of offense, and parole violation inclusion. However, researchers have found some mutual agreement on the broad understanding of recidivism (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). Recidivism is generally regarded as the relapse of an individual into previously held deviant criminal activity; this activity is solely measured by a return to the criminal justice system as a result of a new offense. The lack of description of what act constitutes a relapse in criminal behavior leaves room for various interpretations (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). Recidivistic behavior is often a result of probation violations. Violations may occur in many different ways. Circumstances that may lead to violation of probation include:

- failure to appear for a scheduled court date;
- failure to report to the probation officer;
- failure to pay any required fines or restitutions;
- possessing, using, or selling illegal substances;
- committing other crimes or offenses;
- technical violations; and
- failure to maintain employment.

Incarceration has a large, negative effect on nonviolent offenders and their

families. The literature indicates that because of changes in criminal justice policy, nonviolent crime classifications have increased specific to their incarceration rates. This increase has a direct correlation to the mandating of prison time based upon drug crimes and technical violations (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Technical Violations

Revocation of parole is an example of a result of technical violations. Technical violations include testing positive on a drug screening, failure to report to a drug screening, and failure of a returning citizen to properly report to their assigned community supervision officer. According to CSOSA, the frequency and number of violations are reflective of the offender's ability to successfully integrate back in to society (CSOSA, 2013). Drug violations constitute the highest of all categories measured. This could be attributed to the system in place which regularly screens and records drug violations. Other violations are mainly dependent upon the community service officer being aware of the current compliance of offenders on their caseload. In 2012, drug violations accounted for 156,046 (91%) of the number of technical violations (CSOSA, 2013). Of that number, 51.3% illegally used a controlled substance, 44.5% failed to submit a specimen for substance abuse testing, 4.2% indicated potential water-loading, and 1.0% illegally possessed a controlled substance (CSOSA, 2013). In 2012, non-drug violations accounted for 15,483 (9.0%) of the number of technical violations (CSOSA, 2013). Of that number, 0% disobeyed the law, resulting in a new arrest, 30.7% failed to comply with supervision requirements, 47.1% failed to comply with monitoring requirements, and 22.2% reflected non-drug violations (CSOSA, 2013).

The literature has identified at least two policy areas which have a drastically negative effect on families (Wildeman & Western, 2010). The establishment of mandatory minimums specific to drug offenses has incarcerated a large number of men, who otherwise had no significant criminal history of violent crimes. This pattern of incarceration has damaging effects on the families of those nonviolent offenders. Legislative reform addressing limits on drug sentences would significantly curtail the time of incarceration. Reimprisonment based upon technical violations of parole also serves as a contributor to the rising incarceration numbers, but technical violations do not always equal a new offense and are relatively insignificant to public safety. Violators have been reincarcerated for failing a drug test, missing appointments with the paroles officer, and other technical conditions of their parole (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Dynamic of Fragile Families

The informal, social controls that families and work routines provide are keys to achieving a source of order and stability. Responsive government policies improve the well-being of families by strengthening the family ties and provision of employment (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Wildeman and Western (2010) focused on how going to prison, having a partner go to prison, or having a parent go to prison affects subsequent life chances.

The imprisonment of a group in disproportionate numbers increasingly diminishes the earning potential of adult men, in addition to presenting a major threat to the health and well-being of the offender and the intergenerational family unit (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Strikingly, these trends of mass incarceration of African American men

with children can have the most caustic effect on families. African American men are not generally charged with domestic violence or violent crimes prior to institutionalization. The data shows that having a parent incarcerated is more commonplace for economically disadvantaged children (Wildeman & Western, 2010). To this end, the likelihood exists that the children of incarcerated parents will be negatively affected and ultimately this may increase long term race and class inequity (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Communities change according to opportunities and life chances. Because of each generational experience, children usually adopt their parents' world view, and are further languished—never gaining the mental and emotional fortitude that's necessary to advance in a comparable fashion to the larger, majority society (Wildeman & Western, 2010). A clinical study by Sack (as cited in Wildeman & Western, 2010) indicated that paternal incarceration exacerbated already existing behavioral and psychological problems in children. Regardless of general agreement that strong family support networks are instrumental and influential sources of social cohesion and public safety, U.S. crime policy has produced more vulnerable families and some would state that it has decreased the life chances of their offspring (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

The literature points to the long term opportunity cost of criminal incarceration on the part of men released from the custody of the state (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Having a prison record diminishes an individual's financial earnings potential. This earnings potential significantly affects family income resources. According to a study from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Report, males with criminal histories are about 14% less likely to support their families (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Consequently, many of these families remain poor, and are challenged with increased financial hardship.

Mechanisms to Reduce Recidivistic Behavior

Gaining a true understanding of the factors that both contribute to returning citizens successful and unsuccessful reentry is a key to offer successful treatments that address and affect the criminal outcomes of returning citizens post-release. Social support networks and employment have been cited as mechanisms for deterring recidivistic behavior (Travis, 1996). In a Cleveland study of almost 300 returning citizens, 57% found work opportunities through social support systems (Rhodes, 2008).

Social Support Networks

The literature emphasizes the significance that the role of social support plays in the reintegration process (Rhodes, 2008). Social bond theory reinforces that idea that social ties have an effect on the decision-making and ultimate behavior of individuals; from this perceptive, social structure has the potential to effect the impulses of returning citizens (Rhodes, 2008). Social structures have the ability to establish positive routines and assist with the development of a positive social identity. This social relationship fosters a sense of support, well-being, and pressure not to reoffended (Cobbina, 2010).

Social support networks are playing a major role with the absorption of returning citizens back into communities. When offenders are released from incarceration they face mounting pressures, which can result in fear and anxiety. During this time, social support networks (i.e., family and friends) are critical. For practical purposes, these networks can offer financial, housing, and employment assistance (Farkas & Miller,

2007). Subsequently, this support network can provide the encouragement and support needed to mitigate recidivistic behavior. The literature indicates that family support lowers recidivism rates post-release (Farkas & Miller, 2007). This level of outreach and reliance on social networks should not solely be viewed as an effective means to gaining employment; it should also be used as a barometer of the challenges and marginalization that returning citizens face when trying to gain employment by other means.

Cobbina (2010) investigated the post-release experiences of 50 female returning citizens'. Cobbina's main goal was to understand this population's reintegration process. Cobbina studied 24 released returning citizens on the perceptions of their successful reentry and 26 current prisoners on the failures of their reintegration process. The data from the qualitative study indicated that successful reintegration was facilitated by strong family support, access to post-release programming, and a supportive relationship with the parole officer (Cobbina, 2010). Those who were unsuccessful lacked strong support systems, felt competing pressures and demands, and had unsupportive parole officers (Cobbina, 2010).

Unruh, Gau, and Waintrup (2009) conducted a study on the interventions related to the factors that are contributed to reductions in recidivism. The population studied included individuals who identified as having mental health and special education needs (Unruh, Gau, & Waintrup 2009). The sample consisted of 320 youth who were formerly incarcerated and participated in treatment programs between 1999 and 2004 (Unruh et al., 2009). The findings in the study suggested that the treatments introduced may contribute to a reduction in recidivism rate when problems of employment and education are

addressed (Unruh et al., 2009).

Effects of Employment and Education Services

The role that employment plays in reducing recidivism has been studied for some time from various aspects, and evidence of this correlation is convincing (Rhodes, 2008). Rhodes (2008) studied 12 returning citizens in order to understand how returning citizens have benefited from opportunities to employment. Additionally, Rhodes looked at the challenges this population has with finding employment and the methods they use to overcome those difficulties. Rhodes's research resulted in a greater understanding of the role social ties play with obtaining and maintaining employment opportunities. Further, the research indicated the importance of relevant vocational training in conjunction with social support in order to assist with returning citizens' reintegration (Rhodes, 2008).

As a result of this significant correlation between employment and recidivism, governments have tried to introduce treatments directly affecting some of the attributed factors associated with increased recidivist behavior (Rhodes, 2008). Among those treatments, government officials focused on targeting ex-offender employment by creating various programs that specifically address access to employment opportunities (Rhodes, 2008). However, barriers and limitations still exist that remain for government treatments. Returning citizens are faced with limited work history to draw upon, low skills sets and academic qualifications, and the stigma associated with the classification of ex-offender (Rhodes, 2008).

Employment has a multidimensional effect on the behavior of returning citizens. According to Farrall (2002; as cited in Rhodes, 2008), employment opportunities offer:

A reduction in unstructured time and an increase in 'structured' time; and income, which enables home-leaving and the establishment of significant relationships; a legitimate identity; and increase in self-esteem; use of an individual's energies; financial security; daily interaction with non-offenders...a reduction in the time spent in a single sex peer-aged group... and ambitions and goals, such as promotion at work. (p. 146)

Unruh et al. (2009) conducted a 5-year longitudinal study to examine the reentry outcomes of 531 incarcerated youth with disabilities who returned to communities without additional reintegration services. Sixty percent of the sample returned to the custody of the criminal justice system; only 25% of the sample population enrolled in an education program and even fewer failed to earn the equivalent of a high school diploma. Additionally, of that population 30% gained employment (Unruh et al., 2009). Of those who were working or going to school, they were considered 3.2 times less likely to recidivate (Unruh et al., 2009). Ultimately, the findings indicated that those who had an opportunity to work or engage in academic development reintegrated better than those who did not. The researchers concluded that employment and education could serve as protective factors in the reduction of recidivism (Unruh et al., 2009). Travis, author of *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenge of Prisoner Reentry* (as cited in Cobbina, 2010), underscored this point, connecting returning citizens with employment may or may not reduce the chances that an ex-offender will violate the conditions of their release. However, the job serves reintegration purposes. Employment opportunities connect returning citizens with routine work habits and a sense of economic stability; this

process gives returning citizens the opportunity to contribute to the tax base and connect to the community. Similarly, assisting returning citizens to reestablish a supportive relationship with their family upon release from the criminal justice system may or may not affect their propensity to reoffend (Cobbina, 2010). However, having a successful familial reintegration may have a number of positive effects on the overall well-being of returning citizens families (Cobbina, 2010).

Holistic Approach

Program treatments have the potential to reduce recidivism, however it's not clear which services contribute most to the reduction of recidivistic behavior (Unruh et al., 2009). Because of this reality, the literature encourages the development of a holistic method of treatment. This process addresses the needs of returning citizens post-release. Some of these needs include housing, employment, healthcare, transportation, and proper case management (Cobbina, 2010). None of the needs can be met in isolation and must be addressed without impediment. Policies addressing these essential needs will make reentry smoother (Cobbina, 2010).

Employment programs are responsible for very little reductions in recidivism. Researchers cited that some of the hindrances returning citizens face included limitations of career placement, case management, and other wraparound, extended-care services (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). From the employer's point of view, an added level of ease exists when they know that the employee is receiving all the necessary services for full reintegration. More to that point, employment programs do have a relationship to this transition process; however, the solution is multifaceted because multiple barriers exist

that returning citizen face. These barriers include substance abuse, educational limitation, skills, work experience, housing, and familial and community support (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). Therefore, a consistent reason exists to address these barriers comprehensively. New York's Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together program, ComALERT, represents a good example of this holistic approach with promising outcomes (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). The program provides intervention services to returning citizens. The program has the collective assistance of 150 organizations that assist with job referrals, in addition to treatment, housing assistance, and wraparound services (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). After a six month review, 6.6% of the participants of ComALERT were rearrested, compared to 16% with non-participant returning citizens in Brooklyn, New York (Mckean & Ranford, 2004). The same decrease is evident after a 3-year period when 17% reoffended compared to 41% (Mckean & Ranford, 2004).

Government Policy Effects

Returning citizen has to disclose their criminal history to an employer has an effect on the hiring processes. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act of 1974 largely affected the disclosure process. The act mandated that if an employer asked about conviction history, the ex-offender must disclose that information (Rhodes, 2008). This requirement has increased the level of employer-required criminal history. A Los Angeles study showed that between the early 1990's and 2001, criminal background checks rose from 10% to 60% (Rhodes, 2008). The literature confirmed that returning citizens have been negatively affected by such government measures; this is evident

through a study which found that 75% of employers indicated that if applicants have criminal histories, their consideration will be viewed less favorably (Rhodes, 2008).

Government Reintegration Program Efforts

As a result of the increase in inmate releases, federal efforts have been initiated to address the reintegration of this population (Farkas & Miller, 2007). With the passing of the Second Chance Act of 2007, the federal government appropriated \$100 million for the funding of reentry programs addressing some key components, which have been cited as critical to the success or failure of individual reintegration (Farkas & Miller, 2007). Funding can be used for employment, education, money management, identification of viable communities, housing, public assistance, social support development, and relapse and intervention programs (Farkas & Miller, 2007).

According to a study conducted by the American Correction Association (as cited in Wilson & Davis, 2006), 39 out of the 41 states surveyed have developed and implemented prerelease reintegration programs for offenders. The programs were designed to address potential challenges that may be encountered upon reentry (Wilson & Davis, 2006). These programs had similar goals, however the structures and designs were not uniform in terms of class hours, curriculum, staffing capacity, and level of community engagement (Wilson & Davis, 2006). Wilson and Davis (2006) proved that if correctional programs incorporated multimodal or cognitive-behavioral skills training, some reductions in recidivistic activity would occur. Project Greenlight is an example of a program that incorporates these prerelease suggestions (Wilson & Davis, 2006). Based upon an evaluation of the program, Wilson and Davis anticipated that recidivist measures

were worse than projected. The researchers speculated that this is a result of implementation challenges, program design, and irrelevant program offerings (Wilson & Davis, 2006).

Employment-Based Reintegration Programs

During the past 50 years, a number of federal programs have been developed to address the unemployment challenges of returning citizens. Among those programs were the Manpower Demonstration and Training Act (MDTA) of 1962, where the program was dedicated toward skills development (McKean & Ranford, 2004). The following year, in 1963, congress enacted the Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP; McKean & Ranford, 2004). This program provided unemployment benefits to new released returning citizens for up to 12 months (McKean & Ranford, 2004). In 1973, congress passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which provided career assistance to returning citizens (McKean & Ranford, 2004). Currently, reintegration programs have been provided by the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice; these departments coordinated funding for individualized programs provided by other government agencies, and nonprofit entities (McKean & Ranford, 2004).

McKean and Ranford (2004) said that work programs are not naturally designed to reduce recidivism. However, evidence showed that a correlation exists between ex-offender employment and recidivism rates (McKean & Ranford, 2004). When offenders return to communities, they require employment in order to gain some level of normalcy, at least self-sufficiency, which will provide the means for returning citizens to avoid

criminal behavior. Without a source of legitimate income, returning citizens are likely to return to recidivistic behavior in order to maintain and provide for their basic needs (McKean & Ranford, 2004). This is not an uncommon dynamic. Living organisms desire to survive, a concept expressed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs which argued that human beings have a natural motivation to fulfill basic needs prior to advancing to higher needs. Survival is a relevant concept and this study discusses the reason that returning citizens engage in recidivist behavior (Jones, 2004).

