A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN

AMERICAN MALES' CHALLENGES IN POST INCARCERATION

by

Amber LaShae Scott

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of African American males in the state of Delaware post-incarceration. Incarceration disproportionately affects African American males leading to numerous difficulties during their transition back into the community. The research sought to comprehend the myriad of challenges and identify potential support systems to help facilitate successful reintegration. By utilizing a qualitative research approach, the study employs in-depth interviews to collect data from African American males who have experienced life post-incarceration. The analysis of the data incorporates elements of critical race theory and labeling theory to unravel the interplay of systematic racism and societal perceptions in shaping their reentry experiences. The study used in-depth interviews to explore the perspectives, emotions, and perceptions of each participant while focusing on the participants' encounters with different societal systems such as family, housing, employment, and community support. The study also examined how societal stigmas and racial discrimination has impacted participants' reentry process and shaped their identities. The findings of the study revealed that post-incarceration life for African American males was loaded with numerous challenges. Participants expressed feelings of distrust, alienation, discrimination, and stigmatization leading to difficulties in securing various necessities such as housing, employment, and family reconciliation which ultimately hindered the participant from a fresh start. These insights provided an understanding of the lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration and provide implications for societal interventions. By addressing these concerns that perpetuate recidivism, society can employ a more inclusive environment that supports successful reintegration.

Keywords: Recidivism, reintegration, racial disparities, African-American males

Dedication

I dedicate this study to all Black Men…..You Matter

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the Lord Almighty whose grace has guided me from the beginning of this research to its completion. At each and every moment, I experienced your grace who continuously enhanced my intelligence, even at the times of despair. You have inspired me to keep pushing forward, opened unexpected doors, and enlightened my thoughts with your wisdom.

I am forever grateful for my son. Even though you are too little to understand, know that you are my biggest motivator. Aries, thank you for choosing me to be your mother during this time. Forever my sun, my moon, and all my stars.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical legal studies (CLS)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Each year in the United States, approximately 600,000 individuals are released from both federal and state correctional facilities (O'Brien, 2020), and approximately nine million are released from local correctional facilities. According to the United States Department of Justice (2015), more than two-thirds of those who were formally incarcerated are rearrested within three years of their release; half of those individuals are re-incarcerated. Recidivism is an important policy that affects individuals across different races and ethnicities; however, former research has shown that reentry is more difficult for African Americans (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016). Recidivism impacts African American males at a disproportionate level throughout the United States. A convicted criminal's propensity to commit new crimes is known as recidivism (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016). African American males must continue to deal with racial impacts from various policies, including the War on Drugs and Jim Crow, which has influenced modern issues of reentry. African American males are overrepresented within America's prisons. Mass incarceration is not due to the changes in criminal misconduct but is a result of tough policies that had more of an effect on African Americans than any other race. In 1910, African Americans accounted for 31% of the prison population, although they only accounted for 11% of the population within the United States (Nellis, 2016). In 2016, African American males made up 41.3% of those incarcerated within federal and state correctional facilities (Nellis, 2016). The rate of imprisonment for African American males at a minimum of 18 years of age was 1,609 per 100,000 compared to 274 per 100,000 for Caucasians, and 857 per 100,000 for Hispanics. African American males also spend more time incarcerated than Caucasian males for committing crimes that are similar in nature (Alexander, 2012). Even though research has shown that African

Americans and Caucasians use illegal drugs at similar rates, the War on Drugs promoted punitive criminal justice policies that dramatically increased the prison population and disproportionately imprisoned African Americans for drug offenses (Polomarkakris, 2017).

After being released from a correctional facility, African Americans tend to deal with more collateral consequences of being incarcerated, which then places a limit on their abilities to reintegrate into society. 95% of individuals will return to their communities after being incarcerated; however, the outlook remains austere for inaccessible employment, social networks, and personal relationships (Reisig et al., 2007). Other collateral consequences of incarceration can include student loan restrictions, child custody restrictions, disenfranchisement, public service ineligibility, housing restrictions, and felon registration laws (Cox, 2011). Prior to being incarcerated, many African American males have limited employment skills and education, and a lack of vocational skills to help aid them upon their reentry into society. Former research conducted by Pager, Western, and Stugie (2009) discovered that many employers are unlikely to hire those who were formerly incarcerated, especially minorities. Even though incarceration by itself has been found to decrease employment opportunities by a third and hourly wages by 10 to 20 percent, African American males may find it tremendously difficult to not return to a correctional facility.

Background

The United States Constitution's 14th Amendment, enacted in 1868, guaranteed citizenship to all Americans and extended citizenship to anybody born or naturalized in the country, including freed slaves, "equal protection of laws" (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). The 14th Amendment helped abolish slavery and inaugurate both legal and civil rights for African Americans. However, the 14th Amendment showed that African Americans, as well as any other

individual born in the United States or those that have become naturalized, were, in fact, Americans. As a result, the 14th Amendment became a basis for various decisions across the Supreme Court. Section one of the 14th Amendment begins by defining citizenship: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside" (U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1). This definition contradicted the Supreme Court's infamous decision in the 1857 Dred Scott vs. Sandford case, where Chief Justice Roger Taney described that an African American was not able to claim rights of citizenship, even if they were born free.

Following, Section One states that "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States" (U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1). This clause protected those considered to be American citizens from infringement by the federal government and states. The next clause within Section One states, "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law." The Supreme Court has used this clause to reinforce laws and prevent infringement by states, including those computed within the Bill of Rights, such as the right to bear arms, free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, etc. Lastly, the equal protection clause within the 14th Amendment prevents state governments from discriminating against African Americans. The three-fifths clause, as stated within Section Two of the 14th Amendment, rescinded the idea of African Americans or enslaved individuals being only three-fifths of a person (U.S. Const. amend. XIV, 2). The 13th Amendment implemented that all residents, regardless of their race, are counted as one person (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). Within this section, it is also specified that males, despite their race, who are over the age of 21 have the right to vote.

In 1875, the Civil Rights Act was passed, guaranteeing that all Americans, regardless of color, are entitled to the same protections under the law as white people. Similar goals were pursued by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to end racial discrimination in housing, employment, education, and voting. Despite these guarantees by federal, state, and local governments, African American males with felony convictions often face the deprivation of these fundamental rights (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). Although some formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society successfully, many others encounter numerous obstacles upon their release. A deficient labor market for formerly incarcerated individuals is compounded by continued criminal involvement, limited schooling, and work experience.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (O'Brien, 2020), with approximately 2.2 million individuals behind bars in prisons and jails by the end of 2016. This translates to 655 incarcerations for every 100,000 U.S. residents, indicating a significant issue. Urban areas are fertile grounds for crime due to economic disparity and structural inequality (Shihadeh & Shrum, 2004). The lack of job opportunities may force previously incarcerated individuals to resort to illegal activities to support themselves and their families. Poor family relationships, excessive policing of African American males, and inadequate education systems exacerbate the situation, adversely affecting the quality of life in these communities. Additionally, communities where African American males are commonly released lack the necessary resources for successful reintegration into society. Studies have revealed that 68% of state-level former convicts are re-arrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 83% within nine years of release (Alper et al., 2018), with higher rates of recidivism observed among African American males than Caucasians (Alper et al., 2018).

Situation to Self

The motivation behind the study arises from the pressing need to address the ongoing challenges faced by African American males as they navigate the path of reintegrating into society post-incarceration. The incarceration rates of African American males have consistently reached high levels, exacerbating remaining racial disparities within the United States criminal justice system. Once released from a correctional facility, these individuals must confront numerous obstacles that hinder successful reintegration, thereby increasing their vulnerability to recidivism. Previous research has shown that the obstacles faced by African American males' post-incarceration are frequently overlooked, and their voices are often marginalized. By conducting the study, I aimed to highlight their perception of their lived experiences, providing a platform for their voices to be heard. To develop targeted interventions and aid in a successful reintegration process, it is essential to understand the barriers that these individuals face, the impact on the individual's psychological well-being, and the systemic barriers faced. In the study, the researcher adopted a social constructivist ontological stance. The researcher believes that reality is constructed using language, cultural contexts, and human interactions. An individual's understanding of the world around them and experiences is shaped by their interactions with other individuals. The researcher recognized that lived experiences are embedded in cultural and social contexts, which the researcher will acknowledge and explore in the research.

Within this study, a constructivism paradigm was applied to explore the multidimensional and sincerely personal narratives of African American males' post-incarceration. Recognizing the subjectivity and distinctive ways in which individuals build their understanding of the world, the research delved into the different webs of emotions, interpretations, and perceptions that

shape each individual's identity and path after incarceration. Through the use of open-ended interviews, the study sought to identify the relationship between personal agency, societal influences, and transformative moments that contribute to the determination of their reintegration journey. By valuing each participant and their lived experiences, the constructivist exploration sought to unravel the diverse and nuanced ways in which African American males perceive and reconstruct their lives, shedding light on the complications that motivate each experience post-incarceration.

By adopting a constructivism paradigm, the goal of this research is to contribute to a more inclusive and just society that supports African American males during their reintegration process. Guided by social constructivist ontological assumptions, relativist epistemological stances, and axiological commitments to cultural sensitivity and self-awareness, the study aims to expand the understanding of the lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration. By empowering this ostracized population and providing them with the tools needed to reintegrate successfully, we can work towards breaking a continuous cycle of incarceration, thus promoting positive societal transformation, and reducing recidivism rates.

Problem Statement

Considerable debate surrounds addressing the high recidivism among African American males in the United States. What has become even more questionable is the racial disparities found among the rates of recidivism. It was discovered that African American males may be six times more likely to be incarcerated than Caucasian males (Skeem, 2016). Private prisons were also reported to lack educational programs and vocational training that could help reduce recidivism rates (Savage, 2016). Vocational skills aid offenders in developing conversational skills, obtaining employment, and handling various work experiences (Richmond, 2014). It was

also found that approximately two-thirds of those ex-offenders who are unemployed have educational shortcomings and sporadic work histories. However, when combined with a criminal record, obtaining employment becomes challenging. The problem is that African American males face an insurmountable number of hurdles while trying to successfully reintegrate back into society.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Transcendental Phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the hurdles that ten former offenders in the State of Delaware encounter when attempting to access critical resources after release from incarceration. The study will also make use of labeling theory and critical race theory to demonstrate how the stigmatization of African American male ex-offenders affects their access to housing, education, employment, job training, health care, and the restoration of their voting rights. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the research sheds light on the various hurdles that shape the lives of African American males' post-incarceration. The research contributes to the understanding of race, incarceration, and reintegration while trying to pave the way for interventions.

The study employed a purposeful sampling method to provide insightful information and an understanding of the unique challenges that African American males encounter when reintegrating into society after incarceration. This study can be instrumental in aiding criminal justice professionals and policymakers to implement measures to support African American males upon their release from correctional facilities. These factors are crucial for the successful reentry of African American males into society. Additionally, as noted by Richmond (2014), high rates of recidivism can contribute to mass incarceration. The failure to adequately prepare

African American males for their reintegration into society can have negative implications for their perception of the prison rehabilitation system.

I addressed the gaps in the literature by conducting a qualitative study from the perspective of 10 African American male ex-offenders in Delaware. The study's primary focus was on how participants dealt with prejudices, attitudes, and societal opinions of ex-offenders, as well as the many challenges they encountered when trying to properly reintegrate into society. The project examined social perceptions of African American male ex-offenders as well as concerns related to housing, work, healthcare, voting rights, and education. The study sought to shed light on these experiences in order to better understand the difficulties these demographics face and to offer guidance to policymakers and those working in the criminal justice system on how to support them more effectively during the reentry process.

Significance of the Study

The difficulties African American male ex-offenders face in reintegrating into society were the main subject of this study. Ten African American male ex-offenders from Delaware were interviewed as part of a qualitative approach to this topic in order to learn more about their experiences. To accurately and impartially capture the participants' experiences, the interviews were conducted in person and recorded. The study also investigated the relationship between being an African American male with a criminal record and the chance of recidivism. By contributing to existing research, this study provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of ex-offenders and their re-entry into society, thereby adding value to the current knowledge on the subject.

The voices of African American males are often silenced or distorted. This study aimed to amplify their authentic voices through two main objectives. Firstly, to investigate the

challenges and experiences faced by African American males in accessing education, employment, housing, and voting rights after being released from prison. Secondly, to explore the negative stereotypes and biases against African American males that lead to increased encounters with law enforcement and societal scrutiny. This study has the potential to impact criminal justice stakeholders and policymakers in finding ways to decrease mass incarceration and recidivism rates among African American males. Additionally, it could provide insights for evaluating the effectiveness of correctional facility programs and their perception among African American males. These findings could contribute to dismantling biases, prejudices, and racial discrimination towards African American males within the United States criminal justice system

Research Questions

The lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration represent a precarious area of study within the United States criminal justice system, given the disproportionate representation of this specific population within the incarcerated community. Understanding the lives of this population post-incarceration is essential to create interventions and policies that can help support the reintegration process and reduce the likelihood of recidivism amongst African American males. This study used questions that dug into the unique perspectives and narratives of African American males as they find themselves navigating life outside of a correctional facility. To understand each participants lived experiences the study was guided by the following research questions:

Q1. What are the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society?

This particular research question is formulated to uncover the independent experiences and perceptions of African American males' post-incarceration as they reintegrate society. By

using a phenomenological research approach, the study allowed participants to share their lived realities and emotions thus providing valuable insights into the complexities of life post-incarceration. Understanding each participant can offer a unique perspective on the difficulties and opportunities that confronts individuals when reintegrating back into society.

    Q2. What obstacles, if any, are met by African American male ex-offenders that may have contributed to recidivism?

        This research question sought to identify the barriers and difficulties faced by African American male ex-offenders during their reintegration process, which can increase the risk of recidivism. By studying various factors such as minimal access to employment, strained societal relationships, economic hardships, and encounters with stigmatization and discrimination, the study aimed to highlight likely contributors to the rotating cycle of incarceration. Understanding these different obstacles and challenges is essential for developing interventions and support systems to enable successful reintegration.

    This phenomenological study sought to explore the lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration, emphasizing their struggles, resilience, and triumphs during the reintegration process. By addressing the aforementioned research question, the study aimed to contribute to the progression of information in the field of criminal justice and adopt a more knowledgeable and sympathetic approach to supporting the reintegration process of African American males into their communities.

Definitions

Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

Civil Rights: Protection from discrimination based on race, color, religion, or sex, as defined by federal statutes and the Constitution (Penningroth, 2021).

Ex-offender: A person who was previously incarcerated (Case, 2008).

Jim Crow: A collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation (Alexander, 2012)

Mass incarceration: Historically extreme rates of imprisonment and the concentration of incarceration among the most marginalized (Tucker, 2017)

Racial Disparities: Inequities and inconsistencies between the treatment of racial groups including economic status, income, housing options, societal treatment, safety, and myriad other aspects of life and society (Alexander, 2012).

Recidivism: the tendency of a convicted criminal to re-offend" (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016)

White or Caucasian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the study, including the problem statement, purpose statement, significance, and research questions. Male African American ex-offenders face several obstacles after being released from prison. The high percentage of recidivism among male African Americans shows that the criminal justice system does not successfully rehabilitate them. Recidivism is a significant failure in a system that was supposed to rehabilitate individuals in prison; a large percentage of African American males are likely to be rearrested.

Incarceration has a profound effect on the African American community. Not only does incarceration traumatize individuals, but it also perpetuates a stigma against those who have been incarcerated, which can then impede one's ability to obtain secure employment. The experiences that African American males face are complex due to ensuing discrimination and stigmas (Cooke, 2005). It is crucial that the criminal justice system and citizens acknowledge that these individuals have paid their debt to society, and their time to rebuild a normal life starts upon their release.

