

**Beyond Transitional Work and Low-Wages:  
Management Employment and Formerly Incarcerated African Americans**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Glenn Coffey, without whom I could not have accomplished this monumental task. I also extend my gratitude to my entire family, those who are living and those who have passed on, for giving me the courage to persevere and for instilling in me their legacy of strength, determination, and true grit.

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*“In the midst of fire, I remind myself that it is actually a light that God sent me to enlighten my way to evolve, to grow, and to actualize my true self and become a better human being. This is when I understand that life happens for me not to me and that it is always for a reason and purpose that serve me.”*  
*Alame Leadership Quotes*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
A. Statement of the Problem and Significance .....	1
B. Study Purpose and Rationale .....	4
C. Study Contributions .....	5
D. Development of the Study .....	6
1. Statement of Research Question Formulation .....	6
2. Process for Selecting a Research Design and Method.....	8
II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
A. Literature Review.....	11
1. The Construct of Reentry.....	11
2. Life Course Desistance Theory.....	13
3. Conceptualizations of Desistance .....	14
4. Quantitative and Qualitative Studies on Desistance .....	16
5. Cognitive Change Studies.....	17
6. Relational Change Studies .....	17
7. Structural Change Studies.....	18
8. Positioning Life Course Desistance Literature and this Study .....	19
B. Labor Market Theories .....	19
1. Labor Market Segmentation .....	19
2. Labor Market Stratification, Crime, and Incarceration.....	21
3. The Intersections of Race, Incarceration, and Employment .....	22
4. Gender Differences in Incarceration, Employment, and Wages .....	24
5. Economic Inequality for African American Men and Women.....	26
6. Positioning Labor Market Literature and This Study .....	27
C. Theoretical Framework .....	27
1. Introduction.....	27
2. Qualitative Research Methods .....	28
3. Transcendental Phenomenology: Key Concepts and Terms .....	30
4. The Transcendental Phenomenological Model.....	34
III. METHODS .....	38
A. Research Design.....	38
1. Sampling .....	39
2. Recruitment.....	42
3. Settings/Interview Locations .....	43
B. Data Collection .....	44
1. The Processes of Bracketing and Epoche .....	44

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
2. Data Collection Instruments .....	45
a. Telephone/In-Person Eligibility Screening Guide .....	46
b. Informed Consent.....	46
c. Semi-Structured Interview Guide .....	47
3. Interviewing .....	48
4. The Co-Researchers .....	49
5. Demographic Summary of the Sample .....	55
C. Data Analysis .....	59
1. Data Preparation.....	59
2. Preliminary Data Coding .....	60
3. Data Analysis Procedures .....	61
4. Addressing Interpretive Validity, Generalizability and Reliability .....	62
5. Study Ethics and Confidentiality .....	64
6. Textural Data Analysis .....	64
a. Individual Textural Description "DIANE" .....	64
b. Individual Textural Description "ADAM" .....	73
IV. RESULTS/FINDINGS .....	81
A. Presentation of Group Composite: Core Textural Themes and Findings .....	82
1. Injustice and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System.....	82
2. Making Change (Processes of Identity Shift and Transformation) .....	83
3. Going to Work (Strategies for Finding and Securing Employment) .....	83
4. No Future Nest Eggs (Uncertainty about Future Retirement and Job Security) .....	83
5. Giving Back (The Meaning of Work).....	84
B. Composite Textural Description .....	84
V. DISCUSSION .....	95
A. Interpretation of Findings .....	95
1. Study Findings vis-a-vis Life Course Desistance Theory.....	95
a. Making Change .....	96
i. Self-Contracts .....	96
ii. Metaphysical Disassociation.....	97
iii. Spirituality.....	98
b. Going to Work .....	99
i. Refuge from Immediacy .....	99
ii. Connections to the Workforce, Before, During, and After Prison.....	100
iii. Effective Use of Time Inside and Outside of Prison .....	101
iv. Scaffolding.....	102



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
3. Study Findings vis-à-vis Labor Market Segmentation Theory .....	103
a. No Future Nest Eggs .....	103
b. Giving Back .....	104
4. Study Findings vis-à-vis Labor Market Stratification Theory .....	105
a. Injustice in the Criminal Justice System .....	106
5. Textural Trends .....	106
a. Domestic and Sexual Violence .....	107
b. Post-Traumatic Incarceration Syndrome .....	108
B. Study Implications .....	110
C. Strengths and Limitations .....	111
D. Future Research .....	112
E. Conclusion .....	113
Appendices.....	114
Appendix A: Agency Collaboration Outreach Letter	
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer	
Appendix C: Interview Guide	
Appendix D: Screening Guide	
Appendix E: Informed Consent	
Appendix F: Counseling Agencies	
Appendix G: Participant Contact Sheet	
Appendix H: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement	
CITED LITERATURE .....	135
VITA.....	142

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY METHODS .....	32
II. CORE PROCESSES OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY .....	35
III. CO-RESEARCHERS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.....	56
IV. CO-RESEARCHERS HISTORY OF INCARCERATION .....	58

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

PAGE

N/A

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

**Bracketing:** an exercise of focused contemplation in which the researcher carefully reviews each essential word in the research question to ensure that the question being asked is appropriate to the aims of the investigation.

**Co-researchers:** the individuals who participated in semi-structured interviews were the essential collaborators in this study.

**Epoche (Ep-po-hee):** disciplined and systematic efforts used by the investigator to refrain from and eliminate assumptions and pre-judgments about the co-researchers and the phenomenon under study.

**Horizontalizing:** a process in which the investigator singles out, lists, and preliminarily groups each of the co-researchers' expressions about the meaning of their experience.

**Individual Textural Description:** the written narrative description of each co-researcher's experience (i.e., the noema), including co-researchers thoughts, feelings, and ideas related to the situation (i.e., the noesis).

**Intentionality:** the internal experience of being conscious of something. Intentionality occurs when an individual directs their attention to an imaginary or real object.

**Intuition:** the knowledge process that comes with internally feeling or knowing something that is not explicitly articulated.

**Noema:** the way in which an individual perceives and interprets the appearance of an object.

**Noesis:** thoughts, feelings, and ideas related to a situation.

**Phenomenology:** a form of human science inquiry that investigates and describes consciously experienced phenomena without theoretical causal explanations and preconceptions.

**Phenomenological Reduction:** a two-step procedure occurring during data analysis. First, the investigator removes all redundant, repetitive, and nonessential components of each interview narrative to reveal the core constituents of the phenomenon, and, second, all essential descriptive components of each interview narrative are isolated and used to draft individual textural descriptions.

**Textural Group Composite Description:** developed from the integration and synthesis of 13 individual textural descriptions, a written group narrative depicting the co-researchers' common and shared experiences of the phenomenon of management-level employment as exemplified through direct quotes.

**Transcendental Phenomenology:** a form of reflective scientific inquiry that emphasizes discovery through self-knowledge and self-evidence. The distinctive quality of transcendental phenomenology is that it is first framed by a process of reflection on the appearance of things through a lens of human subjective experience—what one feels, senses intuitively, imagines, and envisions in internal consciousness—and it is then connected to human objective experience—how one judges and makes sense of the object of their awareness. An investigation becomes transcendental when the investigator incorporates and uses specific and rigorous, systematic, and disciplined practices to conduct the study free from prejudgments.

## SUMMARY

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. It was conducted from January 2014 through June 2014. The overall goal of this investigation was to uncover the authentic and commonly shared experiences of the study co-researchers and to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of employment beyond transitional and low-wage sector jobs for African American returning citizens.

The topic of this study was inspired by: (1) my professional experience working in the field of workforce development, (2) a pressing need to address the existing gap in criminological literature on reentry and employment, particularly in light of (3) the extensive and negative employment repercussions of mass incarceration on African Americans, and (4) a need to give voice to and recognize the strengths of a group of extraordinary men and women who overcame great odds to secure stable employment and regain productive citizenship within their communities.

The first step in developing this study was deciding on a qualitative method that would be suitable to my topic and the discipline of criminology. While conducting my literature review, I discovered that phenomenology is a common qualitative approach in criminology and other disciplines in behavioral sciences (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Weaver & McNeil, 2015). Further, my choice of transcendental phenomenology came from scouring books and articles on various methods of qualitative inquiry. After reviewing scores of methodological approaches, Moustakas's (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods* was particularly appealing to me because it matched my goal to gain experience in a research method that honored participants' ways of knowing – a key

principle of qualitative research. More importantly, transcendental phenomenological methods provided me with step-by-step procedures for conducting my study and a rigorous process to guard against investigator bias.

I interviewed 13 formerly incarcerated African Americans (seven men and six women) who are full-time managers for ex-prisoner reentry programs or other agencies that provide ex-offender services in Chicago. All co-researchers were residents of Cook County, Illinois, and they ranged in age between 34 and 71 years old. Some co-researchers (4/13) were married, and all but one individual were parents to teens or adult children. A majority of the co-researchers (7/13) were considered long-termers, and their incarceration lengths ranged between 7 and 27 years. Over half of the co-researchers (7/13) reported crimes motivated by past heroin or crack cocaine addictions and involvement in selling drugs.

All interviews were conducted using an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide, and data collection, analysis, and synthesis were conducted consistent with the transcendental phenomenological methods. The central research question for this phenomenological investigation was: “How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?” The analysis of individual textural descriptions yielded a group textural composite of verbatim accounts of common textural themes which compose the findings of this study.

Data analysis also uncovered significant textural trends. Textural trends do not represent the common experience of all co-researchers, but are compelling elements of the phenomenon of management-level employment experienced by some co-researchers. Though not universally experienced by all 13 co-researchers, two issues emerged which merit discussion and future exploration: (1) *Domestic and Sexual Violence*: a few female co-researchers described their past

and current experiences as victims and survivors of physical and sexual violence, and (2) *Post-Traumatic Incarceration Syndrome*: several co-researchers, male and female, described experiencing traumatic stress-related symptoms which manifested post incarceration.

The findings from this study revealed five common textural themes: (1) *Making Change*: This theme details distinct cognitive exercises and routines practiced by co-researchers to negotiate positive identity transformation; (2) *Going to work*: This theme includes four key processes co-researchers described as essential to finding and securing work post-incarceration; (3) *No Future Nest Eggs*: This theme expresses co-researchers worries about future retirement and job insecurity; (4) *Giving Back*: This theme highlights the meaning of and personal benefits co-researchers derived from working with ex-prisoners returning to their communities; and (5) *Injustice and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System*: This theme highlights co-researchers' experiences with abuse of authority and abusive treatment by corrupt corrections guards, officers, criminal justice officials, and administrators.

The textural themes and trends presented in this study have important implications for criminal justice system policy, protocols, practice interventions, and the provision of community resources aimed at supporting processes of ex-prisoner desistance, community reintegration, and successful employment.



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Statement of the Problem and Significance**

The portrait of incarceration in American is deeply disturbing. The United States ranks number one in the world for its rate of incarceration (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (DOJ), over 6 million people were under adult correctional supervision in America. Of that number, 1.5 million people were incarcerated in our nations' prisons and jails, with approximately 4.7 million people serving sentences of probation or parole in the communities where they live (DOJ, 2014).

Mass incarceration in America is deeply racialized and highly concentrated in African American communities (Alexander, 2010; Gottschalk, 2011; Western & Wildeman, 2009). No other ethnic group is caught more in the grasp of the enduring legacy of mass incarceration than low-income, inner-city African American men, women, and children. African Americans represent 13.2% of the total U.S. population, but comprise approximately 37% of America's prison population (DOJ, 2014; US Census Bureau, 2014). In 2011, African American males were incarcerated at a rate of 3,023 per 100,000 in comparison to 478 per 100,000 for Whites. Further, at year end 2013, DOJ reported that nearly 3% of all-aged Black males residing in the U.S. were incarcerated.

Similar to Black males, the rate of incarceration for African American women, 113 per 100,000, outpaced that of all other ethnic group (DOJ, 2011). Children in African American communities are also disproportionately affected by mass incarceration. In 2008, the DOJ

reported that 1.7 million minor children under the age of 18 had parents in state and federal prisons. Sadly, 1 in 15 of all African American children was living without their parents due to incarceration.

The impact of mass incarceration on Black America is further compounded by the challenges of prisoner reentry. According to Travis, "Reentry is the process of leaving prison and returning to society" (2005, p. xxi). For the four consecutive years 2008-2012 prison releases exceeded prison admissions, signaling a growing trend toward reduced levels of incarceration. Only recently has there been a reverse in this trend.

In 2013, 623,000 persons were released from U.S. prisons, as compared to 631,000 admissions (DOJ). For African Americans, returning home means returning to the same disadvantaged communities they left behind, communities steeped in high rates of unemployment, poverty and violence and greatly lacking in the resources needed to respond to the multifaceted needs of its returning citizens.

More than half of all formerly incarcerated men and women recidivate and are re-incarcerated within three years of their release (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2002; Visher & Travis, 2007). There are many reasons why ex-offenders return to crime, but the evidence has suggested that most do because they lack adequate opportunities and sufficient means to support themselves (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2010; O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001; Travis, 2005). Scholars have consistently cited unemployment and underemployment as primary reasons why ex-offenders return to crime and fail at reentry into society (Pager, 2007; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

High rates of unemployment and persistent underemployment among populations of ex-prisoners has promoted a host of adverse individual, family, and social consequences. At the

individual level, idle time leads to increased opportunities for negative behaviors and subsequent enticements back into crime. For many poor families, supporting members returning from prison often has meant added financial stress, emotional strain, and family discord. With few opportunities for work and persistent unemployment, ex-prisoners have frequently been motivated to commit economic-based crimes.

The overrepresentation of African Americans in the criminal justice system has greatly disadvantaged them on the open job market. The economic recession that plagued the U.S. economy in 2008 doubled the unemployment rate and vastly inflated the cost of living, and once secure middle-class working families continue to struggle to live above the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2012). The intersection of a criminal record with race and gender inequality, coupled with a weak labor market, has undermined the efforts of ex-prisoners to secure legitimate work and obtain self-sufficiency. The current economy challenges the core principal of survival for many, but African American ex-prisoners are among the most vulnerable to long-term joblessness and among the most high-risk populations filling the unemployment roll.

Maintaining current levels of incarceration and the high rates of unemployment for ex-prisoners in America has come at a cost to society. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2006) reported that the costs of mass incarceration to American taxpayers was approximately \$42 billion annually and estimated that the annual cost of incarceration reduces the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) by \$100 to \$200 billion dollars every year (Holzer, as cited in Travis, 2005). As of May 2013, over 155 million people comprised the U.S. labor force, while another 1% of America's potential workers languished in U.S. prisons (BLS, 2013). The personal, family, and community loss and costs associated with mass incarceration,

unemployment, and recidivism exceeds the potential of investment in social programs that provide viable and stable employment for returning ex-prisoners.

## **B. Study Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing scholarship and community-wide practice aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing opportunities for stable employment and reentry success among formerly incarcerated African Americans. Little is known about the reentry and employment experiences of formerly incarcerated adults who manage and direct ex-prisoner transitional agencies. Few studies have explored the employment experiences of African American ex-prisoners who secure work beyond transitional and low-wage sector jobs. This study filled that gap in existing literature. The central research question for this phenomenological study was: "How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?"

My study was inspired by formerly incarcerated men and women who distinguished themselves from the norm by overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to secure stable employment and regain productive citizenship within their communities. It builds upon Maruna's (2001) groundbreaking phenomenological study and book *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*. Maruna's study, conducted in the United Kingdom, found employment, particularly the role of missionary careers, as a key to personal reform and desistance from crime.

However, this study differed in major ways from Maruna's work, including: (1) distinctively dissimilar methods of qualitative data analysis (i.e., Maruna used content analysis and this study used transcendental phenomenology for analysis); (2) the sample in this study was exclusively comprised of formerly incarcerated African American men and women (Maruna's

sample of 65 persons was mostly male and included only 3 Blacks; and, (3) this study had a central focus on the race and gendered dimensions of incarceration and their association with the employment achievements of formerly incarcerated African Americans, whereas Maruna's study did not attend to issues of gender and race.

### **C. Study Contributions**

This study contributes to scholarship and practice in the field of criminology in four significant ways. First, it advances knowledge about the common characteristics, elements, and types of employment that promote ex-prisoner rehabilitation and transition from crime. Second, findings from this study contribute to existing criminological scholarship by promoting a greater understanding of the role of work in reducing recidivism, increasing desistance, and strengthening opportunities for successful reentry. Third, this study gives voice to a vastly understudied group of men and women whose careers position them in a central vantage point to provide first-hand descriptions on the processes of personal transformation, securing employment, and social reintegration. In this way, the insights of professional ex-prisoners may prove relevant to successful outcomes among current populations of reentering ex-prisoners by illuminating pathways for employment and reentry success. Finally, this study was designed to encourage future research and further interdisciplinary discourse aimed at reducing recidivism, enhancing community safety, and increasing reentry success anchored by solid employment.

In this introduction of my study on the experiences of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women, I present compelling reasons why this research was both timely and necessary to contributions toward enhanced employment strategies aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing reentry success. In the next section, I present my

statement of research question formulation and process for selecting a research design and methodology for this study.

#### **D. Development of the Study**

##### **1. Statement of Research Question Formulation**

I initially became interested in the topic of employment success among formerly incarcerated persons during my tenure as the Director of Goodwill Industries of Chicago. My responsibilities entailed the overall oversight and management of Goodwill's direct services in Chicago, which included a workforce development and training program. The program served populations of individuals who were disadvantaged due to disability (mental and physical), incarceration, underemployment, and unemployment. This line of work brought me into contact with two distinctly different groups of individuals with histories of incarceration: (1) individuals who were Goodwill program participants and (2) persons who were colleagues in the field of transitional services for ex-offenders.

Formerly incarcerated individuals constituted a significant portion of the Goodwill workforce development program. Goodwill Chicago served approximately 1,500 participants annually from 2007 to 2008 and of that number roughly 400 participants were persons returning to the community from prison. Many of these individuals had served lengthy sentences of imprisonment and they were looking for an opportunity to turn their lives around. Frequently, the applicant waiting list was 2-3 times greater than the available program space. Once accepted into the program, participants received three weeks of intensive case management and training, which covered life skills, computer literacy, GED (high school equivalency certification), financial literacy, interviewing and resume writing, as well as information and referrals for housing, jobs, substance abuse treatment, and other health services.

Upon program completion, each class would participate in graduation ceremonies designed to recognize their achievement and to award certificates of completion. My role was to hand out certificates in a manner similar to the conferring of degrees, and many participants told me how they felt renewed and regenerated by their new life possibilities. Within a few weeks or months, stories would filter in from the community, stories of dashed dreams and faded hopes. All too often, participants repeatedly experienced degenerating application and interview processes that led nowhere and left them feeling wounded by rejection and filled with mounting hopelessness and desperation. Few obtained employment and of those that did, the employment was often transitional, short-term, and low-paying, with few options for financial independence and long-term economic security.

I also encountered and routinely collaborated with a group of colleagues who had also experienced incarceration but somehow broke through enormous barriers to achieve exceptional employment success. Not only did they find jobs; they built careers and became professionals in an industry designed to help others overcome life adversities caused by the stigma of incarceration. Some of these individuals worked for Goodwill, while others worked for agencies serving ex-prisoners in similar or different capacities, such as policy, corrections, housing, treatment programming, legal, and educational services. I became intrigued by the accomplishments of this group of individuals and curious about what could be learned from their experiences. Later, the achievements of these individuals would stimulate my research interest in exploring successful employment among formerly incarcerated individuals.

In 2009, I returned to graduate school at a time when the U.S. economy had entered into one of the worst recessions in history and the incarceration rate in America outpaced every country in the world. Then something else happened. Two close family members were sent to

prison. They both returned a year later, but their freedom was short-lived. Within less than 18 months, they violated parole; both, on separate occasions, were sent back to prison. They had desperately attempted to straighten out their lives, find work, and become independent. Unfortunately, their situation was complicated by a depressed labor market and the stigma of their prison record.

Consequently, my family members experienced what I had observed in prior years at Goodwill. Their reception on the job market was unwelcoming, disparaging, and ultimately unproductive. This situation compelled me to revisit my earlier experiences at Goodwill, stimulated my research direction, and helped with the formulation and refinement of my dissertation research question: "How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?"

## **2. Process for Selecting a Research Design and Method**

Following the formulation of my dissertation research question, I proceeded to explore options for developing a research interview guide and conceptualizing a research design which would complement the direction of my study. This involved a process of reading books, journal articles, and student dissertations in conjunction with guidance from my dissertation chair and conversations with dissertation committee members, faculty, and other graduate students. From this process, I determined that my investigation must be exploratory and qualitative in nature. I decided to conduct in-depth interviews because of my strong interest in capturing subjective, thick descriptions of the experiences of research participants. Being comfortable with this method of data collection, I selected a rigorous research method that would match my goals for in-depth interviewing, my orientation to understanding the lived experience of participants, and my learning style.



I began by reviewing grounded theory, critical ethnography, and case study methodology, but I found drawbacks in each area. I took a short course in grounded theory and found that it required theory development, which was not consistent with my aim for an exploratory study. Critical ethnography was locale-specific and structured toward individuals located within specific places and settings; whereas, my study was geared to explore the experiences of individuals within a specific domain of their life. Multiple case studies appeared to be the solution, until further investigation revealed that the strategy was not amenable to separating out one aspect of the whole life of an individual or group of individuals who shared a common experience. Finally, I came upon readings on phenomenology. As quoted from Moustakas (1994), the following is an excerpt from van Kaam (1966) detailing characteristics of phenomenological research: "Research performed in this way is pre-empirical, pre-experimental, and pre-statistical; it is experiential and qualitative" (p. 295)

After reading a dissertation on Transcendental Phenomenology (TP), a concept developed by Moustakas and colleagues at the Center for Humanistic Studies (the Center) at the Michigan School of Professional Psychology, I quickly determined that this method provided what I was seeking. It offers a structured, systematic, and rigorous process which clearly defines steps for conducting human science qualitative research in a practical and accessible manner. In addition, I connected with a former student of the Center who graciously agreed to serve as a mentor as I conducted my research using TP. Once I completed the process for development of my research question formulation, research design, and methodology, I set out to select the theoretical framework for this study. The next section of my dissertation presents the theories reviewed and how they shaped and informed the development of my sample criteria and questions for this study.

## **II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study takes an interdisciplinary approach to developing an understanding of the experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. I used three theories to inform the selection of my sample and shape the direction of my inquiry for this phenomenological investigation: life course desistance theory, labor market segmentation (a.k.a. dual labor market), and labor market stratification theory.

From the field of criminology, I employed Sampson and Laub's (1992, 1993) Life-Course Theory of Desistance. From this perspective, desistance is a process of "redirection" or "shifts" (p. 49) away from crime that do not occur abruptly, but rather over the course of time and in the context of varying historical life events.

The theory of desistance is particularly relevant to this study because it links employment to social control processes that contribute to and promote termination of individual acts of crime. In particular, desistance theory aligns with the methodology of transcendental phenomenology in its applicability to drawing out participants' subjective views on the distinctions involved with choosing legitimate careers over criminal careers.

From the fields of sociology and economics, labor market segmentation theory (a.k.a. dual labor market theory) advances the notion that occupations are divided into two specific labor sectors: (1) a primary sector comprised mostly of White people who are employed in management-level and blue collar jobs that provide employment security, career mobility, and a living wage and (2) a secondary sector mostly comprised of women and racial minorities, who are locked into low-wage, service-sector, unstable occupations with little or no opportunities for

career training or advancement (Reich, Gordon, & Edwards, 1973). Labor market stratification theory expands the concept of labor market segmentation and links incentives for crime to depressed wages and marginal work in the secondary labor market.

For the purpose of this study, labor market segmentation and stratification draw attention to the socio-structural barriers of race, class, and gender and their impact on the employment and earnings potential for African Americans. In particular, they provide a unique lens for exploring how participants perceive the influence of race and class on their labor market achievements, individually and collectively, and more specifically whether participants' labor market experiences are the same or different based on their gender identity.

A discussion of this nature must also include the construct of reentry. Reentry is the starting point in which prisoners exit the prison system and return to the communities where they reunify with families, reside, and work. In the literature review below, I include a brief review of reentry and the links between reentry success and stable employment. I present the relevant literature as follows: (A) the construct of reentry, (B) life course desistance theory, (C) labor market segmentation theory, and (D) labor market stratification theory.

## **A. Literature Review**

### **1. The Construct of Reentry**

As previously discussed, reentry is the process of ex-prisoners leaving prisons and returning home (Travis, 2005). In recent years, there has been a consistent pattern of reductions in prison populations in America. In 2012, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (DOJ) reported that 637,400 persons were released from prison. Further, for four consecutive years (2009–2012) DOJ reported that prison exits exceeded prison admissions. The most recent report by DOJ (2013) estimated that approximately 1,574,700 persons were in U.S. state and federal prisons,

representing a slight increase of the total prison population by 0.3%. Despite the announced overall prisoner increase since 2012, the federal prison population decreased by 0.9% by year end 2013 (DOJ).