Employment opportunities also provide stabilizing effects that create a routine, require time management, and allow a person to feel reconnected and contributing to society at large. A challenge returning citizens' face is the ability to gain employment with a livable wage. A study by McKean and Ranford (2004) proved that individuals who have been previously incarcerated have experienced reduced wages compared to those who have not; this difference ranges from 10–15%.

Time spent incarcerated equals time spent away from the workforce and developing valuable skills and expertise. It's unlikely that the majority of people incarcerated will have access to career opportunities during their institutionalization. Of the returning citizens released in 1997, more than half had work assignments (McKean & Ranford, 2004). Further, as a consequence of their exposure to prison subcultures, returning citizens linked to criminal actions can be emboldened rather than their commitment to employment. Independent of other variables, the more time a person spends in prison, the longer it takes for returning citizens to obtain employment (McKean & Ranford, 2004). To be successful, employment programs must assist returning citizens

with overcoming challenges to gaining quality job placements that compensate in a way that leads to self-sufficiency (Mckean & Ranford, 2004).

Ecological Consideration

Unruh et al. (2009) further considered the idea that ecological elements exist that frames the behavior of individuals. These elements are represented in various environments such as academic institutions, place of employment, and home environment in conjunction with various relationships constructs (e.g., family, peers, and government actions). Individuals can create an attitude association with each of these environments. Unruh et al. found that theses ecological elements represent determining factors of an individual's worldview and ultimate behavior. This indicates that when ecological elements are targeted specifically to reintegration, recidivistic behavior can be affected (Unruh et al., 2009).

Effects of Attitude on Reoffending Behavior

One of the overarching questions identified in this study addresses returning citizens perspectives on the government's policy response to those indicators of recidivism and consequential behavior of returning citizens. Malott and Fromader (2010) conducted a study that investigated perceived access to resources postincarceration that could reduce recidivism. The study hypothesized that accessible resources postincarceration would help reduce recidivism (Malott & Fromader, 2010).

Based upon the literature, I believe that a general perception exists regarding the government and how it responds to the needs of the African American community. Many African Americans view this country through the lens of racial inequity; historical

and current. This perception of distrust is based upon a negative view of all three branches and varying levels of government, educational, medical, and financial institutions. The very institutions that government created to build a sense of cohesion and social stability have not been fully embraced without skepticism by the African American community, because of the lack of sociopolitical benefits or economic gains. Therefore, a fundamental departure of trust exists in the criminal justice system. This distrust or perception is actualized in the form of disproportionate treatment by the criminal justice system. The African American community's distrust spans from the legislators that created the criminal justice policies, to the police force and the courtroom. This perception creates an attitude of disconnectedness and frustration in terms of how people view justice and fundamental fairness in this nation.

Tri-Component Model

Researchers view attitude as a continuous ordering of feelings and cognitive processes. Attitude is composed of three identifiable components—cognitive, affective, and conative. Cognitive suggests a basic knowledge about a subject; a person gains this knowledge through personal experience or external trustworthy sources. Affective is indicative of an emotional state (Yuan et al., 2008). Those emotions provide for an assessment of the object; researchers view this assessment as essential in attitude development prior to an eventual response (Yuan et al., 2008). Conative is indicative of behavior or action taken. This last aspect represents the likelihood of a person to make a certain response. Taken from the individual perspective, it reflects a person's intention to utilize certain product or treatments. The perspectives constitute the tri-component

attitude model (Yuan et al., 2008).

Heslop, Lu, and Cray (2008) applied the tri-component attitude model to his longitudinal study on country image effects during an international crisis with another nation. The study looked at the perceptions of Australian consumers of French products during a period of tension between both countries. The researchers indicated that during the period of crisis, Australian consumers developed a negative cognitive and affective posture towards the French; as a result, consumer confidence in French products dropped (Heslop, Lu, & Cray, 2008). Heslop et al. discovered that personal beliefs about a subject play a significant role in influencing how consumers view products and the use of those products.

Ex-offender attitudes viewed from the framework of the tri-component attitude model can be useful for public administrators, responsible for program design and development of evidence-based implementation strategies (Cavell, 1990). Having a fundamental understanding of this construct will allow researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to have a theoretical underpinning during policy development. This model points the interrelationship between attitude development among returning citizens and social competences. Social competence, at the basic level, is the ability to demonstrate effective functioning within a social context (Cavell, 1990). Being keenly aware of how this concept relates to attitude formation is a key to modifying, predicting, or explaining constituent social behavior (Cavell, 1990).

The three principal operational products of social functioning are “social attainment, global judgment of social competence, and peer acceptance” (Cavell, 1990,

p.112). Absent of any deviant behavior, social attainment essentially accounts for socially acceptable behavior. Cavell (1990) believed the global judgment of social competence is punitive in nature, because it allows perceived judgments to be formed based upon what appears to be implicit, observable characteristics. Not only do external actors develop these perceptions, but the individual subject can also observe and internalize these perceptions, viewed through the lens of self-esteem and self-perception. Peer acceptance is a concept that observes the degree to which peers prefer certain individuals (Cavell, 1990). Researchers can use this concept to assess the extent to which the community in which they return views returning citizens, and in reverse assess the extent to which returning citizens prefer government proscribed treatments. Researcher can also use the concept of peer acceptance to identify ex-offender attitudes relating to the acceptance of government actors. Cavell stated that having an understanding of the level of acceptance relative to treatments, such as social skills training, can lead to how effective constituents perceive a treatment. This acceptance or lack of acceptance is taken from the perspective of proper social functioning which applies to individuals, communities, and institutions and can be altered depending on the method of information processing (Cavell, 1990).

Cavell (1990) outlined three steps to information processing: stimulus encoding, decision making, and response enactment. The objective of stimulus encoding allows for the participant to receive, perceive, and interpret the treatment. Decision making is a process of selecting a response to the stimulus (Cavell, 1990). This response is tested against current world views in addition to potential cost benefit effects. Third, enactment

of selected response, accounts for actual behavior and individual adjustments based on the feedback response. The process outlines a fundamental framework for decision making and ultimate behavior (Cavell, 1990).

Cavell's (1990) three steps of information processing (i.e., stimulus encoding, decision making, and response enactment) describe building blocks of attitude formation within the context of the tri-component attitude model. Therefore, one can deduce that consumer behavior consists of all three actions. Social science researchers surmise that attitudes are significant to understanding behavior, because behavior is determined, to a large degree, by a person's state of thought or feelings on a particular subject (Yuan et al., 2008). These attitudes provide indicators of a person's decisions and ultimate action towards a product (Yuan et al., 2008).

Jingxue, Morrison, Cai, and Linton (2008) conducted a study on wine tourist consumer behavior. The study proposed that individual satisfaction and perceived value of service had a major influence on consumer intentions. Utilizing a path analysis, the researchers determined that previous behavior responses had an influence on individual intentions in addition to the level of perceived value (Jingxue, Morrison, Cai, & Linton, 2008). However, past behavior had no effect on the level of satisfaction. The perceived value of a product highly affected the level of satisfaction; the overall satisfaction a consumer had demonstrates a high influence on future intentions to revisit. The data also indicated an effect on how customers perceive similar establishment and their perceived value (Jingxue et al., 2008). Consistent with Yuan et al. (2008), Jingxue et al. (2008) suggested that individual past experiences help to develop a person's attitude towards a

product or service; furthermore, individuals base those attitudes on the level of perceived satisfaction and the value assigned.

Malinowski and Berger (2010) conducted a study and investigated the attitudes of 309 undergraduate subjects specific to nine hypothetical marketing dilemmas. The study concluded that Blacks produced a more ethical response to scenarios than their White counterparts (Malinowski & Berger, 2010). The results were statistically significant and represented the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of the tri-component model of attitudes. The authors suggested that the results of the study were because of disadvantaged social experiences (Malinowski & Berger, 2010). Malinowski et al. believed this pattern was consistent with the disadvantaged experience of women historically in the United States. The literature indicated that women are viewed as consistently more ethical in their decision making than white men (Malinowski & Berger, 2010). Malinowski and Berger suggested that people who have experienced victimization on many levels hold attitudes that are more sensitive to ethical dilemmas. The literature supports the assertion that Blacks are molded by their historical experience of enslavement, segregation, and modern experiences of discrimination (Malinowski & Berger, 2010). This assumption is consistent with that argument that experiences have an effect on individual and collective perceptions and the ultimate attitude of a person (Malinowski & Berger, 2010).

Ko and Pastore (2005) tested a 4-dimensional conceptual model of service quality relative to recreational sports. The first dimension observed was program quality, composed of three sub-dimensions: range of program, operating time, and information

(Ko & Pastore, 2005). Program quality represents the perceptions of the customer about the programs through the customer's direct experience with the three subdivisions (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Second, interaction quality consists of two sub-dimensions: client-employee interaction and inter-client interaction. This dimension is reflected in how the service was delivered. Ko and Pastore indicated that the quality of interaction during service delivery provides a clear indication of the attitude of the services providers, and in-turn determines the customer's ultimate perception of the program. The attitude and behavior of the service employee in responding to the clients' concerns influenced positive assessment of the service (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Third, outcome quality consists of three sub-dimensions: physical change, valence, and sociability. This particular dimension observes whether a perceived benefit exists of the service provided. Lastly, environment quality consists of three sub-dimensions: ambient condition, design, and equipment. The researchers indicated that physical environment is very important and factors into a customer's evaluation of quality of service (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Ko and Pastore tested the model utilizing structural equation analyses and the results support the conceptualization. This study demonstrated that attitude development is dependent at least in part to the cognitive, affective, or conative perception of a service gained through direct experience, or observable indirect interaction (Ko & Pastore, 2005).

Haelsig, Swoboda, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein (2007) investigated the relationship between service quality and strong branding perceptions. The researchers looked at how service provider character attributes affect brand perception. The researchers captured 2,000 face-to-face interviews across five retail sectors, and the

researchers concluded that service quality was most important when building customer perceptions of a retail brand; four out of five sectors indicated this conclusion (Haelsig, Swoboda, Morschett, & Schramm-Klein, 2007). In part, service quality was captured by how customers perceived front-line service providers, i.e., friendly and competent. The researchers of this study captured the idea that customers develop their perceptions based upon the quality of interaction with service providers (Haelsig et al., 2007).

In the development of consumer attitude, Nandan (2005) discussed the roll of brand identity and brand image; both are interconnected but conceptually different. An organization develops brand identity during the process of product or service development (Nandan, 2005). The vision and purpose are a part of the identity development; whereas, brand image is attributed to how customers perceive the product or service offering. Nandan stated that both are key components to creating a strong brand and critical to establishing consumer buy-in and loyalty. Organizations can create innovative vision, excellent services, exceptional management, and a program implementer; however, achievement of positive service assessment from the target audience fails when organizations are unable to provide the brand benefits (Nandan, 2005). Brand image is the summation of consumer impressions from a variety of sources, and combined together this represents the brand personality. This process indicates that consumers form perceptual images of products based upon remembered beliefs associated with the product or service. Furthermore, this adds to Cavell's (1990) argument regarding the significance of information's processing and interpretation of stimuli (Nandan, 2005). Esses and Maio (2011) maintained the two important

components of attitude are cognition, indicating a particular set of beliefs about an object, and affective, indicating particular sets of emotions relative to an object. Having an appreciation for these components helps researchers gain an understanding of how constituents process relevant information, actions taken, and attitudes are changed (Esses & Maio, 2002).

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory is an emerging construct and has taken on various operational definitions. However, it has maintained a consistent core definitional foundation as a deliberate ongoing process by which individuals, groups, and communities gain control over goal direction and resources (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). From an individual perspective, this would include a situation-centered perceived locus of control and resource development skills. Group empowerment could focus on network development, organizational expansion, and policy leveraging (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Community empowerment might focus on organizing around various ideas, coalition building, and resources accessibility. Empowerment is a concept that suggests cooperation with others to achieve targeted goals and resource deployment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

According to Wilkinson (1998), in the 1980s the term *empowerment* initially referred to employee involvement in task-based decision making, intended to create an organizational cultural shift that would result in attitudinal change. The application of this concept in the workplace was a way of allowing the worker to feel more invested in organizational core missions and objectives. Empowerment was represented in the form

of task-specific working groups, which allowed the program implementers to contribute to the organizational decision making process. Not only can frontline program implementers apply Wilkinson's (1998) observation of empowerment, but implementers also can apply it to the constituencies they serve. The theory assumes that program implementers have the unique ability to effectuate core missions and suggest meaningful improvements from an experience-based perspective (Wilkinson, 1998). Consequently, this framework would lead to more employee involvement, job satisfaction, higher retention rates, and increased efficiency. One can state that when employees are empowered, this can improve the quality of service delivery, affecting brand image perceptions and consumer attitudes (Wilkinson, 1998).

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) explained that empowerment theory has undertaken a shift toward a constituent-focused approach. This new paradigm has resulted in the concept of empowerment used as a critical treatment measure when applied on an individual level, viewed as psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment integrates perception of locus of control, interaction with stakeholders to achieve a mission, and an understanding of the elements that serve as barriers or support individual objectives towards self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

When one looks at the concept of empowerment from the individual constituent level, it is viewed from the perspective of individual locus of control and mastery of life experiences with a greater awareness of ecological influences. Empowerment contains a psychological component that looks at intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral levels. The intrapersonal component is a cognitive process referring to how an individual

perceives the capacity to influence one's own life circumstance. Individuals develop this belief based upon perceived competence, locus of control, motivation, and perceived challenges. The second component, interactional, refers to transactional exchanges between individual and environment. This element speaks to the process of gaining knowledge about available resources necessary to meet goals, which requires one to have an awareness of key stakeholders, and have an understanding of decision making and problems solving, which is essential for effective ecological interaction. The behavioral component is reflective of a conative element. It refers to individuals or groups taking actions to exert influence in the environment (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998).

Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, and Checkoway (1992) initiated a study of empowerment that included intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components. The researchers based the study on 911 randomly selected individuals of various racial groups from urban and suburban communities (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). The results indicated a strong association between the intrapersonal and behavioral components, and among racial groups, African Americans had a stronger association than their White counterparts (Zimmerman et al., 1992). This association can be explained by understanding the realities of the African American experience.

Consistent with attitude development theory, African Americans bring to their decision making a historical context, which captures a history of discrimination that have shaped their initial perception of what is within their locus of control (Zimmerman et al., 1992).

Speer (2000) investigated whether a person's intellectual understanding of power and social progress differed from personal self-efficacy views. The objective of the study

was to create a measure of interactional empowerment and compare scores on this measure with scores on a measure of intrapersonal empowerment (Speer, 2000). Speer found that individuals indicating greater levels of intrapersonal empowerment participated in community activities with greater frequency than persons with lower levels of intrapersonal empowerment did. Individuals indicating greater levels of interactional empowerment reported participating in organizational activities and demonstrated a stronger sense of community than persons demonstrate with lower levels of interactional empowerment (Speer, 2000). Zimmerman (1990) found that those highly involved individuals perceived a benefit to their contribution. Individuals gained the development of new skills, increased information, increased interactional and social support, and effectuation and fulfillment of obligation of a contract than less-involved individuals. Zimmerman suggested that a relationship exists between community and individual perception of control and active involvement. There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between sense of community and individual engagement and self-empowerment. This conclusion is directly in line with empowerment theory, which stated that having the ability to participate in decision making enhances one's perception of empowerment, thereby creating an environment that motivates active community engagement (Zimmerman, 1990). Zimmerman further noted that individual level of empowerment has a correlation to the degree of empowerment an organization contains.

Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998) indicated that individuals could use empowerment from a rehabilitative perspective. Zimmerman and Warschausky cited that adults who were engaged in the development of goals for their own treatment plan, on

average maintained their individual treatments for 2 months following the intervention; this was a stark contrast to those who were less active in the development process. Zimmerman and Warschausky indicated that the program implementer engaged constituents from a collaborative perspective more so than a subject matter, expert-centered approach. Balcazar et al. (1990) investigated empowerment theory regarding an advocacy-skills training program for individuals in an advocacy organization for the disabled. The researchers found that individuals who participated in training demonstrated gains in specifically targeted behavior such as more active participation (Balcazar et al., 1990).

Glueckauf and Quittner (1992) provided an excellent research study on empowerment theory in rehabilitation studies. The researchers looked at the assertiveness training for individual in wheelchairs (Glueckauf & Quittner, 1992). Glueckauf and Quittner indicated subject gains in the degree of assertiveness and acceptance of a disabled condition. The researchers also concluded recognition must exist of the significance of participant's target behavior as the first process in empowerment research. These accounts support the assertion that exertion of control, a component of empowerment theory, plays a consequential role in rehabilitation (Glueckauf & Quittner, 1992).

Fawcett et al. (1995) outlined four empowerment strategies for community health and development. The researcher suggested the enhancement of experience and competences, enhancement of group structure and capacity building, elimination of social and ecological barriers, and increased environmental resources (Fawcett et al., 1995).

One cannot underestimate the last two factors, because those factors speak to the realities of environment and the role it plays in decision making and attitude development. The barriers that exist in the physical and social environment can affect program mission and perception. Depending on the intensity of the ecological climate, stakeholders could create conflict and resistance; this phenomenon can affect constituents and service providers (Fawcett et al., 1995).

Psychological empowerment is mindful of decision making influences. Among those influences are causal agents that serve as independent variables, affecting individual, organization, and community health (Zimmerman, 1990). These agents represent public officials, resources, or ecological events. One who is empowered is well aware of this external factor and the interactional response required (Zimmerman, 1990). The interaction between the person and environment indicates an ecological underpinning (Rappaport, 1987).

Individuals can view empowerment theory as a process or outcome. When viewed as a process, emphasis is on the program design and the treatments that trigger empowerment (Hough & Paisley, 2008). Program facilitators encouraging involvement in skills development activities, such as peer support groups can characterize this process. The goal of this process would be for individuals to appreciate the effects they have on their life circumstance, and thus become more self-aware and active in their life experiences (Hough & Paisley, 2008). Empowerment outcomes are the consequence of such processes; outcomes are the end result of such treatment. Having the ability to participate in rehabilitative treatments with a focus on empowerment allows constituents

to overcome limitations of self-efficacy (Hough & Paisley, 2008). Treatment of this nature has resulted with increased self-esteem, increased sociological adaptation, and positive conative changes (Hough & Paisley, 2008).

Ecology of Public Administration Theory

The concept of environment and its effect on public administration behavior is not foreign to the field. Gaus (2010) stated that understanding political dynamics is essential in determining administrative behavior. Gaus believed that citizens, locations, physical and sociological technologies, and cultural characteristics determined the direction and function of administration. Environments are indicative of the interaction and relationships between the people, public administrators, elected officials, and negotiations with other stakeholders. In effect, ecology of public administration theory calls for stakeholders to be actively involved in the policy making process and actively engaged in the effectuation of policy decisions. This concept is complimentary to empowerment theory on both individual and institutional levels. When you apply this model to the changing and demanding environment of incarceration, reintegration, and increased recidivism among returning citizens, one can assume that the programs offered by public administrators are a response to the demands of the people, political actors, and relevant stakeholders. The treatment response is reactive to the environmental concerns (Gaus, 2010).

Gaus (2010) positioned public administration as having a core function in government. This determination places policy implementation in the sphere of politics. Therefore, having citizen buy-in of programs is critical for the legitimacy of

administration. Gaus stated that the purpose and processes of administration comes from its citizenry. Gaus also held the belief that having knowledgeable, qualified citizen participation was essential to administration. This can be perceived as a consequence of empowerment. Gaus believed that people needed the help of the state, and it is the direct active engagement of the citizenry in the administration process that involves the people in government. Citizens depend on various stakeholders that play a role in their life circumstances (Olsen, 2004). The relative successes of these processes are root in individual attitude development, and degree of perceived empowerment.

Conclusion

As a researcher and outside observer, I sought to understand the current attitude of returning citizens, relative to post-release reintegration programming. The literature explains that returning citizens are subject to a very perplexing situation post-release. Therefore, I chose a holistic view to understand this situation. I also sought to provide some best practices on how best to reintegrate returning citizens post-release from incarceration.

The literature indicated that broader factors exist associated with returning citizens' shift in attitude and self-image in the context of the society where they will return (Maruna, 2008). Government actors need to recognize the positive effects of treatments that focus on family support and employment for returning ex-offender, and returning citizens need to be mindful of their individual motivation and desires to create a new life back into society (Maruna, 2008). Another factor for a successful reintegration into society involves returning citizens' cognitive self-perceptions and how positive

views transition into success (Maruna, 2008). I attempted to establish a greater understanding of how returning citizens' attitudes are affected by a public program designed to provide training and access to employment opportunities.

I hoped that this study would better inform policy makers when it comes to reintegration policy formulation. Research can offer insight into policy consequences; access to employment is a prime example of an impediment to successful reintegration. This can be attributed to government policy restrictions that prohibit participation in certain professions and mandate disclosure of an ex-offender's status (Hynes, 2010).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research involved a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons specific to publicly managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. Through this qualitative research, I sought to determine whether attitude has a perceived relationship to completion of job-readiness training. Understanding the attitudes held by formerly incarcerated participants of Project Empowerment allowed for a better evaluation of the program and provided a framework for the District of Columbia's government to tailor current and future reintegration programs to the specific needs of returning citizens. Having these data will assist in creating an environment conducive to successful reintegration back into society, consequently leading to a decline in recidivistic behavior in DC.

Chapter 3 addresses the relevance of qualitative research methodology, explains the applicability of the methods used, restates the research questions, and describes the data-gathering procedures, population and selection, sampling criteria, specific research instrumentation, data coding and collection, data analysis, and qualitative analytic software. I also discuss issues associated with participants' confidentiality.

Research Question

In particular, this qualitative phenomenological research design answered the primary question: How would current Project Empowerment participants describe their attitude toward government-managed, employment-based post-release reintegration programming, and is there a perceived relationship between those attitudes and job-

readiness training completion?

Research Method

I used a qualitative, phenomenological design, because it was the most appropriate approach to gain a better understanding of the participants' insights regarding their experiences (Russell & Stone, 2002). A phenomenological study permits the exploration of the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated persons regarding government-funded rehabilitation programs (DeMarrias & Lapan, 2004). Hence, this study explored the internal states of program participants. I used the van Kaam phenomenological method to gather the information necessary for the study (Moustakas, 1994). The modified van Kaam phenomenological method was useful in developing individual textural and structural descriptions that described the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Van Kaam (1984) defined *phenomenology* as a research method designed to seek disclosure and understanding of a phenomenon as it occurs from the experiences of the individual.

A modified van Kaam method was appropriate for this study because it gave value to the lived experiences of human beings (i.e., the participants) and allowed for the exploration of those experiences. The van Kaam method was originally a four-step approach to data analysis. Moustakas (1994) modified the data analysis model (see Figure 1). To clarify, the first step in the original van Kaam method was to list and group the information and concepts. I then examined the data for recurring ideas, reducing or eliminating irrelevant data. I separated and categorized the data to capture the emergent themes and patterns. Lastly, I then constructed the essence of the phenomenon of lived

experiences into individual textual-structural descriptions from the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). However, I used Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method for analysis in this phenomenological study (see Figure 1).

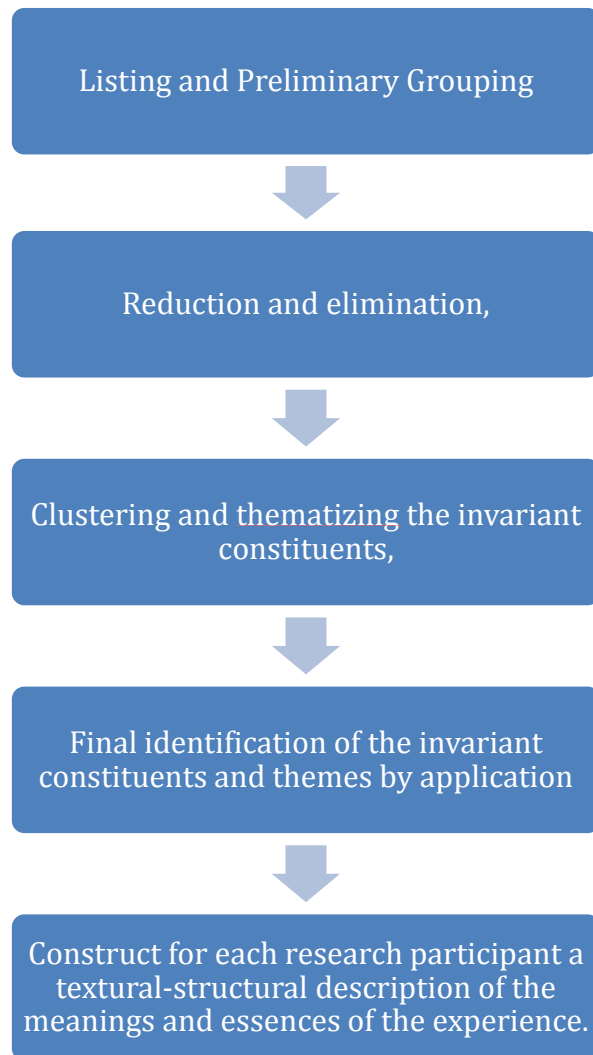


Figure 1. Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1984) original phenomenological four-step method.

I transcribed the participants' responses to the series of guided questions to capture the lived experiences of 32 formerly incarcerated persons in the District of

Columbia. Through this study, I explored the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons regarding government-funded, employment-based reintegration programs. Based on the insights shared by the formerly incarcerated participants, I examined their perceptions concerning the influence of participants' attitudes and job-readiness training completion.

Phenomenological research starts with a research condition and is managed by conducting interviews and making observations (Morse, 2011). Moreover, Moustakas (1994) explained, note taking and data coding of responses are required in phenomenological research. This study included a series of guided questions provided in an open-ended format. I discuss the results of the study in the findings and reflect the specific needs of the study population.

It was believed that qualitative research was the most fitting strategy for this study because it allowed me to collate data from the participants. This meant that I was able to collect lived experiences without the restrictions of a survey questionnaire. I used follow-up questions to emphasize or clear up the information gathered from the participants.

Qualitative research allows a researcher to make generalizations on a particular subject that captures a more diverse population (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). To help eliminate my potential bias, I employed a bracketing method by journaling preconceptions during the study. To understand the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated persons with regard to government-funded rehabilitation programs, a qualitative study was conducted.

Research Design Appropriateness

In this study, I used a phenomenological research design to collate an understanding of a phenomenon about which little is known (Black, 1999). Quantitative methods are effective in illustrating relationships and differences between variables and thus would not be appropriate in a study designed to develop an understanding of participants' attitudes toward the post-release program and the likelihood of completing job-readiness training (Cronbach, 1975). Quantitative research would not have been able to encapsulate the experiences of the participants, because quantitative studies are limited to constructed variables.

Qualitative research focuses on multiple methods; this involves an interpretative and naturalist approach to the target population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, I obtained a collection of pragmatic data through face-to-face interviews, which included the experiences of the participants. The qualitative research design assisted me in understanding the lives of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Seidman (2006) explained that qualitative research gives a better perspective on the participants' actual setting and how the participants live their personal lives.

Various types of qualitative methodology exist, including biography, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) stated that these designs share common ground. I examined the appropriateness of these qualitative methods and determined that phenomenology aligned with my research intentions. The objective of this study was to examine the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated persons regarding government-funded, employment-based rehabilitation

programs in the District of Columbia.

Population and Participants

I selected the population based upon members' classification as formerly incarcerated District of Columbia residents who were current participants in Project Empowerment. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit and select the participants for this study. The inclusion criteria used in this study were as follows: (a) formerly incarcerated and (b) current participant in Project Empowerment in the District of Columbia. These participants represented the target population and contributed to addressing the issues presented in the present study. To have sufficient thematic saturation, a qualitative research study must include 15 to 25 participants (Gordon, 1992).

Informed Consent

Although it was difficult to secure the trust of the target participants, it is vital to obtain participants' trust in a phenomenological study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Walker, 2007). Before the interview, all participants were provided with an informed consent letter that explained the purpose of the study and the research process. I required all participants to indicate their names on the consent letter. Personal information indicated inside the consent letter will remain confidential. I have locked all documents in a secured place for a minimum of 3 years and maximum of 5 years. After the completion of the study, I will discard and shred all the consent forms with personal information. The informed consent was critical because it allowed me to introduce the research effort, intent of the study, expectations, and information needed from the participants.

Confidentiality

The informed consent letter allowed me to gather personal details on the participants; it was therefore important that I assured participants of their privacy and confidentiality. The informed consent explained how this information would remain confidential and would only be released when personal approval was obtained. The confidentiality agreement explained that all participants would be protected and secure from improper disclosure of information in order to improve the reliability and validity of gathered data. However, sample participants were required to sign an informed consent form. I interviewed the participants face to face to gather the necessary information for the purpose of the study. I strictly implemented privacy and confidentiality throughout the course of this study. Confidentiality related to the participants' trust that I would not disclose the information mentioned during the interview to others without first obtaining the permission of the participant.

Data Collection

In terms of data collection and instrumentation, I considered several factors in choosing the correct research method (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). Some of the factors related to the participants and their lived experiences, access to the population, and the variety of participants who represented the population. Forms of data collection included observations, interviews, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2009). Elliott (1998) noted that for phenomenological case studies, a semistructured interview with a series of guided questions is most fitting in order to achieve data validity and reliability within the population.

I used face-to-face interviews with a semistructured series of guided questions to understand the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons in government-funded rehabilitation programs. Using face-to-face interviews in qualitative studies has advantages and disadvantages (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The benefit of using face-to-face interviews was that I could have direct contact with the participants. Therefore, I was able to observe nonverbal communications, which might have added vital information to the present study. In addition, I believed that time and replications of the research were some of the hindrances in conducting face-to-face interviews with the target participants.

Instrument Selection

Marshall and Rossman (2011) explained that in qualitative research, different tools, instruments, and methods are used to collate data. I used purposive sampling to ensure that the participants selected were appropriate for the study. I also used semistructured interviews with a series of guided questions to collate data needed to answer the posed research question for the study. I recorded and transcribed the face-to-face interviews and results to ensure the accuracy of information. Then I analyzed the transcribed interviews through the NVivo qualitative analysis software program to identify common and emerging themes (Godau, 2004).