The goal of this phenomenological study was to shed light on the post-incarceration experiences of African American males. In Chapter 2, I provided a thorough assessment of the literature with an emphasis on the challenges that African American male ex-offenders experience and the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study aimed to shed light on the experiences of African American males seeking housing, employment, education, and healthcare after release from correctional institutions. Upon release, African American males often return to poor neighborhoods and face difficulty finding employment due to having a criminal record. These individuals lack the necessary resources for successful reentry, leading to high rates of recidivism. Inadequate access to housing, healthcare, and education further exacerbates their struggles. Bellair and Kowalski's (2011) research confirms the need for appropriate resources to facilitate reentry and reduce recidivism. This study adds to the literature by exploring the experiences of African American males in obtaining such resources, providing insight into improving their successful reentry into society.

The purpose of this project was to examine the experiences of African American boys in order to inform researchers in the social and behavioral sciences and, ultimately, to meet the needs of this community. In 2019, African American males were jailed at a rate of 1,096 per 100,000, compared to 525 per 100,000 for Hispanic men and 214 per 100,000 for Caucasian men, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2020). However, there is a paucity of study on this subject. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework that incorporates labeling theory and critical race theory. It also includes a thorough search for studies on the obstacles facing African American men as they try to find housing, work, healthcare, and education. The chapter also explores the history of the criminal justice system and African American males in American culture.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks utilized in this investigation will be labeling theory and

Critical Race Theory (CRT). Labeling theory supports the experiences of ex-offenders who are

African American men and the possibility that they will commit crimes again after reintegrating

into society. Communities, according to Bowman and Travis (2012), can assist these people in

overcoming their obstacles by offering them resources including housing, opportunities for

education, and work. By making these resources available, recidivism rates can be reduced. The

project will examine the challenges African American male ex-offenders encounter in accessing

these resources as well as how they are managed as they reintegrate into society. The

experiences of African American male ex-offenders can be examined in the context of

systematic racism and racial influences using the theoretical framework known as CRT. CRT is

aware that obstacles in the social and economic spheres, such as the difficulty in finding and

keeping a job, might prevent people from successfully reintegrating into society. According to

Johnson (2013), these obstacles can also result in mental health problems like depression,

recidivism, and loss of civil rights. Understanding these problems is crucial to develop policies

and programs that can assist African American male ex-offenders in overcoming these obstacles

and effectively reintegrating into society. Combining these theories will also shed light on how

institutional racism and structural inequalities impact the lives of African American male ex-

offenders and how this can result in high recidivism rates.

CRT is an academic concept that dates back to more than 40 years ago. CRT focuses on

the idea that race is socially constructed, and racism is not rooted in individuals but is something

that is rooted in various policies and legal systems (Cabrebra, 2018). CRT originated in the

1970s by scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Cheryl

Harris, Charles R. Lawrence III, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia J. Williams (Cabrebra, 2018). CRT was created as an extension of and critique of Critical legal studies (CLS) which suggests that the law reinforces power dynamics that favor the historically privileged and disadvantage the historically underprivileged (Garza & Ono, 2016). Wealthy and powerful individuals use the law to maintain their position in the hierarchy and oppress those beneath them (Garza & Ono, 2016). In this particular study, the theory views white supremacy and race as an intersectional social construct that advances the interests of those that are Caucasian at the expense of African Americans (Cabrebra, 2018). The legal system, according to CRT and CLS principles, is an ideological and political institution that justifies and validates the presence of the state. However, CRT differs from CLS and other forms of racial critique by treating race not as an independent variable but as a position of struggle (Garza & Ono, 2016). CRT is an analytical lens used to examine existing power, racism, and race within the United States. Theorists of CRT argue that race still matters, and that white supremacy is a constitutional feature of life within the United States. CRT seeks to explain that racism can exist without racists. Racism is more than prejudices and bigotry but is more of a systematic feature of social structure and because it is so deeply imbedded in social structures, it can be misconstrued as a natural process (Bonilla-Siva et al., 2008).

In explaining the high rates of mass incarceration among African American males, both class, inequalities, and race play significant roles in shaping the trends of the US criminal justice system. According to CRT, mass incarceration is not a mere response to an individual breaking the law but an act of social control that seeks to restore the racial hierarchy that existed during Jim Crow. African American males are also not successfully rehabilitated by the criminal justice system, which results in ongoing disparities in access to work, housing, and voting rights. CRT is

highly visible in America's criminal justice system due to various statistics, which show disproportionate numbers in both incarceration and recidivism rates of African American male ex-offenders. In 2000, African Americans represented 20% of Delaware's general population, 42% of those arrested, 64% of the prison population, and 86.8% of those that are incarcerated for drug offenses (Delaware Courts, 2019). Other studies have shown that the amount of African American males incarcerated far exceeds the rate of Caucasian males (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Additionally, African American males who murder an individual that is Caucasian are punished ten times more than as Caucasians who murder African Americans (McCoy & Rodericks, 2015).

According to Brinkley-Rubinstein (2013), incarceration prevents African American males from successfully reintegrating into society and causes both emotional and mental pain. Additionally, mass incarceration can have detrimental effects on the mental and emotional well-being of African American males, and ultimately impact their overall health status and that of their community (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2013). The economic consequences of imprisonment can also limit opportunities for wealth accumulation and access to better healthcare, neighborhoods, and schools, which can further perpetuate inequalities (Maroto, 2014). In this study, I will utilize CRT as a framework to direct theoretical attention to how racism is deeply ingrained in American culture and the concept of race itself. CRT also facilitates the examination of perceived racism and its impact on African American male ex-offenders' ability to reintegrate into society successfully.

Labeling theory was initially introduced by Tannenbaum (Berk, 2015) through his discussion of the "dramatization of evil." Tannenbaum believed that many children would participate in some deviant behavior and the reaction to the behavior leads to a self-fulfilling

prophecy where children that are labelled as delinquent will then engage in future deviant behavior. The children that are caught committing deviant behavior are treated differently than they were before getting caught and treated differently than those who have not been caught. As a result, the labelled children may reconsider their identities and change their behaviors to fit the new identity.

Labeling theory states that the behavior of an individual is influenced by the way other members of society label them. The theory was then popularized by sociologist Howard Becker, appearing in his book *Outsiders* (Berk, 2015). According to Becker (1963), both individuals and various acts are not naturally deviant until social groups define them to be. The foundation of labeling theory is how people establish and create their identities based on how society perceives them. According to this argument, African American males who are stigmatized by society as criminals may be more prone to commit crimes as a result of their categorization.

Moreover, labeling theory begins with the idea that no act is naturally criminal. The meaning of criminality is based on those who are in power through the use of laws enforced by law enforcement, courts, and correctional facilities. According to Becker (1963), deviation is not a collection of traits shared by individuals or groups, but rather a pattern of interactions between deviants and non-deviants and the way in which criminality is seen. Enforcing the status quo and designating conduct as deviant are tasks that law enforcement and courts are tasked with performing. Higher officials can strengthen society's power structure by labeling people and classifying transgression. For example, men can define deviancy for women, older generations as younger individuals, wealthy for poor, and racial majority groups as minorities. In summary, society's dominant groups make and apply labels to groups considered subordinate.

Although an ex-offender serves their time, when reintegrating back into society they are labeled despite the nature of their crime. As a result of having a label, individuals may have difficulty obtaining employment, housing, and security voting rights. When an often-negative label is applied from one societal group to another societal group it often creates a group known as "other"; therefore, the group or individual to whom the label has been applied is often stigmatized (Akers & Sellers, 2009). Labeling, despite an ex-offender's crime, has unfavorable effects on their interactions with a community and personal lives. According to the labeling hypothesis, a person's identity is solely derived through their social interactions with others (Banks, 2017). According to Akers & Sellers (2009), once someone is tagged, they may experience humiliation and embarrassment. According to Goffman (1963), people who have labels won't conduct themselves in a way that betrays the label; instead, they'll display behaviors that support the label.

One's identity is important when reintegrating back into society because it can explain how African American male ex-offenders will be treated by other members of society and their response to how they are treated, thus resulting in behaviors that confirm the given label or stereotypes. This is significant for people trying to reintegrate into society since it may be the cause of African American male ex-offenders' failure to successfully do so. According to Berk (2015), people may feel more defeated the more they are subject to rejection from a community; while people who are perceived as "normal" might not be affected by labels. Labeling theorists contend that when an individual receives a label that is deviant it promotes further deviant behavior (Bernburg, 2019). Akers and Sellers (2009) state that, "the central point of the labeling perspective, then, is that the disgrace suffered by people who are labeled as delinquent or criminal more often encourages than discourages future deviant behavior," (p.155). Labeling

theory is important with reintegration because it can explain why some African American male ex-offenders fail at reintegrating back into society or why they recidivate. People are frequently classified as offenders, parolees, or criminals after leaving prison or jail, which is a derogatory designation based on an unfavorable stereotype. These designations may have negative connotations, which adds to the stigma associated with them. These phrases are used to describe people who are seen as deviant (Bernburg, 2019). Once someone is shunned by society, it may be difficult for them to make a living through legal means, including getting a job or renting a place to reside. This is so that they won't associate with someone who has a label, according to members of mainstream culture (Bernburg, 2019). These people might therefore be compelled to form relationships with other people who have been marginalized and left out by society.

Labeling theory is a framework used to investigate the differential treatment within the criminal justice system and the barriers that African American males face upon being released back into society. Racial inequality helps generate a negative insight into labeling theory. The theory allows us to understand the various labels that are attached to minorities that commit crimes thus causing them to commit more crimes.

Related Literature

I began by doing a generic word search across several web search engines to construct my research. Peer-reviewed journals, various government documents, and a range of dissertations were accessible through search engines like Google Scholar, EBSCOhost Research Databases, ResearchGate, and the Jerry Farwell Library at Liberty University. The main phrases that were used were mass incarceration, recidivism, voting rights, ex-offenders, Black, White, Caucasian men, the criminal justice system, discrimination, racial inequities, and ex-offenders.

The literature collected was from 2014 to 2020. Overall, much of the research that was utilized was from academic peer-reviewed journals.

The literature emphasized racial inequities and how African American communities are affected by mass imprisonment. Researchers have looked at the connection between incarceration in large numbers and the recidivism rates of African American male ex-offenders. Studies show that African American males face higher rates of recidivism than Caucasian males in the United States. (Anderson & Groenig, 2016). The research sought to establish a link between African American male ex-offenders and recidivism rates, which can offer insightful information regarding the deficiencies of the criminal justice system in meeting the requirements of this community.

The literature assessment also identified gaps in the body of knowledge about the reintegration of African American males into society following incarceration. This investigation aimed to close this knowledge gap and shed insight into the experiences of African American boys, who are frequently ostracized in society. This study intended to provide useful recommendations for policymakers, the criminal justice system, and society at large to assist decrease the disproportionate incarceration rate of African American boys and enhance their reentry results by examining the experiences of African American males.

Civil Rights Movement

African American male inmates encounter several obstacles after being released from prison, which can be attributed to the Civil Rights movement. African Americans fought for equal rights in the US throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Before the movement, African Americans could not vote, they lost their property, and they lost basic rights as United States citizens. African Americans encountered various barriers due to not only having a criminal

record but due to the color of their skin. For those individuals that do have criminal records, the communities in which they returned to have made it harder for them by placing a label on them and taking their basic human rights away (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015).

The Civil Rights movement is viewed as a social justice movement where African Americans sought to have equal rights within the United States (Penningroth, 2021). Despite slavery being abolished in 1865, discrimination against African Americans continued along with negative labels being attached to African Americans. By the mid-20th century, African Americans had multiple run-ins with violence, and they were subjected to many prejudices. As a result, African Americans fought for equal rights over the course of two decades.

In 1868, through the 14th Amendment, African Americans were granted equal protection under the law (Johnson, 2013). In 1970, the 15th Amendment gave African Americans the ability to vote. Despite African Americans, being granted basic human rights, in the 19th century, Jim Crow laws were implemented to have subtle control of African Americans. Jim Crow laws were both local and state laws that enforced racial segregation across the United States. Due to Jim Crow laws, African Americans were prohibited from using the same restrooms, attending the same schools, or residing in the same areas (Johnson, 2013). Other laws prevented African Americans from voting while many were subjected to discrimination when seeking employment, residence, and education.

In June 1941, former President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented Executive Order 8802. The order allowed individuals to hold employment in the government regardless of their national origin, race, color, or creed (Bloom, 2019). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was implemented thus allowing for equal employment integrated public facilities, and limited voter literacy tests (Johnson, 2013). In 1965, former President Johnson implemented the Voting Rights

Act to ban literacy tests and in 1968, the Fair Housing Act was implemented to prevent housing discrimination (Bloom, 2019). The Fair Housing Act was the last legislation during the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement is widely recognized as a major achievement in American history, characterized by successive, targeted campaigns of non-violent direct action that successfully challenged racist power structures in the southern United States. However, despite these successes, the US still remains a substantively racially segregated country. The movement may have achieved significant progress, but it fell short of being truly revolutionary in terms of fundamentally restructuring American society and ending racial discrimination. Despite this, the movement continues to serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of fighting for social justice and equality.

Mass Incarceration

The criminal justice system and African American men have consistently interacted for a very long time. African Americans continued to experience prejudice despite the Civil Rights Movement's considerable accomplishments, particularly in the criminal justice system. In the United States, a large proportion of inmates were still African Americans. Between the middle of the 1970s and the start of the 2000s, the rate of incarceration in the United States increased at an unparalleled rate (Thompson, 2010). 2.5 million people, or about 1 in 100 individuals, were affected in 2008. On any given day, 2.12 million people are held in detention in the United States. When compared to other American countries, its high rates of incarceration are viewed as exceptional. The United States continues to imprison a large proportion of its population compared to other countries in the globe, notwithstanding the steady drop-in incarceration rates over the previous 20 years (Thompson, 2010).

According to Thompson (2010), Americans are 10 times more likely than citizens of Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark to be detained, condemned, and imprisoned. Mass incarceration is characterized by its systematic targeting of particular demographic groups; it does not affect all groups equally (Garland, 2001). Male African Americans who are incarcerated disproportionately often have low levels of education. The war on drugs and other tough policies have contributed to the mass incarceration of African American males in the United States. Graff (2015) reports that in 2009, the racial disparity for incarceration was six to one for African Americans. However, the impact of mass incarceration extends beyond the individuals behind bars. It also has indirect effects on their families, communities, and children.

Mass incarceration not only affects inequality by removing African Americans from society, but also leads to employment, voting rights, housing, and other related consequences. It is therefore important to understand the full extent of the consequences of mass incarceration, particularly on African American males and their families, to develop policies and practices that can mitigate these effects. Ethnic and racial disparities continue to be a significant contributor to inequality within the criminal justice system in the United States. African American males are roughly six times more likely to be jailed than Caucasian males, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016). According to Petit & Sykes (2015), this trend is anticipated to continue, with one in three African American males likely to spend at least a year in state or federal prison. According to research by Van Cleve and Mayes (2015), one in three African American males will serve time in prison over their lifetime, compared to one in seventeen Caucasian males. Additionally, although making up just 29% of the US population, African Americans and Latinos make up 57% of the prison population, demonstrating a major racial discrepancy inside the system.

The overrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities within the criminal justice system has negative consequences that extend beyond incarceration. It limits employment opportunities, access to education, and hinders social mobility, which further perpetuates inequality. It is essential to address the root causes of these disparities to achieve greater social justice and equality within the criminal justice system. In 1990, The Sentencing Project brought to light the rate at which African American males were being incarcerated (Roberts, 2014). The Sentencing Project found that one in three African American males between the ages of 20 and 29 years of age were the responsibility of the United States criminal justice system to include jail, prison, probation, or parole. African Americans have been disproportionately incarcerated since the 1980s (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015).

