


2017

Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-Offenders in Local Government

Chandra LaTrelle Porter
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-Offenders in Local
Government

by

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MS, Walden University, 2012

MS, Webster University, 2002

BBA, Georgia Southern University, 1997

BBA, Savannah State College, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Management

Walden University

March 2017

Abstract

The public sector is the largest employer that requires a background check. When African-American male ex-offenders return to their communities, they are often unable to find work in local government because of their criminal record. The central research question for this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in the local government sector. Guided by Sampson and Laub's life course perspective theory, a purposeful sample of 5 African-American male ex-offenders who applied for work or who currently work for local government entities in the state of Georgia was selected for this study. A three-interview approach was employed to include life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning of experiences. The Van Kaam method of analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Eleven central themes emerged that included the importance of employment, limited knowledge of employment, background and hiring process, stigma of a criminal record, lack of available resources, attitudes and biases of hiring managers, good support system, and limited opportunity for a second chance. It is recommended that local government agency officials use positions classified as "hard to fill" as training opportunities in an apprenticeship program to help ex-offenders learn new skills to help them secure employment. The findings and recommendations have implications for positive social change in local government agencies. Local government entities may modify organizational policy and practices including recruitment strategies that eliminate discrimination against African-American ex-offenders to help improve their quality of life and become contributing citizens within the community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study in loving memory of my grandmothers, Doretha Harris Campbell and Myrtle Porter. These women instilled the importance of faith, prayer and hard work in me at a young age. Throughout the difficult times, these two women prayed for me more than I prayed for myself. Their encouragement, support, and unconditional love molded me into the woman I am today. Although they are not here with me in the natural, I know that they are with me in spirit. There are no words to express how much I miss you!

I dedicate this study to the African-American men who participated in this study. Your lived experiences are invaluable. Thank you for sharing your experiences and helping me complete this journey!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The public sector is the largest employer that requires a background check (Westerling, Koch, Mitchell, & Gallaher, 2015). Several studies examined employment barriers, criminal records, recidivism, employer attitudes, and the reentry experiences of ex-offenders from quantitative and exploratory perspectives. Locations included Arizona (Decker, Spohn, Ortiz, & Hedberg, 2014), California (Fields & Abrams, 2010), Michigan (Teshima, 2014), Milwaukee (Denney, Tewksbury, & Jones, 2014), Missouri (Garland, Wodahl, & Mayfield, 2011), Seattle (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011), and Texas (Tripodi, Kim, & Bender, 2010). Due to racial injustices, the criminal record of African-American men is significant compared to White males without a criminal record. These African-American men must be able to acquire the skills needed to be able to compete for employment after incarceration (Lukies, Graffam, & Shinkfield, 2010; Varghese, Hardin, Bauer, & Morgan, 2010).

Despite nearly three decades of research, Atkins and Armstrong (2013) espoused there are contradictory results regarding employer attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders; results that fail to corroborate a distinct pattern of support for hiring ex-offenders. Lukies et al. (2011) noted the literature presents little evidence related to the disparities in employer attitudes towards ex-offenders in geographic locations. Atkins and Armstrong (2013) emphasized the area of ex-offenders compared to the concentration of ex-offenders in neighboring areas has not been considered. A shift towards contextual factors exist as a result of discrepancies such as conviction offense, the race of offender, and prior experience hiring ex-offenders. While reentry and employability are

investigated from multiple perspectives the perceived and actual barriers, through the lens of African-American male ex-offenders able to secure employment in local government warrants exploration.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the background of the problem, the problem that justified the need for the study, the purpose, and the significance of the study. The introduction presents the research question the study will answer. Chapter 1 concludes by providing the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, definitions, scope, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study.

Background of the Study

Smith and Hattery (2010) identified a direct link between the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and incarceration of African-American men. African-American men plagued by the PIC and mass incarceration were unable to acquire legal work and a decent salary to care for their families (Lopez-Aguado, 2016). As a result, the impact of their absence shattered homes and communities (Lopez-Aguado, 2016). The *war on drugs* was created as a result of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1917 (Block & Obioha, 2012). During the Nixon administration, the war on drugs was intended to annihilate and imprison African-American forever (Burriss-Kitchen & Burriss, 2011). Moreover, African-American men were the main focus of the war on drugs and were adversely affected when sentencing procedures became very rigid, and the incarceration rates for African-Americans increased (Burton, Fisher, Johnson, & Cullen, 2014; Fulcher, 2012; Gilmore & Betts, 2013).

There is a widespread stigma as a result of having a criminal record that impedes employment prospects (Denney et al., 2014; Murphy, Fuleihan, Richards, & Jones, 2011; Skardhamar, 2014). Employment barriers persist for African-American ex-offenders who must find a way to confront these internal and societal barriers (Caselman, 2014; Spaulding, Lerman, Holzer, & Eyster, 2015; Varghese, 2012). People of color, specifically African-Americans, are confronted with the stigma of a criminal record since a conviction may prevent them from securing employment (Dill et al., 2015; Pinard, 2013). Although African-American male ex-offenders are determined to secure employment, they must confront a range of barriers during reentry in their respective communities (Spaulding et al., 2015).

There is a need to increase understanding regarding why employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders, specifically African-American males (Chintakrindi, Porter, Kim, & Gupta, 2015). Criminal convictions and arrest records often exclude ex-offenders from obtaining and securing employment opportunities (Harley, 2014; Skardhamar, 2014). The ability to complete a sentence, pay a debt to society and have all rights reinstated is essential for ex-offenders which will allow them to find work to care for their families, become a working member of society and lead a full life (Hoskins, 2014). African-American male ex-offenders are confronted with legal and non-legal consequences such as negative employer attitudes that affect potential employment opportunities (Pinard, 2013). Despite efforts of federal, state, and local programs to eliminate employment barriers, there is a persistent disconnect between ex-offenders with criminal records and how potential employers judge them (Pinard, 2013). Stable employment is of the utmost

importance for ex-offenders, not only as a condition of probation but to rebuild their lives and take care of financial obligations (Caselman, 2014; Spaulding et al., 2015).

Some barriers block employment for ex-offenders. Implementing “ban the box” may limit an employer’s access to criminal records (Solinas-Saunders, Stacer, & Guy, 2013). Ban the Box is an initiative that was created to allow individuals with criminal records an opportunity to discuss their criminal record with the hiring manager at the time of interview for consideration for work based on qualifications for the job (Dougherty & Klofas, 2014). Ex-offenders are confronted with the shame of deliberate and hidden prejudices that make it challenging to get work (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013; Westerling et al., 2015). However, hiring decisions may be justified when based on criminal record data and the possibility of re-offending (Solomon, 2012). Prior convictions should not be used to measure the work performance of ex-offenders since methods on prior criminal conduct are biased and marginalizes the offender and is, therefore, ineffective (Cavico, Mujtiba, & Muffler, 2014; Pettinato, 2014; Timmons, 2014).

There is a significant bias concerning hiring ex-offenders with a criminal record compared to those without a criminal record (Varghese et al., 2010). The hiring decision of employers includes attitudes towards those with a felony charge revealed nearly 63% intentionally hired a convicted felon compared to 81 employers that hired one ex-offender with a felony charge (Swanson, Langfitt-Reese, & Bond, 2012). At least 42% hired an ex-offender with a felony based on experience and skills for the job; 18% hired based on a referral from someone within the organization; and 15% felt the ex-offender had changed and wanted to provide them with a second chance (Swanson et al., 2012).

Almost 78% shared information related to the type of conviction and 14% offered employment because a significant amount of time had passed since the last sentence (Swanson et al., 2012). Only 66% indicated there was no policy to allow them to hire ex-offenders; 9% revealed having a policy that restricted certain types of felony charges, and 4% reported having a policy based on the length of time since the last conviction (Swanson et al., 2012). Regarding the background check, only 73% conducted a check before hiring compared to 27% who did not care about prior convictions because they felt the individual would indicate the information on the employment application (Swanson et al., 2012). In regards to hiring for a particular reason, 53% of employers reported the job applied for would not be considered compared to 47% who would consider the type of conviction and relation to the position (Swanson et al., 2012).

African-American men are contacted by employers less often than White men without a felony and African-American men without a felony were contacted less frequently compared to White men with a criminal history (Mong & Roscigno, 2010; Smith & Hattery, 2010). There is confirmation of outright discrimination against minorities that led to harsh verdicts for African-Americans than Whites (Smith & Hattery, 2010). These results reflect the gravity of the effect on employment opportunities for African-American men with a felony (Smith & Hattery, 2010). Employment opportunities for ex-offenders may be affected by employer attitude, inadequate job qualifications, ethnicity, nature of a crime, undesirable views, discrimination, and legal barriers (Giguere & Dundees, 2012; Lukies et al., 2011).

Few studies have examined the motives for employer bias, the gravity of a criminal record, or how experience influences the decision to hire (Varghese et al., 2010). The effects of employee traits related to employer attitudes concerning hiring an ex-offender are constrained (Lukies et al., 2011). There has been sparse research on the type of offender or insights from hiring managers on the decision to hire or experience in employing an ex-offender (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). Only one study conducted in Michigan by Hickox and Roehling (2013) focused on attitudes, policies, and practices in city and county governments regarding the use of criminal records. No studies were found that have examined the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders who work in local government or how the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of a hiring manager impact their employability. This study sought to close that gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences related to the employability of African-American male ex-offenders who have applied for work or currently work in local government.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that when African-American ex-offenders return to underprivileged communities and cannot find a job due to a criminal record, they are left searching for employment, benefits, and stability in local government. While studies across disciplines explored the reentry experiences of ex-offenders, no research was found that explored the extent to which ex-offenders fail to discuss their criminal record with a prospective employer for employment consideration (Dougherty & Klofas, 2014). Twenty percent of African-Americans work in the public sector at all levels of government compared to 14.2 % for Whites and 10.4 % for Hispanics (United States

Department of Labor, 2014). African-American male ex-offenders are tenacious in their job search despite the stigma and obstacles that confront them when applying for jobs in local government (Purnell, 2013). During the interview process, these men should not be reluctant to reveal their criminal history (Crawford & McBride-Owens, 2014). A hiring manager should not use the criminal record to determine success or behavior on the job or eliminate ex-offenders from consideration (Levashina & Campion, 2009). Concealing prior criminal activity eventually revealed in the background check gives the appearance of dishonesty (Dougherty & Klofas, 2014).

The specific problem is the lack of data on the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. African-American male ex-offenders with extensive criminal backgrounds must deal with the attitude, biases, and perceptions of hiring authorities during the employment process (Harley, 2014; Solomon, 2012). Criminal convictions and arrest records are factors related to negligent hiring (Swanson et al., 2012; Westerling et al., 2015). This has occurred despite the fact that most African-American men had been arrested for crimes that did not result in a conviction when their employment opportunities are impacted (Purnell, 2013; Smith & Duffy, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. A semistructured interview process using open-ended questions was used to explore the lived experiences of five African-

American male ex-offenders. This design offered information-rich data, an account of the phenomenon of employability, and helped to identify the meaning of the lived experiences of ex-offenders.

Research Questions

The criminal records of African-American men serve as a barrier to employment (Murphy et al., 2011). Much weight is placed on past criminal offenses of an ex-offender, particularly African-American males, by a hiring manager (Chintakrindi et al., 2015). Hiring managers are concerned with negligent hiring and potential liability; moreover, their attitudes, biases, and perceptions often underscore the decision to hire these men and change their perception is an arduous task (Varghese et al., 2010). The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? The question was selected to uncover perceptions of African-American male ex-offenders related to the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. The question also addressed the need to identify the barriers that impact employability. The question also addressed the need to determine a theory related to how African-American male ex-offenders can overcome employment barriers due to the stigma of a criminal record.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework that helped explain the significance of the central phenomenon was the life course perspective (LCP) theory (Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, & Fisher, 2005; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). The LCP has been used to

describe how desistance develops in the life course perspective (Bahr et al. 2005). This theory helped show just how patterns of criminal activity influence the employability of ex-offenders in local government. The LCP guided the study and provided insight into how an ex-offender can resist crime to find employment and understand the ex-offender perceptions regarding their employability.

During the 1950s, C. Wright Mills suggested the life course as a field of study in behavioral science. A series of studies conducted in the 20th century by early pioneers focused on the development of children through adulthood (Elder et al., 2003). These pioneers believed by examining individual life and growth to assess the factors that impacted an individual's life trajectories (Elder et al., 2003). In the 1960s longitudinal and panel studies, such as the National Longitudinal Study and Panel Study of Income Dynamics, focused on how people were treated, human lifespan and the life course (Elder et al., 2003). Elder et al. defined the life course as a journey in which the boundaries of age coupled with one's outlook on life will impact the transitions and turning points that form the life stages (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Elder et al's supposition lead to increased acceptance that historical and biographical circumstances shape an individual's life as they navigate their way through the life course and trajectories linked to established pathways and normative patterns.

According to Elder et al. (2003), the life course provides the basis for examining phenomena and the connection between social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change. The two fundamental beliefs of the LCP are trajectories and transitions, which are the lasting patterns, sequences, and unique life events that are rooted in the

trajectories (Bahr et al., 2005). Elder et al. (2003) identified turning points in the life course that are the significant changes in the direction of one's life that may be subjective or objective. One of the essential traits of the LCP focused on changes and maintenance over time, not the initial change in behavior (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Therefore, if an offender has a desire to change, recognize the opportunity for change and has social support for change, change will occur (Davis et al., 2012; Laub & Sampson, 2003). The LCP theory infers that significant changes and relationships are needed to help alter an ex-offender's criminal behavior (Bahr et al., 2005).

The life course perspective, regarded as an emerging theory, symbolizes a significant change in how human interaction is studied (Elder, 2001). Laub and Sampson (2003) advanced this theory by recognizing desistance as a process that hinged on structured routine activities, social controls, and agency. The life course emphasizes continuities and changes in behavior over time including social influences based on age-graded transitions and life events from youth through maturity (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Five principles guide the life course: life-span, agency, time and place, timing and link lives (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of life-span suggests human development and aging are lifelong processes whereas the principle of agency implies an individual will make their life course based on the choices and actions taken based on opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of time and place implies the life course of individuals are molded by the past and conditions experienced during their lifetime (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of timing suggests

developmental experiences and the outcomes of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns are diverse based on timing in one's life (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of linked lives presumes lives are linked interdependently, and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships (Elder et al., 2003).

Forced residential relocation as a result of Hurricane Katrina and the impact of reincarceration of former offenders in New Orleans was analyzed (Kirk, 2012). A sample was taken from two sets of ex-offenders in five metropolitan parishes before and after Hurricane Katrina. The primary focus was on place of residence immediately after release to determine whether or not relocation from the individual's former parish has an impact on their change in behavior (Kirk, 2012). Nearly half the ex-offenders released from prison relocated to a new parish after Hurricane Katrina compared to one-fourth before Hurricane Katrina (Kirk, 2012). A change in location significantly impacts desistance from crime and facilitates behavior changes in ex-offenders (Kirk, 2012). These findings provide support for the life course theory as it relates to desistance from crime.

Four areas may have an impact on turning points in the life course. Residential change impacts an individual's life course as it forces them to become separated from their prior involvement in crime including associates (Kirk, 2012). When former offenders are compelled to change their location, it also increases the chances of supervising, monitoring, and providing social support from family (Kirk, 2012). A change of scenery can restructure normal activities by becoming a part of more prosperous areas that increase employment opportunities, decrease the likelihood of

committing a crime or alter behavioral patterns (Kirk, 2012). A change in location may increase the possibility of identifying transformation in former offenders. The further away an ex-offender is from their old home the greater the chance for change (Kirk, 2012).

Employment and crime over the life course focused on how work has an effect on crime, how criminal punishment affects employment prospects, and how these two methods function together in the present environment of extensive use of electronic background checks (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). The ability to work increased informal social controls and expanded professional social networks that tie individuals to others in networks of shared obligation (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). By assessing the impact of work on crime during the life course, it is evident the intensity and quality of work are central to understanding the relationship. There are limited job prospects connected to greater delinquency during adolescence in the life course (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). Incarceration interrupts the ability to obtain new skills, high-quality employment and develop social networks; thus, the erosion of job skills will be constant over the life course (Lageson & Uggen, 2013).

The life course theory shaped by the general theory of crime proposed in 1990 by Gottfredson and Hirschi implies an individual will reveal low self-control, social failure, and become disobedient based on childhood experiences (Mus & Eker, 2011). The LCP is similar to the general theory of crime advanced in 2005 by Agnew, who regarded crime as a utility of motivation for crime and constraints against crime. Agnew (2005) categorized several variables that influence criminal motivations and limitations into five

major life domains which include family, work, peers, school, and self, stressing the importance of family, work, and peers. The LCP theory suggests major transformations and bonds are necessary to alter the criminal behavior of an ex-offender (Bahr et al., 2005). The primary features of this theory are the informal controls that restrict violating rules (Bahr et al., 2005). The LCP theory purported when an individual breaks the law they lose something; thus, the emphasis on change and stability over time (Bahr et al., 2005). The life-course framework offers an opportunity to examine how the transition process from prison influences how African-American male ex-offenders acclimate to the workforce.

Nature of the Study

This study included a qualitative interview and phenomenological method to describe the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. I addressed the lack of information on the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. I addressed the gap by looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of African-American male ex-offenders in the state of Georgia. The stigma of a criminal record informed the exploration of the participants' experiences, informed how they dealt with employment barriers, and explained how they overcame the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers. This qualitative study involved examining each construct in an effort to provide insight into the lived experiences, employment barriers, attitudes, biases and

perceptions of hiring managers and how African-American male ex-offenders overcame employment barriers (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. External and internal factors influencing employability.

Qualitative Research Method

Englander (2012) stated research methods are based on the primary research question, interest, or problem, not practice. According to Moustakas (1994), the entire experience and search for essences of experiences should be the focus. Qualitative methods focus on people in their natural setting and seek to figure out the individual's perspective of the world and their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The qualitative approach is a flexible process that presents information on behaviors, beliefs, and relationships with individuals. It allows for a more natural, relaxed rapport between the

researcher and the study participant; moreover, a comfortable environment establishes trust as well as contributes to a positive frame of mind for the individual (Barnham, 2012; Cairney & St. Denny, 2015). In qualitative research, participants respond to open-ended inquiries in their words instead of a prepared response (Barnham, 2012; Yilmaz, 2013). The appropriate method for this study was the qualitative method as it enabled the researcher to examine the responses of the participants, evaluate statements, and generate meanings (Cairney & St. Denny, 2015). Qualitative research allowed the researcher to create stories that uncovered the essence of the lived experiences and place those experiences into perspective to gain a better understanding of the participant's views (Barnham, 2012).

The goal of quantitative research is to test a hypothesis, generate a theory, or generalize a population and does not allow careful exploration of the phenomenon (Cokley & Awad, 2013). Quantitative research focuses on collecting numerical data to explain a phenomenon and predict causal relationships (Wahyuni, 2012). A quantitative research method is not ideal for this study as it does not allow for clarity of the unique lived experiences of the ex-offender. Quantitative research does not identify what an ex-offender thinks about their experiences or analyze for the essence of those experiences.

Grounded theory seeks to create a robust, rational theory by using quantitative and qualitative principles, where a sound theory is nonexistent (Nicholls, 2009). Grounded theory is systematic, ordered, and structured and focuses on the interaction between people to generate meaning (Nicolls, 2009). The implied or explicit codes of conduct of social processes define how each interaction develops and shapes the meaning

of participant experiences in the settings in which they occur (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Grounded theory examines the causes, context, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions of the social processes to better grasp the patterns and relationships between them (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). A phenomenological paradigm will portray these perspectives to help understand what an ex-offender believes about their experiences. A phenomenological research design may provide rich data and explanation of the phenomenon of employability and help understand the meaning of the experiences.

Mixed method research combines key features of qualitative and quantitative methods (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Although this mixed method offers multiple concurrently or sequentially to help understand a phenomenon, the focus is primarily on confirmatory and exploratory research questions (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). A mixed method design allows the researcher to obtain deep insights from rich narratives and surveys combined with breadth in data collection from various perspectives of a phenomenon (Klassen, Creswell, Plana Clark, Clegg Smith, & Meissner, 2012; Venkatesh et al., 2013). However, these methods are not ideal for this study as it may not help to understand the nature of the phenomenon that highlights the lived experiences, answer the research questions, or identify with the experiences related to the phenomenon based on descriptions provided by participants.

Research Design

The goal of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Vagle, 2014). A phenomenological design situates the researcher

and participant in a way that will allow them to tie the experiences of the phenomenon together (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological design may provide an accurate depiction of written and organizational experiences and the underlying meaning of the lived experiences from diverse perspectives (Wahyuni, 2012). These perspectives are needed to obtain a complete understanding of how the attitudes, biases and perceptions of a hiring manager may adversely affect their employability. The sample population consisted of five African-American male ex-offenders who have applied for work or currently work for a local government agency within the 159 counties in the state of Georgia.

According to Edmond Husserl, the father of phenomenology, he viewed phenomenology as *pure phenomena* that establish itself into consciousness and stressed the experience of the individual cannot be separated from their experiences in the world (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology stems from the Greek words *phenomenon* and *logos* which means appearance; logos, or analytical thinking, helps to facilitate this appearing (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). To appreciate a description of the phenomena through the perspective of others depends on the ability to think analytically, reflect, and interpret the data (Vagle, 2014). Husserl's approach is referred to as transcendental because it holds on to what may be revealed by reflection on personal acts and their objective relationships (Moustakas, 1994).

The focus of phenomenology is the rich descriptions of the experience illuminated with words (Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl analyzed consciousness and how human consciousness shaped phenomena in the world that explains how the phenomena

appear and experience created for the individual (Davidsen, 2013). Husserl made it easy to grasp phenomenology by using and teaching fundamental concepts to include objectivity, epoche, bracketing, reduction, natural attitude, life world, essence, consciousness, intentionality, and transcendental ego (Davidsen, 2013). *Epoche* is Greek, which means to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche and reduction are concepts that are essential to capturing the meaning and essence of the phenomena (Davidsen, 2013).

A transcendental phenomenological approach means setting aside any preconceived notions of the phenomenon to ensure the study is free from bias or awareness of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This approach is based on prior experience to be responsive to the participants as they described their experiences related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1997) stated that phenomenological reduction requires one to bracket past knowledge of the phenomenon to be completely present in the phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), the approach used by Giorgi (1997) required one to have a sense of awareness to evaluate the information with a fresh perspective. Bracketing decreases potential destructive effects of the intricate biases linked to research and thus enlarge the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

A case study or ethnography research design is not appropriate for this study as these designs cannot uncover the essence of the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders. A case study makes an extensive assessment of a program, event, or one or more individuals whereas ethnography examines a cultural group in the natural setting over time in an attempt to acquire a deeper understanding of the social

phenomenon (Cronin, 2014; Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Freeman & Spanjaard, 2012). A case study and ethnography investigate issues from a perspective other than one that seeks to understand the essence of the phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012). A narrative study assesses cultural and social meanings by translating stories related to the lived experience whereas grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory (Stephens & Breheny, 2013).

Grounded theory seeks to create a robust, rational theory that uses quantitative and qualitative principles, where a sound theory is nonexistent (Nicholls, 2009). Grounded theory is systematic, ordered, and structured process that focuses on the interaction between people to generate meaning (Nicholls, 2009). The way in which interactions are developed shapes the meaning of the experiences based on the implied or explicit codes of conduct of social processes (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Grounded theory examines the causes, context, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions of the social processes to help understand the patterns and relationships (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). A phenomenological paradigm will depict these perspectives to help understand what an ex-offender believes about their experiences. A phenomenological research design may provide rich data and explanation of the phenomenon of employability and help understand the meaning of the experiences.

Definitions

Ban the box: Ban the Box is an initiative that encourages employers to remove criminal record questions from the employment application, focus on skills and adhere to

fair hiring practices when determining whether or not a conviction is job-related (Dougherty & Klofas, 2014).

Civil consequences: A civil consequence is a conviction that are barriers to successful reentry that deny offenders access to employment, identification, relationships with their children, and social services make reentry difficult (Shanahan, 2012).

Collateral consequences: A collateral consequence is ramifications imposed on individuals as a result of criminal convictions that occur separately from the sentence that is enforced by law in the state of the crime (Solomon, 2012).

Exonerates: Exonerates are victims of acts of omission and commission meant to generate a conviction (Wildeman, Costelloe, & Schehr, 2011).

Green factors: Green factors were established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) that determines if a criminal conviction is a business necessity (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

Indirect and direct barriers: Indirect and direct barriers exclude applicants with criminal convictions or arrest records and restrictions which affect inquiries into the offender's prior arrests, convictions and criminal record (Mayson, 2015).

Negligent hiring: Negligent hiring is a legal concept that implies if employers know or should have known about an employee's tendency to criminal activity the employer may be liable (Dougherty & Klofas, 2014).

Assumptions

There are three types of assumptions: negligibility, domain, and heuristic (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). Negligibility assumptions are factors with little significance that may be

disregarded if they impact the suppositions of a theory (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). Domain assumptions restrict the practical application of theory by revealing the context in which the theory is irrelevant (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). Heuristic assumptions are short-term methods that allow the researcher to maintain control when assessing true casual patterns (Foss & Hallberg, 2014).

In a phenomenological study, the researcher makes an attempt to understand the lived experiences through the lens and voice of the participants as well as their perceptions related to those experiences. Another assumption was that African-American male ex-offenders believe hiring managers in local government have certain attitudes, biases, and perceptions that are used to evaluate them based on their criminal record rather than on their work experience or qualifications for the job. Another assumption was that African-American male ex-offenders felt discriminated against because of a criminal record. Another assumption was that ex-offenders understand the organization's background, hiring, and employment process before applying for work. Another assumption was that participants would be able to participant in three 90-minute interviews to describe their lived experiences with the phenomena.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local agencies in the state of Georgia. Despite the fact that researchers have studied ex-offenders as it relates to employment during reentry, they have not represented African-American male ex-offenders in local government in the state of

Georgia. The potential transferability of the study was limited to African-American male ex-offenders who had shared the same experiences of employability.

Delimitations describe the choices made by the researcher and boundaries of the study that are in the researcher's control (PhD-Student.com, 2016; Simon, 2011). The boundaries of this study included African-American male ex-offenders who have applied for work or currently work for a local government entity in the state of Georgia. The reason for these delimitations was that African-American male ex-offenders are more adversely affected due to having a criminal record than ex-offenders of other races (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2015; Swanson et al., 2012). Previous studies were conducted from a psychology, social work and criminal justice perspective (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Davis et al., 2012; Denny et al., 2014; Garland et al. 2011; Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert., 2013; Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2011). This study did not include the perceptions of hiring managers regarding their lived experiences with hiring African-American male ex-offenders.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses of the research that may impact the results (Connelly, 2013; Simon, 2011). The transferability of this study was limited to African-American male ex-offenders who had applied for work or currently work for a local government agency in the state of Georgia. As a human resource professional, I had an opportunity to speak with several African-American male ex-offenders who have similar experiences with employability. Therefore, I am acutely aware of the possibility of bias. To limit my bias, I exemplified the voices and experiences of these men to enhance and gain a better

understanding of the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders who have experienced the phenomenon of employability. Purposeful sampling using the snowball method generated a limited the number of participants but also limited the generalizability of the results.

For this study, I anticipated several limitations. First, the geographic location would prevent reaching the intended goal of 25 participants who had applied for work or currently work for a local government agency in the state of Georgia. Another possible limitation was that the local government agency representatives would not disseminate the recruitment invitation flyer to their employees. A third potential limitation was that participants could be reluctant to volunteer due to organizational policy or fear of retaliation; to my knowledge, this did not occur. A fourth possible limitation could have been the wording and understanding of the interview questions to understand the essence of meaning for participants. Despite this, I did notice when asking participants to describe their understanding of the aspects of the employment process as a whole this generated different meaning from the participant, something that stood out during the interviews. The final assumption was that participants would not be able to participate in three 90-minute interviews due to personal and work obligations, which was the case in this study.

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant for participants who longed to have their voices heard and share their lived experiences. Moreover, the study may be significant as the findings may help counter for the absence of recent and useful literature related to understanding why hiring managers respond negatively toward ex-offenders and

encourage a change in organizational policy and recruitment and hiring practices. The study could also add value and evidence to the existing body of knowledge as there are no studies to date that have examined the lived experiences of the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government in the state of Georgia.

The study sought to fill the knowledge gap in the literature. This study filled this gap in several ways. First, I examined the connection between the literature on employment barriers and challenges and how familiar the participants were with the employment, hiring and background components. Second, I examined the perceptions of these men related to the impact their criminal record has on the hiring decision. Third, I evaluated the extent these men believe hiring managers have attitudes, biases, and perceptions towards African-American male ex-offenders. Fourth, I examined the connection between the literature related to the stigma of a criminal record and why these men believed their criminal record had an influence on a hiring manager's attitude, biases, and perceptions in the decision to hire. Finally, I explored the resources that were available pre- and post-incarceration that helped these men overcome challenges during the employment process.

The insight gleaned from the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders in the state of Georgia may contribute to a greater understanding of employer attitudes to help to diminish adverse views and focus on positive characteristics that affect hiring decisions and understanding of the phenomenon by leaders in local government entities. The insight gleaned from the lived experiences of the participants may also inform and make local government leaders more cognizant of employer

attitudes, biases, and perceptions that may influence extending an offer of employment to African-American male ex-offenders and why these men feel excluded because of their criminal record. This study has the potential to help ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, understand and effectively navigate through the bureaucracy of local government and provides social significance, positive social change that leads to increased understanding of the needs of African-American male ex-offenders.

Significance to Practice

There are several significant reasons for positive social change related to practice, theory, and social change. Local government human resources professionals, hiring authorities, and city and county administrators may benefit from the results of this study and use the information to enhance and modify recruitment strategies to eliminate discrimination against African-American ex-offenders. Human resources professionals in the state of Georgia may use the results to recommend creating programs such as apprenticeships for hard-to-fill positions, mentoring programs and employment seminars to help ex-offenders obtain the requisite competencies to become more marketable. Local government leaders may use the results of this research to become more authentic by demonstrating self-awareness and being attentive to the needs of ex-offenders. Authentic leaders have the capacity to evaluate pertinent facts and consider diverse views before making a decision. Leaders in local government who demonstrate authenticity can turn adversity into learning opportunities to develop and influence others toward making a change to sustain.

Criminal justice personnel can use these data to enhance existing programs that prepare ex-offenders for employment as well as help ex-offenders increase their social intelligence, education, and obtain desired competencies before and after incarceration to be successful when applying for work in local government. The findings may encourage increased collaboration between criminal justice, faith-based organizations and local government officials to create enhanced recruitment strategies to attract ex-offenders. Moreover, the experiences of the ex-offenders may be used to evaluate the efficacy of current programs to identify and eliminate barriers that affect intervention outcomes used for developmental purposes.

Significance to Theory

Incarceration disrupts the ability to acquire new job skills, employment, and social networks that lead to the loss of job skills that is perpetual over the life course (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge and advances the life course theory by showing how the turning points, trajectories, and transitions in the life of an ex-offender provides them with an opportunity to apply social integration skills, life skills, and work skills successfully during the pathway into adulthood and reentry. The life course perspective theory for this study considered how those trajectories and transitions such as crime and incarceration impacted employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

Significance to Social Change

Minorities and African-Americans regard finding public sector employment as a huge accomplishment (Pitts, 2011). There is a sense of urgency for local government

entities to begin addressing the needs of ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, as their employment continues to fluctuate during reentry (Pitts, 2011).

Employment is essential given the visible impact of the criminal justice system where African-American men with criminal records are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and incarcerated (Cavico et al., 2014; Schulte & Cochling, 2013; Wozniak, 2011). The findings from this study may educate African-American male ex-offenders and make them more alert to the anxiety felt by hiring managers as well as delineate employment barriers that affect these men on a social level. The findings may help these men become conscious of the impact a criminal record and the type of offenses that do not affect their employability. Local government leaders can accelerate change through the execution of a rational strategy to alter the existing circumstances for ex-offenders and the betterment of the organization. A new paradigm may be necessary to create effective programs that provide ex-offenders objectivity in employment decisions that do not consider past criminal indiscretions as the chief obstacle to employment.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I presented the introduction of the study, background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study and significance of the research. I also presented the research question, theoretical framework, and nature of the study. Chapter 1 concluded with the definitions, scope of the study, assumptions of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study. This chapter provided an overview of the research that supports the need for this study related to the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. The significance of this study is to fill the gap in the

literature on the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth review of the literature and focused on the employability of ex-offenders and barriers to employment and an overview of the theoretical framework that guided this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. The general problem is that when African-American ex-offenders return to underprivileged communities and cannot find work due to a criminal record, they are left searching for employment, benefits, and stability in local government. The phenomenon of employability has increased awareness for employers to establish a fluid reentry process that recognizes the employment challenges that make it hard for ex-offenders to find work in local government. In 2015, 58% of African-American males were incarcerated, and 59.25% were released back to the community (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2015). The specific problem is the lack of lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia.