Data Analysis

I used a computer program to assist me in coding and analyzing the collected responses. NVivo is a computer program designed to sort and manages complex volumes of textural data that are necessary in determining the themes and trends in individual responses (Plummer & Armitage, 2007). Some advantages and disadvantages in using

this qualitative computer program exist. Coding data through this computer program may be more valid. I based the semistructured interview with a series of guided questions on the research questions posed in this study.

I recorded and transcribed the face-to-face interviews to ensure the validity and reliability of the obtained data. I then reviewed the transcriptions and made initial coding. The intention of coding is to identify the essential data present in the interviews conducted by the researcher (Berg, 2012). Moreover, the goal is to establish common themes and ideas that can provide a deeper understanding of the problem enveloping the research problems posed in the study. This can also aid in describing the issues and insights of formerly incarcerated persons in government-funded rehabilitation programs for returning citizens in the District of Columbia (See Appendix A: Interview Protocol).

I provided the meanings of the codes and associated the codes with words and phrases. I read the transcriptions of the interviews and highlighted words, sentences, or phrases that appeared to be meaningfully related to the research questions. Using a number system, I coded these highlighted sections to represent specific groups of ideas or themes. I repeated this process for each interview transcript.

The identified words and phrases including the initially generated codes were uploaded in NVivo qualitative software. The data uploaded in the software served as a guide for NVivo's sorting process. The software automatically sorted, summarized, and grouped the words and phrases I defined. The sorted and grouped codes were useful in identifying the themes and elements that were crucial in the understanding of the insights of formerly incarcerated persons with regard to the government-funded rehabilitation

programs in the District of Columbia. The goal of this study was to observe those fundamentals that were present and repeatedly mentioned in the semistructured interviews.

I assembled patterns and themes from the coded data. After the identification of the major themes of the responses, I used direct quotations from the transcripts as supporting evidence for the themes that emerged from the coded data, as recommended by Perry and Kostere (2008).

In a phenomenological study, the requirement to achieve rigor of the data findings requires analysis of the meanings of the text and how these texts are structured into the consciousness of the individual or group of individuals (Finlay, 2005). Based on reviews of other relevant qualitative data analysis methods, I determined that the modified van Kaam method (1984) possesses these elements required in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). For the purposes of this study, I used Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's method (1959). The steps for analyzing the data from each participant's interview included the following:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping of every relevant experience of formerly incarcerated persons in the sample.
2. Reduction and elimination of extraneous data to capture essential constituents of the phenomenon in the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons in the District of Columbia.
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents to identify core themes from the experiences of the formerly incarcerated persons in the District of

Columbia.

4. Final identification and verification against the complete record of the research participant to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility within the reintegration programs in the District of Columbia.
5. Constructing for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated person. (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 120–122)

I used this process for this qualitative phenomenological study to guarantee that the participants' responses were provided with meanings based on how the responses were conveyed in textural form and understood based on the structural meaning of the phrases and words. Using Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam method offered an in-depth analysis on the essence and meaning of the lived experiences regarding the government's reintegration program for the formerly incarcerated individuals. Textural descriptions, for instance, under the modified van Kaam method refer to the words that describe the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of an individual based from his or her lived experiences (Farquharson, 2009). The analysis offers textural representations or literal examples of each participant's perceptions and feelings regarding the invariant constituents.

The structural descriptions, on the other hand, offer imaginative variation or descriptions of the emerging thematic labels of the study. After the themes were established, I determined the distribution of variables. I then showed the percentages of the themes and trends. The information regarding the feelings and experiences of

returning citizens provided answers to the research question posed in this study.

Summary

My purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons, specifically regarding publicly-managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. This qualitative research explored the possibility that the attitudes of formerly incarcerated individuals may have a relationship to the completion of job-readiness programming. The objective of this study was to potentially add to the field of knowledge concerning government treatments that address post-release needs, and to present a unique opportunity to improved post-release outcomes of formerly incarcerated persons returning to society.

Chapter 4: Results

Through the present qualitative phenomenological study, I explored how formerly incarcerated persons described their attitudes toward Project Empowerment and whether a perceived relationship between attitude and completion of job-readiness training existed. An exploration of the attitudes held by formerly incarcerated participants of Project Empowerment allowed for a better evaluation of the program and provided the District of Columbia's government with a framework by which current and future reintegration programs offering post-release services can better be tailored to the specific needs of returning citizens. Furthermore, the lived experiences of the participants in this study provide the government with empirical information concerning appropriate mechanisms that could be implemented to create an environment conducive to successful reintegration into society.

Chapter 4 contains a discussion of information obtained from the phenomenological analysis of the interview questions posed for the participants. The data presentation and analysis in Chapter 4 contain an explanation of the methods used, which were the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994), as well as systematized findings through tables, figures, and text.

I conducted the individual interviews with 32 purposive-sample participants who had experiences with the specific phenomenon under investigation and could provide personal reflection and detailed information on reintegration programs for formerly incarcerated individuals. The purposive sample of 32 study participants provided salient characteristics, behaviors, and attributes of formerly incarcerated individuals on the

Project Empowerment program while providing thematic saturation (Ganzach, Kluger, & Klayman, 2000). Phenomenological studies rely on researching participants who lived the experiences to illuminate the meaning and inform a contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). Through this research design, I explored attributes identified by formerly incarcerated persons who attended Project Empowerment, an employment-based reintegration program in the District of Columbia (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Scott, 2003). I recorded the semistructured interviews based upon open-ended questions using compact disc recording technology, with the results professionally transcribed (Chapman & Rowe, 2001; Conway & Peneno, 1999). The recordings facilitated an iterative analysis process to achieve accuracy, meaning, and understanding of participant responses (Dixon, Wang, Calvin, Dineen, & Tomlinson, 2002; Silvester & Anderson, 2003).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) posited that phenomenology enables the study of experiences to understand the development of worldviews. The specific intent of the research was to analyze emergent themes related to formerly incarcerated persons, specific to publicly managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. I used NVivo qualitative software to assist me in coding, identifying, and establishing emergent meaningful themes, linkages, distinctions, and relationships based upon common attributes (Richards, 1999, 2002).

Data Collection

I achieved data collection during the phenomenological study through two distinct phases. The first phase involved preparation and data collection. The second phase

involved organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the data into clusters and themes based on invariant constituents emerging from the data collection. Thirty-two invited participants provided their time and consent to participate in the data collection phase. Each participant volunteered to be part of the research.

I recruited all participants in the study using flyers, which were advertised onsite to attract participants to the doctoral study. Along with the flyers, I prepared an informed consent release that described the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the procedures to ensure confidentiality. Thirty-two individuals responded, indicating a desire to participate. Each of the positive responses on the returned informed consent form indicated a desire to participate; the participants provided a potential time and date to schedule an interview, as well as personal contact information including phone numbers and email addresses. Using information provided by the prospective participants, I accomplished an initial contact to establish the time and date for each interview. I conducted the interviews over a period of 4 weeks, with transcription taking an additional 4 weeks.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The study criteria included formerly incarcerated current participants in Project Empowerment in the District of Columbia. In this study, I recruited 32 participants with the intention of achieving sufficient thematic saturation. Out of the 32 participants, 31 (97%) indicated that they were African American by ethnicity. Of the 32 participants, six (19%) indicated that they were between the ages of 26 and 30 years, eight (25%) were between the ages of 31 and 35 years, six (19%) were between the ages of 36 and 40

years, four (13%) were between the ages of 41 and 45 years, five (16%) were between the ages of 46 and 50 years, and three (3%) were between the ages of 51 and 55 years. The majority of the participants were single but reported an average of three children from their former wives and live-in partners. Twelve (38%) of the participants reported that they were homeless, whereas 14 (44%) said that they were living with their families and relatives. Six (19%) of the participants indicated that they either rent or own their home places. Twenty-five (79%) of the participants stated that they were currently unemployed and were looking for a job. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic profiles.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Research Participants

Participant code	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Participant 1	25	Male	African American
Participant 2	32	Male	African American
Participant 3	44	Female	African American
Participant 4	26	Male	African American
Participant 5	46	Male	African American
Participant 6	33	Male	African American
Participant 7	36	Male	African American
Participant 8	38	Male	African American
Participant 9	36	Female	African American
Participant 10	41	Male	No Response
Participant 11	33	Male	African American
Participant 12	40	Male	African American
Participant 13	35	Male	African American
Participant 14	48	Male	African American
Participant 15	25	Female	African American
Participant 16	36	Female	African American
Participant 17	46	Male	African American
Participant 18	41	Male	African American
Participant 19	30	Male	African American
Participant 20	37	Male	African American
Participant 21	43	Male	African American
Participant 22	31	Male	African American
Participant 23	51	Male	African American
Participant 24	26	Male	African American
Participant 25	53	Male	African American
Participant 26	53	Male	African American
Participant 27	50	Male	African American
Participant 28	35	Male	African American
Participant 29	49	Female	African American
Participant 30	34	Male	African American
Participant 31	33	Female	African American
Participant 32	30	Male	African American

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data collected from the transcripts of the 32 participants' interviews. As methods for analysis, I used the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994), and NVivo qualitative software. Each of the data analysis procedures played an important role in describing the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants concerning the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons in the publicly managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia.

I used the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994) to extract and organize transcribed data in order to identify attributional coding relevant in the study (Munton et al., 1999). In this system, attributional coding identified the source of the data, extracted credit from transcripts, and segregated the source and result aspect of the attribution. I provided each of the emerging codes with a code speaker, the classification of the attribution, and the intention of the codes as they related to the interview questions. I then used these codes to establish categorization and further analysis.

In the analysis of the codes, I followed the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas in a step-by-step manner in order to gather and analyze the data from the conducted semistructured interviews. The steps for analyzing the data from each participant's interview included the following:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping of every relevant experience of formerly incarcerated persons.
2. Reduction and elimination of extraneous data to capture essential constituents of the phenomenon in the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons in the

District of Columbia.

3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents to identify core themes from the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons in the District of Columbia.
4. Final identification and verification against the complete record of the research participant to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility within the reintegration programs in the District of Columbia.
5. Constructing for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated participants of the empowerment program (Moustakas, 1994).

After I established the codes, categories, and themes, I analyzed and grouped the information based on similar themes. I also ranked the information based on the participant's highest and lowest responses.

Listing and Preliminary Grouping

I used NVivo software to assist the coding process (DeNardo & Lopez-Levers, 2002). NVivo is computer software that helps the researcher organize and systematize uploaded textual data. NVivo provides the researcher with an easy method to identify words and phrases that are essential in the coding process. In Moustakas's (1994) method, NVivo has the capability to list the key words and phrases emerging from the transcripts of the participants. This list of words and phrases guided me to identify and describe specific codes, which I then re-uploaded in NVivo for code grouping. The grouped codes served as the basis for determining the themes. I distilled these themes

from the coded text to reflect the themes critical to the central question. The advantage of using NVivo was that the analysis came with source identification, which matched the code with the participants' verbatim responses. Table 2 shows the sample codes with verbatim text culled from the transcripts of the participants.

Table 2

Emerging Codes Using Moustakas Modified Van Kaam Method

	Code Grouping	Descriptions
Code Group 1	Coach, assistance, lifestyle integration, opportunities, individual potential, positive behavior, motivation, access to services, effective facilitators, program provisions, career training, employability	These codes refer to the provisions of the program that the participants used as they participated. The codes articulate positive elements that the participants observed.
Code Group 2	Social response, acceptability, genuine, trust in their capacities, opportunity, chance, unbiased, nonstereotyping	These codes refer to the social needs of the participants that motivated them to participate in the program as well as to aspire for change in their lives.
Code Group 3	Attitude, positivist, willful, change socially deviant behaviors, self-acceptance, self-changes, value-based orientation, prepared for productivity, social contribution, self-belief, independence	These codes refer to the attitudes that participants identified in order to influence job-readiness. The codes indicate that completion and success of the job-readiness program depend on the participants' recognition concerning their abilities and the positive values within them that are valuable to the society.
Code Group 4	Experienced biases, social stereotypes, effective implementation, perceived goodness of women, less social opportunities	These codes identify the barriers of program implementation. These codes indicate the biases or stereotyping that exist in society and are also adopted by the program implementers.

I identified the codes shown in Table 2 with the aid of NVivo. I used these

groupings of codes to identify the themes or *invariant constituents* (a term used to refer to a theme in phenomenological studies). I then regrouped the themes or invariant constituents to form the thematic label of the study.

Reductions and Elimination

I reviewed the coded data identified in the NVivo analysis to ensure accurate representation and understanding of the phenomenon. I also assessed themes to ensure that each moment of the experience or lived experience was a necessary and sufficient constituent to understand the phenomenon. Finally, I condensed the vague participant descriptions and presented them in more descriptive terms.

Clustering and Thematizing

I clustered the themes or invariant constituents of the experiences to form thematic labels. Specific themes emerged from the thematic labels based upon the invariant constituents. I used the listing and preliminary grouping code report to generate the four thematic labels critical to the central question: (a) positive attributes of the program, (b) positive social responses that influence positive attitudes of the participants, (c) specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion, and (d) factors that affect the implementation of reintegration program. The number of participants offering their experience assisted in illustrating the meanings, horizons, and essence of the lived experience.

Thematic Label 1: Positive Attributes of the Program

The findings determined the first thematic label; *positive attributes of the program*, from seven invariant constituents (see Table 3). Only the invariant constituents

that received more than two responses are noted in the text. The invariant constituents central to the theme are as follows: (a) coaching of life skills, (b) assistance in lifestyle reintegration, (c) opportunity to show full potential, (d) teaching of positive social behavior, (e) providing motivation for reintegration, (f) providing immediate access to services, and (g) using facilitators who felt the experiences of the participants.

The most significant and highly relevant themes emerging from the aggregation of the invariant constituents illustrate that among the positive attributes, the program contributes to the lives of the formerly incarcerated individuals by providing coaching related to life skills that they need to reintegrate themselves into society. Participant 2 described a *life skill* as a competency for acquiring a job. Participant 2 said that the program allowed him to acquire on-the-job training. For some cases, Participant 2 said that the on-the-job training could end up in a permanent job placement. Participant 2 said,

I mean it teaches you how to get a job. They send you on a work experience.

When they send you on a work experience, you could end up keeping that job permanently. It's up to you how you act on the job if you keep it. As far as like

Mr. Moore and Mr. Smith, like they're not just telling you what you want to hear.

Participant 2 added that that the program targets a change in an individual's attitude in order for the person to acquire a permanent job. Participant 2 said,

They're not just telling you what you need to do to get the job. They tell you like stuff that helps you in life down the road. They just want to help you better yourself like your attitude, like your self-esteem, appearance, good and bad body

language.

This experience was described by Participant 6 as the stamina required to be employed. Participant 6 said: “The part when they’re getting you ready for that stamina to build the job. You had to stay alert. You had to present yourself to your employer.”

