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The Lived Experiences of African-American Male Exoffenders in the Northeast United States

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Abstract

The Lived Experiences of African American, Male Exoffenders in

the Northeast United States

by

Jacqueline Grant

MS, University of New Haven, 2010

BS, Charter Oak State College, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Discrimination, racism, and class bias affects the accessibility of resources available to African American males who are exoffenders. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders' ability to access resources postincarceration. Guided by Bell and Freeman's critical race theory, a purposeful sample of 6 African American, male exoffenders were recruited from 2 reentry programs in the Northeast United States. A semistructured interview approach was employed to examine the life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning of the lived experience from the participants. The modified Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen method of analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Seven themes emerged that included the stigma of a criminal record, lack of resources, good family support, the importance of employment, accountability, responsibility, lack of education, and the environment that can impact the success or failure of an exoffender's reentry. Policymakers in the criminal justice system can change the current policy that underestimates the extent to which the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has affected the resources that African American, male exoffenders need to reintegrate into society. The positive social change implication is that service providers can use the results of this study to better serve the needs of African American, male exoffenders as they transition from prison into society.

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Dedication

To my grandmother, the late Alice J. (Davis) Freeman (1893–1981). Grandmother, you taught me so much that there are no words nor ways that I can say thank you. You were the most loving, caring, and generous person that I have had the pleasure of knowing. Your kindness to those around you, your dedication to serving others, and your gift of love made you the person that I admire the most. Thank you, grandmother, for everything. Love, your grateful granddaughter.

To my dearest Kristin David Andrew Payton (1985–2015), I'm so proud to have been your aunt. You are my morning star, the light of my life, and the son that I never had. This journey through life even thou cut short has been the most exciting and enjoyable times together. God had a plan for you, and I trust in him, even though I miss you like crazy. I'm hoping to see you in the next life. Goodbye, for now, my dearest nephew. Love, Aunt Jackie

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

The first Civil Rights law was passed in 1875, a decade after the conclusion of the

Civil War and long before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights law of 1875

stated that citizens of the United States, no matter their color, "shall have the equal

benefits of all laws as is enjoyed by White citizens" (as cited in Cheney, 2014, p.2). The

Civil Rights Act of 1964 promised racial equality in education, employment, and voting

and a ban on discrimination in housing. However, African American males convicted of

felonies are deprived of these civil rights by federal, state, and local governments (Pettit

& Sykes, 2015).

A felony drug conviction while receiving federal student loans limits African

American males from accessing financial aid in the form of Pell Grants, other federal

grants, loans, or work-study positions for a specified period (Adams, Chen, & Chapman,

2017). Additionally, states across the country have stipulations that exoffenders must

abide by to participate in society. In New Mexico, for example, regardless of

rehabilitation, a conviction for drug trafficking, child abuse, and sexual offenses may

disqualify an individual for a teaching certificate or child care licensure or employment

(Legal Action Center, 2018). In Pennsylvania, employers may only consider a job

applicant's felony or misdemeanor convictions if they relate to the applicant's suitability

for employment. Connecticut law requires a state agency first to examine the relationship

between the offense and the job, the applicant's postconviction rehabilitation, and the

time elapsed since conviction and release before determining if a person is not suitable for a license (Schulte, 2014).

The state of Louisiana forbids licensing agencies from disqualifying a person from obtaining a license or practicing a trade solely because of a prior criminal record unless the conviction directly relates to the occupation. In the event that the applicant is denied because of a sentence, the reason for the decision must be stated in writing (Schulte, 2014). In some states, former inmates are banned from voting or serving on juries. For example, in the state of Florida, an individual convicted of a felony must apply for executive clemency after a 5-year waiting period. In Florida, people who were convicted of murder, assault, child abuse, drug trafficking, and arson are subject to a 7year waiting period and a clemency board hearing to determine whether franchise may be restored (Florida Drug Policy Alliance, 2016; Pro.Con, 2017). Certain convictions, including some drug offenses, can lead to exclusion from social programs, including welfare, public housing, cash assistance, and food stamps (Delgado, 2012; Maruna, 2011; Mukamal & Samuels, 2002).

Every week, 10,000 prisoners are released from state and federal prisons, and more than 650,000 are released every year (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). According to criminal justice statistics, two-thirds will likely be rearrested within 3 years of release (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). The high volume of inmates who return to prison reflects the growth in the U.S. prison population during the past 30 years. For the African American communities to which many of these former prisoners return (communities that are likely to be impoverished and disenfranchised neighborhoods that lack resources and

have high crime rates), the release of African American exoffenders represents many

challenges (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015).

  With no job, no money, and no place to live, exoffenders often find themselves

facing the same pressures and temptations that landed them in prison (U.S. Department of

Justice, 2015). African American, male exoffenders need somewhere to live and to work

(Ferner, 2015). The exoffenders need to somewhere to live and work before they are

released. However, those resources are limited. Life on outside of prison can present

many challenges for African American, male exoffenders. When an inmate is released,

and in the months that follow, he needs to have his basic needs met to help him get back

on track.

  At the time of this study, there was not a lot of information to secure post release

details of African-American male exoffenders employment records (Nally, Lockwood,

Ho, & Knutson, 2014). Researchers have had to rely on information obtained from the

general population's unemployment records to examine the impact of unemployment and

the recidivism rate among African American, male exoffenders (Nally et al., 2014). The

lack of information makes it necessary to investigate how to serve this group of people.

The knowledge gained from this study has the potential to influence laws, policies,

education, job training, and other essential services African American, male exoffenders

need to reintegrate successfully back into society. According to the National Research

Council Report (2014), three out of four African American men are in prison for

nonviolent crimes (National Research Council Report, 2014).

  Any effort on the part of the federal, state, and local government that would

reduce the recidivism rate and reverses mass incarceration of African American males

should start with addressing nonviolent offenses. Much of the policy conversation has focused on mandatory sentences for nonviolent crimes (King, Peterson, Elderbroom, & Taxy, 2015).

African American men represent over 35% of the jailed inmates and 37% of the prison population of the 2.3 million people in correctional facilities, and they are more likely to be locked up for more extended periods of time than European American men (Wolfers, Leonhardt, & Quealy, 2015). Three-quarters of the prison population are either African American or Latinos; more than a third of drug offenders in federal prison at sentencing had either no or minimal criminal record (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). These African American prisoners mainly come from low-income, disadvantaged communities that lack substantive activities such as employment, education, health care, and adequate housing (Dumond, Brockmann, Dickman, Alexander, & Rich, 2013).

A large proportion of those nonviolent crimes are drug convictions' in 2015, the U.S. government spent more than $51 billion on the war on drugs (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015). The proportion of people incarcerated for drug offenses in state prison who identify as African American or Latino is 57% (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015). Many of the arrests in 2015 in the United States were for possession only (Drug Policy Alliance, 2015). The increased imprisonment of drug offenders has driven the overall growth of the federal prison system, which held nearly 80% more inmates in 2013 than it did in 1980 (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2015). The increase in time served by drug offenders was the most significant contributor to growth in the federal prison population between 1998 and 2010 (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2015). Growth in the prison population has led to increased taxpayer spending.

From 1980 to 2013, federal prison spending increased from $970 million to more than

$6.7 billion (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2015).

Several states have taken steps to divert people convicted of low-level drug

offenses to treatment and other services (Drug Policy Alliance, 2013). States like Utah

and South Carolina are making low-level drug possession a misdemeanor instead of a

felony (Green, Muldrow, & Cohen, 2015). In California, the Substance Abuse and Crime

Prevention Act of 2000 (SACPA) diverts people convicted of nonviolent, drug-related

crimes to community-based treatment, education, or training and probation (Drug Policy

Alliance, 2015).

As of November 2016, Connecticut had a prison population of 15,058

(Regan,2015). The punishment falls disproportionately on people of color (Sledge, 2013).

African American males comprise of over half of the prison population, although

European Americans outnumber African Americans by three to one in the state's general

population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). African American men make up 50% of the

state and local prisoners incarcerated for drug crimes (Sledge, 2013). The state of

Connecticut has instituted two bills addressing criminal justice reforms that have been

signed into law under Governor Daniel Malloy; specifically, they address disparities in

the way African Americans and Latinos are treated by police and the courts (Regan,

2015).

The excessive force bill calls on police departments to promote racial, gender, and

ethnic diversity training of their staff and to provide instruction on issues related to

cultural sensitivity (Regan, 2015). The second chance society bill reduces the

incarceration rates among nonviolent offenders, treats drug possession as a misdemeanor,

and eliminates mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug possession. The bill also speeds up parole hearings for low-risk inmates and eases the process by which exoffenders earn a full pardon for peaceful drug possession (Regan, 2015). These two bills reduce the number of arrest/conviction and incarceration rates among African American males in the state of Connecticut.

Problem Statement

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on September 13, 1994. This crime control bill included a three-strikes mandatory life sentence without parole that impacted states. For example, California has the most offenders (more than 40,000) sentenced under two and three strike laws (author, year). Georgia is second, with 2,000 persons imprisoned under this law; 57 inmates are serving life without parole for their second strike, while some are serving 10 years for a first strike (Prison Policy Initiative, 1996). Each year, thousands of African American male inmates are released from prison, and the architects of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act did not consider how communities would be able to handle a large number of African American male inmates who are being released back into society.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the impact the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States. Several states, including Connecticut, have not prepared for the many needs of the African American, male exoffenders who are being released. The list of their needs includes the ability to find

housing, employment, education, health care, restoration of voting rights, and job training postincarceration. Without these resources to sustain them, reintegration becomes difficult and contributes to high recidivism rates. This study was designed to document and analyze the experiences of six African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the barriers that six African American, male exoffenders from the Northeast United States faced when trying to access essential resources postincarceration. I also focused on how the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 may have impacted these resources. The goal of the phenomenological research was to show how labeling theory (Lemert, 1951) was being used in the criminal justice system and in society to marginalize African American men. The impact of the labeling theory and the implication of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act has affected African American, male exoffenders' ability to find housing, employment, education, job training, health care, and restoration of their voting rights.

A purposeful criterion sampling design was used to offer information-rich data and an account of the phenomenon of the various barriers African American, male exoffenders faced upon reentry. I helped to identify and uncover information about the difficulties African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States experienced postincarceration. The information contained in this study can be valuable to

policymakers and those working in the criminal justice system on how to better assist

African American, male exoffenders being released from prison.

Research Question

What barriers has the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

created for African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study included the concept of self-stigma,

as noted in Moore, Tangney, and Stuewig's (2012), and Bell and Freeman's (1970)

critical race theory (CRT). The CRT was the appropriate choice for the conceptual

framework due to the phenomenological nature of this study, its constructivist stance, and

the limited professional knowledge about the lived experiences of African American,

male exoffenders' postincarceration. Moore et al. described self-stigma as the

overarching process through which stigma impacts the self, and internalized stigma is one

component in this process. The process of self-stigmatization begins with the perception

that others hold negative stereotypes about a group (Moore et al., 2012).

Attributes such as drug addiction or having a criminal record are viewed as

controllable, even among people with these qualities. These stigmatized people may

perceive that others hold stigmatizing beliefs and personally believe that stereotypes

apply to the group (Moore et al., 2012). Some prison inmates perceive and anticipate

being stigmatized by their community (Moore et al., 2012). Two studies that examined

internalized stigma in offenders were qualitative and considered the associated emotional,

cognitive, and behavioral consequences of internalized shame, but they did not assess

acceptance of stereotypes (Chui & Cheng, 2012; Schneider & McKim, 2003). According to Bell and Freeman (1970), CRT is a collection of scholars interested in studying the relationship between race, racism, and power. Ostertag and Armeline (2011) argued that racism is the analytical lens that CRT uses to examine the existing power in the United

States.

Critical race theorists contend that race is a socially constructed concept and that race legitimatizes dominance and social privilege of Whites over non-Whites (Ostertag & Armeline, 2011). Perez-Huber and Solórzano (2014), stated that "racial micro-aggression is a useful tool for research on race racism and the everyday experiences of AfricanAmerican and people of color" (p. 2). CRT centers on the lived experiences of African Americans, targeted by microaggression (Perez-Huber & Solórzano, 2014). Microaggression is defined as subtle but offensive comments directed at minorities (Perez-Huber & Solórzano, 2014).

Phelps and Pager (2016) suggested that both race and class inequalities are critical for explaining the mass imprisonment of African American men.

Race and class shape the trends in the U.S. criminal justice system. In addition, the criminal justice system fails to rehabilitate African American men. This failure causes inequalities in employment, education, housing, and voting rights. Imprisonment hinders the African American male from reintegration into society and may cause mental and emotional harm (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2013). Incarceration of African American males exacerbates the psychological condition of a disenfranchised population and contributes to a diminished health status of individuals, families, and the entire African American community, which is impacted by hyper-incarceration (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2013).

This hyper-incarceration is harmful mentally and emotionally to African American males more so to them than any other race; a negative social status (imprisonment) can affect the wealth that he can receive during his lifetime (BrinkleyRubinstein, 2013). This lack of wealth can influence his wellbeing and possible advantages including the ability to live in better neighborhoods, attend better schools, access to better health care, and political power (Maroto, 2014).

Lee, Porter, and Comfort (2014) noted that imprisonment affects not only the economy but also the family members of those who are in jail. The collateral results can leave families in poverty and cause stress and other emotional disorders (Lee et al., 2014). Nichols and Loper (2012) stated that "mass imprisonment policies have hurt African-American children, the shame, and guilt associated with having a parent imprisoned can lead them to drop-out of school and have little goals in life" (p. 1). Race can influence the punitive policies of the criminal justice system, as is the case of the Violent Crime and Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which led to mass incarceration for many African American men (Lussenhop, 2016).

Nature of the Study

This study included qualitative interviews, and I used a phenomenological method to describe the lived experiences of six African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States regarding the barriers these individuals faced postincarceration. I also addressed the lack of information on the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders postincarceration. I conducted face-to-face interviews and used a tape recorder to document the lived experiences of the participants through the eyes of the

participants, free from theories or preconceptions. I addressed the gaps in the literature by looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of six African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States.

The stigma of a criminal record informed the investigation of the participants' experiences of how they dealt with various barriers that may have interfered with their successful reintegration into society postincarceration, as well as how they dealt with the attitudes, biases, and perception of society towards criminals. The stigma of a criminal record informed the investigation of the participants' experiences on how they dealt with these various barriers. This qualitative study involved examining each construct to provide insight into the lived experiences of employment, housing, education, health care, voting rights barriers, and the perception of society towards African American, male exoffenders.

Definition of Terms

African American or Black: Terms that are used to refer to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of African ancestries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Civil rights: The rights of individuals to receive equal treatment (and to be free from unfair treatment or discrimination) in several settings, including education, employment, and housing based on legally-protected characteristics (FindLaw, 2017).

Exoffender: A person who has completed his or her sentence after being remanded into custody by a court of law. Such a person has served time in either prison or jail (Jones, 2015).

Lived experience: Reflects the experience that is already passed or lived through

(Manen, 2016).

Mass imprisonment: Defined by comparatively and historically extreme rates of imprisonment and by the concentration of incarceration among young, African American men living in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage (Wilderman, 2012**).**

Racial disparities: The disproportionate contact of racial/ethnic groups with criminal justice institutions about their presence in the general population. Racial disparities are often calculated at the state or federal levels of arrest, jail, and prison (National Criminal Justice Reference Services, 2017).

Racial equality: The belief that a person's individuals, regardless of his or her racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense. Characteristics are moral, politically, and legally equal and should be treated as such.

This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them (Amnesty International, 2015).

Recidivism: A person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime. Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that result in rearrests, reconvictions, or returns to prison with or without a new sentence during a 3-year period following the prisoner's release (National Institute of Justice, 2017).

Assumptions

There are four types of approaches to research: epistemological, axiological, ontological, and methodological (Creswell, 2014). The epistemological (how researchers

know what they know) approach means that the researcher tries to get close as possible to the participants being studied. Subjective evidence is assembled based on the individual view from research conducted in the field. The researcher distances himself/herself from those being researched (Creswell, 2014). In the axiological approach (the role of values in research), the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden quality of the information gathered from the field. The ontological (the nature of reality) relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell, 2014). The approach considers the positionality about the context and setting. Researchers embrace the idea of multiple realities and report on these various realities by exploring numerous forms of evidence from different individual's perspective and experience (Creswell, 2014).

Methodology (the methods used in the process of research) is inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's skills in collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014). In a phenomenological study, the researcher tries to understand the lived experiences through the perception of the participants as it relates to those experiences. In this study, I assumed that African American, male exoffenders believed that having a criminal record creates certain attitudes, biases, and perceptions that society uses to create barriers for them and prevent them from successful reintegration. I also assumed that African American, male exoffenders feel discriminated against because they have a criminal record. I assumed that African Americans who use illicit substances are arrested, convicted, and imprisoned at higher rates than other groups. I also assumed that the participants would choose to participate in a 60-minute interview to describe their lived experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The delimitation is a choice made by the researcher, and the boundaries of the study are under the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). One of the delimitations for this study was the location. The target area was in a small Northeast section of the United States. As a result, this study may have limited application to others states where structure and organization of services are rendered to persons released from prison differently. The target area was further refined to an urban city, with a large African American male population.

Patton (1990) argued that the sample size depends on what a person wants to find out, what will be helpful, what will have credibility, and what I can do with the resources that I had available. The sample size for this study was 6 participants. The transferability of the study is limited to African American, male exoffenders who shared the same experiences postincarceration. The boundaries of this study included African American, male exoffenders who had been released from prison in the 6–12 months before the study or those who were on probation or parole during that period. I did not investigate African American women's, children's, Latinos's, and Whites' lived experiences postincarceration.

Limitations

The limitation is a weakness of the study that may impact the results (Simon, 2011). The transferability of this study is limited to African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast of the United States who had been released from prison in the 6–12 months before the study or who were on probation or parole. Connecticut, for example

has a diverse mix of large and small cities and towns, rural and urban locales, and farming and industrial areas (Mathieu, 2013). Therefore, another limitation may be that the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire state of Connecticut because of the geographical differences within the state. The racial composition of the state of Connecticut population is predominantly White, with Whites making up 77% (2,772,410) of the population (The Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, 2011). African Americans make up 10% of the population (362,296), and Latinos make up 13% (479,087) of Connecticut's population (The Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, 2011). These distributions differ from city to city and from town to town.

The homogeneity of the participants' gender in this study precludes a generalization about other African American groups (women and children), even if they live in the same target area in Connecticut. Another limitation is that out of the 5 reentry programs in the Northeast of the United States that I contacted only two reentry sites allowed me the use of their facility to conduct my study. Another limitation was that the participants might been reluctant to volunteer any information regarding their past lived experiences. Another limitation was that I am an African American, female exsheriff who has had similar experiences. Therefore, I am aware of the possibility of bias. To limit my biases, I exemplified the skills of these nonviolent men by separating, coding, and organizing the data that were collected from the interviews into nodes and themes using NVivo software.

Significance of the Study

In this study, I investigated the possible impact The Violent Crime Control, and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on African American, male exoffenders and their experiences of trying to access necessary resources since being released from prison. The analysis of the qualitative data gathered contributes to the literature on this issue and provides an understanding of the underlying meaning of the lived experiences of incarceration through the words of these exoffenders. I also sought to fill the knowledge gap in the literature in various ways. First, I examined the connection between the research on the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders postincarceration and the civil rights legislation that promised racial equality in education, employment, voting, and the ban on discrimination in the housing of exoffenders. Second, I examined the perceptions of these men as they relate to getting these services postincarcerations. Third, I evaluated the beliefs these men held as they tied to the stigma society exhibits for exoffenders and the attitudes, biases, and the perception towards African American, male exoffenders. Finally, I investigated how these men can overcome the barriers placed on them for having a criminal record.

This study adds value and evidence to the existing body of knowledge as there are few studies on the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders postincarceration. The goal of the study was to bring to the forefront their authentic voices and lived experiences, which according to Perso (2012), often go unrecognized in the mainstream discourse. The study may influence policymakers and those in the criminal justice system to find ways to reduce mass imprisonment and recidivism rates among African American, male offenders, thereby producing a positive social change that

has dealt with racial discrimination, prejudice, and biases that exists in the U.S. criminal justice system towards African American males.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the introduction of this study, the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the research. I also presented the research question, theoretical framework, and the nature of the study. I provided definitions, the scope of the study, assumptions of the study, limitations, and delimitations of the study. I concluded Chapter 1 with an overview of the research that supports the need for this study as it relates to the possible barriers African American, male exoffenders face when reintegrating into society postincarceration.
The study may fill the gap in the literature on the potential obstacles and impact the Violent Crime and Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on the African American, male exoffenders when seeking employment, housing, education, health care, and voting rights postincarceration. In Chapter 2, I present an in-depth review of the literature and focus on the barriers African American, male exoffenders face and an overview of the theoretical framework that guided this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders who were seeking employment, housing, health care, and educational services after being released from prison. When many African American, male exoffenders are released from prison, they return to their underprivileged neighborhoods and cannot find employment due to a criminal record; they are left searching for housing, health care benefits, and educational services to reintegrate into society. These services are limited, especially for African American men. Therefore, reentry becomes difficult for many African American males postincarceration.

I explored the lived experience of this subpopulation to inform educators, mental health providers, and other academics in the social and behavioral sciences to understand the service needs of this subpopulation. African American males are imprisoned at six times the rate of White men, and more than any other race (Pew Research Center, 2016). However, few conceptual or empirical studies were available at the time of this study on postprison services available for African American men. This study was limited to the North East of the United States, which as of 2015, had a resident population of 3,590,886, in which African American men comprised of over half of the prison population (Connecticut Department of Corrections, 2017). The State of Connecticut Department of Correction (2015) found that, in 2012, within 5 years of inmates being released, over 70% of inmates were rearrested, and over 60% were convicted of a new crime.

The literature review begins with the theoretical frameworks used in this study, self-stigma as noted in Moore et al. (2012) and the CRT. Chapter 2 also includes the literature search strategies and a discussion of the social barriers that may impact

employment, housing, education, and health care of African American, male exoffenders. I describe the history of the criminal justice system and the Violent Crime and Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 on sentencing disparities among African American men as compared to their counterparts. I highlight the gaps in the research on how society is prepared to manage many African American inmates released into society.

Literature Research Strategy

I used search strategies and keywords through Walden University's Criminal Justice databases, including Criminal Justice Periodicals, Political Science Complete, A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Coindex, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation and Theses, ProQuest Psychology Journals, Science Journals, Social Science Journals, Health Science Collection, the Political Science Collection, and Eric. I also searched dissertations, journals, and law reviews. I used electronic databases, full-text, and peer-reviewed article sources within the past 5 years. I also searched Google Scholar. Using the *Psychology* database, I searched *Specify, Sybarites,* and the *SAGE Full-Text Collection*, generating a small number of articles addressing psychological and medical needs of African American men. I also examined official published reports.

The terms used for the literature search included *African American men, arrest/convictions, Black, criminal record, convict, criminal justice system, discrimination, employment, education, exoffender, health care, disenfranchisement, voting rights, housing, mass incarceration, offender perception, stigma, stereotypes, work*

release, prison, self-determination, unemployment, racial disparities, phenomenology, race, racism recidivism, parole, probation, and *reentry.*

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework used in this study included the concept of self-stigma as noted in Moore et al. (2012) and Bell and Freeman's (1970) CRT. Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, its constructivist stance, and my limited professional knowledge about the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders postincarceration, the conceptual framework of self-stigma helped in the understanding this population and their skills. Moore et al. suggested that stigma is a concept stemming from the labeling theory.

Moore et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study to measure inmates' perception of social stigma against criminals. Moore et al. found that inmates' perception of social stigma was higher than students' stigmatizing criminals. Moore et al. (2012) found that some minority inmates' anticipated stigma had a negative correlation with their employability. Moore et al. found that Caucasians experienced a positive relationship after being released from prison. The findings of stigma have negatively affected the employability of African American men and may have different implications for the reintegration of this group (Moore et al., 2012).

Link and Phelan (2001) defined stigma as a process that occurs when "elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold" (p. 367). Stigma exists at three levels in society: the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Cook, Purdie-Vaughn,

Meyer, & Busch, 2013). The intrapersonal level affects people's experiences with the environment, reducing stigma expression and lessening the impact of stigma on stigmatized groups (Cook et al., 2013).

People who share a stigma or individuals who differ in their stigma status include individuals who are not members of the stigmatized group. The structural level includes social forces and institutions, like legislative action, mass media, and the government's policies Cook et al., 2013). Targeting institutional forces can affect material resources, legal practices, and psychological climate aimed at stigma groups (Cook et al., 2013). African American men who are released from prison have a documented association with self-stigma (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2015).

Concomitant to the concept of stigma were the tenets of CRT to understand how African American, male exoffenders may be affected by covertly marginalized treatment postincarceration. The CRT was first used in 1994 as an analytical framework to access inequality in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Since then, scholars have used CRT as a framework to analyze and critique higher education research and practices, the hiring of faculty, and student retention in colleges and universities (Cerezo, Charter, Pena, Valdez, & Bustos, 2014).

The CRT can be used to uncover social injustices and explain complex racial concepts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). I found articles on the disenfranchisement of African Americans and African American exoffenders. Spates and Mathis (2014), for example, used the lens of CRT to focus on the disparities that exist between the U.S. states' disenfranchisement of African American felons and the rest of the prison population. Spates and Mathis took a critical perspective on how, under the guise of legal

neutrality, mass incarceration has resulted in the silencing of an entire segment of African American men. Spates and Mathis described the laws and policies that have created structural barriers for African American men who have a history of incarceration.

Examining the experiences of African American men who are exoffenders through the lens of CRT was projected to increase understanding of the influences racial manifestations have on the meaning of their skills (Burt, Simons, Gibson, & Gibbson, 2012). Social barriers like stigma can hinder an exoffenders' ability to secure and maintain employment (Johnson, 2013). Different iterations of shame throughout society affect exoffenders in many ways, leading to issues such as recidivism, depression, and civil disenfranchisement (Johnson, 2013).