The literature review begins with an overview the theoretical framework for this study, the life course perspective theory (Bahr et al. 2005). Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategies and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 includes a detailed discussion of the external and internal barriers that impact the employability of African-American male ex-offenders, impact of a criminal record, reentry needs and experiences, EEOC guidance, ban the box and strategies to increase employment of ex-offenders. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 reveals the impact of the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers and criminal record on employability. A review of the

literature indicated a gap in research on the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government who had experience with the phenomenon.

Literature Search Strategy

Despite 10 years of research on prisoner reentry and innovative policies and programs, there is an urgent need to increase understanding of successful reentry experiences through the lens of the ex-offender, specifically African-American males (Mears & Mestre, 2012). A review of the relevant literature provided a historical framework regarding research on the employability of African-American male ex-offenders. The search strategy included historical and current searches using the following keywords: *African-American male, African-American men, attitudes, arrests, ban the box, barriers, bias, black male, career, civil consequences, collateral consequences, criminal record, discrimination, disparate impact, EEOC, employability, employer attitudes, employer perceptions, employment, employment strategies, empowerment theory, ex-offender, former convicts, Georgia, hiring manager, incarceration, interventions, job placement, job seeker traits, labeling theory, legislation, life course, local government, mass incarceration, negligent hiring, offender perception, parole, perceptions, phenomenology, prison, prison industrial complex, probation, recidivism, reentry, reentry needs, self-determination, social determinants, social change, standpoint theory, stigma, stereotype, unemployment, vocational, and work.*

Throughout the process, I used common search strategies and keywords changed based on the broad scope of the topic on ex-offenders. Keyword searches were set up in Google Scholar to receive alerts on newly published articles. The search strategy

included identifying required sources, selected relevant databases and sources, creating and executing an iterative keyword search, reviewing the reference list of sources to find appropriate sources, and selecting, evaluating and summarizing each source. Each article was carefully examined and eliminated if the study did not fit the criteria for the study.

The literature search included the Walden University Library to examine dissertations, journals, law reviews in multiple disciplines, Thoreau multiple database, full-text and peer-reviewed articles. Scholarly and electronic databases were examined for historical and contemporary peer-reviewed sources within the last five years. The databases include *Academic OneFile*, *Academic Search Premier*, *Business Source Complete*, *CINAHL Plus with Full Text*, *Ebrary Academic Complete*, *Google Scholar*, *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, *JSTOR Journals*, *LexisNexis Academic*, *Law Review*, *Networked Digital Library of Theses & Dissertations*, *Political Science Complete*, *ProQuest Central*, *PsycARTICLES*, *PsycINFO*, *SAGE Premier*, *SAGE Reference Online Deep Backlist Collection*, *SAGE Research Methods Online*, *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *SocINDEX*, *Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities*.

Theoretical Foundation

To help explain the significance of the central phenomenon of employability the theoretical framework for this study was the life course perspective (LCP) theory (Bahr et al., 2005; Elder et al., 2003). This theory was previously used by scholars to describe how desistance develops in the life course perspective (Bahr et al. 2005). The LCP theory shows how patterns of criminal involvement influence the employability ex-offenders in

local government. The LCP guided this study and provided insight into how ex-offenders can resist crime to gain employment as well as understand the ex-offender's perceptions regarding how their employability is affected.

During the 1950s, C. Wright Mills suggested the life course as a field of study in behavioral science. A series of studies conducted in the 20th century by early pioneers focused on the development of children through adulthood (Elder et al., 2003). These pioneers believed by examining individual life and growth to assess the factors that impacted an individual's life trajectories (Elder et al., 2003). In the 1960s, longitudinal and panel studies, such as the National Longitudinal Study and Panel Study of Income Dynamics, focused on how people were treated, human life-span and the life course (Elder et al., 2003). Elder defined the life course as a journey in which the boundaries of age coupled with one's outlook on life will impact the transitions and turning points that form the life stages (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Elder's supposition lead to increased acceptance that one's life may be shaped by historical and biographical circumstances as individuals navigate their way through the life course and trajectories linked to established pathways and normative patterns.

According to Elder et al. (2003), the life course provides the basis for examining phenomena and the connection between social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change. The two fundamental beliefs of the LCP are trajectories and transitions, which are the lasting patterns, sequences, and unique life events that are rooted in trajectories (Bahr et al., 2005). Elder et al. (2003) identified turning points in life course that are the significant changes in the direction of one's life that may be subjective or

objective. One of the essential traits of the LCP focused on changes and maintenance over time, not the initial change in behavior (Davis, et al., 2012). Moreover, if an offender has a desire to change, recognize the opportunity for change and has social support for change, change will occur (Davis et al., 2012; Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Five principles guide the life course: life-span, agency, time and place, timing, and link lives (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of life-span suggests human development and aging are lifelong processes whereas the principle of agency implies an individual will make their life course based on the choices and actions taken based on opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of time and place suggested the life course of individuals are molded by the past and conditions experienced during their lifetime (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of timing suggested developmental experiences and the outcomes of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns are diverse based on timing in a one's life (Elder et al., 2003). The principle of link lives presumes lives are linked interdependently, and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships (Elder et al., 2003).

Life course perspective is an emerging theory that symbolizes a significant change in how human interaction was studied (Elder, 2001). Laub and Sampson (2003) advanced this theory by recognizing desistance as a process that depended on structured everyday activities, social controls, and agency. The life course emphasizes continuities and changes in behavior over time including social influences based on age-graded transitions and life events from youth through maturity (Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Finally, the LCP is congruent with the general theory of crime developed in 2005 by Agnew, who regarded crime as a utility of motivations for crime and constraints against crime. Agnew (2005) categorized several variables that influence criminal motivations and limitations into five major life domains which include family, work, peers, school, and self, stressing the importance of family, work, and peers. The LCP theory suggests major transformations and bonds are necessary to alter the criminal behavior of an ex-offender (Bahr et al., 2005). The primary features of this theory are the informal controls that restrict rules from being violated (Bahr et al., 2005). The LCP theory purports when an individual breaks the law they lose something; thus, the emphasis on change and stability over time (Bahr et al., 2005). Using a life-course framework provided an opportunity to examine how the transition process from prison impacted the ability of African-American male ex-offenders to adapt to the current workforce.

Literature Review

Mass Incarceration

Smith and Hattery (2010) provided a historical perspective of the issues of incarceration of African-Americans and the effect on self, family, community and employment opportunities. The constant struggles that confront these men during reentry, as well as impact their family, were seen through a direct link between mass incarceration and the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) (Smith & Hattery, 2010). There was a decline in financial, human, social, and political capital, for these men, their families, and the broader African-American community (Smith & Hattery, 2010). African-Americans have

been affected by harsh sentences and increased rates of incarceration due to the war on drugs compared to other races (Smith & Hattery, 2010). The Rockefeller Drug Law created a system of mass incarceration of over 1 million African-American men which resulted in removing capital from African-American families and communities (Smith & Hattery, 2010).

The Great Depression and the New Deal were meant to relax U.S. penal policies and repeal the prison boom (Gottschalk, 2010). The financial issues in the 1970s played a role in incarceration rates that lasted for nearly three decades while a destabilized drug market caused crime to increase in the 1960s and 1980s and decrease in the 1990s (Gottschalk, 2010). While the prison population decreased between 2008 and 2009 in 27 states and increased in 23 states, the federal inmate population only increased seven percent (Gottschalk, 2010). Sentencing laws and drug reforms in 2001 caused the rates of incarceration to stabilize and increase while public punitiveness attributed to economic depression, uncertainty and labor market disruptions (Gottschalk, 2010). In 2009, firearm purchases increased when communities began to take measures to protect themselves. Incarceration and unemployment rose, and community oriented policing and revisions to the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (BJAG) program was a result of the stimulus deal (Gottschalk, 2010). In 2009, BJAG received over \$600 million to increase state and local law enforcement nationwide despite funding cuts in 2007. Despite this, the poor is still criminalized and with reduced services they may return to prison (Gottschalk, 2010).

The Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) maintains records on nearly 2.6 million individuals in Georgia (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). Between 1982

and 2002 the incarcerations tripled and from 1990 to 2011 the rates doubled. Georgia had the fifth largest prison population in 2010. With almost 20,000 offenders released back to communities in Georgia in the last five years, 61.6% of prisoners in 2013 were African-American compared to a general population of 54.8% African-American (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). In Georgia, the rates of recidivism remained steady at 30% for the last ten years which means at least one in three offenders will return to prison within three years after release (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). Georgia spends nearly \$1 billion compared to well over \$130 million every year for offenders who return to prison (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). Georgia plays a vital role in making improvements to the reentry process for ex-offenders through the removal of legal barriers to implementation of employer incentives (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014).

A major challenge during reentry for ex-offenders is finding a job. The U.S. is the world leader for incarcerating citizens who equate to 25% or 2.3 million incarcerated individuals (Jones, 2015; Raskin, 2015; Westerling et al., 2015). Well over 65 million individuals have a criminal record with African-American and Latino men representing 30% of the population but an alarming 60% of the prison population (Jones, 2015; Raskin, 2015). In the U.S. 95% of offenders are incarcerated, and nearly 2000 will return to their communities without sufficient skills to secure employment (Westerling et al., 2015). At least one in 35 African-American men will spend time in prison compared to one in 214 White men (Raskin, 2015). African-American male ex-offenders compared to White male ex-offenders are prohibited from finding work as a result of ex-offender and

employer traits, social skills, and limited education (Harley, 2014; Moses, 2014). In 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2014) reported that males represented 74 % of arrests in Georgia. The FBI (2014) reported of the 11,302,102 imprisoned in the U.S. 69% were White, 28% Black, and 3% other races.

Mass incarceration results from the number and length of prison sentences and increases in sentencing due to mandatory sentencing laws established in the 1970s that affect poverty, unemployment and contributes to the stigma associated with incarceration (Raskin, 2015; Warde, 2013). Also, it results in social consequences for ex-offenders specifically, African-Americans and Latinos that often lead to additional periods of incarceration, economic disparity, increased criminal activity (Raskin, 2015). Finally, the effects of mass incarceration pose a stigma for ex-offenders that make it hard to secure employment, avoid recidivism, and it significantly impacts families, opportunities for education, welfare benefits, and ability to vote (Raskin, 2015).

Despite the fact that 82% of employers conducts a background check, nearly 65% have expressed they would not hire ex-offenders which reveal severe marginalization of ex-offenders (Westerling et al., 2015). Employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders due to negligent hiring, a critical barrier that warrants more attention (Westerling et al., 2015). Barriers such as lack of education, poor work history, and racial discrimination exist for almost 60% of African-American and Hispanic ex-offenders (Brown, 2011; Westerling et al., 2015).

To reduce the impact of mass incarceration, leadership at the federal and state level can implement several initiatives (Raskin, 2015). First, leaders may repeal

mandatory minimum sentence provisions. Second, leaders may reduce recommended sentences per sentencing guidelines and laws for non-violent offenses. Third, leaders may increase alternatives to prison by advocating for job training programs. Finally, leaders may allow individuals with misdemeanor charges and non-felony convictions a chance to have their records sealed to prevent discrimination by employers.

Admissions, Releases, and Workforce in Georgia

In 2013, the GDC revealed 60% of African-American men were admitted compared to 36% and 4% White and Hispanic males respectively (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2014). In 2014, the GDC (2014) reported 59% African-American men were admitted compared to 37% and 3% White and Hispanic men, respectively. In 2015, the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) reported 58% of African-American men were admitted compared to 38.66% and 2.47% White and Hispanics respectively (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2015).

In 2013, 60% African-American males were released compared to 35% and 4% White and Hispanic men, respectively (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2014). In 2013, 21,124 ex-offenders were released back to their home county in the state of Georgia compared to 20,515 released in 2014 (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2014). In 2014, 60% African-American men were released compared to 36% and 4% White and Hispanic men, respectively (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2015). In 2015, 59.25% African-American males were released compared to 36.88% and 3.42% White and Hispanic men, respectively (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2015).

In 2013, the civilian labor force in the state of Georgia reflected 70% of men were employed, and 65% of men were unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). African-American males accounted for 69% of employed and 61% of those unemployed compared to 1,580,000 employed and 88,000 unemployed White men, respectively (United States Department of Labor, 2014). As of 2014, the BLS reported 67% African-American males employed and 57% unemployed compared to 70% White men employed and 67.3% unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). As of 2013, the labor force for the state of Georgia was 4,767,335 of which 4,378,034 are employed compared to 389,301 unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In 2015, Georgia's population was estimated at 321,418,320 compared to 10,097,343 in 2014 and 9,992,167 in 2013 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). In 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) reported the civilian labor force in the state of Georgia represented 4,893,100 persons. There were 4,651,400 employed compared to 241,700 unemployed. Figure 2 compares the number of males admitted and released from the Georgia Department of Corrections between 2013 and 2015.

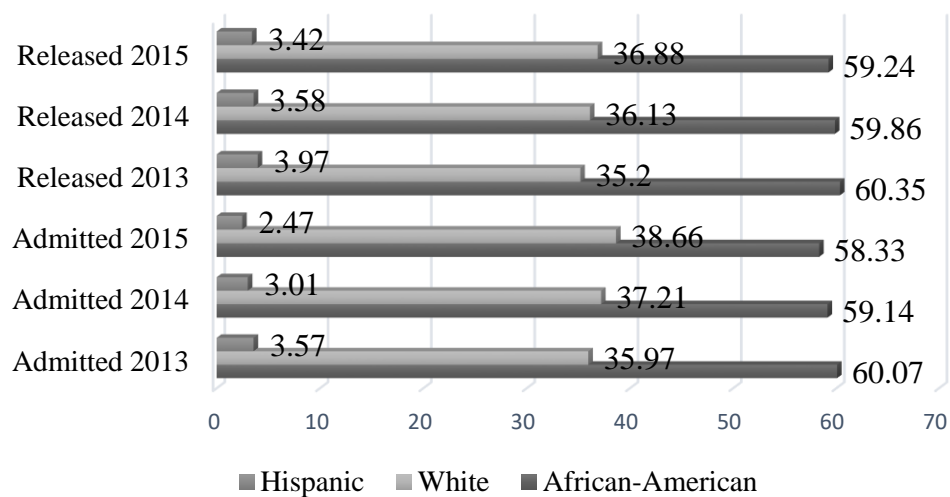


Figure 2. Comparison of Admissions and Releases from the Georgia Department of Corrections, 2013-2015.

Figure 3 illustrates a comparison of the number of ex-offenders released to their home county in Georgia in 2013, 2014, and 2015. These statistics reveal the deep-rooted issues connected to the reentry experiences of African-American men in Georgia who must confront stigma, discrimination, and marginalization as a result of a criminal record.

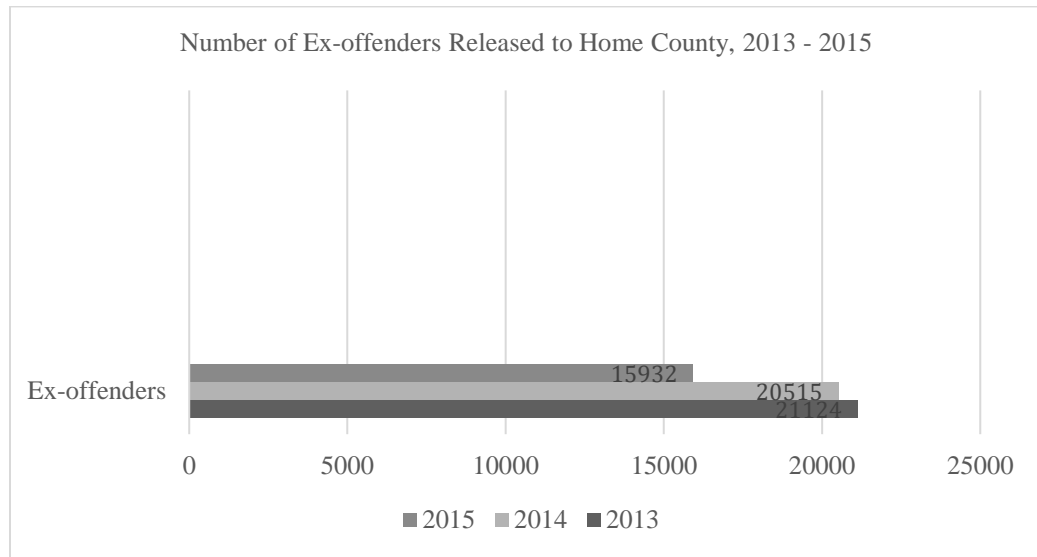


Figure 3. Number of Ex-Offenders Released to Home County, 2013-2015.

Figure 4. compares the population and civilian workforce of employed and unemployed men in Georgia.

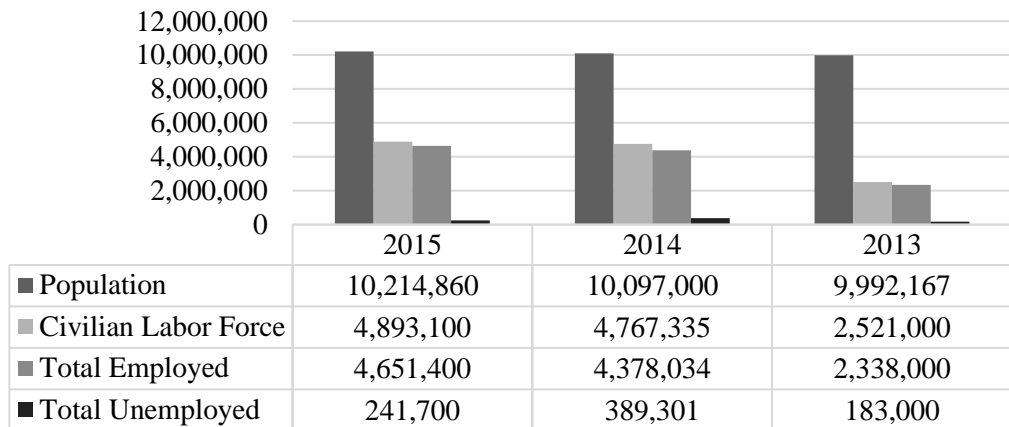


Figure 4. Comparison of Civilian Labor Force and Population in Georgia, 2013-2015.

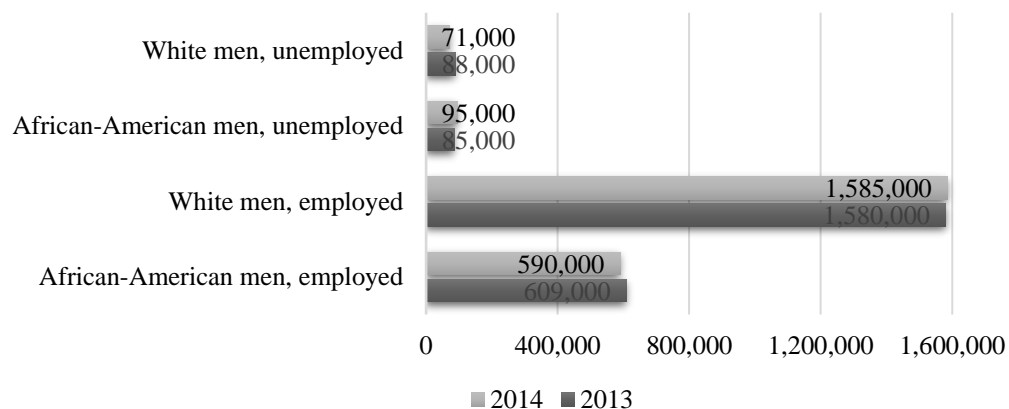


Figure 5. Total Number of Employed and Unemployed by Race, 2013-2014.

Geographic Concentration and Residential Mobility

The success of an ex-offender after incarceration, specifically African-American males, is predicated on the neighborhoods in which they return (Massoglia, Firebaugh & Warner, 2013). There is a high possibility that these men will come back to poor communities that make it difficult to be fruitful and secure employment. Those who do not return to the same neighborhood before incarceration limit their ability to sustain social bonds and job prospects (Harding et al., 2013; Massoglia et al., 2013). Although it was difficult to determine the type of circumstances that will confront these men after incarceration, being classified as a marginalized group opens ex-offenders up to further scrutiny and exclusion from the community which affects the ability to secure a permanent address (Harding et al., 2013).

Despite the limited focus on reentry in urban communities, there has been limited attention on how reentry challenges affect individuals in rural communities (Harding et

al., 2013). Ex-offenders who live in rural areas are confronted with challenges and inadequate services that lead to risk and increased recidivism (Harding et al., 2013; Zajac, Hutchinson, & Meyer, 2014). Employers must establish a fluid reentry process by becoming aware of the challenges such as limited access to employment prospects in rural communities and lack of substantial economies that make it hard for ex-offenders to find work.

Individuals with multiple periods of incarceration live in undesirable neighborhoods compared to a person who has not spent time in prison (Massoglia et al., 2013). Although the residence of the offender lives plays a critical role in their safety and success during reentry, White participants lived in better neighborhoods compared to African-Americans who lived in disadvantaged areas and Hispanics that lived in-between (Massoglia et al., 2013). However, it is not possible to ascertain whether or not ex-offenders live in impoverished regions after incarceration compared to where they lived before incarceration (Massoglia et al., 2013). Certainly, downward mobility decreased for White males compared to African-Americans regarding neighborhood quality based on the disparities in community settings for each group before incarceration (Massoglia et al., 2013). Ex-offenders in rural areas experience barriers such as transportation, availability of jobs, and employer attitudes compared to offenders who return to urban areas (Ethridge, Dunlap, Boston, & Staten, 2014).

There is a likelihood of returning to prison may increase as rural areas are smaller and lack the necessary resources for ex-offenders and the community (Ethridge et al., 2014). Several limitations in rural communities make finding work difficult for offenders

such as the type of employment sector, the size of the organization, and employer perception that impacts work (Ethridge et al., 2014). Although county reentry is an autonomous process, transportation is essential for offenders released on parole in their home county (Zajac et al., 2014).

Two critical issues of interest whether or not parolees in Michigan returned to their old neighborhoods after release and residential stability was explored to discern the relationship between residential mobility and intermediate sanctions the home environment of ex-offenders (Harding et al., 2013). These issues help to determine if the likelihood of an ex-offender returning to their former neighborhood play a role in desistance from crime due to the negative influences that remain such as peers, increased crime or drug use (Harding et al., 2013). Before ex-offenders are released, stable housing must be secured as a condition of parole. At least 1.5 percent lived outside of Michigan compared to almost 41% who returned to old neighborhoods after release from prison (Harding et al., 2013). Almost 56% that lived over two miles and 38% lived five miles from their old neighborhoods (Harding et al., 2013). Nearly 66% of African-Americans and 53% of Whites on parole before and after prison returned to high-poverty neighborhoods compared to 36% of African-Americans and 58% of Whites who moved back to low-poverty areas (Harding et al., 2013).

Ex-offenders on parole experience some form of intermediate sanction as a response from the criminal justice system regarding a parolee's behavior that may violate the conditions of parole. These sanctions are meant to punish them for small crimes or violations that do not send them back to prison but rather serve as a tool to prevent these

behaviors from turning into a serious infraction. Those who experience intermediate sanctions are more likely to return to their former residence. These findings revealed the only time an ex-offender will go back to their old home is when the family moves, the family no longer desires to support the ex-offender due to the number of times they have spent in prison, or returning to the former neighborhood may not benefit the ex-offender (Harding et al., 2013).

Internal and Societal Employment Barriers and Challenges

Discrimination, internal, and societal barriers represent a few of the employment barriers that confront ex-offenders with substance abuse issues (Brown, 2011). Ex-offenders bring certain attitudes and characteristics to the employment process such as feelings of failure, distrust, health problems, lack of education, and learning disabilities that are internal barriers (Visher et al., 2011; Woods, Lanza, Dyson, & Gordon, 2013). The attitudes demonstrated in the workplace toward ex-offenders such as reluctant employers and policies that prohibit asking about convictions are societal barriers (Schulte & Cochling, 2013). Adapting to life after incarceration, culture shock, and the inability to establish relationships confirms that ex-offenders need a broad range of skills and resources to survive and overcome barriers (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011).

The impact of a criminal record is exacerbated for African-American males that experience discrimination while seeking employment who are more likely to have a criminal record than White men (Solomon, 2012). There are additional collateral consequences for ex-offenders with past criminal behaviors (Mayson, 2015; Solomon, 2012). Criminal records contain erroneous information, and numerous individuals,

specifically African-American males, are arrested but never convicted of a crime, yet they are adversely affected by a criminal record than White men (Solomon, 2012). A criminal record creates multiple challenges and employment barriers during reentry; and guidelines must be established to address employment obstacles and how employers may make it possible for ex-offenders find work (Solomon, 2012).

Employment and financial challenges that confront male and female parolees in urban and suburban areas in Denver were explored to advance knowledge regarding the additional financial burdens that prevent parolees from achieving financial security (Pogrebin, West-Smith, Walker, & Unnithan, 2014). The frustration experienced by offenders due to difficulty securing employment, felony convictions and incarceration impeded the job search (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Due to state laws, parole requirements, and the inability to obtain a driver's license, many offenders are barred from obtaining certain jobs (Pogrebin et al., 2014; Warde, 2013). Therefore, offenders fail to disclose their criminal past to prospective employers which violate the conditions of parole and additional periods of incarceration (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Nearly 40% of ex-offenders quickly found work if they lived with family compared to those who did not emphasize that a small part of financial obligations for ex-offenders is paying for shelter (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Most offenders often contacted connections they had before being incarcerated in hopes of finding work; however, not finding work does not offer an opportunity to take care of financial responsibilities and obligations to the courts or family (Pogrebin et al., 2014).

Ex-offenders who exit prison are adversely impacted by limited job opportunities (Bumiller, 2015). Most employers use criminal background checks in employment decisions which influenced how the information is used (Bumiller, 2015). Examining factors to encourage openness to offer work to those with a criminal record in areas with a high population of racial and ethnic minorities and segregation affords employers an opportunity to identify issues that confront ex-offenders including strategies to increase employment opportunities (Bumiller, 2015). In light of the risks associated with hiring employees with criminal records, only 26% consistently performed criminal record checks on prospective employees compared to others who did not conduct a check because they believed no new information would emerge from these checks based on the type of work and pay (Bumiller, 2015). External limitations to decision making were significant such as giving offenders a second chance due to legal obligations, a personal sense of right and wrong or established business practices (Bumiller, 2015). External constraints influence hiring decisions particularly such as periods of incarceration, disability, or family issues that may affect the offender's ability to work.

Many employers have underscored the significance of external constraints on decisions, a critical factor in providing a second chance that is contingent on how an employer identifies good workers with inadequate performance (Bumiller, 2015). The likelihood of an employer considering prior incarceration given labor market conditions, particularly for low paying jobs, is high due to limited prospects for employment (Bumiller, 2015). Despite the ex-offender's history of criminal activity, employers have attempted to shift their mindset to offer job opportunities to ex-offenders to show that

they deserve a second chance. Even though employers aware of employment barriers and challenges for ex-offenders, many understand that addressing these barriers is outside of the control of the ex-offender.

Disabilities. Between 1980 and 2008, the incarceration rates in the U.S. increased from 221 per 100,000 to 780 per 100,000 with minorities being excessively overrepresented (Feist-Price, Lavergne, & Davis, 2014). Nearly five years ago, Whites reflected 72% of the population and 46% of the total number of persons incarcerated compared to 12.6% and 16.3% of African-Americans and Hispanics respectively (Feist-Price et al., 2014). At least 37% of the total number of those imprisoned in 2011 and 2012 were African-Americans, with Hispanics representing 15%, an indication that African-Americans were overrepresented (Feist-Price et al., 2014). Racial minorities account for 50% of incarcerated persons in county and city facilities with African-American men detained nearly six times higher than White men and 2.6 times greater than Hispanic men (Feist-Price et al., 2014). As a result of the war on drugs, poor African-Americans that reside in urban areas became the most incarceration population in the U.S. (Feist-Price et al., 2014).

Nearly 50% of African-Americans have an undetectable learning, intellectual or mental health disability, 56% have mental health issues, 66% in state facilities have mental health problems, and 74% of those in state facilities and 76% in a local facility with mental health concerns meet the criteria for substance abuse (Feist-Price et al., 2014). African-American and Hispanic with disabilities account for 68% and 59% respectively, of those rearrested of new crimes three years after release (Feist-Price et al.,

2014). Unfortunately, these findings suggest incarceration does not deter African-Americans and Hispanics from a life of crime as a large number tend to reoffend (Feist-Price et al., 2014).

Gender neutral barriers. Gender differences related to employment barriers for ex-offenders with disabilities account for nearly 113,000 incarcerated women in state and federal prisons compared to 1,500,000 men (Richardson & Flower, 2014). The types of offenses that lead to incarceration differ for males and females including gender-neutral and gender-specific barriers that prevent both from securing employment (Richardson & Flower, 2014). Both genders experience substance abuse, serious health related problems and similar difficulties during the employment process; however, many barriers are unique to each yet more challenging for males (Richardson & Flower, 2014). Most employers are reluctant to hire offenders who have committed crimes of a sexual nature due to the stigma attached and restrictions related to location (Richardson & Flower, 2014). Female offenders are marginalized and are often confronted with significant barriers that prevent them from securing employment (Richardson & Flower, 2014). Despite opportunities for women offenders in industries that offer job opportunities such as a caregiver, home health care, and cosmetology, being the primary provider for their children makes obtaining employment difficult which deprives them of better opportunities (Richardson & Flower, 2014). Regardless of the neutral and specific barriers for male and female ex-offenders, the same if not similar obstacles confront them during reentry (Richardson & Flower, 2014).

Public, perceived and anticipated stigma. Stigma persists at three levels: structural, social, and self (Moore, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2013). Structural stigma impacts marginalized groups such as offenders as a result of institutional barriers such as laws and policy (Moore et al., 2013). Society's reaction and treatment of offenders is a social or public stigma due to the labels assigned to offenders. An offender will engage in self-stigma based on how they internalize stigma. Moore et al. emphasized society hold a negative view of offenders that impact how offenders see themselves. Further, Moore et al. asserted perceived stigma from the perspective of the offender is associated with a lack of psychological and social functioning.

The stigmatizing attitudes of participants in an urban adult detention center and undergraduate students towards offenders are assessed at two different periods (Moore et al., 2013). Offenders were administered The Inmate Perceptions and Expectations of Stigma measure (IPES) before release and a revised IPES to create the Stigmatizing Attitude Toward Criminal (SATC) measure (Moore et al., 2013). There is a definite link to inmates perceived and anticipated stigma, but no noticeable difference in the perceived or anticipated stigma between African-Americans or Caucasians. Nearly 63% held the opinion that once a criminal always a criminal compared to 68% who believed criminals are bad people (Moore et al., 2013). Offenders perceived a greater level of public stigma, and if they perceived stigma from the public, the outcomes were both positive and negative. However, the offenders anticipated stigma did not estimate post-release employment status or length of employment (Moore et al. 2013).

Perceptions of community members. The attitudes, views, and beliefs of community members in San Bernardino regarding ex-offender employment, neighborhood safety, personal comfort interacting with ex-offenders and reform, revealed several major themes such as work, safety, severity of the crime, criminal lifestyle, social support, and relationship with ex-offenders (Herrera & McGiffen, 2015). Similar to results of a study conducted in 2005 by Visher, Winterfield, and Coggeshall, these findings indicated stable and meaningful employment was paramount to post-release success. Employment may be an indicator of the community's willingness to give ex-offenders a second chance and work within the community as a route to self-sufficiency for ex-offenders (Herrera & McGiffen, 2015).