Participant 6 appreciated the contribution of the program to her life. Participant 6 said that it taught her to rely on her ability to help herself. Participant 6 said:

Project Empowerment is doing so much for me because I never worked nowhere in my life. So, now I'm at the point where I need to stand on my own two feet, stop living off people and live all for me. So Project Empowerment is really great. I have learned so much, so many things I thought I knew that I didn't know. It's really great here. It's different from any other place that I have been to.

Participant 17, on the other hand, described the life skills he gained from the program as his ability to trust others and to deal with different situations. In particular, he learned to trust the government. Participant 17 said:

I feel good about it. It's a great program. I'm learning about myself. It's teaching me how to deal with certain situations and giving me a different look on the government. Some of the programs, you know how they say they help us, but it's making me look at it, and feel a lot better with dealing with my government.

The observation of Participant 17 was supported by Participant 3. Participant 3 said that she did not trust the government. However, the program provided her with the financial support to reintegrate her back in the society. Participant 3 said, “For years I did things

and I always wanted the help from the government and this is the first program that has not only offered finance, but motivates me to want to do something different.”

Participant 3 stated that other than helping the formerly incarcerated individuals get employment, the program teaches them other life skills. Participant 3 said:

And I'm just so excited about this program. I just love this program because not only do they teach you job-readiness, you learn life skills, you learn how to relate to other people in other cultures and business settings and it helps you separate that jail—that prison mentality from the real world because this is the real world. And it really started for me in prison, and I just guess that if you want to do something different, you've got to be around different type of people.

Participant 6 identified financing and employability as competencies he learned in the program. Participant 6 said:

You know you get your proper mind frame, as well as they teach you in a class, you know, critical thinking which shapes and molds your mind. I thank the the instructors we have, I truly believe that they became a blessing through whatever they went through and they are able to give back to us, the ones who need it . . . Other programs pretty much wouldn't be able to say that, I thank the instructors because as well as getting inside knowledge and you're getting job-readiness and training to go on interviews, they teach you how to dress in proper attire and stuff like that.

Participant 12 stated that his positive attitude towards the program could be associated with the opportunity he had to build himself a career, allowing him to decide

for himself. Participant 12 said,

I mean, I got a positive attitude towards Project Empowerment because I feel as though that they have given me an opportunity to better myself as far as my career, and just, you know, making better choices alone, you know, by trying to do something positive with my life.

Participant 24 supported Participant 12 by stating that the program helps build a person's positive character and disposition, and doesn't just giving them the job they need.

Participant 24 said:

I love Project Empowerment because it is giving me the opportunity to get back out in the work field. They do not tell you are going to get a job and we are going to get you a job. They are going to tell you that you have an opportunity. They are going to teach you the necessary skills, the newest techniques for interview to be able to get a job. So it is right up front that they are promising you nothing, but if you come in and you are willing to learn what they have to offer, and once given the opportunity to sit in front of employer and apply the interview techniques that they teach you, nine times out of 10 you are going to be employed.

The second invariant constituent, *assistance in lifestyle reintegration*, emerged after 13 participants shared that the program provided them the opportunity to reintegrate their lives back in the society. Participant 32 justified that, "Overall I think it gives individuals again like myself an opportunity to live a proactive lifestyle and to live a social lifestyle opposed to living a lifestyle that caused us to become incarcerated in the

first place.”

Participant 10 described one of the strategies the program implemented to reintegrate the formerly incarcerated individuals in the society. Participant 10 said:

They brought in capital area asset builders to help people put together financial plans, debt repayment plans, and credit building. Now these are usually services that you have to pay for and plenty of people do—successful Americans pay for these kind of things, financial planning, credit building, debt repayment plans.

Participant 18 added that the program assisted him in finding a job. Participant 18 shared that his credentials were good enough for him to be employed. He shared:

I mean, yeah, because you know for the whole time, the whole 11 years that I just did again, this has been all I’ve been thinking about was, you know, coming back out here and trying to get it back into Project Empowerment for me to help me find a job because I got my education, I have my GED, but I’m still looking to further my education. So what I know that I can do all that through Project Empowerment.

The third invariant constituent, *opportunity to show full potential*, emerged after 10 of the participants said that the program implementers ensured that program participants will show their human potentials that are beneficial in their social integration. Participant 1 shared that this strategy ensured that formerly incarcerated individuals will find their own values in the society. Participant 5 said, “I think it’s a good thing because it basically gives individuals such as myself second chances, where at one point in time, there were no such thing as second chances.” Participant 15 supported this by stating:

I think it's excellent that they're paying for ex-offenders to do things like get a job and get a career and better ourselves. Oh, I appreciate all of monies that they put it for us to do and basically giving us another chance to prove ourselves, to show that we're *not just* felons or criminals, that we are human. People do make mistakes so I think that's a great idea.

For Participant 1, this strategy ensured the reduction of recidivism rate. Participant 1 said,

I think the first government-funded program that help ex-offenders out so they won't do the same thing that they did to get in there; basically they've given us a second opportunity to be able to show our full potential.

The fourth invariant constituent, *teach positive social behavior*, emerged after eight participants said that the program aims to teach socially acceptable behaviors before assisting them in getting employment. Participant 1 described the changes in his behavior as a result of his participation in the program. Participant 1 stated:

Project Empowerment helped me out a lot since I've been home. It helped me—keep me out the streets, it's changing the way I think, the way that I carry myself and my demeanor, and at the same time is getting me ready for reality and how to work in a government workplace without the use of profanity, slang. They're just teaching me the stuff that I should have been taught a long time ago.

Participant 8 shared that the program made him realize the actions that caused his incarceration. Participant 8 said:

I mean a program like this or that. Nowhere to live, nothing. We're just basically

on our own and for a long time ahead, it had me feeling angry but as I got older, I see that a lot of it was my fault first of all, because I got myself in that situation. And a lot of times I was just mad at the wrong person, I should have been mad at myself but I was mad at them.

Participant 9 added, “I think Project Empowerment is a good program for returning citizens because it gives us more structure on how its work in the work field and how to project ourself as human beings.”

The fifth invariant constituent, *provides motivation for reintegration*, emerged from the responses of four participants who said that facilitators and counselors motivated them in their endeavor to help themselves integrate back into the society.

These participants said that the program ensured that they would be motivated enough to help themselves. Participant 6 shared:

. . . as well as give you a motivation to know that you can achieve something as well as help you to just have a little incentive. If you don't have nothing, you can have something to get back on your feet and become a productive member of society, without going out there trying to take something from somebody. Feeling like your self-esteem is shot because you're applying for jobs and can't get them and now your only option in your head, especially if you have kids or whatever, your struggle is to go back out there and get money the wrong way. So, I think the program is excellent.

The sixth invariant constituent, *provides immediate access to services*, emerged after two of the participants articulated that the program is responsive to the immediate needs of

the ex-offender. Participant 11 described this as the following:

I'm glad there's something here to try to help. So, if I'm the person thinking about doing the right thing, he feels as though he has somebody trying to help him do it. And also it gives you something to do . . . Immediate access; some people, when they are coming home from these places, they might not have the support where they can wait around 30 to 60 days. They don't even know where the next meal is coming from. So, when I say immediate access, them saying they're in the program it could mean a difference between them going back out and having to do something to satisfy wherever they're staying. I mean, just to keep them busy, because I believe that an idle man is a devil's workshop. When a person doesn't have anything to do, it's easy to slip back in their old habits, because it's easy.

Participant 24, on the other hand, shared that unlike his previous incarceration, it was difficult for him to reintegrate back into the society. With the recent program he participated in, Participant 24 said:

Well I think it is good because if you have been where I have been in, you come home you need help and this is a way that you can seek and get on your feet to live. As far as a job, having a background in a record, because I have experienced trying not to get the help and go out and look for employment myself. It seemed like it is always "I cannot use you" once they see my background and I have been honest upfront. I think these programs are welcomed. We need more of these programs.

The seventh invariant constituent, *use of facilitators, who felt the experiences of the participants*, emerged from the transcript of Participant 23 who said that facilitators may need to come from similar life circumstances in order for them to provide effective activities that could help returning citizens. Participant 23 said:

It is encouraging to see guys who may have come from similar backgrounds and actually understand the plight that we were faced with coming from prison and some of the varied backgrounds that we had. It is a difference between communicating with someone who has experienced our past and has reached success than someone who has experienced our past and has not reached a similar measure of success.

Table 3 shows the first thematic label, *positive attributes of the program*, from seven invariant constituents.

Table 3

Thematic Label 1: Positive Attributes of the Program

Invariant constituents	# of participants to offer this experience	% of participants to offer this experience
Coaches life skills	19	59%
Assistance in lifestyle reintegration	13	41%
Opportunity to show full potential	10	31%
Teach positive social behavior	8	25%
Provides motivation for reintegration	4	13%
Provides immediate access to services	2	6%
Use of facilitators who felt the experiences of the participants	1	3%

Thematic Label 2: Positive Social Responses Influence Positive Attitudes of the Participants

The data determined the second thematic label, *positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants*, from three invariant constituents that include: (a) employment opportunities provided by prospective employers, (b) genuine support for the reintegration process, and (c) non-stereotyping environment for the participants (see Table 4). The most significant invariant constituent, *employment opportunities provided by prospective employers*, emerged after 13 participants said that opportunities provided and shown by prospective employers motivated them to respond positively to the program. Participant 23 described this attitude through the daily attendance of the participants in the empowerment training program. Participant 23 stated that coming on a daily basis is an indicator of positive attitude. Participant 23 said:

We sit in this class and it is five days a week, and, I mean, on a daily basis you see about four or five people coming through here to thank the facilitators for them finding a job. It is like just testimonial and that is not their intent. They do not come to show off or to make any of the facilitators of the program look good. They are coming back generously to thank them for the opportunity. That, in itself, is encouraging. We talk about it all the time in class. They do not know that we are looking at it in that sense, at least we have not expressed it to them. Me, personally, seeing those people come back to the door, or guys that I know that have been through here before.

The second invariant constituent, *genuine support for the reintegration process*,

emerged from the transcripts of the 11 participants who said that the program provided daily financial support to motivate the participants to attend the training. Participant 21 said:

A lot of people don't want to pay you, that's another problem. You just coming home; you don't have no income. You are going to want to survive. So, if you go into a program that is telling you "come here, come here," but they are not paying you, they are not really helping you. It's not really going to benefit you. These people are paying you to come. They are paying you and helping you. You have to dress appropriate. They are asking for something in return is well. We are going to pay you, we're going to help you find a job, we are going to interview, but our qualifications are for you to come dressed presentable and you have to conduct yourself in an orderly fashion.

The third invariant constituent, *non-stereotyping environment for the participants*, emerged from the transcripts of 10 participants who said that the program intends to provide returning citizens the chance to help themselves. Participant 14 compared the District of Columbia to other states in terms of programs for returning citizens.

Participant 14 shared:

I'm just happy for a second chance, just the opportunity, because I know, I know there are people out there that think I don't deserve a second chance. People think I'm always going to be that. I'm always going to face that stereotype, they say "once a criminal you're always a criminal." Again, I'm not waiting for somebody to come on and help. I got to come on and help myself. It's an opportunity that . .

. I have heard people from Texas, from California, they're not offering these programs like this where they will pay you to better yourself.

Participant 27 supported this observation by stating that:

They do not discriminate if you're this way or that way, whatever it is, you need to pray at a certain time. Try doing it on your break and if you can't do it on your break, then get out there and do it and come on back. They give you all the ways out and they even stop after the first week and say "listen, some of you guys have not said anything since you been here, next week won't be that way."

Table 4 shows the second thematic label, *positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants*, from three invariant constituents.

Table 4

Thematic Label 2: Positive Social Responses Influence Positive Attitudes of the Participants

Invariant Constituents	# of participants to offer this experience	% of participants to offer this experience
Employment opportunities provided by prospective employers	13	41%
Genuine support for the reintegration process	11	34%
Non-stereotyping environment for the participants	10	31%

Thematic Label 3: Specific Participants' Attitudes That Influence Job-Readiness

Completion

The data determined Thematic Label 3, *specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion*, from four invariant constituents that include: (a) willingness to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes, (b) attitude towards

accepting needed changes in self, (c) willingness to contribute to social productivity, and (d) willingness to integrate the values of self-belief and independence (see Table 5). The most significant invariant constituent, *willingness to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes*, emerged from the transcripts of 21 participants who said that the willingness to change the personal attitudes towards the society and how he or she can contribute productively in the community predicts the job-readiness completion. Participant 1 shared that changing the self-outlook, dispositions, and way of thinking could positively help in preparing oneself towards the successful reintegration. Participant 1 said:

I do, it's all about how you take it; it's how you carry yourself. If you could change your attitude, then you can change the way you think. If you change the way you think, you can make it. But it's all within you, it's not nobody else; it's what you're going to do, it's your opinion, it's your option to want to change and be willing to change, and if you're willing to change, Project Empowerment will be right there to help you when you need a shoulder to lean on.

Participant 2 supported the contention of Participant 1. Participant 2 specifically mentioned that a positive attitude is a prerequisite in completing the program. Participant 2 said:

I mean you got to come here with a positive attitude. You got to come here with a positive attitude because you will be interacting with a lot of . . . There would be people here like me I don't like people who constantly talk a lot. There's someone in class who talks too much for me. You got to have to adjust your attitude, and that's the good thing about this program, like being in the class can get up so big

like they can teach you how to deal with stuff you might deal with on the work site.

Participant 8 shared that participants who have an upright attitude may find difficulty in completing the program.

Yes, that's the number one piece. If you're not ready to move forward, you're not going to move forward. And if your attitude is upright, you don't make it. The ones that's loud on the first week don't be there on week three for various reasons. Sometimes, they're late; sometimes they get out of character with their attitude. Sometimes they just want to do their own thing, so it got to have something to do with their attitude.

The second invariant constituent, *attitude towards accepting needed changes in self*, emerged from the transcripts of 16 participants who said that a positive attitude begins in recognizing that needed changes are necessary for a person to implement in order for him or her to appreciate the empowerment program. Participant 3 shared:

If you don't come in open and willing—like I said, there's no need of you being here, because you're not going to be receptive to what's going on. You're not going to be able to take in the information because number one, you're closed and when something is closed that means you can't get in. So, if you don't come in here in a state of mind that you want to do something different, it's not going to work for you. It's just not going to work.

Participant 12 reaffirmed the perception of participant 3 by stating:

Man, if you don't come here with—like I said, if you don't come here with the

attitude ready to learn or a positive manner, you know, then you're going to fail, you know? If you just come here just to be sitting around, and think you're just going to get some money, you're going to lose, you know.

Participant 31 opined that attending the program without full recognition of the needed personal change is a waste of time. Participant 31 said:

If you do not come in here wanting more and wanting something for yourself I do not think you should waste your time here because somebody else is in desperate need of this opportunity. I feel like it is more mental than physical because anybody can put up a front to a mental state of mind if it is not ready for the challenge I just feel like you shouldn't even come this way.

Participant 30 also stressed that, "if you do not have an open attitude, this is not for you and I can say that right now." Participant 30 further stated that, "If you are not ready to change and you're not ready to do something different than what you have been doing, this is not the place for you." Participant 24 supported that statement and said: "I come here with my mind open and with a good attitude and I strive for the things that are for the job. It is a good thing."