Johnson (2013) used the self-determination theory to engage exoffenders in behavior change and job counseling. Johnson used a manage, build, strengthen, develop, and clarify model derived from self-determination and cognitive career theory to explore the subjects' environmental, social-personal, and job concerns. The overall goal of the method was to determine a better way to facilitate adjustment in society by finding and maintaining the exoffenders' employment (Johnson, 2013).

Health Care

Watson (2014b) provided a historical perspective African American man experiencing health disparities compared to other racial and ethnic groups. African American men have a shorter lifespan compared to other ethnic minority groups (author, year). Understanding the barriers that impede access to health care and wellness services

among African American males is vital for realizing the beginning of a process to decrease health care disparities (Watson, 2014b).

Watson (2014b) identified the barriers experienced by African American males in accessing health care services. African American men have many perceptions about health care services (Watson, 2014b). The perceptions of the participants fell into three categories: the negative impact of environment or community, lack of finances or no insurance, and distrust of medical practices associated with race history resulting in accessing health care as a last resort (Watson, 2014b). Watson stated that additional research was needed to create community-based programs to (a) educate African American males on the importance of preventative strategies to maintain wellness and (b) ensure that the appropriate medical and wellness services were available and reached African American men in need. Watson identified the barriers experienced by African American males in accessing health care services as well as giving a voice to African American men. Prior researchers identified factors that present barriers to accessing health care as despair, despondency, socioeconomic status, lack of knowledge, distrust of the medical system and doctors, as well issues related to manhood (Watson, 2014b).

Watson (2014b) proposed that increased understanding and knowledge related to the attitudes and beliefs held by African American males might contain information to develop strategies that promote and improve access to health care for African American men, thereby reducing disparities in health status among African American men (Watson, 2014b).

Participants believed that the population rendered them helpless, hopeless, and powerless (Watson, 2014b). The population presented harmful and destructive peer

pressure, unhealthy living conditions, and a self-defeating community culture, thereby

creating barriers to these African American men seeking access to health care services

(Watson, 2014b). Many African American men lack insurance, or they do not have the

money to go to the doctor, often due lack of educational and economic opportunities that

would support their decision to use financial resources to help to access health care

services (Watson, 2014b).

Labeling Theory

According to labeling theory, people's behavior is influenced by the label

attached to them by society (Crossman, 2017). Labeling can be a factor in a more

persistent criminal life course for individuals who might be experimenting with criminal

activity (Bessemer, 2017). Scholars have shown the impact of convictions on subsequent

criminal behavior. Labeling theorists distinguish between two theoretical perspectives of

how labeling works (Bessemer, 2017). Being labeled may increase an individual's

association with other delinquent individuals and influence his/her perception, attitudes,

and beliefs, thereby conforming to the criminal stereotype and amplifying his or her

criminal behavior. A conviction may have an adverse impact on educational attainment or

finding a stable job, which may increase offending. Labeling affects those who are

already socially and economically disadvantaged (Bessemer, 2017).

In the defiance theory, Sherman (1993) stressed the importance of emotions and

legitimacy for the effectiveness of a sentence. Sherman's theory was based on

reintegrative shaming theory, which posited that punishment should be aimed to "shame

the act, but not the actor" (p. 156). According to Sherman, defiance occurs when four

conditions are present: (a) the offender perceives a punishment as unfair, (b) the offender feels alienated or is poorly bonded to the person or sanctioning agency, (c) the offender perceives the sanction as stigmatizing and targeted at his or her person instead of at his or her law-breaking act, and (d) the offender does not acknowledge the shame that the punishment caused him or her to suffer.

Gaps in the Literature

Most scholars have focused on contact with the criminal justice system during the teenage years, and few researchers followed respondents as adults while controlling for differences in deviant behavior before the labeling occurs (Bessemer, 2017). Most scholars investigating labeling effects have failed to distinguish these periods (Bessemer, 2017). There are insufficient data related to the reasons why African American, male exoffenders face barriers when reintegrating into society postincarceration. Researchers have used informative, quantitative studies that fail to capture the everyday microaggressions African American men may face.

Sentences imposed on African American males in the federal system are 20% longer than those imposed on White men convicted of similar crimes (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). These racial disparities result from disparate treatment of African Americans at every stage of the criminal justice system, including stops and searches, arrests, prosecutions and plea negotiations, trials, and sentencing (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014).

There are high number of convictions of African American men in the United States, and the incarceration rate among African American men is higher than any other racial group. Scholars have found that more significant racial disparities exist in

sentencing for nonviolent crimes, especially property crimes and drug offenses (ACLU, 2014). Much of the research and scholarship on African American males have been rooted in a cultural or deficit model, in which disparities are attributed to African American men themselves rather than to their environments or institutional arrangements (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). The reason for this bias as it relates to employment, housing, education, voting, and job training of African American exoffenders has not been the focus of most studies nor has a focus been on how society will handle the influx of inmates that are being released.

Population Growth, Projections, and Implications

The African American population is projected to grow modestly over the next 46 years (2014–2060; Colby & Portman, 2015). It is anticipated to increase 42%, from 42 million to 60 million, and the total share of U.S. population is expected to grow from 13% to 14% by 2060 (Colby & Portman, 2015).

The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) indicated that African Americans in Connecticut comprise 11.6% and 13.3% of the state population. In 2015, the incidence of poverty for African Americans decreased to 24.1%, down from 26.2% in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The median income for African Americans was $36,898 between 2014 and 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The Census Bureau reported that various measures of income inequality and gender differences in the poverty rates were more pronounced for those aged 18 to 64.

The poverty rate for African Americans is higher than those of Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). For those who live in central cities, the poverty rate for 2015 was 16.8% (author, year). In 2015, 26.3% (62 million) of people aged 25 and older without a

high school diploma were in poverty; for African American males aged 15–34, homicide

was the leading cause of death (US Census Bureau, 2015). With such an array of

information, social workers can develop a plan that could help reduce the incarceration

and recidivism rates in U.S. jails (Mann, Speedlines, & Yamasaki, 2013).

The Second Chance Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on

April 9, 2008. The law authorized federal funding for state and federal reentry programs

that allowed social workers to obtain financing to serve the many needs of incarcerated

people (National Reentry Resource Center, 2010). Social workers can now collaborate

with the criminal justice community to produce needs assessments and develop,

implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs, which Mann et al.

(2013) argued is a contribution to society.

Mann et al. also claimed that the numbers of incarcerated people fall on the job of

social workers as described by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

There must be a reentry plan in place before an inmate is released from prison (Mann et

al., 2013). Reentry is defined as the process of an adult offender returning to schools,

families, communities, and society (Mears & Travis, 2004). Reentry is designed to

facilitate individuals' transition from incarceration in prisons, jails, governmental

institutions, or juvenile facilities to freedom. The reentry processes may begin while a

person is incarcerated and continue after his/her release into the community (Lamella,

Reed, & Taylor, 2011).

All exoffenders, regardless of age, experience barriers to reentry into their

communities after their release. Formal obstacles to successful reentry for former

prisoners involve not being allowed to work in certain occupations, such as security

positions and child care, and being barred from any federal programs, such as public assistance, subsidized housing, and national school loans (Lamella et al., 2011).

In addition to the formal barriers, there are also natural barriers. Incarceration may weaken family ties, alter negatively social networks, and distance exoffenders from the legal labor market. Some correctional institutions allow studies to focus on one race (Whites) when minorities also face reentry issues. African American men who leave prison encounter racial stereotypes and discrimination that make it harder to secure employment in the labor market. Only a few researchers have examined the problems of African American males in the reentry process (Simmons, 2016).

Pager (2007) concluded that African American exoffenders are the least favorable group in the labor market. African Americans have the least chance of securing jobs. Pager stated that "exploring the interaction between race and a criminal record in three contexts, how black ex-offenders face an intensification of stigma, above and beyond the simple additive effects of either characteristic alone" (p. 168). Upon release, African American men are isolated and marginalized due to stigma and political alienation associated with being an exoffender (Lamella et al., 2011). Thus, African American males face barriers in their attempts to negotiate reentry into their communities after a period of confinement.

Social service providers, community practitioners, and faith-based organizations have attempted to help African American exoffenders make the transition back into the community as smooth as possible through reentry programs (Lamella et al., 2011). I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 3.

Over the years, policymakers have begun to understand the critical role that reentry programs play in helping ex-offenders make successful transitions from institutionalization to a positive contributor to society (Rhine, Matthew, Sampson, and Daley, 2003). In doing so, these programs and services attempt to address the exoffender's employment, education, mental health, substance abuse, and housing concerns (Rhine et al., 2003). Several researchers have found that when ex-offender involvement in reentry programs before their release, can lead to positive economic and social outcomes (Lamella et al. 2011).

In addition to providing direct services, another benefit that ex-offenders receive from participating in reentry programs is through the connection to informal networks of social capital that can promote economic and social well-being (Lamella et al., 2011). Exoffenders are released back into their communities where they will need access to a system of social, emotional, and financial support to successfully reenter the society. For many ex-offenders, family involvement plays a role in their ability to provide muchneeded help. There is limited literature on efforts to facilitate the successful reentry of African-American males. Reentry can also be a daunting task for other population segments within the African-American community.

Lamella et al. (2011) described the impact of African-American men trying to reintegrate into society, and the study may have far-reaching positive implications. First, promoting the idea of remaining healthy. Secondly, by taking their rightful place as head of the family and by giving back to their community. In such a way that promotes positive energy and encourages all African-Americans to develop positively. Reentry programs represent an opportunity to help African-American males successfully

reestablish familial and community connections, as well as reduce reentry-related anxiety (Lamella et al., 2011).

Employment

Davis, Charter, and Morgan (2013) emphasized successful employment has been linked to lowering recidivism rates, but many offenders find it difficult to obtain work due to a host of barriers, including a felony record (Davis et al., 2013). An investigation by Cerda, Stafstrom, and Curtis (2015) found that individual factors such as having a criminal record can deter employability and contribute to high unemployment rates among former inmates. Research has identified the combination of having a criminal record and lack of job opportunities as a predictor of recidivism. It is estimated that about 70% of former offender's face obstacles toward obtaining employment. Many former offenders are high school dropouts, and most have limited work experience, low cognitive skills, and suffer from substance abuse problems (Cerda et al., 2015). Limited work opportunities can create employer bias which has been identified as a barrier to employment; it is essential to examine contributing factors that influence company hiring decisions (Cerda et al. 2015).

Research indicates that the type of offense plays a role in the employer's attitude and hiring choice of former offenders (Cerda et al., 2015). Employer bias has been identified as a barrier to employment; it is crucial to examine contributing factors that influence company hiring decisions to address the high rates of unemployment better and to reduce recidivism among ex-offenders (Cerda et al., 2015). Research indicates that the type of offense plays a role in the employer's attitude and hiring decision of former

offenders (Cerda et al., 2015). Employers are less willing to engage former offenders

convicted of violent offenses compared to those convicted of marijuana, traffic violations

and other drug-related crimes (Cerda et al., 2015). Former offenders' employment

opportunities are limited, and lack of qualifications add to the burden (Cerda et al., 2015).

For example, 42% of employers who have hired a former offender stated that experience,

skills, or training of the applicant were the primary factors that influenced their hiring

decision.

     Cerda et al. (2015), concluded that the race of the candidate has no effect on the

employability, but criminal history did, such that the applicant with no criminal history

received a higher recommendation than those with a felony or misdemeanor charge. Core

competencies encompass a variety of interrelated academic and social skills deemed vital

for employability (Cerda et al., 2015). Reading, writing, and computation skills play a

crucial role in the hiring decision since employers consider these skills essential for

competent job performance (Cerda et al., 2015). Communication skills are valued by

employers since employees need to communicate with others in the workplace such as

co-workers, supervisors, and customers (Cerda et al., 2015).

     Cerda et al.'s (2015) research study also revealed that employers were more

willing to hire former offenders if they believed that they had been rehabilitated. With the

high cost of imprisonment, understanding the underlying reasons that impact employers'

hiring decisions and the employability of former offenders and providing stable and

legitimate work are necessary because this understanding can help in alleviating barriers

upon offenders' reentry (Cerda et al., 2015). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017)

found that for African-American males over twenty years old, the unemployment rate for

2016 was 7.8% compared to 3.9% white men for the same year. African-American men made under three-fourths (71%) of what white men earned. The median hourly wage for African American males gainfully employed was $14.90 while white men in a similar position made $20.84 (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The unemployment rate among African Americans is twice that of whites.

The high incidence of unemployment before incarceration indicates that offenders are at an even higher risk of re-offending once they are released if they do not obtain employment (Meyers & Shipped, 2015). African-American men encounter a multitude of difficulties in their everyday lives. African-American men are looked upon by most whites as lazy, undisciplined, and poorly organized, incompetent, less skilled, possess bad attitudes, and rebellious (Steward, 2017). These difficulties are magnified when African-American men must contend with unemployment (Steward, 2017). Young black males as a group also have higher unemployment, lower graduation rates, less access to healthcare and higher incarceration rates than other racial, age and gender groups in the United States (Liu, 2015).

In a study by Strickland (2008), African-American men who returned to their community's post-incarceration found it challenging to make a connection to their communities (Strickland, 2008). The inability to make a connection to one's community has profound economic and sociological implications for them and the community (Strickland, 2008). As a result, their basic needs are not meet; they are unable to provide for their families, and they occupy a marginal position in society (Strickland, 2008). There is limited understanding of how the African-American men who have been incarcerated build their social connections to mainstream jobs successfully, despite the

various obstacles they face (Strickland, 2008). Strickland (2008) used a qualitative study

to examine how African-American male ex-offenders take the support they receive from

personal contacts and build social capital to get and maintain a job.

The data was collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty

formerly incarcerated males. Strickland (2008) argued that along with racial

discrimination, stigmatization, and group powerlessness, finding and maintaining

employment is a crucial factor in post-release success. These factors make it difficult for

African-American male ex-prisoners to find individuals who can help with securing jobs.

Despite these barriers, some former prisoners find employment and do reintegrate

successfully into community and family life (Strickland, 2008).

Travis, Solomon, and Waul (2001) investigated the anticipated costs associated

with arrest and punishment are greater for someone who has various options. Given the

high recidivism rate of released African-American men who have poor employment

prospects due to the lack of education and work experience, a criminal record, drugs and

other disabilities (Travis et al., 2001). Their study found that coming home triggers a

complex and mixed set of emotions and realities for those in closest relation to the former

prisoner. Reentry can raise new fears for the victims of the original offense, or it can be a

time for reconciliation (Travis et al. 2001). The "Fair Chance Act" allows potential

employers to judge the applicants on their qualifications and not their criminal record, but

potential employers do have the right to do a background check (Leadership Conference,

2013). In 2010, Connecticut instituted "ban the box" legislation. The "ban the box"

legislation limits employers from including questions about criminal convictions,

charges, and arrest on job applications (Rodriguez & Avery, 2016).

Work release programs

When ex-offenders are unable to earn a decent wage or have difficulty accessing services, such as housing or healthcare, it creates a vicious cycle where ex-offender rely on criminal activities to survive in society. Work release programs, vocational training, job placement services, and access to formal education allow former offenders to work in the community (Cerda et al., 2015). Several community-based prison reentry programs seek to foster employability among ex-offenders. The programs focus on cognitive and soft-skills training programs that address criminal thinking, conflict resolution, and decision-making strategies (Cerda et al. 2015).

Rukus, Eassey, and Baldwin (2015) conducted a research study utilizing a sample population in a jail-based work release program. The results of their study concluded that older Caucasian and employed individuals at the time of arrest were more likely to complete the application than African Americans and Latinos and those with mental health problems (Rukus et al., 2015). Most reentry researchers argue that the most significant problem ex-offenders face is finding employment that pays a living wage (Rukus et al., 2015).

When ex-offenders are unable to earn a decent salary or have difficulty accessing services, such as housing, or health care; it creates a vicious cycle where ex-offender rely on criminal activities to survive in society. It is well known that involvement in crime declines with age, which is described as the age-crime curve (Rukus et al., 2015). Most scholars identify employment as an essential component of social control.

Employment alters daily activities as well as reduces the need to engage in crime to obtain money (Rukus et al., 2015). Several studies have examined the relationship

between employment and criminal behavior. Additionally, jobs are a significant factor in the resistance to reentry programs, because it is malleable. Work is associated with the decrease in criminal behavior because of disrupting social networks (Rukus et al., 2015).

Researchers have examined the effectiveness of work release programs and note that they have produced mixed results (Rukus et al., 2015). Work release is a cheaper alternative to holding an individual in jail or prison. The value of a work release programs may not be in their original treatment (reduction in recidivism), but the completion of the program may be beneficial to the participants (Rukus et al., 2015). The successful conclusion of a work release program may serve as a credential or indicator to potential employers that a person is ready to reintegrate back into society (Rukus et al., 2015).

Lockwood, Nally, and Ho (2016) showed that African-American ex-offenders would have a higher recidivism rate because they are returning to impoverished neighborhoods. The results of the survey indicated that being employed was a definite factor in recidivism, and unemployment was a decisive factor in recurrence, regardless of race and education (Lockwood et al. 2016). African-American male ex-offenders lack the current job skills and knowledge to meet the job demands from the industrial sector (Lockwood et al. 2016). A consistent finding of researchers has been that residential segregation and economic inequality impacts racial disparities in recidivism among African-American male offenders (Lockwood et al. 2016).

The lack of job training coupled with the racial differences in education further exacerbates many of the social problems African-American men face (Nally, 2014). Research reveals that a lack of employment opportunities contributes to high crime rates

in urban neighborhoods where many of the offenders likely reside in (Nally, 2014). There is insufficient research that examines post-release employment and its impact on recidivism among African-American offenders released back into urban neighborhoods (Nally, 2014).

Housing

Housing has always presented a problem for ex-offenders returning to their communities (Thompson, 2013). Private property owners conduct background checks into potential tenant's background, and they tend to deny housing to anyone with a criminal record (Ballard, Wielding, & Solei, 2016). Thompson (2013) explored the problem that families who reside in public housing have in letting ex-offenders live with them once they are released from jail. Those who live in public housing must sign a rental agreement stipulating that ex-offenders will not live with them (Thompson, 2012).

The difficulty in finding housing also affects the ability of ex-offenders to secure employment (Ballard et al., 2016). Thompson (2013) argued that the relationship between seeking and maintaining a job and stable housing is interconnected. Ex-offenders applying for a job need to have an address and telephone number where potential employers can reach them. Homeless shelters are a common place where ex-offenders reside, but often these shelters lack privacy and tend to be unsafe. The housing is also seen as a temporary place, adding to the ex-offender's feelings of instability (Thompson, 2013).

Education

For many ex-offenders, getting a college education is an essential aspect of their reentry. There are misconception ex-offenders are not eligible for financial aid. In fact, many people with felony convictions can receive financial support but do not apply (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Ex-offenders miss their chance to go to college based on the incorrect or incomplete information. If a person is convicted of the sale of illegal drugs and the offense happened while they were enrolled in school and were receiving federal student aid, then their federal student aid is suspended for a period (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). They might still qualify for funding from other sources, such as scholarships, or funds from the school.

However, if a person is convicted before they enrolled in school and were not receiving federal financial aid at the time, they are not automatically ineligible to receive federal student aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Walters (2011) argued that interaction of motivational (high achievement motivation), structural (blocked economic opportunities), and social (peer reinforcement) factors may be responsible for AfricanAmerican and white differences in crime with significant implications for theory, research, and clinical practice (Walters, 2011). Nellis (2016) described how AfricanAmerican inmates hold more negative attitudes toward the criminal justice system than white prisoners and are more successful in adjusting to prison than white prisoners.

African-American respondents were more likely to attribute the high incarceration rate of young African-American men to structural barriers, and criminal justice inequities (Nellis, 2016). The possibility that African Americans view crime in a less negative light

than whites suggests that cognitive and motivational factors may be necessary for explaining African-American–White differences in crime (Sentencing Project, 2014).

The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) reported that the proportion of African Americans completing college between 1970 and 2011 increased from 4.4% to 22.5%, whereas the percentage of whites finishing college rose from 11.3% to 32.8% during the same period. More African Americans and whites are completing college, but the rate of increase among African Americans is substantially more than whites (Pew Research Center, 2016). McClough and Benedict (2017) explored the persistence of observed racial salary disparity despite substantial gains in educational attainment by African Americans. Building on the research findings of McClough and Benedict (2017), a person's occupation contributes to salary disparity. The study examined how completion of a college major affects the opportunity set of rules available to college graduates.

Although gender differentials are identified and discussed, the research focuses on racial disparities (McClough & Benedict, 2017). African-Americans, on average, enroll in lower-tier colleges and universities. The study found that the academic major and quality of institution contributed to racial earnings disparity. The study also found that the racial differential is due to a complex of issues related to earnings disparity (McClough & Benedict, 2017).

For example, those in the health field are much more likely to earn a higher wage than a K–12 teacher (McClough & Benedict, 2017). African-Americans are expected to be in most of the listed occupations, such as K–12 teacher, social service worker, lowlevel service worker, and manual laborer (McClough & Benedict, 2017). The

probability of being in manual labor is relatively high for African Americans compared with whites (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

McClough and Benedict's (2017) study found that controlling for region, demographics, human capital, and employer characteristics explain one-half of the salary discrepancy between college-educated African Americans and whites. The study also found that women and minorities are inclined to be in majors associated with lower paying jobs (McClough & Benedict, 2017). Dickson (2010) found that African-American females are less likely to choose, maintain, and graduate with majors in the natural or physical sciences (11.3% less likely), business (13.8% less likely), and engineering and computer science (14.4% less likely). Dickson's (2010) findings suggest that society fails to generate female and minority interest in those majors that correlate with higher salaries (McClough & Benedict, 2017).

Dickson (2010) further explained that African-American students are disproportionately abandoning more rigorous majors. In comparison with eight percent of white men, 54% of African-American men who express a preference for majors in economics, engineering, or science, switch to other social sciences or humanities majors (McClough & Benedict, 2017).

A smaller disparity is reported among women, with 33% of white women compared with 51% of African-American women switching from economics, engineering, and science to other social sciences and humanities majors (McClough & Benedict, 2017). The study examined the relationship between academic major and the racial salary disparity observed among a sample of college graduates (McClough &

Benedict, 2017). McClough and Benedict's (2017) findings are consistent with previous research revealing that the benefits of a college education are not distributed equally across society. The study found that African-American college graduates complete majors associated with lower-paying occupations (McClough & Benedict, 2017).

Voting

Several states disenfranchise former offenders from voting while other states allow some opportunities for restoration of rights only after the previous offender finishes probation or parole (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). The process of reregistering to vote is often complicated (Steed, 2015). It's hard to determine whose rights can be restored (Steed, 2015). The loss of voting power has ramifications not only for the ex-offender but also for the communities to which the ex-offender returns, leaving a significant number of residents without a political voice (Thompson, 2013).

A second barrier to the restoration of voting rights for ex-offenders is inconsistent communication among agencies (Steed, 2015). Communication between courts, department of corrections, and election officials is not reliable, timely, or consistent. The inconsistency can result in uneven application of the law, even when the rules are clear.

Another barrier is a lack of information; ex-offenders are sometimes not aware that they have the right to vote upon completion of their sentence (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). They may go through life believing that they cannot vote when, in fact, they can. The Connecticut Public Act No. 01-11 allows the restoration of voting rights for Connecticut residents who have been convicted of a felony and who are on probation (Connecticut 211, 2016). A person confined to a federal or state institution

can have his/her voting rights restored by submitting written proof to a city/town

Registrar of Voters of their discharge from prison (Connecticut 211, 2016).

History of the Criminal Justice System

Historically, Black codes were created to bar slaves from testifying in court

against whites; these codes later transitioned into state laws (Carlin, 2016). The reasoning

behind these statutes was that slaves were property, not people. The courts held that all

nonwhite people, including Chinese people, were barred from testifying against a white

person (Carlin, 2016). White testimony was not restricted from the courtroom, but

African Americans statement was considered inadmissible in any litigation involving

whites. Carlin (2016) noted that it was the courts that limited who could testify against

white defendants and that whites became the only credible witnesses. After slavery had

been abolished, states varied in their willingness to grant rights to African Americans.

There were numerous restrictions placed on African Americans; they could *not* be

taught to read or write, they could *not* enter into contracts, they could *not* own firearms,

and they could *not* own property. Most state constitutions continued to bar African

Americans from testifying in court against whites after slavery had ended; everyone who

was not white was considered African American and unreliable (Carlin, 2016).

Testimonial rights came with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which allowed

people of color into the courtroom (Carlin, 2016).

The tenets of CRT are needed to analyze the effect history has had on the

development of the courtroom as white space (Carlin, 2016). Carlin (2016) viewed the

tenets of CRT that engage in a socio-historical critique of the law based on the

understanding that the law has historically taken an active role in defining whiteness. From Reconstruction through the Civil Rights era, the courts have re-inscribed the values of whiteness to determine its exclusionary contours (Carlin, 2016).

Even before the Jury Service and Selection Act of 1968, many panels were compiled under the "key-man" system. The jury commissioners selected the board from a pool of white citizens in the community (Carlin, 2016). In 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court addressed the constitutionality of the key-man selection system in *Carter v. Jury Commission of Greene County*. The Court found that, while excluding African Americans from the jury constituted discrimination, the key-man system was constitutional (Carlin, 2016). In *Greene County*, the Court relied on its 1953 *Brown v. Allen* decision over a similar jury selection challenge. In the *Brown* case, the jury commissioner chose jury members from tax lists based on property ownership (Carlin, 2016).

In the *Greene County* case, the court replicated its reasoning in *Brown* to support the notion that the key-man system was race-neutral to uphold its constitutionality. Jury members were hand-selected by white jury commissioners based on social circles and property ownership (Carlin, 2016). By concluding that formally excluding people of color from the courtroom was a nonracial issue, the courtroom could continue to segregate the legal system through subtle, more embedded means (Carlin, 2016).