Perceptions of ex-offenders. Three years after release the reentry experiences of parolees in a major metropolitan area revealed at least 55% of parolees completed parole compared to 20% that returned to prison; however, there is no support for the social control theory (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010). Similarly, Garland et al. (2011) examined the difficulties of former prisoners after incarceration in a small metropolitan area in Springfield, MO. Descriptive data and a retrospective designed allow offenders to share their experiences and changes in reentry experiences over time within the first three months such as events and feelings at different times, the effectiveness of reentry programs and services (Garland et al., 2011). Nearly 33% of offenders felt finding employment within one month of release was challenging compared to 28% who felt finding a job was difficult within the first three months (Garland et al., 2011). Most offenders believed work increased anxiety, unemployment involved more than an

absence of income, and employment provided structure; however, some offenders felt discriminated against during reentry (Garland et al., 2011).

Likewise, Davis et al. (2012) explored the reentry process for probationers and parolees in a Western state to obtain diverse perspectives. Four theories, social learning theory, social control theory, cognitive transformation theory, and life course theory were used to understand the reentry process at three different periods (Bahr et al., 2010). Similar to Bahr et al., Davis et al. used the life course theory and cognitive transformation theory to help increase understanding of the reentry process and abstaining from crime. Qualitative interviews established whether or not formal programs, assistance from probation and parole officers or family and friends helped or hindered them during reentry (Davis et al., 2010). An overall view of the experiences, opinions, thought processes, perceptions of involvement in a crime, and how the offender desisted confirmed and extended the findings based on supplemental data from the interviews (Davis et al., 2010).

Numerous reentry challenges such as education, job training, employment, health services, transitional services, and support from family and friends impact reentry (Visher & Travis, 2011). The experience of each offender is unique to the individual offender during the transition process, which are often characterized by social and economic circumstances (Visher & Travis, 2011). Despite opportunities for an offender to obtain a GED while incarcerated, nearly 48% lack a high school diploma or GED (Visher & Travis, 2011). Almost 94% of offenders leaving prison indicated they needed additional education, 82% required job training, and 80% needed work (Visher & Travis, 2011).

Sixty percent of male ex-offenders reported mentoring and anger management is essential requirements compared to education, employment, health services, and child care for women offenders (Visher & Travis, 2011). These results align with other studies that identified obstacles to successful reentry and support include the attitudes of ex-offenders, needs, and expectations, the role of family and community networks.

Perceptions of hiring managers. The attitudes and factors that impede ex-offenders from obtaining employment after incarceration are explored through the use of a sample of college students acting as employers (Varghese et al., 2010). Those without a criminal record are more likely to receive a job recommendation compared to those with a misdemeanor or felony charge (Varghese et al., 2010). Similar to multiple studies, there is a significant bias in hiring decisions regardless of the race of individuals with a criminal record compared to those without a criminal record; however, race did not affect employability (Varghese et al., 2010). Although a criminal record may impact the decision to hire, employers should consider the qualifications for the position after the initial screening for those with a misdemeanor versus a felony charge but not ignore the felony charge (Varghese et al., 2010).

The attitudes of employers' willingness to hire ex-offenders in the current labor market may help ascertain the extent attitudes were influenced by the concentration of ex-offenders in the surrounding geographic community (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). Reentry challenges attribute to the community, employers, and individual traits of ex-offenders with over 90% of ex-offenders have employment gaps and limited social skills (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). There is inconsistency in the type of offense that influence

hiring decisions in earlier studies that revealed 69% of potential employers are willing to hire ex-offenders (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). At least 50% of employers in Baltimore, MD expressed a desire to hire but were not sure if ex-offenders had people skills (Atkins & Armstrong, 2012). Similarly, in a study of employment practices and attitudes of 350 employers toward ex-offenders of different races, nearly 60% expressed they were willing to hire (Atkins & Armstrong).

Contextual factors and biases affected hiring practices not revealed in other studies and showed varying degrees of reluctance to hire offenders still exist (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). However, these factors neglected to consider the role of the ex-offender's geographic location to the location of ex-offenders in the surrounding area or assess employer attitude (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). As a result, the focus has shifted to considering the contextual factors that impact hiring decisions such as conviction offense, the race of offender, and prior experience hiring ex-offenders (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013).

The attitudes of employers toward hiring ex-offenders in high and low concentration areas in Texas revealed at least 54% of organizations were willing to hire an ex-offender compared to 14% who would not (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). This conflict with early studies that reported 12% would hire an ex-offender compared to 42% who would not (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013). Despite findings that revealed an unwillingness to hire ex-offenders was universal, the limited disparity between employer attitudes in high or low concentration areas, securing employment when returning to high concentrated areas was small due to a criminal record (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013).

An employer may violate Title VII as it relates to employment discrimination based on how criminal data are used (Smith & Duffy, 2013). If criminal record information is used to deter theft, fraud, workplace violence and negligent hiring, employment decisions will not violate Title VII unless a decision is made based on protected characteristics (Smith & Duffy, 2013). Disparate impact and disparate treatment determine liability under Title VII. The application of disparate treatment in a criminal record check is a factor when the individual can show they were treated differently based on protected characteristics under Title VII. The disparate impact theory related to the criminal record is a factor when employer policy and practices are not job-related or a business necessity. It is not adequate to dispute claims of disparate impact even if the employer can demonstrate a racially balanced workforce (Smith & Duffy, 2013).

Organizations must become cognizant of arrests that do not establish criminal conduct or result in a conviction. If employers eliminate individuals with a criminal record based on arrest information despite the reason for the situation that led to the arrest, it is not job-related or a business necessity (Smith & Duffy, 2013). Employers are encouraged in some states to delay asking about past convictions to focus more on job qualifications. The tests of job-relatedness and business necessity may be achieved if employers can demonstrate these criteria to avoid liability under Title VII (Smith & Duffy, 2013). The employer must explain how the policy is connected to criminal conduct to determine risks and duties of the job by using the three *Green* factors: the nature and gravity of the criminal conduct, time since the last criminal conduct, and

nature of the job as outlined by the EEOC. However, it may be hard for an employer to demonstrate how and how not to use the criminal record to avoid liability (Smith & Duffy, 2013).

The impact of race and offender status on hiring decisions of small business hiring managers in Grand Rapids, MI did not find any clear preference for applicants of a particular race or criminal background (Teshima, 2014). Despite these findings, Blacks are least likely not to be considered for employment offers by an employer compared to Whites who are more apt not to be considered for employment (Teshima, 2014). Most employers revealed an offender may or may not be considered for employment; however, Blacks have a high chance to be interviewed for entry level positions compared to Whites and Hispanics (Teshima, 2014). Offender status does not always disqualify someone with a criminal record although interviewing those with criminal records is impacted by the degree hiring practices affect the employer's perception of employability and the preference for not having a felony or misdemeanor (Teshima, 2014). While employer attitude did not influence hiring practices, not having a felony conviction is a key trait for potential employees compared to having a misdemeanor (Teshima, 2014).

Components of Employability

Many factors may determine employability that the individual has control over or those beyond their control such personal and job market characteristics (Soeker, Carriem, Hendricks, Joynt, & Naidoo, 2013). An ex-offender must be able to conduct a scan of the internal and external environments to discern if they are employable (Soeker et al., 2013). An ex-offender must be able to learn how to search for information related to job market

trends, requirements for jobs, and use this information to prepare for employment after incarceration (Audet, 2012; Soeker et al., 2013).

The factors that link the perceived job readiness of former offenders in employment courses are explored (Audet, 2012). Factors that influenced perceived job readiness include age, age at the time of the first incarceration, total time spent incarcerated, job training, and time employed during the last ten years (Audet, 2012). A factor analysis was used to determine the connection between knowledge, skills, goals, and confidence which revealed as little as 14% completed some form of job training while incarcerated compared to 10% who completed training after incarceration (Audet, 2012). Close to 60% reported they did not receive training and slightly over 2% received job training before and after incarceration. Only 7 out of the 42 participants indicated a need for job training or job readiness programs (Audet, 2012). These findings show that individuals who spent time in prison during their youth were not as assertive when seeking employment (Audet, 2012).

To evaluate whether or not the type of offense and work qualifications impacted the perceived employability related to offense type were tested (Cerda, Stenstrom, & Matthew, 2015). Offenders classified as violent received remarkably little employability ratings while higher work requirements reflected higher employability ratings (Cerda et al., 2015). Although the presence of two positive traits did not increase a violent past did not help demonstrate the presence of higher work qualifications for employment. There is a correlation between higher job qualifications, core competencies, thinking skills, and

personal qualities; however, the type of work requirements did not impact the perceived dangerousness of the offenders (Cerda et al., 2015).

Impact of the Criminal Record on Employability

There are challenges associated with the impact on labor market outcomes before and after incarceration. A study by Schmitt and Warner (2010) focused on ex-offenders and the labor market related to the effects of incarceration and felony conviction on subsequent employment found more than 90% had affected the impact on jobs yet surpassed this number. Past researchers attempted to segregate the labor market effects of prison time and felony convictions through surveys, audits, aggregate data and administrative data that tracked ex-offenders before and after incarceration as well as examined employer attitudes towards ex-offenders (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). Although ex-felons accounted for a high percentage of the working-age population, African-American men and men without a high school diploma reflected a considerable number of ex-offenders (Schmitt & Warner, 2010). The employment rate for ex-offenders revealed 0.9 percent compared to the male employment rates of 1.7 percent (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).

A reassessment of the 1985 Employment Services for Ex-offenders (ESEO) program on recidivism in San Diego, Chicago, and Boston regarding the impact of reemployment programs revealed ex-offenders who obtained work recidivate less often than unemployed ex-offenders with a higher rate of relapse (Bierens & Carvalho, 2011). Similarly, to determine experience on employment, wages, and recidivism job sectors in Indiana during a major recession, the employment rates of employed offenders released

before, during and after the recession and wages revealed a noticeable increase in unemployment rates of 48%, 55.8%, 61.3% and 69.7% respectively, between 2006 and 2009 (Nally, Lockwood, & Ho, 2011). The average unemployment rate pre-recession was 51.9% compared to 65.5% during the recession. Although the temporary services industry was steady before and after the 2006 to 2009 recession period, employment rates fluctuated from 26.8%, 24.8%, 25.3% and, 22.8% respectively (Nally et al., 2011). While work in the lodging and food services industries increased in 2006 from 12.7% to 21.4%, manufacturing and construction jobs declined 20.6% to 13.5% and 13.8% to 9%, respectively, the employment rates declined for offenders released between 2006 and 2009 from 40.9% to 25.1% (Nally et al., 2011). Employment programs can reduce recidivism if they take the heterogeneity of the ex-offender population into account (Bierens & Carvalho, 2011). In light of the recession, employment barriers confront ex-offenders thus the importance of vocational skills training and specialized skills to compete for jobs.

The 2007 recession impacted the incarceration of African-Americans regarding the relationship between work, crime, and incarceration (Cox, 2010). The behavior of African-Americans is parallel to the rational choice model of crime (Cox, 2010). Incarceration impacts workplace results through three methods: stigma, acquiring human capital and obtaining social capital (Cox, 2010). An ex-offender's ability to find work may prompt them to alter their lifestyle of crime and help restore trust to make amends for the stigma caused by their actions (Cox, 2010). A change in lifestyle may be an

indication that unemployment and reduced employment opportunities, significantly leads to criminal involvement (Cox, 2010).

The economic recession from December 2007 to December 2008 focused on racial disparities and similarities and the impact of an ex-offender level of education in post-release recidivism and employment (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knuston, 2015). A sample of nearly 6,392 ex-prisoners (2,531 White and 3,863 African-American) released in 2005 from five metropolitan counties in Indiana revealed there was no correlation between the race of offender and post-release recidivism (Lockwood et al., 2015). Age, education level, and post-release employment are significant indicators of recidivism and regardless of race the likelihood of returning to prison based on age and education after release were high. The recidivism rate for the African-American ex-offenders is 51% compared to 45% for White offenders. The unemployment rates for African-American ex-offenders after incarceration compared to White ex-offenders were higher yet unemployment clearly linked to 69% of African-American ex-offenders under 30 (Lockwood et al., 2015).

Inequality and exclusion from jobs in the labor market have continuously plagued African-American men (Mong & Roscigno, 2010). Research on labor market consequences of conviction and incarceration convey applicable findings and emphasize methodological challenges in segregating causal effects of conviction and incarceration on the prospects for employment. Enhanced details of Pager's field experiment showed the study offered a firmer basis for causal inference (Burkhardt, 2009). From Burkhardt's (2009) perspective the audit study by Pager exemplified the best assessment of what is, in

reality, an impossible counterfactual. The criminal record was indirectly shown to potential employers when applicants with a criminal record reported previous work experience in prison and listed a parole officer as a reference (Burkhardt, 2009). The criminal record was the only variable not controlled for in the study which suggested Pager isolated the stigma of a criminal record, and the fictional levels of human and social capital were held constant across all job applicants (Burkhardt, 2009).

The career-related experiences of nonviolent felony offenders ages 21 to 46 revealed career choices, positive social networks, ability to identify stress, challenges, and motivators, and understanding the role of spirituality is necessary (Shivy et al., 2007). State correctional facilities endorse the condition on services and programs for offenders, yet most programs focus on vocational skills training, not traditional career develop (Shivy et al., 2007). The potential for ex-offenders to explore a real career path was limited and often lead to them to positions that do not match their skill set. These findings are similar to multiple studies that noted the importance of education, training, and programming during all phases of incarceration to allow ex-offenders to cultivate positive social networks to help facilitate successful reentry (Shivy et al., 2007).

Tripodi et al. (2010) examined the association between employment and recidivism for parolees released from a Texas prison to ascertain whether or not there was a connection between work and increased time to re-incarceration. The Cox regression model differentiated the relationship between work and re-incarceration compared to a Cox proportional hazard model that distinguished the relationship between employment and time to re-incarceration. The findings revealed nearly 24% had been incarcerated

compared to 76% were not incarcerated. Although the ability to secure a job after incarceration did not decrease the chance of reincarceration over time; it could not be determined if the ex-offender was able to remain employed or if those who were not employed were successful in finding work (Tripodi et al., 2010).

The stigma linked to a criminal conviction, limited training and experience, and non-existent social networks suggest that ex-offenders have undesirable views related to work that often affects wage increases for minority offenders compared to those without a history (Evans 2014). The reluctance to hire African-American male ex-offenders based on their criminal record plays a role in the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of employers (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2015). Industries such as transportation, manufacturing, and construction reflect reasons for employer reluctance that underscores the impact of the employability of African-American males may apply to local government as well. The employment issues for ex-offenders are well-documented revealing these men are confronted with inequality in the job search due to lack of skills and education which are unattractive traits to potential employers (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Successful reentry may help ex-offenders establish social ties and standards of good conduct while the ineffectiveness of existing programs and community partnerships will ensure ex-offenders received the resources needed (Visher & Travis, 2011). A successful transition is vital to the overall health and well-being of offenders despite factors that may impact the transition period (Woodall, Dixey, & South, 2013).

In the old paradigm leaders focused on discrepancies and failures, however establishing a new paradigm may lessen the effects of stigma associated with a criminal

record. Providing ex-offenders with opportunities to participate in organized programs such as work release or an apprenticeship may be a leverage point that enables local government agencies to facilitate and smooth the progress of positive social change (Meadows, 2008). The ability of ex-offenders to overcome the status of stigma is difficult due to the power of the stigmatizer, the federal, state, and local government (Jefferson-Jones, 2014). For this reason, if the stigma is assigned at these levels then the federal, state, and local government must also participate in the process of removing the stigma.

Permissive Discrimination

Criminal records impact employment, housing, and civic duties for ex-offenders with the most critical condition of probation as stable housing and employment; however, when ex-offenders cannot find work recidivism rates increase (Caselman, 2014). In the state of Georgia, numerous employment barriers confront ex-offenders than any other State which sets them up for failure. Georgia ranks 48 out of 51 for roadblocks and second in severe collateral consequences compared to all states; however, Georgia does not require assistance with collateral consequences (Caselman, 2014). Since convictions are not sealed in the state of Georgia, employers may ask about any charges that did not lead to a conviction. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated includes 99 code sections and regulations that prohibit convicted felons from obtaining a job although most are permissive and may revoke or deny permits, licenses, and certificates (Caselman, 2014). The first offender law is necessary for Georgia as it addresses collateral consequences that signal a criminal record cannot be used to disqualify individuals from employment in the public or private sectors.

Civil and Collateral Consequences

The phenomenon of civil consequences of a conviction depicts an overlap of civil and criminal law that creates difficult questions about how the theory following this overlap translates into practical application (Shanahan, 2012). An essential feature of the reentry crisis is civil consequences imposed by state and federal legislation for those convicted of a crime such as sanctions and discretionary penalties that result from a conviction and the underlying conduct (Shanahan, 2012). Civil consequences may prevent successful reentry or deny access to employment, identification, relationships with children and social services (Burton et al., 2014; Shanahan, 2012). There are three reform efforts related to collecting and disseminating information regarding civil consequences, developing mechanisms that offer relief from consequences, and integrating these consequences into the sentencing process (Shanahan, 2012). Criminal defendants and the public must be educated on civil consequences, processes must be created to help restore the rights of offenders that free them from administrative or automatic civil consequences, and courts must inform offenders of the consequences they may confront them or allow them to choose among consequences at sentencing (Shanahan, 2012).

There is widespread use of criminal background checks by employers, landlords, and others in Tennessee, which make a conviction of a crime, specifically a felony, just as stigmatizing as branding (Wyatt, 2010). A conviction may have a tremendous impact on ex-offenders such as ineligibility to vote, serving on a jury, civil rights, or pursuing certain occupations (Wyatt, 2010). These convictions are not subject to destruction,

cannot be erased even with the governor's pardon from a public record, or banned convicted felons from employment in many occupations (Wyatt, 2010). Any criminal conviction or arrest could provide justification when selecting applicants without a criminal conviction or arrest; however, those convicted of a crime were not recognized as a protected class and employers can discriminate against them (Wyatt, 2010). Although a criminal record determines how the individual is categorized sentencing and eligibility for early release is determined by prior convictions (Wyatt, 2010). Those convicted of a felony have the burden of establishing if they are fit for probation, and prior criminal conviction may impact sentencing in federal court.

Lessons from New York's 50-year history of Certification of Rehabilitation may be used to describe an idea administrative method for removing legal barriers to reentry (Radice, 2011). The strengths of the Certificate of Rehabilitation, a certificate of relief from disabilities and good conduct certificate may offer assistance to ex-offenders. Certificates have identical legal power, are enforceable and create a belief of rehabilitation that employers or licensing agencies must consider when evaluating criminal records (Radice, 2011; Schriro, 2012). Eligibility requirement differentiates the certificates but recognizes the seriousness of criminal convictions where a stipulation requires the individual to apply for separate certificates of relief for each sentence to remove collateral consequences (Radice, 2011; Schriro, 2012). Despite a 1 1/2 year waiting period to receive a certificate of good conduct or certificate of relief, ex-offenders may seek assistance before or after sentencing to remove the stigma of a criminal record (Radice, 2011).

The expungement process is evaluated to discern how individuals with a criminal record respond and engage in discussions related criminal record data and how it influences long-term social consequences (Myrick, 2013). Four central themes, dispersion, classification, conflation, and multiplication illustrated how persons with a criminal record perceived themselves based on data in the report (Myrick, 2013). Dispersion is a method in which a state retains various versions of the criminal background of an ex-offender whereas categorization describes how the individual perceived themselves based on the criminal record (Myrick, 2013). Conflation depicts how an individual view themselves through the lens of the criminal record whereas multiplication characterizes how the individuals understand themselves from the perspective of their criminal record (Myrick, 2013). These themes depict the responses of individuals regarding the information in their criminal records in any given format.

A primary source of information for criminal records is the database, not the person's rap sheet that leads to disparities in information. An individual must receive access to incomplete information to dispute discrepancies in the information. Many people became flustered when told how to proceed with requesting information on their criminal activities but are not confident information stored in multiple databases offer an accurate reflection of their criminal history (Myrick, 2013). Most criminal record data reveal charges for crimes that did not match the original charge at the time of arrest or accused them of a crime committed by someone else. The criminal record may preclude the system from registering ex-offenders as full, morally aware persons and suppress

state agents with restricted views that deprive individuals of shared reciprocity (Myrick, 2013).

Although a variety of reasons and consequences lead to perpetual criminal debt, fines, fees, and restitution payments imposed by the legal system are designed to deter ex-offenders from committing more crimes, yet offenders lack the resources to pay off debt (Evans, 2014). Sentence completion, restitution, and restoration of rights are important to ex-offenders (Hoskins, 2014). Restitution helps the ex-offender make amends, take responsibility and reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Evans, 2014). Federal and state policies restrict ex-offenders from employment, housing, and public assistance the same way laws permit, require, or facilitate a restriction for an ex-offender (Hoskins, 2014; Jefferson-Jones, 2014). Stigma is a collateral consequence of a conviction yet parallel to the damaging impact of an offender's ability to obtain the necessary daily needs to reenter society successfully (Burton et al., 2014; Jefferson-Jones, 2014). Several states have evaluated collateral consequences or challenged recently enacted reforms. Many states have pursued one or a combination of seven broad approaches such as expanding expungement, sealing remedies or building relief into the criminal justice process (Subramania, Moreno, & Gebreselassie, 2014). The state of Georgia offers all of these except offense downgrades.

Many restrictions are permanent while others are temporary which allows ex-offenders to apply for removal of a restriction but do not provide equal treatment to ex-offenders. The U.S. has limited discretion to prioritize offender debt payments; Georgia is one state that prioritizes legal fines (Hoskins, 2014). To reclaim their status before

committing a crime, the ex-offender must be made aware of the requirements needed to make amends for crimes and pay their debt to society (Hoskins, 2014). The Supreme Court ruled in *Bearden v. Georgia* (1983) failure to pay criminal debt is not grounds for incarceration if an individual lives in poverty, and deliberate nonpayment may result in prison time (Evans, 2014). Employment barriers and the quality of jobs available are genuine concerns for ex-offenders who must deal with the stigma of incarceration that lessens their opportunities to become employed (Evans, 2014).

Those with felony convictions face substantial consequences from loss of voting rights to finding employment regardless of time spent in prison (Mohan & Lower-Basch, 2014). When the ex-offender pays their debt to society only then are they able to apply for primary safety net benefits to assist them during the reentry process that reduces recidivism (Mohan & Lower-Basch, 2014). The ability to secure employment, training and support services may decrease the number of barriers during reentry and increase job opportunities for ex-offenders. When ex-offenders are banned, the reentry process becomes complicated due to inadequate financial support for their families and limited access to other services that may lead to employment (Mohan & Lower-Basch, 2014).

The legitimacy of collateral consequences of convictions that ex-offenders experience during reentry into the community was challenged (Jones, 2015). Federal policies established in the 1970s and 1980s have a disparate impact on African-American men and communities of color (Jones, 2015). The majority of individuals that have been incarcerated experience the enduring effects of collateral consequences to include loss of rights, parental rights, benefits, and employment (Jones, 2015). Collateral consequences

are the result of a conviction whereas direct consequences consist of time spent incarcerated, fines, restitution, or probation. Most collateral consequences originate from Greece, the Roman Republic, and Medieval England in regards to civil death (Jones, 2015). Though it is not clear why old customs were still used when the current system has been updated to exclude individuals with a criminal record, specifically and purposely communities of color, and if older traditions encourage economic and civic contributions. However, there is a direct correlation between successful reentry after incarceration and steady employment, the ability of an ex-offender to secure employment or even vote contributes to their success during reentry (Jones, 2015).

Georgia Reentry Philosophy

Rehabilitation efforts in Georgia during the 1970s did not have a significant influence on recidivism (Sabree, 2007). Presentence, offender assessment, and evidenced-based interventions are features of Georgia's reentry philosophy that help to ensure offenders have a successful reentry (Sabree, 2007). Despite significant strides made in the 80s and 90s toward funding and support for correctional treatment programs, politicians had to substantiate reduced support for rehabilitation as an effective correctional strategy and platform that created new laws and policies that drive the current philosophy (Sabree, 2007). The reentry programs were designed to increase public safety, flatten the growth of the prison population, implement programs in support of rehabilitation, and leverage cost-effective information technology. Reentry initiatives in Georgia include goals to assist ex-offenders towards a path of becoming productive

members of the community, address their needs, and identify community resources for successful reentry (Sabree, 2007).

Current state and federal programs, non-profits, and the effect of a criminal record on Georgians may offer best practices (Dutcher, 2010). Barriers and collateral consequences for ex-offenders with or without a conviction were identified regarding particular groups based on the type of conviction and the other on the severity of the crime (Dutcher, 2010). Legislation such as the Civil Rights Act, EEOC guidance, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, First Offender Act, and Second Chance Act protects the ex-offender from discrimination. Although program effectiveness was not evaluated, these programs offer comparable services to ex-offenders.

Reentry Initiatives, Legislation, and Programs

Program participants in danger of returning to prison earlier than offenders who were not enrolled in a formal reentry program are evaluated (Severson, Brus, Veeh, & Lee, 2011). Evaluating current reentry programs for effectiveness is essential. The Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) is a program designed for adults and juvenile offenders to reduce recidivism and promote public safety. SVORI allows agencies to create programs to enhance criminal justice, employment, education, health, and housing outcomes of released prisoners with before and after release services focused on the types of individuals served (Lattimore, Steffey, & Visher, 2010). The program focuses on isolated community pre-release and post-release based on the needs of the person and potential risk factors for individuals receiving services (Lattimore et al.,

2010). The evaluation identified offender needs as obtaining a driver's license, employment, education and skill-based services (Lattimore et al., 2010). Although SVORI was used in prisons where individuals return to various communities that increase the burden of implementation, criminal justice involvement does not affect prisoner reentry. Collaborative efforts between correctional agencies, supervision agencies, state and local agencies and community and faith-based organizations did not occur; thus, SVORI failed to provide prisoners with similar services and only provided a subgroup of services based on individual needs (Lattimore et al. 2010).

Georgia received four federal grants from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to include the Smart Supervision Grant, State Recidivism Reduction Grant, Justice Information Sharing Solutions Grants, and Justice Reinvestment: Maximizing State Reforms Grant to help implement the Georgia Prisoner Reentry Initiative (Schulte, 2014). This initiative was created in partnership with the Center for Justice Innovation to implement five pilot sites in Georgia. Schulte (2014) asserted that success is contingent on stakeholder collaboration with the community, church and other institutions that have a vested interest in reentry reform. Therefore, the state of Georgia has a great responsibility to ensure that implementation of this initiative is successful for prison reform in Georgia (Schulte, 2014).

Reentry Needs of Ex-Offenders

Men with stable social ties have prolonged times to recidivism, but there is an adverse impact on post-release employment and recidivism (Berg & Huebner, 2011). There is a lower chance to be unsuccessful on parole for men who secured jobs after

release than unemployed men; however, employment after release is minor for men who were unemployed regularly before incarceration (Berg & Huebner, 2011). However, family relationships have a positive influence on work whereas familial ties did not significantly affect employment status (Berg & Huebner, 2011).

Social distance between offenders and state and federal community officers provides an opportunity to determine if adequate support for ex-offenders is provided during reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). Social distance, described as the level of trust between groups includes education, income, lifestyle, and personal traits (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). Barriers to successful reentry for ex-offenders include necessities such as transportation, housing, life skills, education, and assistance with finding work (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). Although the education attainment of officers showed a greater propensity for displaying empathy and support for rehabilitation of ex-offenders, more seasoned officers are advocates for rehabilitation (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010).

The disparity in the officer's upbringing and education attainment from the offender's perspective did not reveal any common bond that would garner support towards having their needs met (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). However, nearly 60% of officers felt social distance did not inhibit the reentry process for the offender alleging offenders use social distance as an excuse compared to 18% who felt social distance was an issue (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). Most officers believed regardless of their upbringing offenders have a choice to continue to engage in criminal activity or refrain from criminal activity; despite this, the attitude of the officer, support treatment, and rehabilitation or social distance influences reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010). At least

70% of the officers felt neighborhoods plagued with crime impacted reentry; 70% reported the offender did not have family support; 88% perceived friends of offenders as criminals; and 90% reported unemployment as a barrier to reentry (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010).

Most research on ex-offenders failed to focus on barriers and support for work or hiring perspectives of potential employers that are essential to reentry of ex-offenders (Brown, 2011). The vocational training ex-offenders receive on traditional career development and planning activities results in limited resources related to career interests and abilities (Brown, 2011). Supply and demand barriers such as characteristics and attitude of the ex-offender, employer attitude, lack of job-related skills, limited job experience, lack of network, and lack of education may block employment (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011; Soeker et al., 2013; Weiman, 2007). Discrimination and the stigma associated with incarceration have an adverse impact on employability and employment challenges are exacerbated by layoffs, downsizing, and unemployment (Brown, 2011). The life course theory views employment as essential in describing desistance from crime and transitions to work during the life course symbolizes a key turning point for ex-offenders. Thus, the ability to secure employment may facilitate changes in behavior.

Reentry Experiences of Ex-Offenders

Employment experiences of former prisoners during the first eight months after release focused on personal and situational factors that facilitate or block work (Visher et al., 2011). Supplemental data from a longitudinal study on prisoners returning to Chicago, Cleveland, and Houston, 30-day employment data before release, and work

experiences six months before to incarceration revealed 68% of offenders worked six months before incarceration with previous employment of two years (Visher et al., 2011). Nearly 53% of offenders had held a job while incarcerated; one in five improved their education or received vocational training; 24% arranged employment before release, and 17% contacted former employers. Although the primary goal is to obtain work, nearly 79% searched for work after incarceration compared to 70% who felt their criminal record affected their job search, and 65% worked at some point after they were released (Visher et al. 2011).

The Before and After Exoneration Questionnaire (BAEQ) explored how wrongfully convicted exonerees handled life after exoneration which revealed nearly 40% reported anxiety; 40% had difficulty sleeping; 33% experienced anxiety related to traumatic events; and 38% lost interest in leisure activities (Wildeman et al., 2011). Nearly 22% suffered from PTSD compared to 22% that suffered from anxiety, depression, PTSD, or a combination of all and felt that employment could lessen the effects of these disorders (Wildeman et al., 2011). These findings reveal exonerees lack relevant work skills and significant gaps in employment. As a result, when exonerees explain the lack of specific competencies or employment gaps to a prospective employer, organizations are not as willing to offer work. Post-release experiences for exonerees are not the same as those who commit a crime and serve time. This study confirmed the ability to secure employment is a critical factor that may eliminate the stigma linked to incarceration as well as create a socially acceptable identity that gives meaning to their lives (Wildeman et al., 2011).

Legal histories and post-exoneration offending data of background checks help to assess the post-release offending behavior and potential risk of wrongfully convicted individuals released between 1999 and 2009 in Illinois, Florida, New York, and Texas (Mandery, Shlosberg, West, & Callaghan, 2013). At least 57% were convicted of at least one crime before being wrongfully convicted compared to 42% with no previous record (Mandery et al., 2013). Nearly 38% were convicted of at least one crime after they were released compared to 62% who did not offend post-exoneration (Mandery et al., 2013). Exonerees may receive approved compensation from tort claims, private bills, or compensation statutes, sue the federal government under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, or the state governments through common law tort claims for malicious prosecution and false incarceration (Mandery et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for exonerees to show a violation of a constitutional right as a major barrier given that a wrongful conviction usually results from inaccurate information; however, if the government has made a mistake or neglected to exercise due care compensation is not awarded (Mandery et al., 2013). Nonetheless, there are restrictions to seeking compensation since only 27 states and the District of Columbia offer compensation. Some states do not award compensation for a guilty plea which means an exoneree may pursue compensation if an official pardon is received; however, only 41% of those wrongfully convicted ever receive any compensation (Mandery et al., 2013).

An examination of perceived and actual difficulties experienced by successful male and female offenders during reentry in Wisconsin revealed education, stable work, housing, and transportation are key barriers that confront ex-offenders as they return to

their communities (Denny et al., 2014). These results align with studies conducted by Gunnison and Helfgott (2011) and Caselman (2014) but also reveal there are no significant problems that exist to prevent ex-offenders from receiving essential resources (Denny et al., 2014). Social support systems are weak before and after incarceration; therefore, offenders struggle to adjust in their respective community due to the lack of structure while incarcerated (Denny et al., 2014). This study demonstrated that although parole requirements emphasize obtaining employment, housing, and transportation, the needs of ex-offenders are not being met to help them survive and abstain from crime (Denney et al., 2014).