The third invariant constituent, *willingness to contribute to social productivity*, emerged from the transcripts of seven participants who shared that the participants should be more than willing to take their share for communal productivity. Participant 7, for instance, said:

A lot of times people come here with an attitude and if they complete this program, and they send them out here into society and then you know, Project

Empowerment is making names for themselves. And they send somebody out there that smacks the boss in their mouth, that's a reflection on them because that's a product which you sent me. You all say he was ready for this work force, you all say he was job ready. His attitude was changed, his frame of mind was thinking. He was a productive, ready to get out there in society and he does something like that is a great reflection on him. Because they're not looking at the person, they're looking at that he came from Project Empowerment.

The fourth invariant constituent, *willingness to integrate values of self-belief and independence*, emerged from the transcripts of six participants who shared that personal values such as belief in self and independence are factors that influence job-readiness completion. Participant 10 described this as the following:

They start with the inside, the person, before they get into the actual job training; before they get into computer skills and interview skills they spend a bunch of time on the inner parts of a person. The mind of a person, the heart of a person, they spend a bunch of time on attitude, self-esteem, um, belief in yourself or what are these things mean to a person, how do you feel about yourself, what do you think you could do to change those feelings if they are negative. Um, if they are good, what do you think you could do to boast those things or bring those things across in your behavior and how would those things change maybe the decisions you made in the past. I mean they spend a lot of time on that.

Participant 13 commented that a positive attribute of the program was that it offered the formerly incarcerated individual the opportunity to be independent. Table 5 shows

Thematic Label 3, *Specific Participants' Attitudes That Influence Job-Readiness*

Completion, from four invariant constituents.

Table 5

Thematic Label 3: Specific Participants' Attitudes That Influence Job-Readiness Completion

Invariant Constituents	# of participants to offer this experience	% of participants to offer this experience
Willingness to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes	21	66%
Attitude towards accepting needed changes in self	16	50%
Willingness to contribute to social productivity	7	22%
Willingness to integrate values of self-belief and independence	6	19%

Thematic Label 4: Factors That Affect the Implementation of Reintegration

Program

Thematic label 4, *factors that affect the implementation of reintegration program*, emerged from the aggregation of two invariant constituents: (a) racial stereotyping from program implementers, and (b) women participants are provided with more opportunities (see Table 6). The first invariant constituent, *racial stereotyping*, emerged from the transcripts of five participants in the study who postulated that they experienced some form of stereotyping which affected their motivation to attend government programming. Participant 21, for instance, shared that law enforcement officials' project the perception of prejudices in the implementation of the law. He shared:

If you are walking in the street, and the police jumps out on you and they tell you to lift your shirt up to make sure you do not have a gun. That is racial profiling,

there is no other way around it. They are targeting young black youth with dreds just because of what they perceive me to be. I'm walking down the street and then they jump out on me. It is against the law, and I want to voice my opinion and what happened after that was. They assaulted me, basically, we do not say nothing because if you say something and they coming right back at you and they are going to target you. That's the part that I had a lot of bad experiences with law enforcement.

Participant 4 supported this observation by stating that:

Me, coming through or going through the court system, like some people have been falsely accused and some people have been rightfully accused. It has its ups and downs. When it comes to police officers, I don't have no problem with them or authority. I know they're doing their job. If I know my daughter was kidnapped I wouldn't mind calling the police and trying to get some help on locating my child. When it comes to the gun laws and being able to carry, things can change about those. Certain occurrences and situations even made those change. For a certain ethnic background or certain individuals due to their environment or the way they live, all that plays a major part.

The second invariant constituent, *women participants are provided with more opportunities*, emerged after four of the participants said that opportunities are given to individuals who are highly motivated to change their behaviors during the process of social reintegration. Women are perceived to be more committed in reintegrating themselves back into society. For these participants, women have been considered

victims of violence and that their committed crimes were the result of the crimes they experienced with their abuser. Participant 3 shared:

I went to prison in 2010. Prior to this, I've been—prior to that, I had been in and out of jail. I'm 44 years old. I've been in and out of jail since I was 10, on drugs, living in the street. I did the thing that people do in Washington DC. So, I was always rebellious against the system. I always felt like I wanted to do what I wanted to do. I was abused as a child. I was sexually molested as a child. I was neglected as a child. I was a victim for a long time, put it like that.

Table 6 shows Thematic Label 4, *factors that affect the implementation of reintegration program*, which emerged from the aggregation of two invariant constituents.

Table 6

Thematic Label 4: Factors That Affect the Implementation of the Reintegration Program

Invariant Constituents	# of participants to offer this experience	% of participants to offer this experience
Racial stereotyping from program implementers	5	16%
Women participants are provided with more opportunities	4	13%

Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions

In this area, the individual textural descriptions "describe the lived experiences of each interview participant wherein they capture the feelings, thoughts, impressions, and concerns" based on the interviews (Farquharson, 2009, p. 92). In this particular case, I presented verbatim proofs and examples in order to provide a more precise perspective of the participants' experiences (Farquharson, 2009). The descriptions present literal

examples of each participant's perceptions and feelings regarding the invariant constituents or themes discussed above.

I used the summarized individual textural descriptions to develop the individual structural descriptions and imaginative variation. Individual structural descriptions provide the fundamental depiction of each participant's perceptions and feelings regarding the themes surrounding the attitudes of formerly incarcerated individuals on the implementation of the empowerment program.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 1. Participant 1 had a positive attitude toward Project Empowerment. He described the contribution of the program as the following:

Project Empowerment helped me out a lot since I've been home, it helped me keep me out the streets—it's changing the way I think, the way that I carry myself, and my demeanor, and at the same time is getting me ready for reality and how to work in a government workplace without the use of profanity, slang. They're just teaching me the stuff that I should have been taught a long time ago.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 2. Participant 2 initially had a negative attitude about the program. He said: "I thought this was just going to be like you just come to class, they teach you how to write your resume. Basically, I thought I was just going to be bored." However, as he attended the program, he realized his initial impression was wrong. He said, "My attitude wise, you could put on a front like cover your attitude up, but it's still going to be there, still stuff about attitude like that's holding back in life."

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 3. Participant 3 longed for assistance from the government. Participant 3 said that the program was the first program he ever attended after his jail service. With the program, he received financial support that motivated him to do “something different.” Participant 3 said:

I just love this program, because not only do they teach you job-readiness, you learn life skills, you learn how to relate to other people in other cultures and business settings and it helps you separate that jail—that prison mentality from the real world because this is the real world. And it really started for me in prison, it really started for me in prison and I just guess that if you want to do something different, you've got to be around different type of people.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 4. Participant 4 appreciated the provision of cash incentive as capital for returning citizens to get a job. Participant 4 further said that the program taught him “self-value.” Participant 4 said:

I can go and actually sell myself to an employer. They also have career development and job-readiness, and things that makes you where they taught me to be hands on or have experience at operating Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, where I can keep up with the times as far as the digital area and the computers.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 5. Participant 5 appreciated the program because it allows returning citizens the second chance to integrate themselves back into society. With a positive attitude, he said: “Hopefully, in the near future there will be more programs such as this one. I say I’m all for it.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 6. Participant 6 considered the program effective in helping returning citizens reintegrate into society. He considered the program an investment for his future endeavors. He said: “I’m putting my best effort forward. I’m putting a lot of energy into this because I think it’s going to be effective for the rest of my life . . . In a more protective life and a more legit lifestyle.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 7. Participant 7 appreciated the program because it gives returning citizens the “opportunity and hope for certain people who really can’t go out there and get jobs, because of their lack of education or their lack of charges, you know homelessness and everything like this” (Participant 7). Participant 7 also appreciated the efforts of the program to educate them on employability and becoming “a productive member of society.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 8. Participant 8 shared that prior to his attendance in the program, he never had enough confidence. Participant 8 stated that this attitude caused him to miss several opportunities.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 9. Participant 9 said:

I don't know. I'm trying to think like what could I say of our Project Empowerment? I think Project Empowerment is a good program for returning citizens because it gives us more structure on how its work in the work field and how to project our self as human beings . . . Most definitely. I think that this program will motivate me to go to another program probably my life skills.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 10. Participant 10

shared that attending public assistant programs was a first time experience for him. However, after “reentering the society,” participant 10 stated, “I’ve ran into the brick walls, the glass ceilings, and the handicaps.” He said that he became a handicap struggling to help himself. Nevertheless, he appreciated the program because it provided him with easier access for lifestyle reintegration.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 11. Participant 11 said that the positive attribute of the program is that it provides immediate access for survival support. Participant 11 stated that without the support from the government, returning citizens will likely recommit crimes to be able to survive in the community.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 12. Participant 12 appreciated the program because it gives him an opportunity to do important and better things than doing “negative things in the street.” He further stated, “It helped me realize that I need to step up, and become a man, and take care of my family, and . . . I feel as though that they have given me an opportunity to do that.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 13. Participant 13 had a fair attitude in the program. He described the program as, “It’s more helping the city out from being independent.” Participant 13 stated that the program intends to address the high rate of unemployment among formerly incarcerated individuals. Participant 13 said: “the unemployment rate was sky high, and Project Empowerment did a lot of efforts to show . . . help people with jobs. Apprenticeship programs. They come once a year, or twice a year.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 14. Participant 14

said that he cannot work without getting assistance from the program. He said, "I don't see how we could work towards getting employment without their help, put it like that."

Participant 14 said:

They're teaching the proper attitude, business attitude, dress code, know-how to conduct yourself during an interview. I feel that's good. I don't see me just going out there asking a total stranger on the street on how to conduct the interview.

Maybe it will work, maybe it won't. I feel like for me specific, this probably is a good thing.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 15. Participant 15 explained that the program "pay ex-offenders to better themselves and to get a new job and to start a new beginning." Participant 15 said: "they teach us job training skills, and job-readiness skills. Like I was saying, no one else around does this type of work and also pay an individual to better their self, get their life together." He further stated that, "For someone with a criminal background, it's hard to like, get back out there and get people to trust you to work in their society . . . that I'm ready to start back in society, that I'm ready to change my life to move forward."

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 16. Participant 16 had a positive attitude toward the program. Participant 16 shared that the participants had been learning from their attendance with the program. With her attendance, she said: "I have been taught that and right now, I'm walking the walk. Every day I have a great attitude when I come here."

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 17. Participant 17

said the program taught him about himself. In particular, Participant 17 said:

It's teaching me how to deal with certain situations and giving me a different look on the government. Somebody in the programs, how they say they help us, but it's making me look at it, and feel a lot better with dealing with my government.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 18. Participant 18 was a two-time ex-offender. However, the empowerment program did a lot for his reintegration into society. He said, "Project Empowerment was that they reach out to the people and give them the opportunities that they are looking for to succeed out here in this world." He further described the effect of the program as:

Keeping people out, helping people stay out of prison, and putting people on the job sites, you know, teaching them the education that they need because some people need that extra push in order for them to get all in the general world for them to achieve their education that they're looking for.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 19. Participant 19 shared that the program helps returning citizens get a job. He compared his employability in an employment one-stop shop with the empowerment program. Participant 19 said that the program provides them with immediate access.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 20. Participant 20 compared the program with other programs for returning citizens. He said that with this empowerment program, implementers ensured that they will be trained and coached before getting employed.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 21. Participant 21

enjoyed the program. Participant 21 said,

I enjoyed the program a lot it's not based on other programs that I have tried to get involved with, when they send you to this place and the that place, but you really don't gain full employment, whereas project empowerment you come and they give you interviewing skills and an opportunity.

He said that the program is intended for ex-offenders who are more willing to change their criminal behaviors.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 22. Participant 22 shared that the program strategically provides assistance to returning citizens to reduce the rate of recidivism. Participant 22 said:

We had the largest murder rates in the country, so a lot of guys they offend at a young age once they are released from incarceration. A lot like myself do not have employment skills, or it's not that very articulated from the surroundings that we were in . . . I think that programs like these government-funded program is a good thing for reentry because it is taking us from one step at a time and it's a lot of us leave and incarceration.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 23. Participant 23 considered the program as effective in encouraging the participants to attend the program. He said that the program uses facilitators who understand the experiences of the participants. Participant 23 said: "The track record of the program is extremely, I would say, it is a good track record. I believe coming through this program will put me in a great position as far as I would see in the future."

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 24. Participant 24 appreciated the program in terms of providing employment for returning citizens.

Participant 24 said:

Well I think it is good because if you have been where I have been and you come home, you need help and this is a way that you can seek and get on your feet to live as far as job having a background in a record, because I have experienced trying not to get the help and go out and look for employment myself. It seemed like it is always “I cannot use you” once they see my background and I have been honest upfront. I think these programs are welcomed. We need more of these programs.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 25. Participant 25 viewed the positive effect the program provided to former returning citizens. Participant 25 said:

I do not really want to be around negativity. Since I have been here, I wanted to do more in life because I see another ex-offender like myself that is not incarcerated and have done things with his life and now he is married and buying a house, he has a car, you has a job, and if he can do it, I can do it, so it gives me a little bit of motivation.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 26. Participant 26 appreciated the financial support the program provided to the empowerment program participants. Participant 26 said: “there is no other program in this country design like that. I was impressed.”

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 27. Participant 27 shared that the program was more effective than other programs for returning citizens. He shared that his long years in prison had made him realize that the program offers genuine assistance for those returning citizens who are willing to change their behaviors.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 28. Participant 28 shared that the program is educational and a life changing. Participant 28 said:

It more than helps me. It shows me where I went wrong at. And for person like me, don't believe I can do no wrong. Because there IQ was a certain amount or never really got caught for doing anything extremely bad. They always getting over on people. It teaches you that that's not the way life is supposed to be and in order for you to change. Basically taught me the definition of insanity. I might not be signees or insanity if I keep on the same thing, expecting a different result than something's wrong.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 29. Participant 29 appreciated the effort the implementers made to understand the plight of returning citizens. She stated that the program provisions provided all mechanisms ex-offenders would need for the reintegration process. Participant 29 said:

I think they are a good thing, if I can be that simplistic. I think whoever brainstormed about the programs like this really had at least a basic understanding of relationship of people reentering society from incarceration and whatever led them to giving some people an opportunity for exposure. Just an opportunity to improve the quality of their life by way of informing them on how to improve the

quality of their life. I think it's exceptional and it has helped someone like me who has gone to prison and has had to start over many times.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 30. Participant 30 appreciated the staff who have been supporting their journey. Participant 30 said: "I feel like they really get you prepared for the working world. I mean they teach you how to be accountable for yourself." He said that the program allowed him to pursue the opportunity that discouraged him to "go back down the road where actually lead me here." Participant 30 confirmed, "It's a good thing that I am here cause a lot of things that I've learned, I mean I'm getting old and I've could have learned it."

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 31. Participant 31 said:

I feel like it is a perfect opportunity for people who has the background and is returning back home from being incarcerated forever. And I feel like it is a great way to introduce this as well as the perception people have of them, because of it gives them an opportunity to see that they are putting forth the effort and to change their path from where they came from and to the perception where they are trying to go and some people just cannot see past that unless they go through the program to be presented with the new outlook of life.