Many African Americans are removed from poor communities once they are incarcerated; once they are released from a correctional facility they then return to those same neighborhoods. Criminologists describe this as "coercive mobility." Coercive mobility is a theoretical framework describing the social impact of high incarceration rates on impoverished communities (Clear et al., 2003). Although it is the intent of prosecutors, judges, legislatures, and law enforcement, to defend citizens and communities, it is believed that coercive mobility actually increases crime and victimization in African American neighborhoods. Racial disparities within mass incarceration are often a reflection of differential enforcement. For instance, law enforcement officers are more likely to stop and search the automobiles of African Americans during traffic stops (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003). This resulted in higher opportunities for law enforcement to discovery criminal offending amongst African American males resulting in higher rates of incarceration.

Criminal Justice System

There is extensive historical evidence of racial inequities in the criminal justice system of the United States. Higher rates of arrest and incarceration for African American males were caused by the disparate racial impact of different laws and policies developed by the criminal justice system. African Americans in the South were the targets of various sorts of policing, sentencing, and detention despite Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which was issued on January 1, 1863, and declared all slaves held in rebellious states to be free. The criminal justice system was implemented as a method of racial control in the Southern States after slavery was abolished in 1865, where over 90% of the population was African American (Ujaama, 2021). Black codes or black laws were implemented in 1865 to govern the conduct of freed African Americans (Ujaama, 2021).

Black codes forced former slaves into exploitative labels that had similarities to the plantation regime. Black Codes were part of a bigger picture of Caucasians seeking to suppress freed African Americans and maintain their political dominance. Although many African American slaves were emancipated, they were held to many restrictions due to Black Codes. Black Codes required African Americans to sign labor contracts with Caucasian employers. If they refused or did not fulfill the terms listed in the contract, then they would be incarcerated or fined. Once Black Codes were deemed invalid due to the 14th Amendment and the 1866 Civil Rights Ace, vagrancy laws were enacted. Vagrancy laws criminalized those that were unemployed and allowed for harsh punishments for minor infractions (Carlin, 2016).

Ultimately, Black codes were used to prevent African Americans from testifying in court against Caucasians (Carlin, 2016). At the time, African Americans were viewed as property and not people. A statement or testimony from an African American towards a Caucasian was

considered inadmissible in court. As a result, Caucasians became the only credible witness within a courtroom. After slavery, African Americans had numerous other restrictions placed upon them such as not being able to learn how to read or write. African Americans were also not able to own property and/or firearms. If the individual was not Caucasian, then they were considered unreliable and African American.

Researchers have worked to understand how certain laws and policies, like the war on drugs, inside the criminal justice system affect African American males. The Regan administration started the drug war in the 1980s, and the harsh laws that resulted from it had a big influence on the African American population as they were processed through the criminal justice system. (Nunn, 2002). During this time, crack was an inexpensive drug used primarily in minority neighborhoods; however, the use of crack was spreading to Caucasian neighborhoods. Prior to the crack epidemic, cocaine was an expensive drug that was primarily used in Caucasian neighborhoods with little interference from law enforcement (Nunn, 2002). Once the cocaine was transformed in a more affordable drug it was more easily accessible for African Americans thus now making it a priority within the criminal justice system. The sale of crack cocaine carried heavier penalties over powder cocaine; this resulted in a disproportionate number of African Americans being criminalized (Nunn, 2002).

African American communities have been affected by the war on drugs considerably more severely than Caucasian communities. According to Small (2001), African American communities have endured the brunt of the war on drugs; African Americans have been arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned at significant rates since the implementation of the war on drugs. The rates are out of significant proportion compared to the general population of African Americans or compared to the drug use population. Studies show that African Americans

account for approximately 13% of drug users within the United States while Caucasians account for approximately 75% (Hinton, Henderson, & Reed, 2018). However, 75% of those incarcerated for drug offenses are African American; this signifies extreme racial disparities within the war on drugs. Due to the number of African Americans throughout the criminal justice system as a result of the war on drugs, African Americans were viewed as being the main cause of the drug problem within the United States.

Male African American ex-offenders encounter numerous difficulties when they reintegrate into society. According to studies, they are more prone than people of other races to experience unjust treatment and discrimination. The reason for this is that systemic racial profiling makes it more probable for African American males to interact with the criminal justice system. Their problems are made much more difficult by the fact that they are more likely to be targeted due to their color and criminal history. According to a study by Brown (2017), racism has a major impact on the ability of African American male ex-offenders to navigate society, notably whether looking for housing, employment, or exercising their right to vote. African American male ex-offenders may have a poor opinion of the criminal justice system and experience sentiments of despair and hopelessness as a result of these impediments to social and political participation. They can be more inclined to commit crimes as a result, continuing the cycle of prejudice and marginalization they experience. This emphasizes how urgently the criminal justice system needs to be changed in order to guarantee that everyone, regardless of color or background, is treated fairly and given an equal chance to rebuild their life after jail.

If African American male ex-offenders are granted the same fundamental rights as other races, recidivism can be reduced. Studies show that although African American men are overrepresented in the population, they do not commit more crimes than men of other races

(Brown, 2017). Male African Americans are disproportionately singled out for racial profiling and prejudice, which increases their likelihood of being detained for traffic violations (Alexander, 2010). African Americans received heavier and lengthier sentences that resulted in incarceration, although having fewer convictions than Caucasians, according to research (Graff, 2015). Additionally, drug possession and/or sales charges were more frequently brought against African Americans. The criminal justice system contains numerous racial prejudices, according to the Sentencing Project. According to Lofstrom and Raphael (2016), racial biases have been found to affect prosecutors' decisions. According to a study, African American males have twice as much of a risk of getting charged with murdering a Caucasian person as Caucasians have while doing so (Lofstrom & Raphael, 2016).

The United States of America is founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice for all. The criminal justice system, as an essential part of the country's governance, is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their race, receive fair and equal treatment under the law. However, despite the constitution's mandate for equal justice, various biases and disparities have emerged within the American criminal justice system. One of the most significant disparities is the disproportionately high number of African American males who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Researchers have identified that implicit racial biases, often held by individuals in positions of power, have played a significant role in these disparities (Valera et al., 2019). These biases, while often not intentionally exhibited, can have a profound impact on the outcomes of cases involving African American males. Consequently, efforts are being made to address these biases and promote fairness and equity in the criminal justice system. Implicit racial biases are relations made by individuals within the unconscious state of mind and have been studied within different stages of the criminal justice

system and the effects on law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, public defenders, the courts, and sentencing decisions. Approximately seven in 10 African Americans state that implicit racial biases have posed an obstacle in their lives (Peffley, 2017). Implicit racial biases have been identified as a source of tension between African American communities and law enforcement. With unconscious racial associations possibly influencing law enforcement officers and their daily tasks, law enforcement officers may pass judgment about the danger posed by suspects (Pelley, 2017).

Racial biases have been identified in traffic stops amongst Caucasians and African Americans. A study conducted by Schleiden (2020), showed that African Americans are 20 percent more likely to be stopped while driving compared to Caucasian drivers. The study also found that once stopped, African Americans are searched approximately one and a half to two times more than Caucasian drivers; however, African Americans were less likely to be in possession of guns, drugs, or any other illegal contraband compared to their Caucasian peers. Additionally, African American drivers are twice as likely to be subjected to deadly force at the hands of law enforcement.

Many African Americans have negative views of criminal justice due to experiences of unfair treatment. When individuals experience unfair treatment from the criminal justice system, the tendency to cooperate with and trust the criminal justice system diminishes (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). Incarceration has both short- and long-term effects on African Americans, their families, and their communities. Research has shown that incarceration has effects on employment, health, housing, and political engagement (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018).

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are rooted within the United States and overlap with the establishment of slavery. Stereotypes have been largely connected to racism and discrimination and have had a negative impact on African American communities and their families. Some of the stereotypes include African Americans being lazy, unintelligent, violent, and born criminals. These stereotypes have affected one in obtaining employment, education, and housing. Stereotypes also affect one's socioeconomic status. The stereotype against African Americans has also caused influence over the decisions made my lawmakers, business owners, and educators. Stereotypes can be defined as cognitive structures that contain an individual's beliefs, knowledge, and expectations about a particular group of people (Green, 1998). Racial stereotypes are known to be fabricated beliefs that all members of a particular race share the same characteristics (Green, 1998). Negative stereotypes stem from racial attitudes that stemmed from discriminatory actions towards African Americans.

Stereotypes of African American men historically have been present throughout American folklore. Hawkins (2017) believed stereotypes to be the dis-beliefs and beliefs of any group of people. Stereotypes are inflated beliefs that are associated with a category and are also described as being "pictures in our heads". Like prejudices, stereotypes have highlighted various aspects of African American males. However, the stereotypes have been limited to being negative. Two stereotypes have neem highlighted to insinuate African American men: brute and sambo (Hawkins, 2017). Both of these stereotypes were created by Europeans to belittle African American men and to secure their positions within society. Brute describes African American males as violent, unreliable, and rude while sambo describes African American males as childlike. Macolin and Herrera (2006) state that European Americans have utilized stereotypes to

bring attention to racially motivated beliefs that characterize African American males in a derogatory context.

Stereotypes are found to be well-established within North American and can exist in various forms with race and gender being the most common (Macolin & Herrera, 2006). Offenders are also subjected to a wealth of stereotypes; society has a pattern of looking down on offenders and categorizing them as being dangerous, uneducated, undesirable, and unhygienic (Hirshfield & Piquero, 2010). The characteristics of a stereotype geared towards former offenders can be used to place a label on any or all former and current offenders. Hirshfield and Piquero (2010) state, "Successful community reentry and the criminological impact of incarceration may depend in part on the attitudes (and consequent reactions) that prisoners encounter [from others] after release" (p. 27). If a community welcomes former offenders back into the community despite prior criminal transgressions, then they are more than likely to succeed at reintegration. However, if the former offenders are rejected by their community and subjected to stereotypes then the chances of recidivism will increase (Braithwaite, 2000).

People who may be classified as deviants may feel alienated from society because of how others perceive them as a result of their actions. According to Akers and Sellers (2009), labeling theory is based on a symbolic interactionist perspective that contends that a person's identity, self-concept, cognitive functions, attitudes, and values can only be understood in the context of how society responds, acts, and changes in social interactions with others. Male African Americans who may feel excluded because of the deviant label society has assigned them will start to think of themselves as deviants when they internalize the label. According to Akers and Sellers (2009), people who are given the term "deviant" will accept it as a component of their self-identity and act in ways that are consistent with the label. Regardless of the crime, former

offenders are stereotyped as being insuppressibly bad; therefore, these individuals spend a lot of their fighting the battle between the stereotypes and their identities (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Former offenders may find it difficult to reintegrate back into society and may often be unprepared for rejection thus making it more difficult to obtain necessary resources such as employment and housing. Labeling theory theorizes that the behavior of individuals may be defined or manipulated by the terms used to describe them.

Caucasians have longed viewed criminal and bad behavior as an inherent characteristic of African Americans (Welch, 2007). Crime being attributed to African Americans is not a new event, these inclinations date back to slavery within the United States. The 1970s through the early 1980s is when African Americans consistently found themselves being stereotyped as a criminal (Welch, 2007). Stereotypes range from rapists, thieves, or just criminal black men. The criminal image of African American men continuously evolves towards a more threatening image in which Mauer (2011) describes criminality as believed to be a biological flaw within African American making racial profiling to be the root cause of the growing perception of criminality among African American males. Law enforcement officers target African American males during investigations, assuming they are likely to be involved in illegal activities. Such practices, while intended to reveal criminal involvement, often lead to discrimination and incorrect information. Researchers believe that while some law enforcement practices may be based on actual criminal behavior, others are influenced by implicit biases and stereotypes (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003).

Male African Americans are overrepresented in the criminal justice system of the United States, where they use it more frequently than members of the general community as a whole. The large proportion of African American males who use the US legal system is thought to be

one of the main causes of this disproportionality. According to studies, African American males are more likely than those of other races to be given harsh sentences (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). In order to increase conviction rates and lengthen sentences, prosecutors are known to exploit racial prejudices by portraying African American males as violent offenders. As a result, a high percentage of African American males are found guilty and given sentences by courts, which further serves to confirm the perception that criminal behavior is associated with African American males. The racial discrepancies within the criminal justice system are a result of the maintenance of stereotypes.

<div align="center">

"Thug"

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Race is the most significant distinction in the United States (Moore et al., 2018). Racial ideology was discovered during the Enlightenment Era when Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson formulated biological racial differences (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Former president Thomas Jefferson highlighted physical differences such as skin color and hair textures as the basis for racial differences. These ideologies were carried on in history to form the various notions of race along with the racial dynamics of inferiority and superiority. During slavery, the image of African American males was pictured as a brute. The brute image portrays African American males as savage, destructive, animalistic, and criminals that are deserving of death (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). They are also depicted as terrifying criminals that target victims, especially white women. During the 21st century, the brute image has shifted to a thug image.

On 28 April 2015, former president Barack Obama identified a group of individuals from Baltimore, Maryland as "thugs." His use of the word thug became the pinnacle of the world's use to identify groups of African American males as thugs. The term thug has been utilized to describe African American males who do not meet the specification of white America. The term

thug originated in Indie to describe men participating in organized crime (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). In the American context, Caucasians use the term thug as a synonym for the term nigger. The term thug has been widely used by politicians to law enforcement during suspected cases of racial profiling. The term thug has been utilized as a smoke screen for the killings of young African American men such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice.

Racial Profiling

The United States has made considerable strides in racial relations; opportunities that were formerly unavailable to various groups of individuals due to their race are now open. It has been discovered that social forces shape race (Case, 2008). African Americans are viewed as being at the bottom of the social hierarchy, while Caucasians are at the top, according to the rigidly enforced black vs white paradigm. The one-drop rule, commonly known as hypodescent, states that someone is considered to be African American if they have even one ancestor who was an African American (Khanna, 2010). Since the early 1970s, the norms of American citizens have moved towards being more colorblind. In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream speech," he emphasized that individuals to be judged by their character and not solely on the color of their skin. A study showed that a majority of Caucasians believe in equal treatment towards African Americans in regard to housing, employment, and education. With the change of norms in American society, there has been a shift in attitudes toward race. However, studies show that discriminatory practices, prejudices, and racial profiling are still present in current times.

Racial profiling is a persistent problem in the United States that has violated the equal protection rights of every citizen. This is particularly true for African American males who are overrepresented as both victims and offenders in the criminal justice system. Despite being only

12.7 percent of the population in 2003, African Americans were arrested for 37 percent of violent crimes and 29 percent of property crimes. The disproportionate representation of African American males in the criminal justice system is evidence of racial profiling and bias among law enforcement officials (Schleiden et al., 2020). African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to become victims of major crimes, according to studies. For instance, according to Smiley & Fakunle (2016), African Americans were more likely than Caucasians to be murdered in 2019. The structural inequality that still plagues the American criminal justice system is highlighted by the overrepresentation of African American males in the system and their higher victimization rates. According to the American Civil Liberties Union racial profiling "*refers to the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin. Criminal profiling, generally, as practiced by police, is the reliance on a group of characteristics they believe to be associated with crime. Examples of racial profiling are the use of race to determine which drivers to stop for minor traffic violations (commonly referred to as "driving while black or brown"), or the use of race to determine which pedestrians to search for illegal contraband."* *"Driving while black" has been used to describe the act of law enforcement officers stopping African Americans without having any probable cause* (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003).