Nearly 95% of offenders released lack the necessary skills to engage with the community despite rehabilitation efforts that focus on work skills, education, intellectual skills, and guidance (Settles, 2009). Little effort has been made to prepare inmates for the transition that has resulted in communities attracting an unskilled population to engage fully in the obligation and advantages of public life (Settles, 2009). Releasing offenders back into the community must be evaluated to improve the community's ability to build social capital. The reentry process may provide the foundation for restorative justice principles; therefore, combining these principles with improving social capital reentry issues may be addressed (Settles, 2009). Those in charge of creating policy may be obligated to review restorative justice to handle a disadvantaged offender population (Settles, 2009). The guiding principles of restorative reentry are the notion that truth itself entails restoring those impacted the most by crimes and allow them to participate in the process that compels justice agencies to reevaluate their role in the reentry process

(Settles, 2009). Primary stakeholders must recognize that crime negatively impacts the community which means they must facilitate the reentry process to garner community involvement to prevent public and economic marginalization, employment barriers and to ensure ex-offenders can reintegrate.

New EEOC Guidance

The EEOC presented updated guidance concerning the use of the criminal record in employment decisions; however, employers felt the guidelines presented a catch-22 in regards to liability related to risk and negligent hiring and not conducting a background check (Bible, 2013; Loafman & Little, 2014). A variety of legal issues exists for employers who refuse to perform a background check such a negligent hiring and resume fraud. In *Connes v. Molalla Transport System, Inc.* the employer failed to conduct a background check of a driver with a record in multiple states yet the court did not hold Molalla liable for negligent hiring (Bible, 2013). In *Carlsen v. Wackenhut Corp.*, a security guard attempted to rape a patron, and the company was held responsible for negligent hiring because they failed to verify contradictory information contained in the background check (Bible, 2013). In *Blair v. Defender Services, Inc.*, a student was attacked by a Defender employee, despite a background check not being conducted as required in the contract. Despite a protective order being issued before the assault, the judge indicated the employer was not obligated to conduct a background check if the applicant stated they had no criminal record (Bible, 2013).

The new guidance is a result of the advances in technology that provide more access to criminal record data (Bible, 2013). The guidance does not change the EEOC

views as it relates to excluding applicants due to a criminal record. The guidance does offer a comprehensive view of disparate impact and disparate treatment and how to evaluate job-relatedness and business necessity. The guidance delineates between federal, state and local laws that prevent employing individuals with a criminal record (Bible, 2013). Employers receive information regarding disparities between arrests, conviction and incarceration rates for African-American, Hispanics and Whites. Also, best practices were provided for companies concerning the use of criminal records in employment decisions as well as general direction, policy development, questions related to the criminal record and confidentiality (Bible, 2013).

The EEOC has long acknowledged the complications associated with criminal records (Pettinato, 2014). Nearly ten years after the final appeal of *Green*, the EEOC publicized the first formal policy to adopt an analysis of *Green*. As a result of statements made in *Green*, barring individuals with a criminal record from employment is unlawful under Title VII (Nichols, 2014). Convictions may be reviewed by an employer using the *Green* factors if deemed a business necessity. A third guideline released by the EEOC in 1990 indicated an arrest is not reliable proof that an individual committed a crime. Employers must apply *Green* factors to determine if arrests records reflect the conduct of an individual (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).

In July 2001, the EEOC identified arrest and convictions records as barriers to employment and as a facially neutral employment criterion. Employers are encouraged to use the *Green* factors to assess the seriousness of the crime, how long ago the crime occurred, and relevance of the crime to the job (Pettinato, 2014). New guidance was

issued based on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals which upheld an employer's application of a policy against hiring individuals with violent criminal convictions (Nichols, 2014). The EEOC maintained criminal records policies violate Title VII if they have a disparate impact on protected classes, are not job-related, and are consistent with business necessity (Pettinato, 2014). New guidelines were established by the EEOC in April 2012 with clear benchmarks to determine the relevance of criminal records in employment decisions without violating Title VII (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). Although these guidelines focus on facially neutral recruitment and hiring strategies they are meant to reduce discriminatory effects of criminal background check policies on the employment opportunities for Blacks and Hispanics (Valdez, 2015).

Two fundamental theories of discrimination under Title VII are disparate treatment, which assumes intentional discrimination, and disparate impact that assumes there is no intent to discriminate against the individual (Pettinato, 2014). Employers with broad policies must recognize that Title VII takes precedent over state law particularly if the length of time passed, nature of the crime or performance is not a factor (Pettinato, 2014). Significant cases such as *Griggs vs. Duke Power Co.*, *Dothard v. Rawlinson*, and *New York City Transit Authority v. Beazer* focused on intentional discrimination, business necessity, and policy against hiring drug users (Loafman & Little, 2014; Timmons, 2014). Under the new guidance, policies were influenced by decisions in cases such as *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*, *Gregory v. Litton Systems, Inc.*, *Green v. Missouri Pacific Railroad Company*, and *El v. Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority* (Doty, 2013; Nichols, 2014). Several cases

appeared to violate Title VII, yet it is unclear how these cases would apply to an employer's criminal conviction record policy (Timmons, 2014). Although Title VII does not focus on criminal records, the *Green v. Missouri Pacific Railroad Co.* and *El v. Southeastern* cases may be used as a guide.

The courts should not favor the EEOC guidelines since the disparate impact theory of discrimination, defense of business necessity, and employer survey on criminal background checks may illuminate the theory of negligent hiring (Valdez, 2015). Organizations that eliminate applicants based on background policies must meet the criteria for business necessity by considering the *Green* factors as well as use the individualized assessment to allow applicants to provide details related to their criminal record (Valdez, 2015). There are three serious concerns related to the new guidelines. First, an individualized assessment may place an unreasonable burden on employers. Second, an employer may be penalized regardless of a completed evaluation. Third, the results of the assessment may reduce an employer's use of criminal background checks and produce unfavorable hiring decisions for minority applicants. Although an individualized assessment may increase employer liability for negligent hiring, only a small number of minorities would be able to obtain employment if hiring decisions were made based on the background check (Valdez, 2015). The inconsistency in determining negligent hiring liability is deciding the scope of an employer's duty to investigate applicants (Valdez, 2015).

The courts lack consistency in how employer's knowledge of the applicant's criminal past would impact negligent hiring liability (Pettinato, 2014). As a result,

organizations remain unclear on how to apply the new guidelines in employment decisions and must devote additional time to evaluate the qualifications and skills of those with criminal records thoroughly when making the decision to hire. With no specific recommended reform to focus on criminal records, ex-offenders, and disparate impact, it was recommended that the EEOC create new guidance that binds or provides additional details on the guidance (Nichols, 2014). Due to inconsistent enforcement of criminal justice, the issue of disparate impact is straightforward regarding hiring policies that exclude former offenders, specifically, African-Americans and Hispanics, who are disproportionately affected (Nichols, 2014; Warde, 2013). To promote change for African-American and Hispanic men the EEOC must reassess their mission, enhance the guidance and include principle standards in federal court to strengthen their position (Nichols, 2014).

Ban the Box

Employment barriers for ex-offenders and the extent ban the box policies may limit criminal history data have been evaluated (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013; Varyr & Dubin, 2014). Ban the box was established to encourage employers to wait until a conditional offer of employment has been made to a prospective employee to conduct a criminal check (Maurer, 2014). Ban the box also allow those with criminal records an opportunity to discuss their past during the interview with the hiring manager and be considered based on qualifications and fit for the job (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013). The theory of labor markets or Akerlof theory helped to obtain accurate criminal history data and information on ban the box. Although there are laws that exist to protect ex-offenders

and policies that permit employers to give ex-offenders a second chance, employers may or may not be required to conduct criminal background checks. However, due diligence by organizations is important during the background check process (Cavico et al., 2014). Employment barriers that confront ex-offenders within various industries are identified as risk and fears and closed versus open record policies (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013). It is confirmed African-Americans are more susceptible to having criminal records and would benefit the most from employment policies that emphasize experience and competencies (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013).

Since the inception of ban the box initiative, in 1998, Hawaii became the first state to adopt the initiative. Subsequently, 14 states, the District of Columbia, and 70 localities have adopted ban the box policies between 2009 through 2014. In 2013 and 2014, nearly 93 of the 155 bills passed in 41 states and the District of Columbia. State legislatures acknowledged the need to improve public safety and make concrete steps to support successful reentry of convicted individuals after they have completed their sentence. Table 1 indicates the many efforts undertaken by the states to provide relief to ex-offenders.

Table 1

Efforts by States to Provide Relief to Ex-Offenders

Year	State	Efforts
Since 1998	Hawaii	1 st state to adopt the ban the box initiative
Since 2009	17 states, the District of Columbia	inform people of their rights, clarify remedies related to criminal information, delineate how criminal history information may be used to ensure procedural fairness
2009 to 2014	14 states, the District of Columbia, 70 localities	adopted ban the box policies
	19 states	passed laws to address specific collateral consequences (housing, health care, finances, education, enfranchisement)
	8 states	passed bills to establish task forces/commissions to catalogue collateral consequences and consolidate expungement procedures
2013 to 2014	41 states, the District of Columbia	155 bills in which 93 were enacted to have state legislatures improve public safety and support the successful reentry of ex-offenders after sentence completion
	31 states, the District of Columbia	expand the scope and impact of expungement and sealing remedies
	23 states, the District of Columbia	enacted 37 laws to increase the scope of expungement and sealing remedies
	8 states, the District of Columbia	enacted 11 laws to remove, reduce, or alter the amount of time for eligibility for expungement or sealing
	8 states	enacted 13 laws to clarify and make explicit the effects of sealing and expunging criminal records related to specific collateral consequences and relief
	11 states	enacted 14 laws to increase access or eliminate barriers to expungement, seal juvenile records
	3 states	altered the burden of proof required to seal or expunge criminal records by lowering or reversing the burden of proof
2013 to 2014	9 states, the District of Columbia	issued certificates of recovery
	5 states	enacted laws related to offense downgrade to encourage individuals with a felony conviction to comply with conditions of supervision and lead crime-free lives
	16 states	built relief mechanisms into the criminal justice process instead of minimizing exposure to collateral consequences after

		conviction and sentence to minimize contact with the criminal justice system
	22 states and the District of Columbia	enacted laws to improve employment prospects for individuals with a criminal record
	8 states	enacted laws to remove or relax disqualifications to certain licensed professions
	10 states, the District of Columbia	enacted laws to remove this hurdle by shielding employers from liability due to negligent hiring lawsuits
	5 states	enacted laws aimed at facilitating the employment of individuals with criminal records by offering incentives to prospective employers
February 2015	Georgia	1st state in the South to ban the box

Since February 2014, 23 states have implemented ban the box while 56 municipalities and counties implemented ban the box to eliminate barriers to employment in the United States (Cavico et al., 2014). As of September 2014, nearly 100 cities and counties adopted ban the box including Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, the District of Columbia, New York, New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle, and Tampa (Jones Day Publications, 2014; Von Bergon & Bressler, 2016). On February 23, 2015, Georgia became the first state in the South to ban the box (The State of Georgia Executive Order, 2015). Table 2 and Table 3 reflect the states, city, and county local government agencies in Georgia that have implemented ban the box initiatives.

Table 2

States with Ban the Box Initiatives

Year	State	Year	State
October 13, 2013	California	April 16, 2014	Nebraska
May 29, 2012	Colorado	August 11, 2014	New Jersey
October 10, 2010	Connecticut	March 8, 2010	New Mexico
May 4, 2014	Delaware	October 27, 2015	New York
December 17, 2014	District of Columbia	December 2015	Ohio
February 13, 2015	Georgia	February 24, 2016	Oklahoma
1998	Hawaii	January 1, 2016	Oregon
July 19, 2014	Illinois	January 1, 2014	Rhode Island
June 6, 2016	Louisiana	March 14, 2016	Tennessee
May 2, 2013	Maryland	April 21, 2015	Vermont
August 6, 2010	Massachusetts	April 3, 2015	Virginia
May 13, 2013	Minnesota	February 2016	Wisconsin

Table 3

City and County Local Government Agencies in Georgia That Implemented Ban the Box Initiatives

Year	Location	Initiative
January 1, 2013	City of Atlanta	Removed conviction history question from employment application; must notify applicants within 30 days of any adverse employment decision; must provide a copy of the background that highlights disqualifying convictions
July 1, 2014	Fulton County	Issued policy for fair criminal record screening; incorporated guidance from EEOC; removed questions about convictions from job application; prohibited from asking about criminal history prior to the first interview; applicants do not have to disclose information on arrests, convictions, or juvenile adjudications; backgrounds limited to sensitive positions; applicants notified of adverse employment actions
February 17, 2015	Macon-Bibb County	Remove questions about criminal record from employment application; applies to applications for professional licenses; background checks required for all applicants; must provide rejected applicants with a copy of the record that caused the disqualification
March 24, 2015	City of Albany	Removed questions about criminal record from employment application; background checks conducted on applicants selected for an interview; follows EEOC guidance; applicants are provided with the reason for denial of employment based on criminal record information and given a chance to dispute any inaccuracies and present evidence of rehabilitation (Rodriguez, 2015)
May 15, 2015	City of Savannah	Removed question about criminal record from employment application; screens applicants during initial hiring process

Some employers disagree with ban the box initiatives and feel obligated to maintain safety for employees and customers (Jones Day Publication, 2014). Employers who hire convicted offenders are subjected to negligent hiring, especially if they were aware or failed to discover an employee's criminal record (Jones Day Publication, 2014). Employers have expressed concern for ban the box statutes and ordinances that conflict with other laws and prohibit them from hiring persons convicted of certain crimes. Ban the box initiatives do not prevent employers from taking criminal history information into consideration. It only requires the employer to eliminate the requirement for applicants to check a box on employment applications regarding criminal history and postpone the background until later in the process (Jones Day Publication, 2014).

Von Bregen and Bressler (2016) offered six suggestions for employers when implementing ban the box initiative in the organization. First, employers must modify their policies to outline how to screen applicants and criminal records. Second, employers must adhere to the criteria established by the Fair Credit Reporting Act regarding adverse action when making employment decisions (Von Bregen & Bressler, 2016). Third, employers must take the necessary steps to revise the employment application and policies that inquire about an applicant's criminal record, particularly for organizations that have implemented ban the box. Fourth, employers must understand that past convictions may be considered in most instances, but not arrests lead to a conviction. Finally, employers must take precautions to keep criminal record information confidential as it relates to adverse action employment decisions (Von Bregen & Bressler, 2016).

Restoration of Rights

The importance of restoring ex-offender rights during the reentry process focused on distinguishing the point in which offenders have paid their debt to society and regaining full citizenship (Miller & Spillane, 2012). To analyze the extent these elements influence successful reintegration, in-depth interviews may help understand the impact disenfranchisement has on self-identity and reentry (Miller & Spilane, 2012). The meaning ex-offenders ascribed to a loss of basic civil rights after completing their sentence underscores the impact the loss and the restoration process on successful reentry into the community (Miller & Spillane, 2012). A narrative analysis helped to assess patterns of perception among ex-offenders such as civic exclusion and its relationship to desistance maintenance and focused on how ex-offenders perceived their life narratives and the effect disenfranchisement had rehabilitation. Ex-offenders in the direct impact group felt the inability to vote directly influenced successful reentry since voting was significant and linked to staying out of trouble (Miller & Spillane, 2012). The findings revealed 26% of ex-offenders reported a connection between the right to vote, other factors blocked successful reentry and voting directly impacted reentry compared to 20 ex-offenders that felt deciding to leave crime behind did not affect losing their right to vote or any other rights (Miller & Spilane, 2012).

In the state of Georgia, only the administrative pardon board grants complete relief without the approval of the governor (State Board of Pardons and Paroles, 2015). An offender may obtain a restoration of rights certificate after they have completed their sentence at least five years before applying without breaking any laws (State Board of

Pardons and Paroles, 2015). If the offender does not have pending charges and all fines and restitution were paid in full, the certificate will restore rights such as jury duty and ability to seek public office (State Board of Pardons and Parole, 2015). If granted a full pardon the crime is not expunged, removed or erased from the record (State Board of Pardons and Parole, 2015). In Georgia, civil rights were lost upon conviction; however, license and employment restrictions are restored after a five-year waiting period (State Board of Pardons and Paroles, 2015). Nearly 500 full pardons and certificates are given annually in the state of Georgia. The first offender expungement law allows individuals to receive probation or confinement without admitting guilt. If offenders complete the terms of probation or sentence, they are considered as not having a criminal conviction which in turn will not impact their civil rights (State Board of Pardons and Paroles, 2015).

Risk for Employers

Employing an ex-offender is a complex process due to federal policy changes, new legal precedents, contentious recidivism research, concerns about risks and increasing skills (Krell, 2012). HR professionals must take into account new ban the box initiatives, negligent hiring, redemption research, and disparate impact (Krell, 2012). A criminal background may create unique employment barriers and challenges for HR professionals that provide valuable insight into the potential dangers, compliance and procedures for hiring ex-offenders. The government has a social responsibility to help enable that benefit for the community by ensuring that all citizens are productive and employable thus becoming contributing members of society (Krell, 2012). HR

professionals must also consider complex legal issues such as employee safety, skills and needs of the organization, negligent hiring, and relevant laws.

Strategies to Increase Employment for Ex-Offenders

According to Schriro (2012), any efforts to assist ex-offenders with reentry must accomplish goals that have been established. Intervention efforts must accomplish the goal, be justified, meet the offender's needs, be individualized, achievable, and provide offenders with a chance to obtain skills in a real work environment which gives them an opportunity to ensure reentry is successful (Schriro, 2012). There is a possibility that employment programs may offer ex-offenders a chance to obtain the skills employers look for as well as help them deal with the many barriers to employment. The ability to acquire requisite skills, technical, hard and soft skills, can help offenders find and maintain work which helps with housing issues, self-esteem, and recidivism (Schriro, 2012).

Correctional education programs may improve successful reentry for some offenders from a culture of prisoners into the general society (Ubah, 2014). Correctional education focused on the effectiveness of prison-based education programs which is determined by the rate of recidivism but neglected to focus on other important considerations (Ubah, 2014). The recidivism rates of offenders are just as important as academic, employment signaling, institutional function and social values of prison-based education programs when evaluating their usefulness (Ubah, 2014). The rates of recidivism for offender's lead rehabilitative correctional programs measure of success or failure (Ubah, 2014).

Strategies to increase employment outcomes for young men of color identified criteria for an employment-focused approach designed to improve economic opportunities, low-income boys and young men of color, highlighted potential policy, system, institutional reforms and program investments (Spaulding et al., 2015). Academic, occupational, and essential employability skills in high school, access to college and credential attainment, and transition into the labor market must be increased to influence low-income young men of color (Spaulding et al., 2015). Institutional changes may reduce employment barriers for young men of color and help find ways to collaborate and serve low-income individuals (Spaulding et al., 2015). Apprenticeships might be a valuable tool to enhance youth development and improve employment prospects for men of color; thus, creating a pilot program and a robust evaluation plan could evaluate program effectiveness and reach of youth apprenticeship for young men of color.

The employer engagement process in the context of these partnerships may offer suggestions to help improve the employment prospects of persons with criminal convictions (Swensen, Rakis, Snyder, & Loss, 2014). Although inaccuracies in criminal records data may prevent offenders from obtaining employment, rehabilitation counselors must strive to develop positive relationships with potential employers to create a well-developed plan to help ex-offenders obtain better job opportunities (Swensen et al., 2014). Rehabilitation counselors must also coordinate and partner with appropriate agency and community stakeholders who may share information on employment prospects (Swensen et al., 2014). Counselors should assess engagement efforts against

the practices to maximize success, develop long-term relationships with employers across industries, and articulate how services can be addressed and meet (Swensen et al., 2014). Outreach efforts should include a commitment to excellent customer service, employer benefits, tracking and sharing placement and retention information with potential employers, appropriate feedback for managers who use their service and emphasizing the benefits of employing ex-offenders to prospective employers.

A strengths-based model focused on identifying and building assets to promote positive change (Hunter, Lanza, Lawlor, Dyson, & Gordon, 2015). The model focused on three areas for ex-offenders: resilience, transformation, empowerment, and civic engagement; identifying strengths and positive traits, and recognizing their value to become positive contributing members of the community (Hunter et al., 2015). The highlights of this model are the ability to identify strengths and assets through assessment, define goals and create a treatment plan, show them how to give back to others, and give ex-offenders and opportunities to participate community activities (Hunter et al., 2015). African-American and Latino participants recruited from three correctional facilities in Connecticut who met the criteria for the Fresh Start Program ReEntry Plan intervention services focused on three key areas: preparing for community release, return, and successful reentry (Hunter et al., 2015). The focus groups revealed there was a prevailing opinion on barriers and strengths linked to reentry challenges related to program execution. These men viewed the program as a way out, a support network, and it created a culture of respect and helpfulness from the community (Hunter et al., 2015). Successful key strategies included the program culture, responsibility to

needs, the focus on strengths which suggest focus groups support a strengths-based approach to prisoner reentry (Hunter et al., 2015).

Review of Conceptual Frameworks and Methods

Career Development Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is a belief in one's own ability to implement appropriate behaviors to reach the desired results (Westerling et al., 2015). The disparities between ex-offenders and individuals not incarcerated were analyzed using the career development self-efficacy (CDSE) theory due to its usefulness with self-efficacy (Westerling et al., 2015). The level of CDSE among a community sample of ex-offenders in a one-week career development workshop in Oklahoma City, OK revealed nearly half the participants received complete educational courses and employment-related assistance (Westerling et al., 2015). There was considerable growth for the entire sample. Despite the perceived career barriers ex-offenders demonstrated career confidence that was similar to individuals without a history of incarceration (Westerling et al., 2015). Thus, creating an environment that provides assistance to ex-offenders in enhancing self-efficacy through self-efficacy (Westerling et al., 2015).

Disparate Impact Theory

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made disparate impact theory possible (Doty, 2013). The *Griggs v Duke Power Company* was the first case to apply the disparate impact theory and recognize disparate impact liability (Doty, 2013; Smith, 2012). Even though the Supreme Court dismantled the disparate impact theory in *Wards Cove Packing Company V Atonio*, Congress made an attempt to undo the damage by the court and

passed the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Smith, 2012). The *Gregory v. Litton Systems, Inc.* decision contested disparate impact based on an employer's criminal background check policy, before the *Griggs* decision. In *Green v. Missouri Pacific Railroad Co.*, it was alleged that using criminal history information violated Title VII (Smith, 2012). The *Litton* and *Green* decisions reflected the belief that Title VII was passed as a comprehensive evaluation to ensure equal employment opportunities and removed obstacles that favored a group of white employees over other employees.

Title VII does not specify what proof plaintiffs must show to establish a prima facie case of adverse impact. In *Hill v. U. S. Postal Service*, the plaintiff alleged the background policy of his former employer automatically barred those with a felony or serious misdemeanor convictions (Smith, 2012). In *EEOC v. Carolina Freight Carriers Corp*, the criminal records policy was challenged because the policy prohibited individuals from working as drivers for any conviction related to a felony, theft, or larceny that resulted in incarceration which violated Title VII (Smith, 2012). In the *EEOC v. Freeman*, the EEOC argued Freeman's use of criminal background checks have a disparate impact on African-American and Latino applicants (Smith, 2012). The statutory language in Title VII does not guide employers on how to satisfy a business necessity defense. However, Title VII does state an employer must show that the contested practice relates to the job and is consistent with business necessity (Smith, 2012).

Empowerment Theory

A reflective narrative approach explored the extent nine African-American men participants in Atlanta's MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program experienced empowerment during the employment process (Jackson, 2013). Five overall themes were identified as tenacity, challenges, coping, stigma, and agency (Jackson, 2013). The MILA program did not provide offenders with interviewing or resume writing skills but did offer support by ensuring participants had transportation, clothes, employment prospects, and skills to improve relationships with family (Jackson, 2013). These findings implied a possible relationship between empowerment and recidivism.

Labeling Theory

An exploratory study of adult men incarcerated in an Ohio correctional facility was assessed to test hypotheses from the amended labeling theory and identity theory (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). The focus on anticipated stigmatization and potential post-release stigma management strategies revealed employers were reluctant to hire ex-offenders, limited consensus on interpersonal traits, and White participants were more exposed stigmatization (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). There is support or limited support for stigma management strategies based on two contradictory forces, inclusion, and exclusion (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). When there was a strong presence of a stigmatizing label, there was not much value for education and work experience (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008).

Self-Determination and Social Cognitive Career Theory

A conceptual model of job counseling with ex-offenders addressed barriers that ex-offenders must confront while seeking employment, transitioning from prisoner to employee (Johnson, 2013). The integration of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) included five steps: manage, build, strengthen, develop, and clarify (Johnson, 2013). The self-determination theory (SDT), a method of human motivation highlights three fundamental psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness which indicate peak performance and change in disorderly actions (Johnson, 2013). An independent and supportive atmosphere helped to examine the concerns of offenders and identify environmental barriers that may impact employment prospects. Offenders learned how to develop positive relationships, obtain community feedback, set goals and create a relapse prevention plan (Johnson, 2013). By freely participating in corrective processes there is a greater chance for an offender to incorporate learning and behavior change to obtain positive results.

According to Johnson (2013), the SDT stimulates positive relationships, changes in disruptive behaviors, and meets the emotional needs of ex-offenders (Johnson, 2013). The SCCT stresses why personal choice is essential when making career decisions and clarifies how internal and external factors can improve or limit personal choice (Johnson, 2013). The SSCT is effective in an environment that stresses three social-cognitive mechanisms: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting that connects the role of environmental effects on the progress and search for employment and educational

pursuits, options, and performance (Johnson, 2013). The SSCT may help understand and address issues related to career development with marginalized groups (Johnson, 2013).

Signaling Theory

The signaling theory was used to argue employment-based reentry programs are essential during the reentry process regardless of a causal impact on employment and recidivism (Bushway & Apel, 2012). A meta-analysis of experimental evaluations of noncustodial employment programs revealed none affected work or rearrests. Those assigned a control condition could pursue non-program training compared to those assigned to an experimental condition that could refuse to show up for training (Bushway & Apel 2012). The theory of signaling was developed to explore how reentry discussions may benefit from changing the focus to letting individuals self-identify as a desister opposed to trying to cause desistance (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Prospective employers make hiring decisions and salary negotiations without knowledge of unflawed information related to an individual's real productivity thus depending on reliable indicators or signals of productivity (Bushway & Apel, 2012). These signals are visible traits that convey information on the person's productivity such as a having a degree that sends a high signal on productivity and success of the potential employee even if the degree does not have an impact on work productivity (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Emphasizing key challenges validates the signaling effect such as the human capital theory of education and the signaling theory of education which project increased wages as a result of education.

Standpoint Theory

The Standpoint theory is a means for understanding collective group discourse (Punyanunt, 2013). An essential feature of the Standpoint theory is personal experiences may shape the perspective of an individual in social groups (Punyanunt, 2013).

Standpoint is a person's view of the world which influences how they understand self and how they communicate with others. The theory assumes that status provides a limited perspective on interpersonal relationships suggesting that groups that appear to be controlling will typically repress inferior groups thus controlling subordinate groups (Punyanunt, 2013). The standpoint theory founded on the precepts of essentialism illustrates how individuals in groups share similar traits or appear to be similar to one another (Punyanunt, 2013).

Gaps in the Literature

There were several disparities in the literature to justify the need for this study. A review of the literature revealed insufficient data related to the specific reasons why employers refuse to offer employment to African-American male ex-offenders. Small samples used in multiple studies limited in-depth analysis of multiple variables that may influence hiring decisions including keeping the race of hiring managers and applicants confidential during the data collection process (Akins & Armstrong, 2011). Hiring managers that hired ex-offenders were not surveyed to allow them to expound on their experiences in hiring these men. The reasons for employer bias, exploration related to the seriousness of the criminal record or work experience has not been the focus of most studies (Varghese et al., 2010).

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 included the theoretical framework and a comprehensive review of the literature to support the need for this study to include discussions on employment barriers and challenges, the impact of the criminal record and civil and collateral consequences that affect ex-offenders. Persons of color, specifically African-Americans, must be able to handle the stigma linked to a criminal record as charges with no conviction can prevent them from finding work. Despite mixed results from 35 years of research on employer attitudes regarding hiring ex-offenders, it is not possible to ascertain a distinct pattern of support for hiring ex-offenders (Atkins & Armstrong, 2010). According to Blessett and Pryor (2013), there are no studies in the public administration field that have assessed how incarceration has affected employment, human resources, diversity management, or social justice. Although many offenders return to urban areas and poor neighborhoods with high unemployment rates, most lack the skills to be successful in the workplace (Woodall et al., 2013). A felony conviction or time spent incarcerated makes finding work impossible which decreases the opportunity to obtain a formal education, work experience, or networking opportunities (Schmidt & Warner, 2010).

This chapter discussed how a criminal record influence labor market outcomes for ex-offenders and provided an overview of reentry initiatives, legislation, and programs including EEOC guidelines. Employer attitudes are critical to ex-offenders that want to work due to the barriers that confront them after incarceration and visualized in the context of structural forces bound to the prison system and weakened economic opportunities for marginalized workers. The discussion concluded with a review of

theoretical framework and methods and strategies to increase employment. Chapter 3 includes the research design used to guide this study, the research design, participant selection, procedures, data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness and a discussion of ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. This study was guided by one central question: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? Five African-American male ex-offenders participated in semistructured interviews sharing their lived experiences of employability in local government. An account of the phenomenon of employability through the lenses of these men helped to grasp the meaning of the lived experiences of ex-offenders. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the research method, the research design and rationale, methodology, target population and sample size, data collection and data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The central research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? The criminal records of African-American males serve as a barrier to employment (Murphy et al., 2011). Moreover, past criminal offenses of an ex-offender, particularly African-American males, carries significant weight with hiring managers given the concerns regarding negligent hiring and potential liability when hiring an ex-offender (Chintakrindi et al. 2015; Valdez, 2015). The attitudes, biases, and perceptions of a hiring manager often underscore the decision to

hire African-American male ex-offenders (Scott, 2010; Valdez, 2015). The ability to change the perception of a hiring manager may be an arduous task (Cavico et al., 2014; Chintakrindi et al. 2015). The extant literature on employability does not include the voices of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. This study explored the phenomenon of employability using a phenomenological method to fill this gap.

Research Tradition

The research tradition is an examination to help understand the different methodological traditions of inquiry designed to explore social and human issues. During this process, the researcher creates a composite depiction, evaluates words and phrases, provides an account of the beliefs of the individual and conducts research in the natural setting (Moustakas, 1994). In a qualitative inquiry, the researchers commit to significant time doing fieldwork. The researcher employs a lengthy data analysis process to include analyzing a large amount of data to reduce the data into a small number of themes. The researcher also composes long passages to demonstrate that the evidence substantiates claims and multiple perspectives. The researcher engages in social and human science research that does not have fixed procedures but rather always develops and transforms (Barnham, 2012).

A researcher engages in qualitative inquiry for many reasons. Using qualitative research is the appropriate choice for the research when a research question asks how or what and intends to describe. A qualitative inquiry can be employed when there is a need to explore a topic and present a complete picture of the subject. A qualitative inquiry is used to study individuals in the natural setting. A researcher may choose a qualitative

inquiry because they want to write in a narrative format. The researcher may also have adequate time and resources to engage in a lengthy data collection process. Finally, a qualitative inquiry may help to accentuate the researcher's role as someone who can articulate the views of the participants as opposed to judging the participants.

Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is referred to as the father of phenomenology (Davidsen, 2013; Giorgi, 2012). Husserl pursued examining consciousness and how phenomena in the world are formed by human consciousness to describe how the phenomena appear to the individual and how the experience began (Davidsen, 2013; Giorgi, 2012).

Phenomenology stems from the Greek words *phenomenon* and *logos* which means appearance; *logos*, or analytical thinking, helps facilitate this appearing (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). The goal of phenomenology is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Vagle, 2014). A phenomenological design puts the researcher and participant in a position that allows them to connect the experiences of the phenomenon together (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological model provides an accurate description of written and organizational experiences; for that reason, the underlying meaning of the lived experiences from the diverse perspectives of the offender was needed to understand how those experiences may impact their employability in a local government agency.

Analytical thinking, reflection, and interpretation, through the lens of another, helped to comprehend the description of the phenomena (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). Husserl viewed phenomenology as pure phenomena that manifests itself into

consciousness but proclaimed the experiences of the individual and their experience in the world cannot be separated (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). Moustakas (1994) referred to Husserl's approach as transcendental because it holds on to what may be revealed by reflection on personal acts and their objective relationships. According to Finlay (2009), there are four elements of phenomenology: the lived experience, phenomenological attitude, rich description, and transformative relational process. Phenomenology studies the subjective meaning of the lived experiences of an individual (Moustakas, 1994). It is a process of intuiting, whereby the researcher is open to experience the phenomenon through a new lens and set aside their perception of the world (Vagle, 2014). The experiences are described through thickness and richness while concealing the limits between art and science (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, providing in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences was a reflective process (Davidsen, 2013; Vagle, 2014). A phenomenological attitude uses reduction that begins with tangible, realistic examples of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2009). However, the results cannot be transferable to other populations but may apply to other people and environments.