The historical rejection of African-American witnesses in the courtroom can factor into juror decision making, and influence jurors' implicit biases against AfricanAmerican credibility (Carlin, 2016). Several scholars have postulated as to how inherent biases in the courtroom would affect credibility determinations along racial lines. The researchers indicate how ethnic performance factors into credibility

determinations; individual behavioral styles have become associated with telling the truth in the courtroom (Carlin, 2016).

Richardson and Goff (2013) argued that racial cognitive processes depend on the associative and representative activation networks, whereby one commonly held idea activates many ideas subconsciously. Understanding the importance of ethnic cognitive processes in credibility determinations and how it plays into the decision-making and assessments of credibility in the courtroom is vital (Carlin, 2016). This process has played out in the various laws passed in recent years that have increased the number of African-American men being incarcerated and has attributed to the drug war legislation, which has disproportionately affected the African-American community (Boyd, 2001).

Researchers have sought to understand both the causes and effects of the nation's war on drugs and its implications for racial equality (Alexander, 2012; Drucker, 2013; Ghandoosh, 2015; Mauer, 2006; Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014).

Researchers have explored the racial bias in the criminal justice system, including police practices, arrest rates, convictions, and mandatory minimum sentences (Rosenberg, Groves, & Blankenship, 2017). Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated the likelihood of African-American involvement in the criminal justice system through policing practices for drug-related crimes *(*Rosenberg et al., 2017).

Many are advocating for the return of the rehabilitative role in judicial and correctional efforts as it relates to drug-related offenders (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014). The Comprehensive and Addiction Recovery Act of 2015 helps states address the dramatic increases in prescription opioid and heroin use in the United States through prevention and rehabilitation efforts. The response to the opioid epidemic, as a

public health crisis with a "white face," has been contrasted to the crack epidemic "blackface" that hit African-American communities hard in the 1980s and 1990s and was met with war tactics rather than compassion for offenders (Yankah, 2016).

Rosenberg et al. (2017), quoting Mauer (2006), note that having "contrasting policy responses have prompted some to raise the question of racially biased motivations and their implications" (p. 10). Rosenberg et al. (2017) sought to contribute to the dialogue on racial bias in the criminal justice system by comparing characteristics of African Americans and whites convicted of a non-violent drug offense in the North East of the United States.

They described racial differences in the characteristics of offenders, charge, drug of choice, the severity of drug problem, and re-entry opportunities that were mandated or referred by probation or parole and consider their implications for criminal justice reforms (Rosenberg et al., 2017).

The data for their analysis came from a more extensive study. The survey aimed to analyze whether movement between the criminal justice system and the community is associated with African-American/white disparities. Non-violent drug offenders ($N = 302$) in the Northeast United States, were eligible for the study if they were above 18 and released from prison or placed on probation within one year of screening (conducted from July 2010 through February 2011) for a non-violent drug-related charge (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Rosenberg et al. (2017) verified the charges with the Department of Corrections and with the Court Support Services Division (CSSD). Their sample consisted of 243 participants who self-identified as Black ($n = 146$, 60%) or white ($n = 97$, 40%).

Participants responded to questions about race, gender, sexual orientation, education, marital status, the number of children they had, current employment status, history of homelessness, and current income. The date of birth determined age is given at the time of screening (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Rosenberg et al. (2017) used chi-square and *t*-tests to describe the differences between African Americans and whites regarding demographics, drug use, and services accessed while involved in the criminal justice system. They also used a multinomial logistic regression technique to determine the association between drug-related charges and race.

Rosenberg et al. (2017) found significant differences between African Americans and whites for the following sociodemographic characteristics: gender, the number of children, education, and homelessness. African Americans had more children on average than whites. Whites were more likely to have at least their high school diploma or general education development (GED) equivalency but were also more likely to report being homeless. There were also substantial racial differences in criminal justice histories (Rosenberg et al., 2017). The researchers revealed that African Americans were convicted fewer times than whites (8.43 vs. 11.29 times) but had more sentences resulting in incarceration than whites (9.09 vs. 6.15) and longer sentences than whites (1.74 vs. .71 years).

African Americans were more frequently charged with drug sales or possession than whites (27% vs. 4%; 20% vs. 16%, respectively). Whites had more charges indirectly related to drugs, such as committing a crime to buy drugs or being high while determining a crime (Rosenberg et al., 2017). African Americans were 2.2 (1.07, 4.55)

times more likely than whites to have a possession charge as compared with an "other"

cost even after adjusting for other sociodemographic factors (Rosenberg et al., 2017).

Similarly, African Americans were eight times more likely than whites to have a

sales charge as compared with an "other" charge, after adjusting for other

sociodemographic factors (Rosenberg et al., 2017). African Americans were more likely

than whites to have been arrested most recently for drug sales. The study found no

statistical race difference in self-reports of ever having sold drugs (79% of African

Americans vs. 70% of whites).

Drugs vary widely in addictiveness and effect. Addressing substance abuse is a

fundamental component of rehabilitative initiatives for offenders; it is essential to

understand drug of choice among drug offenders (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Rosenberg et

al.'s (2017) findings point to differences between African Americans and whites in a

nonviolent drug offender population in the Northeast United States. These differences

have extensive programming and policy implications. Whites and African Americans in

their study were at an economic disadvantage, as demonstrated by their lower income and

education levels (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Consistent with these findings, in 2011,

African-American men were unemployed at a rate of 25% in the Northeast United States

compared with 12% for whites. It is essential to be cognizant of the economic reasons for

African Americans' involvement in the drug trade and address their financial needs

(Rosenberg et al., 2017).

Investment in quality education in the inner city, youth programming, and

efficient job training and placement should be an essential part of efforts to address crime

prevention and recidivism in the African-American community (Rosenberg et al., 2017).

Second, African Americans are more likely to be charged with possession and sales, while whites were more likely to be accused of illegal activity related to drug use, such as stealing to support their drug habit. It should be noted that whites and African Americans in Rosenberg et al.'s (2017) study both reported the same degree of drug sales. Research findings point to real differences in use and severity of the drug problem, and the real differences in the need for drug treatment (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Researchers suggest that the community supervision system is blind to drug type and severity when offering drug-treatment programs (Rosenberg et al., 2017). Both African Americans and whites reported that drug treatment was the service most accessed through parole and probation officers (Rosenberg et al., 2017).

Drug treatment is a necessary rehabilitation service, and it is vital for drug offenders to be able to access drug treatment services through the criminal justice system. However, treatment needs of African Americans and whites differ by drug type and severity of the problem. Race-sensitive, client perspective-centered research is needed on the types of treatment services offered to enhance systems of drug treatment accessed through the criminal justice system (Rosenberg et al., 2017). The Second Chance Society Bill, passed in Connecticut in 2015, is an example of an integrated approach that attempts to address the structural issues offenders face (State of Connecticut Department of Correction, 2015).

It incorporates criminal justice reform with education, employment, and housing opportunities for ex-offenders while working to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline through expansion of a school-based diversion program. The findings from this bill point to the different characteristics of African Americans and whites within the criminal

justice system and suggest a need to acknowledge these differences in the provision of services to both populations (Rosenberg et al., 2017).

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 implemented the "truth in sentencing laws" that would reduce prisoners' eligibility for parole and pay for new federal prisons if states agreed to force offenders to serve 85% of their sentence as opposed to allowing them early parole (Farley, 2016). The national "three strikes" rule mandated life in prison for people who had committed three violent felonies (Keneally, 2016).

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 also overturned the Higher Education Act of 1965, which had permitted prison inmates to receive a Pell Grant for postsecondary education while incarcerated (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Even though college education for prisoners is now seen as a useful tool against recidivism, this change left ex-offenders with fewer resources to build a productive and crime-free life upon reentry (Paulson, 2013).

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 bill has been criticized as a primary cause for increased incarceration rates, rates for minorities. The prison population had tripled in the two decades that preceded the Act (Lussenhop, 2016). Critics of this bill have argued that the bill decimated communities of color and accelerated mass incarceration. Conversely, proponents say it has contributed to the precipitous decline in violent crime in the United States that began in the mid-1990s (Lussenhop, 2016). Regardless, under the bill, millions of low-level offenders were

locked up, causing incarceration rates to balloon and a crisis in prison overcrowding

(American Psychological Association, 2014). Childress (2014) found that the 1994 crime

bill continued the path of criminalizing blackness and criminalizing drug addiction,

which has led to the disproportionate and mass incarceration of African-American and

Latino men (Childress, 2014).

Racial Profiling

Racial profiling is a longstanding problem despite the claims that the United

States has entered the "post-racial era" (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). Racial

profiling is illegal, violating the U.S. Constitution's promises of equal protection under

the law to all from unreasonable searches and seizures (ACLU.org, 2017). Racial

profiling occurs every day in this country when law enforcement targets African

Americans for humiliating, frightening detentions without evidence of criminal activity

(ACLU.org, 2017). Racial profiling is ineffective. It alienates communities from law

enforcement, it hinders community police efforts, and causes law enforcement to lose

credibility and trust among the people they are sworn to protect (ACLU, 2017).

Moreover, racial profiling begins with the police stopping African-American

males for being drug carriers, and criminals (National Institute of Justice, 2017). Creating

a profile about a particular group of people who commit certain types of crimes may lead

an officer to generalize about a group and act according to those generalizations rather

than to specific behaviors (National Institute of Justice, 2017). Several law enforcement

agencies have gone through civil rights litigation because of profiling practices (National

Institute of Justice, 2017).

Moreover, racial profiling begins with the police stopping African-American males for being drug carriers, and criminals (National Institute of Justice, 2017). Despite the training police officers receive, they still may rely on cultural stereotypes and act on their perception of a person's characteristics such as age, race or gender (National Institute of Justice, 2017). Documenting racial profiling in the police is difficult, because of the multitude of factors including high levels of crime in many African Americans neighborhoods (LaFraniere & Lehern, 2015).

But thousands of traffic stops and years of data for example, in the city of Greensboro, North Carolina show the vast racial difference in police conduct.

North Carolina's officers pulled over African-American drivers for a traffic violation at a rate far out of proportion to their share of the local driving population, and they used their discretion to search African-American drivers or their cars more than twice as often as white motorists (LaFraniere & Lehern, 2015). In Greensboro, police officials said that most of the racial disparities in their traffic enforcement stemmed from the fact that more African Americans live in high crime neighborhoods, where officials patrol drivers more aggressively (LaFraniere & Lehren, 2015).

In the seven states with the most comprehensive reporting of racial profiling; Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina and Rhode Island, the data showed that police officers are more likely to pull over African-American drivers than white ones. African Americans are more impoverished than whites; they may have more expired vehicle registration or other automotive lapses that attract officer's attention (LaFraniere & Lehern, 2015). In 2014, Connecticut measured every law enforcement agency against seven benchmarks, including whether the officers stopped African

Americans more during the day when a driver's race is more accessible to detect

(LaFraniere & Lehern, 2015). In three cities and two of 12 state police districts, state

officials said racial differences in treatment of motorists were unmistakable (LaFraniere

& Lehern, 2015). Racial profiling is a genuine phenomenon of harassment, and police

cannot demonstrate that it betters public safety (LaFraniere & Lehern, 2015).

Just the opposite, African-American are more likely to be shot and killed by police

during a routine traffic stop. A series of laboratory studies have shown that a person's

dark skin can trigger the perception of a threat. The deaths of several unarmed African

Americans shot by police during routine traffic stops had at least two variables; the race

of the victim, African-American and that of the officer, white (Dunn, 2016). The Fourth

and Fourteenth Amendment protections against "unreasonable search and seizure and

equal protection under the law," that exacerbates racial profiling (Friedman & Kerr,

2018).

A significant number of empirical studies of racial profiling have examined traffic

stop patterns within a given jurisdiction (Dunn, 2016). These studies use

sociodemographic data from official police records, such as traffic citations or citizen

contact forms, to compare by race or ethnicity with some measure of the respective

population eligible to be stopped or ticketed within the given jurisdiction (Dunn, 2016).

Such studies collected data information in place of traffic tickets and compared it

to the driving population to determine whether race or ethnicity with some measure of the

respective population eligible to be stopped or ticketed within the given jurisdiction

(Dunn, 2016). By recording information on all traffic stops, this method offers insight on

whether there are racial or ethnic or other sociodemographic differences in whom police

cite versus those who are diverted from the criminal justice system with receipt of only a warning (Dunn, 2016).

The major weakness of this method is the issue of subject reactivity or reliance on police officers to collect accurate statistics that indicate whether African Americans are disproportionately ticketed relative to whites within the same jurisdiction (Dunn, 2016). In general, the race of the motorist, the location, whether an arrest was made, and whether the vehicle was involved in an accident are variables on the traffic tickets that were used to analyze the traffic data from various jurisdiction (Dunn, 2016). The data was then analyzed by race and the type of charge for the cases from each jurisdiction in the study sample (Dunn, 2016).

The motorists observed in this study, particularly about driving constitutes a form of domestic surveillance by local government comparable to the Patriot Act, conducting investigations of target citizens without the knowledge (Dunn, 2016). The police, in their efforts to detect and apprehend criminals, operate under the stereotypical rationale of the disproportionate involvement in the crime of African Americans. This assumption and the actions based on it form statistical discrimination that has a disparate impact on African Americans compared to that found by the U.S. Department of Justice (Dunn, 2016). This practice can have profound, adverse social, economic, and legal consequences for African-American motorists. It can also have profound adverse social, economic, and legal implications for African-American drivers, which can lead to further contact with the police and perpetuate the potential for deeper involvement in the criminal justice system (Dunn, 2016).

Arrest/Conviction of African-American Men

The United States has an obligation under Article 2 and Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to ensure that all its citizens regardless of race are treated equally under the law (Sentencing Project, 2013). For African Americans, several contributing factors have led to the disparities in arrest rates; African Americans commit certain crimes at higher rates than other racial groups.

African Americans constitute a disproportionate number of those living in poverty, which is a socio-economic factor that contributes to the high crime rates (Sentencing Project, 2013). Researchers suggest that a significant portion of such disparities may be attributed to implicit racial bias; the unconscious association's humans make about ethnic groups. The Sentencing Project (2013) demonstrated how inherent biases are activated when individuals make impulsive decisions without having all the facts (Sentencing Project, 2013). Every day, police officers make quick judgments about the danger posed by suspects; unconscious racial associations may influence the way police officers perform their jobs (Knafo, 2013).

The effects of racial bias are well demonstrated in the areas of traffic stops. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that while white and African-American drivers were stopped at similar rates nationwide (Sentencing Project, 2013). African-American drivers were arrested at similar rates nationwide, and African-American drivers are more likely than whites to be searched during a traffic stop (Sentencing Project, 2013). Additionally, African-American drivers are twice as likely to experience the use of deadly force at the hands of police. Research has yet to be done on the extent to which implicit racial bias influences the indigent defense system in South Carolina (Sentencing Project, 2013). The

Sentencing Project (2013) found documentation on the impact of inherent racial bias in

the field of criminal justice. Several studies of prosecutorial decisions suggest that

inherent racial bias does, in fact, influence prosecutors' decision-making (Sentencing

Project, 2013).

A survey conducted after the Supreme Court reinstated the use of capital

punishment in 1976 found that the probability of an African-American defendant being

indicted for killing a white person was twice as high as that of a white defendant killing

an African American. Prosecutors are likely to upgrade the case to felony murder status

when the defendant is African American (Sentencing Project, 2013).

Numerous studies have shown that two racial variables affect capital punishment

sentencing: the race of the perpetrator and the race of the victim (Sentencing Project,

2013). Even as the effects of racial bias on every aspect of the criminal justice system

have been well documented and understood, opportunities for criminal justice reform

have been slow (Sentencing Project, 2013). The courts have allowed law enforcement

and prosecutors broad discretion in determining whom to stop, search, arrest, and charge,

thereby increasing the opportunity for racial bias to influence decision-making

(Sentencing Project, 2013).

Moreover, the Court has not challenged policies that are intentionally

discriminatory on the part of criminal justice personnel (Sentencing Project, 2013). In the

case of *Terry v. Ohio* in 1968, the Supreme Court held that a traffic stop did not require

law enforcement to meet the full probable cause standard of the Fourth Amendment.

Kutateladze and Lawson (2016) argued that the Fourth Amendment allowed police to

search a person if the police officer had reason to believe that a crime was afoot.

Arrest practices related to this loose interpretation of the Fourth Amendment, such as

stop-and-frisk, have been criticized for targeting African-American and Latinos

(Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016).

For example, a suspects' prior record is used by the police and the courts for

investigative purposes, and to set bail. Some researchers argue that the use of

nonconviction in a previous arrest in determining punishment is contrary to the principles

of the presumption of innocence (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016). Referring to both federal

and state cases, the Bureau of Justice Statistics puts the number of cases that are plea

bargained at 95% (Kutateladze, & Lawson, 2016). In 2012, a Vera Institute of Justice

study showed that despite prior arrest records being the essential aspect of plea

bargaining and the factors that contribute to plea bargaining, relatively little is known

about the relationship between previous arrest records and plea bargaining (Kutateladze,

& Lawson, 2016).

Factors, such as the defendant's age, gender, race, and ethnicity; the severity of

the charges and number of counts; and type of crime play a significant role in the plea

process (Kutateladze, & Lawson, 2016). Recently, researchers have argued that the use

of arrest records in criminal case processing should be minimized to save criminal justice

dollars and avoid unfair and costly treatment of all defendants, especially minorities who

are targeted by aggressive and inequitable arrest practices (Kutateladze, & Lawson,

2016). Defendants will often take a plea deal rather than take a chance and be convicted

at trial, even when the detainee is not condemned, he/she faces lengthy confinement times

due to case processing delays (Kutateladze, & Lawson, 2016). The lack of trust in the

police and difficulties finding employment make engaging in criminal activity upon release more likely.

Poor communities receive a high-police presence are less likely to report crime and less likely to cooperate with law enforcement (Kutateladze, & Lawson, 2016). Criminal justice policies have been described by some social scientists and legal scholars as contributing factors to individuals committing crimes (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016*).* Sentencing discretion has led to several initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s, and many state legislatures passed laws that imposed fixed sentences for drug offenses (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016). These initiatives have had the opposite effect; instead of ensuring fairness through regulating judicial discretion, these efforts gave prosecutors more significant leverage in the plea-bargaining process.

The criminal justice policies pose several challenges that are well documented from the research perspective. Because prosecutorial decisions' lack of transparency is apparent in the plea-bargaining process, it is difficult to determine what factors prosecutors consider when deciding what type of plea deal to offer the accused (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016). Research data shows that prior arrests record influence sentence provide more than previous prison sentences (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016). The use of the earlier record of case processing is insufficiently regulated by both statutory and case laws, which leaves the door wide open for a prosecutor's offices to choose which factors to consider during the plea negotiations (Kutateladze & Lawson, 2016). Flexion (2012) presented an interdisciplinary perspective on the problem of racial disparities in capital case outcomes.

Research from social and cognitive psychology concerning stereotypes and attitude influence is bridged with other empirical findings concerning racial disparities in capital sentencing (Flexion, 2012).

The psychology of stereotypes and attitudes are used to help explain how racial discrimination can operate undetected among death-qualified jurors while producing sentencing discrepancies (Flexion, 2012). The introduction of a potential source of biased information concerning criminal justice and race is offered. Results indicated that prejudicial ideas are likely operating to influence capital sentencing decisions (Flexion, 2012). In a similar view, Kramer (2012) exposed how the U.S. death penalty post-*Gregg v.* In a similar look, Kramer *Georgia* (428 U.S. 153) contains the evidence of the racial discrimination process. Kramer (2012) brings to the dialogue research from other disciplines psychology helps us understand how the psychological processes can produce discrimination and how capital jurors become open to the course of discriminating.

Flexion (2012) uses the case of *Furman v. Georgia* (408 U.S. 238) which defined jurors who are eligible to sit on death penalty cases. This example helps legal scholars understand how death-qualified jurors view justice and how such jurors will be proprosecution and racially biased (Flexion, 2012). Flexion (2012) developed a psychological theoretical framework that distinguishes between racial discrepancies and racial discrimination. Racial discrimination means accountable by illegitimate factors such as the race of the victim (Flexion, 2012). The data reflects the substantial disparities in the ethnic distribution of the death penalty with whites making up 44% of death row inmates and African Americans 41% (Flexion, 2012).

Flexion (2012) also uses the case of *McCleskey v. Kemp* (481 U.S. 279) to transition to the issue of who qualifies to serve as jurors in capital cases. Flexion (2012) draws three critical frames for analysis; first jurors in capital crimes have considerable discretion. Secondly, death-qualified jurors are more conviction-prone than nondeathqualified individuals. Third, at sentencing, the jurors are likely to be like-minded, where they can reinforce each other's pre-existing views about race and crime (Flexion, 2012). Flexion (2012) developed a theoretical framework based on the psychology literature regarding stereotypes and the connection between stereotypes, attitudes and decision making. Stereotypes and biases influence decision-making. Flexion (2012) showed how different demographic groups have different stereotypes and that race and gender serve as sources of group identification. To apply the theoretical framework, Flexion (2012) used the 1990 General Social Survey data that contained two fundamental research questions. (1) whether crime control beliefs are related to racially biased views; and (2) do the two belief systems predict support for capital punishment that is used as a proxy for death qualification (Flexion, 2012)?

The research was limited to the analyses of white respondents because the focus was on discrimination against African-American defendants (Flexion, 2012). The results showed that crime control, criminal justice beliefs, and racially biased beliefs are positively associated with white respondents. Whites' responses indicated that both crime control beliefs and racially biased beliefs are related to death qualification measured by their support for capital punishment (Flexion, 2012). The results also showed that many demographic factors and assumptions in crime control predicted racially biased views.

Flexion (2012) unveiled the psychological processes to help us understand how jurors make discriminatory decisions. Secondly, Flexion from the data analyzed the General Social Survey extended the knowledge of the links between death qualification, crime control, and racially biased beliefs. The data had some limitations and applied to actual jury decision making, it corroborates the theoretical foundation and sets the stage for more research in the future for anyone wanting a better understanding of the implications of our capital punishment system (Flexion, 2012).

Research has demonstrated that race and ethnicity are associated with harsher punishment outcomes among African-American and Latino defendants in the criminal court (Lehmann, Chirico, & Bales, 2016). Few studies have explored these disparities in the sentencing of juvenile offenders who have been transferred to the adult court. For example, an analysis of defendants sentenced in Florida (N =30,913) revealed that African-American youths are more likely to be sentenced to jail or prison and are given longer prison sentences than whites, but Hispanic youth are only penalized and then judge to jail (Lehmann et al., 2016). Researchers suggest that African-American males are sentenced to harsher sentences regardless of their age (Lehmann et al., 2016).

Over the past 30 years, transfer to adult court has become a standard feature of juvenile justice practice, and all 50 states have either implemented or revised transfer legislation (Griffin, Addie, Adams, & Firestine, 2011; Puzzanchera & Addie, 2014). Considering the punitive changes in criminal justice policy (Garland, 2001; Pratt, 1998; Tory, 1995), an abundance of recent research has found evidence of unwarranted racial and ethnic disparities in adult court sentencing.

Legal scholars have documented that African-American and Hispanic defendants are treated more harshly than whites across sentencing outcomes, including decisions to incarcerate (Bales & Piquero, 2012; Doerner & Demuth, 2010). These findings have been theorized to explain that judges rely on attributional stereotypes in the process of sentencing (Albonetti, 1999; Bridges & Steen, 1998). There's specific offender characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, may indicate that a defendant is more blameworthy or poses a risk to public safety (Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998).

The role of race and ethnicity in sentencing among juvenile offenders who have been transferred to the adult court has received little research attention, and the few studies have reported contradictory findings (Jordan & Freiburger, 2010; Kupchik, 2006; Kurlychek & Johnson, 2004). The lack of research attention to the interactive effects of race and ethnicity in the punishment of transfers is notable. Considering the compelling arguments made by many scholars regarding the importance of examining race and ethnicity about other legal and extralegal factors (Doerner & Demuth, 2010; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2001; Steffensmeier et al., 1998; Warren, Chirico, & Bales, 2012).

Many studies have examined unwarranted disparities between racial groups in criminal court sentencing. The current research makes use of data from Florida involving 30,913 transferred juveniles who were sentenced in adult criminal court for felony crimes. Stolzenberg, D'Alesso and Eitle (2013) analyses of these defendants, investigates whether African-American and Hispanic transferred youth are more likely than White transfers to be sentenced to prison or jail rather than community supervision (Lehmann et al., 2016). Second, among those sentenced to jail, researchers examined whether

AfricanAmerican and Hispanic transfers receive longer prison sentences than whites (Lehmann et al., 2016). Lehmann et al. (2016) tested whether the combined effects of age, sex, and race/ ethnicity have distinctive consequences for sentence type and term of imprisonment length. They also showed whether the impact of race and ethnicity on sentence severity are conditional upon offense type (Lehmann et al., 2016).

According to Baumer (2013), the first conclusion to be drawn from this literature is that "there are substantial racial disparities in the application of the law in the USA" (p. 235). Some studies have reported that Hispanic adult offenders are punished more harshly than both African Americans and whites (Johnson, 2003; Kramer & Ulmer, 2002; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006). Being African-American or Hispanic and from the Northeast reduced the chances of that outcome.

Howell and Hutto (2012) reported that African-American defendants were less likely than whites to receive probation and more liable to be sentenced to jail time offense (Lehmann et al., 2016). The race was irrelevant about restitution as an outcome. Hispanic ethnicity increased the prospects of a jail sentence but had no statistical relevance for convictions to probation or restitution offense (Lehmann et al., 2016).

 Several studies have included race and ethnicity as covariates in sentencing research that included juvenile transfers, but these findings have been contradictory. Convicted African-American and Hispanic defendants were significantly more likely to receive an incarceration sentence (prison or jail) and less likely to be convicted of probation (Lehmann et al., 2016).