The scale of prisoner reentry, along with a consistent decline in prison populations, has significant implications for the quality and welfare of individual, family, and community life. With the current climate of state fiscal crises, efforts toward budget control will compel further reductions in prison populations. In turn, reentry success is a pivotal focus of carceral and ex-prisoner research.

A report published by the Urban Institute detailed the reentry risks and challenges for ex-prisoners, families, and communities (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004). The authors linked recidivism to social conditions that lead to lost opportunities for ex-prisoner productivity. Specifically, they connected the absence of work opportunities to an increased risk of individual re-offending. They argue that stable employment anchors personal transition and positive reintegration into communities, and they provided evidence that long-term community safety, welfare, and economic benefits were contingent upon reentry and employment success.

Hallett (2011) connected reentry success to social factors. Following his review of literature on prisoner reentry and the research agendas encompassing reentry, he argued for research focused on macro-sociological change. Subsequently, Hallett reported that reentry success was significantly tied to factors outside the criminal justice system. LeBel, Richie, and Maruna (2015) contributed to this their study on the employment experiences of "professional ex's or wounded healers." The authors linked successful reentry to the type and meaning of community work. They found that working as a professional ex in community service served an important role in stigma management, psychological well-being, and resistance to criminality.

More importantly, they argued that meaningful and purpose-driven work on the outside showed potential for facilitating reentry success.

Other scholars have linked reentry success and reduced recidivism to individual and social factors related to work experience before, during, and after prison. Hlavka, Wheelock and Cossyleon (2015) conducted qualitative interviews with 38 ex-prisoners in Milwaukee County focusing on ex-prisoners accounts of looking for work. Concurring with prior research, they found that employment was essential to decreasing incentives for returning to crime. They attributed successful reentry to: (1) the personal attributes of prisoners, (2) tax incentives to entice employers to hire ex-prisoners, and (3) increases in pre-release job preparation, including partnerships among employers, reentry programs, and the criminal justice system. Conclusively, reentry success and reductions in re-offending have been centrally linked to employment stability.

## **2. Life Course Desistance Theory**

Desistance theories initially emerged from studies focused on predictors of deviance and delinquency among youth. In their early conceptualizations of desistance, Sampson and Laub (1993) argued that desistance research had primarily focused on teens and that childhood experiences could be important predictors of deviance and criminal behavior in older youth and adults.

To prove their hypothesis, Sampson and Laub (1993) reconstructed the data from the Glueck's (1950) seminal study *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, a longitudinal, multi-wave study of 1,000 delinquent and non-delinquent White males. Using a mixed-methods approach consisting of secondary data analysis and qualitative life history analysis from a subset of the data sample, Sampson and Laub linked youth deviance to the prediction of future criminality in

adulthood (1993). From their integration of literature on life course and crime, Sampson and Laub (1993) identified three central themes in the conceptualization of life course desistance: (1) concern with the social meanings of age throughout the life course, (2) intergenerational transmission of social patterns, and (3) the effects of macro-level events and structural location on individual life histories.

Fundamental to the concept of life course theory is an individual's connections to and influence by forms of informal social control over their lifespan. As such, Sampson and Laub (1993) define life course desistance as "pathways through the age differentiated life span" (p. 609) and link social bond and social control theories to their desistance perspective. From this position, they identify individual life trajectories and transitions as central concepts in their formulation of life course desistance theory.

Borrowing from Elder (1985), Sampson and Laub (1993) define trajectories as long-term developmental pathways (e.g., work life, marriage parenthood, and criminal behavior) and transitions as short-term, abrupt, life events (e.g., first marriage, first job), which are embedded in trajectories. Further, they assert that the interlocking nature of trajectories and transitions can alter/shift life course pathways, resulting in "turning points" (p. 8). In their view, the continuity and discontinuity of deviance is intricately connected to interlocking life trajectories and transitions. From this perspective, Sampson and Laub argue that the quality and strength of social bonds in adulthood to family, work, and community can explain changes in adult trajectories toward criminality.

### **3. Conceptualizations of Desistance**

The conceptualizations of desistance and theories of desistance have evolved from multiple perspectives and disciplines, including developmental psychology, developmental

criminology, and sociology, and socio-structural theoretical frameworks. Although there is general consensus among scholars that desistance is a time-oriented process, there is considerable debate over a clear definition of desistance, what constitutes termination of criminality, and what internal and external factors influence the process.

In their essay *Understanding Desistance from Crime* (2001), Sampson and Laub advanced their discussion on the process of desistance, introducing the distinction between life course desistance and developmental accounts of desistance. In doing so, they argued that individual desistance occurs in combination with situational contexts and structural influences linked with important institutions. Veysey, Martinez, and Christian (2013) concurred with Sampson and Laub (1993). From their review of qualitative studies on desistance across the life course they conclude that age is not solely a factor. Further, they assert that offenders desist at a young age because of personal attributes, marriage, and or military service.

Maruna (1999) in his paper, *Desistance and development: The psychosocial process of going straight*, reviewed the prevailing theoretical approaches to and causal explanations for desistance from crime including ontogenetic, sociogenic, and psychological perspectives. He concluded that age alone does not explain change and that a combination of social and cognitive processes leads to desistance. He argued, "To truly desist from crime ... a person needs to restructure his or her understanding of self" (p. 9). From this position, he advocated for life story narrative research and the importance of understanding the person and the person's story in criminology.

In contrast, Bushway, Thornberry, and Krohn (2003) viewed desistance as a developmental process rather than an act of termination and emphasized two components of desistance: (1) decreasing incidents of criminality and (2) a final termination of criminal

behavior. Subsequently, Bushway, Thornberry, and Krohn (2003) defined desistance as a reduction in the rate of offending from a non-zero level to a stable rate indistinguishable from zero. Expanding on the conceptualization of desistance as a developmental process, Bushway and Paternoster (2013) conceptualized desistance as an individual identity change process which results in a "structural break" influencing patterns of decision-making, personal preferences, and choices. In consensus with Sampson and Laub (1993), they support the notion that marriage and jobs play important roles in "sustaining the new identity," but argue that identity change comes first.

#### **4. Quantitative and Qualitative Studies on Desistance**

Desistance is a central theme in life course investigations involving the reentry and employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons. In addition to the focus on developmental change as discussed in the prior section on Sampson and Laub's theory of life course desistance, three additional categories of personal change processes constitute the focus of desistance studies: (1) cognitive change, (2) relational change, and (3) structural change.

Cognitive change studies investigate individual (i.e., micro-level) processes of identity transformation that contribute to reductions in or desistance from criminal activities (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010; LeBel, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Maruna, 2001, 2004). Relational change studies focus on processes of change influenced by social bonds and ties to family members and other close associates or influential actors (Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, & Seffrin, 2008; Warr, 1988; Weaver & McNeil, 2015). Studies that focus on structural change processes are concerned with macro-level institutional and environmental factors that influence individual desistance, such as work, military service, and incarceration (Giordano et al., 2008; LeBel, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Uggen, 2000).



## **5. Cognitive Change Studies**

Maruna, in his seminal work *Making Good* (2001), conducted field observations and in-depth interviews with ex-convicts and found that the process of change for desisters was centrally linked to the development of a prosocial identity. Expanding on prior findings, Maruna et al. (2004) tested labeling theory and the impact of forms of de-labeling in the reintegration and desistance process. They found that "personal vouchers" (p. 275) by influential community members contributed to a "Pygmalion Effect" (i.e., a form of de-labeling) in the process of prosocial cognitive change among returning citizens (p. 27). LeBel, Maruna, and Bushway (2008) conducted a mixed-methods, qualitative study to test cognitive versus structural factors related to desistance and found that regrets for past behavior contributed to a positive new identity and desistance. Alternately, they found that stigma and social prejudices induced a sense of powerlessness and predicted reconviction.

## **6. Relational Change Studies**

Warr (1988) conducted the National Youth Survey (of 1,725 participants), a quantitative study using multi-stage probability sampling to test the links between life course theories, desistance and changing relations with peers. He found that marriage weakened or severed associations with criminal peers and replaced old peers with new prosocial relationships that contributed to desistance. Weaver and McNeil (2015) conducted a qualitative investigation on the reciprocal nature of individual and social relations to participation in offending. Using life story methodology, they found that social relations shape behaviors, and in turn individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging that promote the process of desistance.

## **7. Structural Change Studies**

Giordano et al. (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study consisting of structured interviews and open-ended life history narratives among a sample of 127 subjects to investigate gendered pathways into and out of crime and to explore the roles of marital attachment and job stability in male and female cognitive processes of desistance. They found that "hooks for change" go beyond marriage (p. 1033). They also asserted that there is a reciprocal relationship between individuals, their environment, and their personal agency. Further, they stated that there were gendered distinctions in the types of factors influencing hooks for prosocial change. Women focused on religious transformation and children as their change catalysts. Alternately, men were less focused on family; men's motivations for change were tied to prison or treatment programs.

Building on prior research, Giordano et al. (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study with a sample of delinquent youths, investigating the role of spirituality and religious participation on adult patterns of criminal involvement. They concluded that religiosity served as prosocial capital, while the lack of connection and acceptance by the church served as a source for blaming God for their problems.

Uggen (2000) researched employment outcomes by conducting secondary data analysis on the National Supported Work Demonstration Project dataset. He found that high-quality jobs influenced desistance by (1) decreasing motivation for crime; (2) increasing social controls; and (3) altering the attractiveness of legal activities or illegal activities. More specifically, he argued that job entry and job quality mediated the human capital and demographic on crime.

## **8. Positioning Life Course Desistance Literature and this Study**

The review of literature on life course desistance provides a contextual background for my phenomenological study investigating the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. More specifically, it serves to fill the gap in existing literature on the distinct processes of desistance linked to the employment experience of African American ex-prisoners. In the next section of my literature review, I examine labor market practices and their impact on employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated African Americans.

### **B. Labor Market Theories**

Labor market practices shape, dictate, and control employment outcomes. In this section, I discuss two central theories focused on labor market practices. I begin with a brief discussion of Labor Market Segmentation Theory (a.k.a. dual labor market theory) and Labor Market Stratification. This will be followed by two thematic bodies of literature that describe the impact of incarceration on the overall employment experiences of formerly incarcerated men and women: (1) the intersections of race, incarceration, and employment and (2) gender differences in incarceration, employment, and wages.

#### **1. Labor Market Segmentation**

Labor market segmentation theory "argues that political and economic forces within American capitalism have given rise to and perpetuated segmented labor markets, and that it is incorrect to view the sources of segmented markets as exogenous to the economic system" (Reich et al., 1973, p. 359). Reich et al. identify four segmentation processes controlling labor market outcomes: (1) dual labor market segmentation, which describes the labor market as split into primary and secondary jobs; (2) segmentation within primary sector jobs, in the form of a

hierarchy comprised of supervisors and subordinates; (3) segmentation by race, a process which stereotypes, assigns, and distributes jobs based on ethnic characteristics; and (4) segmentation by sex, which enforces job restrictions based on gender and assigns women to low-wage, subservient positions in comparison to similar jobs for men (p. 359-360).

In general, positions within primary job sectors require advanced education and skills. Workers in primary sectors are paid higher wages and are given opportunities for career advancement. On the other hand, workers in secondary sectors have fewer educational achievements and are generally assigned to low-wage positions without benefits or opportunities to move up. As such, there is high turnover in secondary job sectors (p. 359-360).

Drawing from the analysis of Reich et al., Bauder (2001) added geography to the discourse on labor market segmentation. According to Bauder, labor market identities are produced through experiences and representations of place, resulting in *spatial segmentation of labor* (p. 43). Spatial segmentation happens when places are ascribed cultural codes that invoke political, social, and economic meanings on the labor market. This process promotes stereotypes, penalizes minorities for where they live, and casts ethnic minorities as criminal and violent based on the cultural identity of their communities. Other scholars challenge this perspective.

Weiman (2007) addresses the concept of "spatial mismatch" between ex-prisoners seeking jobs and their employment opportunities. He argues that the challenges ex-prisoners experience in the labor market extend beyond "physical location and are intricately connected to other extreme forms of social isolation, such as poverty and inequalities in education which compound their disadvantage on the labor market" (p. 507). Reich et al., Bauder, and Weiman present important dimensions of the mechanisms that lock ex-prisoners into secondary job sectors and underscore the persistent challenges faced by ex-prisoners in the labor market.

## **2. Labor Market Stratification, Crime, and Incarceration**

Crutchfield and Pitchford (1997) argued that low-wage, unstable jobs provide few incentives for people to avoid engaging in crime. Crutchfield and Pitchford (1997) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to determine if individuals employed in the secondary labor market were more inclined to engage in crime than persons in stable jobs (p. 93). They sampled 12,000 male and female youths across four cohorts (1966-1979), initial ages 14-21.

They found that unemployment and lack of income do not solely account for participation in crime. They assert that crime evolves from multiple interacting factors, such as marginal employment, lost or weakened income, economic conditions, time out of the labor force, and enticements from the neighborhood concentration of large groups of marginally employed people. Based on their findings, Crutchfield and Pitchford developed a labor stratification and crime thesis that asserted that "the effect of marginal employment on stakes in conformity is conditional on opportunities for interaction with others 'in the same boat'" (p. 98).

Other scholars have focused on the absence of human, financial, and social capital among disenfranchised groups and the relationship of these deficits to their increased risk for and vulnerabilities for imprisonment. In their review of literature on incarceration and stratification, Wakefield and Uggen (2010) argued that incarceration reproduces and reinforces social inequalities (p. 387). They describe the process of entry into prison as a socially determined phenomena caused by several important factors: (1) differential exposure to police surveillance; (2) increased risk that the charges against minorities, women, and poor people will result in convictions due to poverty and their marginalized status; and (3) difference in sentencing patterns, as well as other structural factors (p. 392). This perspective concurs with Alexander

(2010) in arguing that imprisonment is not driven by crime, but rather by socio-structural forces which seek to control, manage, marginalize, and further disenfranchise poor people, particularly African Americans.

### **3. The Intersections of Race, Incarceration, and Employment**

Empirical research has provided strong evidence of the persistence of race-based discrimination and the systematic exclusion of formerly incarcerated, African Americans from the workforce. Pager, Western, and Bonikowski (2009) conducted matched team field audits of 340 entry-level jobs in New York to investigate discrimination in low-wage labor markets. They found significant forms of categorical exclusion of African Americans by employers in interviewing and hiring processes, including: (1) rejection of equally qualified Blacks in favor of White candidates; (2) varying evaluations of qualifications based on race; (3) race-coded job channeling, in which Blacks men were predominantly offered positions requiring physical labor and positions that did not require customer contact; and (4) (most significantly for African Americans and Hispanics with no criminal histories, the chances of being hired were no better than for Caucasians with criminal backgrounds.

Further, Pager (2007) eloquently presented the predicament of intense stigmatization of African American ex-prisoners on the labor market. In her seminal work *The Mark of a Criminal Record*, she argued that incarceration is a form of negative credentialing similar to diplomas among non-offenders and that criminal credentialing serves as an official status marker of undesirable behaviors and job traits to employers. In 2003, Pager published evidence that mere contact with the criminal justice system severely reduced future employment opportunities for African American males and that a criminal record reduced callbacks to Blacks for interviews and jobs by 50% in comparison to their White counterparts.

Another issue of critical concern is open and public access to criminal records.

Accessibility to the criminal records of ex-prisoners has expanded, and increasingly employers are conducting background checks to make hiring decisions. This has raised considerable debate among scholars regarding the virtues of this expansive use of personal and powerful information against individuals who have no control over who uses it and how it is used. For vast numbers of African American, there is reason for critical concern. There is potential for growing, irreversible harm to African Americans individuals and communities, given: (1) that African Americans are disproportionately impacted by incarceration, (2) the absence of legal constraints on who has access to records, (3) the lack of governance on the accuracy of information available, and (4) the lack of policy addressing the perpetuity of postings. Some scholars would suggest otherwise.

Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll (2006) assert that statistical discrimination of African Americans on the labor market can be reduced through the maintenance and continuation of criminal background checks. In their view, employers that conduct criminal background checks will be more amenable to hiring non-offending African Americans than those employers who do not check. Alternately, Pager (2003) argued that criminal background checks do more harm than good. However amenable criminal background checks are to employer's taste for hiring African American candidates, Holzer et al. neglected the context in which this hiring occurs and that frequently the jobs offered are minimum wage positions with no future security.

Clearly, race and incarceration matter in considerations for employment. Undeniably, African Americans are disproportionately represented in all aspects of criminal justice processing, arrests, re-arrests, jails, imprisonment, probation, and parole. Under the current circumstances, this form of entrapment in crime and mass incarceration sustains an enduring

legacy of economic disempowerment and disenfranchisement for formerly incarcerated African Americans needing and seeking legitimacy through work (Richie, 2001, 2012).

#### **4. Gender Differences in Incarceration, Employment, and Wages**

Gender matters in terms of the experience and effects of incarceration on African Americans in three significant ways. First, women and men's involvement in and motivations for crime differ. Most women offenders are sent to prison for non-violent crimes, whereas men are more frequently convicted of violent offenses (DOJ, 1999). Second, male inmates fathered 15 times more children, but female prisoners were more likely to have custodial charge of their children. In 1999, two-thirds of women in prison were mothers to approximately 1.3 million minor children (DOJ, 1999). Because there are fewer prisons for women and many prisons are not easily accessible to poor families, many mothers never see their children while they are incarcerated. And third, women experience higher rates of sexual and physical abuse, before, during, and following their incarceration (DOJ, 1999). Intimate partner violence is significantly linked to the criminal involvement and recidivism rates of African American women (Whaley, Moe, Eddy, & Daugherty, 2008; Leverentz, 2006; Richie, 2001, 2012).

Fewer women commit violent crimes, but for those that do, it is often in response to their victimization by intimates. Women convicted of violent crimes serve longer sentences, and, in most states, if their sentences exceed a year or more their children go into foster care and are eventually placed for adoption (Sentencing Project, 2007). Bonding with a parent is critical to the emotional well-being of children. When imprisonment disrupts this natural process, children with incarcerated parents are at greater risk of their own involvement with the criminal justice system. Thus, locking up mothers, particularly for non-violent offenses, is at best counterproductive to the public safety objectives of mass incarceration.



Successful employment is critical to the rehabilitation and reunification of incarcerated mothers with their children, because incarceration intensifies the economic and social marginalization of women. A briefing from the Sentencing Project (2007) reported that 60% of incarcerated women in 1999 were not employed when they were arrested and over one-third had incomes under \$600 prior to their arrests and incarceration.

Lalonde and Cho (2008) investigated the impact of incarceration on the employment prospects of 6,991 Black and Hispanic women who were former inmates in Illinois prisons. They derived from their findings that "prison does not harm Illinois women's employment prospects" (p. 251), at least in the short term. However, closer investigation proved that any employment gains women realized in the immediate post-release term dissipated over the long-term. In addition, the post-incarceration wage gains reported for mothers with multiple children were extremely low, grossing an average \$600 over a five-year period.

Similarly, Jung (2011) researched labor market outcomes for a sample of 29,560 men released from Illinois state prisons. He found a positive association with length of incarceration and labor market outcomes. Based on his findings, he argued that lengthy incarceration does not make it harder to find a job. In his analysis, inmates who served longer sentences had higher earnings and employment after prison. He attributes his findings to the fact that men who serve longer sentences have time to participate in and benefit from rehabilitation programming in prison. Consequently, Kling (2006) found no significant effect of length of incarceration on employment and earnings, but noted that an unstable economy reduces the prospects of ex-prisoners finding work.

Other scholars strongly debate the findings of those two studies. They offer convincing evidence that incarceration is harmful to the life chances of African Americans and provide proof

that the effects of incarceration can result in lifetime wage penalties ranging from 10-30% for formerly incarcerated African Americans (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003; Nagin & Waldfogel, 1998; Western & Pettit, 2005). Western and Pettit (2005) direct attention to the fact that the human capital of inmates deteriorates over time, leaving them ill-prepared for employment on the outside (p. 563). Further they assert that the appearance of immediate wage gains among non-institutionalized populations of African Americans may be artificial because the institutionalized Black men are not included in official labor statistic counts. Holzer (2003) argued that the intense stigmatization from incarceration rather than deterioration of human capital makes it harder for ex-prisoners to find jobs. And the findings of Nagin and Waldfogel (1998) starkly contrasted the findings of Lalonde and Cho (2008) and Jung (2011). Nagin and Waldfogel (1998) found that length of time in prison damaged the career prospects of ex-prisoners and relegated them in the long-term to spot market jobs with lower wages (p. 25).

## **5. Economic Inequality for African American Men and Women**

Inequality in employment for African American men and women is further evidenced by U.S. unemployment rates. According to Pager (2007), unemployment for formerly incarcerated Black men is approximated at over 75% one year after their release. In 2010, the unemployment rate for Black men was 18.4% in contrast to 8.7% for White men (BLS, January, 2013). The 2010 unemployment rate for Black women was just as disparaging at 13.8%, in comparison to 7.7% for White women (BLS, 2013).

Annual median income disparities by ethnicity are also an issue of concern. On average, Black men earn \$665/week compared to \$879/week for White men. Black women earn \$599/week compared to \$710 per week for White women (BLS, 2013). Lyons and Pettit (2011)

found in their study on race, incarceration, and wage growth that post-release African American ex-prisoners' wages grow 21% slower than the wages for White ex-prisoners.

In sum, formerly incarcerated African Americans experience life-long consequences and irreversible employment and wage sanctions which affect future income, earnings, and employment potential for all offenders, but more so for women who offend.

## **6. Positioning Labor Market Literature and This Study**

This review of the research and discourse on the impact of incarceration on the employment prospects and earnings potential of formerly incarcerated African Americans has helped to shape and inform my study. The next chapter details my research design and methodology.

### **C. Theoretical Framework**

#### **1. Introduction**

My study focused on understanding the experience of management-level employment among a sample of full-time employed formerly incarcerated African American men and women who work in the field of reentry and transitional services for ex-offenders. The central research question for the study was: "How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?" As stated earlier, little is known about the work experience of ex-offenders who secure jobs that provide a living wage, economic stability, and professional careers.

The goal of this study was twofold: first, to document participant accounts of their experience and, second, to conduct a structured analysis to interpret and report findings. The intent of this study was to address the gap in existing scholarship by providing critical insights

that will inform and improve strategies for ex-prisoner employment work initiatives and policies aimed at reducing recidivism and promoting reentry success.

In this chapter, I present my dissertation research model. This chapter is divided into three sections: (A) Qualitative Research Methods, (B) Key Concepts and Terms of Transcendental Phenomenology and (C) the Transcendental Phenomenological Model.

## **2. Qualitative Research Methods**

In the process of formulating my dissertation research question, I explored options for developing a research interview guide and conceptualizing a research design which would complement the direction of my study (see statement of research formulation, p. 9). From this process, I determined that my investigation would be exploratory and qualitative. It was exploratory due to limited scholarship on the research topic and was qualitative because in-depth interviews will capture subjective, thick descriptions of the experiences of research participants, a process not amenable to quantitative research investigations.

Qualitative research is an open system of investigation that takes place in natural environments. Research in this tradition employs a broad range of interpretative, holistic methods (e.g., ethnographies, phenomenology, grounded theory) to assemble a variety of empirical materials (e.g., audio recordings, transcripts, journals, memos) to explain complex phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Padgett, 2008). Qualitative research strategies situate the investigator up-close and within the personal real world of participants experience. Thus open-ended, semi-structured interviews are a primary technique of qualitative research.

The role of most qualitative investigators is to become an active instrument of data collection. Researchers conducting qualitative studies work to achieve an insider perspective in understanding how participants make sense of and attribute meaning to their lived experiences

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). From this perspective, qualitative researchers embrace the individual point of view.

Further, qualitative researchers engage their sensibilities to employ approaches that value and preserve the authenticity of the experiences of participants. In doing so, they do not seek absolute control of the research process but rather go where the data lead (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result, qualitative researchers invoke "verisimilitude, emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring, political praxis, multi-voiced texts and dialogues with subjects" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10).