There are two different definitions of racial profiling, as described by Ramirez, Hoopes, & Quinlan (2003). These definitions include a broad and narrow definition. The broad definition involves the routine use of race as a factor in combination with other factors, such as age and sex, which causes an officer to act with suspicion and take action. The narrow definition of racial profiling occurs when law enforcement stops or searches for an individual solely based on their race or ethnicity. African American males are often profiled not only when driving, but also

when shopping, working, walking, running for political office, and even banking. Such profiling can lead to unjustified suspicion and negative consequences for innocent individuals. Law enforcement's use of stereotypical biases has resulted in a disproportionate number of African American males being stopped, questioned, and searched. This preconception leads law enforcement to assume that African American males are involved in criminal activities (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003). The negative perception of African American males is prevalent among many Caucasians. African American males are at high risk of being stopped and investigated by law enforcement, especially when traveling through white neighborhoods. As a result of this disproportionate targeting, African American males are also disproportionately arrested. Racial Profiling was challenged back in 1968, during Terry vs. Ohio (Jones, 2018). In this case, a police officer from Cleveland, Ohio observed two men walking back and forth in front of a store and looking inside. The officer was led to believe that they were scoping the area and the store to commit a robbery and that the individuals may be armed. Based on suspicion, but without full probable cause, the officer followed two men and observed the officer meeting with another man. The officer then stopped the three men and asked for their names. When the officer received a mumbling response, he frisked the three men discovering guns on two of the individuals. The Supreme Court held that if a police officer has reasonable suspicion that an individual is about to or has committed a crime or appears to be a threat to law enforcement or others, then a stop and search is constitutional (Jones, 2018). Terry v. Ohio says a law enforcement officer does not need probable cause to stop someone; all the officer needs is reasonable suspicion. The decision was meant to protect the public from violent and dangerous individuals; however, this decision has also led to widespread police abuse and significant racial profiling throughout the United States against African American males.

Over the last few decades, various policies and practices of the criminal justice system has had a concentrated severe effect on African American males. Crime policies to include mandatory minimum sentencing, 3-strikes, truth in sentencing, and sentencing guidelines has been used at both state and federal levels. Schleiden (2020) argues that these various policies have reduced the rate of crime. Other researchers have argued that these various policies have been a method to link crime to African American males to create public support for crime control policies and to cause fear to the racial group (Drakulich, 2015). Studies also show that Caucasians believe that African American males are prone to being a criminal, thus causing them to be afraid of African American males. Researchers have identified the disadvantages faced by minorities within the criminal justice to various factors: police preference results in higher arrest rates; get tough policies such as the War on Drugs; sentencing disparities; the death penalty against African Americans (Peffley et al., 2017).

Recidivism

In comparison to Caucasian male ex-offenders, African American male ex-offenders are shown to have the highest rate of recidivism and the shortest period before being reincarcerated (Gill & Wilson, 2017). Recidivism was defined by Butorac, Gracin, and Stani (2017) as a criminal conduct relapse that results in a new arrest, new conviction, and a new sentence. Recidivist behavior requires interaction with the possibility of getting locked up once more. One competing viewpoint holds that regardless of the strength of the defense, recidivism must occur whenever a person has any subsequent encounter with the criminal court system (Durose, 2014).

Recidivism has been determined by one's previous arrest, sentence, and/or detention (Lockwood et al., 2015). Research shows that what makes an individual a recidivist is not what they did, but their past experiences with sentence, arrest, and/or detention within the criminal

justice system. The meaning of recidivism has shaped correctional facilities, legislations, rehabilitation programs, and research in the field of criminal justice. Research has shown that African Americans are both arrested, charged at higher rates, and given longer sentences than Caucasians (Lockwood et al., 2015). African Americans are more likely to engage in various rehabilitation programs in correctional facilities; however, African Americans are more likely to encounter recidivism.

A wealth of research has shown multiple factors in the high rates of recidivism of African American males to include environmental factors, education, and employment (Andrews, 2019). African American males have been found to be overrepresented within the criminal justice system, and once released many African American males are left to survive on their own and return to communities filled with crime. Morenoff and Harding (2008), conducted a study on ex-offenders from Michigan State Prison and the correlation between communities, employment, and recidivism. It was founded that most of the African American male's ex-offenders who returned to a disadvantage neighborhood were more likely to be incarcerated. Due to the high numbers, researchers can conclude that incarceration does not serve as an effective deterrent from committing crime.

A good amount of research has been dedicated to the start of criminal behavior, during adolescence (Drakulich, 2015). Criminal behavior has been found to correlate with poverty, minimal educational resources, and learning complications (Andrews, 2019). In order to prevent a criminal lifestyle, it is suggested that these issues be addressed during adolescence. African American juveniles are approximately 45% more likely to commit subsequent offenses after the original conviction (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). It is important to study one's environment; severe environments can lead to trauma, which then can result in an immature brain which

results in recidivism (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Trauma is defined as being an experience that is viewed as a threat to one's physical or emotional safety (Peffley et al., 2017). It was found that approximately 90 percent of African American males that are incarcerated experience past trauma. It was shown that trauma that is not addressed continues into adulthood, leading to mental illnesses amongst ex-offenders, ultimately resulting in recidivism (Lockwood et al., 2015).

Employment

Employment is a need for many individuals to include ex-offenders; employment provides social connections, self-worth, societal contribution, and income (Lockwood et al., 2015). Davis, Charter, and Morgan (2013) emphasized the importance of successful employment in reducing recidivism rates among offenders. However, ex-offenders often face significant challenges when seeking employment, especially when they have a felony record. Obtaining employment is often a critical factor for ex-offenders to succeed and avoid returning to a correctional facility. Several studies have shown that having employment is associated with reduced levels of recidivism among ex-offenders. Unfortunately, many ex-offenders encounter several barriers to employment after being released from a correctional facility, including financial and educational obstacles, legal barriers, and employer biases towards individuals with criminal records (Burt, 2018). These challenges make it difficult for ex-offenders to secure meaningful employment, despite the benefits of employment in reducing recidivism. Although obtaining and maintaining employment is critical to African American male ex-offenders when reintegrating back into society, employers may already have their set on interests when considering hiring an ex-offender.

Research suggests that African American men face significant obstacles when it comes to obtaining employment. Prior to incarceration, many offenders experience high rates of unemployment which can lead to a greater risk of re-offending if employment is not secured after release (Holzer et al., 2003). Moreover, African American men have to overcome negative stereotypes in the hiring process, as they are often perceived as undisciplined, incompetent, lazy, and rebellious by Caucasians (Holzer et al., 2003). This can result in difficulty finding employment even for those with no criminal record. In fact, African American men have the highest unemployment rates of any racial group in the United States (Alper et al., 2018). These barriers to employment can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to reintegrate into society after incarceration and may contribute to recidivism rates. African American men who returned to their communities after being released from a correctional institution found it more difficult to make connections within their communities (Cooke, 2005). When one is unable to make connections within their community both sociological and economic consequences arise. As a result of these consequences, one's basic needs are not met. Strickland (2008) conducted a qualitative study to explore how African American male ex-offenders build social capital to obtain and maintain employment.

The study collected data through semi-structured interviewed with twenty African American males who were formerly incarcerated. The study argued that maintaining employment was a crucial factor in success post release; other factors included stigmatization, and racial discrimination. With these factors African American males may find it difficult to build connections with individuals who will help them obtain and maintain employment. The study also examined how despite barriers, some former offenders are able to obtain employment and successfully reintegrate back into society.

According to Burt (2018), employers fear that hiring male ex-offenders could case issues to their place of business. Within the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII states that "*an employer can be held liable for treating people with similar criminal records differently, or for maintaining a policy that screens individuals based on criminal history-but only if such differential treatment is otherwise tied to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin* (Bloom, 2019)." Employment is important for the successful reintegration of a former offender; however, communities will often negatively label African American male ex-offenders due to having a criminal record.

When ex-offenders are offered employment when reintegrating into society, employers are then promoting positive change. Many employers deny African American male ex-offenders' employment even though there are laws that prevent employers from discriminating against them. The backgrounds of these former offenders may deter employers from hiring them even if it bears no weight on their ability to perform the job. The repercussions of weakened employment opportunities and loss of wages can have a far-reaching impact on economic security, self-sufficiency, and family well-being (Cooke, 2005). Post-release, incarceration has been found to significantly limit employment opportunities, particularly for low-skilled African American men, leading to prolonged periods of unemployment. Furthermore, studies show that any negative interaction with the criminal justice system can have adverse effects due to the conflict between court demands and work obligations, such as repeated court appearances (Crutchfield & Weeks, 2015).

Although the research on the consequences of other types of police and court interactions is more varied, the negative implications remain evident. It is crucial to highlight that this is not always the case, even while some studies have indicated that finding jobs for African American

male ex-offenders is not a huge problem. Although initiatives like the Second Chance Act of 2007 and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program have been put in place to help ex-offenders reintegrate into society, many obstacles still stand in the way. Because of prejudices and unfavorable preconceptions connected to criminal histories, some businesses may still be reluctant to hire ex-offenders despite the existence of these programs. Furthermore, while the Second Chance Act of 2007 and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program both offer valuable resources, they do not offer a solution to the difficulties that African American male ex-offenders facing employment encounter.

The job search process can be made more difficult by additional issues such as a lack of education, a lack of employment skills, and the stigma associated with incarceration. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more difficult for ex-offenders to get employment as a result of extensive layoffs and hiring freezes brought on by the economic crisis. Due to institutional impediments that contribute to their disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment, it is crucial to keep addressing them even though some African American male ex-offenders are able to find employment. This involves advocating equitable hiring practices, expanding access to educational opportunities, and supporting laws that lessen prejudice against those with criminal records. We can contribute to the development of a more just and equitable society for all by taking a holistic approach to tackling the difficulties ex-offenders of African American descent encounter when looking for work.

Voting Rights

The impact of felony convictions on civic engagement extends beyond voting rights. Individuals with criminal records are often excluded from participating in other forms of civic engagement, such as volunteering and community service (Miles, 2004). This can have

detrimental effects on the individual's sense of belonging and connection to their community, as well as on the community itself, which misses out on the potential contributions of these individuals. Additionally, the stigma associated with having a criminal record can lead to social isolation and further marginalization, making it even more difficult for individuals to reintegrate into society and become productive members of their communities.

Addressing the issue of disenfranchisement and promoting civic engagement for individuals with criminal records is essential for creating a more inclusive and just society. This underscores the significant impact of mass incarceration on the political participation of African American men. Even those who have not been directly impacted by disenfranchisement due to criminal convictions may experience reduced engagement and participation due to the overall climate of criminalization and stigma associated with race and crime in the United States. This can contribute to a sense of disempowerment and disengagement from the political process, which can in turn perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and exclusion from civic life. To address these issues, it is important to implement policies and practices that promote equity, fairness, and inclusion for all individuals, regardless of their past involvement with the criminal justice system. This can involve reforms to sentencing and incarceration practices, as well as efforts to expand voting rights and increase political participation among marginalized communities.

Multiple states across the United States prevent former offenders from voting once they are released back into society. Other states restore the rights of former offenders but not until the successful completion of probation or parole. The suspension or withdrawal of voting rights due to being a convicted felon is known as felony disenfranchisement (Morris, 2021). Felony disenfranchisement does not fall equally among all citizens within the United States; African American males are disproportionately impacted as they are overrepresented within the criminal

justice system. One in 13 African American male ex-offenders is prohibited from casting a ballot in the United States (King & Erickson, 2016). The disproportionate impact on African Americans can be rooted in systematic racism that dates to the Reconstruction Era.

Until 1868, African Americans were not considered to be legal citizens of the United States thus preventing them from voting. States across the United States created and allowed various barriers to prevent individuals from voting. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment banned the denial of suffrage to citizens of the United States "on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude," thus extending voting rights to African American males. However, due to the violent suppression of African American votes during the Reconstruction Era, frail federal enforcement, and the implementation of disenfranchisement measures, many African American were prevented from voting (King & Erickson, 2016).

Through the founded literature, felony disenfranchisement has been found to have multiple impacts on African American male ex-offenders. One of the most common found impacts talks about African American males being disproportionately affected. Utilizing labeling theory, Bernburg (2019) conducted a study focusing on the importance of societal relationships. The author discusses that denying African American male ex-offenders the right to vote can lead to an increase in recidivism because they are often alienated from the population (Bernburg, 2019). Social Stratification has been found to be a result of felony disenfranchisement because African American males may see themselves as having no right in the democracy of the United States.

Housing

For African American males who are resettling in their communities, finding housing has also consistently been a challenge (Bender et al., 2016). Private property owners may run

background checks on applicants, which might lead to anyone with a criminal past being turned down for housing (Bender, et al., 2016). In a 2013 study, Thompson looked at the issue of public housing residents allowing families of ex-offenders to live with them after their release back into society. Tenants of public housing may frequently be required to sign rental agreements that forbid ex-offenders from residing there. Families may therefore be unable to support persons who are seen as ex-offenders.

The inability of an ex-offender to find accommodation has an impact on their capacity to find and keep a stable job (Schneider, 2017). According to Thompson (2013), finding and keeping a stable home and a job are intertwined. Ex-offenders must be able to offer a phone number and address where employers can reach them when applying for a job; without a phone number or address, ex-offenders frequently lose out on job possibilities. Ex-offenders may remain at shelters when transitioning back into society, but there is frequently a lack of privacy. Ex-offenders may experience emotions of instability due to the lack of privacy and frequent perceptions that they are only living there temporarily.

Family

African American men ex-offenders frequently have families that need their support once they are released from prison for corrections. They frequently wonder how they will be able to support their families financially, such as through child support payments, since they are unable to find and keep a job. All people, including ex-offenders, are required by the American criminal justice system to pay back their child support obligations (Roman & Link, 2017). When African American male ex-offenders return to society, they are reminded of the value of looking after their families and kids in order to strengthen family ties.

According to Spjeldnes, Yamatani, and McGowan (2015), almost 50,000 people are behind bars as a result of unpaid child support. In addition, due to their post-incarceration socioeconomic condition, fathers of African American children are more likely to re-offend than fathers of Caucasian children. Ex-offenders who are African American men frequently struggle to find and keep jobs, which makes it difficult for them to pay child support. In conclusion, male African Americans who have been incarcerated frequently have financial obligations to support their children after their release.

<center>**Summary**</center>

In Chapter 2 of the study, the difficulties that African American male ex-offenders have in reintegrating into society are highlighted along with an outline of the theoretical framework and literature review that guide the research. The review offers solid proof of how these obstacles may significantly affect people's access to housing, employment, and voting rights. The literature also emphasized the pervasive racial biases in the criminal justice system as well as the unfavorable preconceptions that might make it difficult for African American male ex-offenders to reintegrate into society. African American males have been unfairly stigmatized due to their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Despite comprising a disproportionate number of arrests, convictions, and incarcerations, the perception of African American male criminals is not rooted in reality. Rather, it is the result of the harmful linking of race to crime, which has perpetuated stereotypes and cast African American males as a threat to society. Law enforcement tactics have often exploited race during criminal investigations, further entrenching these stereotypes. Only when the criminal justice system acknowledges and addresses its discriminatory practices and stereotypes can racial profiling be eliminated, and the barriers faced by African American males be reduced.

There is a dearth of information addressing the difficulties African American male ex-offenders face during reentry, even though past studies have focused on early involvement with the criminal justice system and early identification of deviant behavior in children rather than adults. Most studies employ quantitative research methods, which fail to capture the microaggressions endured by this population. The literature often adopts a cultural model that attributes the inequalities faced by African American males to their own actions rather than to institutional structures or environmental factors. As such, the literature has not adequately addressed the biases African American ex-offenders face in housing, employment, education, and voting, nor has it focused on how society should facilitate their reintegration into society. Utilizing a transcendental phenomenological research approach, the study captured the lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration and gained a deeper understanding of the obstacles they face while trying to reintegrate back into society. Chapter 3 outlines the study's research design, research questions, setting, participants, data collection, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter describes research methods selected to study the post-incarceration experience of African American men. A transcendental phenomenological investigation model was chosen for this study as it allows for a detailed investigation of the participants' experiences and perceptions. This qualitative research design used a phenomenological approach that emphasized the need to understand the nature of human experience as perceived by participants. The purpose of this study was to investigate the obstacles African American male inmates face after their release from prison and their experiences of reintegration into society. African American males who have served time in prison and are now residing in the community are the participants in this study. Snowball sampling, which entails selecting one participant who satisfies the study's requirements and asking them to recommend additional persons who might be interested in taking part, was also used to find the participants. The methodology for this study involved conducting in-depth interviews with the selected participants to gather information about their experiences post-incarceration. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis includes the coding process and analysis of transcribed interviews to identify repeated themes and patterns in each of the participants experiences. The data analysis process is led by the research questions and the research objectives. The ethical considerations of this study included obtaining informed consent from the participant and then ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology, design, participants, methodology, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations that guide the study of the post-incarceration experience of African American men.