Scholars have hypothesized about the relationship between race/ ethnicity and criminal court sentencing outcomes (Lehmann et al., 2016). Building on Alberti's (1991)

theory, the focal concerns perspective, scholars hypothesize a link between race/ethnicity and judicial outcomes. This approach posits that there are three specific considerations which influence the decision-making processes of court actors, the blameworthiness of the offender, protection of the community, and practical constraints and consequences (Lehmann et al., 2016).

Because the information accessible to judges about offenders is limited, judges may employ attributional stereotypes or cognitive heuristics, including those involving race and ethnicity, when engaging the focal concerns (Lehmann et al., 2016). Defendants whom judges identify as more blameworthy or culpable may be viewed as exemplary retributive punishments and these judgments which can be informed by attributions related to respondent's race and ethnicity (Goerner & Demuth, 2010; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006).

The goal to protect the community primarily emphasizes evaluations of offenders' future criminality and their potential danger to the society upon release, which can likewise be conflated with race, ethnicity, and other factors (Steen, Engen, & Gainey, 2005; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006). Judges are concerned with the practical constraints and consequences of sentencing decisions, and their assessments of defendants' risk of reoffending, which can be influenced by stereotyped attributions regarding race and ethnicity are often implicitly tied to the standing of the court in the community (Johnson, 2003).

Judges rely on "perceptual shorthand" to evaluate the blameworthiness and dangerousness of defendants, and this shorthand can be linked to defendants' extralegal characteristics, especially race and ethnicity (Bridges & Steen, 1998). Because the

offender's recidivism can affect the court's community standing, attributions connecting race/ethnicity and reoffending may indirectly inform judges' assessments of practical concerns and constraints (Lehmann et al., 2016).

The connection between race/ethnicity and punishment severity may be relevant for the population of youth who have been transferred to the adult court (Lehmann et al., 2016). Some researchers have argued that recent changes to the landscape of juvenile and criminal justice policy, including the proliferation of the practice of transfer, have been driven, in part, by racialized perceptions of juvenile delinquency (Bortner, Zatz, Hawkins, 2000; Feld, 1999; Jackson & Paton, 2000).

In addition to exerting direct effects on sentence severity, it is expected that race and ethnicity may interact with offenders' sex and age. The focal concerns perspective suggests that male defendants, may be perceived among criminal court actors as more blameworthy and dangerous than females and that the aggravating effects of being male in sentencing will potentially condition those of race and ethnicity (Steffensmeier et al., 1998; Warren et al., 2012). For example, the "crack epidemic" of the 1980s and its lasting association with "disadvantaged minority residents of the inner cities" (Tory, 1995, p. 94), drug crimes are salient for minority youth. The use of data from the population of transferred youth who were sentenced for felony offenses in Florida between 1995 and 2006 (Lehmann et al., 2016).

The age of juvenile justice exclusion in Florida is 18 years old, so their population of transferred juveniles is defined as all offenders who were age 17 or younger at the time of the offense (Lehmann et al. 2016). The data for the study originated from the Florida

Sentencing Guidelines database, which is maintained by the Florida Department of

Corrections. The results of the jail versus supervision comparison indicate that

independent of the other legal and extralegal factors included in the model, African

American and Hispanic are more likely than whites to receive a sentence to jail in adult

court (Lehmann et al., 2016).

The study concludes by stating that the odds of winning a jail sentence versus a

supervision sentence are 2.3 times higher for African-Americans than for Whites and for

Hispanics, the odds are 1.384 more significant than for Whites offense (Lehmann, et, al.

2016). The study concludes by stating that the odds of winning a jail sentence versus a

supervision sentence are 2.3 times higher for African Americans than for whites, and, for

Hispanics, the odds are 1.384 more significant than for whites' offense (Lehmann et al.,

2016).

The Connecticut Judiciary Committee is in the process of passing the Second

Chance 2.0 Bill. Only Connecticut and Illinois are working on raising the age to 21. In

Illinois, Representative Fine is sponsoring a bill (HB6308) that would raise the age of

juvenile court in Illinois to 21 for people charged with misdemeanors (Connecticut

General Assembly Judiciary Committee, 2017).

Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration contributed to another form of exclusion from federally

sponsored surveys of the American population that affect the statistical portraits of

inequality (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). Our understanding of the impact of the civil rights

legislation is key to reentry of ex-offenders (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). Inmates and former

prisoners are categorically and systematically excluded from surveys that gather data

used to guide federal appropriation to states and localities and are used by scholars,

policymakers, and the public (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). Moreover, former inmates often

have tangential connections to households that make it difficult to locate or survey them

(Pettit & Sykes, 2015). A disproportionate number of former inmates are systematically

excluded from the study that draws samples from households (Pettit & Sykes, 2015).

Mass incarceration has influenced the representativeness of most of the

nationality sponsored sample surveys. African-American men represent a small fraction

of the population, but they are excluded in federal studies along with the active military,

and other people with tangential connections to families (Pettit & Sykes, 2015).

Gottschalk (2011) discussed mass incarceration as a process that is explored from the

"ground up," rather than as a "top-down" process (Gottschalk, 2011). It is pressing to

assess mass imprisonment by looking at the political dynamics that are behind mass

incarceration. The "top-down" political mechanism creates an environment structure of

mass incarceration (Gottschalk, 2011) by examining the policies and practices that states

have in common. Every state has expanded its drug offender population in prison, and all

have adopted some form of mandatory sentencing (Gottschalk, 2011).

Pettit and Sykes (2015) posited that the Bureau of Justice Statistics predicts that

"the incarceration rates for African-American men will continue and that one in three

African-American males could spend at least a year in state or federal prison" (p.1). The

incarceration rate for African-American men was 10.1%, compared to 1.6% for white

men (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). There is growing contention that the criminal justice system

itself maintains racial inequality in the United States (Pettit & Sykes, 2015).

Incarceration, low-levels of education, poverty, and a criminal record hinder social facts,

conceals inequality, and undermines the usefulness of extraordinary measures that are used in the design and evaluation of criminal justice policies (Pettit & Sykes, 2015).

Mass incarceration reduces the labor force participation among African-American men, and African-American men who drop out of high school are more likely to be incarcerated than be in the workforce (Petti & Sykes, 2015). The criminal justice system "creates a form of social exclusion that is rooted in racism and the notion of the invisible African-American male" (Lebron, 2015, p.17).

Mass incarceration of African-American men as inmates is underrepresented in surveys and these men are disenfranchised due to voting restrictions placed on felons in 48 states (Lee & Comfort, 2014). This systematic disenfranchisement undermines the legitimacy of civil rights legislation was meant to foster opportunity and equality for the lowest members of our society (Salvatore, 2009). Racial discrimination, segregation, and exclusion contribute to a system of institutions, laws, and customs that maintain racial inequality and is the premised on the subjugation and invisibility of African-American men (Pettit, 2012).

Evidence shows that African-American men are disproportionately targeted for criminal justice surveillance and have been affected by sentencing policies that mandate jail or prison time even for non-violent offenses such as drugs or property crimes (ACLU, 2014). Race matters at all phases and aspects of the criminal process, including the quality of representation, the charging stage, and the availability of plea agreements, each of which impact whether a defendant faces a life sentence. Racial disparities in sentencing can result from theoretically "race-neutral" sentencing policies that have

significant disparate racial effects, including mandatory minimums, school zone drug enhancements, and federal policies adopted by Congress in 1986 and 1996.

Correctional education can play a crucial role to improve the ex-offender's training before they are released from prison. It may increase the ex-offender's opportunities for post-release employment and decrease the recidivism rate among exoffenders (Nally, 2014). Ex-offenders could be assigned to community-based caseworkers to work with them to provide educational and job training (Western, 2003). Some policymakers have begun to consider redirecting expenditures on correction to reduce state spending. Some states have already undertaken the effort to minimize correctional spending (Western, 2003). By incorporating evidence-based alternatives as a solution to reduce the prison population while increasing public safety (Orrick & Veracities, 2014). For example, the Texas legislation reinvested their savings into strategies to reduce recidivism among parole and probation departments by providing funding for reducing caseloads.

Implementing graduated sanctions and expanding specific high-risk subgroups such as the mentally ill has resulted in a decline in prison admission (Orrick & Veracities, 2014). Orrick and Veracities (2014) provide narratives regarding the incarceration of millions of people as a crime control mechanism that has led to a financial drain on federal, state and local governments. Funding based on data provided to the ACLU by the U.S. Sentencing Commission and state Departments of Corrections, the ACLU estimates that nationwide, 65 percent of prisoners serving life without parole for nonviolent offenses are African-American, 17 percent are white, and 15 percent are Latino. Monies that would be used for education, public health, welfare, parks, and recreation are being

diverted to building and expanding prisons (Orrick & Veracities, 2014). Reducing sentences, eliminating prison terms for parole or probation technical violations, and decriminalizing victimless crimes would reduce the prison population (Orrick & Veracities, 2014).

When combined, state and local spending on everything from drug-related arrest to imprisonment of millions of African Americans costs totals $51 billion a year. Alternatives to incarceration such as restorative justice theories are needed to combat this problem (Sledge, 2013). Dismantling the present criminal justice system of punishment would force policymakers, and Congress to confront the failed laws currently operating in this country (Drug Policy Alliance, 2013).). If ex-offenders could communicate their experiences of exclusion and abuse to policymakers, judges, prosecutors and the public, then there is the possibility that the injustice taking place could encounter a sustained resistance.

There is growing argument for the legalization of certain drugs like marijuana and the decriminalization of victimless offenses such as prostitution and homelessness (Fieser, 2014). The resources that are used by police and incarcerate drug offenders could be used to provide services for those addicted to drugs as an alternative to prison (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014). Providing housing, employment, healthcare, and education would eradicate the oppressive conditions that many ex-offenders face (Laird, 2013).

The criminal justice system only serves to preserve white supremacy and class inequality; these tools are used to divide further and depoliticize the poor and people of color (Benson, 2014). The growth of mass imprisonment, combined with institutionalized

racism should serve as a wake-up call to politicians, judges, and those seeking a society of inclusion and full structural equality (Dawson & Francis, 2013). The struggle against mass incarceration is critical. Congress passed laws that were based on fear, and these laws haven't changed since 1982 (Federal for American Immigration Reform, 2014).

Recidivism

Approximately 650,000 prisoners are released yearly from state and federal prisons in a randomized controlled trial of a reentry program for violent criminals implemented by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. The research studies showed about two-thirds are re-arrested and over half re-incarcerated within three years (Cook et al., 2014). The correctional system would appear to do little to correct or prepare inmates for life after release. Understanding the causes of crime, how to reduce recidivism of offenders, and improve research techniques would enable society to identify effective programs and policies successfully (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015). Mackenzie and Farrington (2015) argued that an examination of the Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks (1975) report showed the way to address the problem of finding programs that were effective in preventing or reducing the criminal behavior of delinquents and offenders required more research and better-implemented programs (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015).

While there are many outcomes of correctional interventions, reducing recidivism is one impact referred to by the evidence-based corrections, and this is the reason why many studies focus on this outcome (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015). Factual corrections promote the idea that correctional interventions should be those shown in scientific studies to have the desired impact (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015).

Proponents of evidence-based factual corrections make the following assertions: some correctional programs are effective in changing offenders, and evidence-based programs should be the primary interventions that are developed and operated by correctional systems (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015). It is assumed that science should be used to inform public policy decisions about which programs or interventions are effective (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015). The main result of Mackenzie and Farrington's (2015) article was to reveal knowledge about what works in preventing future offending by delinquents and offenders (Mackenzie & Farrington, 2015).

Perception of Safety

Another possible barrier for ex-offenders is the perception of safety. Because of the violence, many ex-offenders encounter while incarcerated; many ex-offenders feel unsafe post-release (Morenoff, 2014). Many ex-offenders suffer from depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). Ex-offenders who perceive that their surroundings as a threat are likely to re-offend after release from prison (Morenoff, 2014).

Researchers have found that victimization during incarceration was associated with antisocial behavior, emotional distress, and PTSD (Morenoff, 2014). Researchers suggest that importation and deprivation contribute to psychosocial problems post-release and that these difficulties are exported out of the incarceration environment, thereby providing to the success or failure of the ex-offender (Antwi, 2015). Many ex-offenders are released into high crime urban areas without any treatment for their underlying issues, and researchers found that pre-prison trauma is directly related to symptoms of PTSD and

depression via victimization in prison (Antwi, 2015). The researchers suggested

postincarceration treatment to reduce mental health symptoms imported into the

incarceration environment and therapy designed to reduce the damaging experience of

victimization during incarceration (Epperson, Wolff, Morgan, Fischer, Freeh, Hueing,

2014).

Offenders may enter prison or jail with community violence exposure but being a

victim of violence during incarceration is unlike experiences with violence outside of

prison or jail walls (Miller, 2014). The ascendance of prisoner reentry should be a

national policy priority and the rise of reentry programming as the rehabilitative strategy

of choice (Miller 2014; Western 2008). Miller (2014) explained the significance of

relying on the state community-based actors to rehabilitate former prisoners is

emblematic of a more extensive process of devolution (Miller, 2014).

However, in the current system, the responsibility and authority to integrate the

formerly incarcerated into civil society have been off-loaded onto those least able to

accommodate the burden, the family of former prisoners and former prisoners themselves

(Miller, 2014). Reentry policies and practices reveal how the African-American poor

learn to deal with the social conditions of the criminalization of poverty and the formal

and informal mechanisms used to operate them work in similar ways, resulting in similar

social outcomes (Miller 2014; Western 2008).

Mass imprisonment exacerbates social inequalities and has had especially

deleterious consequences for the African-American poor. Prison is a normative trajectory

for a more significant segment of the African-American urban poor (Miller, Miller,

Doric, & Patton, 2015). Incarceration and reentry for the ex-offender revealed that many

prisoners are rearrested within the first three years after release from prison (Carlin, 2016). Many ex-offenders come from low-income areas that have the highest poverty, crime, and unemployment rates. Policies and practices that target these ex-offenders impede their mobility, constrain their participation in social, civil, and economic life (Carlin, 2016). Hostilities toward ex-offenders are justified by discriminatory laws, and the absence of political, legal, and social protection (Carlin, 2016).

Reentry

Watson (2014a), incorporated an Afrocentric comprehensive service approach that focused on powerful tools such as education, housing, and other services that could be used for successful reentry (Watson &Watson, 2014a). Reentry services can offer returning offenders the opportunities to overcome various barriers. The collaboration between criminal justice agencies and social service organizations can mean the difference between defeating past difficulties and becoming a contributing member of society or returning to prison (Morenoff, 2014).

Training is needed for a successful come back to the community, but barriers still exist which can have a detrimental impact on reentry (Gunnison & Helot, 2010; Wyckoff, Lindhorst, & Morane, 2012).

Barriers include such issues as inadequate economic instability, housing insecurity, and untreated substance abuse (Watson & Watson, 2014). Failure to reduce these obstacles can contribute to a return to behaviors and attitudes that influenced incarceration. Untreated substance disorders and lack of access to treatment also complicate reentry. Substance abuse may have gone untreated or received minimal

attention during imprisonment (Substance Abuse Mental Health Service of Adults, 2017).

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incarceration, (Substance Abuse Mental Health Service of Adults, 2017).

Reentry services need to include assessment and treatment. Treatment for

substance abuse issues is a primary reentry concern. Per the Bureau of Justice Statistics

(2012), 16% of persons held in jails or prisons report a history of mental health or

substance abuse treatment. Watson & Watson (2014a) investigated services that focus on

substance abuse treatment can serve to facilitate successful reentry (Watson & Watson,

2014a). Without such services, the risk of recidivism is greater which then places the

community safety at risk.

Providing efficient reentry services has significant implications on a micro-level,

but there are also critical macro-level implications as well (Watson & Watson, 2014a).

An Evaluability Assessment Team conducted a visit to Connecticut Department of

Correction's (CT DOC) New Haven Reentry Initiative (NHRI) project in February of

2013. The team met with department leaders, community-based programmers, and

criminal justice partners to better understand NHRI project services (Willison, Walsh, &

Mikovits, 2013). The NHRI program targets male and female offenders that are housed in

four of the Connecticut Department of Correction facilities; York, Robinson, Osborn, and

Willard-Cybulski (Willison et al., 2013).

These men and women were assessed by the CT DOC's Treatment, and Programs

Assessment Instrument as moderate to high risk of reoffending (Willison et al., 2013).

Funding was provided by a grant from the CT DOC and the CT DOC's Division of

Parole and Community Services and the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division of Probation (Willison et al., 2013). The project targeted adult offenders under state or local custody for general reentry programming and services designed to promote successful reintegration and to reduce recidivism (Willison et al., 2013). Grants were used to provide an array of pre-and-post release services, including education and literacy programs, job placement, housing, and mental health and substance abuse treatment (Willison et al., 2013). The post-release services were organized through the Easter Seals Goodwill Industry (ESGI) (Willison et al., 2013). The Evaluation Assessment study was designed to determine what level of future activity evaluation was most appropriate for each of the four Second Chance sites and to identify the research design and method for each section (Willison et al., 2013). The NHRI program focused on employment and core pre-release elements that boost program sessions that reinforce cognitive-behavioral and job readiness classes (Willison et al., 2013).

Participants of the program meet with ESGI community coordinators and case managers to engage in reentry planning, typically two-and-a-half to three months before their release from prison (Willison et al., 2013).

Under the furlough program, qualified males from the NHRI program may be transferred to local correctional facilities in the Northeast United States. During this period, participants may attend community programs and have access to various community services. This component was designed to connect participants to service providers before they are released (Willison et al., 2013). Participants may be released on parole, probation supervision, or with no control. A total of 214 offenders were served by the NHRI program since the program started in the fall of 2010 (Willison et al., 2013).

The CT DOC chose to focus on individuals returning to the Northeast United States for several reasons. (a) 50% of those released are under 35 years of age; (b) the majority do not have a high school diploma; and (c) offenders have a higher recidivism rate (Willison et al., 2013). Offenders who participate in the NHRI program must complete the reentry workbook program and the job center training program (Willison et al., 2013). Participants are given $2,000 for basic needs, such as food, transportation, and clothing (Willison et al., 2013). The data systems that were used to evaluate the NHRI program come from the CT DOC database and the Department of Probation and Parole Case Notes system, and the ESGI's Efforts to Outcomes database (Willison et al., 2013).

These systems track offenders with the CT DOC identifier. The CT DOC database is an extensive system used by all CT DOC facilities. It includes inmate demographics data, education level information, sentences, offenses, facility transfers, assessment scores, and other relevant information regarding all inmates (Willison et al., 2013). The CT DOC's Offender Management System captures pre-release data on compliance and service provision that can determine both treatment and comparison group cases, which allows researchers to examine criminal justice outcomes beyond recidivism rates (Willison et al., 2013).

Willison et al. (2013) posit that several of the program's core components merit further study, specifically the prerelease furlough component and the probation/parole case manager pairing. The (2013), posit that several of the program's core components merit further study, specifically the prerelease furlough component, probation/parole case manager pairing and role of the CRAs in evaluating the outcomes associated with the furlough component and the case manager dual reporting system that impacts the

furlough component. Willison et al. (2013) argued that the information contained in the study would be beneficial to practitioners, program developers, and policymakers (Willison et al., 2013). The NHRI program represents an innovative, evidence-based approach to reentry (Willison et al., 2013).

The Second Chance Act

The Second Chance Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on April 9, 2008. The Second Chance Act awards federal grants to agencies that provide substance abuse treatment, housing, and other services to ex-offenders (National Institute of Justice, 2016). Criminal justice policies have had real consequences in the form of laws.

The Second Chance Act (SCA) supports state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations in their work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from state and federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile facilities. Incarceration creates barriers to family unification, employment, education, and civic participation, making it difficult for people to reintegrate into their communities, to remain crime-free, and to become contributing members of society (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Reforming the criminal justice system and decreasing the prison populations, but also providing services to formerly incarcerated people to prevent the cycle of incarceration (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013).

The Obama administration made considerable strides in decreasing federal barriers to successful reintegration. The Leadership Conference Educational Fund (2013)

report examined the consequences of these practices and made policy recommendations regarding their reform. The report also discussed policy solutions that address racial disparities and the disparate impact on low-income individuals entering the criminal justice system. It explored some of the many challenges faced by individuals reintegrating into society and offers policy suggestions (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Per the Sentencing Project (2011), 10% of the country's 18–24year-olds are African-American men living behind bars (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013).

African-American families are nine times more likely than white families to have children with at least one parent incarcerated (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). These African-American children were more likely to live in poverty, enter the foster care system, and end up in prison themselves (Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013). Every year, approximately 650,000 people are released from jail, about two thirds of these people are either African-American or Latino.

The educational level of those published is 11th grade, one in six will have a severe mental illness, and 55% have young children (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). The Department of Labor does not track the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated people. But various studies have found that the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated African-American men to be 50% higher nine months or a year after release (lower than White men coming out of prison (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013).

The Leadership Educational Conference Fund's (2013) ethnographic study focused on barriers such as not being able to vote, or not having access to postsecondary

education, or being ineligible for public housing, benefits, and student loans. Hurt

exoffenders and their families (Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013). Over 40%

of incarcerated people over the age of 18 have not graduated from high school, and nearly

20% have a GED (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Historically, African

Americans make up a disproportionate percentage of incarcerated individuals without a

high school diploma, and many of them are illiterate. The more education a detained

person receives, the less likely he/she is going to return to prison and the more likely to

earn a living wage upon release (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013).

The Leadership Conference Fund (2013) studies support the conclusion that

correctional education reduces recidivism. Access to education inside and outside the

prison walls is key to a successful reentry (Leadership Educational Conference Fund,

2013). Individuals who are being released should get access to education and job training

before their release (Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013). The study makes the

following recommendations; improve educational opportunities to provide quality

opportunities and outcomes for incarcerated youth and adults; funding more pilot

programs; and creating both high school and tertiary education easier while in prison

(Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013).

Formerly incarcerated people face a host of state and federal restrictions which

limit their eligibility to access public housing, employment, and a host of other services

(Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Studies have shown that providing

individuals who have once incarcerated the opportunity for stable employment lower

recidivism rates and thus increases public safety (Leadership Education Conference Fund,

2013). Restrictions on the types of jobs that people with criminal records can hold have

accelerated in recent years (Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013). More than 90

% of companies reported using criminal background checks for their hiring decisions

(Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013). These background checks are used for a

broad range of jobs, from warehouse workers and delivery drivers to sales clerks

(Leadership Education Conference Fund, 2013).

Criminal background checks carried out by employers result in individuals with

criminal records not being hired or being fired for having not mentioned their criminal

past in their job interview (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). Because

African Americans are arrested and convicted at higher rates than any other race, having

a criminal record can be a proxy for discrimination based on race (Leadership

Educational Conference Fund, 2013). The Leadership Education Conference Fund (2013)

believes that, as a society, we must balance security and safety with the economic needs

of people reentering society (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013). The report

focused on the formerly incarcerated person who maintained strong family ties compared

to an uneducated former detained individual who is likely to spend the rest of his life

struggling to make ends meet (Leadership Educational Conference Fund, 2013).

Alternatives to Incarceration

Individual liberty is one of the most fundamental of human rights, recognized in

our nation's constitution (Smit, 2007). Governments must justify the use of imprisonment

as necessary to achieve an essential societal objective for which there are no less

restrictive means with which the object can be obtained (Union National Office on Drugs

and Crime, 2006). Prisoners are deprived of essential amenities of life (Union National

Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006). They are often held in overcrowded conditions,

poorly clothed and underfed. They are particularly vulnerable to disease and are likely to

be given inadequate medical treatment. They find it difficult to keep in contact with their

children and other family members (Union National Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006).

Most of the prisoners may be low-level offenders, many of whom are awaiting

trial, who could be dealt with using suitable alternatives instead of being imprisoned.

Implementing effective alternatives to imprisonment will reduce overcrowding and make

it easier to manage prisons in a way that will allow states to meet their basic obligations

to the prisoners in their care (Smit, 2007). Prisoners are disproportionately drawn from

the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the community (Union National Office on

Drugs and Crime, 2006). It is essential that policymakers and other stakeholders in the

criminal justice system look at who is being held in prison, why they are there, and for

how long they are being detained. Such prisoners may be serving sentences for petty or

nonviolent offenses or may be awaiting trial for long periods of time (Smit, 2007). Even

imprisonment of persons pending trial brings disadvantages both to the individual and the

criminal justice system (Union National Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006).

Preparation of defense becomes more difficult when the accused is detained

awaiting trial. Difficulty in gaining access to defense counsel and other resources to

prepare for the test may cause delays and undermine the efficiency of the administration

of justice (Smit, 2007). The criminal justice system should resort to pretrial detention

only when alternative measures are unable to address the concerns that justify the use of

such confinement (Smit, 2007). The longer the suspect is detained, the higher the

sacrifice of that person's fundamental rights. Law enforcement officials have the first

contact with the suspects (Smit, 2007). They must keep any detention as short as possible.

By conducting investigations speedily, they can ensure that the time for which suspects and persons awaiting trial are incarcerated in kept to a minimum (Smit, 2007).

Finally, administrative control of the criminal justice process allows the judiciary to ensure the right to a speedy trial by applying procedural rules strictly (Smit, 2007). As a society, we need to find alternatives to incarceration which can repair the harms suffered by victims, provide benefits to the community such as treatment for drug addiction or mental illness, and rehabilitate offenders (Families Against Mandatory Minimums, 2013). Alternatives can reduce prison costs and prevent additional crimes in the future (FAMM, 2013).

If the courts had more options other than incarceration, then they could do a better job at cost-effective sentences that fit the crime, protect the public, and provide rehabilitation (FAMM, 2013). Alternatives to incarceration help prevent prison/jail overcrowding and save taxpayers millions of dollars (FAMM, 2013). Alternatives to incarceration keep individuals with their families, in their neighborhoods and jobs, allows them to earn money, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities (FAMM, 2013). Alternatives to prison such as drug and mental health courts are proven to confront the underlying causes of crime without subjecting accused to the deprivations of imprisonment and the bleak prospects of post-incarceration (FAMM, 2013). Eight of 10 people believe alternatives to incarceration are the most efficient way to handle these problems. For example, drug-courts provide court-supervised drug treatment and community supervision to offenders with substance abuse problems. All 50 states have drug court programs (FAMM, 2013). However, there are no drug courts in the federal system.

