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THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS OF RE-ENTERING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

by

CHLOE JACKSON

Under the Direction of Sarita Davis

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether Black men experienced empowerment throughout the process of employment preparation. This study also sought to give voice to this population regarding their experience in this process. A definition of empowerment, posed by Barbara Solomon of "empowerment theory", was used to understand the process of empowerment the study participants may have experienced. Nine African American male former offenders who had participated in a job readiness program, and are 18 and older, were interviewed about the preparation they received, and how they perceived this training effected their pursuit of agency, employment, and recidivism.

INDEX WORDS: African American, Males, Prison, Reentry programs, Empowerment

THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS OF RE-ENTERING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

CHLOE JACKSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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2013

THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS OF RE-ENTERING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

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May 2013

DEDICATION

To God and my ancestors

To my beautiful, intelligent, and resilient Mommy

To my children: Austin, Chanel and Delilah

To my family for always having my back

To my friends who were there for me no matter the circumstance

And to all those who are, and continue to be disenfranchised by the system.

You all have inspired this work.

Thank you.

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I am extremely thankful for the support I have received from the African American Studies Department. Every student, faculty member and staff, has made an impression on my journey. I would like to thank Tiffany for always answering any question I ever had, no matter how off the wall it may have seemed. I thank Kaniqua for entertaining my life, as well as helping me navigate the graduate experience.

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To Dr. Gayles, you are a mess, and I am thankful for all the laughs we shared, mostly at my expense. Do not edit this section for grammatical errors, as much as you may want to. You have taught me things about myself through our discussions, which have helped me grow. Yes. I grew. Thank you!

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1 INTRODUCTION

African American men have the highest rates of incarceration; they are also more likely to recidivate than any other race/ethnicity on average across all age groups (Mauer, 1999). Although the methods used to measure recidivism, as well as the conditions surrounding incarceration, vary from state to state, national recidivism studies have provided an estimate of the state of recidivism (The Pew Center on the States, 2011). Recidivism is "the proportions of persons released from prison who are rearrested, reconvicted, or returned to custody within a specific time period" and usually follow former offenders for three years after release (The Pew Center on the States, 2011). The initial national recidivism studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics suggest that recidivism rates had increased from 41.4 percent with the 1983 released cohort, to 51.8 percent among the 1994 released cohort (The Pew Center on the States, 2011). The most recent studies by The Pew Center on the States reveal a national recidivism rate of 45.4 percent of the 1999 released cohort, which decreased to 43.3 percent among the 2004 released cohort. Although this displays a national trend of decreasing recidivism, the recidivism rate for the African American male population is typically the highest among all racial groups (Jung, Spjeldnes & Yamatani, 2010). A 15- state recidivism study that was stated to be generalizable to urban *jails* (distinct from prisons), suggests a recidivism rate of 65 percent among African Americans compared to 55.9 percent among Whites (Jung, Spjeldenes &Yamatami, 2010). These statistics substantiate the inherent problems associated with recidivism, disparately among African American men: stigma, employment, applicable job skills, disenfranchisement, housing, familial ties etc. (Travis & Visher, 2003; Pensylvania, 2011). This study exposes the state of recidivism for African American men, and is indicative of disproportionate African American incarceration rates.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2010). According to the US Department of Justice, over 2,000,000 adults were incarcerated in 2010, as well as over 70,000 youth in juvenile corrections (Glaze, 2011; Kang, Puzzanchera, Sickmund, & Sladky, 2011). In addition, an estimated 5,000,000 adults were on probation or parole in 2009 (Glaze, 2010). This infers that over 7 million adults in the United States are under some form of correctional supervision. To narrow the scope of the incarcerated population, 2010 research demonstrates that of 717, 800 incarcerated men 18 to 29 years old, 37 percent were African American (Child Trends, 2012). This rate is the highest of all racial/ ethnicity groups within that age group. The relationship between race and incarceration/re-incarceration is not deficit-based; the connection lies in the discriminatory/oppressive experiences of African American men within American society. These discriminatory/ oppressive experiences are due to inequality in ecological structures and characteristics that African Americans interact with daily.