An inherent strength of qualitative research is its search for deep meaning expressed through thick, rich descriptions of participants' lived experience. Further, the compatibility of qualitative research with multi-method and multidisciplinary focused research strategies enhances confidence, rigor, and depth in the research process and in conclusive findings (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Padgett, 2008). Moustakas (1994), a humanistic psychologist and phenomenological scholar, shared the common qualities of human science research models and their distinctions from quantitative empirical approaches:

1. recognizing the value of qualitative designs and methodologies, studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches;
2. focusing on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts;
3. searching for meanings and essences of experiences rather than measurements and explanations;
4. obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews;

5. regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behavior and as evidence for scientific investigation;
6. formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement and personal commitment of the researcher;
7. viewing experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole. (p. 21)

My choice of qualitative methods for this dissertation complements my research goals to:

(1) capture the authentic, lived experiences of formerly incarcerated persons who have experienced management employment; (2) explore a sensitive and emotionally invoking topic that has been understudied; and (3) situate this study in a non-hierarchical, collaborative research process. Specifically, I chose the Transcendental Phenomenological Model (i.e., Transcendental Phenomenology) developed by Moustakas (1994) because of its rigor and its ideological stance that knowledge emerges from immersion in human experience. In the next section, I present the key concepts and terms of Transcendental Phenomenology, preceded by a brief discussion of phenomenology.

### **3. Transcendental Phenomenology: Key Concepts and Terms**

My study was framed in the philosophy of phenomenology; the phenomenon under study is the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women residing in Chicago. The central research question for my study was: "How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?"

Phenomenology is a prominent form of qualitative research. The word phenomenon as derived from the Greek language means to "flare up, to show itself, to appear" (Moustakas, 1994,

p. 26). Phenomenology evolved from a philosophical movement whose primary objective was "the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions" (Spiegelberg, 1975, p. 3). Moustakas (1994) credits Husserl (1931) as a leading pioneer in the development of phenomenology. Husserl along with other early crafters of the science of phenomenology asserted that "knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Thus, I selected Moustakas's (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology (TP) as my research method (see, Table I).

**TABLE I**  
**TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY METHODS**  
 (Modified and Adopted from Moustakas, 1994)

<b>Data Collection Preparation</b>	<b>Collecting Data</b>	<b>Organizing, Analyzing, &amp; Synthesizing Data</b>	<b>Summary, Implications, &amp; Outcomes</b>
Formulating the question	Engage in Epoche by creating the appropriate atmosphere and rapport for interviewing	Follow van Kaam analysis method	Summarize entire study
Conduct literature review	Bracket the research question	Develop individual textural descriptions; and a synthesized composite description	Relate study findings and differentiate from findings of literature review
Develop participant selection criteria	Conduct the interview via informal interviewing or open-ended questions or topical guided interview	Develop a synthesized textural composite description	Relate study to possible future research and develop an outline for a future study
Develop instructions and guiding questions of topics needed for the interview			Relate study to personal outcomes
			Relate study to professional outcomes Relate study to social meanings and relevance Offer closing comments: Researcher's future direction and goals



Similar to other forms of qualitative research, TP is concerned with interpretation and qualification of knowledge through participants' ways of knowing, rather than deriving knowledge through measurement and quantification of phenomena to determine causation and generalize findings. Moustakas (1994) defines TP as:

a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and they appear to us in consciousness. Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for phenomenological reflection. The appearance of something makes it a phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience. (p. 49)

Borrowing from Husserl's (1931) conceptualizations, Moustakas (1994) defined the process for achieving *transcendence* in phenomenological studies as Epoche (pronounced *ep-po-hee*), a purposeful engagement in:

disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated ... in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated (p. 22).

The essence of Epoche is learning a new way "to see" distinguish and describe what is before us" (p. 33).

The conceptual framework for TP has been derived from a range of key concepts within phenomenological science. Two of the primary concepts adopted by TP are intentionality and intuition. Intentionality is "the internal experience of being conscious of something" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). Intentionality occurs when an individual directs their attention to an imaginary or real object. For example, witnessing a beautiful waterfall. The *act* of intentionality arouses conscious feelings, judgments, and pleasures, such as the feeling of joy or serenity or awe evoked by seeing the waterfall.

According to Moustakas (1994), "every intentionality has a *noema* and *noesis*" (p. 29).

The noema is the phenomena of the individual experience, the way in which the individual perceives and interprets the appearance of the object. In the example of the waterfall, the noema is how the waterfall appears to us internally (i.e., our perception/internal consciousness), not the real waterfall. The noesis is the way in which the individual ascribes meaning or meanings to the object as consciously perceived.

The second key concept of TP is intuition: the notion that all individuals are intuitive thinkers. Summarizing Descartes's and Husserl's descriptions of intuition, Moustakas (1994) stated:

All things become clear and evident through an intuitive-reflective process, through a transformation of what is seen; first intuitively in the common appearance, in the manner in which something is presented and then in the fullness and clarity of an intuitive-reflective process. (p. 32).

Thus, intuition is the knowledge process that comes with internally *feeling* or *knowing* something that is not explicitly articulated. In addition to the framework provided by intentionality and intuition, a TP study is launched through a series of core phases and processes.

#### **4. The Transcendental Phenomenological Model**

Transcendental Phenomenology (TP) has four primary phases in the research process: preparing to collect data, collecting data, analyzing and synthesizing data, and summarizing findings (Table I, p.32). However, TP differs from other qualitative methods in the types of steps employed throughout its implementation phases, as it incorporates a distinct set of core processes. I used three of the core processes of TP to uncover knowledge in this dissertation study: epoche, phenomenological reduction, and synthesis (see Table II, p.35).

**TABLE II**  
**CORE PROCESSES OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY**  
 (Modified and Adopted from Moustakas, 1994)

<b>Core Processes</b>	<b>Stage of Implementation</b>	<b>Steps</b>
<b>Epoche</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualization of Research</li> <li>• Data Collection</li> <li>• Data Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refrain from and set aside pre judgments</li> </ul>
<b>Phenomenological Reduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracketing</li> <li>• Horizontalization</li> <li>• Delimit horizons</li> <li>• List invariant themes</li> <li>• Create individual textural descriptions</li> </ul>
<b>Synthesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate individual textural descriptions into a group composite textural description of the meanings and essences of the experience</li> </ul>

The methods and terminology of TP can be complex and challenging. Yet TP offers a systematic, organized, and rigorous set of core processes that parallel other forms of excellence in qualitative research. As noted earlier, the humanistic sensibilities of TP emulate participant's ways of knowing. As such, a distinct feature of TP is that research subjects are considered "co-researchers" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103). From Moustakas's point of view, this posture is central to the practice of TP as it honors participants' knowledge as primary and creates a non-hierarchical, collaborative research process centered on respect and mutuality. Below, I provide a detailed description of the core processes and other distinctive features of TP.

The term "Epoche" means to refrain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Epoche is the first core process in transcendental methods, occurring before and during data collection and

analysis. In epoche, the researcher employs mental and physical exercises to clear her/his mind of preconceived thoughts about the phenomenon. As such, Epoche is purposeful action to maintain vigilance against introducing investigator bias into the research process.

Examples of Epoche can include cognitive/reflective exercises and/or various forms of meditative practice. A cognitive/reflective practice of Epoche can be something as simple as clearing your mind by taking a sheet of paper and writing down all your thoughts from the chaos of your day up to and including all your thoughts about the impending interview and interviewee and, once done, discarding the page as a demonstrative way of getting rid of any obtrusive thoughts. Other ways to practice Epoche include mindfulness practices such as yoga, prayer, and meditative exercises.

The second core process of TP is Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction (TPR) (Moustakas, 1994). TPR occurs during the data analysis phase of the study. In the first step of TPR, the investigator removes all redundant, repetitive, and nonessential components of interview narratives to uncover the core constituents of the phenomenon. In the second step, all essential descriptive components of each interview narrative are isolated and used to draft individual textural descriptions. Textural descriptions are the *what* of co-researchers' experience (*the noema*)—the description of the experience itself, as well as thoughts, feelings, and ideas related to the situation (*the noesis*).

The third and final step is synthesis. During this stage of analysis, individual textural descriptions are integrated into a group composite textural description. The group composite textural description is the presentation of the findings from this investigation.

It is the common experiences shared across all co-researchers: the central themes, core meanings, and essence of the phenomenon of the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women as extracted from the interview narratives of co-researchers.

### **III. METHODS**

In this chapter, I present the qualitative methods and procedures I used to conduct a study on the experiences of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women residing in Chicago. Co-researcher recruitment and interviews for this study were conducted from late January 2014 through June 2014. As stated, the phenomenological model is comprised of four steps: (1) data collection preparation; (2) collecting data; (3) organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data; and (4) summary, implications and outcomes.

I modified my section headings for greater clarity in the presentation of the research process, but the content areas remain relatively the same. Thus, this chapter is divided into four sections: (A) Research Design (i.e., data collection preparation), (B) Sampling (i.e., data collection preparation), (C) Data Collection, and (D) Data Analysis (i.e., organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data). The presentation of my research findings will be presented in the next chapter and it will represent the fourth and final component of the phenomenological model (i.e., summary, implications, and outcomes).

#### **A. Research Design**

As previously stated, I used Transcendental Phenomenology (TP) as my qualitative research method to explore the experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated persons. My research design also incorporated a purposive sampling strategy. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), purposive sampling assumes no set number of research subjects, but rather sets a cut-off point for interviewing at the time when a researcher has

saturated her/his learning with regard to a particular phenomenon. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify purposive sampling as compatible with qualitative studies that: (1) apply a theoretical/conceptual framework, (2) use non-random probability sampling, and (3) target small sample sizes. Among the various forms of purposive sampling, I selected snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves the use of key informants who provide referrals to people that they know and believe to be a fit for the phenomenon under study (Weiss, 1994).

I designed a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide, and I conducted in-depth, interviews (ranging 3–4 hours) to reach my goal of capturing thick and rich descriptions of co-researchers' shared experiences. This form of qualitative interviewing was compatible with my research method, as TP endorses open, flexible, and long interviews.

There were three stages to my analysis process. First, I loaded verbatim, typed interview transcriptions into ATLAS.ti software (Muhr, 2012) and developed preliminary data codes. Preliminary codes were reviewed, refined, and developed into a codebook.

Second, I reviewed each individual transcription and selected a phenomenological analysis method. Moustakas (1994) offers two such models. I used the van Kaam method of analysis (van Kaam, 1966) to identify and cluster meaning units into essential themes from each co-researchers experience. The themes derived from the van Kaam process were developed into written textural descriptions depicting the essence of each co-researchers experience. Before proceeding to step three in the analysis process, I introduced a process of member checking (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011) to validate the accuracy of my interpretation of each co-researchers experience.

Third and last, findings from individual textural descriptions were used to develop a group textural composite detailing the common elements and shared experiences of

management-level employment across all co-researchers. The group textural composite represents the findings of my study on the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women residing in Chicago.

## **1. Sampling**

According to the transcendental phenomenological model, the priorities for sampling and selecting research subjects are:

The research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is ... interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview [and] grants the investigator the right to tape-record ... the interview and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107).

As stated earlier, I used snowball sampling to recruit co-researchers for this study. One explicit goal connected to my sampling strategy was to recruit a representative equal number of male and female co-researchers. As stated in the literature review section, the phenomenon of management employment among formerly incarcerated African American women has been understudied. Thus, exploring gendered distinctions in the experience of management employment among male and female co-researchers compelled me to oversample for the participation of women in my study.

A second goal of sampling was to ensure that the sample size was confirmed by the data collected and the themes uncovered rather than quantitative procedures for sampling. Employing snowball sampling procedures maximized my opportunities for the inclusion of women in the study and allowed for the fluid recruitment of co-researchers until my learning on the phenomenon had been saturated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I estimated that I would interview from 8 to 15 co-researchers before reaching the point of saturation in this study. Saturation was realized after conducting my thirteenth interview.



In addition to the sampling criteria detailed by Moustakas, I developed and implemented the following inclusion criteria: (1) African American men and women aged 25 or older who had served prison time; (2) residents of Chicago, including neighboring suburbs of Cook County; (3) full-time employment for a minimum of two years; (4) employment in a management-level position (i.e., chief executives, program or case managers) with an institution or agency providing ex-prisoner reentry transitional assistance or policy work; (5) a minimum annual income of \$25,000; (6) no convictions or arrests involving prison or jail time served, within three years from the last date of release; and (7) no arrests for non-felony offenses within one year from the last date of release.

The subject pool for my study was exclusively formerly incarcerated African American men and women for three reasons: (1) the pervasive, negative impact of racism, compounded by the stigma of a criminal record positions African Americans at the high extreme of experiencing adversity and at high risk for persistent unemployment and under-employment; (2) the disproportionate representation of African Americans among populations of people arrested, jailed, and imprisoned entrenches them in social disadvantage and creates barriers to securing employment and to achieving successful community reintegration; and (3) the employment experiences of female ex-offenders have been understudied.

Adults aged 25 or older was a criterion based on prior research that found: (1) people who made the transition from youth to adulthood were less likely to recidivate (Harrison & Schehr, 2004); (2) adult ex-prisoners were more committed to legitimate work (Gill, 1997); and (3) labor force participation rates for men and women peaks between ages 25-34 (BLS, 2012).

I limited inclusion to individuals who were employed full-time for a minimum of two years at a management level in ex-offender reentry, transitional assistance, or policy work. This

criterion was consistent with the findings of scholars who assert that the quality and meaningfulness of work was linked to overall job satisfaction and that earning a living wage motivates desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001; Pager, 2007; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

I adopted the 2011 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic (BLS) categories for management positions to classify types of participant management experience. BLS lists two categories for management: chief executives and social service managers. Chief executives are employed by private and public sector organizations, and their role is to provide overall organizational oversight, management, and direction. Social service managers manage or coordinate agency programs, including various components of direct services.

## **2. Recruitment**

Recruitment of co-researchers began with outreach to local agencies serving populations of formerly incarcerated persons. Three Chicago-based agencies consented to serve as recruitment sites: Cabrini Green Legal Aid, Safer Foundation, and St. Leonard's Ministries. Each agency signed a study memorandum of understanding (Appendix A). The University of Illinois at Chicago's Institutional Review Board approved the protocol application in January 2014. After receipt of IRB approval, I posted and distributed recruitment flyers with tear-off contact information at each agency site (Appendix B).

The collaborating agencies were well-established non-profits that have consistently provided myriad services to formerly incarcerated men and women. Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA) opened its doors in 1972 and provides a host of pro bono legal services central to removing barriers to employment and reducing recidivism among formerly incarcerated persons (CGLA, n.d.). Safer Foundation was founded in 1972 and offers employment, housing, substance abuse, and life skill services for citizens returning from prison to their communities (Safer

Foundation, n.d.). And finally, St Leonard's Ministries was established in 1954 and is a multi-site agency, providing a range of comprehensive services, including residential, case management, mental health, and employment services (St Leonard's Ministries, n.d.).

Potential co-researchers contacted me by phone or e-mail to get further information on the study and state their interest in participating. In addition, the co-researchers who completed in-depth interviews and a key community informant referred other potential co-researchers. A telephone screening was conducted with each potential co-researcher to determine their eligibility for in-depth interviewing.

In total, 22 persons contacted me and were screened by phone for eligibility. Thirteen were deemed eligible co-researchers for the study. Among the potential co-researchers who expressed interest, nine were found ineligible for the following reasons: five did not meet the study minimum annual income standard of \$25,000; two served jail time but no time in prison; one was unemployed; and one was not African American.

Once eligibility was established, an interview date and location were set. Interview locations were mutually agreed upon and based in large measure on the safety, confidentiality, comfortability, and site accessibility for co-researchers.

### **3. Settings/Interview Locations**

All eligibility screenings were conducted by telephone. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs of Cook County. Most interviews took place in my university office and/or conference rooms located at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Governors State University; four interviews were conducted in the homes of co-researchers; and two were conducted in the conference room of an IRB-approved collaborating agency site. Most interviews proceeded uninterrupted, with the exception to two interviews

conducted in co-researchers homes. However, the interruptions were minor, and the focus in each was resumed with ease.

## **B. Data Collection**

### **1. The Processes of Bracketing and Epoche**

Prior to initiating interviews, I engaged in two essential phenomenological processes: bracketing and epoche. As discussed, bracketing was used in finalizing the formulation of the central research question. It is an exercise of focused contemplation in which the researcher carefully reviews and brackets essential words in the research question to ensure that the question being asked is appropriate to the aims of the investigation. According to Moustakas (1994), the purpose of bracketing is to ensure that "the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question" (p. 97).

Bracketing was beneficial in maintaining focus on the central research question. In addition, it defined the core boundaries of the investigation with regard to the inclusion criteria; clarified the parameters of the employment experiences under investigation (i.e., management-level); and encouraged open and fluid descriptions of each co-researcher's experience during the interview process through use of the term "*how*."

As stated earlier, a central concern of TP is implicit interviewer bias. Maintaining vigilance against and taking active steps to remove and reduce bias in the research process is achieved in the phenomenological model through the practice of epoche (Moustakas, 1994). As stated earlier, epoche in practice is a process of intentional, active efforts to clear one's mind of preconceived notions, pre-judgments, and thoughts about research participants and their experiences. The goal of epoche in interviewing is to approach the process with an open mind and to be receptive to listening to and hearing participants telling of their experiences.

Initially, I was apprehensive about using epoche because I believed it was based in meditative practices foreign to me. I was also concerned that co-researchers might perceive epoche as alien in an interview setting. I decided on a more subdued approach. Before each interview, I would take a moment in a private space at the interview site to engage in deep breathing exercises, a practice I had learned in Yoga classes. This exercise helped me to relax, clear my mind, and prepare to engage openly and fully with co-researchers.

I also did not attempt to engage co-researchers in meditative practice. Rather, I selected a process that I felt would be less intimidating, particularly since our interview would explore personal and sensitive topics related to their experience of incarceration and reentry. Before starting each interview, I would ask each co-researcher if they would like to engage in a few moments of silence with me to “settle in” and prepare for our work together. I was pleasantly surprised when every co-researcher welcomed the opportunity to sit silently, relax, and re-focus their energy in preparation for our interview.

## **2. Data Collection Instruments**

Before entering the field to collect data, I developed the following data collection instruments to gather co-researcher's demographic data and interview narratives: (1) a Telephone/In-person Eligibility Screening Guide (Appendix D); (2) an Informed Consent (Appendix E as approved by UIC, IRB) and (3) an In-Person, Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Appendix C). In addition to these instruments, my data collection process included reflective journaling, field notes, and memos. Although less formal, journaling and field notes enhanced my understanding of the phenomenon under study. In addition, I stored my journal notes and memos in ATLAS.ti and as the investigation progressed they later served as important reference

tools for controlling researcher bias in the research process. Below, I provide a chronology of data collection procedures along with a brief description of each data collection item.

**a. Telephone/In-Person Eligibility Screening Guide**

When contacted, I explained the eligibility screening process. The telephone/in-person eligibility screening form (Appendix D) including: a recruitment script comprised of a brief introduction on the purpose of the study; a description of my role as the principal investigator; and a request for potential co-researchers' verbal consent to participate in a 10-15 minute interview, comprised of (9) questions to determine their eligibility for participation in in-depth interviews. Once verbal consent was obtained by telephone, I proceeded to ask questions and wrote responses on the screening guide. All eligibility screenings were completed by phone. Once eligibility was determined, an interview date and time were scheduled. All potential co-researchers in the recruitment eligibility screening process received \$15 as a token of appreciation for their time and/or travel.

**b. Informed Consent**

The second stage of data collection began with a thorough review, discussion, and signing of the research informed consent with each co-researcher (Appendix E). It included details on: research procedures; the voluntary nature of participation in the study; co-researchers rights to refuse or withdraw their participation at any time during the investigation; assurances of co-researchers confidentiality and anonymity; the length and duration of interviews; and the potential risks and benefits of participation.

I asked each co-researcher to read the informed consent along with me as I read it aloud and reviewed it with them. At this point, any questions or concerns raised were addressed and satisfied. Once co-researchers consented voluntarily to participate, the consent form was

executed with my signature and that of the co-researcher. Each co-researcher received an executed copy of the signed consent form for their records.

Informed consent was treated as an integral part of the research process and as the interview(s) progressed, co-researchers were routinely advised of their rights as voluntary research participants, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time. I also informed co-researchers that they could stop the interview at any point, if they experienced any form of distress resulting from sharing their experience of past incarceration and current managerial employment. In addition, I provided each co-researcher with a list of counseling agencies for future reference in the event that participating in the interview caused them any form of psychological distress (Appendix F).

### **c. Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

I used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) for this research project. However, due to the open and reflexive nature of qualitative interviewing and consistent with the methods of transcendental phenomenology, the guide was subject to change as interviews progressed and new lines of inquiry were realized. Prior to data collection, I piloted my interview guide with a key community informant who had experienced incarceration and currently works as a manager in the reentry field. The pilot interview did not reveal any significant need for changes to the guide. The informant was not included as a co-researcher for the study, and the pilot interview was not included in the study outcomes.

The semi-structured interview guide was comprised of 17 semi-structured questions designed to encourage open-ended, reflective responses. The interview guide was divided into three broad thematic areas: well-being, trouble with the law, and employment. In addition,

related probes were included with each semi-structured question to aid in clarifying and capturing fuller accounts of co-researchers' experiences, when needed.

Section 1 focused on the co-researchers' perceptions of their well-being and concerns in the context of their marital status and family relationships, education, vocational skills, perceptions of health, and current lifestyle. Section 2 explored the first and last involvement of co-researchers with the criminal justice system and incarceration, along with their feelings about incarceration and its effects on their employment outcomes. The third and final section explored the employment experiences of co-researchers, including social and structural barriers to employment and the perceived meaning of their full-time, management-level employment.

### **3. Interviewing**

In total (i.e., after eligibility screenings) 13 co-researchers volunteered for the study and completed semi-structured interviews.

The average length of semi-structure interviews ranged 3-4 hours, and they were scheduled over the course of 1–3 meetings. Approximately, half ( $n = 7$ ) of the interviews took place in my university office and/or conference rooms located at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Governors State University; ( $n = 4$ ) interviews were conducted in the homes of co-researchers; and ( $n = 2$ ) of the interviews were conducted in the conference room of an IRB-approved collaborating agency site. All co-researchers received a total of \$50 as appreciation for their time and travel.

Each interview was audio-recorded with the expressed permission of each co-researcher and their approval was documented on the informed consent form. At the end of the first meeting, each co-researcher completed a contact sheet (Appendix G). The contact sheet detailed the best time and method to reach them; their preference for reviewing and commenting on a



written summary of their interview; and, in the case of a second or third meeting, the appointment time and place for the next meeting.

At the completion of 13 semi-structured interviews, I realized that my learning about the phenomenon of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women had become saturated. Distinct patterns and prominent and consistent themes had emerged, and I recognized the need to turn my attention to the process of data analysis.

#### **4. The Co-Researchers**

Adam is a 71-year-old African American male and former member of the Black Panther Party. He is a survivor of the Vietnam War, colon cancer, and diabetes. He was married twice and is the father of three adult children. Adam was sent to prison for accountability in planning an armed robbery that resulted in a murder. His sentence was 50 to 100 years. After serving 11 years and based on his reputation as a model prisoner, Adam received an early parole. Within a year, he was re-incarcerated on a technical violation for crossing state lines (to go to work). He was in prison an additional 16 years. In sum, Adam spent 27 years of his life in prison. Adam is currently Director of Client Services for a Chicago legal clinic that works to free and exonerate innocent victims of imprisonment. He works full-time and earns \$41,500 annually.

Bernie is a 60-year-old African American male. His wife is an ordained minister, and they have been married for 27 years. Together, they parented a son, and he is stepfather to three step-daughters. Bernie has a lengthy history of incarceration which began at age 9. For a major part of his life, he was an active heroin addict. His involvement with the criminal justice system includes theft; forgery; burglary; armed robbery; fraud; con scams; mob action; and violation of parole. He served prison time on three separate convictions: armed robbery, forgery, and parole violation. In addition to crimes committed, Bernie was the victim of two wrongful convictions.

The first was at age 19 when Bernie received a death row sentence for prison mob action, murder, and attempted murder. His second wrongful conviction was for attempted burglary in a case of mistaken identity. In total, Bernie served 12 years in prison. A portion of his last sentence was served under mandatory residential addiction treatment. Bernie is a former client of the agency that currently employs him. He has been employed in his position as Program Administrator/Community Liaison full-time for the past 15 years and his gross salary is \$73,000 per year.

Debra is a 54-year-old African American woman. She met her husband at age 23, and they have been married for the past 12 years. They have two sons, and they raised her nephew (a Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS] ward) for six years. Debra and her five siblings were also wards of the state. Her entry into crime was through the enticement of her partner. They both were active crack cocaine users who committed retail theft and burglaries together to support their addiction. Despite numerous arrests and jail confinements for theft, Debra was only convicted twice. In total she served six and one half years in prison. To complete her second conviction, she was paroled to a residential addiction treatment program for formerly incarcerated women. She is currently a Case Manager in Cook County employed full-time with a local agency that serves incarcerated and addicted adult women. Her gross annual salary is \$31,000.