Individual textural-structural description for Participant 32. Participant 32 described the program as motivational. Participant 32 said, "It just puts me in a position where I feel like using the information that I am receiving will put me in a position that I can reach new heights."

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the semistructured interviews of a purposive sample of 32 formerly incarcerated individuals concerning their attitudes towards publicly-managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. Through the interviews, I explored the attitudes held by formerly incarcerated participants of Project Empowerment to determine specific needs of the returning citizens. Chapter 4 articulated the data collection process, provided the demographics of the study participants, arrayed the interview findings, and described the modified van Kaam phenomenological method employed to analyze the data. I conducted, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews through the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam phenomenological method to identify the thematic labels and themes or invariant constituents that emerged in the transcripts of the participants. NVivo software aided in the coding of the recorded and transcribed interviews to establish invariant constituents. By analyzing the invariant constituents derived from the coded text of each transcribed interview, I found four thematic labels from the rich textured descriptions: (a) positive attributes of the program, (b) positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants, (c) specific participants' attitudes that influences job-readiness completion, and (d) factors that affect the implementation of the reintegration program. I analyzed each category of themes for phenomenological essence substantiated by the lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated individuals in the District of Columbia.

Based on the four thematic labels identified using the textural and structural meanings of the participants' experiences, the findings of the study suggested that

completion and success of the job-readiness program for formerly incarcerated men and women requires positive attitude from both the society and the participants. The society may need to provide these formerly incarcerated individuals with the opportunities to exercise their potentialities and become productive citizens of the country. On the part of the participants, they may need to recognize that they need to adapt socially acceptable behaviors in order for citizens and employers in the society to develop trust and confidence. I further discuss the meaning and essences of these experiences in the subsequent chapter. Chapter 5 provides the research conclusions and recommendations in light of the findings of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I conducted this qualitative phenomenological study to explore the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons specific to publicly managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. Specifically, this qualitative research determined the current attitudes of participants of Project Empowerment and whether a perceived relationship between attitude and completion of job-readiness training exists. For this research, I used semistructured interviews with a series of guided questions to gather the data needed to address the research question for the study. The participants of the current study were purposively sampled based on the following criteria: formerly incarcerated status, a resident of the District of Columbia, and a current participant of Project Empowerment. I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with 32 participants who had experience with Project Empowerment and could provide personal reflection and detailed information on reintegration programming for formerly incarcerated individuals. Through a phenomenological research design, the following research question was answered: How would current Project Empowerment participants describe their attitudes toward government-managed, employment-based post-release reintegration programming, and is there a perceived relationship between those attitudes and job-readiness training completion?

I conducted data analysis using the modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994), and NVivo qualitative software. These data analysis methods played an important part in describing the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants concerning the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons in the publicly managed,

employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. The information gathered regarding the feelings and lived experiences of returning citizens provided an answer to the research question posed in this study.

Summary of Findings

I collected the demographic information on the 32 participants included in the study. The majority of the participants was African American and was between the ages of 26 and 55. These participants reported that they were single; however, some had children from their former live-in partners. Some participants lived with their relatives and children, while a number of them were homeless. Out of the 32 sampled participants, 6 (18.75%) were female and 26 (81.25%) were male. To determine the emerging themes from the participants' responses, I employed the modified van Kaam phenomenological method to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). Initially, I conducted, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews through the process of van Kaam's phenomenological method to identify the thematic labels and themes or invariant constituents that emerged from the transcripts of the participants. Moreover, NVivo software aided in the coding of the transcribed interviews in order to establish invariant constituents. Through analyzing the invariant constituents derived from the coded text of each transcribed interview, four thematic labels emerged: (a) positive attributes of the program, (b) positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants, (c) specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion, and (d) factors that affect the implementation of the reintegration program.

Under the theme *positive attributes of the program*, seven invariant constituents

emerged: (a) coaching of life skills, (b) assistance in lifestyle reintegration, (c) opportunity to show full potential, (d) teaching of positive social behavior, (e) providing motivation for reintegration, (f) providing immediate access to services, and (g) using facilitators who felt the experiences of the participants. Moreover, three invariant constituents emerged from the theme *positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants*, namely, (a) employment opportunities provided by prospective employers, (b) genuine support for the reintegration process, and (c) nonstereotyping environment for the participants. Accordingly, the theme *specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion* identified four invariant constituents: (a) willingness to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes, (b) attitude toward accepting needed changes in self, (c) willingness to contribute to social productivity, and (d) willingness to integrate the values of self-belief and independence. Finally, under the theme *factors that affect the implementation of reintegration program*, two invariant constituents emerged: (a) racial stereotyping from program implementers and (b) women participants are provided with more opportunities. These themes substantiated the perceptions and lived experiences of the formerly incarcerated individuals in the District of Columbia regarding the relationship of Project Empowerment and the completion of job-readiness training.

This present study showed that the program provided socially excluded individuals with economic and social opportunities that are essential to live a life outside incarceration facilities. In particular, the program provided the participants with informal education on lifestyle and employment assistance that built their individual capacities

necessary in reintegrating in society.

The current study found that success of the reintegration program depends upon how readily society accepts returning citizens and provides these citizens the opportunity to contribute productively. However, I found in this study that the biases or stereotypes experienced by these returning citizens could affect their motivation, behavior, and commitment to succeed in any job-readiness program. These biases include those racial and gender discrimination perceived by formerly incarcerated individuals from government program implementers. Government programs that are intended to help returning citizens will likely fail when participants are unable to cope with experienced social stereotypes, unable to recognize their past mistakes in life, and unable to embrace the values of independence and self-belief.

Discussion

In this section, I examine the alignment of the findings of the current study to the existing literature. In terms of positive attributes of the program, coaching life skills garnered the highest frequency among the participants' responses. The importance of improving life skills was revealed in the study of Rhodes (2008). Rhodes elaborated by citing life skills as among the barriers faced by returning citizens during reintegration. Rhodes revealed that returning citizens are faced with limited work history, low skill sets and academic qualifications, and the stigma associated with the classification of being an ex-offender. Furthermore, Western and Muller (2013) posited that returning citizens face major challenges to employment due to employer bias toward criminal history, or as a result of limited skills and social protocols.

In addition, Unruh et al. (2009) emphasized that employment and education can be used as protective factors to reduce recidivism among returning citizens. Employment and education may not only serve to improve the financial stability of returning citizens, but also improve their life skills. Thus, the positive attribute, coaching life skills, is supported by the existing literature. Moreover, Wilson and Davis (2006) stated that if correctional programs incorporate multimodal or cognitive-behavioral skills training, recidivism will be reduced. In addition, Cobbina (2010) stated that the federal government's implementation of policies that address the essential needs of returning citizens (e.g., improving life skills) makes reentry smoother.

Another positive attribute of the program is assistance in lifestyle reintegration. According to Farkas and Miller (2007), the passing of the Second Chance Act of 2007 appropriated \$100 million for the funding of reentry programs addressing some key components that have been cited as critical to the success or failure of individual reintegration. These key components include assistance for employment, education, money management, identification of viable communities, housing, public assistance, social support development, and relapse and intervention programming (Farkas & Miller, 2007). However, McKean and Ranford (2004) observed that work programs are not naturally designed to reduce recidivism. Instead, work programs are made to increase employment opportunities, which provide stabilizing effects that create a routine, promote time management, and allow a person to feel reconnected and contributing to society at large. Thus, work programs make returning citizens fully reintegrated into the community (McKean & Ranford, 2004). Therefore, proven studies support assistance in

lifestyle reintegration as a positive attribute of the program.

The opportunity to show full potential as a free individual is another positive attribute of the program. According to McKean and Ranford (2004), work programs have collective assistance from organizations that give opportunities for returning citizens to show their human full potential. Such services include assistance with job referrals, treatment, housing assistance, and other wraparound services. Another positive attribute of the program is teaching positive social behavior. Cobbina (2010) posited that programs that provide opportunities for once-incarcerated individuals support the social bond theory, which indicates that social ties have an effect on the decision making and ultimate behavior of individuals; thus, social structure has the potential to affect the impulses of returning citizens returning to the community.

The study also revealed that providing motivation for reintegration is another positive attribute of the Project Empowerment program. Maruna (2008) posited that returning citizens motivation and desire to create a new life are essential for them to fully reintegrate into society. Moreover, another attribute of the program is that it provides immediate access to services. Harding et al. (2013) explained that access to services is one of the barriers to returning citizens reintegration. In addition, Malott and Fromader (2010) elaborated, that accessible resources after incarceration would help to reduce recidivism. Finally, the last positive attribute of the program is the use of facilitators who understand the experiences of the participants. It is critical to have program administrators who understand the challenges faced by returning citizens. Having facilitators who are keenly aware of reintegration risk factors allows for effective

program design, abatement of implementation challenges, and elimination of irrelevant program offerings (Wilson & Davis, 2006). Facilitators should be made aware of these factors affecting the effectiveness of the program. Thus, it is essential for the facilitator to consider the needs of returning citizens based on their experiences.

The second theme that emerged was that positive social responses influence positive attitudes in participants. Employment opportunities provided by prospective employers are an indication of social acceptance for individuals who have been socially outcast for several years. Providing employment opportunities to low-skilled men and women is an effective strategy in curbing increasing rates of recidivism (Wildeman & Western, 2010). However, inequalities that affect offenders should be addressed in order to solve issues concerning employment opportunities and underemployment. The issue of employment for offenders could be resolved by maintaining the social ties of offenders (Rhodes, 2008). Offenders who had an opportunity to work or engage in academic development had better reintegration into society (Unruh et al., 2009).

Genuine support for the reintegration process is another positive social response that influences the positive attitudes of participants. Social support networks and employment have been cited as key mechanisms for deterring recidivistic behavior (Travis, 1996). Cobbina (2010) confirmed that social relationships foster a sense of support, well-being, and pressure not to reoffend among returning citizens.

The nonstereotyping environment for the participants influences positive attitudes among returning citizens. Harding et al. (2013) stated that some citizens believe that fundamental inequalities exist as a result of racial bias in American society at large.

Caucasian or White Americans are more favored for employment than African Americans (Harding et al., 2013). Diversity programs have yet to change to address social stereotyping against formerly incarcerated individuals. Work programs that accommodate formerly incarcerated individuals could potentially influence policy makers to enact policies that ensure the economic well-being of this group of individuals.

Consequently, specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion was the third theme that emerged in the data analysis. While the literature shows that attitude differences exist among racial groups toward the justice system, this study found that formerly incarcerated individuals possess the willingness to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes. This finding is essential because a positive attitude influenced job-readiness completion. The literature revealed that African Americans can be less trusting of the criminal justice system than their White counterparts (Western & Muller, 2013). Moreover, the present study found that a positive attitude toward society should start with self-acceptance. The present study indicated that formerly incarcerated individuals should recognize needed changes in attitude and improvement in self-esteem. Successful employment comes from improving the self-esteem of an individual (Rhodes, 2008). Furthermore, successful employment comes from the understanding of the person that his or her work is valued (Harding et al., 2013).

The last theme that emerged from the responses of the participants of the current study was factors that affect the implementation of the reintegration program. Consistently, previous studies confirmed that racial and gender stereotyping exists in

programs that address recidivism (Western & Muller, 2013; Wildeman & Western, 2010). This study affirmed the previous research of Western and Muller (2013), which indicated that police bias is the major reason for racial disparities in incarceration. In terms of gender, women are perceived to be more favored to receive opportunities than men. This finding supported previous research indicating that women are perceived to experience more success in reintegrating themselves into society than men (Wildeman & Western, 2010). The successful reintegration of women could be attributed to strong family support, access to post-release programming, and a supportive parole officer relationship (Cobbina, 2010).

Conclusions

Four thematic labels (positive attributes of the program, positive social responses influence positive attitudes of the participants, specific participants' attitudes that influence job-readiness completion, and factors that affect the implementation of the reintegration program) emerged from the responses of the participants. Previous literature aligned with and supported these themes together with their corresponding invariant constituents.

Previous researchers confirmed the importance of the following positive attributes of the program: coaching life skills (Rhodes, 2008; Western & Muller, 2013; Wilson & Davis, 2006), assistance in lifestyle reintegration (Farkas & Miller, 2007; McKean & Ranford, 2004), opportunity to show full potential (Cobbina, 2010; McKean & Ranford, 2004), motivation for reintegration (Maruna, 2008), immediate access to services (Harding et al., 2013; Malott & Fromader, 2010), and employing facilitators who

understood the experiences of the participants (Wilson & Davis, 2006). In addition, provision of employment opportunities by prospective employers was one of the positive social responses. Previous studies (Harding et al., 2013; Wildeman & Western, 2010) indicated that these social responses contributed to the development of positive attitudes of participants. Furthermore, this present study found that these opportunities may need to have genuine support from different stakeholders. This finding supports the postulations made by Travis (1996) and Cobbina (2010), who emphasized the importance of genuine social support for the success of reintegration.

Theoretical Foundations

Tri-component attitude theory, Gaus's ecology of public administration, and empowerment theory guided the present study. As reviewed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, a change of attitude in an individual is influenced by how the individual feels, behaves, and thinks in relation to his or her environment. In the tri-component model, the positive attitude, feelings, and cognitive functions of the individual are indicative of the success of the program (Yuan et al., 2008). As applied in this study, the attitude of an ex-offender upon release influences how he or she behaves when reintegrated into society (Pickens, 2005).

In this study, policymakers designed the program in such a way that formerly incarcerated individuals appreciated the intervention and recognized the needed changes in attitude, feelings, and views prior to reintegrating into society (Esses & Maio, 2002). The majority of the participants in the study appreciated the processes they had undergone to build their capacities as well as improve their dispositions, attitude, and

commitment for change, which are necessary in a successful reintegration program.

However, like other scholars who studied the use of the tri-component model (Heslop, 2008; Jingxue et al., 2008); I consistently found that the social competence of incarcerated individuals is dependent upon the social acceptance and degree of opportunities provided to them by the government and the public in general. The results suggest that government and government treatment in general influence participants' attitude and perceptions concerning the delivery of services available for them.

Consistent with earlier research findings, the positive perceptions and appreciative commitment of the formerly incarcerated individuals depend on how public administrators show unbiased, nonstereotypical, and professional service delivery (Ko & Pastore, 2005). In sum, the positive attitudes shown by the participants in the study were based upon a perceived benefit and positive experiences of the process of service delivery.

As this model had been introduced several years ago, the application of this may have not been recognized by the policymakers. The tri-component attitude model can be useful for public administrators, responsible for program design and development of evidence-based implementation strategies. Guided by this theory, stakeholders responsible in modifying, predicting, or explaining constituent social behavior could respond to the needed improvement of the programs for the incarcerated individuals (Cavell, 1990). Having a fundamental understanding of this construct will allow researchers, policymakers, and practitioners a theoretical framework guiding the development of a policy. This model points to the interrelationship between attitude

development among returning citizens and social competences. Social competence, at the basic level, is the ability to demonstrate effective functioning within a social context. Being keenly aware of how this concept relates to attitude formation is a key to modifying, predicting, or explaining constituent social behavior (Cavell, 1990).