In this section, I describe the qualitative research that guided my study. The qualitative research design consisted of informative principles that make an individual's world visible to other individuals and is utilized when attempting to empower individuals to tell their stories along with minimizing the perceived power of the researcher over the participants (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Qualitative research is also utilized for the researcher to be able to listen to first-hand information from the participants. The researcher opted to utilize a qualitative research design to obtain a rich description of the phenomenon such as a participant's behaviors, needs, desires, and emotions whereas, quantitative research will only provide numbers. The research design will be conducted to obtain the perspectives of African American male ex-offenders regarding recidivism. The goal of this phenomenological qualitative study was to hear voices that have been silenced historically and to identify different variables that cannot be easily measured. The voices to be captured in this study are those of African American male ex-offenders. The study analyzed the issues of recidivism from the perspective of this group seeking necessary resources such as employment and housing post-incarceration. Participants in this study were individuals who reside in the state of Delaware. Further participant descriptions will be discussed later in the section.

Design

In this study, the researcher used a transcendental phenomenological approach to delve into the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders in Delaware. This qualitative method was chosen as it allowed for a deep exploration of the commonalities and independent experiences of the study participants. The process of phenomenological research, as described by Moustakas (1994), involves a series of steps that ensure the rigor and scientific evidence of the investigation. The researcher must first identify a topic and question that holds social meaning

and significance. A comprehensive review of relevant literature is then conducted to inform the research and develop a set of questions that guide the interview process. The researcher will then conduct lengthy, one-on-one interviews with the participants, recording their responses for analysis. It may be necessary to conduct follow-up interviews to obtain further information or clarification. The data will then be organized and analyzed to develop individual structural and textural descriptions, a composite textural and structural design, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences. Ethical considerations will also be taken into account throughout the research process to ensure the well-being and privacy of the participants. Within the study, the researcher will seek to identify and provide an accurate depiction of the commonalities of African American male ex-offenders. The target study is that of African American male ex-offenders. The goal of the study's design was to understand the experiences of each individual as they each experience occurrence. The design cannot be answered by asking common questions but rather by seeking and studying the individuals who have specifically experienced the occurrence.

Using a phenomenological research model allows for a rich description and brings the phenomenon alive with emerging themes and essences. Phenomenological studies allow for a specific event or type of person to be evaluated. When utilizing a phenomenological study, a specific thorough viewpoint of one's experiences is highlighted. Secondly, the qualitative study will allow for the participant's voices to be heard. Third, with the use of semi-structured interviews, the perceptions of reintegrating back into society from the perspective of African American male ex-offenders can be explored. Lastly, this study allows for the voices of African American male ex-offenders to be heard while bringing awareness to both a social justice and a systematic issue.

In the phenomenological process, Moustakas (1994) highlights three essential steps to carry out a transcendental phenomenological research design to include epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoche or bracketing is a process that involves blocking out biases to explain a phenomenon in terms of its meaning. According to Moustakas (1994), "Only what enters freshly into consciousness, only what appears as appearance, has any validity at all in contacting truth and reality." Following epoche, is transcendental-phenomenological reduction; during this period a researcher describes exactly what they see, both internal and external, and the phenomenon and self. With the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, each experience is considered in its singularity. Following is imaginative variation, where the aim is to understand the structural essences of the experiences. Moustakas (1994) describes the purpose of imaginative variation as to take the various perspectives of the participants and combining them into structural themes so that they epitomize the essences or underlying structures of the experiences.

A phenomenological research design also possesses its weaknesses. First and foremost, the selected design method is not generalizable for all African American male ex-offenders and their experiences with reintegration. The selected study was geared to a specific group of people which can allow for the argument of being irrelevant to the universal population. Secondly, a phenomenological research design can allow for researcher biases, due to the researcher having an opportunity to form their own personal opinions among the participants. Next, qualitative research in general can be considered time intensive; the researcher submerged herself into the selected population and coded all collected data accurately to capture each participant's responses. Lastly, with a phenomenological research design, there is always the possibility of

errors due to a participant's memory of their lived experiences and the differences in memory explanation.

I practiced self-care, such as swimming and meditation, before conducting interviews to facilitate the process of organizing personal feelings and experiences. I then generated lists of meaningful, non-repeating statements made by participants to level the data and group them into large thematic sections. As the themes emerge, I described the participants' experiences and emotions in texture. I then worked to explain the structure and figure out how participants participate in the phenomenon. Once the textural descriptions were complete, I used Moustakas' (1994) approach to transcendental phenomenology to create a composite description of the participant's task, assessing the academic rigor, and quality of the study in question, and ensure ethical protection. This allowed me to describe in detail what participants experienced.

To ensure credibility and dependability, the researcher sought participants' feedback through participant checks. Limitations of the study included factors such as demographics, sample size, and researcher biases. However, using the transcendental approach to phenomenology provided a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Research Questions

Q1. What are the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society?

Q2. What obstacles, if any, are met by African American male ex-offenders that may have contributed to recidivism?

Setting

The interviews were held in person with an estimated interview time of approximately 60 minutes. The researcher ensured the participant that the information obtained will remain confidential. Approximately one week later, the researcher held follow-up interviews utilizing the *Zoom Microsoft Teams* platform. The researcher held all virtual meetings in a private office while allowing the participant to remain in the comfort of their residence. The secondary interview was used to follow up with how the participant is feeling and ask additional follow-up questions or to seek clarity on past responses. The secondary interviews had an estimated interview time of approximately 30 minutes. The researcher made observations based on the participant's body language, and nonverbal and emotional responses.

Participants

The phenomenological research design is precise to the African American ex-offender population in the state of Delaware. The purposive sampling method along with the reputational technique was used to select participants after screenings were conducted and evaluated to confirm their status as African American male ex-offenders. Participants must be African American males, at least 18 years of age or older, and must have been previously incarcerated. The researcher screened each potential participant through a phone interview and determined if the individual was willing to share their personal experiences with being incarcerated and their life once released from a correctional facility.

The study consisted of 10 African American male ex-offenders, ranging in age from 18-50 years, in the process of having reoffended in the community. African American male ex-offenders were sought to participate in the study. When trying to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon of interest, the study has to have a degree of credibility which requires that the

interviews are held with enough people to get a good insight into the phenomenon, but not so many people that the researcher may lose sight of the essence of the topic (Ellis, 2016). It is recommended that a researcher utilize a minimum of six but no more than 25 participants. The researcher elected to use 10 participants in that it will provide enough information to address the research questions in Chapter 1 as well as to meet saturation. Data saturation will be accomplished by the researcher using semi-structured interviews, observations during the interviews, and follow-up interviews for accurate data.

Procedures

The researcher recruited potential participants by communicating via telephone and email with probation officers in the state of Delaware. Prior to receiving and completing the demographic profile survey, participants were provided with a copy of Liberty University's IRB Consent Form. After reading and signing the form, participants completed the demographic profile and then participated in the semi-structured interview; questions were both video and audio recorded and then transcribed for review purposes. After approximately one week, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews to seek clarity. A variety of different platforms were utilized to include *Microsoft Teams* and *Zoom*. After a review of the data collected, the researcher provided a transcription of the interview to the participants to ensure accuracy. The data collected was stored and secured on a hard drive.

Potential participants were issued the demographic profile survey, interviewed, and then asked to recommend the name of other individuals who may show interest in participating in the research study. The selected participants must be willing to share their lived experiences of reintegrating back into society post-incarceration. The researcher then selected participants based on the criteria. After selecting the potential participants, the researcher emailed Liberty

University's IRB-approved consent form, the demographic profile, and a statement of consent to each participant.

Researcher's Role

Within qualitative research, there is the possibility that the researcher's values may find themselves incorporated into the research (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Within this study, the researcher who identifies as an African American woman that has close and continuous relationships with the selected group identified. As an African American woman, the researcher has also had their share of run-ins with discrimination and racism; because of these experiences, addressing the disparities amongst disregarded groups serves as an influence. Bracketing is an instrument utilized by researchers to relieve the possible damaging effects of preconceptions related to the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing will allow the researcher to avoid projecting any type of influence on the participant's viewpoint.

Data Collection

This phenomenological research study on African American males' lived experiences post-incarceration employs an inclusive data collection approach rooted in constructivist principles. The purpose was to capture the various and vivid narratives that shape each participants reintegration process and help provide a holistic understanding of each participants post-incarceration realities. The data collection process incorporated several sources and methods to include semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, to ensure that triangulation enhanced the legitimacy and complexity of the findings.

Data triangulation was rigorously applied throughout the study to enhance the credibility and overall depth of the study. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources or methods in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena

(Carter et al., 2014). By incorporating data from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, the study triangulated information thus strengthening the trustworthiness and validity of the interpretations. Triangulation also permitted the identification of commonalities and divergences amongst each individual's narratives thus offering a more inclusive exploration of each participant's lived experiences. The data collection process facilitated a deeper understanding of African American males' lived experiences post-incarceration, capturing the complex layers of the reintegration process.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the essential factor of the data collection process. Through the use of the interviews, participants had the opportunity to share their personal experiences and emotions related to their post-incarceration experiences. The researcher used a variety of social platforms to conduct the interviews such as in-person interviews and *Zoom*. The researcher asked follow-up questions to gain a further understanding and seek any clarity needed. The interviews were approximately 30 – 60 minutes in length over the course of three weeks. After the researcher reviewed the data, the information was transcribed and then issued to all participants to ensure accuracy.

The interview procedure was designed to explore themes such as the effect of incarceration on one's identity, family relationships, employment opportunities, and community connections. With the use of open-ended questions, participants were then encouraged to reflect on essential moments and their insights of societal attitudes toward reintegration.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions:

1. What events led you to become incarcerated?
2. Was this your 1st, 2nd, or 3rd offense?

3. Describe the obstacles you had to face leading up to being incarcerated?

4. How did your loved ones react when you were arrested and incarcerated?

5. How did your loved ones react when you were released?

6. Were you able to find employment upon your release?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

   b. Are you currently employed?

7. Were you able to find suitable housing?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

8. What was your experience in obtaining an education?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

9. Were you able to get your voting rights restored?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

10. Has anything helped you reintegrate back into society?

   a. What specifically?

11. Do you think having a criminal record makes people treat you differently? Why?

12. Do you think people saw and treated you differently prior to and after being incarcerated?

13. Did you see yourself differently prior to and after being incarcerated?

14. Describe how you were treated prior to and after being incarcerated?

15. How do you think being an African American male has affected your life prior to and after being incarcerated?

16. What do you think the stereotype of an African American male is?

17. What do you think the stereotype of having a criminal record is?

18. Do you feel that you fit those stereotypes when seeking different services needed to reintegrate back into society (housing, employment, etc.)?

19. Do you worry about what people may think of you prior to knowing you have a criminal record and after?

20. Would the idea of experiencing stereotypes cause you to commit other acts of crime?

21. Do you feel that reintegration would be easier if you were not an African American male with a criminal record? Why?

    a. Can you provide any specific examples?

22. Do you think life would be easier if you never had been incarcerated? How?

23. How many times have you been incarcerated?

24. Have you been back to prison for violating your parole?

25. Do you feel you could reoffend if you do not obtain the necessary resources?

26. Do you feel you could reoffend based on any stereotypes or negative labels placed upon you?

27. What do you think African American males should know prior to possibly being incarcerated and once being released back into society?

28. What would you say towards the criminal justice system about your perceptions of African American males prior to being incarcerated and once being released back into society?

These interview questions are designed to capture a wide range of experiences and personal perceptions of African American males' post-incarceration experiences. The semi-structured interviews allow for each participant to further dive into their responses.

Audio/Video Recordings

The interview was both audio and video recorded to later be transcribed for the researcher to review. Audio and video recordings provide a boost in the study by preserving each participant's emotions, nonverbal cues, and voices. With the use of recordings, a more vivid depiction of each participant's lived experiences post-incarceration and their emotions expressed throughout the interview. The interview recordings were then synchronized with the transcripts of the interview to ensure accuracy during the data analysis process.

The rationale of video and audio recordings is based on the phenomenological nature of the study which aims to understand each participant's experiences as authentically as possible. A deeper examination of hesitations, emotions, and nonverbal responses that may not be fully conveyed through a textual transcript can be achieved through audio and video recordings. With the ability to capture each participant's actual expressions and voices, the study aimed to create a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences.

Document Analysis

This phenomenological study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to understand the intricate dynamics of the lives of African American males' post-incarceration experience. Alongside interviews and audio and video recordings, document analysis served as a fundamental component to contextualize and supplement the findings of this study. Document analysis provided several insights into the study that are found to be valuable. It offered a historical perspective into the experiences of African American males' post-incarceration, allowing for patterns to be identified. It also aided in uncovering systemic challenges and institutional barriers that African American males may encounter post-incarceration.

The researcher identified and analyzed two different types of documents to include academic literature, policy documents, and relevant reports. These documents cast light on societal attitudes, policies, systemic challenges, and historical trends that influence how African American males navigate a successful reintegration process. With reviewing academic literature, the researcher was able to understand various aspects throughout history such as racial discrimination and how it has influenced African Americans. By also analyzing policy documents, various barriers towards successful reintegration were identified. Different policy documents can highlight the impact of policies on employment, voting rights, housing, and other various aspects that are of importance to life.

This phenomenological research study on African American males' lived experiences post-incarceration employed an inclusive data collection approach rooted in constructivist principles. The purpose was to capture the various narratives that shape each participants reintegration process and help provide a universal understanding of each participants post-incarceration authenticities. The data collection process incorporated several sources and methods to include semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, to ensure that triangulation enhances the legitimacy and complexity of findings.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data plays an important role in transforming the collected qualitative data into meaningful insightful data. Given the phenomenological nature of the study, the collected data is analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. The IPA approach can be described as being a qualitative approach that aims to provide a detailed examination of one's personal lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The use of IPA seeks to interpret and understand each participant's lived experiences by discovering various themes,

meanings, and patterns within each particular narrative. With the use of IPA, the researcher captured the essence of each participant's personal story and the way they perceive their post-incarceration experiences.

The analysis process began with Epoche. Epoche or bracketing is a process that involves blocking out biases to explain a phenomenon in terms of its meaning (Moustakas, 1994). I engage in bracketing by writing notes and memos both prior and while conducting the study. The analysis process then transitioned to data transcription. I converted the spoken language from the recorded interviews into written text, preparing the data for coding and analysis. I then absorbed myself into the data by repeatedly listening to the audio and reading the transcriptions with the goal of becoming familiar with each participants narrative and gained a complete understanding of each participants lived experiences.

Next, the data was broken down into meaningful units for initial coding. Data coding is described as being a process of categorizing excerpts of qualitative research data in order to find themes and patterns (Linneberg & Kirsgaard, 2019). Each code was developed directly from each participants' own words. The codes were descriptive and showed the unique challenges and experiences of the participant. The researcher then engaged in data reduction, where similar codes were then grouped together to form themes. Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By further analyzing the data, the researcher then engaged in theme development. Several themes arose from the data. Three themes specifically arose that answered RQ1: (1) incarceration history, (2) the environment, and (3) stereotypes. Four themes arose from the study to answer RQ2: (1) discrimination, (2) lack of resources, (3) responsibility, and (4) employment. The data

then underwent clustering, where the developed themes were compared and contrasted to identify dissimilarities and commonalities.