Diane is a 48-year-old African American woman. She is the mother of four children. She has been married twice to abusive men. Diane states she resorted to drugs in the first marriage to cope with ongoing physical and emotional assaults perpetrated by her husband. Her criminal background includes drug trafficking, check forgery, and parole violation. She was convicted six times, but only served prison time for one conviction (i.e., violation of parole). In addition, she

was wrongfully convicted twice. She reported that she was framed for two crimes that she did not commit: theft and drug trafficking. She was eventually sentenced to prison and served two years on the violation of bond charge. Currently, Diane is the Reentry Program Manager and a minister for a faith-based, community non-profit program. She is employed full-time and earns \$32,000 per year.

Florence is a 64-year-old African American female. She resides alone and is a single mother of three adult children. She is an adult survivor of childhood physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by family members. At age 14, she was sent to juvenile detention for running away from home. At an early age, she began abusing substances and became addicted to crack cocaine. She cycled in and out of prisons eight times, mostly charged with petty shoplifting offenses (a trade she was taught by her mother). At age 44, she was caught shoplifting but falsely charged with felony attempted robbery by the arresting officers. Consequently, under state three-strike laws, Florence received a determinate sentence of 4 to 10 years on the charge. While incarcerated, she participated in a drug and behavior modification treatment program for 19 months. Her participation in drug treatment earned her an early parole, and she was released from prison after serving 2 years and 8 months. Currently, Florence is a full-time, Mental Health Counselor/Case Manager for a women's treatment program in Chicago, where she earns \$45,000 per year.

Karen is a 53-year-old African American female. Her spouse is deceased, and she is raising their two boys alone. She owns her home and resides with her mother and her youngest son, an 11-year-old with special needs. Her eldest son attends college out of state and returns home during school breaks. Karen's first and only incarceration was for drug trafficking and attempt to deliver cocaine in a drug case set up by the police. She became entrapped in the case

after befriending an undercover officer who enticed her to earn some extra money by acting as a go-between for a drug purchase. She was sentenced to six years in prison and served three years before receiving parole. She completed parole in six months, has been free for the past 20 years, and subsequently, received clemency in 2015. Karen's current title is Job Coach/Case Manager, and she is employed full-time by a non-profit program that serves youth offenders. She earns \$29,120 per year.

Keith (pseudonym) is a 45-year-old African American male. He is a single father of two children: a son for whom he has legal custody and a daughter who resides with her mother. At the age of 22, Keith was accused and wrongfully convicted of the rape and sexual assault of a 16-year-old minor. Keith received a determinate sentence of 35 years and served just over eight years in prison. He was released from prison in 1999 and subsequently exonerated of the crime on February 1, 2000. Keith is currently a full-time, Senior Litigation Paralegal at the Chicago law firm that provided pro bono representation to free him. He provides support to the firm's pro bono unit working with wrongly convicted citizens returning from prison. He is in his fourteenth year of employment with the firm, and his salary is \$85,000 per year.

Kevin is 34-year-old African American male. He is single and has a pre-teen daughter who resides with her mother. Over the span of a 10-year period, Kevin had four incarcerations. His last conviction was for possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver. Due to his re-occurring involvement with the criminal justice system, he requested and received a bench trial. The judge sentenced him to 7 years in prison. After serving three and a half years, he was released on parole. Kevin's job title is Caseworker, and he is employed full-time with a transitional housing, substance abuse treatment, and alternative to prison program. Prior to his

employment with the agency, he was a client of the program for two years. His gross annual salary is \$30,000.

Lisa is a 61-year-old African American woman. She is single, resides alone, and is the mother of 6 adult children. For many years, Lisa had a physically abusive spouse who made constant threats to kill her and the children. She tried to leave the relationship on numerous occasions, but each time her husband pursued her and forcibly brought her home. Feeling trapped in the relationship, Lisa hired someone to kill her husband. With no prior history of arrests or convictions, Lisa was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder. She received a determinate 20-year sentence; after serving seven years, she was granted gubernatorial clemency. Lisa's case set legal precedent, as it was the first clemency granted for murder in Illinois. Lisa is the full-time, founding Executive Director of a non-profit, transitional shelter serving survivors of domestic violence and women returning home from prison. She earns a gross salary of \$36,000 per year.

Patricia is a 63-year-old single African American woman. She is the mother of four maternal sons and a surrogate son. Two of her sons are currently incarcerated, and her eldest son died from an overdose. He had been missing for nine years. Patricia resides with her 86-year-old mother, 24-year-old son, and stepson in a three-flat building that she co-owns with her mom. She was an active drug user, and she committed crimes to support her addiction. Convicted on multiple counts of theft (shoplifting) and drug peddling, Patricia received a nine -year determinate sentence. She was released after serving two and a half years in prison. Currently, Patricia is a full-time, Case Manager/Team Leader for a state run corrections institution. She earns an annual, gross salary of \$33,000.

Vaughn is a single, 52-year-old African American male. He currently resides with his 8-year-old son. At age 14, Vaughn shot and killed one of his closest boyhood friends while playing with a gun. He was placed in juvenile detention for four months while his case was being tried. It was his first involvement with the criminal justice system. Eventually, the charges were dropped and the homicide deemed accidental. Unable to cope with what he had experienced, Vaughn spiraled into an ongoing battle with mental illness, substance abuse, and trouble with the law. His criminal history includes incarcerations for possession of controlled substances, pandering, solicitation for prostitution, domestic violence, burglary, and possession and theft of stolen vehicles. For 13 years, Vaughn cycled in and out of jails and prisons, all while living with an undiagnosed severe mental illness. During his last incarceration, he was sent to a prison psychiatric hospital and for the first time received mental health treatment. Since his release, he has maintained his medication and treatment regime, and his condition has improved. Vaughn's current job title is Case Manager, and he is employed by a prisoner reentry and recovery program. He works full-time and earns a gross salary of \$35,000 per year.

Vince is 56-year-old, single male who has never been married and has no children. At age 20, he was convicted of first-degree murder and armed robbery—a crime he did not commit. His conviction was based solely upon circumstantial evidence and the betrayal and testimony of a friend who had committed the crime. Vince received an indeterminate sentence of 150–350 years and served 26 years in prison. In 2003, Vince was released from prison after making 17 parole board appeals. Currently, Vince is employed full-time as the Program Director for a reentry agency, and his salary is \$38,000 annually.

Wilson is a 63-year-old African American male. He has been married for 13 years and is stepfather to two adult sons. His only child, a son, died at age 13 (during Wilson's incarceration).

Under the Illinois accountability rule, Wilson was charged and tried for felony murder on a triple homicide case, a crime he did not commit. It was his first and only arrest and subsequent incarceration. Against the urging of counsel and firmly proclaiming his innocence, Wilson refused to take a plea offer from the state's attorney. His case went to trial, and, at age 24, Wilson was sentenced to 100-300 years in prison. Appeals were filed to the Illinois Supreme Court and a writ of certiorari was filed with the United States Supreme Court, but the case was unwinnable. After serving 24 years in prison and 12 successive parole board appeals, Wilson was paroled at age 48. Wilson is currently the Executive Director of a Chicago, faith-based transitional, reentry program for formerly incarcerated persons and he earns \$65,000 per year.

Below, I present a demographic summary of co-researchers including: age, marital and family status, health, and well-being, length of incarceration, income, educational attainment, and employment. I also highlight gender distinctions in the presentation of the data.

## **5. Demographic Summary of the Sample**

Some characteristics presented below were developed by running frequencies in SPSS (IBM Corp., 2013). Seven men and six women participated as co-researchers in the study (see Table III, p.56). Co-researchers ranged in age from 34-71 years old; median age was 56. Nine co-researchers ( $n = 9/13$ , 67%) were single, and ( $n = 4/13$ , 31%) were married (2 men and 2 women). Most co-researchers (98%) were parents to an average of three children. Only one co-researcher reported never having children.

**TABLE III**  
**CO-RESEARCHERS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>Co-Researchers (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>#Children</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Current Job</b>	<b>Annual Income</b>
Adam	African American	M	71	S	3	A.A.	Program Manager	41,500
Bernie	African American	M	60	M	4	M.A.	Program Administrator	73,000
Debra	African American	F	54	M	3	G.E.D.	Case Manager	31,000
Diane	African American	F	48	M	6	G.E.D.	Program Manager	32,000
Florence	African American	F	64	S	3	B.A.	Mental Health Clinician /Counselor	45,000
Karen	African American	F	53	S	2	M.A.	Case Manager /Job Coach	29,120
Keith	African American	M	45	S	2	B.A.	Senior Paralegal	85,000
Kevin	African American	M	34	S	1	H.S. Diploma	Case Manger	30,000
Lisa	African American	F	61	S	6	A.A.	Executive Director	36,000
Patricia	African American	F	63	S	5	A.A.	Case Manager	33,000
Vaughn	African American	M	52	S	1	H.S. Diploma	Case Manager	35,000
Vince	African American	M	56	S	0	B.A.	Program Director	38,000
Wilson	African American	M	63	M	3	B.A.	Executive Director	65,000



In terms of mental and physical well-being, ( $n = 4/6$ , 67%) of the female co-researchers reported experiencing some form of domestic and/or sexual victimization in their lifetime. No male co-researchers reported domestic or sexual violence victimization; however, two males ( $n = 2/7$ , 28%) reported convictions for violence against women. In addition, seven co-researchers ( $n = 7/13$ , 54%) reported substance addictions and drug-related incarcerations. A smaller number of all co-researchers ( $n = 2/13$ , 15%) reported being on medication for diagnosed, ongoing mental disabilities.

Overall, male co-researchers served longer prison sentences and were convicted of more serious offenses than female co-researchers (see Table IV, p. 58). The range of individual time served by male co-researchers was two and a half years to 27 years; while women served one and a half years to 7 years. In terms of severity of offenses, men tended to commit more severe crimes. Four ( $n = 4/7$ , 43%) of the male co-researchers served time for murder, compared to only one ( $n = 1/6$ , 17%) female co-researcher convicted of conspiracy to commit murder. Similarly, four ( $n = 4/7$ , 43%) of the males were convicted of burglary/armed robbery, compared to three ( $n = 3/6$ , 50%) of the females who were convicted of the lesser crime of retail theft. However, a relatively equal number (15%) of male and female co-researchers were convicted of drug-related offenses. However, it is important to note that ( $n = 8/13$ , 62%) of the co-researchers committed crimes to support drug habits. And finally, the cumulative sum of prison time served for all offenses by all co-researchers was 139 years.

**TABLE IV**  
**CO-RESEARCHERS INCARCERATION HISTORY**

<b>Co-Researchers (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Offense</b>	<b>Time Served /Last Conviction</b>	<b>Prior Convictions</b>	<b>Cumulative Years Inside</b>	<b>Year Released/ Years Out</b>
<b>Vince</b>	M	Murder/Armed Robbery	26 Yrs.	0	26 Yrs.	1998 (16 Yrs.)
<b>Kevin</b>	M	Possession of an Illegal Substance with Intent to Sell	3 ½ Yrs.	4	9 ½ Yrs.	2011 (3 Yrs.)
<b>Keith</b>	M	Rape/Sexual Assault of a Minor	8 Yrs.	0	8 Yrs.	1999 (15 Yrs.)
<b>Diane</b>	F	Technical Violation of Probation (Forgery)	2 Yrs.	6	2 Yrs.	1997 (17 Yrs.)
<b>Patricia</b>	F	Retail Theft	2 ½ Yrs.	12	2 ½ Yrs.	1997 (17 Yrs.)
<b>Bernie</b>	M	Attempted Burglary	3 Yrs.	3	12 Yrs.	1983 (31 Yrs.)
<b>Debra</b>	F	Retail Theft	1 ½ Yrs.	2	2 Yrs.	1999 (15 Yrs.)
<b>Wilson</b>	M	Triple Homicide	24 Yrs.	0	24 Yrs.	1998 (16 Yrs.)
<b>Lisa</b>	F	Conspiracy to Commit Murder	7 Yrs.	0	7 Yrs.	1988 (26 Yrs.)
<b>Vaughn</b>	M	Technical Violation/Warrants (Burglary)	2 ½ Yrs.	3	13 Yrs.	2000 (14 Yrs.)
<b>Florence</b>	F	Felony Attempted Robbery (Retail Theft)	2 Yrs.+ 8 mos.	8	2 Yrs. 8 mos.	1996 (18 Yrs.)
<b>Adam</b>	M	Accountability Armed Robbery/Murder	27 Yrs.	0	27 Yrs.	2003 (11 Yrs.)
<b>Karen</b>	F	Drug Trafficking with Intent to Deliver	3 Years	0	3 Yrs.	1995 (19 Yrs.)

(Note: Sum of all co-researchers cumulative years served inside prison = 139 Years)

Considerable variation was also observed in educational and income strata among male and female co-researchers (See Table III, Co-Researchers Demographic Characteristics).

Overall, the men had higher educational attainment. All seven of the male co-researchers (100%) completed high school, and six of the seven men (86%) possessed college experience. Among those, four ( $n = 4/7$ , 57%) earned bachelor's degrees; one (14%) held a master's degree, one (14%) an associate degree and one (14%) a high school diploma. In contrast, two female co-researchers ( $n = 2/6$ , 33%) did not complete high school, but earned GED diplomas, one woman (16%) earned a master's degree, one (16%) a bachelor's degree and two (33%) associate degrees.

In addition, male co-researchers occupied the highest managerial posts and wage earning positions (See Table III, Co-researchers Demographics). The median income for all co-researchers was \$36,000, and the top three wage earners were all males with annual incomes as follows: \$65,000, \$73,000, and \$85,000. The annual incomes of the top three female co-researchers were respectively \$33,000, \$36,000, and \$45,000. In terms of management positions, five men and two women were program managers or directors. In sum, 71% ( $n = 5/7$ ) of the executive/upper management positions in the sample were held by males. Meanwhile, six co-researchers held line management jobs, and most ( $n = 4/6$ , 66%) line management positions were held by women: four females were case managers and two male co-researchers occupied case management positions.

## **A. Data Analysis**

### **1. Data Preparation**

After completing the interview process, I attempted to begin the process of transcribing my first interview transcription verbatim. My audio-recordings were lengthy (averaging about 3 - 4 hours each) and I quickly realized that my skill level was not sufficient to complete 13

individual interview transcriptions in an efficient and timely manner. Subsequently, I struggled with finding adequate amounts of time to dedicate to the transcription process. As a result, I began searching for a transcriber.

I was fortunate to receive a referral for an exceptional, professional transcriber from a colleague at the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. The transcriber had extensive background in working with research institutions and was experienced in verbatim transcription of audio-taped interviews. Audio recordings provided to the transcriber were de-identified, as pseudonyms were used during the interview process.

In addition, I took several measures to ensure the transcribers compliance with study confidentiality and ethical conduct in the research process. First, I conducted a study protocol and ethics briefing with the transcriber and second, I required the transcriber to sign a written Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix H). The transcription agreement specified the procedures for maintaining confidentiality and the requirements for the secure handling of all research materials while in the transcribers possession. In sum, 602 pages of interview transcriptions were compiled from the audio-taped interviews. Overall, the transcribers work was outstanding and the process was completed in a timely and efficient manner.

## **2. Preliminary Data Coding**

Each completed transcription was loaded into the ATLAS.ti software program for preliminary coding. I developed a research codebook from this process. Although the use of data software is not a procedural requirement of the phenomenological model of analysis, it greatly aided management and review of massive amounts of interview data. I also stored my research journal notes and memos in ATLAS.ti. As I reviewed each transcription, I checked them for accuracy by listening to my audio recordings and cross-referencing my journal notes and memos.

### **3. Data Analysis Procedures**

Moustakas (1994) offers two options for data analysis, the modified version of the van Kaam Method and the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method (Stevick, 1971; Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975). The major distinction between the two models is that the van Kaam method does not require the researcher to have personally experienced the phenomenon under study. For purposes of this study, I chose the van Kaam method, which relies on a process of phenomenological reduction.

The chronology of key procedures in the van Kaam method are as follows: (1) Horizontalizing; (2) identifying horizons (i.e., meaning units); (3) clustering meaning units into themes; (4) developing individual textural descriptions; and (5) (for this study) developing a group composite from individual textural descriptions. In the process of Horizontalizing, I singled out, listed, and preliminarily grouped each of the co-researchers' expressions about the meaning of their experience. Following this process, I developed a list of meaning units (i.e., horizons), and all related units of meaning were clustered into core themes. Primary themes were used to develop individual textural descriptions.

At this point, the process of phenomenological reduction was incorporated to determine which statements were essential to the writing of each individual textural description and to identify thematic commonalities of the experience of full-time, management employment among formerly incarcerated men and women. Phenomenological reduction allows for the natural unfolding of the essence of common and shared experiences among co-researchers. The process involves repeated cycles of close examination, extrapolation, re-examination, grouping, and reduction of textural data to arrive at common themes as conveyed in the distinct individual and grouped narratives of co-researchers. Textural descriptions depict the thoughts, feelings, and

circumstances of each co-researchers experience. Using the phenomenological reduction process, I developed 13 individual textural descriptions ranging 8-12 pages each. The final textural descriptions detailed the lived and authentic experiences of co-researchers as expressed through *their* telling of *their* stories.

As I completed drafts of the textural descriptions, I contacted co-researchers who had previously expressed their interest in participating in member checks (Hennick et al., 2011) to validate the accuracy of my interpretation in the written textural summaries of their experiences. Nine of the thirteen co-researchers participated in the member check process by reviewing and commenting on their individual textural descriptions. Four co-researchers were unreachable: two had passed away, and the contact information for the remaining two was no longer valid.

All participants in the member check process acknowledged that their textural summaries were accurate with only minor notes for changes, mostly related to demographic information on sentencing and incarceration lengths. Once the member checks were completed, individual textural descriptions were synthesized into a group textural composite featuring the common elements and shared experiences of management-level employment among all co-researchers.

In sum, I wrote approximately 130 pages of textural summary to complete the analysis process and to develop a textural group composite depicting the findings and results for this study.

#### **4. Addressing Interpretive Validity, Generalizability and Reliability**

Qualitative research methods have been criticized as biased and arbitrary (Ungar, 2003). These claims are based on the belief that qualitative research methods are not rigorous scientific practices and that qualitative research outcomes do not yield valid, reliable, and generalizable findings. Qualitative scholars have addressed these concerns by developing sound research

processes and terminology that fits with the philosophy, conceptual framework, and strategies for conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In response to questions and criticisms regarding validity, reliability, and generalizability, qualitative researchers have responded with trustworthiness, authenticity, credibility, and particularity (Creswell, 2009). The specific methods that I incorporated in this phenomenological study to address qualitative research concerns were as follows.

- 1) I addressed investigator research bias and arbitrariness by developing a statement of research and question formulation; engaging in the process of *Epoche* prior to each interview; conducting an intricate review of and check for accuracy on each transcription; addressing any presentation of contradictory information; and maintaining a research journal.
- 2) To assess trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility, I invited co-researchers to review and comment on draft summaries of individual textural descriptions (i.e., member checks); I conducted a confidentiality and procedural briefing session with the research transcriptionist; and I received mentorship and expert consultation on transcendental phenomenological methodology from Dr. Beth Anne Jacob. Dr. Jacob received her methods training from Clark Moustakas' Center for Humanistic Studies in Detroit, Michigan, and now teaches phenomenological research methods at the University of Chicago.
- 3) To demonstrate particularity, I incorporated the use of long interviews and extended time with co-researchers, which contributed to the development of thick, rich descriptions and themes that resonated with the phenomena of the experience of managerial employment for formerly incarcerated men and women.

## **5. Study Ethics and Confidentiality**

IRB approval was received for the study. The following steps were taken to conform to UIC and IRB requirements: (1) an interview protocol was followed throughout the study; (2) all information obtained from data collection and analysis was kept confidential; (3) co-researchers' anonymity was maintained and their identities were not and will not be disclosed in any future reports or publications; pseudonyms and ID numbers were used to de-identify the co-researcher interview data; (4) all interview documents, including field notes, memos and journals, completed surveys, tape-recordings and transcripts related to the study, were stored in a locked file cabinet in my university office; (5) computer files were password-protected, and any backup electronic files were stored in a locked file cabinet in my office; and (6) all tape-recordings were destroyed within 30 days after data transcription.

I conclude this chapter with a presentation of two examples of the thirteen written, individual textural descriptions developed as part of the study data analysis. These textural descriptions magnify the complexities and dynamics of the experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. The presentation of individual textural descriptions will be followed by the textural group composite/synthesis in the findings chapter.

## **6. Textural Data Analysis**

Below, for demonstration purposes, are brief examples of textural data analysis to show how it is done and how it relates to this study.

### **a. Individual Textural Description "DIANE"**

Diane's most immediate concerns include: living with an abusive spouse; worries about the future welfare of her children; and future financial and job security. Diane's experience of



employment post incarceration is highlighted by the following textural themes: education; early influences; domestic violence; the experience of incarceration; reentry and barriers to work; the experience of work; the meaning of work and achievements.

**Education:** *[I] was in my senior year ... Then left ... I didn't go back to school."*

Diane dropped out of high school in her senior year. Years later, she earned a General Equivalent Diploma (G.E.D) from Olive Harvey College. She enrolled in classes while incarcerated, but she did not complete any degree or vocational program. Diane is currently working on a bachelor's degree in business management at Northeastern University.

**Early Influence:** *"I was in an abusive relationship"*

Diane was first married at 19. Her husband was an active drug user who was abusive toward her. He had an extensive criminal history and Diane recalls that he spent most of their married life in jail: "He was constantly in and out of something ... he was in jail more than we were together." Her initial involvement in crime evolved from fear of his abuse and because of his control of her: "I was in an ... abusive relationship ... he had some substance abuse issues ... just a lot of controlling ... when he went to jail, I got pulled in cases. My first incarceration was a case with him."

**Current Family Environment:** *"I'm a mother, a wife and a daughter ... I get pulled in different directions."*

Diane is coping with a multiplicity of family problems. She often puts her family's well-being before her own. She is the mediator in a violent relationship between her adult son and daughter-in-law; the caretaker for her elderly father; the support line for an incarcerated son and an unemployed son; and the disciplinarian for a rebellious teenage daughter. She worries that her

children will inherit the traits of addiction and trouble with the law that she experienced in her past.

I want them to ... not take on that curse ... Cause sometimes it's a hereditary curse ... their father through addiction, me through addiction, incarceration ... we have to look at what our children see ... they think it's normal to do certain things ... those are my worry of my children. I want them to be happy. I want to see them all in the house of the Lord.

Along with concerns for her children, Diane is experiencing domestic violence re-victimization in her current marriage. She states that she feels "trapped" and describes the relationship with her current husband as "strange." For the past two and a half years, she has been subjected to verbal, financial, and emotional abuse. Diane describes how she sensed, but disregarded signals of his abusive traits when they were dating: "he locked on like a pit bull ... There were signs being shown ... I did not respond to the signs that I was seeing ... those were wake-up calls for me."

Diane states that her spouse has never physically harmed her however, she is the constant target of verbal and emotional assaults: "Verbally, it's certain gestures and certain things that he would do ... like the biting of the tongue or biting your bottom lip, like anger, like you mad or something, or even drawing your fist to even acting like you wanna hit." The injuries of words are evident to Diane as she recounts one of many assaults on her self-esteem: "He was like, yeah, your family told me how promiscuous you are ... He was like, you a half nigger ... Saying I half do things."

Diane's spouse also uses tactics of financial abuse to undermine and exert his control over her. After filing a joint tax return, Diane found that her spouse owed back child support: [He] "didn't even let me know that [he] owe[d] back child support and they took all of the taxes."

Diane has also experienced intimidation by her husband with a weapon. He is employed as a security guard and has a license to carry a gun. At home, he wears his gun to exact fear and exert his control over the family:

I trust God that it will be safe. He's not [the] law, but he just been trained in some ... He walks around with his gun on his hip all day long. And I [said] that ain't necessary. You ain't ... Robocop ...that's not necessary in the home. ... My father ... He does feel intimidated by him ... He's never threatened me.

From the beginning, Diane's current marriage has been one ongoing pattern of abuse. She states that she wants a divorce, yet she is cautious about how she will leave the relationship and what it will cost her to leave:

I'm gonna just go ahead and file for divorce and just move on because it's obvious that it's not gonna get better ... I have not told him yet. I'm waiting to speak to my lawyer to know – what my rights are ... since he's been paying half of the rent and he's been staying in the house.

Diane's situation is complicated and although, she admits that her spouse has never threatened her with his gun, she senses that her situation bodes danger. As a result she is taking extra precautions to be safe.

**The Experience of Incarceration:** *"things started like a chain reaction."*

Diane was drawn into a life of crime and addiction by her first husband. He was the instrument behind three of her convictions. Her first conviction occurred when she was pressured by him to falsify employment records to get him out of jail. She recalls how the conviction had a domino effect on her life:

The very first time ... I was in trouble with the law ... he was trying to state that he was working. ... So I created a document and doctored up the paper saying that my husband worked for this company. ... After that first time ... things started like a chain reaction. It's like once my name was written down on some kind of court police paper – it started as to being a chain reaction all my life ... things were just so easy for me to be caught up with something else again.