In the ecology of public administration theory of Gaus (2010), political dynamics shape the behavior of public administration. Therefore, government policies and programs are influenced by the norms, culture, and social views and priorities of the public. The social environment dictates the interaction between the people, public administrators, elected officials, and participating stakeholders. In this study, the environment where programs for incarcerated individuals are implemented experienced stereotyping from public administrators of the program. The results of this study showed public administrators inside and outside the facilities are perceived to provide more opportunities to women than men. I also found that there is a perception that public administrators believe that men are more prone to commit further criminal acts than women are. Cases of these stereotyping influenced the actions and behaviors of public administrators in implementing the program for the formerly incarcerated men and women.

From the perspective of this study, the ecology of public administration theory links the theories of tri-component attitude and empowerment theory together. Ecology of public administration theory functions when environmental pressures and demands on the social and political systems are triggered. As such, when government leaders and public administrators of the program are unable to motivate and provide empowerment

opportunities for the formerly incarcerated individuals, government interventions for this population will remain ineffective.

The policymakers viewed that provisions of employment that could satisfy the economic needs of an individual could reduce the case of recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals. While I have found that the social environment viewed employment as a potential barrier in the reintegration of the formerly incarcerated individuals in the society, the program failed to recognize that employment opportunities is not guarantee for successful reintegration. In this present study, other relevant environmental factors that are essential in implementing reintegration programs were social acceptance from friends, elimination of race and gender stereotyping, and realignment of program to incorporate the changes found in this study. This finding is necessary for policymakers to review the program by involving the public concerning how to eliminate the social stereotypes while taking precautionary measures in dealing with the formerly incarcerated individuals. This means that while government leaders analyze the needed program improvement, they may need to educate the public on the importance of social acceptance and participation to the government activities. The success of these processes however is dependent with the level of citizens empowerment.

Consistent with the end requirement of the ecology of public administration theory, the empowerment theory suggests the involvement of an individual and/or groups of individual in matters that affect their present and future social and economic conditions (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Such involvement may extend from individual to organizational skills development that is necessary in the productivity of an

individual or group of individual (Wilkinson, 1998). In this study, the empowerment model is evident in the conscious effort of the government to provide the returning citizens the opportunity to productively contribute to the economy of the country while also meeting their own basic needs. This action is evident in the personality development and on-the-job trainings the government funded for the ex-offender.

The themes presented in the result suggest that participants feel a positive attitude of empowerment through their participation in the program. The finding also indicated that participants felt a connection and sense of empowerment from the facilitator of the program. With the continuous effort to provide an empowering environment to both returning citizens and program implementers, the government could improve recidivism rates in the country with the improvement of the quality of service delivery (Wilkinson, 1998).

Limitations of the Study

This present study posed several limitations. First, the current study had a smaller sample size, which affects the generalizability of the findings. The study was limited to only explain the cases of the participants included in the study. Secondly, the study was limited to explaining the experiences of the African American, formerly incarcerated individuals concerning their attendance and participation. Another potential limitation was the possibility of the unwillingness of participants to indicate any possible likelihood of recidivist behavior, especially if they were recently released from incarceration, on parole, and looking for employment opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study recommends that the purposive sampling method should be replaced by a random sampling method. I used purposive sampling to determine the validity of the generated data. Moreover, I recommend that this study be replicated in various ways. Future researchers may consider returning citizens who reside in other states in order to limit the confounding variables. Future researchers may also utilize quantitative methods in order to determine relationships of the newly established themes. Finally, future researchers should focus on the use of a mixed method research design. Utilizing this research design, the qualitative part of the research can determine emerging themes. Accordingly, the quantitative method can be used to determine whether the newly established themes can describe, correlate, and predict. Through these expansions of the current study, more definite conclusions can be generated.

Implications for Social Change

This study is significant for public officials as the empirical findings provide a program model that could successfully reintegrate returning citizens into their respective communities. The present study provided in-depth information concerning the importance of empowering returning citizens who would be experiencing discrimination in the workplace and society in general. The investigation of the dynamics of the program implementation in relation to the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals supported the theoretical assumption that programming for this group must be designed in a manner that understands their affection, behavior, and cognition concerning their self and the society.

Recommendations for Action

The data indicated that the mission of reintegration programming should focus on the facilitation of an empowering reintegration experience for returning citizens. This can be done by asserting affirmative identification, creating an empowered service environment, providing critical social engagement tools, and social support opportunity networks (see Figure 3). Having affirmative identification reestablishes ones humanity in the context of the society and is critical to reintegration efforts. This study supports the term returning citizen in place of ex-offender when referring to former inmates of correctional institutions. The term returning citizen instills a greater degree of positive identity. This term indicates a degree of confidence that the community has a positive and supportive perspective, relative to those individuals leaving correctional institutions. This confidence is shared between the returning citizens and the communities that absorb them. The data indicates that attitude is impacted by how individuals perceive they are viewed, which is in part dependent on the social responses. Providing a treatment that incorporates the dynamic of identification is critical and empowers the formerly incarcerated. Identity empowerment reestablishes a social connection. Positive social identification establishes an unbiased perception, creates trust, acceptability, and recognition of the benefits of citizenship.

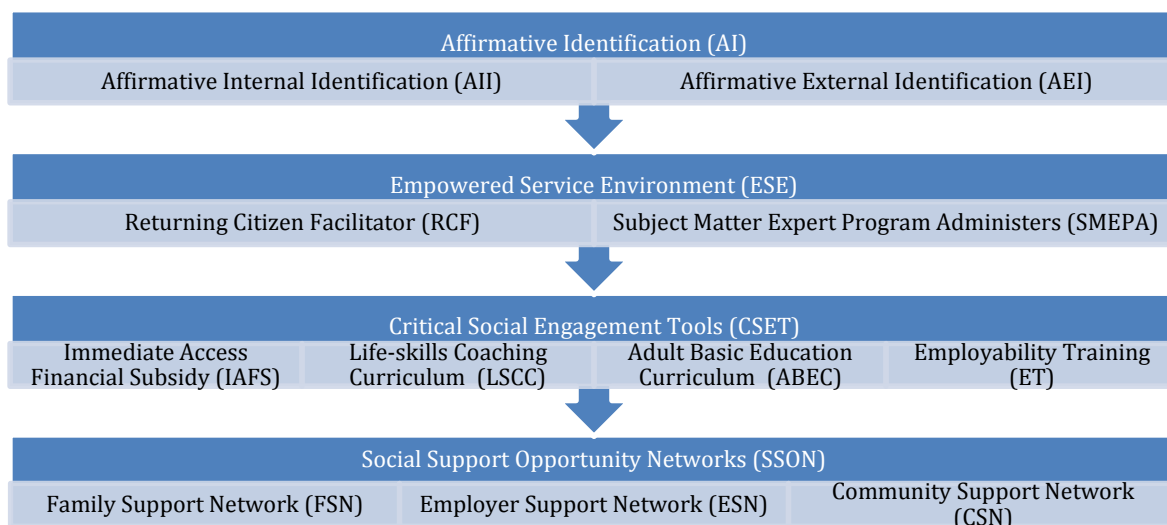


Figure 3. Returning citizens empowerment program model.

The empowerment of formerly incarcerated individuals is further facilitated by the creation of an empowered service environment. This process is done by utilizing and staffing reintegrated individuals as facilitators of reentry programs. This process allows returning citizens to feel empowered and creates an opportunity for participants to connect with program offerings. Additionally, staffing qualified subject matter experts as program administrators, with specific interest and knowledge of the dynamics of reintegration is essential. This process encourages returning citizens to participate in programming, as well as inspires change in their lives. This behavioral change is attributed to creating an empowered service environment.

The data indicates that there are critical social engagement tools necessary for successful reintegration. Reentry programs should provide immediate financial assistance, life-skills coaching, adult basic education courses, and an employability training curriculum which incorporates job-readiness, vocational, and career-search

training. Having access to those tools further equips returning citizens with the knowledge and resources necessary for successful reentry.

Social support networks are one of the most important factors to effective reintegration. Program implementers should inform and educate families and communities about their valuable contribution to the reintegration process. The government, in effect, may need to financially support the social education of these families and community groups. These strategies, among many other strategies identified in this study, encourage better evaluation of post-release programs, affecting program missions, objectives, and resources allocations.

The results of the study can be a viable venue for government programs, community groups, school programs, educational institutions, and policy makers, among others, to create programs that address social problems of reintegration among formerly incarcerated individuals, which can subsequently address issues of escalating crime rates and recidivism of formerly incarcerated criminals. The model proposed in this study could be used to identify activities that could contribute to the success or failure of job-readiness program. Furthermore, the results of the program evaluation could be used to strengthen current implementation practices in order to support the increasing number of program participants.

Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the emerging themes generated from the responses of the participants of the study. Moreover, in the discussion section, the study examined the alignment of the current findings to the existing body of literature. It was previously

revealed that the current study posited that employment is associated to recidivism. However, limited studies extensively focused on the perceptions of returning citizens view of the reintegration program. After the discussion of these findings, I presented the generated conclusions in this chapter. Through these findings, I discussed the theoretical foundation. I also presented the limitations of the current research, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change in Chapter 5. Finally, I provided recommendations for action.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

In particular, this qualitative phenomenological research design will be used to answer the primary question: How would current Project Empowerment participant's describe their attitudes toward government-managed, employment-based post-release reintegration programming, and is there a relationship between those attitudes and job-readiness training completion?

1. All participants' privacy will be protected during all phases of this study. Do you have any concerns about your privacy?
2. Do you have any questions about the informed consent?
3. Do you give permission for this interview to be audio taped?

The following questions will be used to guide the semistructured interviews with the participants:

1. What are your general feelings about government-funded, employment-based reintegration programming? (Affective)
2. What is your current attitude towards Project Empowerment? (Conative)
3. Does Project Empowerment help you with lifestyle reintegration? (Cognitive, Affective, Conative)
4. How do you think factors in Project Empowerment encourage you to reenter similar programs? (Cognitive)
5. What are your perceptions with regard to the program offerings? (Cognitive)
6. Do you feel like the program helps you alleviate joblessness in terms of long term employment? (Affective)

7. Do you think that the eligibility of the program is fair to residents in the District of Columbia? (Cognitive)
8. Do you think that Project Empowerment should include additional reintegration services following the completion of job-readiness training? If yes, what? (Cognitive)
9. Do you think that programing can help attain unsubsidized long term employment? (Cognitive)
10. What factors are still lacking in Project Empowerment? (Cognitive)
11. Why do you think that formerly incarcerated persons would be enticed to join the program after being released? (Cognitive)
12. How do you think a person's attitude influences the results of their job-readiness completion? (Affective)
13. How would you describe your attitude towards government in general?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of the attitudes of formerly incarcerated persons, specific to publicly-managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia. The researcher is inviting formerly incarcerated District of Columbia residents who are current Project Empowerment participants to take part in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent,” which allows you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Zachary D. Weaver, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated persons specific to publicly-managed, employment-based reintegration programs in the District of Columbia, and to determine if a perceived relationship exists between attitude and completion of job-readiness training. By understanding the attitudes held by ex-offender participants of Project Empowerment, the researcher can better evaluate the program and provide the District of Columbia government a framework by which current and future reintegration programs offerings post-release can better be tailored towards the specific needs of the returning citizens. Having this data can assist with creating an environment conducive for successful reintegration back into society, consequently leading to the decline in recidivistic behavior in the DC.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview that will last approximately 30 minutes.

Here are some sample questions:

1. What are your feelings, in general, about government-funded, employment-based reintegration programming?
2. What is your current attitude towards Project Empowerment?
3. Does the program help you with lifestyle reintegration?
4. How do you think factors in Project Empowerment encourage you to reenter similar programs?

Voluntary Nature of the Study: This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Project Empowerment will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time. Declining or discontinuing will not negatively affect the participant’s relationship with the researcher or the participant’s access to programmatic services.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: Being in this type of study may

involve some risk as minor discomforts can be encountered in daily life, such as deep emotions, stress, or becoming upset, related to the questioning. Being in this study will not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

Because a limitation of knowledge specific to this area of inquiry exists, and previous studies have cited that the time of post-release is critical for returning citizens to have successful reentry, governmental treatments developed to address post-release needs present a unique opportunity to improve post-release outcomes of returning citizens. The researcher hopes that the results of this study will potentially add to the field of knowledge. Additionally, the research could potentially yield a greater understanding of the triggers of recidivism and allow for improvements in current reintegration policies and programs offered in the District of Columbia. The outcomes of this study can encourage better evaluation of post-release programs; affecting program missions, objectives, and resources allocations.

Payment: Participants will not receive any payment, thank-you gifts, or reimbursements for participation.

Privacy: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The researcher will keep data secure by storing it in a secure, locked file. The researcher will keep them for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Disclosure: Confidentiality cannot be absolute. Under court order or subpoena, for example, legal reasons may compel a researcher to disclose the identity of, or information about, a research participant. In some instances, a researcher may be mandated to report information to government agencies as in cases of child abuse or elder abuse, certain communicable diseases, illegal drug use, and other situations.

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Zachary.Weaver@WaldenU.Edu. If you want to talk privately regarding your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 02-27-14-0173250 and it expires on February 26, 2015.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Summary of Findings: Please check the box below if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of the findings of this study. Also provide a forwarding email address for transmission of report.

Yes Email: _____
 No

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision regarding my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant _____ Date of consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix C: Confidential Demographic Questionnaire

Note: Participants are asked to provide demographic data when they return the consent form. All participants have the right to refuse to complete any part or the entire demographic data request.

Age: _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____ Transgender _____

Race/Ethnicity:

- African American/Black
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Multiracial
- Native American/American Indian
- White
- Not Listed (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to respond

Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

Marital Status:

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

Children:

Number of Children _____

Number of Children under 18 years of age _____

Housing Data: Which statement best describes your current living arrangement?

(Check all that apply)

- I pay rent for my housing.
- I own my home.
- I live in housing where I do not pay rent
- I live with parents(s), relative(s), or guardian(s).
- I live with a husband/wife/domestic partner/significant other
- I live alone.
- I live with my child/children.
- I am homeless

Employment Status Data:

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Walden University

Understanding the Attitudes of Ex-Offender's in Government-Managed, Post-release
Programming

Principal Investigator, Zachary D. Weaver

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Purpose of Research: The primary purpose of this research is to understand the current attitudes (thoughts, feelings, and potential behaviors) held by participants of Project Empowerment. By understanding the attitudes held by participants of Project Empowerment, the researcher can better evaluate the program and provide the District of Columbia government a framework by which current and future reintegration programs offerings post-release can better be tailored towards the specific needs of the returning citizens.

Basic Eligibility Criteria: Participants will be selected based upon their classification as:
Current Participant of Project Empowerment;
Formerly Incarcerated Status; and
District of Columbia Residency

Procedures Involved:

Eligible participants will be administered a semistructured interview.

Time Commitment Required: 30 minutes or less

Location of Research: The Headquarters of Project Empowerment located at the Department of Employment Services, Conference Room #2001, 4058 Minnesota Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20019

For more information, contact Zachary D. Weaver, at 678-499-6070, or email Zachary.Weaver@WaldenU.Edu