Epoche and reduction are concepts that are essential to capturing the meaning and essence of the phenomena under study (Davidsen, 2013). *Epoche* allows an individual to refrain from judgment from how one would normally look at things (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological approach forces the researcher to set aside inflexible views, to ensure the study is unbiased and to be responsive to participants as they describe their experiences related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1997) posited phenomenological reduction compels the researcher to bracket their prior

understanding of the phenomenon to be wholly present in the phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), the approach used by Giorgi required one to have a sense of awareness and bracket prior knowledge to evaluate the information with a fresh perspective. Bracketing lessens the possible harmful aftereffects of the intricate biases linked to research and thus enlarge the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

The essence of the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders cannot be determined in a case study or ethnography research design, as they were not appropriate methods to gain the lived experiences needed in this study. The goal of these research designs is to investigate issues from a perspective other than understanding the essence of the phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012). A case study focuses on making an in-depth exploration of a program, event, or one or more individuals (Cronin, 2014). Ethnography focuses on the study of a cultural group in the natural setting over time (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Freeman & Spanjaard, 2012). A narrative study examines cultural and social meanings by interpreting the stories that relate to the lived experience whereas grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory (Stephens & Breheny, 2013). A phenomenological paradigm helps to capture these perspectives to understand what ex-offenders believed about their experiences. A phenomenological research design provided rich data and explanation of the phenomenon of employability and contributed to understanding the meaning and heart of the experiences.

In phenomenology, themes related to consciousness based on the lived experiences of the participants were generated; therefore, the overall focus was the experience of the participant (Giorgi, 1997). One of the primary traits of consciousness is

it presents objects to the individual; thus, intuition is a common type of awareness or consciousness (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology starts with an evaluation of intuition, not in the objective sense regarding the meaning of the participant's experience (Giorgi, 1997). Consciousness is an awareness of the system (embodied-self-world-others), which has aspects and parts that are intuitive or presentable (Giorgi, 1997). According to Giorgi (1997), it is important to differentiate between intuition and experience. He implied people live in a natural attitude but must understand things are not always what they seem. Although there is a direct link between the essence and the natural attitude, things present in the natural attitude, are kept within the phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997).

Intentionality is a critical aspect of consciousness which takes objects that transcend the act in which it appears (Giorgi, 1997). The philosophical aspects of phenomenology include reduction, description, and the search for essences (Giorgi, 1997). Reduction requires one to bracket any prior knowledge of the phenomenon to be fully present; however, reduction does not mean to forget about the knowledge but rather set it aside to experience the phenomenon with a fresh perspective and describe it as intuition (Giorgi, 1997). The primary goal of phenomenological reduction was to gain a better understanding of the natural attitude (Giorgi, 1997). Thus, the researcher must assess the description with sensitivity to their discipline and the phenomenon itself (Giorgi, 1997).

Role of the Researcher

My primary role in this study was to collect and interpret the data and analyze the information into themes. I had an ethical responsibility to conduct a self-evaluation of any preconceived ideas or unresolved issues with appropriate persons to effectively articulate the objective of the research. I was open and honest with participants regarding my role as the researcher. As the researcher, there were no unresolved issues with any relevant persons.

My experience as a human resource professional in local government provided an opportunity to conduct backgrounds on hundreds of potential employees, specifically African-American male ex-offenders. These men shared how their criminal record impacted their ability to obtain employment. By capturing the perspectives of the participants may to help facilitate changes in organizational policies and recruitment strategies, eliminate systematic discrimination against ex-offenders, and contribute to creating programs that help these men acquire the requisite skills for employment. Equally important was to provide background data that will help to understand the purpose of the study, setting, participants, interpretations of the phenomenon, any connection with participants and research site.

I sent an introductory letter and recruitment flyer via e-mail to 729 local government agencies representatives to include: (a) the human resources manager/director; (b) city/county manager; (c) town manager; (d) city/county administrator; (e) city/county clerk; and (f) mayor. I also requested their assistance with circulating the recruitment flyer to their employees via intranet, email or as a paycheck

stuffer to eliminate coercion. I sent follow-up emails to the agency representative that responded to the initial request to address any questions or concerns and to clarify the purpose of the study.

I originally intended to interview 25 participants, or until data saturation was achieved; however, after 90 days of attempting to find participants to interview, I was only able to conduct interviews with five African-American male ex-offenders to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences related to the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) asserted in phenomenological research a researcher should demonstrate personal interest and have a connection with the phenomenon they are trying to understand. A personal interest and experience with the phenomenon allowed me to examine how these experiences related to the stigma of a criminal record created barriers to employment opportunities.

During a 10-15-minute telephone screening, each participant received an explanation of the purpose of the study, potential risk, and a thorough review of the informed consent form. I addressed any biases and personal background that may influence interpretation data and the rights of participants. The study took place throughout the state of Georgia to mitigate bias. To reduce the risk of bias the researcher excluded her place of employment. The recruitment flyer included the researcher's contact phone number and email address for those who wanted to volunteer to participate in the study. There was no incentive offered for taking part in the study.

Crisis, mental, emotional, psychological, social or economic issues of the participants were unknown before the study. To mitigate this possibility of emotional

distress, each participant was asked if they were experiencing any significant life changing event that might prevent them from participating. There was a chance that participants over the age of 65 could experience health issues by discussing their experience; however, they were not excluded from the study.

The Tuskegee Syphilis study conducted in 1932 by the United States Public Health Service possibly influenced African-American offender's decision to participate or decline participation in research (Poythress, Epstein, Stiles, & Eden, 2011). For this study, all necessary precautions were taken to protect the participations from being coerced, to establish a safe environment, and keep their information private and confidential. If participants experienced any signs of discomfort, they could stop the interview at any time without penalty. The participants were notified verbally and in writing of the limitations related to confidentiality before obtaining their consent. As the researcher, I also collected, coded, and analyzed the data as described by Barnham (2012).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

This study took place in the state of Georgia where there are seven regions, both rural and metropolitan (United States Census Bureau, 2015). As of 2014, Georgia ranked 48th among the states for employment barriers for ex-offenders compared to other states (Caselman, 2014). Ex-offenders can be unsuccessful during reentry since they do not receive assistance related to collateral consequences or have their rights restored (Caselman, 2014).

This qualitative study used purposeful random sampling to attract five African-American male ex-offenders who met the established criteria. Purposeful random sampling allowed for reporting credible data on the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2013). It enabled the selection of cases that are information-rich to discover the essential meaning for the purpose of the inquiry (Suri, 2011). Three factors linked to purposeful sampling include the selection of the participants and site, the type of sampling strategy, and the sample size (Seidman, 2013). Participants who had experience with the phenomenon were selected since they could offer a thorough, rich description of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Their experience helped increase understanding of the phenomenon to describe their experiences regarding their employability adequately. Cases loaded with information contributed to gathering additional knowledge and awareness related to critical issues, enlightenment related to the research question, and the significance of the examination (Suri, 2011).

A combination of methods was used to recruit participants for the study. Criterion sampling provided an opportunity to attract participants that met the pre-established criteria for the study (Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling helped obtain information from the targeted group regarding details of other information-rich cases (Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling was used to compliment the purposeful sampling method since these men may know other African-American male ex-offenders who worked in local government and referred those who did not respond to the initial inquiry. The five participants provided diverse perspectives that allowed commonalities between their lived experiences to emerge.

An e-mail, fax, or letter was sent to 729 local government agency representatives in 159 counties from the state of Georgia that described the purpose of the study. Also included was a request to distribute the recruitment flyer to employees who may want to volunteer for the study. Of the 35 towns, 17 (48%) did not respond; 1 (.02%) deleted the email; 19 (54%) had no contact information on the website; and 2 (.05%) were delivery failures. From contact information found during an internet search, an email was sent to 168 county agency representatives in the state of Georgia. At least 4 (.02%) did not have contact information, and 4 (.02%) agreed to disseminate the flyer. There were 7 (.04%) delivery failures; 143 (85%) did not respond, 9 (.05%) indicated they did not have any ex-offenders, one declined, one deleted the email, and one indicated he spoke with employees who were ex-offenders and they did not want to volunteer. Emails were sent to 358 (68%) of 523 city agency representatives. At least 165 (32%) did not have an email address listed on the website. I mailed out 165 (32%) letters; one phone was disconnected; 8 (.015%) received a fax; 15 (.028%) delivery failures; one mailbox was full; 14 (.026%) deleted the email; one declined; and, 18 (.034%) indicated they had no ex-offenders. In total, only eight agencies agreed to disseminate the recruitment flyer to employees.

Organization representatives who responded to the request and distributed the recruitment invitation flyer completed the organizational demographic form. Follow-up emails or telephone calls were made to ensure the officials understood the purpose of the study and that there was no cost for employees to participant in the study. Some representatives deleted the initial email request and follow-up request. The targeted

number of 25 participants was not achieved using the original recruitment method. As a result, I made a request to the Walden University Institutional Review Board to add additional recruitment methods to help secure more participants for the study. The alternative recruitment methods included Facebook, YouTube, employment agencies, barber shops, newspapers, radio advertisements and churches with prison ministries.

Due to difficulty obtaining the targeted population, low response rate, and resistance from local government agency representatives, I felt it would be even more difficult to make a request to interview the hiring managers based on the email replies and conversations with agency representative I spoke with by telephone. The response rate was not high; therefore, I reconsidered conducting interviews with hiring managers to understand their lived experiences with hiring ex-offenders and the impact of their attitudes and perceptions towards the employability of ex-offenders with a criminal record. A higher response rate would have allowed interviews to be conducted to understand the phenomenon from the hiring manager perspective.

After approval was received from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, interviews were scheduled with five participants. Each participant who volunteered for the study received a letter of invitation and acknowledged that they understood participation was strictly voluntary. The informed consent form was reviewed in its entirety with each participant before conducting the interview. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant to protect their identity. All interviews were held in a secure location to protect the participant and the researcher.

Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2013) asserted that the fundamental difference in using face-to-face interviews versus a telephone interview is there is no visual encounter. It may be said that using telephone interviews is not natural because it is a challenging and exhausting process compared to using face-to-face interviews (Irvine et al., 2013). The lack of face-to-face contact may impact the interview process in areas such as loss of nonverbal data, specifically body language and facial expressions; loss of contextual data such as physical traits and the interview setting; and loss of spoken data (Irvine et al., 2013). However, using telephone interviews helps save time, is cost effective, and promotes increased anonymity regarding sensitive topics (Irvine et al., 2013). When using telephone interviews, a researcher must be effective communicators to obtain the confidence and support of participants (Irvine et al., 2013). Based on these reasons, and given that the targeted population for this study is geographically concentrated located across the state of Georgia, telephone interviews may be a viable option for conducting some of the interview.

Setting and Sample Population

Qualitative research does not seek to generalize the results of a study. It requires the use of purposeful sampling in which the sample is chosen to serve an investigative purpose. A phenomenological study requires the sample be purposeful to ensure access to participants who have experienced the phenomenon. The participants have information rich data related to the phenomenon under study. The sampling provides insight into the phenomenon as opposed to an empirical generalization from sample to population. This study included a combination of purposeful sampling: criterion and maximum variation.

The participants for this study were selected using the maximum variation sampling across age and community backgrounds to ensure there was an inclusive range of experiences related to the phenomenon (Seidman, 2013). In maximum variation sampling, significant common patterns are identified (Seidman, 2013). Those common patterns are essential to describing the experiences of the phenomenon.

The participants had to have experienced the phenomenon under study which is an essential criterion. For this study, the goal was to find participants who could provide a rich description of their experiences. The participants selected for this study have applied for work or currently work in a local government agency in the state of Georgia. The key criterion included (a) self-identification as an African-American male ex-offender; (b) over 18 years of age; (c) have applied for work or currently employed by a local government agency; and, (d) the ability to participate in three 90-minute interviews or one 90-minute interview.

The setting for the study included local government agencies within the 159 counties in the state of Georgia because a majority of African-American male ex-offenders seek employment in the public sector after release from prison (United States Department of Labor, 2014). The research sites provided important contextual factors that may have influenced the experiences of the participants. Although the selected research site(s) are diverse in nature, the number of African-American male ex-offenders that are employed may be few in some areas.

The lived experiences for each participant were different. The availability of jobs after release varies based on the geographical location. Various city and county agencies

may have established programs that assist ex-offenders during reentry, yet these programs may or may not have prepared participants for employment in local government. The participants were categorized by region to protect the identities of the participants and the local government agency in which they work. The sample included five ex-offenders who were willing to share their lived experiences regarding the barriers that confront them and how they overcame those obstacles during the employment process to find work. Data collection took place between June 2016 and August 2016. Secondary data included statistical information such as the number of ex-offenders incarcerated by race, recidivism rates, and the number of ex-offenders employed in Georgia.

Sample Size and Eligibility Criteria

The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? What the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, usefulness, credibility, time and resources impacts the sample size (Dworkin, 2012; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Burmeister and Aitken (2012) recommended identifying a range of sites and number of participants for the study in advance to include in the sample. Seidman (2013) asserted when purposeful sampling is used coupled with the maximum variation the researcher must know when they have interviewed enough participants.

The sample size must be big enough to reach saturation. The sample size is no more than 12 participants in phenomenological studies (Morse, 2000; Pietkiewicz, &

Smith, 2014). A sample represents a perspective, not a population. The main goal of a phenomenological study is to focus on the lived experiences of a small sample of individuals who share similar experiences. It is likely to obtain rich data for analysis with a sample of 6 to 10 participants. Morse (2000) purported quality data is not determined by the number of participants interviewed, but rather by the volume of usable data obtained. Sanchez (2015) achieved saturation with 8 participants in a study to uncover and understand the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking men with LEP when accessing health care treatment, housing, education, and employment in the state of Pennsylvania, and no new emergent themes. Davis (2015), in another study, reached data saturation with a sample of 10 that explored the experiences of African-American male students in the environment of public schools in northern Florida to determine common perceptions of students who drop out. This study had a sample size of 5 participants. Saturation was achieved with the fifth interview and satisfactorily generated descriptions from the participants that included and effectively reflected the perceptions of the participants.

There are two criteria for enough: sufficiency and saturation of information (Dworkin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Sufficiency indicates the researcher has enough participants and sites to establish an adequate sample whereas saturation of information occurs when there is no new information (Dworkin, 2012; Suri, 2011). Data saturation depends on the nature of the data source; thus, purposeful data and precise questions ensured saturation much quickly (Suri, 2011). Further, data should be sufficient to allow a comparison between dimensions and constructs and answer the research question (Suri, 2011). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the researcher's personal lens may impact

data saturation. Therefore, for the data to accurately reflect the participants lived experiences, the researcher must be cognizant of their world view and personal lens to know when data saturation occurs (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

Qualitative research warrants the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). The researcher may use multiple sources of data collection in the study that requires obtaining accurate and valid data to demonstrate methodological triangulation of sources (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). The researcher must bracket any prior assumptions or biases on the phenomenon to give attention to the methods used during data collection (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013).

Due to the work and time constraints and scheduling conflicts of participants, the three-interview approach was employed to obtain the lived experiences of the participants during one 90-minute interview session. This process included semistructured interviews with five African-American male ex-offenders. The semistructured interview questions facilitated a deep discussion of the perspectives of each participant regarding the impact of incarceration and criminal record on their employability in local government (Irvin, 2013). Also, the interview questions helped to facilitate a discussion on the participants' views related to the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers towards ex-offenders. A list of the interview questions is listed in Appendix B.

Member checking. Member checking was used as a quality control process to help improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the data (Harper & Cole, 2012). In member checking the researcher repeated or provided a summary of the information to

the participant to ensure accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). Once the participants agreed or disagreed that the data accurately reflected their views or experiences credibility was obtained (Harper & Cole, 2012). Further, member checking was conducted at the end of the study as the interview transcripts were analyzed and a copy provided to participants to review for the authenticity of information shared in the interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). During member checking, the researcher shared the results with the participants that provided them with an opportunity to analyze and make comments on the data to decrease the possibility of incorrect data including the interpretation of data (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking ensured results were authentic and original and gave the researcher an opportunity to verify that the information was accurate and complete to enhance validity (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Interview protocol. In qualitative research, the primary objective is to obtain the life story of an individual regarding their experiences through interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). An interview protocol was created to include a list of semistructured interview questions and a script of what was said before and after the interview including important details about the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommended for selecting a topic of interest and letting the research guide the questions to ensure that the interview protocol was successful. The interview protocol included valuable information such as the date, time, and location of the interview, pseudonym and a section to document critical information or questions that emerged as a result of the participant's response. The protocol served as a multi-purpose procedural guide (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The protocol also served as a tool to remind the researcher to talk

about critical details, informed consent, and confidentiality, as well as build rapport, provide contact information, or perform member checks (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The interview started with general questions and progressed to more difficult questions which provided an opportunity to build confidence and establish trust with participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Each participant was asked the same questions throughout the interview which allowed the researcher to gain insight into the lived experiences and learn the perspectives of the participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Prompts were used throughout the interview to help maintain focus, remember the questions as well as allow unforeseen data to emerge (Irvine et al., 2013). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested being flexible enough to make adjustments throughout the interview when an unexpected response occurs which gives you a chance to add additional questions to the protocol for the remaining meetings if the information proves to be valuable.

Informed consent. The informed consent form must have three elements: disclosure, capacity, and voluntariness (Abaunza & Romero, 2014). Disclosure provided the participants with sufficient information to make an independent decision (Abaunza & Romero, 2014). The information furnished to participants were communicated in layman terms based on the comprehension ability of the participants and assessed when reviewing the form to ensure each participant understood the information (Abaunza & Romero, 2014). Capacity assured that the participants understood the information and were able to make a rational decision (Abaunza & Romero, 2014). Voluntariness gave

participants the right to make a decision without coercion, manipulation, or undue influence (Abaunza & Romero, 2014).

Field test. A field test of the interview questions was conducted by sending an email to eleven faculty members at Walden University with experience in qualitative research and phenomenological research to request their assistance to serve as an expert panel member for a field test of the interview protocol. Five faculty members responded to the request to test the alignment of the interview questions to the research design. Three of five faculty members that responded provided feedback. One faculty declined and said the research topic was outside of her area of specialization. Another faculty member said the study was interesting, but declined as he has not worked in the Ph.D. program since 2012 and currently teaches in the DBA program.

The first faculty member who participated on the expert panel stated the study was interesting and important and put herself in the position of someone responding to the questions. The faculty member made several recommendations to include: (1) asking about emotions instead of emotional stress; (2) distinguishing between the employment process, applications, and interviews from the background check; (3) asking to what extent did the criminal record affect their ability to obtain employment; (4) asking to what extent do you believe hiring managers have attitudes and biases toward African-American male ex-offenders; and, (5) asking to what extent and in what ways were you able to change their perceptions about you (personal communication, November 10, 2015). Other comments made were questions to gain clarity of the study.

The second faculty expert panel member replied that the interview protocol gets to the heart of the stated purpose of the study, the readability is excellent and flows nicely (personal communication, November 23, 2015). One faculty member recommended adding the phrase seeking employment to the question “Describe the challenges you faced as an ex-offender” (personal communication, November 23, 2015). The third faculty member has a background in public policy and provided feedback from an empirical perspective. The third faculty member commented the study was interesting and a semistructured interview process was appropriate for the study. Triangulation with elite interviews was recommended by interviewing potential employers, secondary data, review of the literature, and government data to ensure the data takes on much more rigor. The faculty member did not provide feedback on the interview protocol; therefore, it was resubmitted again to obtain feedback. The feedback from the faculty was incorporated into the interview protocol listed in Appendix M.

I intended to conduct a pilot study before the actual study to help enhance the quality of the selected method by validating the design (Leon, Davis, & Kraemer, 2011). A church in a neighboring city that had a prison ministry was sent a letter to request permission to conduct a pilot study with program participants. Although the church administrator confirmed via telephone that the request was received, the church never responded to the request regarding if the pilot study would be approved. The primary focus for conducting a pilot study was to test the feasibility of the research and validate the interview protocol and to help mitigate potential risks regarding the credibility and validity of the research (Leon et al., 2011). Conducting the pilot study would have

assisted the researcher with validation and alignment of the interview protocol, research question, interview questions, research design, and selected method. The pilot study would have also helped determine if the information provided by the participants would help understand the phenomenon and if the interview questions were rational and comprehensible to the participant. Despite not being able to conduct the pilot study, the field test of the interview protocol helped to reveal inconsistencies to make adjustments before administering the actual study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Seidman (2013) pointed out methods for obtaining access to potential participants may impact the interview process. Seidman (2013) suggested gaining access to participants through informal networks and limit reliance on third parties as much as possible. Researchers must gain access to participants through formal and informal gatekeepers and the person responsible for operating the site (Seidman, 2013). Failure to use the proper channels for permission may prevent the researcher from accessing participants. The membership coordinator of a local government organization was contacted to help gain access to the local government agency representatives. The membership coordinator emailed the recruitment invitation flyer via the membership list serve for distribution. In light of this, there was still a small response rate.

On April 13, 2016, the Walden University Institutional Review Board gave the approval to collect data for this study. The approval number for this study is 04-13-16-0256549 which expires on April 12, 2017. Contact was made by phone to each participant who volunteered for the study. A brief phone interview was conducted to

ensure the participants met the criteria for the study. During the phone interview, the participants received an explanation of the study, a date, time and place for the meeting were set, and processes were put in place to ensure physical and emotional safety. Each participant was reassured all information would remain confidential and would only be accessible to the researcher. Based on the location, the initial meeting was held in person to expound on the purpose of the study and informed consent process. All interviews took place in-person in a secure location which cultivated an environment of mutual respect that was essential to the interview process (Seidman, 2013).

All documents were placed in a separate manila folder for each participant to include their pseudonym to protect their identity. The informed consent form was reviewed with each participant in its entirety. The participants were reminded that they could opt out of the study at any time. Before the interview started, participants were asked if they had any questions and informed them if any of the questions made them uncomfortable they did not have to answer the question, and the interview could terminate at any time. On June 10, 2016, I conducted an interview with the first participant, Hammer. On July 25, 2016, the second participant, Torey was interviewed. On August 7th, the third participant, Mike was interviewed. On July 7, 2016, the fourth participant, Gumbo was interviewed. The final interview was conducted on September 5, 2016, with Cheeze.

Field notes were taken during each interview to document nonverbal communication such as body language and facial expressions. The three-interview process was completed in one session due to the participants' work and personal

obligations. Each interview was transcribed within 72 hours. After I had transcribed each interview participants were contacted via telephone to inform them that the interview transcript was ready for their review. Participants were asked to return the interview transcript within 48 hours. Some participants did not return the transcript back within 48 hours and returned them within one to two weeks.

Qualitative research consists of four types of data: observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). An interview protocol was created to include a list of semistructured interview questions. A descriptive phenomenological psychological method required the researcher to acknowledge the need for understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the lived experience to discover the meaning (Chan & Walker, 2015; Englander, 2012). Having complete knowledge of the philosophical principles that shaped the research method, research question and collecting and analyzing data was essential (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Pereira, 2012). Vagle (2014) stated a phenomenological study ensures the research question focuses on uncovering the meaning of the phenomenon.

When presenting the information on the research to the participants, it was important to be explicit about expectations from the participants (Seidman, 2013). The ability to create a mutual respect and convey the goal of the study determined if participants were interested in volunteering in the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Data were collected over a three-month period, June 2016 and August 2016, using the three-interview approach in one setting. The semistructured interviews provided a complete description of the lived experiences of the participant. A digital voice recorder and

computer webcam were used to help transcribe data. Data was transcribed by the researcher after each interview was complete. A participant file was maintained on all participants to include a copy of the informed consent form, interview transcript, and any notes taken. All data, documents, and recordings from the study are kept in a secure location for five years and only accessible by the researcher. After which, all files, electronic and paper will be deleted, destroyed, or shredded.

Changes in Recruitment Method

Originally, I had planned to conduct a pilot study at a church in a neighboring city with members of a church prison ministry. I was not able to receive permission to conduct the pilot study after several attempts. I contacted the Walden University IRB to notify them of the issues with obtaining approval from the church for the pilot study. It was recommended to remove all information related to the pilot study from the IRB application. On May 8, 2016, I made a request to the Walden University IRB to change recruitment methods to allow targeted participants to self-identify as an African-American male ex-offender who has applied for work or currently works for a local government agency in the state of Georgia. Volunteers who currently work for a local government agency were verified by one of two methods, a current employee ID, or a paycheck stub. Due to the low response rate regarding the request made by the local government agency representatives to disseminate the recruitment flyer to employees, I asked to change the recruitment method by adding alternative methods to find volunteers for the study. These alternative methods included a narrated PowerPoint presentation on social media platforms YouTube and Facebook, churches in the Atlanta Metro and

surrounding areas with prison ministries, beauty shops and barber shops, temporary agencies, and the Georgia Justice Project. These methods were selected to ensure that the targeted population was aware of the study. Minor changes were made to the required documents for the study. The recruitment invitation flyer was revised to make it more attractive to potential volunteers for the research. On June 7, 2016, the Walden University IRB approved the request for changes in the recruitment method and the recruitment flyer.

While attending the residency four in Atlanta in June, I decided to stay two extra days just in case I was contacted by potential volunteers. On May 27, 2016, I conducted an internet search of churches that had a prison ministry. Based on the results of the internet search, a recruitment invitation flyer was mailed to 60 churches in the Atlanta Metro and surrounding areas with a prison ministry. Unfortunately, I did not receive any phone calls or email responses from any of the churches while in Atlanta. On June 21, 2016, one church responded and forwarded the email to the church deacon; however, no response was given to determine if the church shared the recruitment invitation flyer with members of the prison ministry.

From June 8-10, 2016, I attended a conference for one of the human resources organizations I am a member. I participated in an effective presentations class and took the opportunity to present the purpose of the study. On June 13, 2016, the membership coordinator assisted with distributing the recruitment invitation flyer and letter regarding the study to the members. As a result, I received six responses.

Interview Process

Phenomenology requires readily accessibility to participants through multiple interviews and establishing rapport, which are essential elements to the success of this study (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Rowley, 2012). The interview protocol was reviewed to ensure they are understandable by participants. The field test helped to determine if the questions would generate the data needed. The protocol served as a multi-purpose procedural guide to direct the interview process, remind the researcher to discuss critical details, informed consent, and confidentiality, build rapport, provide contact information, or perform member checks (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview protocol included a script of what was said before and after the interview included in Appendix M.

The interview guide consisted of semistructured questions and prompts. If participants did not respond to the initial question, prompts were used to obtain additional information. All participants were asked the same sequence of questions to include prompts as needed. The interview guide consisted of the following areas of inquiry:

- Experience as an ex-offender for the first time applying for employment in local government
- Challenges in the employment process
- Familiarity with the employment/hiring process
- Familiarity with the background process
- Attitudes and perceptions regarding the criminal record
- Attitudes and perceptions regarding the decisions made by hiring managers

- Attitudes and perceptions on seeking employment as an ex-offender
- Perceptions regarding available resources pre- and post-incarceration

Moustakas (1994) recommended using the long interview to collect data in phenomenological research. This extended interview consists of an informal yet interactive dialogue that employed open-ended questions to generate a comprehensive account of the participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The long interview gave the researcher an opportunity to create a comfortable yet trusting climate that allowed the participant to be honest and forthright as each provided me with a total reflection of his experiences (Moustakas, 1994). An interview protocol helped to generate rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participant. Further, Moustakas (1994) recommended engaging in epoche to set aside any biases that may emerge while conducting the interview.

Seidman (2013) suggested using a three-interview format which consists of three 90-minute interviews that integrate elements to enhance the validity of the data which consists of the life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning. This approach allowed participants to share their lived experiences related to time spent incarcerated, how their criminal record impacted employment and the employment barriers that confront them. The participants were unable to participate in three 90-minute interviews due to work or personal obligations, and the three-interview process was conducted the same day. The researcher and participants were able to explore the experience of the participant, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

I used a digital voice recorder and computer voice recorder to record the interviews, ensure the information collected was accurate and assist with recording notes, non-verbal communication, and cues of the participant. The equipment was tested before the start of each interview. A manila folder contains the screening questionnaire, participant demographic form, informed consent form, letter of invitation, interview protocol, and interview transcript. Participants provided consent to record before the beginning of the meeting. I asked open-ended questions to encourage each participant to elaborate on their experiences. Prompts or follow-up questions were included to probe participants for additional information. These questions were designed to help the participant to elaborate, provide more detail or clarify information. The use of prompts or follow-up questions was a major factor in delving into topics that emerged and led to a deeper awareness of the phenomenon.

Each interview took place in person in a secure location. During each interview, the participant was seated directly across from myself and I used a digital voice recorder and computer voice recorder to record each interview. After each interview was complete, I transcribed each interview instead of having someone transcribe the data. To transcribe one's data provides insight and clarity through immersion. The data analysis process began and continued as all interviews were complete. If new data had emerged during the review of the transcripts or data analysis that needed clarification, additional interviews would have been completed. After the data was transcribed, a copy was placed in the participant file. The participants were contacted after the data were transcribed to participate in member checking to ensure that I captured the meaning of what was said.

Each file includes a copy of the following documents: (a) phone screening interview; (b) letter of invitation; (c) participant demographic form; (d) informed consent form; (e) interview meeting introduction script; (f) thank you letter; (g) interview protocol; (h) and transcribed interview.

Data Analysis Plan

The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? Moustakas (1994) asserted the primary focus of phenomenology is the lived world from the perspective of the observer; a phenomenology interview that begins with a general dialog or reflective activity to create a comfortable and trusting environment. Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, and Sambrook (2010) stressed descriptive phenomenology involves the researcher employing a bias-free process. In hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, the researcher focused on the human experience which rebuffs Husserl's focus on the description (Vagle, 2014). Interpretive phenomenology assumes that one cannot separate the observer from the world. Participant feedback in interpretive phenomenology is important as it helps check interpretations made by the researcher (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

The challenge in qualitative analysis is making sense of the data (Bekhet, 2012). It was recommended that data be collected and analyzed at the same time to help cycle back and forth between reflecting on the data and strategizing on how to collect better data (Rowley, 2012). The modified Van Kaam method of analysis was used to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994):

1. Listing and preliminary grouping
2. Reduction and elimination
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and theme by application
5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher and individual textural description of the experience
6. Construct for each co-researcher and individual structural description of the experience based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation.
7. Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994).

I performed Step 1, listing and preliminary grouping, on all phrases expressed that were pertinent to the experiences as described by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). For Step 2, reduction and elimination, I reduced the data by engaging in multiple reviews of each interview transcript and eliminated any phrases that did not reflect the lived experience of the participants. Repetitive and overlapping statements were eliminated with the remaining statements reflecting the meaning units of the experience used to describe the phenomenon in descriptive terminology, or invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994). In Step 3, clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, I grouped the invariant constituents by theme, the process of clustering that reflected the

essential themes of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In Step 4, final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application, I checked the invariant constituents and themes against participant transcripts to ensure the expressed themes were clearly identified. In Step 5, construction of individual textural description, I used quotes from each transcribed interview to construct a textural description of the meaning and essence of the lived experience of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). In Step 6, construction of individual structural description, I constructed structural descriptions for each participant based on the textural descriptions created (Moustakas, 1994).

In Step 7, constructs for each research participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes, the textural and structural descriptions were joined to construct an understanding of the experience of the phenomenon experienced by each participant (Moustakas, 1994). A composite description was created that represented the synthesized essence and meaning of the experiences for each participant. Any data that contradicted the emergent themes from the data analysis was not ignored and reported even if the data did not support the theory used to guide this study. There were only two discrepant cases in the data for this study.

According to Dworkin (2012) and Seidman (2013), there are two criteria for enough: sufficiency and saturation of information. When sufficiency occurs, it means that there were enough participants and sites to create an adequate sample while saturation of information means there is no new information to emerge (Dworkin, 2012; Suri, 2011). I

intended to recruit 25 participants for the study because I predicted that no new information would emerge after the completion of 25 interviews. I made a point to be open and flexible to make adjustments to the sample size until I reached full data saturation; meaning no new information emerged after I completed 25 interviews. However, due to the low response rate, only five participants volunteered and interviewed for the study. Moreover, Suri (2011) suggested that data saturation is contingent on the type of data source; thus, purposeful data and accurate questions ensured saturation much quickly.