In and out of prison, Diane's ex-husband controlled her. His abusive tactics included pressuring her to have sex with him on prison grounds, coercing her to smuggle drugs into prison and framing her for a crime he had committed. She relates how he entangled her in an intricate system of prison corruption, involving guards and inmates:

I'm going to visit him at the time when the situation happened with me entering drugs in the penal institution. When I came in in the evening ... I only did it ... I think maybe twice ... I drop it, they pick it up, and they take it in the prison ... because the drugs in there was going for much more than what it went on the outside. So they making money, the guards and everybody else is running the real money inside the prison. There was a whole system of it that was involved.

Diane's involvement in smuggling drugs into prison left her vulnerable to sexual advances by a guard whom she rebuffed. On one occasion, the guard tried to lure her into his car off prison grounds. "I wouldn't get in the car with [him], and [he] told me I'm gonna get you next time ... You ... dick teaser." On her next visit, the guard framed her: "So the next time I came out there, he said I had drugs on my baby. And I was taken into custody. ... They arrested me, I had my children. My children saw that process."

Diane recalls her total disbelief and the emotional pain of being arrested at the prison gates, in the full presence of all her children, for something she did not do. Again, she found herself on the receiving end of abuse and corruption orchestrated by a manipulative and controlling man. She wanted to fight the case, but the risk of leaving her children parentless and wards of the state was too great a cost. She pled guilty. In exchange, she received 2 years' probation. She admits regretting that decision.

The lawyer [said] ... it's your word against the officer. You might plead guilty ... and this will be over. You can go on and live your life ... I wish I really would have fought it to the end ... That's on my record. That's something that people look at ... as cases got bigger, as things I was involved in later... It was piling on to future cases.

The third case in which Diane was implicated for her husband's wrongdoings was an armed robbery charge:

I had an armed robbery. They broke it down to a robbery, but it was not me. That was ...my husband and another female ... and they charged me ... He did eventually get charged ... and he got 20 years ... I was like tell them who it was ... but he didn't really wanna say nothing because it would give him a rap. He said, you know you didn't do it...But they charged me with it. I end up getting probation on that.

Diane's last involvement with the criminal justice system was for a forgery: "My last experience ever with [crime] ... was when I was writing bad checks at this time I had a—drug habit." However, it was not the forgery charge that caused her imprisonment. She was convicted on a technical violation of bond. She describes the years of her incarceration as an experience of total surrender to God and an opportunity through God to embrace change.

I had just came out of IDOC ... had been clean for five years, and went back into the atmosphere. And it was like this is not where I am supposed to be. It gave me a glimpse of the things that's around me and the things that I need to be out there focusing on. I been trained for the prison ministry, and he [God] gave me another glimpse to come back in here and look at what work I need to be doing ... So it was a surrender. It was a total surrender inside ... I knew I was going home and I was going home a little different than what I came in ... I was ready for change ... it was like each time God took something away ... until it was all, let me surrender all.

Diane recalls how she gained a new vision and purpose for her life after observing the suffering of other inmates: "I got a vision to see what's around me that needs to be helped. I saw broken spirits. I saw women that needed help. I saw women that needed some direction. And I tried to give it." Her ministry work in prison renewed her trust in God: "That was my beginning of being dedicated and being able to follow the word of God. It taught me discipline and just trusting in God's word."

**Reentry:** *"I had something to come back to."*

Diane acknowledges that she was "blessed to have something to come back to" – a family and a home. To stay sober and crime-free she cut-off negative associations and lifestyles: "I was serious about my recovery ... I was serious about change ... Anything that was connected to my past life, I cut off ... I had to make new friends, new people, and obtain new goals and

directions." Of all the challenges she faced, Diane notes that finding a job was "the hardest part of coming from prison."

## **Barriers to Work**

### *Checking the Box*

Diane describes how the process of applying for jobs and facing rejection is an anxiety-ridden experience for formerly incarcerated persons.

It was very difficult to attain employment. So when they asked, "Have you been convicted of a felony?" My stomach would [do] butterflies and turn around because I didn't know how to answer the question ... do I answer yes or do I answer no? Do I just not answer it? ... I would stand on that part for about 20 minutes and be acting like I'm still filling out the application, 'cause I need to go back to that question. And I didn't know how to present that question because it's like if I do this, they're gonna say no. ... That was the hurting time, mostly, is "Have you been convicted of a felony?" That's the thing that's on the application that really tears people down. And I know it just wasn't me.

### *Stigma*

Diane imparts her experience in seeking work and illustrates how doors are constantly closed to employment and hopes are dashed in an instant, based on a criminal record:

On the first interview I said I had a background. As reluctant as I was to put it on there, "Have you been convicted of a felony?" I did say yes, and they took me through the interview all the way up into the third interview. By the second interview I'm excited, thinking I may have the position. On the third interview, it was to tell me that, we're sorry, they tried everything they could to hire me, but because of my background they would not...It allowed me to feel hopeless. It allowed me to look at, what am I gonna do, how to maintain and support myself in trying to find a job. It was like here we go again, all the way up to here. It was very discouraging ... what else can I do?

### *Education and Skills Earned on the Inside are disqualified on the Outside*

Diane states her concern for and challenges the altruism behind prison rehabilitation and reform programs. She questions why the job skills and education inmates earn behind the walls are disqualified for work on the outside.

Many people that go through and have the degrees and been through the education process ... we can make eye glasses in the correctional facility, we can do license plates, we can do bombs, we can do all kinds of stuff behind the wall. But when we get out here,

we can't even get a job in those fields, when we've been skilled behind the wall. So is it to limit us behind there...or to put out a product?

### *Racism*

Diane believes that her criminal record was more of a factor in her experience of employment discrimination than her race: "I don't think it was the race that not allowed me to receive the job. I think it was the discrimination of the offense of the incarceration that determined the job. It wasn't because I was Black."

### **The Experience of Employment:** *"It was very difficult to attain employment"*

After prison, Diane initially had a difficult time finding work. In an effort to pay her bills she started a home business selling gift baskets to her family and members of her church congregation. She eventually found work through word-of-mouth from friends and family. She worked several jobs including telephone sales, construction, and factory work, before settling into her current position.

Today, Diane is a program manager for a non-profit, faith-based, prison ministry and reentry program and she is ordained minister in her church. She has worked in her position for the past 10 years; however, she has been affiliated with the church for more than 16 years. Before she obtained the job, she was an active member and volunteer worker for the church:

I told the pastor that I had just came from incarceration, and he told me you're gonna run my prison ministry ... once I got home I needed to get grounded in a faith-based organization. I needed to be connected spiritually. That was the thing that was missing from me ... The criminal background didn't affect me in getting a job because the prison ministry was ... helping formerly-incarcerated individuals.

Diane believes that her distinction in finding work at the church was that "the job 'received' [her]." For once, she feels she is employed at a place where her past did not resurrect to block her opportunity for meaningful work.

### **The Meaning of Work:** *"giving to others."*

Diane asserts that helping others "doesn't feel like work." She describes her job as spiritually rewarding and as an empowering gift to others.

the passion of helping someone else ... it's a gift to be able to give to others what was so freely given to me ... it's—such [a] reward ... to be able to see a person's life change, to be able to see them obtain the jobs, to be able to see them get the housing and build the relationships back with families that sometimes were broken because of ... incarceration.

**Achievements:** *"I finally got it."*

Reflecting back on her life experiences, Diane believes that her "most important achievement is to be in [her] children's life "clean and sober with a right state of mind." In addition to being a "role model" for her children, Diane counts among her blessings her ability to return to school. She credits her family for taking care of her children "while [she] was going through the storm" and "thanks God" for her ability to change her life in time to show her family she "finally got it."

**Future Outlook**

This textural description has explored the various textural themes linked to Diane securing employment in the reentry field: education; early influences; domestic violence; the experience of incarceration; reentry and barriers to work; the experience of work; the meaning of work and achievements.

Diane is a survivor whose life story is a testament to sheer will and the strength of her faith. She is conflicted by the fulfillment of working a job that is deeply meaningful to her, but has little or no opportunities for career advancement and long-term financial security. Despite the daily challenges that confront her—abuse by her spouse, financial insecurity, and family distresses—she perseveres to help others and give back to her community. She is hopeful that furthering her education will enhance her ability to transcend her current station in life. The one



constant in her life has been her enduring faith in God, and it is in this spirit that she invests her trust for the future.

**b. Individual Textural Description "ADAM"**

Adam's primary concern is for the well-being and future of his daughter who is single and the mother of his grandchildren. He is also concerned about financing his business ventures:

"Problem is, like most small businesses, you don't have the money. We need 125 grand at minimum to get it off the ground."

**Early Influences:** Adam has five siblings (all males), but only knows two of his brothers. When Adam was 5, his mother died from childbirth, and the children were separated. Adam was raised by an aunt who had 14 children of her own. He is close to his two older brothers, but lost touch with his three other siblings. He adores his aunt: "My aunt ... she's the grand joy of my life as far as the family is concerned. She wrote me every month that I was in prison ... Her thing was trust in God, God going to bring you home."

**Education:** *"this idiot Senator ... lobbied to stop Pell grants for prisoners."*

Adam graduated from high school in 1960. He started junior college, but was drafted into the military in 1961. He took additional courses at San Francisco State and the United States Armed Forces Institute, but did not earn a degree. While incarcerated, he earned an Associate Degree, a paralegal certificate, and took additional coursework toward a Bachelor's Degree from Roosevelt University. He was unable to complete his bachelors due to legislative changes restricting prisoner's access to federal educational funds.

Roosevelt had nine extension divisions in the prison system. I needed about 20 some, maybe 30 some hours to get a bachelor's. I was going to Roosevelt until this idiot ... this old racist Senator ... lobbied to stop Pell grants being available to prisoners.

Adam also took courses in accounting and gained vocational skills in legal research working in the prison library.

**Pathway to incarceration:** *"I hated the United States. And the United States hated me."*

Adams enticement into crime was fueled by his experience of the Vietnam War. For him, returning home from the war meant a return to the fronts of American racism.

When I came out of the service, I was completely disillusioned ... it [ the Vietnam war] was a terrible, terrible situation to live with day in and day out...You were first casualty ... and I lived with that for 13 months, through monsoon[s] ... when I came home, I hated the United States. And the United States hated me. ... You were like mud. ... And there was no hero's welcome. ... I was just sick of the United States of America, their foreign policy, with the way they were treating Black folks.

Adam wanted a revolution. He sought acceptance and solidarity among others with similar anti-American sentiments. In the Black Panther Party Movement, he found persons ready to fight the status quo and confront American systems of racial, social, and economic injustice by any and all means necessary.

At that point in my life, I just was anti-American, period. ... I joined the Black Panther movement. My role in the Black Panther movement was what we call appropriations. ... We're saying we're going to appropriate monies from our former slave masters. ... That was the philosophy ... funds have to come from currency exchanges and whatever. ... And that's how I got involved ... I saw myself as a revolutionist.

Acting on his newfound philosophy of appropriations, Adam planned a robbery of a local financial institution. The robbery resulted in a homicide on the scene and Adam received an indeterminate sentence of 50-100 years.

I was telling guys how to rob this particular institution, they had a ... drop vault, And I was telling these guys ... what they had to do and when they had to do it ... I wasn't on the scene when it happened. ... The guy who was the manager there tried to take the gun from my two co-defendants. And they shot him. They killed him. ... They say, he did it to himself. I wasn't there, so I don't know.

**Experience of Incarceration:** *"having seen the brutality of Vietnam, in one sense prison was just ... a cake walk."*

Adam spent a little over 15 months in the county jail before being sent to prison for the first time. His time in the county jail served as his introduction to the processes and the realities of injustice within the criminal justice system.

Guys were being forced to cop out for stuff that they didn't do, police giving them bad gun cases. I saw all that. ... People – don't realize that guys would plead guilty to cases – they were not guilty of in order to get out of county jail. That's how bad that place is ... on 26<sup>th</sup> and California. They would rather be in prison than to be over there.

Once he entered prison, he was confronted with widespread corruption and violence.

A dirty, little secret about prison is that there are drugs, there's alcohol, there's sex. I mean, with females, not, that rape thing with guys and stuff. All that goes on ... the general public wouldn't have a clue about this – how does a guy get drugs? Cause a guard brings them in. How does a guy get alcohol? Cause a guard brings it in ... [that prison] was the most corrupt joint probably in the country. I mean, the feds had to take it over.

Adam quickly learned that there would be no forum for revolutionaries in prison.

I saw myself as a revolutionist ... when I went into prison, I saw myself the same way ... in prison don't nobody care whether you're a revolutionist or not. ... You got to be looking over your shoulders every day ... I recognized soon as I got to prison you can't be afraid to die if you gonna survive.

As a result, his self-perception changed to fit his circumstances, and he set new priorities consistent with what he had learned: "So when I got to prison, I knew two things: Survival and what am I gonna do while I'm here ... [and] I had made up my mind I'm gonna make a difference."

For Adam, prison was a painful reenactment of some of his experiences as a war veteran while simultaneously a tool for his survival in prison.

I had seen people die next to me. I guess in a sense prison wasn't like war, but in terms of the casualties and that kind of thing, I had seen that. I had seen up-close murder... I saw guys shoot lieutenants. That's how bad Vietnam was ... And so for me, having seen the brutality of Vietnam, in one sense prison was just almost like a cake walk.

Adam shifted his revolutionary tactics to legal activism and advocacy strategies aimed at improving prison conditions. He started with the prison library: "the law library was totally

inadequate ... so we sued, myself and another guy ... it's in the law books. It became a class action [lawsuit] ... we won \$265,000 to start a law library."

The lawsuit resulted in new books, improved, and expanded library space, inmate training on library systems and research, and jobs for inmates as library clerks. Working with a contractor from West Publications, Adam served as the law clerk: "I was law clerk for death row for nine years. I got their ... Humanitarian Award ... from the Coalition to Stop the Death Penalty."

Adam was a stellar prisoner for 11 years and was granted an early parole on his first appeal to the parole board. He continued to maintain a "stellar record" as a parolee. However, the only legitimate work he could find was in sales. He immediately took a job as a traveling salesman, compelled by the pressing need to provide for his wife and baby. His parole officer was working to get Adam an early release from parole and was aware of Adams job but, before his parole officer's recommendation could be approved, Adam was re-incarcerated on a technical violation.

I got in a car accident in Milwaukee, and at the time I was still on parole. So when they looked, they see me on parole [for] robbery, murder ... they violate me. I [was sent] back to do six months and ended up doing almost 16 years. The parole board ... wouldn't parole me again. His recommendation [parole officer] they didn't care nothing about it. The system was changing ... from a system of rehabilitation to just lock 'em up.

Adam's re-incarceration was devastating. He lost his family: "I lost my wife. I lost my daughter. I'm back in the penitentiary system. It's dismal." His experience of prison the second time around was distinctly different than his first experience.

The institution was different. There was no attempt at rehabilitation ... guys were just locked up. They had stopped all the industry and all the education stuff they had going. That was gone by the wayside. It was just thuggish. ... The officers were thugs. ... Everybody was out for a buck. I don't want to romanticize any parts of prison, but prior to that ... guys committed crime because they had a need. They didn't have a job, so they stuck somebody up ... the latter part of my corrections ... experience ... it was like survival of the fittest ... it's more animalistic.

By the time Adam was released in 2003, his wife had married someone else and his daughter had been raised by her stepfather. To this day, Adam agonizes over losing his family and deeply regrets not being present to see his daughter grow up: "I feel really guilty about not being there for her. I don't worry about it, but I feel guilty that I wasn't there."

**Reentry and Employment:** *"I didn't see myself in corporate America."*

Adams experience as the death row law clerk was an asset to his employment outlook when he returned home. He had developed an impressive group of contacts within local law firms that were familiar with his expertise. His reentry was uncomplicated as he had a supportive extended family and immediate prospects for work: "When I first came home, I had offers from several law firms." Yet, Adam was reticent to work in corporate America: "I didn't see myself in corporate America. I just didn't think--this fits me."

Instead Adam chose to work part-time for a wealthy attorney dedicated to doing community law work in prisons and pro bono work for tenants' rights.

He had been working with prisons for years. He's a very successful lawyer. ... But he does community law work. That fit me. ... All I did was research ... he had a grant from the feds or whomever ...to put together a manual every year for guys who do pro bono work for prisoners. And my job was to update that manual. ... And that's all I did.

Adam was referred to his current job by an attorney who knew of the opening. He has worked for the law clinic for 11 years. His primary responsibility is to review all Requests for Counsel (RFC's) from men who are in prison and to make recommendations for legal representation by the clinic. In addition, he provides support to exonerees as they reenter society.

I make a determination whether or not this person fits the criterion to have a questionnaire form sent to him...We have meetings every month... if they are not already in somebody's box ... we will propose, -- we think we should take this case or whatever the case ... That's my first primary responsibility." "Our clients, our exonerees, they have ongoing needs, employment, education, housing, relationships. ... That's the other part of my job. For the most part, it's about employment, housing and day-to-day stuff.

Adam's reentry into society and employment was uncomplicated. He did not experience first-hand the common barriers to employment based on race or his status as an ex-felon. However, he has observed the struggles of other former inmates in finding employment and social acceptance and this observation frames his post incarceration mindset.

## **Perceptions of Employment Barriers**

### *Racism*

Adam has observed racial discrimination against former inmates.

I've ... had come through the clinic Hispanics and European guys, White guys. I have seen employers more conducive or more willing to – give a non-Black guy a job more readily than a Black guy. ... As far as myself personally, I can't speak on it 'cause I've not had a problem getting a job. But if I didn't have some skills or if I didn't have certain connections, there go I but for the grace of God. There's no doubt in my mind that race plays some part in whether or not a guy is gonna get a job that's an ex-offender.

### *Stigma*

Adam recognizes that the stigma of a criminal background complicates and compounds the distinctions of racial discrimination in hiring.

Is it because he's Black, or is it because he's a formerly-incarcerated person ... he's got a double whammy, in my mind. He's Black *and* he's formerly incarcerated. [I]n the mind of a potential employer, all he sees is a problem.

### *Mental Illness*

Adam's observation is that mental illness is largely unaddressed and contributes to the stereotype of Black men as culturally problematic and violent. In his view, the public and employers must be educated on this topic and equipped to address it in workplace settings.

At least 15 percent to 20 percent of the guys in prison are there because they're mental ... the correction officer, he don't see that. He see this guy's Black, he's got a problem. That's his thinking. And he's not trained to deal with it. So you go to seg (segregation) or I beat you down or whatever the case may be...as far as employers are concerned, they got the same mindset.

### *Gender Bias*

Adam perceives the public as being more sympathetic toward females returning from prison.

They do a background search on you. They gonna find out you been in prison. And most of the time you're not gonna get hired, female or male ... I think there's more sympathy toward a female ... I don't know this to be an empirical fact, but ... females for the most part, they only find themselves involved in crime because of some dude.

### **The Meaning of Work:** *"helping to get legal justice."*

Adam's experience of incarceration was incited by the injustices he encountered in his world and in prison. For him, work inside and outside of prison was all about correcting injustice, finding approbation and freedom from unjust institutions and legal systems.

I saw a lot of injustice all those years. And to be a part of something that tries to correct that is – it's rewarding. I mean, you can get a spiritual high when a guy is exonerated that's been locked up for 20 years for something he didn't do ... that's what it's about for me, helping to get legal justice.

### **Achievements:** *"My daughter."*

Adam has made great strides in his return from prison to society. But from his vantage point, his academic, advocacy and work achievements pale to the life he brought into the world. Without hesitation, Adam states his greatest achievement was his youngest child, his daughter: "My daughter ... that would be the most important achievement of my life."

### **Future Outlook:** *"Life [it's] not a free ride."*

Adam is a survivor and a social change revolutionary. His life's accomplishments are a living testimony to his resilience, perseverance, and dedication toward giving back and making a difference in the lives of others. He has dedicated his life to improving the quality of life for countless numbers of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. His wish for his grandchildren and his daughter is that when he "leaves this world." they will continue his fight for a just and humane society.

This textural description has explored the various textural themes linked to Adam's employment as project manager for a Chicago legal clinic: early influences; education; pathways to and experiences of incarceration; reentry and employment; perceptions of employment barriers; the meaning of his work and achievements.

Adam's life's work is consistent with his long-standing commitment to social justice. His work as a social activist has positively impacted and made a difference in the lives of countless numbers of formerly incarcerated men and women. This is the legacy that he desires for his grandchildren—to pass on a commitment to social change work that will improve life opportunities for others and contribute to a just society.

I would like my grandson to recognize that I get up every morning [and] go to work. ... I don't want him to think that it's a free ride to this thing we call life. It's not a free ride. – You gotta put in your time and do this. ... You got to pay some dues.

This section of the textural analysis chapter featured two examples of individual textural descriptions. In the following and final section of this chapter, I present the composite textural description.



#### **IV. RESULTS/FINDINGS**

A total of six women and seven men were interviewed for this study. Below, I present brief biographical profiles of the 13 co-researchers. All co-researchers were given pseudonyms for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity. The coding process in ATLAS.ti was useful in storing and organizing over 600 pages of transcribed data, and investigator memos and notes. All co-researchers completed interviews without any noticeable distress. In addition, many co-researchers expressed their view that participating in the interviews and reflecting on their experiences had a positive personal impact. And most co-researchers commented that their participation was a meaningful way of helping others.

The composite textural description serves an important function as it reveals critical insights into the universal experience of co-researchers. As such, it deepens our understanding of the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African Americans.

I conclude with a group composite textural description derived from the synthesis of 13 individual textural descriptions. The group composite highlights and depicts the core textural experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men and women who are employed in full-time management positions.

An integral part of the group composite of textural themes presented here are verbatim excerpts from the transcribed interviews of co-researchers. As such, the identity of co-researchers is kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Further, to affirm and honor the

ways in which co-researchers expressed their lived experiences, the language and communication style of each co-researcher was preserved. In some instances, the words used by co-researchers may appear grammatically incorrect and/or offensive to some readers.

### **A. Presentation of Group Composite: Core Textural Themes and Findings**

This chapter presents findings from my phenomenological study on the experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. The experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women is a multidimensional and dynamic process. It is a process perceived and described by co-researchers as deeply self-fulfilling and gratifying while at the same time, challenging and filled with competing tensions. The men and women in this study expressed distinct individual experiences that were thematically common across their cohort. Five core themes comprise the group composite textural description: (1) injustice and corruption in the criminal justice system; (2) making change; (3) going to work; (4) no future nest eggs; and (5) giving back.

#### **1. Injustice and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System**

Co-researchers described numerous personal experiences with and observations of injustice and corruption within the criminal justice system. They consistently and vividly recounted examples of abuse of authority and abusive treatment by corrupt corrections officials. Their narratives included experiences of wrongful convictions and incarcerations; violations of individual and prisoner rights; and examples of bureaucratic and procedural errors.

#### **2. Making Change (Processes of Identity Shift and Transformation)**

Co-researchers employed three common strategies for making change: (1) self-contracts: consistent and routine mental exercises and vocalized affirmations to refute criminal identities;

(2) metaphysical disassociation: forms of mental blocking and cognitive exercises used to transform and transcend conditions of their confinement; and (3) spirituality: active practicing of spiritual beliefs through prayer, meditation, reading scripture and other religious activities.

### **3. Going to Work (Strategies for Finding and Securing Employment)**

Four key processes were identified by co-researchers as essential to going to work after incarceration: (1) connections to the workforce before, during, and after prison, which included, access to influential sponsors, prior job histories, and effective networking; (2) scaffolding of education and work experiences by consistently building up personal assets; (3) effective use of time in and out of prison, achieved through planning and executing daily routines that supported positive productivity and personal transformation; and (4) refuge from immediacy: direct support from families and community groups that helped bridge co-researchers transition from prison into society.

### **4. No Future Nest Eggs (Uncertainty about Future Retirement and Job Security)**

This theme expresses co-researchers fears and worries about retirement insecurity (i.e., incarceration-related shortfalls in accumulating social security benefits, the lack of pension plans or access to individual retirement accounts) and job insecurity (i.e., feeling locked into the non-profit sector, competition for jobs by outside others, and limited opportunities for career advancement).

Two common concerns about future health and welfare were expressed by all co-researchers: (1) anticipated shortcomings in retirement income and healthcare benefits related to years of incarceration and (2) increasing competition for jobs coupled with limited opportunities for future job advancement.

## **5. Giving Back (The Meaning of Work)**

Co-researchers described a range of benefits derived from their work, far beyond compensation. They described their work as a meaningful way of giving back to others and making amends to society for their past transgressions.