Although research on the relationship between social context and recidivism is limited, it has been hypothesized that ecological characteristics of communities may influence recidivism (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Bales, Hay, Reisig, & Wang, 2007). Ecological characteristics refer to the neighborhood or social context in which offenders are reentering. Some environmental barriers within these contexts are impoverished neighborhoods, violence within these neighborhoods, insufficient schools, limited access to proper healthcare etc. These environmental limitations occur simultaneously with the politically and socially constructed barriers founded on discriminatory practices such as: over-policing of Black neighborhoods, racist attitudes of those in power, redlining, zero tolerance school policies, stop and frisk policies, unemployment, mandatory sentencing, prison gerrymandering etc. Although there is little empirical research on

the effect the context of neighborhoods has on recidivism, it is evident that social constraints, such as high levels of poverty or inequality, may greatly encourage crime (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Rose & Clear, 2003; Bales et al., 2007). While all the formerly listed barriers may predict recidivism, the most difficult to secure, and most sufficient deterrent of re-incarceration, is employment (Redcross, Yahner, & Zweig, 2010; Uggen, C. 2000; Jacobs, & Western, 2007; Berk, 2007; Yahner & Zweig, 2012; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002).

Incarceration has weakened Black men's connections to labor market opportunities, and has depleted their work skills, which warrants the need for job experience and skills (Visher & Travis, 2003). Since a number of formerly incarcerated men have limited job experience or job skills, attaining job readiness skills help these men become more employable, increasing their likelihood of securing a job and ultimately avoiding recidivism (Redcross, Yahner, & Zweig, 2010; Uggen, C. 2000; Jacobs, & Western, 2007; Berk, 2007; Yahner & Zweig, 2012; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002). Little is known about *why* job readiness helps excarcerated African American men avoid recidivism from the perspective of African American men. We know that men are more likely to avoid re-incarceration when they are employed, yet we have limited information about their experience during the job search process. What happens during this process that makes them feel like they can attain employment and thus, seek employment? This study will investigate just that: Does procuring job search skills empower these men to more actively engage in the job search process? Does this increase their likelihood of obtaining employment?

From the perspective of this research, empowerment is hypothesized as the phenomenon in which African American men experience throughout the job readiness program, which may effect the job search process. Empowerment has been hypothesized because it addresses the individuals' agency, as well as the context in which the individual is being disempowered or

oppressed. This chapter will provide justification for social concern and theoretical interest, as well as discuss limitations, and examine the theoretical framework that will shape the study's interpretation.

Background

The mass incarceration of Black men is of theoretical interest because of its grand effect on African American communities. Mass incarceration effects Black families, communities, and politics because this phenomenon perpetuates poverty. With the preservation of mass incarceration of Black men, poverty persists in many Black communities due to joblessness, family disruption, and lack of leverage in the Black vote (Sudbury, 2002; Alexander, 2010; Pettit & Western, 2004; Marable, 2005; Council on Crime and Justice, 2006; Pennsylvania, 2011). The proceeding analysis examines the prison industrial complex and how the mass incarceration of Black men, as a result of this system, diminishes human capital.

The prison industrial complex is defined by Julia Sudbury (2002) as, "the correlation between politicians, big business, media and the prison industry in effort to exploit minority dominated prison labor in response to globalization of economics." To examine the war on drugs relationship to the prison industrial complex, the globalization of labor must be understood. In the 1980s, the move towards the search for cheaper labor to maximize profits and new policies that allowed this, caused for outsourcing of corporations (Sudbury, 2002). With corporations taking job opportunities out of the United States and into foreign countries, Americans, specifically those with little education or skills, were hit hard by unemployment (Sudbury, 2002). This grossly affected Black communities due to the concentration of factory jobs within Black communities, which largely sought foreign labor at this time (Alexander, 2010). With the mass removal of job opportunities in Black communities, the removal of access to wealth

accumulation occurred and underground economies developed (Pettit & Western, 2004). As a consequence of this development the severe criminalization of these mechanisms of survival grew exponentially. More money was then spent on facilities to house prisoners, eradicating money from social programs serving impoverished Black communities (Marable, 2005). This redistribution of funds further removed job opportunities from Black communities, as well as furthered the prison economy in providing prison labor (Marable, 2005; Sudbury, 2002). Globalization and the prison industrial complex' utilization of foreign and prison labor, minimized job opportunities in Black communities where education and skills were limited.