During the interview process, I had to rephrase questions for the participants to obtain the information needed. After the fifth interview, saturation was achieved as there were no new themes to emerge, and the data did not present any new information on the phenomenon. According to Seidman (2013), the sample size may vary based on the phenomenon under study. Sample sizes in phenomenological studies may range from as little as three to over 300 participants. According to Patton (2002), size was not of the greatest importance. The most significant factor in determining sample size was the intent of the study, the number established reliability, and the feasibility and availability of the resources. The sample size for this study was five participants. Based on previous phenomenological studies on ex-offenders, this size was appropriate. The process of data collection, data analysis, and the formation of categories required finding patterns in the participants' responses to support selected themes. The goal was to saturate each category to show similarity and consistency. Data saturation was necessary as it provided a complete understanding of data and supported the categories and themes selected from

the participants' responses. The saturation of data also allowed for data to stand alone without additional information.

Coding. After I had recorded each interview, I began to analyze the data. Codes were used to retrieve and categorize similar segments of data before and after data analysis (Talanquer, 2014). Several types of coding were employed such as descriptive, In Vivo, emotion, and value (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Talanquer, 2014). Descriptive coding was used to summarize short phrases that aided in indexing and categorizing (Talanquer, 2014). In Vivo coding was used to code participant responses and respect their voice while emotion coding was used to capture the experiences of the participants and gain insight into their perspectives, worldviews and life conditions (Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Values coding combined three different types of codes that reflect the participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs that represent their perspective or worldview (Miles et al., 2014). Coding is a deductive and inductive process that allows movement back and forth as the data is analyzed and the researcher engages in a critical reflection of what the data means (Talanquer, 2014). Coding may present challenges if too much data is coded or too little data is coded (Whiffin, Bailey, Ellis-Hill, & Jarrett, 2014).

I started by identifying and comparing common themes in interview one and two. After identifying common themes, I analyzed the third interview to examine common themes to compare to interviews one and two. I continued the same process with interviews four and five. A careful review and reading of the data helped develop categories and themes. I made sure to bracket my biases which allowed me to give equal

attention to all data. After determining the categories, I reread the data to code the data through highlighting and annotations. I elected to hand-code the data instead of using NVivo which allowed me to immerse myself on the data.

To help with data reduction, I focused on the data that was pertinent to the central research question. I read and reread the responses to each question to code data related to the lived experiences of the five participants regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. I engaged in the process of comparing the participants' responses to each interview questions to identify similarities in perspectives and derive meaning. I focused on data pertinent to the central research question to reach conclusions and findings related to the participants lived experiences regarding the impact of a criminal record on their employability in local government. After I had reviewed the five sets of data, I continued to immerse myself in the data. My goal was to be as thorough as possible to ensure that I had reached data saturation before making a request to stop data collection and start analyzing the data.

As I analyzed the data, I was able to reduce and extract discrepant cases that were germane to the central research question. I focused only on the themes that were related to the central question. As such, some participant responses were discarded because their responses were not related to the central research questions. The focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. The focus of this study was not to explore their discontent with the criminal justice system after release.

A list of significant statements was established based on the experience of the ex-offenders. By grouping statements into themes a textual or structural description of the experiences of the ex-offender illustrated the essences of the phenomenon (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). A provisional list of codes was created before the interviews and adjusted as necessary (Sotiriadou et al., 2014; Talanquer, 2014). Coding of data ended when no new information was revealed (Dworkin, 2012).

After the completion of the five interviews, I followed up with each participant to provide a copy of the interview transcript which allowed them to review the interpretation of their responses to the interview questions and ensure that I accurately interpreted the meanings of their responses. During member checking, each participant confirmed the interview transcript was accurate, and the interpretation was complete. None of the participants added any new information. Each participant thanked me for allowing them to be a part of the study. The participants expressed their desire that the study results would facilitate a change in programs and services for ex-offenders as well as make it easier for them to find employment after release. In summary, each participant indicated their agreeance with my interpretation of the meanings of their responses and did not have any addition information to add. No new data that emerged as a result of the member checking as verified by participant feedback.

Bracketing. The researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). A prerequisite to being able to set aside those things that may impact the study was an awareness of personal values and beliefs (Chan et al., 2013). The researcher was able to bracket by canceling the natural attitude that helps to

see the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing assisted in lessening the possibility of negatives outcomes related to any biases that may contaminate the study (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing enhanced transparency and engagement by showing personal experiences and understanding of the phenomena as well as protected the interviewer and participant from sensitive topics (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

To achieve bracketing, I followed Chen et al. four recommended strategies: mental preparation, deciding the scope of the literature review, planning data collection and data analysis. Further, Chen et al. asserted these strategies helps to prepare to conduct this type of study, manage preconception, collect data to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through face-to-face interviews, and analyzing data to enhance trustworthiness. As the researcher, setting aside any knowledge of the phenomenon, beliefs, values and experiences helped to provide an accurate description of the lived experiences as told by the participants. Memos were written to examine and reflect on how to engage the data and become aware of themes that may prevent paying attention to the participants or elicit an emotional response (Chan et al., 2013; Tufford & Newman, 2010). I maintained a reflexive journal to record any thoughts, feelings or perceptions and to identify any potential influence that emerged during the process that could potentially impact the study (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Audit trail. This study examined the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders related to their employability. The audit trail ensured trustworthiness, transparency related to the steps taken in the study, data collection, and presentation of

results (Houghton et al., 2013; White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). The audit trail established a record of tasks employed during the study (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The audit trail included a copy of the interview questions, prompts and a timeline of all steps used in the study.

Peer debriefing. The debriefing was employed after the interviews were conducted to allow participants to obtain additional information related to the study (Patterson, 2010). The debriefing process served several purposes. Debriefing encouraged the researcher to examine bias and a comprehensive understanding helped the researcher develop and assess the research design, address concerns and receive support (Houghton et al., 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015). I obtained each participant's contact information for the debriefing. During the interview, it was possible for participants to experience a level of anxiety or discomfort when discussing their past. The purpose of the study and information on the results were reiterated. The researcher thanked the participants for volunteering for the study and offered to answer any questions or address any concern.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was essential to success; therefore, the ability to gain access to the local government organizations and the participants who worked in these agencies was critical. The ability to ensure credibility was critical to establishing trustworthiness. Steps were taken to manage the pages of data that are collected and assign an identifier for each participant. All participant documents included informed consent, interview transcript, demographic data, and field notes and used the same participant identifier.

There are four criteria to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Elo et al., 2014).

Credibility

Member-checking was an essential part of the data collection process in qualitative studies because the researcher could verify information obtained during the interview process (Maxwell, 2013). Using member checks improved the rigor of phenomenological research (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). Member-checking provided a systematic method for seeking feedback from participants and allowed them to evaluate the interpretations, clarify misinterpretations, provide additional information, or verify that the researcher captured the meaning of what was said (Maxwell, 2013). It also fostered a dialog of the meaning of the analysis from the perspectives of the participants and researcher. Participant feedback was an essential element in establishing credibility (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). However, researchers must be cautioned that it is possible for a participant to experience anxiety when asked to reflect on past experiences, regret sharing information, or feel they have to agree with the researcher. The validity of the data may be affected if participants do not agree with the researcher's interpretation of the data (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). Recruiting participants who have experience with the phenomenon that can offer diverse perspectives on their lived experiences and consistency in collecting data helped to establish credibility (White et al., 2012). Also, member checks, triangulation, peer review and persistent exposure contributed to enhancing credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to use the study in other settings (White et al., 2012). Using rich descriptions assisted with transferability. The sample, setting and process are aspects of a qualitative study that must be adequately described the study to be compared to other studies (White et al., 2012). The study identified limits to selecting a sample that critically examined the ability to be generalizable to other settings. The results provided thick descriptions that allowed the targeted audience to determine if the study can be transferrable or appropriate in another setting (White et al., 2012). Transferability is always left up to the reader to decide (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Porte, 2013).

Dependability

Field notes were used to record the participant feelings and thoughts. By maintaining a journal to document all the steps taken during data collection and data analysis helped to establish dependability. The journal was a method to record reactions, reflections, and interpretation from field notes and research journal to guard against bias (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). All participants had an opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information (Houghton et al., 2014). Confirmation of data from multiple sources and ensuring data was complete by obtaining multiple perspectives was used for each interview with participants to illustrate a complete representation of the phenomenon (Houghton et al., 2013). Triangulation ensured that the participants lived experiences have been recorded accurate, awareness of any variability, biases, or inconsistencies (Houghton et al., 2014). The lived experience of each participant was compared to the other participants to establish to illustrate the

depictions of the participants based on their lived experience (Houghton et al., 2014).

Negative or discrepant information that counters any themes that emerge was included to present contradictory information that will enhance credibility.

Confirmability

The main elements of confirmability are the manner in which the researcher acknowledges biases as well as the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Houghton et al., 2014). An audit trail, which demonstrates rigor, was used to establish confirmability such as a reflexive journal to bracket during the research process (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012; Lamb, 2013a; White et al. 2012). The reflexive journal included the purpose of the study, thoughts, feelings and perceptions of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, the researcher's role and personal value system (Hayman et al., 2012; Lamb, 2013a). Reflection helped to create and clarify the meaning of the experience which allowed for enhanced critical thinking and introspect (Lamb, 2013b). Reflexivity was fundamental in helping the researcher identify potential influences (Chan et al., 2013; Lamb, 2013b). Reflexivity included examining personal values and interest that may affect the research and identify areas of potential bias to reduce their influence through bracketing (Chan et al., 2013).

Ethical Procedures

There were several ethical issues to consider in the study. The ethical guidelines of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice were adhered to (Walden University, 2010). The ability to protect human subjects was a key ethical concern the guidelines established by Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for informed consent

was followed. I completed and received certification (#118834) on "Protecting Human Research Participants" from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. This study went through a meticulous process of examination from the Walden University IRB.

I contacted the Walden University IRB to inquire when I could start sending out the recruitment invitation flyer to secure participants for my study. The Walden University IRB stated that the flyer could be sent at any time. An internet search was conducted over a 1-year period to obtain contact information for all local government agencies within the 159 counties in the state of Georgia. At least 84 agencies (11%) had no contact information either email, fax or phone available on the website. I made phone calls to 75 local government agencies in which there was not an email address listed on the organization's website.

On December 17, 2015, emails were sent to local government agency representatives to request assistance with disseminating the recruitment flyer to their employees. The first group of representatives received emails on December 17th, December 18th, December 23rd, December 28th, December 29th, and December 30th. Follow-up emails were sent on March 25, 2016. I continued to conduct an internet search to obtain contact information for the remaining local government agencies. On April 14, 2016 emails were sent to the remaining representatives and follow-up email sent on April 30, 2016 after approval was received. All emails and follow-up emails were sent return-receipt to track whether or not the email request was read or deleted. The letter to local government agencies and recruitment invitation flyer provided an in-depth and

succinct explanation of the purpose of the research. I explained the purpose of the study and ensured the representative that all necessary precautions were in place to protect the identity of both the organization and the participant.

Despite the emails, follow-up emails, and phone calls to 723 local government agencies to request assistance with disseminating the recruitment invitation flyer, the response rate was lower than expected. Of the 723 local government agencies, 398 responded to the request, did not open the email or deleted the email without reading it. I sent follow-up emails to organizations that deleted the initial request; however, the representative also deleted the follow-up email. The responses received from the local government agencies that responded to the request varied (see Appendix R).

The approval was contingent on how effective the process of protecting participants was established for this study. Once I received approval from the Walden University IRB, each participant received an in-depth explanation of the study and their rights as participants. The participant rights included the purpose of the study, the benefits of the study, the right to participate voluntarily, the right to withdraw at any time, the right to ask questions, the right to privacy, and the right to receive a copy of the study. I reviewed all pertinent information with each participant and I provided each participant copies of all documents. There was an opportunity to ask questions to clarify any information that was provided before the interview to ensure each participant had a clear understanding that participation was strictly voluntary, free of deception, free of coercion, or any other type of manipulative actions. The informed consent form summarized the potential risks and benefits of the study per federal guidelines. The document included

the date the participant and researcher signed the form electronically or in-person. All forms are kept secured on a password-protected portable hard drive for five years and will be destroyed.

The identity of the participants and their rights are protected as well as respected as outlined in the guidelines established by the Walden University IRB. I established trust and integrity with each participant during the process. Participants received an explanation on how the data is collected and used. There was no resistance by ex-offenders in their respective organization to participate in the study. The number of study participants may be lower than expected based on agency policy or procedure. There was not a delay in getting approval from the IRB for the ex-offender population who have been released and currently employed in local government.

Since the participants are considered part of a vulnerable population, procedures were established to ensure limited risks and confidentiality of the participants. The methods for recruiting ex-offenders were discreet so as not to make it a requirement for an individual to disclose they are an ex-offender. When conducting the data analysis, the description of the participants was general so that no one can detect who has participated in the study (personal communication, April 1, 2015). Participants were asked to use a pseudonym to protect their identity. All interview transcripts, digital audio files, and written documents will be locked in a storage box for 5 years and destroyed at the end of 5 years. Conducting interviews in a private setting ensured the safety of the participant and the researcher. The participants could withdraw from the study or at any time during the interview process and before publishing the data. The informed consent form and

confidentiality were reviewed during the debriefing. Each participant had an opportunity to review the data, clarify or correct any data, as well as withdraw any information provided.

The participants for this study were ex-offenders who are considered part of a vulnerable population to must be protected from emotional and physical harm during the process. I made sure each participant was protected by: (a) conducting interviews in a secure location; (b) assigning pseudonyms to participants; (c) pledging to destroy all files upon five-year expiration date; (d) informing participants that they could stop the interview without penalty at any time; and, (e) informing participants that they may opt out any time.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described and provided justification for selecting phenomenology as the qualitative research methodology for this study. I provided an overview of the research site, selection criteria, recruitment process, interview protocol, potential risks, and ethical considerations. I provided a detailed description of the procedures, data collection, and data analysis methods as well as an explanation concerning the role of the researcher and the influence on the research study. I also explained the process for the sampling procedures and concluded with a discussion of trustworthiness to include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and ethical issues.

In Chapter 4, I will summarize the research that reports fundamental aspects and detailed descriptions of the lived experiences discovered through the face-to-face interviews coding and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. Five African-American male ex-offenders shared their lived experiences in semistructured interviews. This research has implications for positive social change: by emphasizing the impact of a criminal record on the employability of these men in local government and exploring ways to help local government agencies address this issue. The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia?

The data were analyzed and connected back to the central research question to depict the experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding employability. The process of hand-coding the data helped me to identify significant statements, phrases, and themes, which provided insight into the participants' employability, including similarities among themes and categories from the data. The life course perspective theory supported and shed light on themes discovered in the data analysis.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the research setting, participant demographics, population, data collection, data analysis and evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter includes a review of the findings that addressed the central research question.

Research Setting

Purposeful sampling and the snowball technique were used to recruit participants for this study. Between December 2015 and April 2016, a recruitment flyer was sent to

723 local government agency representatives in the state of Georgia. I conducted a face-to-face interview with five participants using a digital voice recorder and computer voice recorder. I was able to establish rapport with each participant during a brief phone interview and again before conducting the interview. The interview setting offered privacy, convenience, and comfort to help ensure each interview was successful. I conducted one interview at the home of a participant, three interviews at a local park and one at a Salvation Army. I gave the participants the option of conducting the interviews after work or on the weekend at a time that was convenient for them. The participants agreed to be interviewed after work during the week and on the weekend at a mutually agreed upon time. Each participant was thanked for taking time out of their schedule to consent to the interview.

The interview process was explained to each participant, including how the data would be used. I informed the participants that after I transcribed the interview, I would provide a copy of the interview transcript via e-mail or in person for member checking. None of the participants requested to withdraw from the study or expressed any emotional or psychological stress during the interview. I asked each participant if they had questions before the interview. I debriefed the participants' after the interview, and provided them with an opportunity to express any concerns regarding their participation in the study or if they experienced any discomfort as a result of participation in the study.

Demographics

The participants included five African-American male ex-offenders that self-identified as an African-American male ex-offender who has applied for employment or

currently works for a local government agency. The participant demographics are listed below in Table 4. Each participant selected a pseudonym to protect their identity. Three participants were single, one was married, and one was divorced. The participant's ages ranged from 30 to 60 years old. The least number of years employed in local government was less than one year, and the highest number of years employed in local government was five years. The highest period of incarceration was 35 years and the lowest period of incarceration was 60 months. Due to the low response rate from other regions in Georgia, the sample only included African-American males from Coastal Georgia. I reviewed the informed consent forms with each participant before obtaining their signature. I also reassured each participant of their rights. The participants were selected because of their lived experience with the phenomenon of employability in local government agencies.

Table 4.

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Years of work experience	Education	Number of Years incarcerated	Region
Hammer	Male	Single	40-49	5 years	Technical	60 months	Coastal Georgia
Torey	Male	Married	30-39	1 -3 years	Masters	5 years 3 months	Coastal Georgia
Mike	Male	Divorced	40-49	Less than 1 year	GED	15 years 6 months	Coastal Georgia
Gumbo	Male	Single	50-59	1 – 3 years	HS Diploma/GED	35 years	Coastal Georgia
Cheeze	Male	Single	50-59	Less than 1 year	HS Diploma/GED	8 years 2 months	Coastal Georgia

Data Collection

Five participants met the criteria for this study and consented to participate. The five semistructured interviews included a series of open-ended questions designed to induce an exploration of the lived experiences of employability in local government (see Appendix N). The use of a phenomenological design places the researcher and participant in a position that allows them to connect the experiences of the phenomenon together (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were recruited for the study through a recruitment invitation flyer between December 25, 2015 and August 2016 (see Appendix C). The recruitment invitation flyer was emailed to 723 local government agency representatives in 159 counties in the state of Georgia to request assistance with disseminating the flyer to employees. Due to the low response rate, I made a request to the IRB to use alternative recruitment methods. The participants for this study were obtained from referrals based on contact with hiring managers, personal contact or the snowball technique.

The data collection process started after the Walden University IRB approved the study. I conducted a brief 15-minute telephone meeting to collect background information, gain an understanding of the participant's lives, and to understand the impact of the criminal record on their ability to find work. I interviewed five participants between June 2016 and August 2016. Each participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent form to sign by email or in person which were reviewed with each participant and collected at the time of the interview. Before each interview began, the researcher thanked the participant for their time. Each participant received an introduction to the questions to be explored during the meeting. The researcher reminded

the participants that (a) the interview would be recorded using a digital voice recorder and computer voice recorder; (b) they would receive a copy of the transcript to review for completeness and accuracy; and, (c) they could stop at any time without penalty.

An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency in the flow of the interview. A total of 12 interview questions including prompts were used as a tool to guide and explore topics further, document the lived experiences, as well as take handwritten notes during each interview. I used an informal, long interview that included a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix N) that was designed to induce a comprehensive exploration of the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. I also observed the nonverbal communication such as facial expressions and body language of each participant as they shared their experiences. Each interview was recorded verbatim as the participant conveyed their lived experience including grammatical errors and slang. The shortest interview lasted for 32 minutes, and the longest interview lasted 61 minutes. The average time for the in-depth interview was 48 minutes. For some questions, the participant asked for the question to be rephrased to ensure they understood what was being asked. The interviews took place at the home of the participant with permission of his spouse, a café in Whole Foods, the Salvation Army, and a local park. One interview was rescheduled due to the background noise in the facility selected for the interview. Each participant was willing to share their lived experience and appeared to be honest in their responses.

The interview protocol included space to take notes or rephrase the interview questions that the participants needed further clarification, and ensure the participants

answered each interview question. The results of the data collected from five African-American male ex-offenders include the details of their lived experiences revealed from their perspectives. The interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of the interview which allowed me to properly document the information. Participants were encouraged to be as honest as possible when responding to each interview question.

I labeled each participant's audio recorded file and transcribed interview as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc., to include the pseudonym selected by the participant to ensure their anonymity. Each participant was asked to participate in member checking to ensure the accuracy of information and findings from the interviews. I informed the participants that this process would take no more than 30 minutes. Each participant agreed to participate in the member checking process. I verified the email address of those with an email account and verified the contact number of those without an email account to call them once the interviews were transcribed and set up a time to meet.

I used a journal to track codes and themes to categorize the responses to the research question. The transcribed data were color-coded by highlighting common themes. For example, if I saw that the word stigma was used, I used a colored ink pen to underline, and similar statements were grouped according to emerging themes. Other significant statements were highlighted and grouped based on emerging themes. Common themes and data saturation was achieved from the five participants, with similar experiences and perceptions recorded to illustrate consistency in the data. During the debriefing process, each participant received a copy of the transcribed interview transcript via email or in person to review for accuracy. The debriefing process allowed

each participant to ensure the accuracy of their accounts and the transcription accurately reflected their words and meanings. Participant profiles were recorded on a participant demographic form to obtain background information.

Participant Profiles

Five African-American male ex-offenders who have applied for employment or currently work for a local government agency participated in this study. Given that African-American males reflect the largest population during reentry in the state of Georgia, the rationale for conducting this study on this particular group was to explore their lived experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of their criminal record on their employability in local government. The information collected from the participant demographic forms enhanced the data gathered from the interview questions and provided an understanding of the impact of the criminal record on their employability. Each participant story was based on their experiences as an ex-offender. The background data was essential to this study as the data increased the validity of the research data.

Participant 1

The first participant was Hammer, a 40–49-year-old single male who lives with his girlfriend and daughter. Hammer dedicates his weekends to spending time with his daughter. Hammer was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 20 and spent 60 months in prison. During the interview, Hammer appeared to be very passionate about sharing his lived experiences. At times, he demonstrated his frustration regarding multiple callbacks to interview for positions he eventually did not receive. It took him four years and five interviews to receive an offer for his current position. Hammer shared

the main reason he became interested in working for a local government agency was the excellent benefits package provided to employees.

Participant 2

The second participant, Torey, was a 30-39-year old married male. He was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 13. After his incarceration, Torey pursued his master's degree in social work after he was released and was previously employed as a counselor. Torey currently works as a coordinator for a local government agency helping other ex-offenders turn their lives around. Torey firmly believes that ex-offenders deserve a second chance after they have served their time. He feels there needs to be a paradigm shift to change the mindsets of both the employer and the ex-offender is reentry is to be successful.

Participant 3

The third participant, Mike, was a 40-49-year old divorced male. Mike was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 27. Mike is currently pursuing his bachelor's degree. He has applied to work as a general laborer and mid-level positions with a local government agency but has not been able to secure employment. Although he received some training before, during and after incarceration, he was not aware of any programs to help him after he was released.

Participant 4

The fourth participant, Gumbo, was a 50-59-year old single male. Gumbo was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 19. Gumbo has applied for general laborer positions and currently works for a local government agency. Gumbo was determined not

to return to the system because he wanted to *make my momma proud*. He promised himself that he would not get into trouble again and to this day has kept that promise. Gumbo indicated the training he received during his period of incarceration did not prepare him for a career after incarceration because he was not able to obtain employment in the areas he received training during incarceration. If it had not been for his current supervisor, he felt he would never have been given an opportunity for a second chance.

Participant 5

The fifth participant, Cheeze, was a 50-59-year old, single male who currently lives in a local shelter. He was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 17. Although he is not from Georgia, he previously worked for a local government agency in Florida. He has applied to work as a general laborer. Cheeze parents are deceased and he had to do whatever it took to survive. He has made it a point to constantly surround himself with positive people who continuously encouraged and motivated him to turn his life around.

Data Analysis

After each interview was complete, I hand coded the data without the use of a computer software program. Each interview was transcribed within 48 hours of data collection and stored on a secured portable hard device. I followed Moustakas (1994) recommendations by engaging in epoche to help recognize and manage any biases related to the phenomenon. I used inductive data analysis to examine similarities and patterns that exist between the participants and effectively analyzed and synthesized the data. I was interested in finding similar elements that existed between African-American male

ex-offenders to develop a summary of my interpretation of each interview for member checking. As I began analyzing the data, I carefully listened to each interview multiple times while transcribing the data and immersed myself in the data to understand the essence of each participant's experience.

I precoded the data to identify boundaries to assist with describing the amount and quality of data being collected for coding thus putting emphasis on the specific data that answered the central research question. Transcription of each interview took seven to ten hours. In addition to transcribing the context, I listened for emotional cues that indicated a change in the participant mood and tone of voice as their experiences were recanted. I ensured that I was responsive to the frequency and context associated with codes that were germane to the research question. At the completion of each interview, I contacted the participant to inform them that the transcript was ready for review. The transcripts were emailed or given to participants in person with instructions to return within 48 hours.

I used first and second coding methods (Saldana, 2013) to analyze the data. Saldana (2013) asserted that first cycle coding is a preliminary evaluation of concepts, phrases or statements frequently stated by participants. Codes were grouped into specific categories and concrete themes. Based on the type of research conducted, these categories were used by themselves or combined (Saldana, 2013). By moving carefully through the data using first cycle coding, I was able to give particular attention to In Vivo coding, descriptive coding, emotions coding, and values coding (Saldana, 2013).

Second cycle coding helped the researcher cycle back to data collected during first cycle coding (Saldana, 2013). I also reorganized the data to focus the direction of the study back to the central research question. The connection between the first and second cycle coding consisted of provisional interconnections to uncover patterns, themes, and the essence of the phenomenon under study.

In vivo, description, emotion, and values codes. Saldana (2013) explained In Vivo codes gives attention to the words and phrases, or direct quotes, used by participants as codes which respects the voice of the participants. Descriptive codes are nouns that are used to summarize words or phrases (Saldana, 2013). Emotion codes identify the feelings of the participant or describe their reaction as indicated by the researcher during the interview (Saldana, 2013). Values codes reflect the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants based on their perspective or worldview (Saldana, 2013). Instead of using the software NVivo, all data was hand coded which allowed me to immerse myself in the data. My committee approved the use of hand-coding data and understood the importance of doing so.

I used the modified van Kaam method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). After transcribing each interview, I read it multiple times and highlighted all significant statements germane to the participant's experience. Each significant statement was highlighted in a different color to help code the data and make it easier to identify emerging themes. I created a list of each sentence or phrase that reflected the views of each participant. These sentences and phrases helped to understand how each participant

experienced the phenomenon. The process of horizontalization helped me to view each statement as equal or having equal significance (Moustakas, 1994).

Reduction and elimination allowed me to evaluate the expressions of each participant to ascertain if including the sentence or phrase was needed and satisfactorily described elements of the phenomenon. I was able to identify the meaning units of the experience and redundant phrases were eliminated to reduce the data to data of useful significance to the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). After engaging in a thorough read of each sentence and phrase to determine equal value, all repetitive, unrelated, and unclear statements were not considered for further data analysis. The identified and labeled horizons were clustered into 347 significant statements to textural descriptions for 165 themes. Subsequently, themes with more than five unique coresearchers were identified, which resulted in generating composite descriptions for 11 final themes. The third step, clustering and thematizing, is a process of gathering the core categories of the participant experience and placing the invariant constituents into themes (Moustakas, 1994). After recognizing and combining overlapping and repetitive categories, I clustered the 165 preliminary categories into 11 themes. This step helped me to arrange the data into themes that reflected the fundamental essence of the experience.

In step four, I substantiated the central themes of the participant experience to ensure the phrases and corresponding themes were consistent with the transcribed interview of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). Each transcript was compared to the central themes to determine the themes were clearly stated by each participant, if not clearly articulated, the theme consistent with the descriptions of the participants, and if

they were not clearly articulated, the theme was germane to the lived experience of the participant. The data analysis resulted in identifying 11 themes.

In step five, each pertinent and substantiated phrase related to the specific themes was constructed into individual textural descriptions of the experience as articulated by each participant. This step helped the researcher grasp what each participant experienced (Moustakas, 1994). I used verbatim examples from each transcribed interview in this step. In step six, construction of individual textural descriptions for each participant, I included a structural explanation of how the experience happened into the textural description (Moustakas, 1994). In step seven, I constructed the textural and structural descriptions the *what* and *how* of each participant (Moustakas, 1994).

The essence of the experiences of an individual is never ending. After following each step as outlined in the modified Van Kaam method of analysis, I integrated the description into a composite description of the meanings and essence of the experience as articulated by each participant. I critically evaluated the data to eliminate any data that could not be used. Every theme identified supported each participant response and served as confirmation that saturation was achieved when the information provided from participants became repetitive and new codes and themes no longer related to the research. I achieved saturation with the fifth interview as no new data emerged.

Discrepant Cases

A discrepant case is data that departs from the perspective on the phenomenon being studied (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). There was one discrepant case identified in the interviews with the participants. Although each participant was cognizant of the

importance of securing a job, Mike did not have a positive lived experience related to employability after his incarceration. At the time of the interview, Mike was waiting to be contacted for an interview. His responses to the interview questions were based on his perception of how ex-offenders are perceived by society and hiring managers. Although a supportive network of family and friends helped him stay out of jail, his criminal record kept him from finding work.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility and adherence to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Walden University, 2010), I secured approval from the Walden University IRB approval on April 13, 2016 (See Appendix A). I maintained the integrity of all guidelines throughout the process. Also, I followed the modified van Kaam method of data analysis for described in Chapter 3 and used member checking- and reflexivity.

Transferability

As outlined in Chapter 3, I used diversity and thick descriptions to ensure transferability. Sample diversity included a balanced representative of interviewees by gender, age, position, and years in the local government sector. Thick descriptions involved the use of multiple reviews of interview data, audio and written, as well as multiple paragraph contextualization to ensure integrity and transferability.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, I adhered to Walden University's quality standards and guidelines. Also, I actively engaged with my dissertation committee throughout the process and incorporated recommendations and suggestions, particularly for issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. Also, as previously highlighted, I adhered to the modified van Kaam method of data analysis as well as member transcript verification.

Confirmability

For confirmability, the modified Van Kaam method fulfilled the core concept of bracketing as essential to phenomenological research. This essential element of phenomenological research is inherently reflexive, thereby satisfying the standard of confirmability. The bracketing process included an initial self-interview along with data analysis to surface themes associated with the lived experiences of being an ex-offender seeking employment. Consequently, bracketing and reflexivity allowed for emerging possible biases while processing interview data with deep listening and fresh seeing.

Study Results

This qualitative phenomenology study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government. There were several patterns, themes, and relationships that emerged as I immersed myself in the data. The patterns that emerged as a result of this study included the stigma of a criminal record and willingness to speak candidly about their experience related to employability as an ex-offender. All statements with significant meaning were

emphasized, and commonalities were identified to formulate meaning units and clustered into organized themes.

From five verbatim transcripts, 347 significant statements were extracted to include formulated meanings, clusters of themes and sub-themes. I analyzed the 165 working themes for unique theme representation and words dedicated to each theme resulted in 11 final themes along with corresponding structural elements revealed from the structural description, Step 5 of the modified van Kaam data analysis method. These themes include the following: (a) the importance of employment; (b) limited knowledge of the employment, background, and hiring process; (c) dishonesty and honesty about past; (d) discrimination, racism, stereotype; (e) strong will and determination to succeed; (f) accountability and responsibility; (g) stigma of a criminal record; (h) lack of available resources; (i) attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers; (j) good support system; and, (k) limited opportunity for a second chance.

Textural Description of Participant Experiences

The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia? The following textual description of the experiences of the five participants depicts individual textual narratives from each participant related to their experiences. The textual descriptions include: (a) familiarity with the employment, hiring, and background process; (b) attitudes and perceptions regarding the criminal record; (c) attitudes and perceptions regarding the decisions of hiring managers; (d) attitudes and perceptions as an ex-offender seeking employment; and, (e) attitudes and

perceptions related to resources pre-and post-incarceration which are presented in a descriptive design. The perceptions of these five men regarding the support or lack of support received after release incarceration and during reentry are encapsulated in these textual syntheses.

Emergent Theme One: Employment is Important

The theme of *employment is important* emerged as an essential mission and major challenge for participants as ex-offenders have a difficult time finding work during reentry. Westerling et al noted nearly 95% of offenders are incarcerated in the U. S. and return to their communities without relevant skills to secure work. Employment was not within reach for two participants at the time of interview. Regardless of the barriers that confronted these men, three participants were able to persevere and find work.