### **B. Composite Textural Description**

Equity and justice in America's criminal justice system is an individual right and constitutional guarantee. Yet, all of the men and women in this study experienced forms of injustice and/or corruption in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Co-researchers consistently described and categorized layers of criminal justice bureaucracy, incompetency, and discrimination that undermined their efforts to receive justice and equity. Expressing this injustice, co-researchers described this experience:

When I got arrested, I was thinking, everything that I had been taught as a criminal justice student is that, you're innocent until proven guilty, you don't go to prison until you actually do something. But that was the theory of the justice system. That wasn't the actual daily practice of the system. (Keith)

I had a charge put on me that was not mines to do. It was falsely. Should have been a petty shoplifting, and they end up charging me with a robbery because in the state that I lived in, if you ran from the police, they charge you with robbery – if you just run. This instance I never ran, never made it even out the store, and I just think that they just trumped it up and used it on my previous record. (Florence)

Another instance in which co-researchers discovered that "freedom and justice for all" was more of an ideal than a reality involved system procedural errors. Co-researchers described situations that left them languishing in prison long after they should have been released: "I still stayed there [prison] for three months after I was told I was paroled. ... Because the parole officer hadn't did the things he needed to do."

Another co-researcher recounted how her clemency appeal was approved by the parole board, but sat for six years in a pile on the Governor's desk awaiting signature until its execution in 2015.

They passed me [in 2009]. Now this packet goes to the governor, he has to sign off on it, and then what you did is erased. The process is done. It [was] sitting on a desk ... it's thousands just sitting in this room ... so it's a backlog. (Karen)

Along with the procedural errors that left some co-researchers powerless victims of the system, others were wrongfully charged and/or convicted of crimes they did not commit both before and during their incarceration. One co-researcher describes and exemplifies this phenomenon:

A riot happened ... I got trapped into the riot ... initially Governor [blank] said the riot was a year late ... because the prison was designed to house 600 inmates. [T]he day I arrived there was over 2,000 inmates there ... We [gangs] got scapegoated ... they housed us on death row ... for a year. ... Three guys got killed, but 17 of us got charged with 15 counts of murder. (Bernie)

Many more co-researchers were coerced into confessions without proper representation of counsel.

I heard that three people got killed in that house that day. I went down to the police station. I thought ... I'd be home for dinner ... I was gonna just tell them what I knew and I did. They went looking for the guy ... he was in the city morgue. ... So here I am the only one that is alive that was at the house and the police ... had to convict somebody. (Wilson)

"They told me if I told them everything, they wouldn't charge me with the max. And without a lawyer present ... I told them everything." (Lisa)

Other co-researchers described how they observed and encountered corrupt officials and prison guards.

I wouldn't get in the car with the guard, and the guard told me, I'm gonna get you next time ... You ... dick teaser. The next time I came out there (visitation at county jail) he said I had drugs on my baby. I was taken into custody. ... They arrested me, I had my children ... [T]he lawyer [said] ... it's your word against the officer, plead guilty ... and

this will be over. ... I wish I ... would have fought it to the end. That's on my record ... as cases got bigger ... it was piling on to future cases. (Diane)

"A dirty, little secret about prison is that there are drugs, there's alcohol, there's sex ... [prison name] was the most corrupt joint probably in the country ... the feds had to take it over."  
(Adam)

Although the expression of this theme varies, each and every co-researcher shared in the experience of criminal justice system injustice and/or corruption.

Despite corruption and injustices in the judicial system, co-researchers found ways to make positive change, transform identities, and turn away from crime. Co-researchers described how being labeled a criminal was emotionally packed with feelings such as anger, fear, shame, remorse, and grief. They asserted that these feelings constantly challenged their ability to survive prison and to mentally prepare for returning home. As a result, co-researchers took great measures to refute criminal identities; to find ways to disassociate from their conditions of confinement; and to begin their process of identity shift and positive transformation. As one co-researcher explained:

You trying to kill that part of you off and strengthen that part of you that you've been starving all your life. That's the guy with some integrity, with some morals, some principles. You [have] been killing him, starving him. Now it's time to feed him and kill off this guy that's been breaking the law, being dishonest, stealing. You got to kill him off. So you got to go through this transformation. (Bernie)

Another co-researcher expressed the transformation process in the following way: "I was serious about my recovery ... I was serious about change. ... Anything that was connected to my past life, I cut off ... I had to make new friends, new people, and obtain new goals and directions" (Diane). As evidenced by these statements, co-researchers were determined to escape the labels of criminality and transform their identity.

Although it is not necessary for the process of personal identity change and transformation to begin in prison, for men and women in this study it did. Co-researchers described three common ways in which they worked to shed the criminal label, turn away from crime and transform their experience of incarceration into a positive future trajectory: (1) self-contracts; (2) metaphysical disassociation; and (3) spirituality.

The process of engaging in self-contracts, began with co-researchers refusing to be defined by where they were or by what they had experienced. Co-researchers mentally and verbally exercised processes of self-contracts. For some, this resolve was motivated by the experience of wrongful incarceration, but for most it was motivated by specific life events, such as the loss of a significant family member: and/or personal epiphanies inspired by fatigue from crime. "I said to myself ... I shouldn't be here ... the truth is going to come out. ... On that day I began to fight." (Keith) "I got the call ... your mother died ... I said it was time for me to get my life together ... my mother passing away --that was the first trigger" (Kevin) "It was leaving my daughter. I thought that I would be putting her at risk for ... abuse or just not being taken care of." (Florence).

Self-contracts also took form as specific coping tactics which included self-promises and personal affirmations. "I made myself several promises ... those promises guided my time in prison ... I wasn't gonna let them break me, I wasn't gonna let them drive me crazy. I wasn't gonna let them make me angry and bitter and ... I was going to leave there a better man than when I came in." (Vince) "I don't care if I got to knock on 1,000 doors to get a job – I'm going to keep knocking." (Keith) "My mind was made up on what I wanted to do with my life ... I worked hard at being somebody different while I was there, before I came home." (Debra)

Along with self-contracts, co-researchers used other mechanisms to cope with and transcend their experience of emotional and physical confinement. Metaphysical disassociation, a term I developed to describe a process co-researchers used for separating thoughts from feelings – became a tool for avoiding assimilation into prison culture and, a way of reconciling past transgressions. For co-researchers it was a form of mental blocking and a cognitive exercise involving an imaginative redefining of prison space. Co-researchers gave vivid descriptions capturing this process:

"I saw prison as a monastery ... a place with many different levels of reality ... you ... choose what reality you wanted to live on." (Wilson) "[it was like] being on vacation indefinitely. My body was dead. My mind was never there. Even though people said you got 300 years, you're never getting out, that thought never took root in my mind." (Vince) "The actual, physical part of being in a cage ... it was like I was there, but I wasn't there." (Keith) "I used to read 800 pages in one week ... I would read and go outside of that place" (Vaughn).

As expressed, co-researchers used a variety of metaphysical coping strategies to mentally escape their confinement, heal, and transform. One of the most common forms of transformation was spirituality. The intertwining of faith and fate was a consistent experience among co-researchers. "I was at the Cook County jail when I accepted Christ as my personal savior ... inside that gave me peace. So when they gave me 20 years, I didn't freak out or go crazy..." (Lisa) "I ... already felt like I was redeemed in the eyes of the Lord for whatever I owed and for my own transgressions in life and poor choices." (Wilson) "The things I prayed for while I was incarcerated, everything that I prayed for, He gave it to me. I knew I was going home and I was going home a little different than what I came in." (Diane)



Not only did faith help co-researchers to cope and transform their identities, but they attributed their faith in God as a powerful source of protection, providence, and consolation.

"The only way that I managed to make it through all that is that I realized that God, my Creator was protecting me from myself." (Vaughn) "You know how He (God) took that fish and two loaves of bread. Well, he took that state pay and made it work out for me. ... I didn't have to ask anybody for anything." (Karen)

For co-researchers in this study, faith served as a foundation for their personal security and peace of mind. Although identity transformation contributed to changed attitudes and lifestyle commitments, co-researchers experienced varying levels of employment barriers linked to the stigma of incarceration. Four key processes were identified by co-researchers as essential to going to work after incarceration: (1) connections to the workforce before, during, and after prison; (2) scaffolding of education and work experiences; (3) effective use of time in and out of prison; and (4) refuge from immediacy upon reentry.

All co-researchers had work histories prior to incarceration, although their work experiences differed vastly in terms of their length of employment and the types of jobs held. Some worked in low-wage service industries, others worked as secretaries or in middle management jobs, and a few were business owners. "I was a maid service [for a convention center] ... I cleaned the building." (Karen) "I started ... getting involved with the theater ... I was actually hired -- with [a production company]." (Vaughn) "My expertise at that time was in accounting ... I went to work for an [accountant]." (Adam) "I actually used to be a police officer." (Keith) "I owned [a] service station. ... I was the youngest dealer the Shell Corporation ever installed ... prior to that I had another business where I was an exterminator." (Wilson)

During incarceration, job assignments were defined by prison industries. However, co-researchers acknowledged that certain jobs on the inside proved crucial to connecting to work on the outside and netting employment advantages, such as ready job references, transferable job skills, and sponsorships that lead to work on the outside. "I was the law clerk on death row for nine years. ... When I first came home, I had offers from several law firms." (Adam) "I explained the \$3900 tax break ... I worked that job [fast food chain] when I was in work release." (Kevin) "The knowledge ... I gained working in the [prison] law library ... it definitely helped me to be able to work in a big law firm. ... The firm I work for now took my case pro bono." (Keith) "I was blessed ... I only worked for three people ... and each one knew my background." (Lisa) "The criminal background didn't affect me getting the job because the prison ministry was ... helping formerly-incarcerated individuals." (Diane)

After prison, co-researchers were effective networkers making contact with employers through job fairs and public speaking engagements. "What really kicked off my career ... I joined a church and I went to a job fair." (Wilson) "I spoke on community panels and they used me as a voice of redemption to talk about how I was once a convicted felon ... served time in prison ... was ... gang affiliated [and] ... turned my life around." (Bernie) "I was doing a presentation at the county jail for a bunch of agencies ... after I did the presentation, this guy walks up to me ... and asks me do I have a card, would I be interested in coming to his place of employment and doing a presentation for him and his coworkers." (Vince)

Co-researchers also built reputations as subject-matter experts on their prison experience. As a consequence some were highly sought after and readily received into jobs post prison release. "She [the bureau director] approached me and advised me of [a therapeutic prison project] ... I interviewed ... [and] ... they created this position for me." (Bernie) "So she asked me

would I be interested in working there. And I said sure. So she offered me the job right there on the spot." (Vince)

Another consistent thread among co-researchers was their incremental scaffolding of educational and job skills, both during and after prison. "When I got out of prison, I had to go through a GED program. That was a challenge, being 32 in a class with a bunch of young people." (Bernie) "[In-prison] I got two -- associate's degrees in applied science, one computers and another in electronics. I also participated in certification programs. I was fortunate I was in prison during the time when the Pell grant was still available..." (Wilson) "I know shorthand and how to type 70-120 words per minute. I was always good at that." (Patricia) "I have four bachelor degrees (i.e., psychology, computer science, construction technology, and culinary arts) and two associate degrees. (Vince)

Each learning and work opportunity was used to advance to the next career or educational opportunity. I feel like my career really started as a case manager/retention specialist ... that was the foundation skill ... now, I manage people who are caseworkers." (Wilson) "I started in the courtrooms ... I couldn't believe it. I remember they going in there on me, and now I'm going in there on my client." (Patricia) "I decided I would go on to do my master's ... the more education I was getting, seemed like the better my life was shaping." (Florence) "I have had uninterrupted work since the time I first started working ... over 15 years [ago]." (Wilson)

Regardless of their backgrounds, all co-researchers expressed their commitment to making effective use of their time during and after prison and many did so, by helping others. "Everything that I did in prison was preparing me for when I got out of prison. I used the time as effectively as I could use it." (Keith) "I tried to help guys educate themselves ... I helped guys get

their GED ... " (Adam) "I didn't get involved in the world of the prison. I woke up every day, made the best out of the situation ... by going, helping other people...." (Lisa)

Beyond the strength of their personal commitments, co-researchers acknowledged the support of families, peers, and communities as crucial to their reintegration.

I came for the appointment, and she hired me. She says you'll make \$20 an hour and I looked at her. I said, you know I been to prison? She said it ain't where you been. It's where you are now. (Patricia)

Coming home to supportive families and communities provided co-researchers with refuge from immediacy, bridging their transition back into society and relieving pressures for immediate employment, housing, food, finances and other critical day-to-day survival needs: "I didn't go straight to work. I was blessed to have a brother ... who ... could offer me refuge ... I didn't have to become a contributing member of the family right away." (Wilson) "I got out and got into the [transitional housing] that's where I really started to turn around, 'cause ... there wasn't that sense of urgency" (Kevin) "their [community agency] support ... helped me, ... I enrolled for my associate's [degree] ... they helped me pave the way for getting back into the mainstream of life." (Florence)

Although co-researchers were able to effectively overcome barriers to employment through the use of the measures discussed, they all expressed concern for their future quality of life. Two universal concerns were expressed: (1) no future nest eggs (specifically the lack of retirement benefits) and (2) competition for jobs coupled with limited opportunities for future advancement. The concern for retirement security was presented as the more pressing of the two issues:

If I worry about anything, it's how well will I be doing 20 years from now ... like a lot of people in my position, we don't necessarily have the nest eggs that other folks have acquired or compiled in life to deal with the expenses that come along, if you're so blessed to be long-lived. I don't have a pension that I'm going to fall back on at a certain

stage in life. I will have all the eligibility requirements for Social Security, but that's not enough to live on. (Wilson)

Another co-researcher commented on the absence of raises, pension, and health benefits in the non-profit industry:

I'd have did anything when I got on this journey to be in a position ... where I had a 401(k) plan or that I got yearly incentives. We don't even get a 2% cost of living raise. I've just pretty much tried to get in and fit in wherever I can, as long as I'm employed. I don't even have health and benefit. I picked up the new marketplace, new Obama Affordable Health Care Plan, and they charging me \$179 a month. I just told them that I wanted to cancel, and they won't even let you cancel out ... next year I'll be 65, so therefore I'm just gonna wait and get my Medicare ... My last job ... was a nonprofit agency ... they used to match, a savings plan, IRA, but they don't even do none of that now ... being ready for retirement, that back-up income this is where the uncertainty comes in. (Florence)

Along with concerns about retirement, co-researchers detailed their concerns about increasing job competition and limited opportunities for advancement in their field:

I worry about I wouldn't say my job... I don't worry about losing it or anything ... but you think about five, ten years down the road. Is this what you want to be doing? As far as room for improvement, advancing, that's not, too realistic because the higher-ups, they're ... not going anywhere because they came from where I came from...The people at where I'm at now, it's like five of us. Then it's a guy directly above us and then there's the lady who runs [everything] she's not going anywhere. (Kevin)

Another co-researcher underscores this constant thread of future job security concerns:

At this job we're not getting paid what we should [for] the work we do. Nowhere near ... the reason I'm in school ... is because they changed the criteria. We have to now have a bachelor's or a master's to be in the position I'm in ... Before you just had to have a high school diploma. And I had an associate. They [college grads] come in with a master's. They come in with a bachelor's and you ain't telling them really what the job consists of ... they don't stay. They used to hire recovering addicts. The ones that's still here is the recovering addicts. (Patricia)

Despite concerns about future income and benefit security, co-researchers spoke passionately about their work. Without hesitation, all co-researchers stated giving back by helping other returning citizens filled their lives with meaning, purpose, and spiritual rewards. "I keep what I have by giving it away." (Bernie) "God saved me ... so that I can be a better servant

to the community." (Vaughn) "It's the purpose of my life..." (Wilson) "I'm helping and ... it feels good (Kevin) "Doing what you love to do, it's not like work." (Karen) "That's my reward ... my fulfillment." (Lisa) "it's a spiritual high..." (Adam) "It's very uplifting." (Debra) "I know my mission is to let somebody know, they can do this." (Patricia) "When I see change [in others] I know it's because of me." (Vince) "Helping others ... has always been [my] passion ... " (Kevin) "I ... go far and beyond my duties, on my job ... just for human mankind and helping others." (Florence) "It's a gift to be able to give to others what was so freely given to me." (Diane)

The composite textural themes presented above illustrate the shared experiences of co-researchers who were formerly incarcerated and are currently employed in management-level positions. In the telling of their stories, they have shared: forms of injustice they encountered within the criminal justice system; experiences and processes of making positive change and transformation; strategies they used to go to work; concerns for future retirement nest eggs; and the gift of giving back as the essence and meaning of their work. Linking and presenting the commonality of their experiences helps to enhance and expand our understanding of the challenges, processes, and pathways to management-level work for formerly incarcerated persons.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

This qualitative study explored the experience of management-level employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. It was an exploratory investigation which sought to reveal the authentic and commonly shared experiences of co-researchers and to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of employment beyond transitional and low-wage sector jobs for African American returning citizens. The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing scholarship and community-wide practice aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing opportunities for stable employment and reentry success among formerly incarcerated African Americans.

The topic of this study was motivated by: (1) my professional experience working in the field of reentry, (2) the employment repercussions of mass incarceration on the African American community and (3) the strengths of formerly incarcerated African American men and women who overcome great odds to secure stable employment and regain productive citizenship within their communities. The central research question for this phenomenological investigation was: "How do formerly incarcerated African American men and women perceive and describe their experience of full-time, management-level employment?"

### **A. Interpretation of Findings**

#### **1. Study Findings vis-a-vis Life Course Desistance Theory**

In my literature review, I discuss the principal tenets and assertions of Sampson and Laub's (1992; 1993) Life Course Desistance Theory. In their view, social bonds and informal social controls lead to desistance. From this perspective, positive personal change is influenced

by external connections. In essence, identity shift and positive transformation result from the strength of social controls, bonds, and connections to important life transitions, such as marriage, work, school and the military.

Similar to Life Course Desistance Theory, findings in this study support the notion that micro and macro level relationships and events influence personal change. However, co-researchers narratives in this study suggested that positive transformation begins as a personal and internal process. Findings from this study also indicated that co-researchers' process of personal change was driven by willful cognitions and self-directed corrections that happened independent of informal social controls. Two themes in my findings underscore these findings and highlight these connections to Life Course Desistance Theory: *Making Change*, and *Going to Work*.

#### **a. Making Change**

Three emerging subthemes were embodied in co-researchers discussions on how they negotiated positive identity transformation: self-contracts, metaphysical disassociation, and religiosity/spirituality. For co-researchers in this study, personal change began inside the prison walls.

##### **i. Self-Contracts**

Co-researchers related that their identity transformation began as promises to themselves to become better persons, a process I refer to as *self-contracts*. They described deeply reflective contemplation of the past experiences that led to their imprisonment, and they spoke with passion about their commitment to positive change and desistance. Many related how their commitment to positive change often resulted from triggering events while in prison, such as personal epiphanies, death of a significant family member, separation from their children, and



(for some) wrongful conviction. Co-researcher Kevin stated, “It was time for me to get my life together ... my mother passed away ... that was the first trigger.”

Co-researchers also reported that they engaged in daily, organized routines and practices that they believed strengthened their resolve toward positive change and prepared them for legitimacy and employment on the outside. They gave examples of practices such as positive self-talk and daily affirmations routinely vocalized to themselves and to others. Co-researcher Keith stated to himself every morning: “I don’t belong here.” Co-researchers reported that these positive outward, verbalizations were ways in which they re-affirmed their plans to move beyond feelings of despair and hopelessness, toward a new identity and forgiveness of self and others. Many co-researchers talked about transitioning from deep feelings of anger and resentment to inner peace and acceptance as they shifted their focus to positive transformation on the inside.

## **ii. Metaphysical Disassociation**

Co-researchers related the challenges of surviving in prison and fighting off the constant intrusions of negative thoughts and feelings. They related intense feelings of guilt, grief, remorse, anger, hopelessness, and low self-worth. They described unique mental exercises they invoked to block out and transcend the harsh conditions of their confinement. They reported using forms of self-learned and self-imposed cognitive tactics to rise above and disassociate from prison culture and to guard against assimilating the negative ideals of their prison environment. Many co-researchers were voracious readers and described how they read several books a day. They talked about how access to books and reading served two important functions: (1) first, as a coping mechanism, a way of mentally escaping prison and transporting themselves to places outside the prison walls and (2) as an intellect builder and tool of personal growth. Other co-

researchers immersed themselves in work and school to manage negative thoughts, maintain positive associations, and sustain their commitment to adopting non-criminal identities.

### **iii. Spirituality**

Co-researchers also discussed their engagement in diverse religious and spiritual activities and talked about praying, practicing forms of meditation, and participating in religious services while in prison. Co-researchers talked about the power of prayer and meditation as spiritual sources of hope, redemption, and faith in the possibility of a positive future life.

As illustrated by the subthemes of self-contracts, metaphysical disassociation, religiosity and spirituality, the process of making change started inside prison. Co-researchers provided key insights into understanding internal processes leading to positive identity transformation and desistance from crime. While this finding is not new, their narratives add new dimensions to our understanding of how, why, and when positive identity transformation began for this sample of formerly incarcerated African Americans. Considering the disproportionate level of incarceration of African Americans, this finding suggests a level of cultural specificity in the formation of thoughts and actions leading to making positive change.

Further, co-researchers' accessibility to and use of prison resources (i.e., books, employment, and school) as methods for organizing and sustaining their commitment to positive transformation calls attention to the critical need for prison interventions and programs that incentivize and support processes of transformation. All of the co-researchers in this study associated the process of making change on the inside as a crucial first step to their employability post incarceration and successful reintegration into society.

## **b. Going to Work**

Going to work marked a significant step in the desistance process for co-researchers in this study. This theme included four key elements that co-researcher described as essential to finding and securing work after incarceration: “*refuge from immediacy*” upon reentry; connections to the workforce before, during, and after prison; scaffolding of education benefits and opportunities; and, effective use of time, inside and outside of prison.

### **i. Refuge from Immediacy**

*Refuge from immediacy* was a notable finding that emerged from co-researchers’ transcribed interview, and it was a common theme among every co-researcher's reentry experience. It refers to forms of direct and immediate reentry supports provided by family members and community reentry programs. Co-researchers discussed how their acceptance into “the homes of family members and community programs sheltered and protected them from exposure to hunger and homelessness.

A majority of co-researchers in this study were “long-termers and they described how they were also confronted with significant changes in society upon their reentry. Many co-researchers reported an urgent and pressing need to bridge and repair the gap between living behind prison walls and the progression of society on the outside. They talked about how refuge allowed them time and opportunity to learn new soft skills and adapt to new technologies such as phones, computers, and different modes of transportation.

Similar to Sampson and Laub (1991), this finding emphasizes the important role of relationships and social connections in the transition process from crime to legitimacy. However, the point of departure in this study is that the role of social relations and social supports takes on a distinctly different and expanded meaning for African American ex-prisoners. As illustrated by

co-researchers in this study, coming from experiences of incarceration, marginalization, and social oppression uniquely positions African American ex-prisoners at greater disadvantage upon reentry. Thus, for formerly incarcerated African Americans, social supports are significantly linked to crucial survival and assimilation needs, in addition to their influence on desistance. Further, in this study, family and community supports served as important bridges to building employment pathways through provision of essential social supports.

## **ii. Connections to the Workforce Before, During, and After Prison**

All of the co-researchers in this sample were employed before, during, and after prison, and their employment experiences were quite diverse. Prior to incarceration, some co-researchers worked in low-wage, service industry jobs as maids, janitors, and employees of fast food chains. Others worked in primary sector jobs such as office managers, construction workers, and accounting clerks. Several co-researchers were entrepreneurs: one person owned a successful commercial business; another operated a home craft business; and one was a singer/actor who wrote, produced, and directed stage plays.

During incarceration, co-researchers worked a variety of prison jobs. Co-researchers also described prison industry employment through work release programs and contract jobs with outside companies. They talked about side jobs they performed in addition to their prison work, such as tutoring other prisoners and producing art for commercial and private sale. A few co-researchers related that their most notable and meaningful job experience in prison was working in the prison library. For several co-researchers, work as prison law clerks netted important connections to influential attorneys and outside law firms that hired them post release.

Co-researchers reflected intensely upon the meaning and importance of work and school opportunities in prison. They related concerns about changing conditions in prison and the long-

term, negative effects of reducing and eliminating prison employment, training, and education programs.

As I interpret these findings, I believe that many co-researchers in this study were atypical of general populations of returning citizens, particularly in light of my literature review. Co-researchers in this study were highly organized, and they exhibited a strong sense of order and resilience, which is inconsistent for people with long histories of incarceration. Co-researchers were consistent with routines of productivity, and they demonstrated these traits as strengths, pre and post release.

### **iii. Effective Use of Time Inside and Outside of Prison**

Co-researchers discussed how education and work were important tools for effective use of their time inside and outside of prison. They described their participation in prison work and school programs as forms of productivity that bolstered their self-esteem and provided them with transferable skills for work after prison. Co-researchers also described their strong desires to make up for lost time and their commitment to seizing opportunities that helped build their skills and assets.