Data triangulation was then applied to enhance the validity of the findings. I cross-validated the identified themes by comparing the themes with different sources such as audio and video recordings, transcribed data, and member checking. Member checking is a practice to further explore the credibility of the results (Birt et al., 2016). The collected data was returned to participants to check for accuracy and quality with their experiences. At the conclusion, the researcher synthesized the findings into a comprehensible narrative. The results were reported in the forms of themes and detailed descriptions thus providing a complete account of the challenges faced by African American males' post-incarceration. The identified themes served as a foundation for the study's implications and recommendations for addressing these challenges and to aid in promoting a successful reintegration process for African American males.

Trustworthiness

Through the use of triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, consistency, and thorough documentation both trustworthiness and credibility were ensured. Selected participants had the opportunity to review the recorded transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information recorded. Participants received the transcripts two or three days following their interview. The researcher allowed the participants one week to review the transcripts. By reviewing both audio and video recordings, member checking, and peer review triangulation were achieved. Peer reviews aided in analyzing the data collected by the researcher and check for biases that may have been obtained through the researcher. The review of both audio recordings allowed for a true portrayal of the verbal, social, and emotional coding.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and authenticity of research findings (Shenton, 2004). In this study credibility was established through a combination of research methodologies and commitment to reflecting the participants' genuine voices. I transcribed the semi-structured interviews verbatim and used pseudonyms to maintain the integrity of participants' narratives, thus minimizing the risk of misrepresentation. The study's findings were aligned with each participants viewpoints through member-checking where each participant reviewed and validated their transcriptions. Throughout the study I engaged in long interactions with each participant to foster trust and rapport. As a result, there was a deeper understanding of each participant's experiences. Ultimately, preserving the authenticity of participants' voices and by retaining validation methods highlights its commitment to credibility, allowing readers to have confidence in the findings.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability focuses on the stability and consistency of the research findings, while confirmability focuses on the researcher's objectivity and neutrality (Shenton, 2004). Both dependability and confirmability are confirmed through documentation and systematic processes. I maintained an audit trail throughout the research process to include coding procedures and data analysis methods. The documentation promoted dependability by allowing verification and replication of the steps taken in the research. As the researcher, I also sought outside input from peers and mentors who were not directly involved in the study. The discussions allowed for another perspective on the research process, thus mitigating any potential biases and contributing to confirmability. Reflexivity is also critical throughout the research process as I acknowledged biases and preconceptions that arose throughout the research process. By being transparent with

myself, I enhanced the credibility of the findings of the study. In the end, through the use of documentation, outside reviews, and reflexive practice the study ensured that the findings are dependable.

Transferability

Transferability is described as the extent to which it can be applied in other contexts, circumstances, and settings (Shenton, 2004). Transferability can be achieved by providing detailed descriptions and information. I presented a comprehensive overview of the participants' backgrounds, environments, and the socio-cultural context; therefore, the study enables readers to assess the potential impact of the findings to similar situations. By capturing the essence of each participant's lived experiences, there is a contribution to a deeper understanding of the universal aspects of their experiences, enhancing the transferability beyond the study population.

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Ethical Considerations

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Ethical considerations were of dominant importance with the goal of protecting the well-being and the rights of each participant and ensuring the integrity of the research. With following the procedures issued from Liberty University's IRB guidelines, several other ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout conducting the study to include:

1. Informed Consent: Prior to conducting the study, all possible participants were provided with detailed information about the study and its purpose. Informed consent was sought and obtained from each participant, and they were guaranteed their right to withdraw from the study without consequences on several occasions.

2. Confidentiality: With the goal of protecting the anonymity and privacy of the participants, all personal information in regard to the participants is kept confidential.

Pseudonyms were utilized in the study and report to guarantee that the identity of each participant was not disclosed.

3. Bracketing: To eliminate biases and extract all personal feelings from the research, the researcher underwent bracketing by writing analytical memos both prior to any research and during. Analytical memos allowed the researcher to record thoughts, personal reflections, and any contradicting information.

4. Minimization of harm: Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the semi-structured interview may result in participants being triggered due to unresolved issues relating to their lived experiences post-incarceration. Therefore, the researcher adopted an approach that was supportive throughout the interview process along with providing a list of resource centers and counselors available.

By adhering to the above ethical considerations, the researcher was able to ensure that the study was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner, while protecting the rights of each participant involved in the study. The ethical considerations allowed for trust to be shared between the researcher participants along with upholding the credibility and integrity of the research findings.

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Summary

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In this chapter, I have described the design of the research investigation. Step 1 of this study consisted of the interview process, where the researcher obtained knowledge from each of the participants from their personal perspectives. The purpose was for the researcher to gain detailed knowledge of each participant's lived experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for the researcher to ask necessary follow-up questions which then lead to more comprehension of the described phenomenon. The insight into the lived experiences of the

participants helps determine what exactly African American males may need while incarcerated to reduce the rates of recidivism. The selected design will go beyond identifying what actions led an individual to be incarcerated, but to also understand the barriers that each face.

Step 2 of the study involved the researcher categorizing different themes obtained though the semi-structured interview process. This involved the researcher conducting a thorough review of the video, audio recordings, transcribed data, and member checking, resulting in data triangulation. Through the use of video and audio recordings, the examiner was able to identify and study each participant's body language along with the tone of each participant's voice to ensure accuracy in the recorded responses. The data was then coded by hand, allowing the researcher to study the findings in detail. Step 3 focuses on the correlation between the collected data and the research questions. The researcher confirms that the issues presented in Chapter 2 coincide with the presented research questions. The purpose of Chapter 3 is to describe the selected participants and the data collection process. Additionally, the chapter describes the research design to include the strengths, weaknesses, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 of this study describes the results of this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the phenomenological research conducted to highlight the lived experiences of African American males' post incarceration. Each of the participants within this study utilized their voices to unveil the multilayered components of reintegration. Through their narratives, a deep understanding emerges of the challenges faced, the emotions experienced, and the reflections that shape their path in the future. The subsections of this chapter capture significant themes and patterns that have surfaced from each of the participants' stories, emphasizing the difficulties and resilience essential to their post incarceration experiences.

With the guidance of phenomenological research, this chapter dives in the heart of the study: the lived experiences of African American males' post incarceration. The participants and their unique stories form the foundation of the findings as their emotions, perspectives, and voices become interconnected to paint a picture of their reintegration journey. Through analysis, the results of the study uncovered a range of themes that reflect the obstacles that the offenders faced. The following sections offer a deeper understanding of the complexities that characterize each participant's experience. The findings not only highlighted each individual narrative but also contributed to the broader picture on societal perceptions, reintegration, recidivism, and enablement of African American males within the context of their lived experiences post incarceration.

Participants

There were 10 African American male ex-offenders who participated in the phenomenological research study with ages ranging from 27 to 46. Participants were coded using

pseudonyms. The highest level of education amongst all the participants was a high school diploma and all the participants served prison sentences between zero and six years. Each participant described how being incarcerated impacted their life. African American male ex-offenders were utilized to describe their personal experiences once being released from a correctional facility and discuss the hurdles encountered. The demographics collected enhance the data and provide an understanding of the phenomenon.

Participant 1

David is a 32-year-old African American male. He has two children and currently resides with his mother. David holds a high school diploma and has been on parole for four months. He served two years in James T Vaughn Correctional Facility for possession of narcotics with the intent to sell. David was engaged in the interview process and showed compassion about the topic. David showed signs of emotion when discussing his lived experiences of transitioning back into society. David discussed frequently being in trouble at an early age and committing crimes to "make ends meet." David is unemployed.

Participant 2

Marcus is a 46-year-old African American male who has had frequent run-ins with law enforcement and incarceration. He was recently released from James T Vaughn Correctional Facility after serving four years for burglary. He has four kids but does not maintain a relationship with any of them. Marcus lives with his cousin and has been on parole for one month. Although now employed, he expressed frustration with trying to employment when first released. Marcus described his coping mechanisms as marijuana and alcohol.

Participant 3

Elijah is a 29-year-old African American male who describes his run-in with the criminal justice system as "being in the wrong place at the wrong time." Elijah described his life prior to being incarcerated as simple. He does not have any children and lives with both parents. He was raised in a predominantly African American neighborhood and believes his environment contributed to his actions. Elijah served three years for theft and has been on parole for 5 months. Elijah expressed frustration when describing his employment search.

Participant 4

Anthony is a 40-year-old African American ex-offender. Anthony served five years for selling drugs. He has been on parole for nine months. When discussing the criminal justice system, Anthony showed signs of humor. Anthony stated that the "criminal justice system is a joke and is not meant for people that look like me." Anthony has had multiple run-ins with law enforcement including domestic violence and believes that he will have more run-ins. Anthony described his experiences as being difficult, especially in regard to finding employment; Anthony finds it easier to revert to his old methods to make "quick money" over obtaining suitable employment.

Participant 5

Joe is a 27-year-old African American male ex-offender. Joe served five years for identity theft. Joe is employed in a fast-food restaurant. He resides in an urban neighborhood with affordable housing. Joe possesses a high school diploma. Joe started off reserved and quiet but opened up with the use of open-ended and follow-up questions. Joe described his living situation as homeless.

Participant 6

Tom is a 37-year-old African American male ex-offender. He served five years for drug possession with the intent to sell. He has been on parole for five months. Tom has seven children and is on child support. He does not maintain a relationship with any of his children. Tom is unemployed. Tom showed signs of frustration when describing his reintegration process. He described himself as a "big black man that no one wants to hire." As a result of his looks combined with his conviction, Tom believes that there is a negative label attached to him due to not being able to find employment. Tom stated that at this point in his life, he would rather make fast money instead of going through the employment process. He believes the system is and always has been designed for African American males to fail.

Participant 7

Franklin is a 30-year-old African American male ex-offender. Franklin had a lengthy criminal history dating back to when he was a young teenager. He has violated his parole on multiple occasions. He has been using drugs and alcohol since he was a child and most of his family has been incarcerated at some point in their lives. He is a single father of two children and stated that he is "trying to make ends meet." Franklin served seven years for assault.

Participant 8

Brandon is a 27 African American male ex-offender. He served two years for assault. Brandon is in the process of obtaining a bachelor's degree and currently holds a high school diploma. Brandon has never been in trouble prior to his incarceration. Brandon felt that he did not fit any of the negative stereotypes against African American males. He now feels that labels have been placed on him for what he calls a "mistake." He described his life prior to being

incarcerated as being easy and now describes it as difficult. Brandon expressed a lot of emotion and anger during the interview.

Participant 9

Mark is a 42-year-old African American male ex-offender and is currently self-employed; he owns a car detailing business. Mark expressed applying to multiple jobs upon his release; however, he felt that he was judged by his incarceration and skin color. Mark showed signs of being sad he described the events that led him to being incarcerated. Mark served three years for possession of a firearm. He carried a firearm "for protection." Mark is married with one child and lives in "the hood." Mark describes the effects of trying to take care of his family on his mental health. Prior to going into employment with himself, he has contemplated committing other crimes to take care of priorities such as bills and food.

Participant 10

Cole is a 34-year-old African American male ex-offender has been released from prison within the last month. Cole served six years for theft. He has been incarcerated on one other occasion. He is not employed and is a victim of mental health issues. Cole lacked emotion when discussing his lived experiences. He expressed that he wants to do right but no one will help him. He is currently residing in Delaware with his girlfriend and has been on parole for two weeks.

Results

For this study, I listened to 10 interviews and transcribed each interview verbatim. The participant's names were not used, and they each were given an alias. Each of the transcriptions were read several times over two weeks to ensure validity and to find patterns. The transcriptions were then grouped with matching codes based on what the participants stated during the semi-structured interviews; the codes were then transcribed into themes. These themes were then

reviewed to determine if they accurately represented the data and related to the research questions.

Several themes arose from the data. Three themes specifically arose that answered RQ1: (1) incarceration history, (2) the environment, and (3) stereotypes. Four themes arose from the study to answer RQ2: (1) discrimination, (2) lack of resources, (3) responsibility, and (4) employment. Data saturation was reached during the interviews. Each of the participants shared similarities when describing their lived experiences post-incarceration.

Theme One: Incarceration History

The theme of incarceration history was identified in the first relevant question which states, what are the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society? Participants believed that being incarcerated once or on multiple occasions created a negative stigma. Participants highlighted that having a history of being incarcerated put a strain on their family relationships and put a strain on being able to obtain the necessary resources to successfully reintegrate such as finding employment and/or adequate mental health treatment.

Regarding this particular theme, Marcus stated:

"It doesn't matter if you go to jail once or eight times. They still gone look at me the same."

Brandon stated:

"Just because the word incarceration is attached to my name, people think I'm this horrible guy. I've been lucky enough to get into school so I can better my future, but the moment someone sees that I've been locked up, all the good in me is overlooked. People associate blackness with always causing trouble. I think people assume there is a history of getting into

trouble, or being loud, or ghetto, or I have no respect, or I'm a thug just because 1 I am black and 2 because I am a male. Never they just made a mistake, or they were young. If we really want to talk about the situation, I was defending myself…. (Laughs out loud). But I bet if I was white then self-defensive would have been easier to prove. But nah, I don't expect people to ask what happened. I'm the black guy, I'm automatically going to be viewed as being the aggressor by some people. It is what it is"

Theme Two: Discrimination

The theme of discrimination was also addressed in the first research question which states, what are the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society? Corresponding semi-structured interview questions that were addressed include do you think having a criminal record makes people treat you differently and describe how you were treated prior to and after being incarcerated.

The participants of the study varied in upbringing and socioeconomic statuses; however, each participant shared similar experiences and emotions when reintegrating back into society. The emotion of fear was present with each participant due to perceptions from employers and/or society. After incarceration, African American males often deal with consequences that may limit their abilities to reintegrate back into society such as not finding employment, finding suitable housing, being denied loans, and/or being harassed by law enforcement. Participants describe their lived experiences with discrimination when trying to reintegrate back into society.

Regarding the theme of discrimination, Brandon stated:

"Because I am a black male that has committed a crime, people find it hard to trust me…..because I'm just a black, people find it hard to trust me."

Franklin noted:

"It is hard when you are a black felon, let alone black. You make a mistake once

and that mistake is going to define you for the rest of your life. The circumstances

do not matter all because you are black. People see me and they make

assumptions without hearing what I have to say. Most people have already made

up their minds about me before they get to know me."

Theme Three: Lack of Resources

The theme of lack of resources also emerged through data analysis. A lack of resources

makes reintegration difficult for African American male ex-offenders when trying to reintegrate

back into society. Research shows that a high amount of African American male ex-offenders

come from urban neighborhoods where resources are already scarce and are subjected to many

economic and social problems (Thompson, 2013). Many offenders return to these neighborhoods

and are overwhelmed with the lack of resources that may have originally pushed them to commit

a crime.

Upon release from a correctional facility, these offenders are subjected to a hard

transition of reintegration. They worry about employment, housing, and reconnecting with loved

ones. Even with a limited number of opportunities and programs for ex-offenders to participate

in, the challenges facing the individuals once released often outweigh the support systems and

tools thus resulting in high rates of recidivism.

When asked to describe his lived experiences when seeking necessary resources, Cole

described:

"I know I have a problem. Since coming home, I have not been right mentally and I am

battling depression. Some days are better than others. Instead of the world helping me

and helping me get back right, I am just tossed to the side with people telling me I am

fine. The criminal justice system just throws people in prison that have mental health issues. How does that help them? How do we get better if prison is the only option for rehabilitation?"

Anthony stated:

> "I wasn't able to participate in the vocational programs. I don't know why but I never got the opportunity to do so. Now I don't know where to start. I guess there are some resources out there but not anything where I live. Them people are scared of us, so they don't want to deal with us. Why? I don't know man."