Alternatives are an essential part of all levels and stages of the criminal justice system (Smit, 2007). Legislators, judicial officers, lawyers, and administrators they all must work together (Smit, 2007). There is no point in pressing courts, to use alternatives to prison sentences if there is no law allowing such options to be imposed and no administrative structure to implement them (Smit, 2007). Alternatives may infringe less on the human rights of persons who would otherwise be detained and may be less expensive (Smit, 2007).

If the primary objective is to attempt to ensure that offenders desist from future crime, there is no evidence that imprisonment does that more effectively than community-based alternative punishments (Smit, 2007). Studies on the different forms of punishment and recidivism suggest that incarceration makes it hard for offenders to adjust to life on the outside after release and may contribute to their reoffending (Smit, 2007). Most prisoners will return to their community without the skills to reintegrate into society in a law-abiding manner and are more likely to commit a further crime (Smit, 2007). One of the challenges facing authorities are seeking to develop the use of alternatives to imprisonment as a way of reducing the prison population is ensuring that, conceptually, choices should not be drawn too narrowly (Smit, 2007). Alternatives to prison, though comparatively inexpensive and efficient, may themselves treat offenders in inhuman and degrading ways (Smit, 2007). Authorities must take steps to ensure that decriminalization does not result in continued incarceration by an indirect route (Smit, 2007).

Police and the prosecuting authorities should take the lead in diverting suspects out of the criminal justice system. It is critical to have re-entry programs available for

inmates reentering society (Smit, 2007) However; not all states have them. The criminal justice system has different ways of addressing reentry some leaving former inmates with very few options. Reentry programs make a huge difference, starting when inmates are first incarcerated and following through until they are released into society.

Using the prison system as a last resort, all stages of the criminal justice system, increasing prison capacity, diverting minor cases, reducing pre-trial detention, developing alternatives, reducing sentence lengths and ensuring consistent sentencing are part of a process needed to develop solutions to keep people out of prison in the first place (Smit, 2007). This has already been working when treating rather than punishing drug addicts and the mentally ill offenders thereby ensuring fairness for all (Smit, 2007).

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 included the theoretical framework and comprehensive review of the literature that supports the need for this study to include discussions on the various barriers ex-offenders may face post-incarceration. The research reviewed presents evidence of a significant problem affecting the lives of the African-American male exoffender population seeking services in employment, housing, education, voting, and health care. These problems worsen when a person has a criminal record. The literature review for this study adds to evidence that having criminal record results in numerous barriers African-American male ex-offenders face upon reentry.

The probability of disruption to inform social bonds to family and the community only heightens when there are limited resources to service this population. "If inmates are not given the opportunity to learn new skills in prison, how can you expect them to

become law-abiding citizens upon release and reentry into society?" (Leadership

Education Conference Fund, 2013, p. 1). Chapter 3 includes the research design used to

guide this study, participant selection, procedures, data collection and analysis, issues of

the trustworthiness and discussion of ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the impact the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on the experiences African American, male exoffenders in the Northeast United States when they try to access necessary resources postincarceration. This study was guided by the central question: What barriers have the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created for African American, male exoffenders? Six African American, male exoffenders were selected to participate in the semistructured interviews documenting their lived experiences. An account of this phenomenon through the lenses of these men may help researchers to grasp the meaning of the lived experiences of exoffenders. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the research methods used in this study, the research design and rationale, methodology, target population and sample size, data collection and data analysis, and issues concerning the trustworthiness of the research.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was the following: What barriers have the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created for African American, male exoffenders? A criminal record can serve as a barrier for African American, male exoffenders when trying to access services such as health care (Frank, Wang, Smith, Lee, & Comfort, 2014). A significant contributor to poor health outcomes among people released from prison is discrimination.

Prisoners and former prisoners are disproportionately racial and ethnic minorities, and they experience discrimination based on their racial or ethnic identity in numerous settings including health care settings (Pew Center, 2009). Discrimination based on a person's criminal record may serve as an additional barrier to engaging in health care (Schnittker & John, 2007; Smedley et al., 2003). Researchers have identified a criminal record as a stigmatized social status that can result in unfair treatment and daily indignities across a variety of social settings (Schnittker & John 2007; Uggen & Manza 2002). Discrimination based on criminal record has been established in employment, housing, and receipt of other social services from former prisoners (Manza, & Behrens, 2004; Pager et al., 2009b; Pager & Shepherd 2008). The extent of the literature on the various barriers exoffenders face postincarceration does not include the voices of African American, male exoffenders. In this study, I described the phenomenon using a phenomenological method to fill in this gap in the literature.

Research Tradition

Researchers use different stances toward the kind of data needed to study the subjective aspect of human life (Jacob, 1998). The tradition differs from discovery incorporated into the design of a single study. Researchers in all the research customs emphasize the importance of description and eschewed preconceived ideas. Some researchers hold assumptions that guide the development of the detailed questions (Jacob, 1998). In each tradition, assumptions are related to what scholars in the tradition think should be the focus of the study.

Each culture contains the understanding that detailed studies should precede studies that test hypotheses. In qualitative research, the researcher commits to a lengthy time in the field doing field work (Sage Publication, 2006). Qualitative research involves the researcher creating and depicting words and phrases and providing an account of the beliefs of the individuals by researching a natural setting (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher employs data analysis procedures that combine a significant amount of data into small numbers of themes.

The use of a qualitative inquiry is appropriate when the research question asks how or what and then attempts to describe the intent (Agee, 2009). Qualitative research can be employed when there is a need to explain, explore, or investigate a topic. Participant observation plays various roles in this tradition. Participants are the most important method of data collection, but open interviews, autobiographies, life histories, and letters can be used as well (Sage Publication, 2006). Qualitative studies are used in natural settings and when the researcher wants to write in a narrative format. The researcher can accurately articulate the viewpoints of the participants in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher in this study was to collect and interpret the data and analyze the information to gather it into themes and patterns. My professional experience as a local sheriff has provided me the opportunity to encounter arrestees and inmates in a legal setting. My experience with the participants in this study was that of a researcher who had some knowledge of arrest, conviction, and incarceration of the population under

study. These skills served as an advantage during the interview process because I could maintain the participants' narratives within the parameters of the research question. My status as an African American woman helped with the development of trust with this target population. I was open and honest with the research participants regarding my role as the researcher.

I had an ethical responsibility to conduct my research in a professional manner, free from any preconceived notions or unresolved issues with the participants to communicate the objective of the study effectively. Capturing the perspectives of the participants in their own words may facilitate changes in the criminal justice system as well as possibly eliminate discrimination that African American male former inmates experience when trying to access employment, housing, education, and health care postincarceration.

The objective of the study can also be achieved by providing background data to assist the reader in understanding the purpose of the study, the setting, participants, and the interpretations of the phenomenon. According to Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, and Crann (2015), minorities may mistrust research. The mistrust is common to minorities, indigenous people, and immigrants, and this mistrust extends to a history of being mistreated in research, experiencing breaches of confidentiality, and the tendency of the research community to pathologize populations (Gray et al., 2015). These were recurring themes that emerged from participant narratives, which suggested that it would be useful to recruit African American participants through community-centered, faith-based reentry organizations within the greater Northeast United States area.

Researcher Biases

I used a qualitative inquiry approach so that participants from the African American population would not feel obligated or coerced into participating in the study. My goal was to give voice to a disenfranchised group the opportunity for their views and the communities in which they represent to be heard. My exposure to the difficulties experienced by the members of the target population, while beneficial, had the potential of contaminating the interpretation of the findings. As I strive to maintain the safety of the participants, I was also conscious of keeping the participant's identity and responses confidential when researching the field. The data collection procedures were held in a convenient location where participants already congregated.

Methodology

Participant Selection

This study was conducted in the Northeast United States. The selected geographical area was on the Northern shore of Long Island Sound. The North East United States is a part of the New York metropolitan area; it is the second largest area in Connecticut (Hartford being the capital and the largest) with a population of 130,612 as of 2016 (Town Charts, 2017). The racial breakdown of the Northeast United States was Whites 38.1%, African Americans, 33.8%, and Hispanic or Latino 28.1% (Town Charts, 2017). The median age was 30.3 years; there were 91.8 males per 100 females (author, year). The median income for the household in the city was $29,604 (author, year). About 24% of the population lived below the poverty line, including those 18 and older (Town Charts, 2017).

I used purposeful criterion sampling to attract six African American male exoffenders from the Northeast United States. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful criterion sampling works when all the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (p. 155). Participants who have experience with the event are selected because they could offer a rich and in-depth description of the event (Vagle, 2014). The criteria for this study included (a) incarceration for offenses such as drug sales and drug manufacturing; (b) self-identification as an African American, male exoffender; (c) being over 21years of age; and (d) the ability to participate in a 60-minute interview.

The setting for the study included two reentry program sites located in the Northeast United States. The research questions were structured to discern the lived experiences of African American, male exoffenders in seeking housing, education, health care, and securing employment postincarceration within the Northeast United States. The decision for the sample selection was influenced by Denscombe (2014), who posited that the sample size could affect both the theoretical and practical considerations. The researcher must be able to gain access to the kinds of people, contexts, events, and documents that will be crucial to the success of the research. This may include getting the necessary authorization to contact people. Denscombe underscored that there are factors to be considered when conducting research: feasibility, suitability, ethics, cost effectiveness, and the researcher's qualifications all influence the decision for the sample selection.

Sample Size and Eligibility Criteria

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), producing an in-depth examination of the phenomena, and not generating a theory to be generalized over the whole population,

is the best practice to use. The sample size must be large enough to reach saturation. For example, in qualitative studies, the sample size is no more than 12 participants in a phenomenological study (Morse, 2000; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Phenomenological studies are usually small, which enables a detailed and less time consuming analysis. The sample size in most qualitative studies should follow the concept of saturation. Researchers use saturation as a guide during the collection of data.

Failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is achieved when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of probing questions and creating a state of *epoché* in a phenomenological study will assist the researcher in the quest for data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation might be attained by as few as six interviews, depending on the sample size of the population (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013), phenomenological studies have several factors that can affect the number of interviews needed to achieve saturation. A range of six to 12 interviews may occur to reach saturation (Marshall et al. (2013). Considering that the target population had a 50% recidivism rate (State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management's Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division's, 2013), I recruited six participants to ensure the minimum number of interviews, as recommended by Marshall et al. For this study, the interview lasted 60 minutes. According to Ando, Cousins, and Young (2014), "Reaching a saturation point in the thematic analysis is relevant to validity in qualitative studies, yet the process of achieving

saturation is often left ambiguous" (p. 1). For this study, saturation occurred when

participants' narrative brought no additional information to the response of the research

questions. Six African American, male exoffenders were recruited from two reentry

programs.

Project Fresh Start Reentry Program in the Northeast United States seeks to

provide information sharing among organizations and groups implementing reentry

initiatives. The Project Fresh Start program offers support to support local efforts in

advancing public safety, using proven practices in serving the formally incarcerated. It

also focuses on community capacity through building grant-making technical assistance,

and it advocates and informs policy making and systemic reforms that promote the

successful reintegration of exoffenders (Project Fresh Start, 2017). Project More

Incorporated was created in 1974 by a diverse group of individuals. The purpose was to

assist exoffenders with reentry into their communities. Project More operates several

programs, such as day programs as the Community Services Labor Program, the Warren

Kimbro Reintegration Project, the Regional Transitional House for females, and the

Walter Brooks Halfway House for men (Project More, 2017).

According to the State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management's

Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division's February 2015 report, 54% of the men

and women discharged from state correctional institutions returned to prison within 3

years of their release (New Haven Register, 2017). In addition, 50% of those who were

rearrested within 1 year were arrested on drug-related charges. Men and women ages 18

to 24 are those who possess greatest risk to recidivate (New Haven Register, 2017).

These reentry programs target those identified as high risk to recidivate in hopes of

decreasing the number of repeat offenders who are rearrested. I made telephone calls and sent e-mails to the directors of the two reentry sites as well as invitation flyers that were posted at the two reentry sites in the Northeast United States, asking for participants for this study.

A brochure containing information about the study being conducted, as well as a telephone number, was provided to the potential participants so that they could contact me. A brief telephone interview was conducted for screening inclusion criteria with further instructions to decide for the interview process. At the various reentry sites, each prospective participant was provided with a written consent form, and a verbal explanation was given of the research process.

The consent form contained the nature of the study, participants' rights, a statement to withdraw at any time from the study, a stipend for their participation, risk, and benefits, the length of the interview, and a confidential agreement. The consent form also included the limits of confidentiality, the threats to harm self or others, and disclosure of any potential danger to minors. I allowed the participants time to ask questions if they did not understand the research process/study. Before the interviews, each participant received a printout of the issues that they were asked to discuss.

For this study, participants were adult African American, male exoffenders who resided in the Northeast United States. They were on probation or parole and had been released from prison within the past 12 months, after serving a minimum of 1 year of incarceration for a felony conviction. I chose these criteria because the U.S. Justice Department data showed that over the past 2 decades, the nonviolent prisoner population has increased at a rate much faster than the violent prisoner population and that many

people entering prisons and jails were sentenced for nonviolent offenses (as cited in Schanzenbach et al., 2016).

The study corroborated the findings of other studies that have found that African American men are imprisoned at eight times the rate of Whites, and Hispanics are incarcerated at three times the rate of Whites (MacDonald, 2016). Minority communities represent 70% of all new prison admissions (Wagner, 2016). Sixty percent of the growth in state prison populations has come from locking up violent offenders, while 17% are serving time for nonviolent drug offenses (Wagner, 2016). I assumed that after 1 year or more of imprisonment, exoffenders would find changes within society. The additional criteria of the adult African American, male exoffender who had been released from prison created a similar sample of men who have only been released from jail within the past year.

Instrumentation

I was the primary instrument for data collection. I had at my deposal various sources of data collection to use in the study to obtain accurate and valid data as well as to demonstrate the methodology of triangulation of sources. I bracketed any prior assumptions or biases of the phenomenon to give attention to the methods used during data collection.

Data Collection

Six participants were used for this study. The participants signed a consent form before the start of the interview. Each participant's first name was used, and no last name was used to ensure privacy. Only I knew the last names of the participants. Due to time

constraints, the semistructured interviews took place at the two reentry sites in the

Northeast United States. The conversations were taped using a tape recorder. I asked each

participant 13 questions in the same order.

The interview lasted about 60 minutes. I typed a written document (transcript) of

the interviews. The semistructured interview questions helped to facilitate a more indepth

discussion of the perspective of the participants regarding the impact the Violent Crime

Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 had on African American, male exoffenders,

as well as their ability to access housing, employment, health care, and educational

services postincarceration. At the end of the interview, each participant was given a $50

gift card to Stop and Shop grocery store as a thank you for their participation in the study.

Interview Protocol

The primary goal of this study was to obtain information through interviews about

the lived experiences of six African American, male exoffenders. The interview protocol

consisted of a list of 13 semistructured questions for each participant in the study to

answer. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Due to the nature and vulnerability of the participants, the research was conducted

on a one-to-one basis, and an audio tape-recorder was used to record the interviews and

responses. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested letting the research questions act as a

guide to ensure the interview protocol is successful. The interview protocol includes the

time, date, and location of the interviews. The participants were identified by their first

name; no last names were used for privacy reasons. The use of a telephone interview was

not feasible because it is more difficult to reach some exoffenders, many of whom may

not have access to a telephone. The method of a focus group was too risky and would

have compromised the confidentiality of the participants in the research. I stopped

reviewing here due to time constraint. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look

for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 4.

Informed Consent

Full disclosure was provided to each participant in the study. Each participant was

given sufficient information about the research study to make an independent decision

whether to participate in the research study or not. The informed consent forms consisted

of disclosure about the survey, the choice to participate voluntarily or not, the capacity to

understand the information and be able to make a rational decision, and the know-how to

withdraw from the research study at any time (Abaunza & Romero, 2014).

Potential Risks

The potential risk identified with this study was the reenactment of traumatic

experiences and recollection of those traumatic experiences that the participants

encountered while incarcerated. The reliving of those experiences during the research

interview carries the risk of provoking feelings of anxiety, depression, and discomfort.

The benefits of this study outweighed the chance, and it is important to note that because

the participants are members of a vulnerable group their identity and extra protective

measures were taken to keep their information confidential. The research data and

responses with any identifiable information were not nor will be disclosed to the public or

unauthorized individuals. The researcher provided participants with a list of community

resources that can be helpful should they need counseling.

Adequacy of Protections Against Risks

According to Harris and Atkinson (2015), to maintain the protection of the participants from potential risks. Participants must be provided with adequate information, and the consents were given voluntarily as well as the assurance that those providing consents were competent to do so (Harris & Atkinson, 2015). Invitation flyers were used instead of referrals from the reentry programs to increase the confidentiality of the individuals in the research study and to decrease perceptions of coercion.

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative method that was selected for this research study was a phenomenological inquiry; it is a method that can produce rich, in-depth, detailed descriptions of participants' concrete, lived experiences and has the potential to generate data to which phenomenologically inspired analysis or reflection can be applied.

The method that I used was semi-structured interviews (Crust, Swann, Allen-Collinson, Breckon, & Weinberg, 2014) through observations (Ravn & Christensen, 2014), to autoethnographic and, to be portrayed shortly, auto-phenomenography.

I organized the data and managed it using a hard-copy, and electronic files to store the information of the participants. The data included interviews and transcripts generated from the interviews. I kept a daily journal of each encounter that described my contact with each participant, the topic, date and time, the data site and the participant's involvement, and any additional questions the participants asked.

According to Rowley (2012), the data should be collected and analyzed at the same time. All phases ranging from a single word to full sentences that describe the experiences of the participants should be listed and grouped (Moustakas, 1994). The

second cycle consists of coding, containing the original text, by reducing the data by reviewing the interview transcripts to eliminate phrases that do not reflect the lived experience of the participants.

Any repetitive, overlapping statements should be removed, and only the statements that reflect the meaning of the experience should be used to describe the phenomenon in descriptive language. The third cycle of coding involves clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents by theme. Clustering the data reflects the themes of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth cycle of coding requires identifying the invariant constituents and themes by application to ensure that the expressed issues are identified. In the fifth cycle of coding, the use of quotes from each transcribed interview is used to construct a textual description of the meaning of the lived experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

In the sixth cycle of coding, the researcher builds an individual structural report for each participant based on the textural stories (Moustakas, 1994). In the seventh cycle of coding, for each participant, the researcher constructs a textural-structural description of the meaning of the experience by incorporating the invariant constituents and themes. This helps with the understanding of the knowledge of the phenomenon experienced by each participant (Moustakas, 1994). NVivo was used to analyze the information contained in this study. Any discrepancy was noted and addressed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Applying the correct trustworthiness criteria for this phenomenological study, such as credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability, was critical

(Shenton, 2004). The first step was to organize and maintain the files in order and to assign a code number to identify each research participant, which assisted in navigating through several pages of documents from this proposal.

Each transcript, consent form, field note, note of demographic information, and the journal was given a code number relevant to the participant. Developing trustworthiness involved spending time with each participant, and the researcher spent a total of about 60 minutes with each participant. Information gathered by each participant was critical to the research study as it describes their lived experiences. According to Saldana (2013), the extended contact with participants confirms saturation which did not expose any additional information to the study. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data saturation is achieved when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of probing questions and creating a state of *epoché* in a phenomenological research design assisted the researcher in the quest for data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

When the research is to the point of no new data and no new themes, one has reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The researcher can conduct the study in a manner to attain data saturation by collecting rich (quality) and thick (quantity) data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Interviews are one method by which the study results reach data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested data triangulation for correlating people, time, and space; investigator triangulation for connecting the findings from multiple

researchers in a study; theory triangulation for using and associating various theoretical strategies; and methodological triangulation for correlating data from multiple data collection methods (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Credibility

Participant feedback is an essential key to establishing credibility. Recruiting participants who have experience with the same phenomenon can help to develop credibility in collecting data that is consistent with their lived experiences (Creswell, 2000). Data triangulation is a method to get to data saturation, Denzin (2009) argued that no single practice, theory, or observer can also add to the credibility of a study (Creswell, 2000). Denzin (2006) stated that triangulation is the method in which the researcher "must employ multiple external methods in the analysis of the same empirical events" (p. 13). Triangulation is the way in which researchers explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon. It is one method by which the validity of the study results is ensured (Fusch, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to duplicate the study in another setting. Identifying the limits, the background, and sample used in the study to describe the research and compare it to other studies using the same or similar methods is essential. Results that can provide a thick description allow the target audience to determine if the study can be transferred to another setting (Colorado State, 2017).

Dependability

To ensure dependability of the research study, I used field notes and a journal (Shenton, 2004). Field notes were used to record the thoughts and feeling of the participants and the diary to record the participant's reactions, reflections, and interpretation, as well as act as a protection against biases. The journal documented the steps taken to collect data and analysis to help with establishing dependability (Leung, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability was the process in which the researcher acknowledges any biases, the neutrality, and the accuracy of the data. I used a reflexive journal to bracket the research process. The reflexive journal includes writing on the purpose of the study, the race of the participants, the feelings, thoughts, and perception as well as the researcher's role, and any personal values and interests that can affect the research and help identify any potential biases that may exist through bracketing.

Ethical Procedures

Minimizing the risk to human subjects by using procedures that are consistent with the research design that does not expose participants to unnecessary risk was the researcher's primary concern when conducting this research study. The researcher completed and received a certification (#1719900.) on "Protecting Human Research Participants" from the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research. This research study was subjected to rigorous examination from Walden University's Institution Review Board, and I received approval to conduct this proposed study contingent upon the demonstration of clear, concise measures in place to protect

participants who volunteered for this study. The appropriate steps were taken to protect

participants from harm were considered and approved by Walden University Institution

Review Board. The ethical guidelines of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice

were adhered (Walden University, 2014).

The ability to protect human subjects is a critical ethical concern under the

guidelines established by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and all

procedures for informed consent were followed. All documents were placed in a manila

folder for each participant to protect their identity. Consent forms were reviewed with

each participant in its entirety. The informed consent form summarized the potential

risks and benefits of the study per federal guidelines. I receive approval from Walden

University's IRB, approval number #11-17-17-507139.

Each participant received an in-depth explanation of the research and their rights

as participants. The participant's rights included the purpose of the study, the benefits of

the investigation, 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.

Each participant was 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 that

if any question that I ask makes them uncomfortable, they do not have to answer. Only

participants' first names were used in the study to protect their identities. All information

contained in the survey was confidential and will stay in the hands of the researcher. The

report will be stored on the home computer of the researcher for five years and then

deleted.

Steps to Minimize Ethical Concerns

The research study took place at two different Northeast United States reentry sites to decrease the risk to the researcher and to ensure the safety of the participants. This research study focused on the lived experiences of six African-American male exoffender post-incarceration. All documents (consent forms, research flyers, and questionnaires) were kept safe by the researcher. An invitation to participate in this research study was placed at the two reentry sites in the Northeast United States only, thereby removing any forms of coercion to participate. The flyer listed the researcher's telephone number to contact if potential participants were voluntarily interested in taking part in the study.

To further minimize the potential risk to participants, the researcher asked the participants if any significant events were going on in their day-to-day lives that would preclude them from taking part in the research study. Inquiring about any significant events was important because of any mental illness or any life crisis that would hinder them from participating. Another ethical consideration was the participant's living status. Participants need autonomy to make decisions about participating in this study and must be able to travel to and from the reentry programs (research site) in the Northeast United States. In conclusion, the researcher took several measures to protect the participants from coercion, to create an environment of safety, and to protect the participant's rights and information.

Measures to Address Emerging Ethical Incidents

The researcher has an ethical obligation to report any events if the participant verbalized or showed signs of injuring himself or others during the interview process. The consent form included these limitations of confidentiality. For example, if the

participant disclosed his intent to harm himself or others, it is the researcher's ethical and legal obligation to connect the person to professional services (e.g., hospital, crisis intervention center) as well as report this information to the authorities under Connecticut law. Under Connecticut law, vulnerable populations include those defined 45 CFR §46 Common Rule Subpart C (Prisoners), and Subpart D (Children), and those mentioned in 45 CFR 46.111(b): mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons (Heritage University, 2016).

The researcher has a sworn duty to warn authorities if the participant disclosed inflicting harm to a minor under CGSA § 17a-101 et seq. Child Abuse Reporting**.** Connecticut General Statutes describes who is mandated to report child abuse as well as the content of such reports (Connecticut Department of Families and Children Services, 2017). Participants were informed in writing and verbally of these limitations of confidentiality before signing the consent form for participating in the proposed study (Kaiser, 2009).

Summary

Chapter 3 included a description and justification of the phenomenological qualitative method that was used in this research study. It also contained an overview of the research sites, recruitment process, interview protocol, potential risk, selection criteria, and ethical concerns. There was a detailed description of the procedures, data collection, and data analysis methods as well as an explanation of the role of the researcher and the influence of the study. The chapter included a summary of the sampling procedures used in this study and concluded with a discussion of the

trustworthiness to add credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and

ethical concerns. In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed description of the lived experiences

discovered through the face-to-face interviews, coding, and analysis. Additionally, in

Chapter 4, I give an interpretation of the findings.

In Chapter 5, I make recommendations for further research and address the

implications for a positive social change at the individual, community, and social levels.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the impact the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Suppe, 2014) has had on African American, male exoffenders regarding their ability to finding housing and employment and restore their voting rights, and access health care, education, and educational training postincarceration. Six African American, male exoffenders shared their lived experiences in semistructured interviews. This study may lead to positive social changes by emphasizing the impact a criminal record has on African American, male exoffenders and their ability to access services postincarceration and exploring how policymakers and the criminal justice authorities can assist African American, male exoffenders in reintegrating into society. The research question was the following: What barriers have the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created for African American, male exoffenders?