The combination of the lack in job opportunities and mass incarceration of Black men, contributes to the regression of human capital of Black men reentering society. On an individual level, exposure to prison subcultures makes it difficult for these men to transition back into normally functioning environments (Council on Crime and Justice, 2011), and weakens their job and social skills. Not only does this lack of skills reduce their prospects for employment and therefore their ability to provide for their families, it also weakens the individual assets that could benefit the community (Council on Crime and Justice, 2011). In addition, the stigma inured from incarceration can also block employment opportunities, transfer to their child/family and community, making trust difficult to regain from community members and employers (Council on Crime and Justice, 2011).

It is all a vicious cycle in which removing jobs from Black communities may lead to the participation in drug dealing to survive, which contributes to the increased intensity of drug laws and enforcement, that land primarily Black men in jail. This incarceration benefits rural white-dominated areas, where these prisons are built, with job availability, profit from cheap prison labor, and over-representation of rural regions in the government. African Americans are then

under-represented in government due to incarceration in which they cannot participate, and lose their right to vote altogether. Exclusion continues when these men are released: there are a limited number of jobs, and an even smaller number for those with felonies, which often leads to returning to a criminal lifestyle and thus, returning to the prison system. Nevertheless, this leaves Black communities under represented, households with solely one source of income, and an assumed need for more prisons, which take resources away from social programs and into the creation of prisons. These effects demonstrate the need for social concern and the necessity of this, and other research.

Statement of Problem

The problem is African American men are recidivating at rates higher than any other racial group nationally (Mauer, 1999). Several factors are believed to effect recidivism, but unemployment is considered to be a major predictor. As of November 2012, The Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that African Americans have an unemployment rate of 14.3%, compared to whites at 7%, Hispanics at 10%, Asians at 4.9%, and women at 7.2 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). In addition, African American men over the age of 20 faced an unemployment rate of 14.1 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This unemployment rate increases for young African American ex-offenders due to factors such as a lack of skills, work history, a high school diploma, and/or their criminal record (Engel, Fahey & Roberts, 2006). This evidence demonstrates the risk of African American male offender recidivism, due to the absence of employment preparation upon release from correctional facilities.

Significant research supports the effectiveness of job readiness and job training programs on recidivism rates of ex-offenders (Redcross, Yahner, & Zweig, 2010; Uggen, C. 2000; Jacobs, & Western, 2007; Berk, 2007; Yahner & Zweig, 2012; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002). There is also

extensive empirical literature on masculinity within prisons, reentry experience, needs and perceptions (Nandi, 2002; Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Visher & O'Connell, 2012; Karp, 2010; Trimbur, 2009; Mutua, 2006) and prospects on reentering the labor market and barriers (Royster, 2006; Pager & Western 2009; Western & Pettit; 2005; Wacquant, 2001; Travis, 2005; Holland, Eacho, Mann, Moon, Shivy, & Wu, 2007). Studies have explored empowerment and the disabled, impoverished and women (Hutchison & Lord, 1993), Black men and masculine performance of provider roles (Dyer, 2005; Trimbur, 2009), and Black political empowerment within social movements, yet there is little research that gives voice to former African American offenders and their experience during the job search process. Therefore, the need to explore and disclose *how* and *why* job readiness programs are more effective is crucial; and this study hypothesizes empowerment to be the determining factor.