Theme Four: Employment

The theme of employment was an important part of all participants. Being able to find and maintain stable employment had a strong influence on whether and individual commits further crimes. Because of the many societal barriers, once an individual is released from a correctional institution, it makes it so much more difficult to obtain and maintain stable employment. Not having employment can affect other tools needed for a successful reintegration such as finding suitable housing.

As the participants described their lived experiences, it adds to the research phenomenon that incarceration created a stigma thus making it difficult to work.

Tom stated:

> "Despite me having the necessary skills and qualifications, it's hard to find work. I think all the jobs I have applied for ask if I have ever been convicted of a felony either during the interview or just on the application. I already know it's over for me. That question is a set up for failure. If I say no and they find out I lied, then I can be fired but

if I say yes and tell the truth then I'm automatically disqualified. I need a job so I don't

go back to prison but this entire employment process takes me for a loss."

David described how searching for employment made him feel:

"It's been very difficult and depressing. I picked up a trade in high school but

even with that, it has been difficult. All I heard was excuse after excuse like the position

closed or we don't feel that you are a right fit. Well, what is the right fit? No criminal

record? The only bright thing is, is that I was able to go into business for myself because

of my trade.

Theme Five: Responsibility

The theme of responsibility emerged in participants' descriptions of their lived

experiences. The results of the study show that when an ex-offender wants to change and has

support behind their decision then change is bound to happen. Accountability can be viewed as

taking responsibility for behavior and taking action to repair the harm done. In this case, when an

ex-offender takes responsibility for their actions, and they share emotion with the victim/s then

restorative justice can then occur (Hawkins, 2017). Restorative justice has been effective in

reducing recidivism, lowering the costs of crime, and has been shown to improve safety in a

community (Hawkins, 2017). Many of the participants express a desire to change and some of

the participants did not.

Elijah stated:

"I was just at the wrong place at the wrong time. I've never been in trouble before

but I was hanging out with the wrong group of people who saw an opportunity and we

decided to take it. My parents provided me with a simple life. I didn't have the nice

expensive gear, but I had the basics. I wanted to fit in and the group of people I was with

believed that if you wanted something then you go and get it. I didn't necessarily think

about how my actions was going to affect someone else; just I was gone have some

jewelry and money. You know, all the stuff that I though mattered. I don't wish prison on

nobody so you never have to worry about me being in trouble ever again.

Joe stated:

"I don't enjoy prison. Hell no one likes prison. But can I confidently say that

will never end up back there again? No I can't. I'm working a minimum wage job and

I'm pretty much homeless with no family. At least I had a bed."

Franklin stated:

"I swear I be minding my business and the problems come to me. Do I want to go

back to prison? No. But the temptation be so real. And where I come from alcohol and

drugs is a normal part of life. If it wasn't for those two things right there, then I probably

could have avoided a lot of problems."

Theme Six: Stereotypes

The theme stereotypes consistently arose during participant's descriptions of their lived

experiences. Throughout the history of the United States, African American males have been

subjected to stereotypes which has ultimately had a negative impact on African American

communities and families. More often than it should, African American males are viewed as

being dangerous, violent, and criminal which is derived from a history of stereotypes and slavery

(Nellis, 2016).

Mark explained:

"People look at me differently. They looked at me differently before I was locked

up and they definitely look at me differently now."

Joe explained:

>"I remember getting into an elevator one time with a white woman a when the
>doors I noticed she clutched her purse tight to her body as if I was going to rob
>her. I feel like I just let everyone down. Everything that people think black men
>are, a part of me feels like I proved them right."

Theme Seven: Environment

The issue of environment emerged as a prominent theme in the lived experiences shared by the participants. Many African American male ex-offenders tend to return to urban neighborhoods that lack the resources necessary for successful reintegration into society (Bloom, 2019). Urban neighborhoods frequently have poor educational systems, broken homes, and a strong police presence, all of which can have a negative impact on the ability of African American male ex-offenders to access necessary resources such as employment. Research conducted by Nellis (2016) found that African American male ex-offenders who returned to neighborhoods with high levels of racial inequality were more likely to re-offend. It is worth noting that African American male ex-offenders are more likely to reside in disadvantaged communities where children are frequently exposed to high levels of violence as witnesses and victims (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016).

Anthony described:

>"I grew up in New York. Where I'm from people wear the latest designer and
>jewelry. I never considered myself a bad kid but there are things that I wanted but
>I just could not afford them. I just did stupid things. To get what I wanted I got
>into the drug thing to make quick money and then I would steal so I could also get
>money and get whatever I needed and what I wanted."

Elijah described:

> "Let me say this. I don't know anything but the streets. I grew up in the streets
> and was raised in the streets. That doesn't mean my life wasn't good though. I
> probably could have explored more to life and other places, but I was comfortable
> where I was it because the streets are what I know. All I knew was greed, alcohol,
> and violence. I did things that I saw my friends and family doing; the people that I
> trusted. I started using marijuana at the age of 12 and heroin by the age of 16."

Summary

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders' post-incarceration, with a particular focus on the challenges they faced when seeking essential resources such as employment. Data was collected solely through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences openly and honestly. From the data gathered, seven themes emerged that highlighted the participants' perceptions and lived experiences, which ultimately impacted their ability to reintegrate into society. Through this research, we gained valuable insights into the difficulties faced by African American male ex-offenders, and the findings which can serve as a resource to inform policies and programs aimed at supporting their successful reentry. I wrote a qualitative review of the seven themes that emerged to provide both support and evidence to the body of knowledge and theoretical framework. I analyzed the data using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis for phenomenological research.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, seven themes were identified: Incarceration History, Discrimination, Lack of Resources, Employment, Responsibility, Stereotypes, and the Environment. The first theme of incarceration history arose throughout the

semi-structured interviews. Participants described having any history of incarceration caused them to be faced with various hurdles while trying to operate as law-abiding citizen in society. This included trying to find employment and mend family ties. The second identified theme was discrimination as many of the participants expressed being discriminated against both before incarceration and during their reintegration. Many of the participants expressed that being African American automatically made them a target whether they were being followed in stores or being stopped by law enforcement. The participants automatically felt that they were being treated differently simply because of the color of their skin. The third theme, lack of resources arose as a hurdle. Many of the participants were not able to find the necessary resources needed to reintegrate successfully such as suitable housing, mental health treatment, and employment. Society created a series of collateral consequences that prevent an ex-offender's ability to reconnect economically and socially. The fourth theme that emerged was employment. Many of the participants did not have employment and found it difficult to find employers who did not ask if they had a criminal conviction. Because of the inability to find employment, many participants found it difficult to not revert back to criminal activity. The fifth theme, responsibility arose throughout. Studies show that taking responsibility is important to reduce the risk of recidivism (Thompson, 2013).

The high rate of recidivism amongst ex-offenders is a significant concern, with more than half being rearrested for serious offenses. Another theme that emerged from the study was the impact of racial stereotypes on African American male ex-offenders. Participants discussed how these stereotypes often resulted in discrimination and hindered their ability to reintegrate into society. Another significant hurdle and theme was the environment that ex-offenders returned to after their release. Many returned to urban neighborhoods lacking necessary resources, and

where criminal behavior was socially learned from friends and family. These environments often contributed to the high levels of violence and law enforcement presence, which further impeded successful reintegration. Overall, the study highlighted the lived experiences and challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders and the need for greater support and resources to facilitate successful reintegration. The purpose of Chapter four has been to produce the results from the semi-structured interviews and to discuss the themes that arose from the semi-structured interviews and how they correlate with the research questions. Incarceration History, Discrimination, Lack of Resources, Employment, Responsibility, Stereotypes, and the Environment are the seven themes that arose from the participants. Chapter Five will include the conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the hurdles that African American male ex-offenders face when attempting to access critical resources after release from incarceration. Through the use of Clark Moustakas' Transcendental Phenomenological approach, critical race theory and labeling theory, this study illustrated how African American male ex-offenders are stigmatized, and how this stigma affects their ability to secure housing, education, employment, job training, health care, and the restoration of their voting rights. The purposeful sampling method provided insightful information, and an understanding of the unique challenges that African American males encounter when reintegrating into society after incarceration. This study can be instrumental in aiding criminal justice professionals and policymakers to implement measures to support African American males upon their release from correctional facilities. By addressing the gaps in the literature and providing the perspective of 10 African American male ex-offenders in Delaware, this study sheds light on the experiences of dealing with biases, attitudes, and societal perceptions towards former criminals, as well as the various barriers they faced in successfully reintegrating into society. The findings of this study can also be used to inform policies and programs that can promote successful reentry and reduce recidivism rates among African American male ex-offenders.

In the previous chapter, the researcher described the design of the research investigation. Step one of the study involved the interview process, where the researcher obtains knowledge from each participant's perspective. The purpose was for the researcher to gain detailed knowledge of each participant's lived experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask necessary follow-up questions which lead to more comprehension of the

described phenomenon. The insights into the lived experiences of the participants help to determine what African American males may need while incarcerated to reduce the rates of recidivism.

Step two of the study involved the researcher categorizing the different themes obtained through the semi-structured interview process. This involved the researcher conducting a thorough review of video, audio recordings, transcribed data, and member checking, resulting in data triangulation. Through the use of video and audio recordings, the researcher was able to identify and study each participant's body language along with the tone of each participant's voice to ensure accuracy in the recorded responses. The data was then coded by hand, allowing the researcher to study the findings in detail. Lastly, step 3 focused on the correlation between the collected data and the research questions.

Summary of Findings

The phenomenological study consisted of two research questions that helped guide the study: RQ1) What are the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society? RQ2) What obstacles, if any, are met by African American male ex-offenders that may have contributed to recidivism? In this study, I conducted 10 interviews, transcribing each interview verbatim. Each participants identity was anonymized using aliases. The transcriptions underwent multiple readings over the course of two weeks to ensure validity and identify response patterns. While transcribing, I assigned codes to text segments based on participants' statements during semi-structured interviews. The codes were then grouped together into different themes; the accuracy of each theme was reviewed against the data. The data revealed several themes, of which three addressed RQ1: (1) incarceration history, (2) the environment, and (3) stereotypes. Additionally, four themes emerged to address RQ2: (1)

discrimination, (2) lack of resources, (3) responsibility, and (4) employment. Data saturation was

achieved during interviews, and participants exhibited similarities in describing their lived

experiences post-incarceration.

Discussion

The results of the study corroborated the theoretical framework that served as a

foundation for the study and executed themes that emerged from the participants. The results of

the study also verified the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Each of the 10 participants

discussed the difficulties of trying to reintegrate back into society. The results of the study both

substantiated and expanded upon existing knowledge within the field. Several aspects of the

study's findings confirmed established patterns and insights, thus enhancing the credibility and

relevance of its contributions.

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of criminal justice in several

keyways, shedding light on the nuanced experiences of a specific demographic and offering

insights that can inform policy, practice, and research. First, by delving in the lived experiences

of African American male's post incarceration, the study personalizes the reintegration process.

The study moves past statistics by providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and

emotions that each of these individuals face. Second, the study focuses on African American

males specifically acknowledging the intersection of race and criminal justice. It highlights the

disproportionate impact of incarceration on this specific demographic and exposes the systemic

inequalities that they encounter. Third, the study amplifies the voices of African American males

and validates their experiences. This study empowers individuals to advocate for change along

with contributing to the efforts that specifically aim to shift societal perceptions, challenge

stereotypes, and promote a more just and inclusive criminal justice system. Lastly, the study

provides insights into the complex interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors that influence reintegration experiences. This relative understanding is crucial for developing complete solutions that address the complex challenges faced by African American males' post-incarceration.

The study contributes significantly to the field of criminal justice by cultivating the experiences of African American males during reintegration, addressing racial disparities, informing policy, expanding research methodologies, and providing valuable contextual insights. These contributions jointly advance the understanding and potential improvement of the criminal justice system's approach to reentry and societal reintegration.

Empirical Literature

The emergence of the "incarceration history" theme in the study's findings corroborates previous research that highlights how a history of incarceration influences an individual's post-release experiences. This theme aligns with existing literature that explores the impact of prior imprisonment on reintegration difficulties and reduced opportunities. The themes of "discrimination" and "stereotypes" in the study also resonate with former research that address systemic inequalities and negative perceptions faced by African American males' post incarceration. The consistent appearance of these emerging themes reaffirms the lasting challenges associated with racial bias and societal judgements.

The findings related to "lack of resources" and "employment" corroborates established research on the hurdles African American males encounter in accessing essential resources and securing stable employment upon reintegration. These themes reinforce systemic barriers that hinder successful reentry into society. Lastly, the "environment" theme echoes previous studies that emphasize the pivotal role of the environment in shaping individuals' reintegration

experiences. This corroboration reinforces the interconnectedness between an individual's surroundings, support networks, and opportunities.

Theoretical Literature

The use of a phenomenological approach distinguishes this particular study from previous research that may have utilized quantitative methods or different qualitative methodologies. By solely focusing on the lived experiences and independent perspectives of African American males' post incarceration, this study provides a more in-depth and nuanced exploration of their narratives.

The study's emphasis on each participant's narratives, word for word transcriptions, and use of pseudonyms highlights its commitment to preserving the authenticity to participants' voices. This approach turns from some of the previous research that might have summarized or paraphrased participants' stories, ensuring a more genuine depiction of their experiences. The focus on African American males' experiences post incarceration tailors the research to a specific demographic and context. While some previous research might have covered reintegration experiences more broadly, this study focuses on the intersection of race, gender, and incarceration in African American males' lives.

The study's engagement with reflexivity acknowledges and addresses potential biases thus enhancing the credibility and transparency of the findings. This self-awareness sets it apart from earlier research that may not have explicitly addressed the researcher's role. Lastly, this study's efforts to enhance transferability through detailed descriptions and contextual information differentiate it from research that might not have placed as strong of an emphasis on guaranteeing that the findings can be applied beyond the study's immediate scope.

By aligning with previous research findings, this study contributes to a growing knowledge base. The consistent emergence of these themes across multiple studies also reinforces their significance and underlines the need for targeted interventions, policies, and support systems to address the challenges faced by African American males' post incarceration. Furthermore, the study's unique phenomenological approach deepens the understanding of these themes by offering insight from the perspective of the participants themselves, thereby deepening the existing literature with authentic and personal narratives.

Implications

The reflective insights drawn from the phenomenological study of African American males' lived experiences post incarceration carry significant implications across theoretical, empirical, and practical dimensions. This section dives into the impact of the study's findings, encompassing implications that not only augment the theoretical understanding of reintegration but also notifies empirical research strategies and holds the potential to shape interventions and policies. By bridging the gap between lived realities and scholarly research, this section sheds light on the broader significance of the study's exposures and creates a path toward more compassionate and effective approaches to supporting the reintegration of African American males into society after incarceration.

Theoretical

Theoretical implications of this study include the confirmation of previous research on the challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders during their reintegration into society. This study adds to the theoretical framework by identifying seven specific themes that emerged during the interviews: incarceration history, the environment, stereotypes, discrimination, lack of resources, responsibility, and employment. These themes can be used to

inform future research and theoretical development on the challenges of reintegration. The theoretical implications can have significant potential for furthering existing knowledge in several different areas to include:

1. Understanding Post-Incarceration Reintegration: The study provides a deeper understanding of the various challenges faced by African American males while reintegrating back into society post-incarceration. By diving into their lived experiences, the research increases the public's understanding of the complications involved in the reintegration process.

2. Labeling Theory and Critical Race Theory: The integration of labeling theory and critical race theory in this study's theoretical framework allows an extensive examination of how race and labels intersect to have an effect on African American males' post-incarceration. The findings can contribute to a deeper understanding of how social inequalities, labels, and systematic racism impact African American males' challenges and opportunities during the reintegration process.

3. Advancing Phenomenological Research: With the use of phenomenology as the chosen research method, the study explored the lived experiences of African American males' post-incarceration this adding perspective to the changing body of qualitative research. Phenomenology can serve as an ideal method for any future research that also seeks to understand the lived experiences of any ostracized population in various contexts.