The data were analyzed and connected back to the research question to depict the experiences of the six African American, male exoffenders regarding their access to essential services postincarceration. I used NVivo to code the data to help me to identify themes, phrases, and patterns and provide insight into the participants' lived experiences when trying to access services such as employment, housing, health care, education, and educational training. Similarities among themes and categories from the data emerged and shed light on CRT and ideas discovered in the data analysis.

Chapter 4 provides the setting in which the study was conducted. I discuss the demographics of the six participants and the characteristics that are relevant to the investigation. Additionally, I present an account of the data analysis procedure, including codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data. Evidence used to establish the trustworthiness of the study is outlined. Finally, I address the research question and provide data to support the findings.

Research Setting

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to recruit participants from two reentry programs in the Northeast United States for this study. An e-mail was sent to the directors of the reentry programs in the Northeast United States. A meeting was set up between myself and the directors to discuss the study. I met with two directors to get their permission to conduct my study at their facilities and to post a flyer to recruit participants. Each of the directors granted their approval, and a brochure was displayed at the reentry programs in the Northeast United States asking for volunteers to participate in the study (see Appendix F & G).

Each participant who called the telephone number listed on the brochure was prescreened over the telephone. I asked each caller some questions to see if he met the requirements for the study. The interview process was explained to each participant, including how the data were going to be used. I informed the participants that I would provide them with a gift card of $50 as a thank you for their participation in the study. I also explained to each participant that he could withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question that made him uncomfortable.

I asked each participant if he had any problems that would prevent him from participating in the study before the interview, and I had each participant sign a consent form before the interview. After the interview, I debriefed the participants and provided them with the opportunity to express any concerns regarding their participation in the study, as well as a referral to a Clinic in the Northeast United States if they were experiencing any discomfort because of their involvement in the research.

Demographics

The participants included six male exoffenders who self-identified as African American. They were at least 21 years of age and had been released from prison in the past 12 months or were on parole or probation and attending a reentry program in the Northeast United States. Only participants' first names were used in the study to protect their identity.

Data Collection

Six African American, male participants met the criteria for this study and consented to participate. The six semistructured interviews included a series of openended questions designed to induce an exploration of the lived experiences of these African American, male exoffenders. The use of a phenomenological design places the researcher and the participant in a position that allows them to connect the lessons of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were recruited for the study through a recruitment brochure that was posted at the reentry sites from November 20, 2017 through November 30, 2017 (see Appendix C). The invitation flyer was displayed at the two of the reentry programs in the Northeast United States.

The data collection process began when each caller contacted me from the information and telephone number posted on the invitation flyer. I conducted a brief 10minute telephone interview to collect background information about each participant. I explained to each potential participant over the telephone about the study and answered any questions regarding the survey to them over the phone before setting up the in-person interview. I screened 12 participants over the telephone from November 20, 2017 through November 30, 2017, before selecting the final six participants who met the criteria for the study. Each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form to sign in person before the interviews took place. I went over the study again in person with each participant before starting the interview, and I allowed the participants to ask me questions. I conducted a face-to-face meeting with six African American male participants at two different reentry programs: Project More, Inc. and Project Fresh Start in the Northeast United States.

The duration of the interviews was between 60 to 65 minutes. None of the participants withdrew from the study at any point in the interview process. There were no interruptions during the interviews, and each participant was only interviewed once. I used a tape recorder to recorder the interviews. I also took hand-written notes to record their physical expressions and body language. I was able to establish a rapport with each participant during the screening process and again before conducting the interview.

The interview setting provided privacy, convenience, and comfort to help ensure each interview was successful. I informed the participants that after I transcribed the interview, I would give them a copy of the interview (written transcript). I reproduced the interviews verbatim in a Microsoft Word document and saved the data on a password

protected flash drive. I provided each participant with a $50 gift card to Stop and Shop

supermarket as a thank you for their participation in the study. I debriefed the participants

after the interview and provided them with an opportunity to express any concerns

regarding their involvement in the research or if they experienced any discomfort because

of their participation in the study.

The data collection process started after the Walden University IRB approved the

study. I interviewed the six participants in the period of December 11 through December

14, 2017. I wished to gain an understanding of the participants' lives and to understand

the impact of the criminal record on their ability to find housing, employment, health

care, restorative their voting rights as well as seek mental health and substance abuse

counseling. Before beginning each interview, I thanked each of the participants for his

time. Each participant was given the interview questions in advance so that he would

know in advance what questions would be asked of him. I reminded the participants that

(a) the interview would be recorded using a tape recorder and (b) they could stop the

interview and refuse to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable at any

time without penalty. An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency in the flow of

the interview, and a total of 13 questions were asked of the participants with each

response being reordered (see Appendix D).

I recorded verbatim each word that was conveyed by the participants as he shared

his lived experiences, including grammar errors and slang. The interviews took place at

Project More, Inc. and Project Fresh Start, both located in the Northeast United States.

Each participant was willing to share his lived experiences and appeared to be honest in

his responses. The results of the data collected from the six African American, male

exoffenders included the details of their lived experiences revealed from their

perspectives. The interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of the conversations,

which allowed me to document the information as accurately as possible. I labeled each

participant's audio recorded file and copied the discussions by the participants the first

name only. I used a journal to track codes and themes to categorize the responses to the

research questions.

During the transcription process, I listened and relistened to the tape-recorded

interviews of the participants to immerse myself in the words spoken. Each participant's

transcribed interview was read and reread several times, and I highlighted every

significant statement made that was relevant to the experience. The meaningful

comments were highlighted in different colors to effectuate a color code for each

potential theme that emerged from the data. Next, I made a list of each sentence or phrase

that provided a representation of the thoughts of each participant. The sentences or

phrases provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Common themes and data saturation were achieved from the six participants, with similar

experiences and perceptions recorded to illustrate consistency in the data.

Participant Profiles

I conducted this study with this group to describe the lived experiences and

perceptions regarding the impact of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act

of 1994 has had on their ability to access essential resources post-incarceration. The

information collected from the participant demographic forms enhanced the data gathered

from the interview questions and provided an understanding of the impact the Violent

Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Each participant narrative was based on his

experiences as an exoffender. The background data increased the validity of the research data to this study.

Participant 1

James was a 40–50-year-old single male who lived in a halfway house in the Northeast United States. James had two children, a GED certification, and had been on parole for the past 2 months. He served 18 months in prison for possession of narcotics with the intent to sell. James started getting into trouble at an early age. He used marijuana as a teenager and hung around with the other troubled youth in the neighborhood. During the interview, James appeared to be passionate about sharing his lived experiences. At times, he demonstrated his frustration about the criminal justice system (prison) and shared with me what he experienced while incarcerated. Since returning to the Northeast United States and living in a halfway house, James expressed to me what it is like to live in a halfway house. For example, the clients must get permission to leave the halfway house to look for employment.

The clients are allowed a pass to go to Project Fresh Start or Project More, Inc. to help them find work, get a 2-hour bus pass to travel to a job interview and help them find permanent housing and health care referrals.

Participant 2

Richard C was a 50–60-year-old single male and a father of three. Richard had a lengthy criminal history dating back several years. Richard started out in his early 20s robbing individuals. He started using drugs and drinking as a teen; he had a GED certification and a certified driver license (CDL) license. Richard also had certificates in

janitorial services and landscaping. Richard served 20 years in prison for robbery and was homeless living in the Northeast United States.

Participant 3

Stephan L was a single, 40–50-year-old male, from the Northeast United States who ended up in prison. Stephan served 13 months in prison for possession of narcotics with the intent to sell. This was not Stephan's first offense. Stephan grew up using various drugs. He was introduced to heroin as a teen, Stephan was sent to a youth detention center at an early age, was in and out of prison as a young adult and was influenced by his environment. Stephan had a GED certification. He had six children. Stephan had been in a halfway house for the past 90 days, Stephan said he had scoliosis and was seeking medical care for this condition. Stephan said that he has applied for social security disability benefits for this condition, but because he lived in a halfway house and was a convicted felon, he said that he was denied social security benefits.

Participant 4

Stephan M was a 40–50-year-old male, married, and father of five children. His first criminal offenses occurred when he was 16. Stephan's drug of choice was cocaine. He had a high school diploma and served 3 years in prison for a probation violation. Stephan has been in and out of jail since 1988. Stephan M served time in prison for burglary and narcotics possession. He was a repeated offender, who had, on several occasions, violated his probation and his parole. Stephan lived in a halfway house in the Northeast United States.

Participant 5

Richard B was a 40–50-year-old male and the father of nine children by several different women. Richard started selling drugs at age 13. Richard was from the Northeast United States and ended up serving 30 months for domestic violence; he had a 12grade education. Richard was quiet, and then he began to open to me about his experiences in the criminal justice system. Richard was the second oldest of seven children. He worked 8 years in a warehouse. He was living in a halfway house for the past month.

Participant 6

Eric was a single, 50– 60-year-old male with one child and a high school diploma. Eric was from the Northeast United States. Eric started committing burglaries at age 18 to support his drug habit. Eric used various drugs (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, and crack). He too had a lengthy criminal history of crimes, including domestic violence. Eric committed crimes in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. He suffered from nerve damage in his right hand, due to being shot several times in both arms by a state trooper in Virginia. Eric made a great impression on the actor, Denzel Washington. Eric was on parole in a halfway house in the Northeast United States.

Data Analysis

I used Stevick's (1971), Colaizzi's, and Keen's (1975) method of analysis modified by Moustakas (1994, p. 121–122) of phenomenological data to move inductively from signing statements to seven themes: (a) stigma of a criminal record, (b) lack of resources, (c) right family support, (d) lack of education, (e) the importance of employment (f) accountability and responsibility, and (g) the environment.

I used inductive data analysis because my profile fits the sample criteria and the question under investigation is my passion. A modified Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen method is more popular among researchers. The process employs phenomenological reduction, which includes bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing invariant qualities and themes, and constructing textural description (Moustakas, 1994). The textual and structural stories generated for each of the six themes represent the meaning and essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The data collected were used to identify meaning units and themes. I analyzed the data by listening to each interview multiple times while transcribing the data, and I immersed myself in the data to understand the participants' lived experiences. I used precoding methods to identify and to set limits on the amount of data used in the study. Transcription of each interview took several hours to complete, emphasizing the data that answered the research question.

The first step in the analysis was horizontalization, which is used to evaluate the concepts, phrases, or statements by each participant as being equal. Step 2 is the reduction and elimination process, identifying the meaning of units and statements where redundancy occurred with data that presents the value of the lived experiences of the participants. Step 3 is clustering of the critical categories of the skills and placing the invariant constituents into themes.

Step 4 is validating the essential themes of the experiences to ensure the statements, and arguments are consistent with each of the participant's transcribed interviews. Step 5 constructed the ideas into textual descriptions of the lived experiences. Step 6 formed a composite portrait of the lived experiences of each participant

(Moustakas, 1994). Step 7 integrated the specifications into a composite of the meaning of the lived experiences of the participants.

Discrepant Cases

A discrepant case is a datum that offer deviation of the perspective on the phenomenon being studied (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). There was no discrepant evidence identified in the interview with the participants, or contradictory findings were found in the data. The process of horizontalization helped me to view each statement equally or as having equal significance (Moustakas, 1994). The elimination and reduction allowed me to evaluate the expressions of the participants to ascertain if sentences or phrase needed to be included in the description elements of the phenomenon. I was able to identify the meaning of units of the experience, and redundant phrases were eliminated to reduce the data to just the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

All repetitive, unrelated, and unclear statements were removed and not considered for data analysis. The identified and labeled horizons were clustered into 333 comments with textural descriptions for 173 themes. Seven themes were identified, which resulted in generating composite reports for the seven final themes. Clustering and thematizing is a process of gathering core categories of the participant's experience and placing the invariant constituents into topics (Moustakas, 1994). I clustered the 173 types into seven topics. I centered on issues that represented the participants' experiences to ensure the phrases and similar themes consisted of the transcribed interviews of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through

the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at

Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used stringent protocols and techniques to qualitative studies to ensure the

reliability of the present study (Anney, 2014). I employed all protocols described in

Chapter 3 to safeguard the credibility of the research during the data collection and

analysis processes. I followed the SCK method of data analysis described in Chapter 3

was used in the form of bracketing and recording of perceptions about the phenomenon,

to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the findings (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy,

2013). The participant collaborated mutually with me to address reflexivity.

Transferability

In Chapter 3, the sample included a balanced representation of the interviews by

gender, age, marital status, education, number of children, and years of incarceration. The

thick descriptions involved the use of multiple reviews of interview data, audio, and

written information as well as a diverse paragraph contextualization to ensure integrity

and transferability. The data was then inputted into NVivo for analyses, and several

themes emerged.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, I adhered to Walden University's standards and

guidelines. An audit trail specifying the steps in the research process was the approach

used to enhance the reliability of this study. I reported details of all levels in the data

collection process, and the analysis method used to determine the findings. As described in Chapter 3, these processes might affect the dependability of the study.

Confirmability

Cope (2014) stated that confirmability in a qualitative study is based on the extent to which the researcher can demonstrate that the findings are centered on an interpretation of the data, and not on the perceptions of the researcher. There was no deviation from the strategies previously described in Chapter 3 that could affect the confirmability of this study. I took care, reflective notes to establish confirmability as I reflected on the insights and feelings presented by the participants as they narrated their stories during the interviews.

I also employed bracketing to minimize threats to confirmability by looking beyond any bias, assumptions, and preconceptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

Results

This phenomenological study was conducted to examine and understand the lived experiences of six African-American male ex-offenders regarding their ability to access necessary service post-incarceration. In the present study, an understanding was gained of not only what the participants experienced, but how their experiences were developed. There were themes, patterns, and relationships that emerged. The trends that arose because of this study included the stigma of a criminal record and the willingness to speak openly about their experiences as ex-offenders related to accessing vital services.

From the six verbatim transcripts, 333 statements were extracted to include formulated

meaning, clusters of themes and sub-themes.

I analyzed 173 themes, which resulted in narrowing the issues down to seven

working themes along with corresponding structural elements discovered from the

structural description, which is one of the steps used in Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen data

analysis methods. The themes are as follows: (a) stigma of a criminal record; (b) lack of

resources; (c) good family support system; (d) accountability and responsibility; (e) the

importance of employment (f) lack of education, and (g) the environment.

Emergent theme one: Stigma of a criminal record

The theme, *stigma of a criminal record* emerged throughout the interview

process. The participants believed that potential landlords and employers are reluctant to

rent or hire ex-offenders based on their criminal record (Navarro, 2016). The stigma of a

criminal record has left some ex-offenders fearful of not being hired for a job or not being

able to find a place to live. A landlord who has bans on renting to people with criminal

records is in violation of the Fair Housing Act and can be sued and face penalties for

discrimination by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The fair housing law applies to policies that exclude people with criminal records,

a group that is not explicitly protected by the act but falls under it in certain

circumstances (Navarro, 2016). Federal officials have said landlords must distinguish

between arrests and convictions and cannot use an arrest to ban applicants. In the case of

applicants with convictions, property owners must prove that the exclusion is justified

and consider factors like the nature and severity of the crime in assessing prospective

tenants before excluding someone (Navarro, 2016). Participants describe their lived

experience in trying to find housing and their perceptions regarding attitudes and understanding of potential landlords on the criminal record.

Regarding this theme, Eric stated, "Because of the crime I usually come to prison or go to jail for, it's hard for people to trust me."   Stephan M. noted:

Housing is *tough* when you are a felon. You will have to take a sober house or some program where you are there for a certain amount of time. They work with the agency who work with other rental agencies after you have established some job or income.

James stated that:

It's hard, I mean it's not easy at all. A lot of times they put out these programs such as ANR, or HER should I say and sent you down to housing and they are supposed to help you get back on your feet. Help you transition back out into society, but a lot of times it's not for everybody. They don't give everybody a chance, sometimes they send a certain amount of people out, and it's not for them you know what I mean? So, it's been hard.

Emergent theme two: Lack of resources

The theme *lack of resources* emerged as another common theme among the participants. The problem confronts inmates being released from prison and struggling to make successful transitions. Researchers have suggested that a significant share of reentering offenders come from communities located in urban cities and in states already straining under a load of their existing social and economic problems. Without in-depth planning, these neighborhoods will remain ill-prepared to take on the additional demands of the burgeoning reentering ex-offender population (Thompson, 2013). Record numbers

of ex-offenders will be left on their own to navigate their release and reintegration into the very communities in which they first found themselves enmeshed in the criminal justice system (Thompson, 2013). The lack of resources overwhelms some ex-offenders upon reentry into their communities (Thompson, 2013).

A prison record, in addition to lack of education and a lack of job skills, limits exoffender's employability (Thompson, 2013). Economic obstacles are complicated by the profound physical and mental health problems that ex-offenders have. To the extent that mental health problems have manifested before incarceration, they often remain untreated in prison (Thompson, 2013). Eighty percent of the state prison population reports a history of drug or alcohol use (Thompson, 2013). Rates of mental illness are as high as four times the rate in the general population. Providing accessible treatment for psychological and physical diseases could help stabilize these conditions and enable individuals to maintain housing and employment (Thompson, 2013).

When asked to describe their lived experiences in getting vital resources, James described:

> "*Nowadays* they are throwing people with mental health issues, mental health problems throwing them into the jail when they should be in a facility that specializes in helping people with mental health. So, I think right now things are all screwed up, *and* things don't have any order. And things just don't *make sense no* more, so, I just learn how to deal and cultivate with society on my own. I feel that there's not enough help, *not* enough assistance."

Eric stated:

My addiction goes farther than using cocaine; I have a gambling problem too. So, they were not addressed while incarcerated. There are not being addressed at this *minute* because in the halfway house there so *much* things going on. The bottom line is you must help yourself.

Emergent theme three: Good family support

The theme *good family support* emerged as participants described their lived experiences regarding family support. Studies have shown that prisoners who maintain consistent contact and connection with their families during and after their sentences have a lower recidivism rate than those who do not. Over half of the incarcerated adults are parents of minor children, which means they may miss out on many of their children's critical and formative years (Simmons, 2016). The participants in my study understood the importance of having a good family support system to help them successfully reintegrate into society.

Richard B. expressed how his supportive family helped: "It's been good, I talk to them all the time. My twins come to the Roger Sherman House to see me all the time." Eric, too, described his support system:

My experience with my family members is *very good*. My mother is 94, my sister is 65, and my other sister is 58. We are *tight*, I mean at 50 years old I have been enabled by my family my mother and my siblings all my life. My father past away ten years ago, he would have been 102. My family is Spanish and West Indian, so I have good ties with my family. I have a brother in California, a sister in West Haven, a sister in Clinton, Maryland and a sister in

Shelton that I deal with. I'm close to my sister in West Haven were my mom lives

and my sister in Maryland.

Richard C. stated, "As far as that's *concern* because a lot of us are alike, so it's

really not an issue." James stated," Beautiful, I have my siblings, I have my brother

and it's been a great experience. They miss me; I missed them."   Further, Stephan L.

noted:

There's four boys including me, and there's two girls. I'm very much

close to all of them, four of them is here in Connecticut, and two of them is down

south. So, when I get out of here (halfway house) that's where I'll be staying.

Emergent theme four: The importance of employment

The theme *employment is essential* emerged as the participants shared their lived

experiences. Because of systemic legal and societal barriers, once ex-offenders are

released, it is difficult for them compared to the general populace to find gainful

employment, secure a consistent source of housing, and function in society (Simmons,

2016). Often, ex-offenders are perpetually punished for crimes. The causes of these

restrictions are systemic and affect ex-offenders at all levels of society (Simmons, 2016).

For many African-American male former inmates, employer interest in an ex-offender

rises when they find out that the crime was nonviolent or drug-related. Taylor, Miller, and

Mouzon (2016) stated that few studies, examine everyday discrimination (e.g.,

commonplace social encounters of unfair treatment) among this group. When exoffenders

are released from prison, they tend to find that their expectations for returning to healthy

life are not always realistic (Simmons, 2016). Ex-offenders face massive obstacles when searching for employment.

As the participants described their lived experiences, it adds to the findings of this study that incarceration created a stigma that made it difficult to find work.

James believed that:

I have felonies on my record sometimes despite the fact you go to a job interview, or you sign an application, some places ask you if you have been convicted of a felony. And even if you say yes, they won't give you a chance at the job, and if you say no and if they find out *the you* have it, they still not going to give you the job. So, they leave you in a situation where you feel like you're lost, and you feel that you are out here by yourself and especially when you don't want to go back.

Stephan L. stated:

Well, I need to be able to go out there and not *have prejudice* against me. I know with my record that everything is not going to be handed to me. But, just being fair man, if the guys *is* fair I can work and manage from there.

Eric recalled how the inability to find work made him feel:

No, it's was very tough for me, I had to start from the bottom. I had to get a little minimum wage job; I was working as a teller marketer. I had a lot of doors slammed on me, a lot of no's, or we will get back to you. I don't think you fix this position and so on. I didn't give up, in the beginning, I was little depressed you know, but I made it through. I always had burglary so; it's; been *very hard* for me to get a job."

Richard B. responded simply, "No, I'm looking for a job." Stephan M. concurred, noting, "I don't have a job. I've been having a hard time because I don't have a phone."

Richard C., too, found the job search difficult: "I currently have a temp job. Right now, because I took this class, with the cleaning services that's what it's going to be in the cleaning services that what it's going to be."

Emergent theme five: Accountability and responsibility

The theme *accountability and responsibility* emerged in the participant descriptions of their lived experiences. The results of this study revealed when an offender has the desire to change and has social support; then change will occur, but, first, the wrong must be acknowledged. According to Zehr (2016), restorative justice happens when an offender's needs center around having the offender empathize with the victim and take responsibility for their actions. Restorative justice does not imply a return to past experiences of a status quo which involved trouble, but rather a transformation to our better selves and communities which are always available to us as a potential (Zehr, 2016). Some of the participants indicated their desire to change, while others did not.

Stephan M. stated:

> So, I found myself venturing out into the community getting to know various people. So, I did what pretty much what everybody did at that time what everybody did to earn money. So, I sold drugs to get money, but before that, I had a lengthy juvenile record, that started probably when I was 12. I pretty much did all the placements and group homes. It was downhill from there because I didn't learn much about being incarcerated because the system back then, they didn't keep you long. So, you didn't, it wasn't punishment, I have various charges.

Eric noted:

So, my choices at that time was to be more of *a adolescent*, being

disobedience, just acting out. And it came to the point where I wanted things*,* and

that had a lot of influence because I like nice things. And I always had them

growing up. So, when I had to become somewhat independent to get these things

I didn't have the skill set. But also, *easily* distracted, so my distraction, led me to

a lot of the influence that surrounded me in the streets.

James reflected:

Not to return to prison? Honestly, that's a good question. I'm not a person

that loves prison. Nor do I strive to go back to prison, I think honestly, just I've

made some wrong decisions in my life as a youth.

Stephan L. remarked "So, you have to go out here and get a job and surround

yourself with good people."

Emergent theme six: Lack of education

The theme of *lack of education* emerged as a significant challenge for the

participants. Many prisoners have limited knowledge or educational attainment, which

makes it difficult for them to secure employment after they are released. Because of

incarceration and involvement in the criminal justice system, many former prisoners are

viewed negatively by employers.

The combination of a limited professional network and a noticeable résumé gap

can make it very difficult for ex-convicts to get an interview with a prospective employer

(Simmons, 2016). Blomberg, Bales, and Piquero's, (2012) study indicated that academic achievement indirectly and directly reduces recidivism. They conducted a sample research study on the effects of inadequate education on. Recurrence. The study consisted of 4,147 delinquents, 86% male and 57% non-white, with an average age around 17. Bloomberg et al. (2012) found that men with above-average education were most likely to return to school after release. Those with less adequate training or substandard education were more likely to be re-incarcerated within one year of release.

The research concluded that the lack of intervention by the criminal justice system creates a continuum of repeating illegal activities. In emphasizing this theme, Eric stated that "I have my high school diploma." Richard B. said, "I went to the 12th grade, but I didn't finish." Meanwhile, Stephan M. explained that "I have a high school diploma I have various college credits." Richard C. told me that "I have a GED."

Stephan L. explained, "I finished the 9th grade, I went back and got my GED already it was a dream, for me, I call it a black man's dream to go back and get your GED." Finally, James noted, "I received my GED. I have some college experiences a well."

Emergent theme seven: The environment

African-American males are more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage in which the ability to use informal social controls over crime and disorder are weakened and where perceptions of police illegitimacy interfere with the ability to harness formal resources to control crime and disorder (Sampson, 2012). Children in high-crime communities are exposed to high levels of violence as both victims and witnesses (Sampson, 2012). Although it is commonly believed that poverty, community

disorganization, and troubled families are causes of criminal justice system involvement, in the era of mass incarceration the causality often runs in reverse (Sampson, 2012). This has happened most acutely in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage, which are predominantly African American. African-American men in the criminal justice systems partly stem from the structure of the communities in which the least advantaged of them live (Sampson 2012).

Neighborhoods with high concentrations of economic deprivation, residential instability, and family disruption which are predominantly African American provide an ecological niche for crime to flourish (Sampson, & Groves 1989; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Much of the violence in low-income neighborhoods stems from conflicts between gangs, whose membership consists mostly of young African-American men a reflection of the population in areas with concentrated poverty (Sampson, 2012). This has resulted in a disproportionate rate of death by homicide among young, African-American men relative to their white peers. Communities with high levels of concentrated poverty tend to have high levels of need in such areas as mental health and substance abuse treatment and family therapy (Sampson, 2012). Resources are often inadequate or unavailable for financial reasons because many of these service needs are also risk factors for criminal involvement, with the perverse effect of financing services only after a person is formally involved in the criminal justice system.

Upon release, former prisoners face a variety of barriers to adequate health. They face difficulty accessing health care because many lack health insurance post-release. There is a range of health resources that the formerly incarcerated, especially those convicted of drug offenses, are barred from accessing. This includes cash assistance, food

stamps, and federal housing assistance. These barriers exacerbate the health problems that incarceration creates, in effect continuing the punishment beyond release. Poverty, unemployment, and other indicators of social disadvantage exert both direct and indirect effects on the African-American environment. A chaotic home environment and the lack of resources were associated with poverty.