Empowerment provides a broad scope to encompass aspects of locus of control, competency, self- esteem and self- efficacy, yet focused enough to provide the framework for the context in which empowerment occurs and the interaction between the two, i.e. social institutions, and the impact of widely-held racial attitudes. The lack of representation of African American former offenders' perspective in the literature necessitates the use of qualitative methods. Their participation in this discourse is necessary because research rooted in their social experiences reveals various unknown causes for certain outcomes. In addition, inclusion in this discussion engenders more accurate research findings that prompt solutions and represent this population. Narrative interviews of African American male former offenders will be utilized and is appropriate in addressing the preceding "problem" due to its explorative nature by investigating empowerment as a possible phenomenon.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine empowerment throughout the process of employment preparation. This study also seeks to give voice to Black men regarding their post-incarceration experience. A definition of empowerment, posed by Barbara Solomon, will be used to understand the process of empowerment the study participants may have experienced. For the purpose of this study, empowerment will be defined as: "the process by which persons gain the ability to obtain and utilize resources to achieve individual or collective goals, and to manage emotions, knowledge, skills or material resources in a way that allows for effective performance of social roles so as to receive personal gratification" (Solomon, 1976). This study will utilize qualitative methods in order to explore whether a group of ex- offenders experienced empowerment from a job readiness program, which may have affected the job search process and outcome.

This study uses the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program in Atlanta, Georgia as a vehicle to explore the research question. The MILA program is a re-entry program targeting African American men who have been previously incarcerated, have a child(ren) under 15 years old and do not have a sex- crime related felony offense. The goal of the MILA program is to build and improve life skills as well as provide direct connections to services that will allow men the opportunity to fulfill all of their legal, financial, and familial obligations in an effort for them to be a positive contributor to society. The ultimate goal is to reduce recidivism among Black men and improve the relationships between fathers and their children in efforts to reduce the likelihood of those children entering the criminal justice system (Roettger & Swisher, 2011). The fellowship program entails 12 monthly group activities over the course of one-year. Participants are also expected to maintain open communication with program staff over the course of the

program. Twenty African American male former offenders who have participated in job readiness classes in this program, and are 18 years and older, will be interviewed about the preparation they received, and how they perceive this training has affected, or will affect, their pursuit of employment.

Significance

The significance of this research is that it gives insight into the perspectives and experiences of this underrepresented population in the literature. The focus would be specifically on the African American population, due to this populations' predominance in the justice system. Databases have been explored for literature encompassing job readiness interventions targeting the African American male population and its impact on empowerment, and little research has been done on this experience. This lack of research calls for the need for more research investigating this experience, as this study will. This theory specifically focuses on the empowerment of minorities, which compose a majority of those incarcerated in the justice system. This research will serve as the foundation or starting point for future research on the relationship of empowerment and the proposed population. Also, this research will contribute to the *What Works* literature of the reentry research field. Lastly, this research will provide possibilities of employment preparation interventions having greater affect on the reduction of recidivism of African Americans through the use of empowerment as an element of the education.

This research may allow program/reentry coordinators to build on certain aspects of existing programs that formerly incarcerated men see as empowering in an effort to increase the effectiveness of the program in deterring recidivism. In relation to the goal of the MILA program in improving these incarcerated men's familial relationships, specifically with their children, this

research may allow for a more effective curriculum for their job readiness program that is based in empowerment; in that the ability to provide for ones family is rooted in masculine ideas of what it means to be a father. Empowerment may play a role in a man's agency to seek the means to provide for his family, which may therefore, improve familial relationships. Lastly, in relationship to the discipline of African American Studies this research will contribute to knowledge about African American formerly incarcerated men from their perspective, which can manifest in improvements in praxis within programs that serve this population and will ultimately positively affect African American communities.

Nature of the Study

The current research will take on a narrative approach in an effort to centralize the voices of the participants. Creswell (2007) describes the narrative approach as one that "gives an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected". In order to utilize this form of inquiry, the stories of the participants should be collected, reported and organized into themes, chronologically (Creswell 2007). The qualitative nature of this design is vital in giving voice to this research population, as quantitative methods would not be able to do so. Extensive quantitative research has disclosed the relationship between job readiness interventions and reentry success (Redcross et al.,2010; Uggen, 2000; Jacobs & Western, 2007; Berk, 2007; Yahner et al., 2012; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002), yet it is unable to address *why* this success occurs. It does not allow the population to express why this intervention has led to better transitioning for them and how it affected their attitudes, behavior, self-actualization etc.