4. Criminal Justice Reform: By highlighting the many challenges faced by African American males' post-incarceration, the findings can contribute to aid in reducing recidivism rates and addressing systemic issues within the criminal justice system.

The theoretical implications of this study contribute to the broader understanding of the challenges faced by African American males' post-incarceration. By integrating various theoretical perspectives and methodologies, the research provides valuable insights that can inform policy, practice, and research intended to create a successful reentry and promote social justice within the criminal justice system.

Empirical

Empirically, this study provides important insights into the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders and the challenges they face during reintegration. The themes identified in this study can be used to inform the development of interventions and policies aimed at supporting the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society. The empirical findings of the study can have the following implications:

1. Support Services and Resources: The study's empirical findings can aid in the distribution of resources and support services for African American males' post-incarceration. By being able to identify the areas that in need, organizations and policymakers can guarantee that suitable resources are available to address employment, housing, education, and other crucial variables that are essential to a successful reintegration.

2. Training and Education: Training programs can be developed for law enforcement officers, correctional staff, and other professionals within the criminal justice field. Educating these individuals on the challenges and experiences of African American males' post-incarceration can foster empathy, improve interactions, and help reduce biases.

3. Reducing Recidivism: By discovering the variables that contribute to high rates of recidivism amongst African American males, the empirical findings can help develop strategies to reduce the rates of reoffending. By addressing the causes of recidivism, there can be a positive impact on public safety all while promoting successful reintegration.

4. Community Engagement: Empirical implications can aid in fostering community engagement and collaboration in supporting the reintegration of African American males' post-incarceration. The findings of the study can be used to develop initiatives that provide a helpful and wide-ranging environment for individuals reintegrating back into society.

The empirical implications of this study have significance in guiding the development of interventions, policies, and support services that address the challenges faced by African American males during post-incarceration reintegration. By translating the research findings into actionable strategies, the study can contribute to positive change, increased social support, and better outcomes for the marginalized population.

Practical

Practically, the findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice. The identification of incarceration history, discrimination, lack of resources, employment, responsibility, stereotypes, and the environment as significant hurdles for African American male ex-offenders highlights the need for targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing these challenges. The practical implications incorporate actionable recommendations and strategies to address the challenges identified in the study. The following are practical implications:

1. Employment and Job Training: Practical implications highlight the significance of job training and employment assistance amongst African American males' post-incarceration. Workforce development programs and partnerships with employers can help navigate their transition amongst the job market.

2. Education and Skill Development: The values of educational opportunities and skill development are emphasized to prepare African American males with tools that are necessary for successful reintegration. Having access to skill training and education can enhance one's employability.

3. Community Support and Reintegration: The importance of building and maintaining a supportive community for African American males' post-incarceration is highlighted in the study. Mentors, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups can provide social support and reduce any feelings of isolation.

4. Culturally Competent Professionals: The study shows there is a strong need for professionals that work with African American males' post-incarceration be culturally competent and sensitive to each participant's unique experiences. This can be achieved with training and education to enhance the understanding of the challenges faced by the marginalized population.

The practical implications of the study are actionable recommendations that can be implemented by policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners to support successful reintegration of African American males' post incarceration. By translating the research findings into practice, the study aims to foster positive change that promote social support and long-term well-being of the susceptible population.

Recommendations

The recommendations developed from the research study aim to recommend social support, equity, and a successful reintegration for African American males' post-incarceration. By collaborating with various stakeholders such as policymakers, teachers, districts, and administrators, individuals can workIm together collectively to break the cycle of recidivism and foster positive outcomes for this susceptible population.

First, it is recommended that policymakers implement Criminal Justice Reform. This can be done by addressing systemic issues that have been found to contribute to the overrepresentation of African American males within the United States criminal justice system. This can also be achieved by funding resource programs that are specifically geared towards the needs of African American males once released from a correctional facility. These programs should be geared to address employment needs, housing, education, mental health, and substance abuse.

Secondly, it is recommended that caregivers and parents strengthen family bonds and become involved by offering guidance and emotional support during the individual's reintegration process. Caregivers and parents can help by seeking out community resources that support the many hurdles faced by African American males and their families during the reintegration process.

Lastly, it is recommended for community organizations to establish mentorship programs that can aid in connecting African American males with various support networks and role models that can help support their reintegration process. These organizations can also offer job placement and offer skills training such as vocational training. This would heighten the employability of African American males and aid in creating a path towards stable employment.

Community organizations can help foster a supportive community environment by offering opportunities and resources for African American males' post-incarceration.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations and limitations are important to acknowledge in any research study. Delimitations refer to the boundaries or parameters that are set by the researcher before the study begins. The following delimitations were highlighted: (1) The study specifically focused on African American males in a specific geographical area; therefore, the findings may not represent the experiences of African American males in other locations; (2) the study also used a qualitative research design, and the findings may not be representative of larger populations or generalizable to other contexts; and (3) the study solely focused on the challenges faced by African American males. The experiences of African American females or those individuals who identify with non-binary gender identities are not examined in this study.

Limitations are considered a weakness of the study that ultimately may impact the results (Simon, 2011). The following limitations were highlighted during the study: (1) Participants struggle to recall specific details of their post-incarceration experiences accurately, mostly if significant time has passed since their release; (2) I am an African American woman who has friend and family relationships with African American males who were incarcerated on multiple occasions (all biases were limited during the research); and (3) phenomenological studies aim for depth and richness of understanding but do not seek to generalize findings to a broader population. Therefore, the specific challenges faced by African American males in this study may not be directly applicable to other groups or populations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides a foundation for understanding the experiences of African American male ex-offenders, future research can further explore and expand upon the themes identified in this study. This can help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by this population and can inform the development of more targeted interventions. While this study provided valuable insights into the experiences of African American male ex-offenders, a longitudinal study can provide a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by this population over time. This can help to identify critical periods during the reintegration process when targeted interventions may be most effective. This study identified policy as a factor that can hinder successful reintegration. Future research can examine the impact of policy on the experiences of African American male ex-offenders and can inform policy reform efforts aimed at promoting successful reintegration. The current study also identified several challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders during reintegration. Future research can examine interventions aimed at addressing these challenges, such as employment programs, mental health treatment, and access to resources. This can help to identify best practices for promoting successful reintegration and reducing recidivism rates.

Summary

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences and challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders during the process of reintegration into society. Using a phenomenological research design several themes were identified from semi-structured interviews with participants: Discrimination, Lack of Resources, Employment, Responsibility, Stereotypes, Incarceration History, and the Environment. The study has several implications for theory, practice, and policy. Theoretical implications suggest that the findings can contribute to a

better understanding of the challenges faced by African American male ex-offenders during the process of reintegration into society. Empirical implications suggest that the findings can inform the development of evidence-based interventions that address the needs of African American male ex-offenders.

Practical implications suggest that the findings can inform the development of programs and policies that support the reintegration of African American male ex-offenders into society. These programs and policies should be designed to address the challenges identified in this study, such as discrimination, lack of resources, and employment. The study highlights the importance of providing support and resources to facilitate the successful reintegration of African American male ex-offenders. One of the most important takeaways from the study is the need for greater awareness and understanding of the impact of racial stereotypes on African American male ex-offenders. The study illustrates how these stereotypes often result in discrimination and hinder their ability to reintegrate into society. Another important takeaway is the need for increased access to resources such as suitable housing, mental health treatment, and employment, which are essential for successful reintegration.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Screening of Telephone Calls

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is Amber Scott, I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am inviting you to participate in my research study as part of my dissertation. Your participation is completely voluntary. You will have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time. The interview will take place face-to-face and takes at-least 60 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, I will provide you a copy of the interview, and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy, and or remove any information that is not accurate. The purpose of this telephone call is to confirm that you meet the requirements for this research study. If you want and do participate in this research study, your personal information will be collected. I will begin by asking you some questions:

1. Are you a citizen of the United States?   YES   or   NO

2. Are you a male?   YES   or   NO

3. Are you African American?   YES   or   NO

4. Are you between the ages of 18 and 50?   YES   or   NO

5. Have you been incarcerated?   YES   or   NO

    a. How many times?   _____ time/s

6. Are you able to invest 60 minutes for a face-to-face interview?   YES   or   NO

Note: If a potential participant meets the above criteria then personal information will be collected; A citizen of the United States, an African American male between the ages of 18 and 50, and was incarcerated at least once.

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire

A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Males'

Challenges in Post Incarceration

"I am going to provide you with an overview of what our time together will look like here today. First I am going to ask you some demographic questions, which are personal questions about you. Then we will shift into questions about your personal experiences both prior to being incarcerated and after, from there I will ask questions about your perception on how people see you knowing you have a criminal record, and then I will conclude with more personal questions. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, if you want to end the interview at any point, you have the right to do so. Please be aware that if you choose to end the interview early, all of the information you have provided me with will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately. Do you have any questions, thoughts, doubt, concerns, or gray areas? (Address and concerns if any, if none then proceed with the first set of questions.)"

<u>**Demographic Information**</u>

1. What is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. Where are you from?

4. Where do you currently reside?

5. What is your racial background?

6. What is your highest level of education?

"Next, I am going to ask you some questions about your experiences both prior and when you were released from prison. There are no right or wrong answers. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, if you want to end the interview at any point, you have the right to do so. Please be aware that if you choose to end the interview early, all of the information you have provided me with will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately."

Interview Questions

7. What events led you to become incarcerated?

8. Was this your 1st, 2nd, 3rd offense?

9. Describe what obstacles you had to face leading up to being incarcerated?

   a. Probe if participants discuss experiencing problems

10. How did your loved ones react when you were arrested and incarcerated?

11. How did your loved ones react when you were released?

12. Were you able to find employment upon your release?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

   b. Are you currently employed?

13. Were you able to find suitable housing?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

14. Were you able to get your voting rights restored?

   a. What problems did you encounter?

15. What was your experience in obtaining an education?

    a. What problems did you encounter?

16. Has anything helped you reintegrate back into society?

    a. What specifically?

17. What is your biggest issue with reintegrating back into society?

"I am now going to ask you some questions about the way you perceive others to see you knowing that you have a criminal record. There are no right or wrong answers. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, if you want to end the interview at any point, you have the right to do so. Please be aware that if you choose to end the interview early, all of the information you have provided me with will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately."

Critical Race Theory and Labeling Theory Questions

18. Do you think having a criminal record makes people treat you differently? Why?

19. Do you think people saw and treated you differently prior to and after being incarcerated?

20. Did you see yourself differently prior to and after being incarcerated?

21. Describe how you were treated prior to and after being incarcerated?

22. How do you think being an African American male has affected your life prior to and after being incarcerated?

"The next set of questions will focus on how you view yourself due to having a criminal record and being an African American male. There are no right or wrong answers. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, if you want to end

the interview at any point, you have the right to do so. Please be aware that if you choose to end the interview early, all of the information you have provided me with will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately."

Stereotype Threat

23. What do you think the stereotype of an African American male is?

24. What do you think the stereotype of having a criminal record is?

25. Do you feel that you fit those stereotypes when seeking different services needed to reintegrate back into society (housing, employment, etc.)?

26. Do you worry about what people may think of you prior to knowing you have a criminal record and after?

27. Would the idea of experiencing stereotypes cause you to commit other acts of crime?

"We are now going to move forward with the last set of questions to sum up our interview. These questions are more personal. There are no right or wrong answers. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Also, if you want to end the interview at any point, you have the right to do so. Please be aware that if you choose to end the interview early, all of the information you have provided me with will be removed from the study and destroyed immediately."

Closing

28. Do you feel that reintegration would be easier if you were not an African American male with a criminal record? Why?

    a. Can you provide any specific examples?

29. Do you think life would be easier if you never had been incarcerated? How?

30. How many times have you been incarcerated?

31. Have you been back to prison for violating your parole?

32. Do you feel you could reoffend if you do not obtain the necessary resources?

33. Do you feel you could reoffend based on any stereotypes or negative labels placed upon you?

34. What do you think African American males should know prior to possibly being incarcerated and once being released back into society?

35. What would you say towards the criminal justice system about your perceptions of African American males prior to being incarcerated and once being released back into society?

"This is going to conclude our interview. I want to thank you for your time and participation as I found your answers very informative. In about one week I will reach out to you via telephone and/or interview to schedule a follow-up interview via Microsoft Teams or Zoom to confirm what I have documented. Is there anything that I can answer or address for you at this moment (if yes then address questions or concerns, if not then end interview.) Thank you."

Appendix C

Research Participants Needed

African American Males and Recidivism Study

- Are you an African American male between the ages of 18 - 50?

- Have you previously been incarcerated?

- Have you encountered obstacles when trying to reintegrate back into society post-release?

If you answered **yes** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to identify the various barriers that African American males face upon their reentry into society. Participants will be asked to participate in a 60 minute face-to face interview, and a 30 – 45 minute follow-up interview through *Microsoft Teams or Zoom*. Questions will focus on a participants personal experiences of challenges in post incarceration. Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive a $50 grocery gift card.

The study is being conducted in Dover, Delaware.

Amber S, a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Amber S. at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ **for more information.**

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Appendix D

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!!!

Dear Potential Participant:

As a graduate student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Criminal Justice. The purpose of my research is to identify the lived experiences of African American male ex-offenders once they are released into society and to identify what obstacles, if any, are met by African American male ex-offenders that may have contributed to recidivism and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be an African American male between the ages of 18 and 50 and been previously incarcerated. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 60-minute face-to-face interview and then a 30 – 45 minute follow-up interview approximately one week later. The follow-up interview will take place via *Microsoft Zoom or Teams*. Within 3 – 5 days of the follow-up interview, a transcription will be provided to you to ensure accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please make contact via the provided email below to answer a series of screening questions to determine your eligibility.

A consent document will be given to you one week prior to any interviews. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the face-to-face interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive a $50 grocery gift card.

Sincerely

Amber S., Primary Researcher

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Appendix E

Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7, high-quality text-based mental health support and crisis intervention. Crisis is any painful emotion and anytime you need support.

If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, depression, stress/anxiety, emotional abuse, relationship issues, or isolation/loneliness then text 741741. *All conversations remain confidential.* **If you are in immediate risk of seriously harming yourself or others, then contact 911.**

1. Your opening message can say anything.
2. The first two responses are automated. They tell you that you're being connected with a Crisis Counselor and invite you to share a bit more.
3. When you've reached a Crisis Counselor, they'll introduce themselves, reflect on what you've said, and invite you to share at your own pace.

I am mandated by laws to report any cases of abuse of a minor to the authorities.

List of Tables

Table 1, **Participants' Characteristics**

Participant # and Name	Gender	Age	Highest Level of Education	Years Incarcerated	Crime	Employed?
1 – David	Male	32	H.S.	2	"Possession"	N
2 – Marcus	Male	46	G.E.D	4	"Burglary"	Y
3 – Elijah	Male	29	H.S.	3	"Theft"	N
4 – Anthony	Male	40	12th grade	5	"Selling Drugs"	N
5 – Joe	Male	27	Associates	5	"Identity Theft"	Y
6 – Tom	Male	37	G.E.D	5	"Possession w/ intent to sell"	N
7 – Franklin	Male	30	12th grade	7	"Assault"	N
8 – Brandon	Male	27	H.S.	2	"Assault"	Student
9 – Mark	Male	42	G.E.D	3	"Possession of a Firearm"	Y
10 - Cole	Male	34	11th grade	6	"Theft"	N

Table 2, Developed Themes by Participants

Themes	Participants
Incarceration History	Marcus; Brandon
Environment	Anthony; Elijah
Stereotypes	Mark; Joe
Discrimination	Brandon; Franklin
Lack of Resources	Cole; Anthony
Responsibility	Elijah; Joe; Franklin
Employment	Tom; David