Every co-researcher in this study articulated the advantages they gained from work, education, and other learning opportunities pre and post release. All of the co-researchers in this study found and secured work post release. A few co-researchers were employed immediately. However, the vast majority related that they experienced constant barriers to employment. A few co-researchers talked about how they volunteered initially to work jobs for no wages to demonstrate their trustworthiness and work skills. Other co-researchers described anxiety-ridden interview processes and being turned down for jobs because of their criminal background; however, they continued to search for work.

Co-researcher narratives exhibited their strong sense of resilience and self-worth. When confronted with rejection, co-researchers continued to believe that they were employable. This finding suggests that the cognitive tactics co-researchers employed in prison strengthened their fortitude for confronting reentry and work challenges on the outside.

#### **iv. Scaffolding**

Co-researchers also talked about how they consistently built upon every opportunity for self-improvement and employment. They reported active engagement in a host of school work, volunteer, reentry meetings, and other networking opportunities to prepare for and find work. A majority of co-researchers talked about how they meticulously organized, practiced, and prepared for interviews. The details they shared included bringing resumes, records of credentials earned in and out of prison, referrals from influential sponsors, and records and journals of all their accomplishments pre and post release.

I refer to these activities as *scaffolding*, and it reflects how co-researchers incrementally scaled each opportunity to build upon existing experiences to improve prospects for their employment. Sampson and Laub's Life Course Desistance Theory (1992; 1993) confirms that school and work are social control processes that influence life choices, transitions, and turning points. Findings from this study concur with the strong link between work, school, and desistance and add that an important dimension to this from the experience of African American ex-prisoners is *accessibility* to school and work. Findings from co-researchers' narratives highlight the need for meaningful work and access to education inside and outside prison. Co-researchers reported that their work and school experiences empowered their commitment to turn away from crime and strengthened their belief in the possibility of positive change.

### **3. Study Findings vis-à-vis Labor Market Segmentation Theory**

The primary premise of labor market segmentation theory (Reich et al., 1973) is the existence of a dual labor market divided into primary and secondary workforce sectors. The theory asserts that each sector is characterized by differences in work classifications, occupations, and employees based on class, race, and gender. Jobs in the primary sector include management-level and blue collar jobs with job security and benefits, and these positions are primarily held by Caucasians. Alternately, secondary labor market jobs are mostly comprised of women and racial minorities, who work in low-wage, service-sector jobs without benefits or opportunities for career advancement (Doeringer & Piore, 1975; Piore, 1969, 1975; Reich et al., 1973). There are two themes from study findings that I relate to the literature on Labor Market Segmentation Theory: (1) *No Future Nest Eggs* and (2) *Giving Back*.

#### **a. No Future Nest Eggs**

This theme emerged as one of the most notable themes expressed by co-researchers. It captures and expresses co-researchers' serious concerns about future job stability and their insecurities about retirement. The significance of this theme is underscored by the absence of existing literature on the retirement experiences of formerly incarcerated African Americans. This study finding is particularly relevant because the median age of co-researchers was 56 and every co-researcher expressed this as a common concern.

Co-researchers who worked for non-profit, reentry agencies described fierce competition from co-workers for their management positions due to limited advancement opportunities within their agencies. A majority of co-researchers stated that they felt locked into non-profit jobs and locked out of private sector jobs because of the stigma of their criminal backgrounds,

race, and, age. They cited gaps in the accumulation of pensions and social security retirement benefits due to lengthy incarceration histories.

Co-researchers also voiced concerns about changes in agency hiring practices that were driven by funding mandates. One co-researcher reported that new funding decrees and policies on her job required master's degrees for positions formerly held by recovering addicts and ex-prisoners. She also commented on her observation of the rapid and high turnover rates among college grads that were hired.

I learned through co-researchers' narratives and my review of the literature that few, if any, discussions of labor market theories address employment segmentation and the compounded forms of oppression experienced by formerly incarcerated persons who are near or considering retirement. Reich et al. (1973) labor market segmentation theory clearly addresses the political and economic forces of capitalism that drive segmented work sectors. Findings from my study expand and contribute to the labor market segmentation discussion by adding co-researcher insights into the intersectionality of oppression and socio–structural barriers in the workforce.

#### **b. Giving Back**

This theme highlights the meaning of work for co-researchers in this study and the personal benefits they derived from helping other ex-prisoners reintegrate into their communities. It relates to labor market segmentation theory because it highlights some features of nonprofit work that provide benefits that extend beyond wage and career advancement. Every co-researcher expressed how their connection to meaningful work and helping others was personally gratifying and spiritually redeeming. Some co-researchers described their work as a way of addressing and impacting injustice in corrections and society. While other co-researchers reported their work as a means of making amends to their families and society for past



transgressions. Some co-researchers commented on how their engagement in reentry work reinforced the strength of their commitment to desistance and abstinence from drugs. Co-researcher Bernie aptly illustrated the meaning he derived from helping others as he stated that “he kept what he had by giving it away.”

The theme of giving back is an important link to labor market segmentation theory because it highlights features of lower-wage, nonprofit work that provide personal and social benefits beyond higher salaries and career advancement. Every co-researcher in this study emphasized the personal value derived from being of service to others and working in a job with meaning and purpose.

#### **4. Study Findings vis-à-vis Labor Market Stratification Theory**

Labor market stratification (Crutchfield & Pitchford, 1997) expands upon the concept of labor market segmentation and argues that incentives for crime are linked to depressed wages and marginal work in the secondary labor market. Co-researchers in this study commented on how their employment and earning potential were negatively impacted by the length of their incarceration. A majority of co-researchers described how hard they worked to secure stable jobs, only to find that many employers offered little or no retirement, health care, and insurance benefits. Some co-researchers expressed their initial excitement about the passage of the Affordable Care Act and the universal discount coverage it promised to offer. Most co-researchers reported how their excitement diminished as they experienced bureaucratic obstacles to registering, mandatory coverage penalties, and steep insurance premiums that were not covered by non-profit employers.

To circumvent current and future income shortfalls, many of the co-researchers in this study reported working side jobs to pay for health benefits and to save for emergency situations.

Although not substantiated in this study, some co-researchers also reported their belief that people without criminal records earned more money for the same jobs they performed. I interpreted this experience as a form of labor market exploitation that requires future investigation.

#### **a. Injustice in the Criminal Justice System**

An additional tenet of labor market stratification posits that the longer people are incarcerated the greater the negative impact on their future income and potential lifetime earnings. This assertion is centrally tied to the co-researchers' theme of injustice and corruption in the criminal justice system. Co-researchers talked about experiencing wrongful incarcerations and trumped-up charges that led to long imprisonment terms. They reflected on how being taken out of society for extended periods put them at greater disadvantage upon reentry and challenged their abilities to earn a living wage.

As stated earlier, many of the co-researchers in this study were incarcerated for long periods of time. Consistent with the premise of labor market stratification, this finding illustrates how the complicated web of punitive criminal justice policies and mass incarceration negatively entangle the lives of co-researchers for decades after their release.

### **5. Textural Trends**

In contrast to textural themes, textural trends do not represent the common experiences of all co-researchers. The textural trends presented below emerged as significant and notable aspects of the experience of managerial employment among a subset of co-researchers. Although not universally experienced by all 13 co-researchers, two issues proved to be compelling textural trends which merit presentation and further exploration: (1) domestic and sexual violence and (2) "post-traumatic incarceration syndrome."

**a. Domestic and Sexual Violence**

Three female co-researchers openly disclosed experiencing domestic violence, rape and/or sexual violence by intimates and/or family members.

I was in an abusive situation for many, many, many years ... my husband, he did so many things to me in that situation, such as set up all night with a shotgun, told me he would kill me and my family, chase me around the table with a knife when I invited him to my graduation for my associate's, hit me in the head with a pipe and tried to throw me off the third floor porch and beat me to a pulp. (Lisa)

Others said, "I was married at 16, and it was a very ... abusive [and] controlling [relationship]" (Diane). "She [grandmother] was very, very, very, very, very, very physically abusive ... sometimes ... she would tie me up to the bedpost, make you get in the water, whoop you wet." (Florence) One co-researcher shared her experience as an adult survivor of childhood physical abuse, rape, and molestation by family members and strangers.

At a young age [6 or 7] ... things had happened ... like some sexual abuse by my grandmother's brother ... it's in the back of my mind there had to be others because I was the little girl while all the drunk men's drinking at that house. And, hey, give you a dollar, dance for me. Come on over here and sit on my lap. So it was always that kind of stuff. (Florence)

In addition to domestic and sexual violence, female co-researchers described experiences of sexual harassment on the job. These behaviors were particularly prominent on jobs where women were the minority, such as construction work or in work environments traditionally dominated by men.

I would feel that they liked seeing me out working, sweating and ... the men would sometime be standing around and I'm just doing the work ... I was only lady there, was on the job, and I felt a little intimidated at times ... It was a matter of the gestures or the things that they didn't say personally to me, but indirect things. 'It's real hot out here.' Or 'you need to work in a T-shirt like we work in a T-shirt ... You should take your T-shirt off.' (Diane)

He be up on me all the time all the time, trying to lure ... He be a little too doggone close, always making sexual comments. 'Oh, you look good. You got a nice body on you. I'd really like to take you.' (Debra)

One co-researcher felt that she was made vulnerable to sexual harassment at work when her status as a Black woman with a criminal record was known. For her, the stigma of incarceration was compounded by race, womanhood, and the perception of her sexual immorality.

I got hired at (Mr.'s Towing) ... Anyway, honey, I'm gonna tell you. You have to be like would you get back off of me. Too much sexually, trying to always hit on me all the time ... coming at me with sexual comments and this man was married, living with his girlfriend and ... trying to talk to me ... just because you know I am from that background, do you really think I'm gonna be that easy? (Debra)

The experiences described above point to the gendered dimensions of domestic and sexual violence. Yet domestic and sexual violence may not be an exclusive experience of female co-researchers. None of the men reported or discussed any crimes of domestic violence and rape perpetrated against them. Clearly, the question of exposure to and perpetration of domestic and sexual violence by formerly incarcerated males remains unanswered and calls for future research.

#### **b. Post-Traumatic Incarceration Syndrome**

Another experience that trended among co-researchers was labeled by one participant as "post-traumatic incarceration syndrome."

Post-traumatic incarceration syndrome ... it was like post-traumatic stress disorder. If you been an in a violent, hostile situation, you learn to cope. And when you taken out of that hostile environment, after being out months, then those symptoms of paranoia and suspicion start creeping up ... and so you start responding to situations in society as though they happening in society when they really not. You get these phobias. You become paranoid and you wonder where this coming from. And most Vietnam vets go through that. They used to call it being shell-shocked. Then they coined the term post-traumatic stress disorder ... a person coming out of prison go through that after being out for a while. You normal when you first come home, but after you out for a while, you can be walking down the street and projecting something about to kickoff, 'cause from experience being in prison ... then you find yourself responding and people looking at you. What you say, man? Or you challenge somebody on the streets because you projecting they coming off on one way and they really not. (Bernie)

Although not experienced universally in the same way, another co-researcher described a similar experience:

Everything had changed in those seven years ... I was just scared to be around people by myself. Even though I was around people in there all the time, out here I was scared. Everything was different. And everything was frightening. ... I knew how to drive. I had all these cars before I left. I had my license. But I was scared to get behind the wheel of the car. I was scared to actually go sit on the bus stop and just go where I had to go by myself. If somebody was with me, I was okay. I didn't want to go by myself ... I'm telling you, I don't know what it was... But after a while, the longer I stayed out, then ... it went away. I don't know. I call it a culture shock. (Lisa)

The co-researcher who identified this phenomenon detailed vivid examples of the experience with post-traumatic incarceration syndrome:

Working on a job in a warehouse ... a warehouse setting kind of remind[s] you of a prison setting and coworkers talking ... you get to wondering if they plotting on you. And so now you wonder if they plotting on you, how you gonna deal with this? Now, in prison, you shank up ... you arm yourself with a weapon ... then you step to them and challenge them. And I had to do that, and they didn't know what the hell I was talking about. (Bernie)

[Another example], my wife, when her daughters moved in. [I]n prison you become self-centered. You use toothpaste from the bottom up to preserve it. You use so many blocks of toilet paper, 'cause you don't know if you run out when you get some more ... so you preserving stuff. Soap you don't leave in the water. It deteriorates[s] too fast. So you wanna hold on to the soap you done bought from commissary. my wife daughters ... was pulling toilet paper down and squeezing toothpaste from the middle ... all that bothered me ... I became real aggressive with them ... it like don't you know the rules ... but they never been incarcerated. (Bernie)

Co-researchers agreed that these experiences dissipated over time with support from understanding family members and/or peers who had undergone similar experiences. Even though co-researchers experienced post-traumatic syndrome from incarceration, it did not impede their ability to move eventually into management-level positions.

In the next section of my dissertation, I present study: (B) Implications, (C) Strengths and Weaknesses; (D) Recommendations for Future Research and (E) Conclusion.

## **B. Study Implications**

Findings from this study have particular relevance for criminal justice practice and policy. Findings suggest unique and culturally nuanced cognitive routines and practices (i.e., self-contracts, metaphysical disassociation, and spirituality) exercised by African American prisoners to refute criminal identities, turn away from crime and achieve positive identity transformation. These findings have implications for increasing reentry success.

Consistent with co-researchers' narratives and my literature review, social relationships and connections to direct support from family members, peers, influential community sponsors and resourceful community agencies has a positive impact on the transitions of prisoners from prison to work. Findings here suggest that the duration and timing (specifically, the immediate provision of resources and supports) can be vital to individual survival needs and to pathways toward legitimate careers.

Findings also suggest that older populations of returning citizens are more vulnerable to future economic instability and may experience more serious financial hardship during retirement. Given the range of labor market forces that stigmatize, oppress, and marginalize African American ex-prisoners, findings in this study suggest the development of key policy legislation aimed at providing retirement and health care benefits for formerly incarcerated persons. These actions can reduce the extensive public cost for retirement care for returning citizens. Conducting more studies that capture a wider sampling frame of seniors in this population may heighten our understanding and serious consideration of program and service enhancements that stabilize returning citizens, incentivize desistance from crime, decrease reliance on public assistance, and increase community well-being and safety.

### **C. Strengths and Limitations**

Strengths of this study include: (1) collaboration with a group of formerly incarcerated African American co-researchers; (2) the unfolding of previously unidentified, culturally specific and nuanced cognitive processes which imply relevance to desistance and positive identity transformation for African American ex-prisoners; (3) considerations for future scholarship and research on the reentry, employment, and retirement needs of African American returning citizens; and (4) a significant contribution to my learning and professional development as a scholar and researcher.

Potential limitations of this study include the demographic features of the study co-researchers, in terms of race, age, sample size, and length of incarceration. Specifically, this study was conducted exclusively with a population of African American men and women. The median age of co-researchers was 56, and a study of this nature with a younger sample of co-researchers could potentially yield different outcomes. In addition, most of the co-researchers in this study were long-termers serving well over seven years, and findings may prove inconsistent in studies on current populations of prisoners with lengthy sentences because of shifts in prison culture, environment, policy, and practices.

Another potential limitation was my “insider” positionality on several personal and professional fronts (Kanuha, 2000, p. 440). On a personal level, I am an African American female academic with close family members who have experienced imprisonment and reentry. On a professional level, I was formerly employed as the Executive Director of a Chicago-based agency that provided workforce development services for formerly incarcerated persons. There were also distinct variations in education, class, and life experiences between co-researchers and

me that placed me in the position of negotiating my role as both an inside and an outside researcher (Merriam et al., 2001).

Though I have never experienced imprisonment or reentry, I have experienced social marginalization and racial oppression. Admittedly, I encountered times during the interview and analysis phases where my role as a researcher faced head-on with my insider status, particularly as co-researchers related emotionally painful and disturbing experiences. I anticipated the emergence of these multiple identities during the research process, and acknowledging their existence was the first step in controlling for their potential distraction. More specifically, these challenges were controlled for through my engagement in the transcendental methodologies of Epoche, Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction, and the development of textural descriptions from the verbatim narrative accounts of co-researchers.

#### **D. Future Research**

Future research and further interdisciplinary discourse is needed aimed at reducing recidivism, enhancing community safety, and increasing reentry success anchored by solid employment. Closer examination by interdisciplinary research teams in psychology, criminology, and economics may help inform the design and delivery of effective corrections and community agency interventions pre and post release. Future research should look at the question of exposure to and perpetration of domestic and sexual violence by formerly incarcerated males given the textual trends that emerged. Conducting more studies that capture a wider sampling frame of formerly incarcerated individuals is also called for due to the views expressed by this older sample.



## **E. Conclusion**

This dissertation addressed the importance of understanding the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated African American men and women who have achieved employment beyond low-wage and transitional jobs. It gives voice to an understudied population of resilient African Americans who have overcome tremendous barriers to secure meaningful employment, social acceptance, and reintegration into society. Co-researchers in this study shared valuable insights, and their authentic lived experiences contribute to and expand upon existing scholarship on reentry, employment, and desistance. Findings from this dissertation suggest the need for closer examination and support for individual desistance and transformation processes that begin in prison and sustain personal trajectories and turning points away from crime post-release.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Agency Collaboration Outreach Letter

University of Illinois at Chicago,  
Department of Criminology Law & Justice  
“Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
formerly incarcerated African American men and women.”  
Appendix – B

STARTS APPROVAL EXPIRES

JAN 17 2014 JAN 17 2015

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

AGENCY COLLABORATION OUTREACH LETTER (DATE)  
(ADDRESS)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), majoring in Criminology, Law and Justice. I am currently conducting research on the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons. My dissertation title is “*Beyond Transitional Work and Low-Wages: The Experience of Managerial Employment among Formerly Incarcerated African American Men and Women.*” Specifically I am interested in exploring the process between positive personal transformations, the acquisition of meaningful employment and its relation to successful community reintegration. The timeline to initiate my research is projected for late fall of 2013, based on approval by the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

At this point, I am reaching out to potential community collaborators. I need your help. Your program was referred to me as a model of best practices in transitional services for formerly incarcerated persons and I am very excited about the potential of collaborating with your agency. Specifically, I am requesting that your program consider: 1) acting as a recruitment site, and 2) providing a safe, confidential space for on-site interviews, as needed. All study volunteers will receive a small cash stipend as appreciation for their time and travel. A copy of the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects approved recruitment flyer has been attached.

I am looking forward to meeting you and answering any questions you may have regarding my research study. Are you available to meet during the week of \_\_\_\_\_? I will call you as a follow-up to this correspondence. In the interim, if you need additional information, I can be reached by email at [vcoffell@uic.edu](mailto:vcoffell@uic.edu) or by phone at 312-636-7201. Again, thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Vickii Coffey  
Doctorate Candidate\  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Department of Criminology, Law and Justice  
1007 W. Harrison, M/C141  
Chicago, IL 60607  
[vcoffell@uic.edu](mailto:vcoffell@uic.edu)

## Appendix B Recruitment Flyer

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice

“Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women.”

STARTS APPROVAL EXPIRES

JAN 17 2014 JAN 17 2015

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### RESEARCH STUDY

*“PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR AN EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH STUDY”*

Are you:

- ✓ an African American female or male,
- ✓ age 25 or over,
- ✓ a person who has been formerly incarcerated
- ✓ living in Chicago or Cook County and,
- ✓ working full-time in the reentry field?

If you answered YES to all the questions above, you may be eligible to participate in a study on your employment experience. Interested volunteers will participate in a brief 10-15 minute interview to determine eligibility for the study. Participants will be compensated for their time.

If you are interested in participating or learning more about this research, call (312) 636-7201 or Email [vcoffe1@uic.edu](mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu)

Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>	Beyond Transitional Work Study (312) 636-7201 <a href="mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu">vcoffe1@uic.edu</a>
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## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **In-Person, Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

**Participant ID#\_\_\_\_\_**

“Thank you for interest in my study and the time you are taking to participate. I really appreciate this opportunity to talk with you today. To start, here’s a copy of the research consent form for you to read. Let me know when you’ve finished reading it. I’d like to discuss it with you and answer any questions you may have, before you sign it. I also have a participant contact sheet for you to fill out. The contact sheet will only be used to do follow-up on interviews and to clarify questions related to the study. To protect your confidentiality, I’ll keep it securely stored in a locked file cabinet, in my office.

Now, I’d like to briefly review important details of today’s interview. The purpose of my study is to learn more about the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons working in management positions. I will be asking you questions about your employment experiences and how you feel your incarceration affected your employment opportunities. You are being asked to participate in one or two, separate, face-to-face interviews. The interview(s) will range between two to four total hours. Your participation is completely voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it. Please let me know and I will skip the question. If you decide at any point that you do not want to continue your participation in the study, tell me and I will stop the interview. With your permission, today’s interview will be tape-recorded. To protect the confidential nature of

your participation, all tape-recordings will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet. However, if you do not give consent to tape-recording, handwritten notes will be taken. Do, I have your permission to tape record the interview? Do you have any questions before, we begin? Great! Let's get started!"

[Collect informed consent and contact sheet, turn on recorder, test sound level with participant].

**Area of Interest I: "Who Are You & How Are You Doing?"**

[First] - I just need to verify that you are still currently employed at least 40 hours per week?

- a. \_\_\_\_ Yes → continue to question 1
- b. \_\_\_\_ No → end interview [read end script]

**I'd like to start with just getting to know more about you, so tell me...**

1. How are you doing?
  - a. Probe – What's going well for you?
  - b. Probe – What's not going well for you?
  - c. Probe – What do you worry about?
2. Where do you live?
3. So, who do you live with?
  - a. Probe – Can you tell me a little about your relationship with them?
  - b. Probe – Is there anyone not living in the household who you are financial responsible for?
4. How far did you go in school?
5. When and where did you complete high school or your GED?
  - a. Probe for if completed education while incarcerated.
6. When and where did you complete college or vocational school?
  - a. Probe for if completed education while incarcerated.

**Area of Interest II: “Trouble with the Law”**

**So you’ll remember that the purpose of my study is to understand how incarceration has affected your employment? So let’s start by talking about your incarceration. Start at the beginning...**

7. How did you first get in trouble with the law?
  - a. Probe – What happened?
  - b. Probe – What was that like for you?
  - c. Probe – How did it make you feel?
  - d. Probe – How did it affect your life?
8. Now let’s get specific, before your current job what was your last experience with the criminal justice system?
  - a. Probe – What happened?
  - b. Probe – What was that like for you?
  - c. Probe – How did it make you feel?
  - d. Probe – How did it affect your life?
  - e. Probe –for offense, sentence, release conditions, economic hardship?
9. Was this your only involvement with the criminal justice system?
  - a. \_\_\_\_ Yes → [continue with next question]
  - b. \_\_\_\_ No → [probe for number of times incarcerated]
10. What was it like to be incarcerated?
  - a. Probe – What was it like for you?

[End Script – If interview is NOT completed in first meeting] → “Thank you for your time today. Let’s schedule our next interview. When is a good day and time for you to meet? Ok, thank you and I will see you on [date and time of next interview]. Have a good day/evening!

### **Area of Interest III: “Employment”**

**[If this is a second interview –read introduction script]** “Good morning or afternoon [participant’s name]. Again, thank you for your help with my study. Before we begin today, I’d like to briefly revisit several important points about the study interview process and your consent to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential. All tape-recordings will be stored in a secure, locked cabinet. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it. Let me know and I will skip the question. You can withdraw from the study at any time and withdrawing will not harm any future relationship you may have with the University of Illinois at Chicago. Do I have your permission, to tape-record today’s interview? Great!”

**Now, let’s talk about your job...**

11. Tell me about your current job?

a. Probe – How did you get this job?

b. Probe – How did your criminal background affect your getting this job?

12. Tell me about your first job?

a. Probe – For type of work?

b. Probe – How long they worked there?

c. Probe – Any skills learned?

13. What does this work mean to you?



14. Many people who have served prison time have trouble finding and keeping a job, what was different for you?
15. How do you think race, racism, prejudice or discrimination influenced your ability to get a job?
16. How do you think sexual discrimination, sexism, and gender bias influenced your ability to get a job?
17. Looking back on your life experiences, what would you say were your most important achievements?

**End Thank You Script Completed Interview(s)→** “Thank you this concludes our interview(s)! I am very grateful for your help, the information you shared will contribute to a better community understanding of the employment experiences of ex-prisoners, and it is my hope that your experience will help promote better employment opportunities for ex-prisoners returning to their communities. For your time and travel costs and as a token of my appreciation for your help please accept this \$50 (cash). Also, I’ve asked a lot of sensitive questions and some of them may have raised uncomfortable feelings for you. So, I’d like to give you a list of community agencies and professionals that you can contact, if you need help processing this experience now or in the future.