The disruption of African-American families was found to have the most extensive effect on robbery and homicide. High rates of joblessness among African American males also seem to be directly related to the prevalence of families headed by African-American females. Related to this theme, Richard B. stated: "Out on the block trying to get money. It started when I was very young, 13 or 14. I was selling in the North East United States."

Stephan M. explained:

My first incarceration as an adult began in 1988 when I was 16. I grew up in here in the Northeast United States, oh, boy, I guess there were things that I wanted. I couldn't afford them. I was placed in a reform school in the Northeast United States, I've gone through CJR, Long Lane, so I went to from one place to another. I never considered myself and bad child, I just did stupid things so, after leaving Long Lane, I progressed into the drug thing we would steal just to get money so that I could get whatever we needed.

Richard C. noted, "Probably a lack of social skills, probably a multitude of different things, inexperience, being young, mental not focused on what my agenda needed to be at the time." Stephan L. described:

Well, I would like first to start by saying my growing up in my community, and the streets *is* the only life that I knew, but the streets are the only life that I allowed myself to know. Where I was brought up around drugs, greed, corruption*,* and prostitution. And we often did things that we *seen* older guys doing. And I took it from then but for me*,* I got hooked on drugs*,* and I had to get my drugs by any means necessary. I start using heroin was I was 15 years old.

James told of "Being young and not having a sense of direction as a child as a teenager." Eric elaborated that "But with other offense it's*,* been a very long time. I started since 1985; I was 18."

Composite Description of the Lived Experience

The composite description is a synthesis of the themes that participants have in common. The objective of this step was to provide a summary of the meaning of the phenomenon under study. A composite also provides an answer to the research question; what barriers has the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created for African-American male ex-offenders? All participants expressed that their incarceration has had a significant impact on their ability to access employment, housing, jobs, and job-training, restoration of their voting rights and education. Obtaining health care or health care benefits was not a challenge for the participants.

For example, Stephan L. has had no problems getting medical care for scoliosis. Five of the participants in this study currently reside in halfway houses in the Northeast United States. Some are on parole, while others are on probation and one is homeless. Reintegration into society has been a struggle for them. They lack the necessary resources

to reintegrate back into society successfully. For example, they are not allowed to drive a car nor get in a car driven by someone else. Therefore, they must walk or take public transportation to find employment. For some, not having the proper attire for a job interview, a telephone, or family support, means they are left to fend for themselves.

There are various mental and emotional obstacles they face while trying to adjust to their new surroundings. The psychological effects of being incarcerated for many years has taken its toll on some of them, for example, Richard C., who suffers from PTSD. Some ex-felons are unable to function within society due to post-traumatic stress caused by incarceration and the violence they encounter while incarcerated. Many ex-felons who have been detained for a substantial amount of time who are unable to function within society or the workforce are disabled, due to post-traumatic stress caused by incarceration and the institutional violence and psychological oppression of imprisonment. Because of a lack medical resources and active psychologists in correctional facilities, most ex-felons with this disability are never diagnosed.

Currently, 60% of prisoners have been in prison before, and there is growing evidence that Post Incarceration Syndrome is a contributing factor to this high rate of recidivism. Post Incarceration Syndrome is a set of symptoms that are present in many currently incarcerated and recently released prisoners. The symptoms are caused by being subjected to prolonged incarceration with few opportunities for education, job training, or rehabilitation. The signs are most severe in prisoners subjected to prolonged solitary confinement or severe institutional abuse. These participants have limited work

experiences and education, so it will be hard for them to re-enter the job market. Some landlords will not want to rent their apartments to ex-offenders, especially those convicted of drug-related offenses. Most of the participants in this study have spent time in prison for drugs.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on African-American male ex-offenders and describe the lived experiences of six African-American male ex-offenders when trying to access employment, housing, job-training, healthcare, and restoration of voting rights post-incarceration. The lived experiences shared by these six men add insight about the barriers they have faced when trying to access these essential services. The interviews served as the only method of data collection. I conducted the conversations face-to-face to generate significant statements regarding the lived experiences of the participants. I presented the results of the study in which seven themes emerged that identified the everyday experiences and perceptions of these African-American male ex-offenders that impact their ability to reintegrate into society successfully. I wrote a qualitative reflection of the seven themes that emerged to provide support and evidence to the theoretical framework and the body of knowledge. I described the discrepant cases and issues of trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 also included the sampling method, research question, data analysis procedures, evidence of integrity, the themes that emerged from the data, and the in-depth narratives presented by the participants.

I analyzed the data using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis for phenomenological research. Seven themes emerged from the shared experiences and descriptions submitted by the participants. The themes identified were the stigma of a criminal record, lack of resources, good family support, the importance of employment, accountability, and responsibility, lack of education, and the environment. The first theme was the stigma of a criminal record as a significant contributor to their low socioeconomic status. There was also the inability to find housing after release because offenders convicted of drug crimes are barred from public housing.

Additionally, there is reluctance on the part of potential landlords to rent to those who are convicted felons. The second theme, lack of resources emerged as another barrier. Participants didn't have jobs or were finding it difficult to find a program to meet their needs. Because of these competing demands, most parolees find themselves unable to lead law-abiding lives. The lack of stability, i.e., the chaos, sometimes leads many backs to crime. The third theme that emerged from the study was good family support.

This was a positive experience for most of the participants, only one of the participant reported being separated from his family for many years. The fourth theme, the importance of employment, a prison record, limited education and a lack of job skills, limits ex-offender's employability. The difficulty in finding housing also affects the ability of ex-offenders to secure employment (Thompson, 2013). Thompson (2013) describes the relationship between stable housing and employment as being interconnected. Society has created a vast network of collateral consequences that inhibit an ex-offender's ability to reconnect to the social and economic structures that include barriers to obtaining government benefits, voting disenfranchisement, disqualification

from educational grants, and exclusion from individual business and professional licenses

(Thompson, 2013). Without structural support or intervention, these individuals face

many obstacles making it impossible for them to pursue legitimate means of survival.

The fifth theme was accountability and responsibility, and the standard approach

has been to allow ex-offenders to fend for themselves with little or no support or

guidance (Thompson, 2013). Most ex-offenders released from prison re-offend. Over,

50% were rearrested at least once for a felony or serious misdemeanor (Thompson,

2013). The sixth theme, lack of education, many prisoners have limited knowledge. As

with many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, soft-skills are often a significant

deficiency. The sixth theme was lack of education. Many prisoners have limited

knowledge or educational attainment. As with many individuals from disadvantaged

backgrounds, exoffenders' paucity of soft-skills are often a significant impediment.

Soft-skills include excellent communication and interpersonal skills, ability and

willingness to learn, attention to detail, reliability, as identified by employers that

consider hiring ex-offenders. Hard skills are described as the technical skills required to

complete job assignments. Many of the participants in this study lack education and job

skills. The seventh theme was effects of the environment. Most ex-offenders return to

families or friends in their old neighborhoods. This is the environment that helped them

get into trouble in the first place (National Press Report, 2018). Researchers suggest that

criminal behavior is a socially learned behavior. These behaviors can be learned from

parents, family members, and the community environment.

The effects that the environment has had on an individual returning to society

after being incarcerated can determine if the personal reintegration will be successful or

not. In Chapter 5, the purpose and nature of the study are reiterated, based on the need to

increase existing knowledge of the lived experiences of ex-offenders when seeking these

essential services. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the meanings and findings of

the data as compared to the existing body of peer-reviewed literature discussed in

Chapter 2. I consider the study's limitations, trustworthiness, and recommendations for

further research within the boundaries of the study. I also explore social changes and

theoretical implications. Chapter 5 closes with a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I examined the lived experiences of

six African American, male exoffenders regarding their ability to access housing,

employment, health care, education, job training, and restoration of their voting rights

postincarceration. I wished to find out if the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement

Act of 1994 created any barriers for exoffenders and their experiences since being

released from prison. The research question that guided this study was the following:

What barriers has the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 created

for African American, male exoffenders regarding accessing housing, employment,

health care, education, job training, and restoration of voting rights postincarceration?

The sentencing disparities between African American men and their counterparts

has affected the African-American community. The effects of many African American

men being incarcerated has created a stigma that makes it difficult for African American,

male exoffenders to find housing, employment, education, and health care and gain

restoration of voting rights (Katzen, 2013).

Interpretation of Findings

The study's findings are summarized below as they related to the literature review

in Chapter 2. I interpret the results and compare them to the literature review to determine

whether they confirm, disconfirm, or extend the knowledge that the Violent Crime

Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had any impact on African American,

male exoffenders' abilityto seek housing, employment, education, job training, health

care, and restoration of voting rights postincarceration. The participants expressed that

incarceration played a role in their postincarceration experiences. Their experiences were the result of years spent in prison for various crimes.

Theme 1: Stigma of a Criminal Record

The concepts of stigma and labeling, including self-labeling and assuming the stigmatized identity, provide a contextual understanding of the lived experiences of these exoffenders (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, Stutterheim, & Sholosberg, 2013). Several scholars have documented the pervasiveness of stigma that surrounds people who have had contact with the criminal justice system. Being involved in the criminal justice system conveys a negative social status. Exoffenders find it difficult to get jobs and housing. Incarceration has adverse financial effects on them as well.

A criminal record remains a negative and stigmatizing credential that prohibits exoffenders' access to gainful employment in the postrelease labor market. Some researchers have noted success in securing reasonable postrelease work among the most reliable predictors related to whether an individual will avoid returning to prison (Bushway, Stoll, & Weiman 2007; Travis 2005). Participants voiced experiences with racial discrimination and pointed to how these experiences helped solidify perceptions of limited opportunity structure.

Theme 2: Lack of Resources

Incarceration disproportionately affects African American males more than any other group. Not only that imprisonment is disproportionately concentrated in certain minority neighborhoods, but that in high concentrations, confinement can lead to more crime. A lack of educational attainment compared to the general population, a lack of

vocational training, high rates of unemployment, various disabilities, alcohol or drug dependence, and confinement can lead to more crime that contribute to multiple barriers to successful reentry (Simmons, 2010).

Theme 3: Good Family Support

Adding to their financial strain, many families often find it necessary to support the offender both during incarceration (e.g., providing spending money, accepting expensive collect calls) and after release (e.g., providing housing, food, cash, transportation). Several of the participants stated that they had a good relationship with their family members. Only one of the participants was separated from his family members.

Theme 4: The Importance of Employment

The difficulty in securing job was echoed by the participants and findings by Mbuba (2012), who found that the label exoffender resulted in a lifetime stigma of being viewed as a criminal. Lockwood, Nally, and Ho (2016) showed that African American exoffenders have a higher recidivism rate because they likely return to urban neighborhoods characterized by poverty, unemployment, and crime.

Lockwood et al. indicated that postrelease work was the most influential factor in recidivism, regardless of the offender's ethnicity. Unemployment was the most influential factor in recurrence, irrespective of an offender's race and education. Their job prospects were limited by employers' preferences, low levels of education and training, and fragmented personal networks or social capital.

Theme 5: Accountability and Responsibility

Holding individuals criminally responsible for the crimes they have committed is a complicated issue. Self-reporting studies have examined the effect of age on opinions about the extent to which criminal accountability and responsibility should be attributed to the person or external cause (Piquero & Brame, 2008). Developmental psychologists have shown that adolescents should be considered less culpable for criminal behavior than adults due to their developing cognitive processes Piquero & Brame, 2008). Other factors relevant to opinions about offenders, such as perceptions of their legal competencies, have been investigated.

The race of the defendant plays a role in the conviction and sentencing process. There are racial disparities at nearly every level from arrest rates, to bail amounts, to sentence lengths, to probation hearing outcomes. Police arrest African Americans for drug crimes at twice the rate of Whites, according to federal data, even though Whites use drugs at comparable rates and sell drugs at similar or even higher rates (Kahn & Kirk, 2015). Two of the participants in this study related their criminal activities to a lack of maturity, and two others noted that their criminality was related to their environment.

The two remaining participants stated psychological factors as the cause of their criminal behavior.

Theme 6: Lack of Education

Being arrested without a conviction can increase the likelihood of future criminality, limit educational attainment, exacerbate family problems, and reduce job stability through the sometimes permanent disqualification for an array of professional

licensures (Dobbie, 2016). Education may lower the probability of detection and punishment or minimize sentence lengths handed out by judges. According to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (2016), African American males ages 18 and older make up just 5.5% of all college students. Many African Americans live in poverty, which can cripple their chances of education and, ultimately, upward mobility. Four of the participants in this study had their GED; one had a high school diploma and the other participant dropped out of school at the 12th grade.

Theme 7: The Environment

Most researchers have focused on the density of substance use/procurement locations (e.g., bars, alcohol, or tobacco retail outlets) in an individual's residential neighborhood. Higher densities of substance use/procurement locations in a person's residential community are associated with higher use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs among adolescent, young adult, and minority populations (Cederbaum, Guerreo, Adhikari, & Vincent, 2015).

Researchers who focus on proximity, rather than density, acknowledge that individuals may travel outside of their residential neighborhood to consume alcohol or drugs with limited exceptions (Paschall, Grube, & Thomas, 2014).

Paschall, Grube, & Thomas (2014) indicated that proximity between the place of residence and substance use/procurement locations is associated with increased use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs including among adolescents and young adults. The proximity between the place of residence and substance use/procurement locations reduces travel time and transportation costs, allows for greater access to and heightens the visibility of alcohol or drugs, and provides opportunities for substance use and related

behaviors (Paschall et al., 2014). Paschall et al. demonstrated that, compared with those residing in closer proximity, young adult club scene participants who lived further from their preferred nightclub reported higher intensities of alcohol and cocaine use. Participants residing near their preferred nightclub experienced higher frequencies of arrest for public intoxication. Individuals raised in impoverished environments are at risk of suffering and witnessing violent behavior (Paschall et al., 2014). I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. I will now look at your references.

Individuals living in impoverished environments are also more likely to be exposed to stressors such as unemployment and a lack of social and economic mobility (Rumberger, 2011). Studies have also identified a critical gender effect. African American males are exposed to a more considerable amount of adversity in their microsystem (Hackett, 2014). Most studies have shown that crime is caused because of the social and economic environment (Bura, 2012).

To understand how a situation can shape a mindset that has the potential to lead to deviant behavior, one's upbringing and social learning environment directly contribute to an individual's specific criminogenic needs. Such needs are traits that lead to criminal behavior (Hegger, 2015). One of the best examples of a criminogenic need that ties into the social learning environment would be criminal peers (Hegger, 2015). Such peers are those individuals who tend to coerce or indirectly affect the decision making of another (Hegger, 2015). Other factors that can be directly linked to the social environment would include child abuse, domestic violence, and exposure to emotional harm (Hegger, 2015). The participants in this study alluded to their situation as a contributing factor that led them to drugs and criminal activity.

Conceptual Framework and Findings Interpretations

The results of this study validated the theoretical framework on which this study was based upon and executed as significant themes emerged as identified by the participants. The findings of the study also confirmed the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. All six participants expressed that the transition from prison into their communities had been extremely arduous.

The component of this conceptual study framework was Bell & Freeman's (1970) CRT, and Moore et al.'s (2012) self-stigma concept stemming from the labeling theory. Critical race theory addresses the issues having to do with race from a variety of perspectives. It "employ[s] storytelling" as a means to "communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, as a first step in understanding the complexities of racism.

Moore et al.'s (2012) self-stigma concept stem from the labeling theory. Stigma describes the overarching process through which stigma impacts the self. The perception that others hold negative stereotypes. Ex-offenders who perceive stigma can still recognize discriminatory treatment. African-American ex-offenders are a highly stigmatized subset of offenders, as they are the prototypical image of the dangerous "Black criminal" which is highly prevalent in the media (Welch, 2007). African American ex-offenders perceived stigma may be threatening to the self and activate self protective responses.

The link between perceived stigma and stereotype agreement may be attenuated for African-American ex-offenders. Ex-offenders are exposed to stigma after being released from jail or prison, with laws that marginalize them from community participation as well as stereotypes/discrimination from community members (Moore,

2016). As stated in Chapter 2, both theories are identified with the experiences of the exoffenders in the peer-reviewed literature. While interviewing the six participants about their lived experiences post-incarceration, it became evident that the stigma of a criminal record had influenced these men by the stigma attached to them by society because of being incarcerated.

CRT. Critical race theory provides a useful tool to examine racial inequality that has perpetuated social and educational contexts, how racial formations connect with crime policies, how communities are differentially policed, how various bureaucracies and institutions categorize ethnic communities, and what implications processes of racial and ethnic differentiation have for identity politics.

This can contribute to both a lack of understanding about the relationship between criminal justice and race and a lack of solutions for increasing racial equality. Currently, the criminal justice system is the most oppressive tool that creates racial inequality in America. It is essential to identify how race and racism are operative in criminal justice policies that impact African-American men (Simon, 2013). Using phenomenology coupled with CRT in this study was an appropriate method for future studies to describe the lived experiences and the impact of such policies as it relates to the accessibility of essential services for African-American male ex-offender post-incarceration.

A qualitative phenomenology method to collect data through in-depth interviews assisted in gathering information-rich data about the experiences African-American male ex-offender's post-incarceration. The constructs of CRT provided the structured framework needed to answer the research question that gathered the attitudes, biases, and perceptions of African-American male ex-offenders regarding their ability to access

housing, employment, healthcare, and the restoration of voting rights post-incarceration. This section presents the finding based on the everyday lived experiences of the six participants. These significant findings helped to develop a cognitive map of the lived experiences of the participants. The themes derived from the categories external and internal factors such as the current criminal justice policies as it related to crime and sentencing of its minority citizens. The lack of education, the lack of employment, job training resources, and skills, attitudes of society, and the stigma associated with a criminal record.

This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the accessibility of essential service ex-offender need to successful reintegrate into society post-incarceration. Race is so ingrained in the criminal justice systems that it becomes difficult to notice. Race is reflected in the creation of laws, and policies that are a set of social practices that constitute race and impact racial identities, racial perceptions, and the myriad of complex meanings attached to racial categories (Gomez, 2010). The penal logic has shifted from rehabilitating the individual to the punishment, management, and the incarceration of people (Gomez, 2010).

Risk assessment tools are used in the criminal justice system to reflect social structures which are racially differentiated (Course Hero, 2018.). These risk prediction tools are not free of bias but are the reflections of the society that has produced racial inequalities (Chouldechora, 2017). These tools are used for a multitude of decisions, including pretrial detention, bail, sentencing, and parole, and the effects of risk assessments instruments are seen in the imprisonment of African Americans (Course

Hero, 2018). Risk assessment tools contribute to compounding inequality and reinforces bias as offenders are processed at various stages of the decision-making (Omori 2013; Stolzenberg, D'Alessio, & Eitle, 2013). Risk-prediction tools absolve decision makers and politicians of the responsibility for the perpetuation of racial inequalities by using risk as a proxy for the race (Harcourt, 2010). Researchers may not want to acknowledge that racial bias exists throughout the system, but they do admit that they are unable to locate how race impacts sentencing. The academic scholarship on criminal justice is tightly linked to the creation of policy.

The outcomes of this scholarship affect the mechanisms, procedures, and institutions that grant fundamental freedom and liberty in ways that other disciplines do not (Course Hero, 2018). According to Western and Wildeman (2009):

> This is demonstrated in the incarceration rates of African-American men, in the high unemployment rate of African-Americans, and in the high death rates among young African-American men. Racial disparities in unemployment, and in wealth are eight to one African-American-white ratio. (p. 229).

As a result, of the warehousing of African-American men in prisoners deepens racial segregation and weakens the African-American communities (Clear, 2007). An example of the characterization of African Americans can be shown in the hiring of white job applicants with a criminal record over African-American applicants without any criminal history (University of Michigan Debate Camp, 2018). Scholars must also look outside the criminal justice system. Systems like schools, hospitals, welfare offices, all act as pipelines to criminal justice institutions or mimic the punitive features of criminal justice apparatuses (Thompson, 2013).

Stigma. Stigma affects behavior this is relevant to criminal offenders as a stigmatized group. Upon conviction and incarceration, people receive the stigmatizing label "criminal offender." Perceived stigma and stereotype agreement may be closely related to criminal offenders. *Anticipated stigma*, the expectation of experiencing discrimination because one's stigmatized identity may explain why internalized stigma is associated with reduced outcomes (Moore, 2016).

Likely shame is conceptually distinct from perceived and internalized stigma, as it specifies the treatment an individual *personally* expects to experience *in the future* because of his or her stigmatized identity (Moore, 2016). Perceived stigma and anticipated stigma originate in the stigma theory, which describes how perceptions that others hold negative stereotypes about a stigmatized group turn into expectations of rejection from others upon joining that stigmatized group (Moore, 2016).

Racial stigma is a visible stigma, which leaves individuals open to more experiences of discrimination than those with concealable stigmas (Pinel, 1999). Through experiences of bias, prejudice, or attributing failures on unfair discrimination rather than personal faults (Moore, 2016), African Americans may be more prone to the harmful effects stigma can have on the self-concept, strengthening the relationship between stereotype agreement and internalized shame.

African Americans may use coping strategies "acting as normal," or they may withdraw from social interactions except for close friends/family and being open about one's identity and educating others about it (Goll, 2015). Several of my participants expressed that they anticipate being viewed as ex-prisoners for the rest of their lives. Self labeling and CRT explain why many individuals accept the negative labels subscribed to

them by society. This self-view and acceptance of negative labels are consistent with the findings of researchers who have studied how the identities placed on individuals in a specific group by society are accepted as the perception of self (Moore, Tangney, & Stuewig, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

This research, despite the abundant data collected and correspondent analysis, has its flaws. There are various limitations to this study; the lack of experience conducting a phenomenological study, the small sample size, and the delimited to the Northeast United States; therefore, generalizing the results of this study to all African-American male exoffenders in other regions in the Northeast United States must be done with caution. However, it is important to document how limitations to the trustworthiness of the study were mitigated.

I conducted interviews until saturation was achieved to mitigate this limitation. Because of a limited number of participants who responded to the request to disseminate the recruitment invitation flyer it is not possible to determine if the recruitment flyer was shared with all individuals who wanted to share their experience. Potential participants may have been reluctant to volunteer due to organizational policy and a fear of retaliation by sharing their lived skills related to the phenomenon.

Due to time, date, and the availability of the participants. This study was conducted in a two-day period, with limited space to do such interviews. It is possible that those volunteers to participate committed more severe crimes thus were less likely to receive family or community support during reentry. Saturation was accomplished after the sixth interview when no new ideas were presented (Robinson, 2014). The full

descriptive data were used to describe the experiences of the participants. An audit trail was also used to ensure dependability of the study (Anney, 2014).

The research process was thoroughly expounded from the data collection process, the context of the study, to an explanation of the findings. All participants were from the Northeast United States and between the ages of 40–56; therefore, it could not be discerned whether groups under age 30 shared similar lived experiences. In this study, attempts were made to ensure an atmosphere of open, honest, and non-dominant communication during the interviews. I assured that all questions were open-ended. I was also careful not to inject any personal assumptions or beliefs throughout the interview process. The interview protocol was utilized as guidance to assist in the management of this process. Researcher bias was recognized as a probable limitation to this study based on knowledge on the topic and prior assumptions about the participants (Chenail, 2011). Self-reflection and the bracketing of my preconceived biases were used to reduce this potential bias. All knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and values were put aside to describe the lived experiences accurately as presented by the participants.

Recommendations

I conducted this study to address the gaps in the literature regarding the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders and how difficult it is to secure employment and other essential services post-incarceration. The six participants in this study shared their reasons why they believed specific barriers that confront them prevent them from accessing the vital services they need. This research was available to all exoffenders, but the interviews were conducted with African-American males only.

Therefore, the results of the study may underestimate the extent to which the lived

experiences of the participants affect reentry of the overall population of ex-offenders

trying to access essential services post-incarceration. Hence, further research could be

conducted to address the limitation of this study by examining the lived experiences of

African-American female ex-offenders or concentrated on a more diverse sample of

exoffenders because this study was limited to African-American males. A more varied

sample of ex-offenders could reveal additional experiences that were not ascertained in

this study. It should be noted that there was no control for variables in the data in this

study. Quantitative research could be conducted to determine how the lived experiences

of ex-offenders are measured by variables of stigma and labeling. There is little to no data

that speak to CRT and the shame of African-American male ex-offenders when trying to

access post-incarceration services.

Any additional studies within the realm of lived experiences of ex-offenders

would advance the knowledge to criminal justice policymakers of the needs of this

population. Other data could also contribute to evaluating the impact of a criminal record,

limited education and the accessibility of essential services post-incarceration. Harding

(2013) states that reentry challenges and lack of resources increase the likelihood of

recidivism. The following recommendations could eradicate these barriers and ensure that

ex-offenders receive the necessary help they need to reintegrate into society successfully.

Recommendations for Future Research.

African-American males comprise a disproportionate percentage of the

individuals imprisoned in correctional institutions across the United States (King, 1993).

Few social scientists have discussed or examined the impact incarceration continues to have on African-American males after release. The nation has not heard much protest from the African-American community regarding the disproportionate incarceration of African-American men (King, 1993).

Most social service and mental health agencies do not offer services and programs that address the unique needs of inmates, former inmates, or their families (King, 1993). If a significant percentage of African-American males continue to be subjected to the emotional, psychological, and health-related risks associated with the prison environment, then the population of healthy African-American men will deteriorate (King, 1993).

Social scientists have argued that being separated from family, friends, and community, is probably the most devastating social and psychological experience an African-American person can encounter. African-American males have been taught to value and depend upon their social, family, and community relationships for sustenance and strength during good and bad times (King, 1993). Moreover, their identity within the community is tied to the family and extended social relationships they share with many African Americans. The stigma begins to affect them before they leave prison by limiting their chances of obtaining parole or release (King, 1993). African-American male inmates and their families are disproportionately poor and lack the social networks and resources required to locate employment (King, 1993). As a result, many inmates must depend upon social welfare, friends, and family members to find jobs. African-American male inmates find it difficult to secure their release from prison because they are poorly educated and lack job skills (King, 1993).