As the participants described their lived experiences, they pointed out that the inability to obtain employment created thoughts of returning to their former lifestyle just to be able to survive. Hammer recalled the inability to find work made him “feel like giving up, quitting, or resulting back to the negativity, back to drug dealing or robbing to get this money.” Torey sought employment in local government because he “needed a job.” Mike, who was still unemployed at the time of interview, affirmed he sought employment in local government because he “needed to be able to take care of myself without having too much struggle.” Each participant sought employment in local government for the similar reasons: a stable job and benefits.

Based on the findings of this study, incarceration created a stigma that made it difficult to find work due to limited job prospects and avoid recidivism (Bumiller, 2015;

Raskin, 2015). As suggested in findings in the literature, a criminal record created multiple challenges and employment barriers during reentry and employers must be able to establish guidelines that address these obstacles to employment that make it possible for these men to find work (Solomon, 2012). Ex-offenders who exit prison are adversely impacted by limited job opportunities (Bumiller, 2015).

Emergent Theme Two: Limited Knowledge of Employment, Background, and Hiring Process

The theme *limited knowledge of the employment, hiring and background process* revealed the participants did not have knowledge of the processes in local government. Their knowledge was based on what they knew or did not know, or what they expected to happen. To explore this topic, participants were asked about their knowledge of the hiring process. Their responses revealed that the participants had limited knowledge of the steps in the process. Hammer stated,

I really wasn't that familiar with the hiring process. I know that it would have to go through H and R. I didn't know that I was gonna sit in front of a panel of maybe three or four personnel. I knew I was facing a drug screen. I knew I was facing a criminal background. I did not know the hiring process, but I know those things.

Mike acknowledged he had limited knowledge of the employment process. He stated, "I am familiar with going through a vetting process that evaluates an applicant on job skills, grammar and properly completing the application for employment." One participant,

Gumbo affirmed he knew how to apply but was not familiar with the process at all as his PO helped him get his current job. He knew that there would be certain challenges and the application has to be viewed by human resources- people he says does not know who he is.

A background check is one of the key aspects of the employment process that may impact job opportunities for ex-offenders. Only a limited number of local government agencies have implemented ban the box initiatives as noted in chapter 2. When describing their lived experiences, the participants indicated they were familiar with ban the box but did not have a thorough understanding of this initiative. The participant responses varied when were asked about their lived experiences regarding familiarity with the background standards before applying for work with a local government entity. Hammer acknowledged he knew that the local government agency he works for hired convicted felons but did not know if there were certain charges that would immediately bump him out the system. He recalled, "I just took a chance. That's the only thing that I really know about their hiring process. I know that they do hire convicted felons." Torey was not familiar with the background procedures; however, he assumed anyone with a criminal history would be disqualified from "successfully obtaining employment."

Cavico et al revealed that nearly 56 municipalities and 100 cities and counties had adopted ban the box. The FIRC, EEOC guidance, and ban the box initiatives decreased employment obstacles at the federal, state, and local levels (Pinard, 2013). Since 2013, only five city and county municipalities implemented ban the box. In 2015, Georgia

became the first state in the south to ban the box. Mike was the first participant to discuss ban the box initiative the state of Georgia. His understanding of ban the box is “don’t ask don’t tell. If they don’t ask me anything I don’t have to tell them anything about it. I don’t have to offer the information or nothing requested of it.”

Ex-offenders must understand the purpose and intent of the ban the box initiative. First, it encourages employers to conduct the background check after the conditional offer of employment is made. Second, it allows the ex-offender to discuss the information during the interview with the hiring manager. Third, it allows ex-offenders to be considered based on qualifications and fit for the job (Maurer, 2014; Solinas-Saunders et al., 2013). Employers are encouraged to use the Green factors to assess the seriousness of the crime, how long ago the crime occurred, and relevance of the crime to the job (Pettinato, 2014).

Gumbo shared his lack of knowledge regarding the background process. Like Hammer, he knew a background check would be conducted but felt it did not matter because his PO had helped him get his job. Cheeze also confirmed he was not real familiar with the process, but he did know that a prospective employer would look at his criminal record and conduct an NCIC check. Although the participants had some knowledge of what happens during the employment, hiring, and background process, and ban the box, they do not have a complete understanding all of the aspects. Most organizations list this information on their website but for organizations that do not list the information on the website, asking the human resources representative about the process will help learn about the steps and what to expect.

Emergent Theme Three: Dishonesty and Honesty About Past

The theme *dishonesty and honesty about the past* aligns with the attitudes, and characteristics ex-offenders bring to the employment process such as feelings of failure, distrust, lack of education and learning disabilities (Visher, Debus-Sherrill & Yahner, 2011; Woods et al., 2013). Committing crimes cultivates stigma, embarrassment, and deceitfulness because many African-American males are apprehensive about disclosing information regarding their criminal record to a prospective employer. The participants understood that withholding information from the employer breeds distrust and will often work against them rather than for them when trying to secure employment. In agreement with findings in the literature, offenders who fail to disclose their criminal past to prospective employers can very well violate the conditions of parole and additional periods of incarceration (Pogrebin et al., 2014). Two participants revealed that after release from prison they did not disclose their past criminal behavior on employment applications. The participants expressed that they did intend to hide the fact that they had a criminal record. They concealed the information as a means of being able to find work to survive. Hammer recalled a lived experience in which he was fired from a temporary service nearly one year after annual background checks were conducted. He was told they “didn’t know how I fell through the cracks or whatever with my charges and it’s just, it’s really ridiculous to me.”

Torey recalled one job where is decided to remove the anonymity of his felony background. By the time the company found out, he was a manager and they allowed him to complete a new application that included his criminal background information. Mike

was honest on his application, shared why he was convicted, and that he is under state and federal supervision. He said, “So, I got to disclose that if you ask the question, I have to tell you.” Gumbo did not lie on his application but chose not to list the information or even discuss it. He admitted that he only indicated yes and included the date of his conviction but did not get too many interviews. He said he “learned from the first two times by puttin’ your offense down and what it was. You don’t even get a chance.” Instead of listing too much information about his criminal convictions he simply put *will discuss in an interview*. Cheeze indicated the hiring managers asked about his felony charges during the interview. He said the hiring managers asked him several times before and after the interview about his convictions and he shared the information. It was obvious that Cheeze was frustrated when the hiring managers kept questioning him after he disclosed his criminal background:

And they asked me, they really, kept asking me that. And they, I think they was really trying to see if I was gone tell ah, something different each time. *But I said the same thing over and over cause that’s what it was.*

Emergent Theme Four: Discrimination, Racism, and Stereotype

The theme *discrimination, racism, and stereotype* emerged as the participants shared their lived experiences. The findings align with Brown (2011) which revealed discrimination and the stigma of incarceration adversely impacts employability and employment challenges. One of the side effects of incarceration is collateral consequences that make it difficult for ex-offenders to have their needs during reentry.

The participants view on life impacts the transitions and turning points in their current life stage (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Trajectories and transitions, (i.e., patterns of criminal behavior and unique life events (incarceration), are the two primary beliefs of the life course and those turning points may be subjective or objective (Bahr et al., 2005; Elder et al., 2003).

Two participants reflected on their lived experiences; they recalled feeling discriminated against because of their criminal record. Hammer conveyed, “it becomes biased or, umm, discriminating against you because of you a convicted felon.” Torey described his feelings as:

Dismay. You know um, feeling of I would say discrimination. But I think that discrimination plays a part in it. Especially with me being an African-American male with a criminal background. I just fit what would be a negative stereotype of the average African-American male.

Cheeze believed that hiring managers stereotype African-American males in general.

First of all, I think with that, you know, they was stereotyping us for years with the color of our skin. I know this ‘cause for years, I been seeing this on the job. They really stereotype us black men, the same, you know, that we got the same attitude, this don’t care attitude.

Each participant believed that he had experienced discrimination during the employment process because of their criminal record. The literature revealed out of all states Georgia ranks 48 out of 51 for roadblocks and second in severe collateral consequences but does not require help with collateral consequences (Caselman, 2014). In the state of Georgia, numerous employment barriers confront ex-offenders than any other State which sets them up for failure. Although subtle at times, these participants indicated they have experienced the discrimination, racism and stereotypes and the impact it has on their ability to find work. In Georgia, the first offender law addresses collateral consequences that indicate a criminal record cannot be used to disqualify individuals from employment in the public or private sectors.

Emergent Theme Five: Strong Will and Determination to Succeed

The theme *strong will and determination to succeed* emerged as I listened to each participant described their lived experience. Standpoint is a person's view of the world which influences how they understand self and how they communicate with others. Self-efficacy is a belief in one's own ability to implement appropriate behaviors to reach the desired results (Westerling et al., 2015). It was obvious that each participant had a strong will and determination to be successful once released from prison.

Hammer admitted that selling drugs was easier and paid more, but the consequences were not worth it; he just wanted to get a real job. Torey described his experience as an opportunity to share his story to help "shift that paradigm that people who commit acts of crime, don't always stay in that condition." His strong determination helped him from recidivism. These beliefs align with findings in the literature regarding

the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) that personal choice is essential when making career decisions and clarifies how internal and external factors can improve or limit personal choice (Johnson, 2013). Gumbo described it as:

Something that you gotta want to do it know what I mean, just like anything else in life. If you don't want to do it, it ain't gone work. You gotta want to do it for it to work. If you ain't strong, you'll fall of the horse. You'll fall of the horse, and you will be back in. But you have to be a person that, willing to say okay, I'm gone make, I'm gone make them out of a lie.

Cheeze believed that "if a man did certain things in his past, now he is doing something, trying to do something different. That ought to tell a person this man here trying to change his way of life and his way of thinking." By freely participating in corrective processes these men understood they had a greater opportunity to change their behavior and achieve positive results. None of the participants desired to return to prison but did desire an opportunity for a second chance.

Emergent Theme Six: Accountability and Responsibility

The theme *accountability and responsibility* emerged in the participant descriptions of their lived experiences. Aligned with the findings of Davis et al. (2012) as well as Laub and Sampson (2003), the results of this study revealed when an offender has a desire to change, recognize the opportunity for change and has social support for change, change will occur. All five participants indicated they had a desire to change from their former lifestyle because the consequences of incarceration were not worth it.

The participants recognized they each had an opportunity to change when the circumstances of life impelled them to go down a different path and change their lifestyle.

The participants displayed some frustration as they recalled their experiences and difficulty finding work because of the crimes they committed. They did not blame others for their unfortunate circumstances and admitted the situation they were in at the time caused them to commit crimes and go to prison. Instead, the participants were accountable and accepted responsibility for their actions and behaviors that were in their control. Hammer admitted being a convicted felon “was not beyond my control if I prevented that from the beginning.” Mike was straightforward and had no shame about his criminal record:

I don't like the fact that I had to go to prison or the things that I used to do. But it happened. It brought me to a point where I am the person I am today. And I've even become better as a result of that. So, I learned from it. So, it's nothing I look at as being ashamed of. It's a part of my life.

Gumbo spent the most time incarcerated, 35 years, but still took responsibility for the mistakes he made and his lack of education.

Granted it's not nobody's fault you didn't get the proper education. And I mean, like I say it's not the white man's fault that what you didn't, I mean, that you didn't

go to school and the things you need. I mean, that's your fault. But one mistake don't even, don't, don't, don't make everything wrong.

Cheeze believed during his interview the hiring managers continuously questioned him about his past to see if he was untruthful.

I explained it to them, *the situation I was in, in life that caused me to do these type of things, where no one would give me a job. I had to do what I had to do.* That's what I felt like during the time. When nobody, you know, while I'm out there in the streets and nobody would listen to me about giving me an opportunity, you know, to work. So, I told them, *this is what I had to do to survive.* This, this is what caused me to commit felonies. You know, *I had to do what I had to do to survive.*

Emergent Theme Seven: Stigma of a Criminal Record

The theme *stigma of a criminal record* emerged throughout each interview. In agreement with the literature, the participants believed employers in local government that are reluctant to hire African-American male ex-offenders based on their criminal record plays a role in the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of employers (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2015). Participants described their lived experiences about their perceptions regarding attitudes and perceptions on the criminal record. Hammer and Mike knew their criminal background was the only thing that prevented them from

finding work in local government. Torey believed for individuals with a criminal record, perceptions are a key factor for several reasons to include “feeling undervalued or looked at as less than a citizen.” He stressed that these biases cause people not to “particularly trust individuals with criminal backgrounds or particularly like people with criminal backgrounds. He feels those with criminal records are seen as the scum of the earth or less than human.” Gumbo believed having a criminal record means employers do not want to give ex-offenders a chance: “You can’t prove yourself, then it puts you back into that other category that cause you to get a criminal record from the beginning.” Cheeze was a non-violent felon and did not feel that his record played a role.

The participants described their lived experiences on their perceptions regarding the decisions made by the hiring managers. Hammer felt:

Once you become a convicted felon, it don’t matter it could be a hundred years from now, I’m still gonna be a convicted felon. Although I done my time, and I done maxed out my time. I’m not on parole, I’m not on probation. I’m not on, in any type of program, but I’m a *convicted felon*. And it’s, it’s devastating on the hiring process. Especially the severity level of charges. The more violent, your chances are slim to none.

Torey’s views were very strong regarding how ex-offenders are perceived by hiring managers:

When you're considered an ex-felon or a person who's been, been involved with criminalistics activity, you're looked at like a second-class citizen. You're looked at like a person who isn't deserving of having another chance that supposed to be locked away. And in combination of being an African-American male um, where false perception is already, um, being given um, that, that, that impacts um, the opportunity to be able to ah, to get, get employment.

Mike believed the manner in which the media portrays ex-offenders poses problems for ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, in society as a whole. Gumbo felt the attitudes of employers play a role because the employers know that an ex-offender needs a job more than the average person who is not ex-offender. Cheeze felt that hiring managers have stereotyped ex-offenders for years because of the color of their skin: "Every time you walk into an office. They already, you know, they slash you right then, 'cause you know, you a felon and you black. They not really looking at a felon as a human being, I think."

The participants described their lived experiences on their views regarding the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of a criminal record on the hiring decision. Hammer felt hiring managers had more fear than an attitude when deciding to hire an ex-offender. The findings align with a study conducted by Solinas-Saunders et al that employer reluctance to hire African-American male ex-offenders based on their criminal record played a role in the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of employers. Torey believed his past criminal record and how he current lifestyle will make an "impact on the hiring manager and help

them understand that individuals, especially African-American males, are not defined by their past.” Mike was adamant that the only thing that prevented him from finding work was his criminal record. Gumbo believes the hiring manager uses their status as an ex-offender and the fact that they served time in prison to their advantage. The participant responses aligned with findings by Jefferson-Jones (2014) that the ability of ex-offenders to overcome the status of stigma is difficult due to the power of the stigmatizer, the federal, state, and local government.

The participants described their lived experiences regarding the attitudes and perceptions and the challenges that confronted them as an ex-offender seeking employment. Aligned with Gunnison and Helfgott (2010) and Visher and Travis (2011), numerous reentry challenges impacted their reentry to include education, job training, employment, transitional services, and support from family and friends. Hammer felt that every time he walked into an establishment that was predominately white and being a convicted felon was not going to go well. He knew there would be challenges because of his “convicted felon badge is like you carrying the luggage on your shoulder.” Torey felt it was very problematic trying to find employment as a felon: “Because as ah, as a person with a felony conviction. Because of the way people perceive you.” For Mike, not having a license or transportation is a challenge and he has yet to find quality employment outside of work at a temp agency.

Gumbo was straightforward in his response to the challenges that confronted him as an ex-offender seeking employment: “First of all, being black. Second of all is ah, my criminal background, know what I mean. And, I would say thirdly, know what I mean,

actually for the salary that I knew would help me.” For Cheeze, his challenge was people who had more education than him. He felt his limited computer skills were an obstacle because most jobs have to be completed online. Transportation was a challenge for all of the participants. Cheeze recalled: “I ain’t had the right clothing. You know, your *appearance* play a major role nowadays trying to get a job. You ain’t got no money.” Despite the fact discrimination and racism exist no matter how subtle still exists in today’s society, the worldviews of the participants were essential in discerning how they perceived the impact of the criminal record on the complete employment process and their ability to reintegrate successful back into the community.

Emergent Theme Eight: Lack of Available Resources

The theme *lack of available resources* emerged as another common theme among the participants. Incarceration interrupts the ability to obtain new skills, high-quality employment and develop social networks; thus, the erosion of job skills will be constant over the life course (Lageson & Uggen, 2013). As discussed in chapter 2, prior studies revealed 48% of ex-offenders lacked a high school diploma or GED; 94% needed more education; 82% needed job training; and 80% needed work (Visher & Travis, 2011). This study aligns with findings by Audet (2012) where as 60% reported they did not receive training and slightly over 2% received job training before and after incarceration. Only two of the five participants indicated they received some type of training while incarcerated.

When asked to describe their lived experiences as it relates to how the resources played a role in getting a job or staying out of prison, three of the five participants

revealed although they were aware of resources there were no resources available to them before, during or after incarceration. Hammer was aware of programs, but also felt that his PO should have been more of a resource and provided job leads. Hammer was not aware of any place that he could go to for help as a convicted felon and did not participate in any type of program before his release date: "It's almost like they say, for real, the system is designed to bring you back; for you to come back to prison." After he was released, he was given a check for a \$25 bus ride back home and stayed in a halfway house for 6 months.

Torey never participated in any class that would prepare him for reentry. He received a \$25 bus pass after he was released. Torey believed his education helped him get his job. Mike was not aware of any program that was available after he was released from prison. For Mike, he felt that none of those resources had "an effect on me going through the interview process or anything. It's just something that would have helped me have a better standard of living in the meantime." Gumbo knew that the halfway house would be a resource for him since he spent so much time in prison. He learned how to adapt to society and received encouragement from two ladies who worked at the halfway house. Gumbo learned a variety of skills during his time in prison and was able to include those skills on his resume: "So, once I presented my resume and they say, '*Well okay, do you know how to do outside work?*' I said yeah, know what I mean. So, they say '*We gone give you a chance.*'"

Cheeze was able to use his friends and people that worked in human resources as a resource to build his network. He participated in a reentry program to learn how to

complete applications online and create a resume. Consistent with Bellair and Kowalski (2011) findings, the participants acknowledged that they must adapt to life after incarceration and establish relationships and acquire the necessary skills and resources to survive and overcome barriers. A variety of resources should be at the disposal of ex-offenders to help prepare them for life outside of prison.

Georgia's reentry philosophy has missed the mark; four of the five participants acknowledged that programs offered while incarcerated did not adequately prepare or equip them with the necessary competencies for work upon release. Though most ex-offenders do not have the requisite skills needed to conduct a job search, solve problems, communicate effectively, these are soft skills that must be learned during all phases of incarceration, particularly for African-American males. Aligned with Evans (2014), the participants believed that employment barriers and the availability of quality of jobs are a major concern for them since they must also deal with the stigma of incarceration because it decreases their opportunities to become employed.

Emergent Theme Nine: Attitudes, Biases, and Perceptions of Hiring Managers

The attitudes, biases and perceptions of hiring managers play a major role in whether or not ex-offenders receive an offer of employment. The worldview of the participants' illuminates why they believe hiring managers display negative views towards ex-offenders. When asked to describe their perceptions of the attitudes and perceptions of hiring managers as it relates to the criminal record, the participants felt these were learned behaviors that were taught at a young age and manifested into adulthood.

Hammer felt that the things that he has done as ex-offender do not truly reflect him as a person. However, he believes that “employers fear having a certain type of person around in their business, in their establishment.” Torey views on the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers were very strong:

There’s a high number of individuals who have biases and *misunderstanding* to something they don’t understand. I think that there’s racial bias involved in it. I think there is a bias that says that *all people who have felony backgrounds are criminals*. You know um, *implicit bias* that’s very prevalent. I think it’s very prevalent that it’s the extent of it. African-American males are often times displayed in the media the thieves, the thugs, the violent criminals. Um, *untrustworthy*, Um, *undermined*, *undervalued*. Um, and that’s historical. Um, and so I think that mindset has trickled down through generation to generation. Not only is it a mindset to um, a mindset as a perception, I also think that it’s something that is done by design. In order to continue to have ah, social-economically disadvantaged class of people, individuals as well as an underclass or oppressed class, um, I think that denying employment to individuals is a way of *subjugation*.

Mike felt that because he has done time and had a record, “people have these reservations and hesitations and these biases that really doesn’t allow them to be honest

about how they deal with people from time to time.” Gumbo believed hiring managers have certain attitudes, biases, and perceptions because they know you are an ex-offender:

Um, that would be exceptions about what criminals is. They never, they don't know nothing about it, know what I mean. They never been in a prison, know what I mean. Only thing they ever knew about it is what they read in a book and what they see on TV. Or what they hear somebody else say, know what I mean.

Cheeze felt that hiring managers:

Really stereotype us black men, the same, you know. That we got the same attitude, this don't care attitude. You got people raised up, really separate from, they parents taught them not to be really dealing with Black folks. And they get in these positions, they gone look at you like they parents taught them.”

Emergent Theme Ten: Good Support System

The theme *good support system* emerged as the participants described their lived experiences regarding their employability. The participants indicated after release from prison they received support from family and friends who helped them find work, provide clothing and shelter, or financial support. Aligned with Johnson (2013), regarding the SDT which stimulates positive relationships, changes in disruptive behaviors, and meeting the emotional needs of ex-offenders, the participants support system were

positive influences. These participants clearly understand the importance of having a good support system to help them navigate successfully in a society that refuses to give ex-offenders a second chance.

Hammer expressed his supportive family helped him. Torey described his support system as his current wife who provided him with a place to stay and helped him as much as she could. He also received support from a friend who was a Pastor, who talked to him and encouraged him. Cheeze described his support system as people with a positive attitude toward life and people with jobs. A supportive environment allowed the participants to examine their concerns and identify environmental barriers that impacts job prospects. The participants were empowered by their network of family and friends. The results align with Jackson (2013) findings, as there appeared to be a connection between empowerment and recidivism.

Emergent Theme Eleven: Limited Opportunity for a Second Chance

The theme *limited opportunity for a second chance*, emerged as the participants described their lived experiences. The job prospects for African-American men who have been released from prison are low. These participants confirmed that they are confronted with barriers that impede the possibility of employment. Despite having a criminal record and being accountable for their actions, not all participants were fortunate to find work. The participants expressed a desire for a second chance, to not only prove others wrong but to become contributing members of society once again.

Despite the ex-offender's history of criminal activity, employers have attempted to shift their mindset to offer job opportunities to ex-offenders to show that they deserve

a second chance. Hammer received his opportunity after five interviews. His current supervisor allowed him to explain his situation to her. She understood because she also had family members who were convicted felons and believed in second chances. He said “to hear her say ‘I’m gonna give you a chance’” he felt the weight of the world release; his posture changed, and everything changed for the better. Torey believed he “fit the scope with the hiring managers of the type of person that not only could show where, where I was and where the population I’m dealing with will go if they don’t turn their lives around.” For Mike, he just “wants an opportunity to prove myself.” Cheeze believed some of the hiring managers might have felt that he was not going to change while others said they would give him an opportunity.

Summary

The main goal of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government. The lived experiences shared by each participant added insight into the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government in the state of Georgia. I presented the results of the study in which eleven themes emerged that identified common experiences and perceptions of African-American male ex-offenders that exist and impact their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. Moreover, the results of this study revealed subthemes to include a desire to change, how society perceives ex-offenders, family support and an opportunity to prove themselves to the hiring manager without judgment based on past criminal behavior. These subthemes explained the meaning and essence of five African-American male ex-offenders.

Discrimination, rejection, self-stigma, and perception were identified as external factors that played a key role in the ability of these men to find work. A qualitative reflection is written for the eleven themes that emerged to provide evidence and support related back to the theoretical framework and body of knowledge. This study represents an exploration of the perceptions and lived experiences of the ex-offender that resulted in an information rich description of employability. I also described discrepant cases and issues of trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of the participant responses and results from the data analysis identified eleven emergent that represents the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of five African-American male ex-offenders. The interpretation of themes included excerpts from textual data. This chapter included a description of the participant's demographics, research setting and data collection and data in which eleven themes emerged.

In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. I will also address implications for positive social change at the individual, organization, and social levels and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. The motivation for pursuing this research was to find out whether or not common experiences existed between participants who have applied for or currently work for a local government agency to engender responses to explain the phenomenon from the participant perspectives.

Chapter 4 offered a detailed analysis of the various participant responses and results from the data analysis identified eleven emergent themes that represent the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of five African-American male ex-offenders. Chapter 4 discussed the major themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. The themes include: (a) the importance of employment; (b) lack of knowledge about the employment/background process; (c) dishonesty and honesty about past; (d) discrimination, racism, stereotype; (e) strong will and determination to succeed; (f) accountability and responsibility; (g) stigma of criminal record; (h) lack of available resources; (i) attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers; (j) good support system; and, (k) limited opportunity for second chance.

The literature review was an overview of research studies on African-American male ex-offenders. To gather information and examine employability from the perspectives of the participants, the central research question that guided this study: What are the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government? As discussed in chapter 2, the history of incarceration

for African-American men began with the prison industrial complex and the war on drugs that ultimately led to harsh sentencing that affected the African-American community as a whole (Smith & Hattery, 2010). Moreover, financial issues, a destabilized drug market, increases in crime were key factors in the increased rates of incarceration (Gottschalk, 2010). The effects of mass incarceration created a stigma that made it difficult for ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, to find work and avoid recidivism (Raskin, 2015).

The state of Georgia has the fifth largest prison population with nearly 20,000 offenders released back to communities each year (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). In 2015, 59.25% of African-American men were released from prison compared to 60% in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Although there is not a huge disparity in the number of African-American male ex-offenders released in the previous 3 years, finding employment is still a major hurdle. Researchers have conducted studies on the geographic concentration and residential mobility of ex-offender (Ethridge et al., 2014; Harding et al., 2013; Massoglia et al., 2013; Zajac et al., 2014), but no studies were found that specifically focus on the geographic concentration of African-American male ex-offenders in the state of Georgia.

Georgia plays a vital role in making improvements to the reentry process for ex-offenders by removing the legal barriers to implementing of employer incentives (Georgia Center for Opportunity, 2014). Despite 10 years of research on prisoner reentry, policy updates, and innovative programs, a better understanding of the experiences through the lens of the ex-offender, specifically African-American males, could help

facilitate positive social change within the local government arena regarding recruitment strategies and practices related to hiring ex-offenders. This study gave attention to the voices of the participants to learn about the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of African-American male ex-offenders have regarding their employability.

The success of African-American male ex-offender's after incarceration depends on which neighborhoods they return to (Massoglia et al., 2013). When these men return to their respective communities they lack sufficient skills, social skills and education to secure stable employment (Harley, 2014; Moses, 2014; Westerling et al., 2015). Those who do not return to the same neighborhoods may not have the ability to maintain social bonds or job prospects (Harding et al., 2013).

Thirteen interview questions aligned with the central research question were designed to engender responses that reflected the lived experiences of the participants. The findings of this study helped to understand the perceptions of the five participants who shared their stories regarding their lived experiences with employability after incarceration. The central research question helped to gain an understanding of the stigma associated with a criminal record, from a social, cultural, and educational stance, when trying to find work. The central research question also helped to identify the role of the criminal record on employability as well as the common perceptions related to a sincere desire of African-American male ex-offenders to get a second chance. Each participant conveyed how the stigma of a criminal record impacted their ability to find stable, long-term work.

Chapter 5 presents an interpretation of the findings and discusses the limitations of the study, recommendations for practice and future research, and implications for positive social change at the individual, organization, and social levels.

Interpretation of Findings

There were no other phenomenological studies that used the life course perspective theory (LCP) to explore the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. Using phenomenology coupled with the life course perspective theory in this study is an appropriate method for future studies to describe the life transitions and trajectories regarding the lived experiences and the essence of meaning related to the impact of the criminal record on employability. A qualitative phenomenology method to collecting data through in-depth interviews assisted in gathering information rich data about the experience of employability in local government. The constructs of the LCP theory effectively provided the structured framework needed to answer the central research question that gathered the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government.

This section presents the findings based on the common lived experiences of the participants that illustrate how the criminal record impacted their employability. The key findings helped to develop a cognitive map of the lived experiences of the participants. The common themes derived from the categories external and internal factors are a sincere desire to change, lack of knowledge, resources, and skills, attitudes and perception of hiring managers, the perception of society, and the impact of the stigma

associated with a criminal record that hinders employment. In essence, the interrelated themes express the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability in local government. This study extends the current literature by adding to the body of knowledge regarding the beliefs of African-American male ex-offenders have related to the impact of their criminal record on the decision to hire.

Federal cases that focused on discrimination and disparate impact such as *Griggs v Duke Power Company* (Doty, 2013; Smith, 2012), *Gregory v Litton Systems, Inc.*, (Smith, 2012) and *Green v Missouri Pacific Railroad Co.* (Smith, 2012) established the foundation for violations of Title VII regarding the use of the criminal record. *Green* helped establish what is known as the Green factors to ensure minorities received equal employment opportunities and employment obstacles were removed. Resources such as job assistance programs can offer assistance to ex-offenders seeking employment when confronted with employment barriers which also reduces recidivism. Adapting to life after incarceration, culture shock, and the inability to establish relationships confirms that ex-offenders need a broad range of skills and resources to survive and overcome barriers (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011).

The participants view on life impacted the transitions and turning points in their life stage (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Trajectories and transitions, (i.e., patterns of criminal behavior and unique life events (incarceration), the two primary beliefs of the life course and those turning points, may be subjective or objective (Bahr et al., 2005; Elder et al., 2003). In the life course, the principle of time and place propose individuals are molded by the past and conditions experiences during their lifetime (Elder et al., 2003). The life-

course framework provided an opportunity to examine how the transition process from prison impacted the ability of African-American male ex-offenders to adapt to the current workforce.

The life course perspective theory also helped to focus this study on how the participants made the transition from being incarcerated to reentry in their respective community. Research findings revealed that reentry is the main transition in the life of an ex-offender. This transition is parallel to the transition to accepting a new job, losing a job, purchasing or losing a home or a diagnosis with a major illness but may also happen simultaneously with the aforementioned transitions.

The results of the data collected through in-depth interviews with five African-American male ex-offenders regarding their employability, and further analysis, showed that they each had a sincere desire to change, a network of family and friends and wanted find work to become successful after incarceration. For example, theme 1, employment is important, was the most important theme since the ability to secure a decent job with benefits signifies stability for these men including finding a home, providing for their families, and taking care of financial obligations and responsibilities. The ability to secure employment was illustrated by Torey's comment "I sought employment, with that, at that particular time because one, I needed a job because I knew there would be benefits involved because I have children and I have a family."

Similar to findings by Soeker et al. (2013) and Audet (2012), this study confirmed that participants believed several factors might determine their employability which may be within or beyond their control over such personal and job market characteristics. The

participants revealed that the limited availability of quality jobs and limited skills do not offer much opportunity to find a decent job with benefits. Cheeze reported he lacked sufficient skills using a computer to complete the online application process. He knew a lady that owned a flower shop who assisted him with completing online applications so he would not have to go to the library. Cheeze said, “So, I went over there and went online, and she showed me you know, how to complete out everything. She typed it all in, showed me how to, you know. Kinda slow, but you know what I’m saying. But I know where, but I know where to go now.” Despite this limitation, Cheeze took the initiative to learn how to use a computer and overcome this obstacle. The results of this study revealed that participants understood that being dishonest about their past criminal record impacted their ability to secure work.

The theme *stigma of a criminal record* confirmed existing findings by Westerling et al. (2015) that suggested employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders due to negligent hiring, a critical barrier that needs further attention. The data from this study supported findings by Moore et al. (2013) which suggest stigma persist at three levels: structural, social, and self. The participants were cognizant of the reactions of employers and society because of the negative views attached to the stigma of a criminal record. Stigma, a collateral consequence that impacts the ability to acquire the basic needs to survive is an affliction for these men. Historically, ex-offenders have been underprivileged as a result of the stigma of incarceration and the challenges that confront them on all levels.

The theme *lack of available resources* supports findings by Visser and Travis (2011) regarding the numerous reentry challenges that confront these men to include

education, job training, employment, transitional services, and support from family and friends that impact reentry. This study corroborated findings in a study conducted by Shivy et al. (2007) that implied the possibility for ex-offenders to explore a real career path was limited and often lead to them to jobs that do not match their skill set. As one participant recalled most of the training he received while incarceration was useless after release from prison.

The theme *limited opportunities for a second chance*, also confirmed existing findings by Westerling et al. (2015) regarding employer reluctance to hire ex-offenders due to negligent hiring. The results of this study also confirmed findings by Pogrebin et al. (2014) that indicated the frustration experienced by offenders due to difficulty securing employment, felony convictions and incarceration impeded the job search. The results of this study also confirmed findings by Solinas-Saunders et al. (2015) regarding the reluctance to hire African-American male ex-offenders based on their criminal record influences the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of employers.