And finally, would you like an opportunity to review and comment on a draft of the written summary of your interview?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to review the summary. →[” Ok, I’ll contact you when the summary is drafted and schedule a time for us to discuss it. Thank you so much for your time and expertise!”]

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I don’t want to review the summary →[Ok, thank you so much for your time and expertise!”]

## Appendix D Screening Guide

University of Illinois at Chicago,  
Department of Criminology Law & Justice

“Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
formerly incarcerated African American men and women.”

Appendix: D

Participant ID# \_\_\_\_\_

STARTS APPROVAL EXPIRES

JAN 17 2014 JAN 17 2015

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### Telephone/In-Person Eligibility Screening Guide

Good morning/afternoon, my name is Vickii Coffey and I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am interested in researching the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons. You have expressed an interest in my study. Is this a good time for me to tell you about the study?

- If no: “When is a better time to follow-up with you? \_\_\_\_\_  
[schedule appointment day and time]
- If yes: “Thank you. The purpose of my study is to learn more about the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons working in management positions. Although you may not directly benefit from the study, the information you share may contribute to a greater community understanding of the factors which promote employment success for ex-prisoners. Today, I’d like to conduct a brief 10-15 minute interview with you to determine your eligibility to participate in my research. If you are eligible and you agree to participate, the study will involve 2-4 hours of interviews. “May I have your consent to ask you a few questions to determine if you are eligible to participate in the study?
- If no: “Thank you for your time, have a great day.”

University of Illinois at Chicago,  
Department of Criminology Law & Justice

"Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
formerly incarcerated African American men and women."

Appendix: D

Participant ID# \_\_\_\_\_

➤ If yes: "Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Ok, my first question is..."

1. Do you describe your ethnic and racial heritage as African American?
  - a. ☐ Yes → continue to question 2
  - b. ☐ No → end interview [read end script]
2. What is your date of birth?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ → if born before 1988 → end interview [read end script]
3. What is your gender?
4. Are you currently employed at least 40 hours a week?
  - a. ☐ Yes → continue to question 5
  - b. ☐ No → end interview [read end script]
5. What is your job title?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your annual salary from your current job – excluding any other income source  
such as child support, disability payments, or a second job?  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ → if less than 25,000 per year end interview [read end  
script]
7. Have you ever been incarcerated in prison?
  - a. ☐ Yes → continue to question 8
  - b. ☐ No → end interview [read end script]
8. When was the last time you were released from prison?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ date → if less than 3 years [read end script]
9. When was the last time you were arrested for a non-felony offense?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ date → if less than 12 months [read end script]

**[end script for persons who qualify]** "You are eligible for my study – I want to hear your story!"

In appreciation for your time and/or travel costs today, I have \$15 for you. Let's schedule an

University of Illinois at Chicago,  
Department of Criminology Law & Justice

"Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
formerly incarcerated African American men and women."

Appendix: D

Participant ID# \_\_\_\_\_

appointment for your interview. What is a good day and time for you? The interview will take  
about 2-4 hours. How can you be contacted if there is a need to reschedule the date? Thanks, I  
look forward to our meeting. Have a great day!

Set-up appointment:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date, time and location of in person interview: \_\_\_\_\_

**[end script for persons who do not qualify]**

"[participant name] unfortunately, my study focuses on people with different experiences.  
However, I appreciate your willingness to be of assistance and as a token of appreciation for  
your time today, I have a \$15 for you."

- If screening is by phone: "May I have your mailing address?"
- If screening is face-to-face: "Once again, thank you for your time!" [give participant \$15  
cash]

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice  
"Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
formerly incarcerated African American men and women."  
Appendix: F

STARTS APPROVAL EXPIRES

JAN 17 2014 JAN 17 2015

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled, "*Beyond transitional work and low-wages: the Experience of Managerial Employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women.*"

Name of Principle Investigator: Vickii P. Coffey  
Name of Organization: University of Illinois at Chicago, Criminology, Law & Justice  
Department of Criminology, Law & Justice  
1007 W. Harrison, M/C 141  
Chicago, IL 60607.

Name of Advisor: Dr. Beth Richie, PhD.  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Professor,  
Department of Criminology, Law & Justice  
Director, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy  
412 S. Peoria St., Rm. 322  
Chicago, IL 60607

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
- Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

#### Introduction

I, Vickii Coffey, am a researcher with IRB certification through the University of Illinois at Chicago. I am conducting a research study on understanding the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated persons. I am going to give you information and invite you to be a part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. The consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me, my research

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice

“Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women.”

Appendix: F

advisor or the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects. In addition, the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects can answer questions about your rights as a research participant.

#### Purpose of the research

Many persons released from prison return to Chicago and repeatedly fail at their attempts to find work that enables them to be self-supporting. Frequently, reentry failure results in repeated cycles of return to prison. I am interested in identifying ways to stop this from happening. The purpose of this study is to provide information that will contribute to improved reentry employment opportunities, workforce development practices and policies. I believe that you can help in this effort by sharing your experience about the challenges you faced and overcame and in doing so; you will provide unique insight into the barriers to reentry success and what it takes to succeed at reentry and secure employment.

#### Type of Research Intervention

The research will involve your participation in one or two separate interview sessions ranging from 2- 4 hours total hours.

#### Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research, because I feel that your experience as a formerly incarcerated person who is working in ex-offender transitional services can significantly contribute to understanding what is needed for successful community reentry and full-time employment.

#### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluations or reports. If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind later, withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any time. Your withdrawal from the study will not harm any existing or future relationship you may have with the University of Illinois at Chicago or place of employment.

#### Procedures

I am asking you to help us learn more about reentry and work for formerly incarcerated persons residing in Chicago. I am inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to participate in one or two interview sessions for a total of 2-4 hours. All interviews will be guided by me. The interviews will be carried out in strict confidentiality and will be tape-recorded. You may decline to be tape-recorded and still participate in the interview. During the interview, I will sit down with you in a safe and confidential area at one of the study recruitment sites. If it is better for you, the interview can take place in my office or in your home. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. If you want to stop or take a break during the course of the interview, you may do so. No one else but you and I will be present unless you request that someone else to be present.

The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except me and a professional hired by me to transcribe the tape-recordings will have access to the information documented during your interview. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement as part of her/his contract for



University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice

"Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women."

Appendix: F

transcription services and will be responsible for transcribing the tapes from the interview sessions. The entire interview will be tape-recorded, with your consent and you will not be identified by name on the tape. Tape-recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet, in my locked office, until transcribed and will be destroyed at the study completion. No personal identifying information will be included on the transcription, though the contact information for research participants' may be maintained on a separate document in a locked file cabinet, in case it is necessary to contact you at a later time. A summary of your interview will be made available for your review and comments and to ensure that I have accurately captured your remarks.

#### Duration

The research project will take place over a period of nine to twelve months in total. Interviews will be conducted over a period of one to four months. During that time, I will visit you one to two times (based on mutually agreed upon times) to complete the interviews which will take approximately 2-4 hours total.

#### Risks

I am asking you to share with me very personal and sensitive information. You may feel uncomfortable talking about some of your experiences with incarceration, prison release, and work and community reentry. I believe that the risks associated with this research are minimal. Although I will engage in every effort to keep your responses completely confidential (see confidentiality section), a risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to (see privacy and confidentiality section)).

You do not have to answer any question that make you feel uncomfortable or take part in the interview, if you don't wish to do so, that is fine. You do not have to give me any reason for not responding to any question or for refusing to take part in the interview. Participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be otherwise entitled. Your withdrawal from the study will not harm any existing or future relationship you may have with the University of Illinois at Chicago. It should also be understood that the investigator has the right to stop the interview process at any time.

#### Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation will contribute to expanded knowledge on the ways to increase opportunities and the potential for ex-offenders to gain full-time employment and succeed in community reintegration.

#### Reimbursements

There are no costs for participating in this study. You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research. , You will receive \$50 for your time and travel involved with your participation in the study interview sessions.



University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice

“Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women.”

Appendix: F

#### Confidentiality

This research is being done in the Chicago transitional services community and it may draw attention. The local transitional service community is relatively small and people may talk about this project. As a member of this community you may be asked about the study and you can reveal what you want to. However, at no time will the principal investigator share information about your participation or lack of participation in this study.

To ensure confidentiality, you will be assigned a unique ID number so that your name will not be directly associated with your interview transcript. ID's and interview transcripts will always be kept separately from your personal identifying information. Only I will have access to your personal identifying information. All personal information, transcripts and tape-recordings will be kept in a locked office in separate storage units and on different password protected computer files. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have an ID number on it instead of your name. Only I will know what your number is and I will lock that information up in a file cabinet with a lock and key. No participants in this study will be identified in any publications or presentations that result from this research, unless you specifically request it in writing and the researcher determines that there is little chance of risk.

#### Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and choosing to participate will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in any way. You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish without your job being affected. I will offer you an opportunity at to review a summary of your remarks before I finalize their inclusion in the study findings, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Criminology Law & Justice  
 "Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among  
 formerly incarcerated African American men and women."  
 Appendix: F

## Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research on the employment and reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated persons. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study. In addition, with regard to tape-recording my interview:

(Please check one):

- ☐ I agree to be tape-recorded  
☐ I do not agree to be tape-recorded

Print Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ (Day/Month/Year)

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ (Day/Month/Year)

### Who to Contact:

If you have any questions, you may ask them at the time of the interview, or contact the researcher as follows: Vickii Coffey, University of Illinois at Chicago, Criminology, Law & Justice Dept. M/C 141, 1007 W. Harrison St., Chicago, IL 60607, [vcoffe1@uic.edu](mailto:vcoffe1@uic.edu), 312-636-7201.

You may also use the above contact information to obtain information on the results of this study. As an alternative, you may also contact the faculty sponsor Beth Richie with your questions:

Beth Richie, PhD, Dissertation Chair, Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy (MC 347)  
 University of Illinois at Chicago, 412 S. Peoria St., Room 322, Chicago, IL 60607,  
[brichie@uic.edu](mailto:brichie@uic.edu), 312-996-6339.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Please reference research protocol number 20131029-77910-1.

**Appendix F**  
Counseling Agencies

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DIRECT SERVICES & SHELTERS**

Apna Ghar 773-334-0173	Chicago Abused Women Coalition 773-278-4566	City of Chicago Domestic Violence HelpLine 1-877-863-6338 (24-Hour Line)	Domestic Violence Legal Clinic 555 W. Harrison Street Suite 1900 Chicago 312-325-9155
Family Rescue 773-375-1918	Jane Addams Hull House Domestic Violence Court Advocacy 555 W. Harrison Rm. 2200 Chicago (312)325-9176	Korean American Women in Need (773)-583-0880	Mujeres Latinas en Accion 708-222-1675

**DRUG & ALCOHOL HELP**

Alternatives Inc 4730 North Sheridan Road Chicago, IL 60640  (773) 506-7474	Bobby E Wright CBHC Addictions Program 9 South Kedzie Avenue Chicago, IL 60612 (773) 722-7900	Community Counseling Center Drug Abuse Helpline 4740 N. Clark Chicago 60640 773-769-0205 (24-HOUR HELP LINE)	Women's Treatment Center 140 North Ashland Avenue Chicago, IL 60607 (312) 850-0050
Changes Behavioral Services Inc 1701 South 1st Avenue, Suite 501 Maywood, IL 60153 (708) 338-2274	Associates In Alcohol and Drug Counseling Inc 8938 South Ridgeland Avenue, Suite 100 Oak Lawn 60453 (708) 233-0161	Al-Anon & Alateen 1-888-425-2666	Narcotics Anonymous 708-848-4884

**LGBTQ SERVICES**

Affinity Community Services 773-324-0377 (Services for African American lesbian teens and women)	Center on Halsted 3656 N. Halsted Chicago, 60613 773-472-6469 (X235)	<u>Gay/Lesbian Support</u> <u>773-929-HELP</u> <u>(Line works 6pm-10pm, nightly)</u>	Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Support 1-888-843-4564 (line M-F, 4pm-12pm; Sat. 12-5pm Eastern Time)
LGBT Support Group for Youth on the South Side 773-935-3151			

**LEGAL SERVICES**

First Defense Legal Aid 1-800-LAW REP4 (free 24-hour legal help for people arrested)	Public Defenders Office 312-603-0600	Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago 111 W. Jackson Blvd. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Fl. Chicago 312-341-1070	Cabrini Legal Aid 740 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago 312-738-2452
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**SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTERS**

Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline 1-888-293-2080	<u>Community Crisis Center</u> <u>847-697-2380</u> <u>847-697-9740</u>	Illinois Department of Human Services 1-877-863-6336	Legal Assistance Foundation of Metro Chicago 111 W. Jackson Blvd., 3 <sup>rd</sup> Fl. Chicago 312-341-1070
Life Span 847-824-4454  Des Plaines: 847-824-0382	Pillars Community Services Administrative Office 333 North LaGrange Road, Ste 1 LaGrange (Cook cty) 60526 708-995-3690	Rape Victim Advocates 1-888-293-2080 160 N. Michigan, Suite 600, Chicago 312-443-9603	YWCA Rape Crisis Hotlines Chicago metro area: 1-888-293-2080 DuPage County: 630-971-3927 South Suburbs: 708-745-5672

**Appendix G**  
Participant Contact Sheet

ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appointment Schedule/Next Availability:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Best way to contact: **cell** \_\_\_\_ **home** \_\_\_\_ **work** \_\_\_\_ **email** \_\_\_\_
- Best Day to contact: **Mon. Tues. Wed. Thurs. Fri.**
- Best Time to contact: **Before /After** \_\_\_\_ **a.m.** / \_\_\_\_ **p.m.**

**Alternate Contact:** *(if unable to reach you through your primary sources)*

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Relationship** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Project Title:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have been hired to

**Transcriber** \_\_\_\_\_ (specific job, research assistant, transcriber, etc.).

I agree to:

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing research information in any form or format \*e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)*.
4. after consulting with the Researcher(s), erase or destroy all research information in any format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researchers(e.g., any information stored on computer hard drive)
5. participate in the study training on the research confidentiality, ethics and protocol.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Researcher(s)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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- Whaley, R., Moe, A., Eddy, J., & Daugherty, J. (2008). The domestic violence experiences of women in community corrections. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 18(3), 25-45.

## Curriculum Vitae

### VICKII COFFEY

Instructor

Governors State University  
CHHS Department of Social Work  
1 University Parkway (G243)  
University Park, IL 60484

Office: (708) 235-7142  
Email: VCoffey@govst.edu

#### EDUCATION

- 2013     **Doctoral Candidate** (Expected completion, summer 2016)  
Department of Criminology, Law & Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago, IL
- Dissertation Title: Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women.  
Dissertation Chair: Beth E. Richie, Ph.D.
- 1997     **Master of Social Work Administration**  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
Major: Clinical Social Work
- 1981     **Bachelor of Arts**  
University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL  
Major: Liberal Arts & Sciences  
Minor: Criminal Justice

#### TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence and Victimization
- Mass Incarceration
- Prisoner Reentry and Employment
- Race, Class and Gender

#### ACADEMIC POSITIONS AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2015 –Present **Instructor**, Department of Social Work, Governors State University  
Full-time, tenure track, faculty member, appointment to Assistant Professor upon completion of dissertation in the Spring, 2016. Current teaching assignments include undergraduate and graduate courses:
- Interprofessional Teamwork
  - Social Welfare Policy I
  - The Social Work Profession in a Diverse Society
  - Urban Dynamics

2013 – 2015 **Lecturer**, Department of Social Work, Governors State University (GSU), University Park, IL

Designed and implemented undergraduate introductory class on violence against women as a course selective. Responsible for teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses. Courses taught, include:

- Field Integrative Seminar I and II
- Interprofessional Teamwork
- The Social Work Profession in a Diverse Society
- Social Welfare Policy
- Urban Dynamics
- Violence Against Women

2010 – 2012 **Instructor**, Department of Criminology, Law and Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

Planned and facilitated summer and fall session undergraduate courses with enrollment average of 25-30 students; prepared course materials; designed and delivered course lectures; developed and graded course assignments and exams. Courses taught, included:

- Introduction to Criminology
- Violence Against Women (Current Controversies in Domestic Violence)
- Victimization

2009 – 2013 **Teaching Assistant**, Department of Criminology, Law and Justice, UIC

Provided teaching support to lecture courses with enrollment of 100-150 students; facilitated and taught small group breakout seminars for 30-40 students; proctored and graded term papers and exams; tutored students requesting coursework assistance. Assisted with the following courses:

- Introduction to Criminal Justice
- Law and Society

#### RESEARCH WORK IN PROGRESS

Coffey, V. (2013). Beyond transitional work and low wages: The experience of managerial employment among formerly incarcerated African American men and women. (Data analysis is complete, summarizing findings and conclusions in preparation for dissertation defense).

#### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2015 – **Junior Faculty Research Mentee**, Governors State University, Chicago, IL  
Study Title: “The GUIDE (GSU-UICC-Disparities-Education) Training and Research Program”

GSU Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Balthazar

- Collaborative, community-based research and translational science project aimed at providing mentorship, career development and capacity building in cancer/health disparity research and methodologies for GSU junior faculty and students through the implementation of a breast cancer research project.

Vickii Coffey 3

- 2011 – 2012 **Research Intern**, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Chicago, IL  
Study Title: “Program Evaluation of St. Leonard’s Ministries Temporary, Supportive Housing and Ex-Offender Reentry Services”  
 Principal Investigator: Jessica Reichert
- Worked collaboratively with the project’s research team to develop the study interview protocol and measures and conducted qualitative interviews with study participants.
- 2011 **Research Assistant**, Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Violence, University of Illinois at Chicago  
Study Title: “Longitudinal Study of Social Support, PTSD, and Problem Drinking in Rape Victims”  
 Principal Investigator: Dr. Sarah Ullman
- Conducted phone screening surveys/ interviews with program participants; assisted with the development of research interview questions and the design of the interview protocol; entered and maintained participant data in customized excel spreadsheet; and, processed and tracked participant stipends.
- 2009 – 2010 **Research Assistant**, Center for Research in Law and Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago  
Study Title: “Advancing Knowledge and Practice in Policing: A Longitudinal Platform for National Research”  
 Principal Investigator: Dr. Dennis Rosenbaum
- Conducted foundational demographic research to develop a training curriculum designed to encourage police officers to be more respectful, fair and responsive to the public.

#### CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

- 1995 – 1997 **Social Work Intern**, Cook County Hospital, Chicago, IL  
 Provided individual and group counseling, assessments for and direct services to patients and their families in the following divisions:
- Pediatrics
  - Trauma & Emergency Rooms
  - Women and Children with AIDS Program

#### PROFESSIONAL MANAGMENT AND PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

- 2007 – 2008 **Executive Director**, Goodwill Industries of Metropolitan Chicago, Chicago, IL  
 Responsible for the overall direction and management of a multi-site, non-profit, workforce development and reentry program for ex-offenders and other disadvantaged populations. Services delivered to approximately 1,500 clients annually and operating budget of approximately \$3,000,000/year. Staff complement of 37.

Major accomplishments, include:



Vickii Coffey 4

- Submission and approval of application for 250,000 federal appropriation for agency service expansion;
- Successful agency 3-year, re-accreditation by Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities;
- Completion of comprehensive, agency 3-year, strategic plan; and,
- Selection as 2008 “Goodwill is Good” for Families national award.

2003 – 2007 **Executive Director**, Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, Chicago, IL

Responsible for the leadership, overall direction and management of a non-profit, 100-member, domestic violence advocacy, training and public policy coalition with an annual operating budget of \$1,000,000. Staff complement of 28.

Major accomplishments, included:

- Providing leadership to successful public policy, advocacy campaign to stop the implementation of HUD’s Homeless Management Information System which threatened the safety and confidentiality of homeless victims of domestic violence;
- Securing a 12% revenue increase in the contract for operating the City of Chicago Domestic Violence Helpline; and,
- Facilitating and implementing an agency 3-year, strategic action plan.
- Co-authoring and securing funding to publish a faith-based, domestic violence intervention and prevention training manual.

1996 – 2003 **President**, Vickii Coffey & Associates, Inc., Chicago, IL

Developed, conducted and coordinated conferences, workshops, trainings and meetings for local and national domestic violence programs, community corporations and government agencies.

Major accomplishments, included:

- Securing HUD funding to partner with Chicago Housing Authority for focus group research on domestic violence and specialized domestic violence training for housing authority police;
- Providing consultation to and overall coordination for (2) national federally funded conferences on domestic violence, the “ Next Millennium Conference” in Chicago with an attendance of over 1,000 advocates and the Multi-cultural Conference in San Juan Puerto Rico, with over 500 attendees; and,
- Serving by appointment on (2) national domestic violence advisory councils: the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women and the Department of Defense Taskforce on Domestic Violence.

1989 – 1996 **Executive Director**, Chicago Abused Women’s Coalition (CAWC), Chicago, IL

Responsible for providing leadership, overall direction and management of a non-profit, domestic violence crisis intervention and direct services program for abused women and their children with an annual operating budget of \$1,000,000.

Staff complement of 35.

Major accomplishments, included:

- Expanding CAWC from a single site shelter to a multi-site service agency resulting in a 61% increase in clients served annually and a 44% increase in agency operating revenues over 3 years;
- Partnering with the City of Chicago Police Department and the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority on a 5-year, 5 million dollar, Department of Justice grant to pilot the Domestic Violence Reduction Project; and,
- Applying for and receiving United Way of Chicago agency full membership and multi-year funding.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Training Manual

Alpert, E., Miles, A., & Coffey, V. (2005). *Responding to domestic violence: An interfaith guide to prevention and intervention*. Publication of the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, Chicago, IL.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PROCEEDINGS

- Coffey, V. Beyond transitional work and low wages. Poster accepted for presentation at the Annual Conference of the American Society for Criminology, Washington, D.C. November 19, 2015.
- Coffey, V. (2010). Women, domestic violence and reentry: What do we know? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, San Francisco CA.
- Coffey, V. (1997). Putting our ear to the ground: Getting the African American community to own, define and address domestic violence. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, Atlanta, GA.
- Warrior, S. & Coffey, V. (1995). Achieving effective domestic violence public education in a diverse society: A solution-oriented approach. Paper presented at the 1995 Symposium of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Harrisburg, PA.

## WORKSHOPS AND PANELS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2013 | <b>Presenter</b> , "Beyond transitional work and low wages" presentation at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.                                |
| 2013 | <b>Panelist</b> , "Moving from Practice to the Academy," roundtable discussion at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.                          |
| 2013 | <b>Guest Speaker</b> , "Symposium on Trauma and Domestic Violence," at the annual conference of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, Chicago, IL. |

Vickii Coffey 6

- 2010 **Guest Speaker**, Annual meeting of the Cook County Department of Public Health, Maywood, IL.
- 2008 **Panelist**, “Goodwill is Good for Families,” Goodwill international conference, Washington, DC.

#### ACADEMIC COMMUNITY SERVICE

- 2014 **Coordinator and fund developer**, “Conversations on Violence Against Women,” domestic violence symposium at Governors State University, University Park, IL.
- 2014 **Coordinator**, “Maria’s Story”, film preview and panel discussion on domestic violence at Governor’s State University, University Park, IL.
- 2013 **Coordinator and moderator**, “Race to Incarcerate” symposium at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
- 2008 **Coordinator**, “Re-framing Reentry,” conference and photo exhibition on prisoner reentry at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

#### AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2013 Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowship, Illinois Board of Higher Education
- 2011 Minority Fellowship, American Society of Criminology
- 2010 Martin Luther King Scholarship, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2009 Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2004 Certificate of Appreciation, City of Chicago Police Department
- 2002 Elizabeth Butler Award, Department of Social Services Administration, University of Chicago
- 2002 1<sup>ST</sup> Alumni Humanitarian Award, Alumni Association, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2002 Legacy Award, Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, University of Minnesota, St. Paul
- 1999 Outstanding Advocate Award, Next Millennium National Conference on Domestic Violence, U.S. Department of Human Services, Washington, DC
- 1996 Human Dignity Award, Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Springfield, IL
- 1994 President’s Crime Victims Service Award, U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Victims of Crime, Washington, DC

#### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES

- 2015 **Member**, Faculty Development Advisory Committee, Governors State University
- 2015 **Member**, American Society of Criminology
- 2015 **Member**, Network for Social Work Management
- 2011 –Present **Member**, Illinois Collaborative on Reentry, Chicago Metropolis 2020
- 2011 – 2014 **Commissioner**, Village of Flossmoor Community Relations
- 2005 – 2007 **Member**, Attorney General of Illinois Appointee, Illinois Violence Prevention Authority
- 2000 – 2003 **Member**, Secretary of Defense Appointee, Department of Defense National Taskforce on Domestic Violence

Vickii Coffey 7

- 1995 – 2000 **Member**, Presidential Appointee, National Advisory Council on Violence  
Against Women
- 1994 **Witness**, Testimony on Domestic Violence, U.S. Congress, Committee on Crime  
and Justice