A prison term of imprisonment stigmatizes African-American males to the extent that they find it more difficult to support themselves once they are released jail (King, 1993). Their "ex-convict" status makes it more difficult for them to obtain credit, jobs, training opportunities, and education (King, 1993). African-American "ex-convicts" are often forced to engage in criminal activities to support themselves and their families. Since 90% of the crimes African-American males commit are against other African Americans, the entire African-American community suffers when men go to prison and are released no more prepared to function in a highly competitive economy than they were before they were incarcerated (King, 1993).

Implications

For change to work, police officers will need to change not only what they are doing, but how they think and react to the various situation involving minorities (Schoenfeld, 2017). To make change work, it is crucial that drug treatment programs and reentry services be in place. The United States needs to make a significant effort to reduce educational and employment inequalities in poor communities from which most offenders come from (Schoenfeld, 2017). Changing U.S. drug policies to focus less on punishment and more on therapeutic remedies to reduce the effects of racial disparities in the criminal justice system is also essential, particularly considering the racial disproportionality in the incarceration of African Americans for a drug offense that cannot be explained. There are more African Americans imprisoned for a drug offense, based on evidence of racial patterns of drug using and selling (Schoenfeld, 2017).

To avoid the increasing racial disparities in the criminal justice systems; sentencing laws, policies, and practices for all crimes must be part of the reform. The United States has the highest rates of imprisonment of African Americans which some criminologist has called "coercive mobility." Coercive mobility refers to the forced extraction of African Americans from communities of those convicted and sentenced to prisons, and their return after their sentence to the very same communities. Coercive mobility has a profound impact on the African-American community. These effects on the African-American population are thought to disrupt families, decrease employment, reduce income, and possibly increase crime.

Implication for positive social change

Individual level. There were 526,000 African-American males in state and federal prisons in 2013. About 14.3%, were between the ages of 18 and 24 (Kertscher, 2015). Drug policies that were instituted in the 1980's have constituted the most significant factor contributing to the rise in criminal justice populations among African Americans (The Sentencing Project, 2016). African Americans and Hispanics represent almost 70% of offenders sentenced to state prison for drug possession. The impact of these changes on the African-American community has resulted from the intersection of race and class effects (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Since African Americans are disproportionately represented in low-income urban communities, the impact of these social ills is intensified (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Sentencing policies compounding the higher arrest rates for drug offenses have been changes in sentencing

policies that have also disproportionately affected African Americans (The Sentencing Project, 2016).

The impact of these policies can be seen in the harsh crime control policies in which it was undertaken to achieve political, not strategic, objectives (The Sentencing Project, 2016). It is the adoption for political purposes of policies with foreseeable disparate impacts, the use of disadvantaged African-Americans as means to achieving politicians 'electoral ends, that must, in the end, be justified (The Sentencing Project, 2016). The combination of four components of the criminal justice system—prison, jail, probation, and parole— about three-quarters of all offenders under supervision have been convicted of a non-violent offense (The Sentencing Project, 2016). African-American males are identified as the perpetrators and are arrested in numbers disproportionate to their proportion of the overall population.

The images on the evening news of African-American men as criminals are indicative of some disturbing trends, and they lead to highly misleading beliefs which nevertheless have far-reaching consequences (The Sentencing Project, 2016). These images of African-American men as criminals can have far-reaching effects on public policy, significant numbers of African-American males have come under criminal justice supervision because of drug offenses (The Sentencing Project, 2016). A recent study found that about two-thirds of the offenders had been employed at the time of arrest, primarily at low-wage jobs. Thus, drug dealing became a source of income for these young African-American men (The Sentencing Project, 2016). As increasing numbers of young African-American men are arrested and incarcerated, their life prospects are severely diminished.

Prison becomes a typical experience for young African-American males; its stigmatizing effect is reduced. Current crime control policies may be increasing the severity of the problem, mainly when other options for responding to crime exist. The lack of access to treatment caused by the limited availability of drug treatment programs and facilities, particularly for low-income African-American men, can also become a barrier (The Sentencing Project, 2016).

Family level. The African-American family, battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting, is in the most deep trouble, according to Coates (2015). Out-of-wedlock births were on the rise, and with them, welfare dependency, while the unemployment rate among African-American men remained high (Coates, 2015). The matriarchal structure has robbed African-American men and deformed the African-American family and, the African-American community.

The African-American family has been left to fend for itself. As the crime was increasing in the African-American neighborhoods, so where the number of children in needy, female-headed families. In the 1980s and '90s, the incarceration rate of African America men doubled (Coates, 2015). Then, from the '90s to the present, violent-crime rates fell while imprisonment rates increased for African-American men (Coates, 2015). Among all African-American males born since the late 1970s, one in four went to prison by their mid-30s; among those who dropped out of high school, seven in ten did (Coates, 2015). The emergence of the carceral state has had far-reaching consequences for the economic viability of African-American families (Coates, 2015). Mass incarceration widened the income gap between whites and African-Americans (Coates, 2015).

The overcrowding, the stripping of programs and resources, were part of the national movement toward punishing inmates harshly and for more extended periods. These efforts curtailed the ability of African Americans to buy better housing, to move to better neighborhoods, or to build wealth (Coates, 2015).

Organizational level. The criminal justice system has experienced unprecedented growth for more than twenty years (The Sentencing Project, 2016). In recent years, the federal government and many states have adopted a variety of harsh sentencing policies. Among the most prominent of these have been the "Three Strikes and You're Out" policies, approved by the federal system and fourteen states (The Sentencing Project, 2016). These laws provide for a sentence of life without parole upon a third conviction for a violent felony. The rise in prison populations has also been exacerbated by the impact of Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 passed by Congress and signed by former President Bill Clinton (The Sentencing Project, 2016). The rise in criminal justice populations has affected the African-American communities even more so than others.

The impact of the "war on drugs" has fallen disproportionately to African American communities. Drug policies of the past decade have been the single most significant factor contributing to the rise in criminal justice control rates for African Americans (The Sentencing Project, 2016). The long-term goal should be to reduce crime and the numbers of people entering the criminal justice system. A common strategy to reduce the severity of criminal justice control without compromising public safety may be achieved by creating a broader array of sentencing options for non-violent offenders who would otherwise be sent to prison (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Rescuing a

generation of African-American men from the social ills that confront them may be achievable by implementing a strategy that will ensure that the multiple barriers they currently face will be removed.

Policy Level. If the goal of public policy in recent years had been to incarcerate record numbers of African-American men, then the strategies have been successful (The Sentencing Project, 2016). With the passage of the federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. For example, required a state applying for federal grants for prison construction needed to show that it. (a) had increased the percentage of convicted violent offenders sentenced to prison; (b) had increased the average prison time which will be served in prison by convicted violent offenders sentenced to jail; (c) had increased the percentage of sentence which will be served in prison by violent offenders sentenced to prison (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014).

The mechanisms of those policies were a mandatory minimum sentence, three strikes, truth-in-sentencing, and life without the possibility of parole laws. Mandatory minimum sentence laws required minimum prison terms for people convicted of crimes. Three strikes laws required minimum 25-year sentences for people convicted of a third felony. State truth-in-sentencing laws required that people sentenced to imprisonment for affected crimes serve at least 85% of their nominal sentences (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014). When implemented as part of a comprehensive change to the sentencing system, "truth-in-sentencing" laws were associated with massive changes in prison populations (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014). The increase in the percentage of sentences required to be served before release led to more substantial increases in length of stay and effect of length of stay on the

expected number of prisoners (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014). Mandatory minimum sentence and three strikes laws have little or no effect on crime rates, shift sentencing power from judges to prosecutors, often result in the imposition of penalties that practitioners believe to be unjustly severe, and for those reasons foster widespread circumvention (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014). Racial disparities in the imprisonment of African-American men reflects America.

These laws include harsh punishments for offenses for which African Americans and Hispanic people often are disproportionately arrested and convicted (National Academics of Science, Engineering, Medicine, 2014). The political and social context in which current policies unfolded has a specific ethnic dimension. The first concern differences in the probability that on an average day African Americans (3,023 per 100,000) were more than six times more likely than white men to be arrested. The second kind of disparity concerns racial differences in rates of imprisonment relative to group differences in offending (Quizlet, 2017). The third kind of inequality involves racial differences in sentencing and case processing after controlling for legally relevant differences among offenses (Quizlet, 2017).

Literature has shown and continues to show that African Americans are more likely than whites to be confined awaiting trial to receive incarcerate rather than community sentences, and to receive longer sentences (New Haven Register, 2017).

Racial disparities in imprisonment are of long standing in the 1980s and early 1990s. The reason for increased racial differences in incarceration relative to arrests is straightforward: stricter sentencing laws enacted in the 1980s and 1990s increased the

lengths of prison sentences mandated for violent crimes and drug offenses for which

African Americans are disproportionately often arrested. In states that have sentencing

guidelines, African Americans are more likely than whites to receive sentences at the top

rather than at the bottom of the instruction ranges. Whether because of conscious bias,

unconscious stereotypes linking race with crime, or colorblind application of racially

tinged policies, judges' and prosecutors' decisions regarding bail, prosecution, and

sentencing are not racially neutral.

While there is no convincing evidence of widespread racial bias in sentencing,

there is, in contrast with several decades ago, credible evidence that African-American

defendants are treated differently (New Haven Register, 2017). Many researchers have

concluded that African Americans are treated less favorably than whites at many stages.

For example, in pretrial detention, prosecutorial charging decisions, and decisions to

impose community rather than incarcerate punishments were given to white defendants

and not African-American defendants. There was a significant difference at each stage of

the criminal justice process for whites than there was for African-American a substantial

difference (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Race should not matter when

criminal sentences are imposed. The policies created were ineffective at creating just,

consistent, and transparent sentencing systems (National Criminal Justice Association,

2017).

Criminal justice policymakers and practitioners should adopt and support

evidence-based and promising practices while being flexible about innovative methods

which have a sound basis in empirical research. Support for research, including

implementation, as well as cost-benefit analysis studies, is critical if the system is to

make the best use of its limited resources and to advance the body of knowledge that leads to policy changes (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017).

Such experience is of limited use unless policymakers, practitioners, and the public are kept informed. Criminal justice practitioners and community-based service providers must engage the African-American communities on how best to prevent violence, as well as how to report a crime in their neighborhoods (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017).

Evidence-based policies provide a promising approach to the challenges of an incarcerated population and provide targeted and proven sanctions for offenders based on their risk to the community (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Criminal justice professionals must work with policymakers, law enforcement, mental health providers, community groups, and both public and private sector professionals to educate and to develop solutions to this vital safety issue (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Reentry programs can play a significant role in reducing the risk of reoffending. The goal of reentry programs is to reduce recidivism, improve public safety and reduce the incarceration rates (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Reentry services should begin when the offenders are incarcerated and should incorporate a risk assessment tool to guide placement into evidence-based reentry programs.

Community monitoring should include services that address the needs identified while the offender is imprisoned and should focus on supervising high-risk offenders to reinforce accountability (National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Upon release, offenders should enter a reentry program created through the partnerships of the criminal justice agencies and local re-entry organizations to facilitate access to housing, jobs, and

mental health/substance abuse treatment in the communities where the offender lives

(National Criminal Justice Association, 2017). Lawmakers should support these efforts

through adequate funding and legislation that seeks to correct such disparities that exist

among African-American men in the prison system (National Criminal Justice

Association, 2017).

Methodological Implications

As stated in Chapter 2, the studies on the lived experiences of African-American

male ex-offenders are limited. Understanding the lived experiences of African-American

male ex-offenders are garnered from the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals.

The methodological implications of this study are that of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973),

and Keen (1975) recommendations for data analysis procedures that allowed for a more

targeted analysis that led to an in-depth description of the lived experiences of

AfricanAmerican male ex-offender's post-incarceration. The data collected, and analysis

method employed provided a more comprehensive report of the lived experiences of

these individuals from their perspective.

Theoretical Implications

Perez-Huber and Solórzano (2014) utilized CRT to explain how ordinary forms of

racism—racial microaggressions—emerge in the everyday experiences of African

Americans, to understand and analyze racial microaggressions. Perez-Huber (2014)

demonstrate how daily racist events are systemically mediated by institutionalized racism

(i.e., structures and processes), and guided by ideologies of white supremacy that justify

the superiority of a dominant group (whites) over non-dominant groups (Perez-Huber,

2015). 2014). The data used in this study on the lived experiences of African-American male ex-offenders combined with the theoretical framework can help to develop criminal justice policies that combat racial injustices and the disproportionate incarceration rates of African-American males. Implications from this research are expected to contribute to scholars' critical understandings of African-American male ex-offenders' lived experiences. A significant framework of this study was CRT and Stigma stemming from the labeling theory, which can be employed to advance the theoretical understanding of the social and psychological needs of African-American male ex-offenders as they relate to their lived experiences when accessing essential services post-incarceration. These theories can be used as a theoretical foundation for both qualitative and quantitative studies to build a connection between the data on the variables for accessing vital services post-incarceration, and the social and psychological needs of African-American male exoffenders.

Recommendation for Practice

The participants in this study provided valuable insight into how difficult it is to access essential services such as housing, employment, education, and restoration of voting rights post-incarceration. These insights can provide policymakers and those in the criminal justice field with knowledge as to how the stigma of a criminal record and race influences the reentry experience of ex-offenders. The United States must acknowledge that there are racial differences in the criminal justice system that lead to unjustifiable racialized practices which dictate how the criminal justice system operates. Treatment rather than incarceration and reforming the current sentencing policies can reduce mass incarceration. Having in place a decision-making model to determine who is released,

based on observable, measurable factors with checks and balances in place, will lead to better decisions than those found on the offense for which a person was incarcerated.

There needs to be a more considerable effort to recruit and retain personnel with culturally diverse backgrounds in the criminal justice system that reflect the diversity of the inmates. Cultural diversity training of criminal justice personnel should be increased to enhance their ability to work more efficiently with inmates from culturally diverse backgrounds. Strategies that allow policymakers, practitioners, and criminal justice authorities to cover their political position, save citizen's money, by protecting them and helping minority communities by making the American criminal justice system more just (Crutchfield, 2017).

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the impact the Violent Crime Control, and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on African-American males' ex-offenders lived experiences when trying to access essential service postincarceration. This research gave voice to the six participants and contributed to the understanding of their lived experiences and how they were affected by public policies such as the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This act not only led to mass incarceration of African-American men but continues to impact their ability to access basic service post-release.

The findings from this study consisted of a conceptual framework based on Bell & Freeman's (1970) CRT. Critical race theory examines and seeks to transform the relationship that undergirds race, racism, and power. Critical race theory is concerned with racial subordination, prejudice, and inequity, and it accentuates the socially

constructed and discursive nature of the race. Delgado and Stefancic (1993) noted that

CRT is a critique of liberalism, the use of storytelling, the influence of structural

determinism, and examination of the intersections of race, sex, and class. Which form a

debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism, a perspective of cultural

nationalism/separatism, and the need for critical pedagogy. The participant's in-depth

description is supported by Moore, Stuewig, & Tangney (2012) stigma stemming from

the concept of labeling. The participant's detailed narrative is supported by Moore et al.'s

(2012) concept of stigma arising from the concept of labeling. Former inmates face

many hardships once they are released into the community, and being stigmatized as an

ex- offender is often implicated as a significant barrier to successful community

reintegration (Moore, 2013). Understanding how and why participants experienced the

difficulties is key to acceptance of the deviant label. Exoffenders are subjected to adverse

societal reactions to this label and often results in self isolation and loneliness.

  Stigma exists at three levels in society: structural, social, and self. Stigma is

thought to impact individual behavior through interactions between institutional barriers

that marginalize groups (structural), stereotypes and discrimination from community

members (social), and different responses to these factors (self) (Link & Phelan, 2001).

This encompasses several constructs including perceived stigma, which is defined as an

individual's perceptions of the public's stigmatizing attitudes toward their group.

Qualitative research shows that people think negatively of "criminals." People often think

of stereotypes such as low socioeconomic status and minority race when thinking of

criminals (Moore, 2013) and associate negative personality traits with the word

"criminal." Research shows that there may be differences in how African American and Caucasian people think about stigma (Corrigan, Larson, & Kuwabara, 2010).

African Americans indicated greater stigmatization on items about feeling stigmatized by others whereas Caucasians reported greater stigmatization on items regarding keeping their identity a secret and being afraid of interpersonal rejection. The criminology literature suggests that being labeled an offender may be "redundant" for African Americans because they already manage racial stigma (Moore, 2013).

Winnick and Bodkin (2008) found that Caucasian prisoners were more likely to endorse secrecy as a strategy for coping with stigma when compared to African American prisoners (Moore, 2013). This is especially problematic as the stigma is theorized to be a substantial barrier to the successful reentry of ex-offenders into society (Moore, 2013). When people expect to be mistreated, some may feel that applying for jobs is pointless, and so remain unemployed (Corrigan, Larson, & Kuwabara, 2010). African-American male ex-offenders into society (Moore, 2013). Moore (2013) asserts that the anticipation of discrimination may make people more likely to behavioral avoidance of stereotyped domains, as well as withdrawal from others (Moore, 2013). Quinn and Chaudoir (2009) found that anticipated stigma was correlated with depression and anxiety in people with various concealable stigmatized identities (e.g., mental illness, criminal actions).

The study advances the current literature on the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders. In this research study, I merged the CRT with stigma to address the various barriers ex-offenders are confronted with from a qualitative

perspective. To show the impact the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 has had on African-American men. Mass imprisonment of African-American men damages social networks distorts social norms and destroys social citizenship. The damage to social networks starts at the family level and reverberates throughout communities where the families of prisoners are located. Mass incarceration strains the extended networks of kin and friends that have sustained African-American families in difficult times, weakening communities' ability to withstand economic and social hardship. Locking up someone places a financial and social strain on the rest of the family. Incarceration strains the extended networks of kin and friends that have sustained African American families in difficult times, weakening communities' ability to withstand economic and social hardship. Incarceration destroys social citizenship at the community level, which includes felon disenfranchisement, labor market exclusion, and political isolation.

Imprisonment works to constrain African-American communities' participation in the labor market as well. At the basic level, incarceration physically keeps inmates from working. Confinement of African-American men impairs community structures and norms that would channel resistance to systemic injustice in productive directions. As these communities disengage from the national political economy, the rest of society stigmatizes them as criminal, deprives them of social supports, and treats their members as noncitizens. Imprisonment has become the norm one in which questions of justice, fairness, and access to resources to the African-American communities. The penal institutions have historically been critical components of social policy aimed at governing marginal social groups. At times, policy regimes have emphasized the social causes of

marginality and attempted to use welfare and prisons to reform and integrate socially dispossessed groups. Structural racism systematically maintains racial hierarchies established in prior eras by embedding white privilege and nonwhite disadvantage in policies, institutions, and cultural representations. Imprisonment of African-American men serves as justification for prison policy and related crime control and sentencing reforms.

Certain individuals in society benefit from imprisonment stemming from the asserted reduction in crime as well as the individual liability of drug offenders for creating social problems but pay little heed to the social harms caused by the mass incarceration. The current prison policy, and its inadequacies and racial bias, does not begin to calculate the costs of mass imprisonment on African-American men and their communities.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Hello, you are invited to participate in this research study, which is part of my doctoral

degree program. The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of

African-American male ex-offenders in finding housing, employment, healthcare, and

education post-incarceration. You can take part in this research study if:

- You are an African-American male

- Age 21 years or older

- We're convicted of a felony

- We're released from prison in the past 12 months

- Served at least one year in prison

If you meet these requirements and would like to be interviewed, please call Jackie Grant

(doctoral student) at █████████ . During the telephone call you will be asked some

questions to see if you are qualified for this research study. If you decide to participate,

you will be asked to meet with me face-to-face at one of the two reentry sites in the

Northeast United States. The interview will last 60 minutes, you will be given the

opportunity to tell your story and to verify the information and add or delete any

information the it's accurate. At the end of the interview, you will receive a $50.00 Stop

& Shop gift card as a thank you gift.

Appendix B: Preliminary Screening of Telephone Calls

Hello, my name is Jackie Grant, I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I invite you to participate in my research study as part of my dissertation. Your participation is entirely voluntarily. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time. The survey takes at least 60 minutes in a face-to-face interview with me. After the interview, I will provide you with a copy of the interview, and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy, add or delete any information that is not accurate. This telephone call is intended to confirm that you fulfill the requirement for this research study. If you do and you want to participate, your personal information will be collected. I will start by asking you some questions;

1. Are you a permanent resident of the Northeast United States?   Yes   No

2. Are you an African-American male?   Yes   No

3. Are you over the age of 21?   Yes   No

4. Were you in prison for more than a year?   Yes   No

5. Were you convicted of a felony?   Yes   No

6. Were you released from prison in the past 12 months?   Yes   No

7. Are you currently enrolled in a reentry program?   Yes   No

8. Would you be able to invest 60 minutes for the interview?   Yes   No

Note: Personal information will be collected if respondent meets these eight criteria's. A resident of the Northeast United States, the age of 21 years or older, in prison for more than one year, convicted of a felony, was released from prison in the past 12 months and is currently enrolled in a reentry program.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Time:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Jackie Grant

Interviewee: Participant Code:

The position of the interviewer: Student

Hello, I want to thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this research study. This interview will last 60 minutes; is this time okay with you? As a reminder, you can withdraw from this study at any time. Your identity will be protected; only your first name will be used in this study. I will be the only person with access to your information, which will be destroyed at the end of this study. I will be recording your answers in this tape recorder; I will also be taking notes in a journal during this interview. The recorded information will be transcribed into a written document. You will have the opportunity to read this document, add or delete any information from this document that is not accurate. If you would like a copy of the result of the research study, I would need your address where to send the report. You are free to tell your story without interruption. Do you have any questions before we start?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

- Tell me what events led you to become incarcerated?

- Was this your first, second, third offense?

- Please tell me what your experience was like when you returned to your community from prison and tried to find housing?

- Where you able to find suitable housing?

- What was your experience in connecting with family and friends?

- Where you able to get support from your family and friends?

- What is your experience in seeking employment?

- Where you able to find employment?

- What level of education did you finish?

- What was your experience in getting an education or job training?

- What was your experience in seeking health care?

- Where you able to get your voting rights restored?

I want to thank you for your participation in this research study. I would like to schedule a second interview with you to confirm that what is written in the documents are precisely what you said. If again, you would want a copy of the result from this research study, I would need your address where to send the information.

Appendix E: Crisis Hotline Information

If you or someone you know is feeling or experiencing;

- Suicidal Thoughts

- Self-harm

- Depression

- Stress/Anxiety

- Grief

- Physical Abuse

- Emotional Abuse

- Sexual Abuse

- Isolation/Loneliness

- Relationship Issues

Free -Crisis Text Line does not charge for the support it provides. Standard messaging fees are waived on Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, and Sprint, and texts to 741741 will not appear on your phone bill if you use one of these carriers. Confidential – What you say stays between you and the Crisis Counselor. If you are at immediate risk of seriously hurting yourself or others, emergency services may be contacted. I am mandated by law to report any cases of abuse of a minor to the authorities. The Crisis hotline number 24-Hours is: (203) 974-7735 or (203) 974-7713.

List of Tables

Table 1A, **Participant Demographic Data**

First Name	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Education	Number of years Incarcerated	Number of children
Stephan	Male	Single	40-49	9th grade	13 months	6
James	Male	Single	40-49	G.E.D.	18 months	2
Richard	Male	Single	50-60	G.E.D.	20 years	3
Stephan M.	Male	Married	40-49	G.E.D.	3 years	5
Richard B.	Male	Divorce	40-49	12th grade	30 months	9
Eric	Male	Single	50-60	High School Diploma	3 years	1

Table 2A, *Themes by Participants*

Themes	Participants who identified themes
Stigma of a criminal record	Eric, Stephan M, James
Lack of Resources	James, Eric
Good family support	Richard B., Richard C., Stephan L., Eric, James
The Importance of Employment	James, Stephan L., Eric, Richard
Accountability and Responsibility	Stephan M., Eric, James, Stephan L
Lack of Education	Eric, James, Richard B., Richard C., Stephan L., Stephan M.
Environment	Richard B., Stephan M., Richard C., Stephan M., Eric,

.

Table 3A, **Invariant Constituents and Emerging Themes**

THEMES	INVARIANT CONSTITUENTS
Employment and financial challenges	a. Financial challenges because of the inability to obtain employment (Stephan L.)
	b. The failure to find housing because of a criminal record (James)
	c. The lack of resources needed to transition into society (Eric, James, Richard B, Richard C., Stephan L., Stephan M., James)
Unresolved substance abuse problems	a. Create implications for education, and substance/alcohol care policy (Eric, James, Stephan L., Stephan M., Richard B, Richard C)
	b. Attachment and substance use disorders (SUD) in adolescence (Stephan L., Stephan M., Richard B.)
	c. Substance abuse problems frequent among indigenous people (Eric, James, Stephan L., Stephan M., Richard B., Richard C.)
Coming of age	a. Lack of maturity (Richard C.)
	b. Lack of education (Richard B.)
	c. The environment one is in can influence behavior (Stephan L.)
	d. Lack of goals and direction (Stephan M.)
Broken family relationships	a. Relationship with family members no longer exist (Stephan M.)
	b. Divorce because of criminal history/activities (Stephan M.)
Unresolved emotional and psychological factors	a. Inability to get rid of prison persona (Stephan L.)
	b. Bitterness (Richard B.)
	c. Suffering from PTSD (Richard C.)
	d. Anger (James)
Negative societal reaction to ex-offenders	a. Being reviewed as an ex-convict by members of society (Stephan L.)
	b. The feeling of being prejudice against for having a criminal record (Stephan L.)
	c. Fear and anxiety (Stephan M.)
	d. Decision-making difficulties (Eric)