The lack of available resources that should have prepared them for work in today's society limited their ability to find a job. Despite having received some assistance before and after incarceration such as how to complete an application, they did not have relevant knowledge of the employment process, hiring process or background standards in local government that would hinder them from securing employment. The lack of job opportunities caused some of these men to contemplate returning to their former ways or continue to be persistent in obtaining a second chance at life. These participants depended

on their support system for living arrangements because without a place to live or a job these men could return to illegal activities that would send them back to prison.

After careful analysis of the data, the results from this study were unable to confirm if ban the box played a role in the ability of these participants to be interviewed or gain employment. Maurer (2014) found that ban the box initiatives were created to encourage employers to conduct the criminal background check after making a conditional offer of employment. Three participants indicated they were familiar with the ban the box initiative. In studies conducted by Massoglia et al. (2013), Harding et al. (2013), Zajac et al. (2014), it was suggested that success is dependent upon the neighborhood the ex-offender returns to during reentry. The results from this study were not able to confirm if location impacted the geographic concentration of ex-offenders.

The essence of meaning was gleaned through the lens of the conceptual framework and reflections on published peer-reviewed literature found in chapter 2. By combining the themes with the premise of the life course perspective theory, the themes identified presented the essence of the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders. After release from prison, each participant had a definite plan to return to their families, find housing and work, and make amends within society. Their goal was to make positive changes in their lives. Nevertheless, their efforts to existing within society were a key motivating factor in their ability to have a successful reentry. Moreover, these men depended on the readiness of their support system and a strong desire to succeed to achieve their needs of finding a place to live, employment and assistance with paying restitution to society.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the rich data collected and correspondent analysis, this research, like any other research, has its limitations. Englander (2012) emphasized the actual concern, depending on the phenomenon, is trouble finding participants for a study. The first limitation is lack of experience conducting a phenomenological study. Second, the sample for this study was small and delimited to Coastal Georgia; therefore, generalizing the results of this study to all African-American male ex-offenders in other regions in Georgia must be done with caution. Third, because a limited number of local government agency representatives responded to request to disseminate the recruitment invitation flyer it is not possible to determine if the recruitment flyer was shared with individuals who wanted to share their live experience. Fourth, potential participants may have been reluctant to volunteer due to organizational policy, fear of retaliation by sharing their lived experiences related to the phenomenon. Fifth, due to personal and work obligations, none of the participants were able to participate in three 90-minute interviews. Perhaps if participants were able to participant in three 90-miniute interviews it would have allowed them to share more information related to their lived experiences. Sixth, I did not inquire about the type of crime leading to a felony conviction for participants. It is possible that those who volunteered to participate committed more severe crimes; thus, were less likely to receive family or community support during reentry. Finally, all participants were from Coastal Georgia and between the ages of 30-60; therefore, it could not be discerned whether or not groups under age 30 shared similar lived experiences.

Recommendations

African-American male ex-offenders find it difficult to secure work after incarceration. The five participants shared their reasons why they believed the obstacles that confront them prevent their employability in local government agencies in the state of Georgia. These changes could help to eradicate the issue and ensure ex-offenders, specifically African-American men, are evaluated for requisite skills for the job based on job qualifications, not the criminal record. The following sections offer recommendations for practice and future research.

Recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice include local government agency leadership must work toward changes and implementation of current organization policy, practices, and procedures, recruitment strategies and background standards. Local government agency officials in the state of Georgia who have not implemented ban the box initiatives should consider implementing this initiative to allow ex-offenders with an opportunity to interview based on skills before disclosing their criminal record (Maurer, 2014; Solinas-Saunders et al., 2015). Ban the box allows the hiring managers to make an assessment based on job qualifications and competencies first before inquiring about the criminal record (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2016). Often time, the personal biases of hiring managers, biases that are taught and learned early life, may underscore extending offers of employment due to the stigma of a criminal record (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2015). Although employers may be hesitant to remove the “box” because of the potential risk involved, removing the box can be seen as a good faith effort to give ex-offenders an opportunity to interview and demonstrate their qualifications for

the position. Further research may also illuminate the attitudes, biases, and perceptions that include the perspectives of the hiring manager.

Second, local government agency officials should increase their collaborative efforts with criminal justice and faith-based agencies to ensure ex-offenders receive vocational training and career development resources related to career interests and abilities they can use to obtain employment (Spaulding et al., 2015; Swensen et al., 2014; Visher & Travis, 2011). The needs of ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, are high. The barriers to successful reentry identified in this study were transportation, housing, life skills, education, and help to find work which was similar to findings by Gunnison and Helgott (2010). To increase job opportunities for ex-offenders, they need good job leads as well as the requisite skills to be successful at work to include technical, hard and soft skills (Schriro, 2012; Swensen et al., 2014).

Finally, local government agencies that have positions classified as “hard to fill” can use those as a training opportunity for an apprenticeship program to help ex-offender learn new skills to help them secure employment (Brown, 2011; Spaulding et al., 2015; Visher & Travis, 2011). The reentry programs in the state of Georgia were designed to help ex-offenders by addressing their needs, provide resources and assist them to become contributing citizens once again (Dutcher, 2010). Based on the lived experiences of these participants this was not the case as these men shared they were not prepared to transition back into society.

Recommendations for future research. Future researchers should conduct a pilot study with ex-offenders who participate in a prison ministry sponsored by local

churches or other organizations that assist ex-offenders during reentry. According to Leon et al. (2011), a pilot study can test the feasibility of the study, help validate the interview protocol and help mitigate potential risks regarding the credibility and validity of the research. Although this study only included five participants, conducting a pilot study would help future researchers select information-rich cases to ensure the study has depth and breadth.

Based on the small sample size and responses from local government agency officials, gatekeepers can be more willing to share information on future studies with employees to assist future researchers with gaining access to participants who meet the criteria for the study. For example, one agency representative responded, “The nature of one’s background is a private matter and opening a solicitation for sensitive information would expose information about an employee’s past that would otherwise be held private” (see Appendix G). Taking away their right to choose to volunteer to participate in a study is unfair to them as these men may want to share their experiences. Moreover, the ability to gain access to participants in local government would also ensure that future researchers can interview those who have experienced the phenomenon as well as offer a comprehensive description of their lived experiences.

As previously noted, there are no studies conducted that have focused on understanding the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders in local government. Future researchers should replicate this study utilizing a phenomenological approach with ex-offenders in different age groups that work for or have applied for employment in a local government agency from all regions. Recommendations for future

research should include interviewing hiring managers to explore their lived experiences with hiring ex-offenders regarding their employability and perceived employment barriers from their perspectives. By collecting more data, analyzing data and presenting the data to human resources and public administrators in local government as well as criminal justice professionals could help facilitate change regarding organization policy and practices, programs, and recruitment strategies. Additional data could also contribute to evaluating the extent the criminal record, limited education and limited work skills may have an impact the decision to hire African-American male ex-offenders.

All participants in this study lived in Coastal Georgia, and their needs are much different from ex-offenders in other regions. These men have unique experiences that are contingent upon their social and economic conditions. Future researchers should discern whether or not the geographic location of ex-offenders and the challenges that confront them impact employability for African-American male ex-offenders in local government in rural, metropolitan or urban areas in the state of Georgia (Atkins & Armstrong, 2013; Massoglia et al., 2013). There is a strong need for vocational skills, transportation, housing and ability to take care of financial obligations. Harding et al. (2013) pointed out reentry challenges and lack of services increase the likelihood of recidivism. If hiring authorities in local government agencies are willing to hire African-American male ex-offenders, it is important that they understand the magnitude that their attitudes, biases and perceptions and contextual factors influences the decision to hire (Ethridge et al., 2014).

Implications

Impact on Positive Social Change

This study has several implications for positive social change. Based on the themes of discrimination, racism and stereotype; the stigma of a criminal record; and, attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers, future researchers should interview hiring managers in local government agencies officials to discern the exact cause of the prejudices and stereotypes the hiring manager has regarding African-Americans with criminal records. Second, more research must be conducted to determine the biases hiring managers have against African-American males. Third, African-American males must educate themselves on the use of criminal records in employment decisions. Fourth, the progress of African-American males must be tracked to determine if the programs have been able to equip them with the necessary skills needed to obtain employment in a local government agency.

There must be collaborative efforts among human resources professionals in local government agencies and the criminal justice system to create valuable programs to help African-American male ex-offenders secure employment. The ability to find work with a local government agency offers these men stable jobs and benefits. Although some local government agencies may have begun the process to address the needs of ex-offenders, specifically African-American males, these men still have difficulty finding work in a local government agency. The extent literature confirmed that African-American men with criminal records are more arrested, convicted, and incarcerated more often than their counterparts (Cavico et al., 2014). This study revealed that African-American male ex-

offenders are attentive to the anxiety displayed by hiring managers are perceived as a barrier to employment.

Findings also revealed that these men are conscious of the impact a criminal record and the type of offenses that affect their employability. To facilitate change, local government leaders must execute strategies that may modify the existing conditions for ex-offenders that may propel the organization forward. A new model is needed to help create programs that are effective yet offers ex-offenders a second chance that does not hold their criminal records against them as a permanent stigma.

Individual Level

The implications for positive social change at the individual level includes ex-offenders as a whole take the initiative to learn about the organizations employment, background, and hiring processes so that they are familiar with the steps in each process. Each participant expressed they had a good support system of family and friends. It is important for ex-offenders to have a good support system as they offer the stability they need to be successful. Ex-offenders must be empowered and have self-determination. Family relationships were a significant factor that helped these participants from returning to prison. The personal experiences of these men have shaped their worldview which plays a key role in their self-awareness and communicating with others.

Organizational Level

The implications for positive social change at the organizational level may be applicable at the local level. At the organizational level, it is imperative to help ex-offenders understand employer attitudes to diminish conflicting views and focus on

positive characteristics that influence hiring decisions. Human resources professionals, hiring authorities, and city and county administrators in local government may consider exploring more efficient programs that are designed to teach ex-offenders the skills they need to successfully compete in the workplace. Study findings suggest local government human resources professionals, hiring authorities, and city and county administrators must use the data to enhance and modify recruitment strategies to eliminate discrimination against African-American ex-offenders.

The findings suggest that creating programs such as apprenticeships for specific positions, mentoring programs and employment seminars to help ex-offenders obtain the requisite competencies to become more marketable to an employer. Study outcomes also indicate the need for increased vocational training directly related to the needs of the ex-offender to ensure they can secure work in local government. Additional considerations are for local government officials to articulate a clear and consistent message regarding the criteria used to determine the extent criminal record information may be used in hiring decisions to include data about available resources before, during, and after incarceration.

Policy Level

The implications for positive social change at the policy level include changing outdated policies and practices that prohibit hiring ex-offenders. Findings from this study confirmed employment barriers do exist in local government for African-American male ex-offenders. The participants admitted they have limited knowledge of the employment, background, and hiring processes. The findings suggest these men must educate

themselves on what happens in each phase in the process. Results suggest efforts must be made to help facilitate changes in organizational policies and recruitment strategies, eliminate systematic discrimination against ex-offenders, and contribute to creating programs that help acquire the requisite skills for employment.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experience of African-American male ex-offenders to help discern their perceptions related to the attitudes, biases, and perceptions regarding their employability. This research gave attention to the voices of the five participants and contributed to understanding the frustrations they experience due to the stigma of a criminal record in the hiring process. The findings from this study supported the conceptual framework based on Sampson and Laub's (1993) life course perspective theory which focused on the impact the transitions and turning points that form the life stages. The LCP examines the phenomena and connection between social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change (Elder et al., 2003; Laub & Sampson, 1993). This study advances the current literature on employability by merging phenomenology and the LCP by addressing the employability of African American male ex-offenders that offers confirmation from a qualitative perspective. Five participants described their lived experience as a life lesson in which they had to do what they had to survive. Despite their sincere desire for change, they had strong opinions about how society perceived them to include the stigma associated with having a criminal record.

Supply and demand barriers such as characteristics and attitude of the ex-offender, employer attitude, lack of job-related skills, limited job experience, lack of

network, and lack of education may block employment (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011; Soeker et al., 2013; Weiman, 2007). Employers who use the criminal record as the sole source for making hiring decisions make assumptions about the employability of ex-offenders, specifically African-American men. Granted hiring authorities in local government agencies want to hire an individual with the requisite skills for the job, they must keep in mind that the individual characteristics of an ex-offender impact their employability.

By increasing employment for African-American male ex-offenders, local government agencies can ensure that jobs are available to this marginalized group. Although these men have a criminal record, they deserve an opportunity to enhance and develop the requisite skills and experience that will not only increase their earning potential but their employability in local government. Local government agency officials should rethink policies that prevent individuals with a criminal record from being offered employment for jobs that require occupational and professional licensure. This could be achieved through apprenticeship programs for entry level positions. Helping these men increase their skills these men will allow them to be able to maintain and sustain employment which is essential to a successful reentry.

Discrimination and the stigma associated with incarceration have an adverse impact on employability and employment challenges are exacerbated by layoffs, downsizing, and unemployment (Brown, 2011). The findings suggest that African-American male ex-offenders believe the impact on the hiring decision and negative influences create an unnecessary burden when seeking to obtain employment that is

essential to their success. The life course perspective theory views employment as essential in describing desistance from crime and transitions to work during the life course symbolizes a key turning point for ex-offenders. African-American male ex-offenders are faced with diverse challenges due to lack of education and skills. The ability to understand the extent of those challenges will be essential when creating and implementing changes in organization policy and practices. The findings of this study suggest that as a result of the impact of the criminal record and the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers on employability, a change in current policy, practices and recruitment strategies can address apprehensiveness in the decision to hire ex-offenders to create positive social change.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Dear Ms. Porter,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-Offenders in Local Government."

Your approval # is **04-13-16-0256549**. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also, attached to this email is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an online format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on April 12, 2017. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

Sincerely,

Libby Munson
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@waldenu.edu
Fax: [626-605-0472](tel:626-605-0472)

Appendix B: Request for Assistance to Disseminate Recruitment Flyer

Greetings!

My name is Chandra L. Porter and I am a doctoral student in Walden University's PhD program. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled "*Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-Offenders in Local Government*," and your assistance is requested. In order to complete this study, I will need to interview 5-25 ex-offenders who meet certain criteria and I am seeking your assistance to disseminate recruitment flyers to your employees who may meet the criteria.

This study is being conducted to learn more about the employment barriers African-American male ex-offenders are confronted with during the employment process. I am particularly interested in speaking with African Americans who are 18 years and older. I would like to know more about this topic because African-American males are disproportionately impacted by a criminal record than Whites or Hispanics and are less likely to be offered employment. This study is important because as African-American males are released back into the community they find it difficult to secure employment due to the stigma of a criminal record. This is because African-American males are more likely to have felony and misdemeanor charges than their counterparts and they have the highest incarceration rates than other races.

There is no cost for employees to participate in the study. Participation in research is always voluntary. I am requesting your permission to disseminate the attached flyer to your employees. I would like to speak with African-American male ex-offenders who currently work for your organization that want to take part in this research study and who are:

- African-American or Black male
- Ex-offender
- 18 years or older
- Has applied for work or currently work for a local government agency
- Able to take part in three 90-minute interviews

Please post the enclosed recruitment flyer in a common area for all employees, on your intranet page, or as a paycheck stuffer.

Thank you in advance for your assistance to help me recruit potential participants for my study.

Respectfully,

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Seeking Volunteers for a Research Study Entitled***Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-offenders in Local Government******Did you know?***

- African-American males are disproportionately impacted by a criminal record than Whites or Hispanics and are less likely to be offered employment?
- African-American males are released back into the community and often find it difficult to secure employment as a result of the stigma associated with a criminal record?
- African-American males are more likely to have felony and misdemeanor charges than their counterparts and they have the highest incarceration rates than other races.

My name is Chandra L. Porter and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. To complete my degree, I am conducting a study to **explore and describe the lived experiences** of 5-25 **African-American male ex-offenders** who **have applied for employment OR are currently employed** in local government (City or County) in the State of Georgia. The purpose is to learn more about the **barriers and challenges** that confront African American male ex-offenders due to **the stigma** of having a **criminal record**.

Criteria

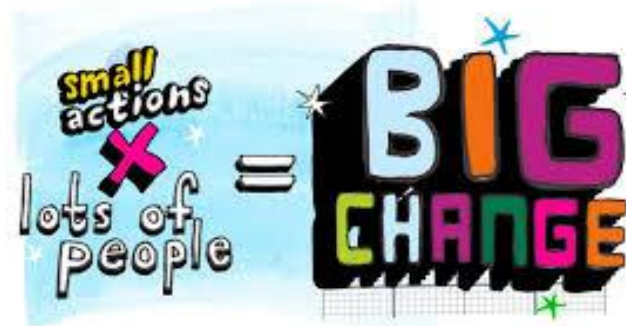
You must be African-American, 18 years of age or older, have applied for or currently work for a local government agency, and able to participate in one 90-minute interview.

Once the interview has been conducted and transcribed, you will receive a copy via email to review and verify the accuracy of the information.

Please share this flyer with others you know who meet the criteria and may also be interested in participating for this study.

To schedule your interview for this important study

Contact me at [REDACTED]
Or [REDACTED]



Thank you for your efforts in this study!

Do You Want To:

Have your voice heard?

Share your lived experience?

Positively contribute to changes in organizational policy and hiring practices as it relates to ex-offenders?

Help to understand this phenomenon?

Interviews will be conducted between May 31st and July 31st in person, Skype, FreeConferenceCall.com or via phone

Appendix D: Follow-up Email/Letter to Local Government Agency

Greetings!

Dear _____:

Recently, you received an email regarding my research study entitled “*Exploring the Employability of African-American Ex-offenders in Local Government.*” This purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders currently employed in local government regarding their attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the impact of their criminal record on their employability in local government. I am defining ex-offenders as individuals who are rehabilitated and no longer engage in criminal activity.

If you have disseminated the recruitment flyer that was emailed to you, please complete the enclosed Organizational Demographic Form. The purpose of collecting organization demographic information is to be able to obtain background information on the organization and group participants who volunteer for the study by region. The names of the participants and the organization will remain anonymous and confidential.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to contribute to the extension of the knowledge base related to the exploring the employability of African-American male ex-offenders in local government.

Respectfully,

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Enclosure

Appendix E: Organization Demographic Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization: _____ Position: _____

1. Which of the following describes your organization? (*check all that apply*) Board of Commissions City County

2. How would you classify.

 Metropolitan Rural Urban

3. Region:

 Atlanta Metro
 Central Georgia
 Central Savannah River
 Coastal Georgia
 North Georgia
 Southeast Georgia
 Southwest Georgia

4. Number of Employees

 0 – 500 501-1000 1001-2000 2001-3000
 3001-4000 4001-5000 5000+

5. What is your highest level of education?

 High School Diploma Associate's Bachelor's
 Master's Doctorate Other6. Does your agency hire ex-offenders? Yes No

7. If yes, does your agency ask about the criminal record on the employment application?

 Yes No

8. Does your agency ask applicants about their criminal record at the time of interview?

___ Yes ___ No

9. Has your agency implemented “ban the box”? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, indicate the date your agency implemented “ban the box.” _____

If no, please indicate why.

10. When does your agency conduct the criminal record check on a tentative selection?

___ Before the interview is conducted

___ When a conditional offer of employment has been made

11. Are applicants with criminal records notified of adverse information revealed in the background report if they are not selected or disqualified from the process?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, are applicants given an opportunity to verify or dispute the accuracy of the information in the background report?

___ Yes ___ No

If no, please explain.

If the information in the background report is found to be incorrect after applicants have verified and disputed the information, do you still consider the applicant for the position applied for?

___ Yes ___ No

If no, please explain.

3. Number of Employees by Region

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Number of Employees								
0-500								
501-1000		3				4		1
1001-2000		1						1
2001-3000								
3001-4000								
4001-5000								
5000+								

4. Education Level of Hiring Managers by Region

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Highest Level Of Education								
HS Diploma								
						1		
Associates								
Bachelor's		1				1		2
Master's		3				1		
Doctorate								
Other								
						1		

5. Does Your Agency Hire Ex-offenders?

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Yes		2				3		2
No		1						

6. If yes, does your agency ask about the criminal record on the employment application?

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Yes		3				1		
No		1				2		2

7. Does your agency ask applicants about their criminal record at the time of interview?

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Yes		4				2		1
No						2		1

8. Has your agency implemented “ban the box”?

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Yes						2		2
No		4				2		

9. If yes, indicate the date your agency implemented “ban the box”.

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
		2015				2015		2015

10. When does your agency conduct the criminal record check on a tentative selection?

N=10	Region	Atlanta Metro	Central Georgia	Central Savannah River	Coastal Georgia	North Georgia	Southeast Georgia	Southwest Georgia
Before the interview is conducted		2						1
When a conditional offer of employment has been made		3				3		1

Appendix G: Email Responses from Local Government Agencies by Region

Metro Atlanta	<p>No ex-offenders Does not employ ex-offenders Only has one employee The City of [REDACTED] does not wish to take part in the study. The nature of one's background is a private matter and opening a solicitation for sensitive information would expose information about an employee's past that would otherwise be held private. I wish you well in your studies. I'm sorry but we will not be able to participate Forwarded to City Manager for response (note: no response received) The City [REDACTED] does not have any employees who meet the criteria to participate in your study Thank you for your request but I do not think we will be able to help you. We are a small city with only 1 part time employee. I guess you would say we are mostly volunteer in our city Only 1 employee The City of [REDACTED] does not hire ex-offenders I am afraid we do not meet the criteria you are looking for. We are a small city and until 12 years ago we only had a part time [REDACTED]. I came to work here in 2004, which brought our employment to two full time employees but it's not a revolving door. We are a very small city and do not have a police dept. or a maintenance department, or any utilities and we have a volunteer fire dept. But the Fire Dept. is a service of the county. I think you would find more qualified participants in seeking out larger cities that have more going on.</p>
Central Georgia	<p>I am afraid we do not meet the criteria you are looking for. We are a small city and until 12 years ago we only had a part time librarian. I came to work here in 2004, which brought our employment to two full time employees but it's not a revolving door. We are a very small city and do not have a police dept. or a maintenance department, or any utilities and we have a volunteer fire dept. But the Fire Dept. is a service of the county. I think you would find more qualified participants in seeking out larger cities that have more going on. No ex-offenders Unfortunately, we do not have any ex-offender employees who could participate in your research study Sorry, we don't have any employees that would fit in your study I'm sorry, but we do not have any African-American males currently employed with [REDACTED] County Government I am not sure that [REDACTED] County will work as part of your study due to a unique situation. We have a correctional institution that houses State Prisoners, but is operated as a work camp by the County. As such we are limited in our hiring of ex-offenders due to</p>

the limitation of them working with the prisoners who work in almost every department. Therefore, our numbers are very low if any. This is a statutory issue, not a personnel issue. We have had inmates that have been trained in specific positions that we would have liked to hire upon their release, but we are prohibited from doing so. We have found them other employment outside county government.

No ex-offenders

No ex-offenders

No ex-offenders

I will post this flyer for you, however, we do not currently have any ex-offenders that work for ██████ County.

We are a relatively small org. with approx. 48 fulltime staff, none of whom meet the profile you are targeting

Central Savannah
River

Coastal Georgia

Only one employee

Only two employees

At one time, we employ a few employees that meet your criteria, but currently we do not have any ex-offenders.

I am the only employee that is employed by the City of ██████

Forwarded to HR Manager for response

North Georgia

Thank you for giving ██████ County the opportunity to participate in this survey, however at this time ██████ County does not have any employees that meet the necessary criteria you listed in your email

Posted the recruitment invitation on employee portal (note: did not receive organizational demographic form)

No ex-offenders

No ex-offenders

Southeast
Georgia

No ex-offenders

The City of ██████ has no one who meets the criteria for this study

South Georgia
Southwest
Georgia

At this time our city does not employ anyone who meets this criteria. We are a very small town and do not anticipate any positions coming open any time soon. Thank you for considering our city for this study and I am sorry we cannot help you with your dissertation

Appendix H: Letter of Invitation to Participants

Greetings,

My name is Chandra L. Porter and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. This letter is to let you know about a research study that you have the option to take part in entitled “Exploring the Employability of African-American Male Ex-Offenders in Local Government.” This study is being done to learn more about the barriers and challenges that confront African American male ex-offenders.

I am conducting this research as a doctoral student of Walden University student. Research studies are done to answer questions. This purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders currently employed in local government regarding their attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the impact of their criminal record on their employability in local government. I am defining ex-offenders as those who are rehabilitated and no longer engage in criminal activity.

There is no cost for you to participate in the study. Participation in research is always voluntary. If you meet the criteria listed below, I would like to speak with you:

- African-American or Black
- Ex-offender
- Male
- 18 years or older
- Have applied for or currently work for a local government agency
- Are able to take part in three 90-minute interviews (or one 90-minute interview)

If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. A pseudonym will be used for you to help ensure confidentiality of information shared for this study. I will be available to speak with you more about the study and answer any questions either by phone, email, or in person. If you are interested in learning more about participating, please contact me at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED].

By responding to this email, you are consenting to be considered for this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time. After the interview, you will receive a transcribed copy of the interview to validate the accuracy of its content.

Respectfully,

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix I: Participant Demographic Form

Interviewee: _____ Pseudonym/ID: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Gender:

Male
 Female

Current Age:

18 - 29 50 - 59
 30 - 39 60+
 40 - 49

Marital Status

Single Married Divorced
 Separated Widowed

How would you describe yourself?

African-American/Black White/Caucasian
 Hispanic Native American
 Pacific Islander Multi-racial
 Other

Years of work experience in local government?

< 1 year 1-3 years 4-5 years 5 years+

Age at first incarceration? _____

Length of incarceration?

___ months ___ years

Highest level of education?

below 9th grade 12th grade Associate degree
 9th grade HD diploma/GED Bachelor degree
 10th grade 2- year college Doctorate
 11th grade Technical School Other

Please indicate your salary.

- less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$29,000
- \$30,000 - \$39,000
- \$40,000 - \$49,000
- \$50,000- \$59,000
- more than \$60,000

At any time before, during, or after incarceration, did you receive any type of training to prepare you for a career?

Yes No

If yes, please indicate the type of training you received.

Do you feel that the training you received prepared you for a career?

Yes No

If no, why?

Thank you for completing the form!

Appendix J: Participant Letter/Email to Confirm Interview Script

Date
Participant Name
City, State, Zip

Dear:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my study “Exploring the Employability of African-American Ex-offenders in Local Government.” The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders currently employed in local government regarding their attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the impact of their criminal record on their employability. I would like to confirm your interview on (date) at (time) at (location), as the date, time, and location we agreed upon to conduct the interview.

Respectfully,

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix K: Reminder Notification

Approximately one week ago, you were invited to take part in a research study to explore the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the impact of their criminal record on their employability in local government. You were chosen for the study because you meet the criteria for this study. If you are currently employed by a local government agency, once again I invite you to take part in this research study.

This email serves as a reminder that if you would like to give your consent to participate in this study to please electronically sign and return the Informed Consent form via email that was sent to you last week at your earliest convenience. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the study or regarding your participation in the study at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

I look forward to learning about your experiences as an ex-offender. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix L: Interview Meeting Introduction Script

Hello (Participant Name),

First, I would like to thank you for your interest in participating in my study entitled “*Exploring the Employability of African-American Ex-offenders in Local Government.*”

Before we start, if you have any questions or concerns I can address at any point during this meeting or the remainder of the study, please feel free to let me know. If you are unable to participate in three 90-minute interviews due to time constraints, personal or work obligations, you will be asked to participate in one 90-minute interview. All interviews will be recorded via digital voice recorder and/or webcam in the same manner as the first interview meeting.

Do you have the Informed Consent Form with you?

[If yes, review form. Ask if there are questions/concerns] Let us review the form together.

Now that we have reviewed the Informed Consent Form, do you consent to participating in this study?

[If no, participant completes opt-out form]. Thank you very much for working with me and your time up to this point. I wish you the best and hope you enjoy the rest of your day. *[Meeting ends]*

[If yes, provide participant a copy for their records] Please sign where indicated at the bottom of the Informed Consent Form where indicated.

We will now continue with the next portion of the meeting where I will begin recording the interview. If you do not mind, I will take a moment to set up my equipment.

[Begin recording]

Today’s date is (date) at (time). (Participant’s name/Pseudonym) and I have just completed the informed consent process. (Participant’s name), please affirm that you have signed the form electronically or in person, have submitted it to me, and that you agree to being recorded by stating, “*I agree.*”

[Read interview protocol verbatim]

Appendix M: Interview Protocol

Today's Date: ____/____/____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Thank you for your willingness to volunteer to participate in this study. I will be asking you about your experiences as an African-American male ex-offender and your employability in local government as it relates to the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of hiring managers regarding your criminal record. This interview will last approximately 90-minutes. A digital recorder and webcam will be used to record your responses. If you need to take a break at any time during the interview, please let me know. I would like you to be as open and honest as possible about your experiences. I may take notes while you are talking to ensure that I gather as much information as possible. If you have any questions during this process, please ask me.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable with being recorded, please let me know and I will stop recording immediately. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you may choose to not answer. Additionally, if you decide that you no longer wish to participate in the study, you are entitled to discontinue participation, without prejudice or penalty, at any time.

[Are you ready to begin?]

General Opening Question *[note nonverbal cues]*

1. Describe for me your experience as an ex-offender the first time you applied for employment with a local government agency.

Prompt:

- a. Why did you seek employment with a local government agency?

2. Describe the aspects of the employment process you found most challenging and why?

Prompt:

- a. How did these challenges affect you emotionally?

Attitude/Perceptions – Employment/Background Process *[note nonverbal cues]*

1. Describe your familiarity with the employment/hiring process in your organization prior to applying for employment.
2. Describe your familiarity with the organizations background standards prior to applying for employment.

Attitudes/Perceptions – Criminal Record [note nonverbal cues]

1. Describe why you believe your criminal record may have impacted your ability to obtain employment with a local government agency.
2. Describe your perceptions related to the impact of your criminal record on the hiring decision.
3. Describe how you disclosed your criminal record during the employment process and during the interview.

Prompts:

- a. Were you honest about your past?
- b. If no, did the hiring manager ask you about your criminal record?
- c. How did you explain your criminal past?

Attitude/Perceptions – Hiring Manager Decisions [note nonverbal cues]

1. Describe the extent you believe hiring managers have attitudes and biases towards African-American male ex-offenders.
2. Describe the extent you believe hiring managers have certain perceptions towards African-American male ex-offenders.
3. Describe the extent how you believe your criminal record influenced the hiring manager's attitude, biases, and perceptions in the decision to hire?

Prompt:

- a. Describe how you were able to change the hiring manager's perception of you.

Attitude/Perception on Seeking Employment as an Ex-Offender [note nonverbal cues]

1. Describe the challenges you faced as an ex-offender seeking employment.

Prompts:

- a. Which of these challenges do you feel is beyond your control?
- b. Were these challenges the same before you decided to apply? Explain why.
- c. Do you believe these challenges are specific only to African-American men or do they apply to other races as well? Explain.

Perceptions – Available Resources Pre- and Post-incarceration [note nonverbal cues]

1. Describe the resources available to you to pre- and post-incarceration that helped you overcome challenges during the employment process?

Prompts:

- a. Describe how these resources played a role in your ability to secure employment in local government.
- b. Describe how these resources kept you from returning to jail/prison.

Do you have any additional information to add at this time?

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix N: Participant Thank You Letter

Date:

Dear _____ :

Thank you for meeting with me in and sharing your lived experience as an ex-offender regarding your employability in local government. I greatly appreciate your generous sharing of personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Enclosed is a transcription of your interview. Would you please review the entire document and confirm the information accurately captures your lived experiences regarding your attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about the impact of your criminal record on your employability in local government. If, after reviewing the transcript, you realize that there is important information not captured regarding your experience, please feel free to add comments to further explain your experiences. If you are adding additional comments, please use a different color font (blue pen) or use the comments feature on the review tab. However, please do not edit the transcript for grammatical corrections, as the way an experience is verbally expressed is critically important to this work.

Please return your transcript along with any comments, clarifications, or elaborations within 48 hours (insert date). Again, thank you for your participation in this study and your willingness to share your experiences. If you have any questions related to this verification process or the study, please contact me at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED].

Respectfully

Chandra L. Porter
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University