Also, within narrative research, it is stated that a "paradigmatic" approach can be taken in order to investigate "how individuals are enabled or constrained by social resources…" (Creswell, 2007). This is applicable within this study due to the utilization of empowerment as a

paradigm in its quest to discover how "social resources" enable individuals, or in context of this study, employment preparation. In addition, this narrative approach is appropriate due to its ability to use theoretical lenses to guide the stories (Creswell, 2007). This is important to this research study, as it operates from an empowerment perspective.

Hypothesis/ Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is: Does job readiness empower Black men to seek employment? In order to answer this question, several sub-questions must be proposed:

1. Does job readiness affect empowerment during job search?
2. Does empowerment affect job search/outcome?

Within the context of this study, job readiness is defined as gained knowledge of resume writing, interviewing etiquette, job search resources etc. These questions were proposed in order to understand the combination of cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes that may occur as a result of a job readiness program, and throughout, the job search process. These questions hope to disclose what altered, progressed, or strengthened the attitudes of the participants, or if this occurred at all, which can give insight into how reentry services are administered, structured, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The framework used in order to observe the experience of the intervention program from an African-centered perspective is the black empowerment theory, posited by Barbara Solomon (1976). This theory can be considered African- centered due to its critique of traditional researchers lack of understanding of the dynamics of the Black community. Therefore, this theory acknowledges the need for research that does not measure these dynamics against the hegemonic paradigm, but reflects African American cultural values and systems of coping as

resilient, rather than deviant. The concept of empowerment has been researched in fields including community psychology, social work, healthcare, and education and has been observed at numerous levels such as individual, interpersonal and communal (Hur 2006). The concept of "empowerment" is presented as a goal of problem solving with clients who belong to a "stigmatized group", as stated by Solomon (1976). Empowerment is defined as a process whereby self-direction and the helping process are the healing and strengthening forces among African Americans (Solomon 1976). Within this model, participation of the "stigmatized group" in the problem solving process warrants power and control in order to redefine their own self-worth, competence, and transform their social and physical conditions (Solomon 1976). In its application to the current research, the "stigmatized group" are African American male former offenders, and the "problem solving" is the job readiness program. A more descriptive definition of black empowerment by Solomon (1976) is:

> *…the clients perception of his own intrinsic and extrinsic value; the clients motivation to use every personal resource and skill, as well as others in his command, in the effort to achieve self- determined goals; and finally, a conviction that there are many pathways to goal attainment and as long as one makes the effort, failure is possible but the more effort one makes, success is probable.*

The distinctiveness of the empowerment framework is that it recognizes the race/class nuance of stigmatization, and tackles the issues within the practitioner- client relationship that are unique to African Americans. Within this framework, the stigmatized are not just former offenders, but the framework recognizes they are *African American* former offenders who are subject to a particular set of barriers other groups may not be subjected to. Also, this framework is conscious of the affects stereotypes and racism have on the helping relationship, and how they may affect empowerment of the person receiving help. Stereotypes and racist perceptions of clients on behalf of the practitioner, or person providing the service/intervention, have a direct

affect on the empowerment process because stereotypes may influence what the service provider believes the client is capable of. These "negative valuations" may impact how the client will perceive their own capabilities, which have historically been reinforced by the larger society, and sometimes even family, friends and the clients themselves. With that, this framework stresses working from an anti-racist perspective that also manifests in praxis; with service providers and clients sharing power in this process.

In relationship to the current research, the theory employed will guide the researcher in identifying expressions of participants that demonstrate a possession of, or progression towards, the characteristics of an empowered individual as described in the proposed definition. While this study does not explicitly ask whether or not this population has experienced empowerment due to this program, it does hope to discover a theme of empowerment through narrative inquiry of the experience.

Definitions

The following definitions have been provided due to their prevalent and particular context in which they are used:

Empowerment- participation of the "stigmatized group" in the problem solving process warrants power and control in order to redefine own self-worth, competence, and transform their social and physical conditions (Solomon, 1976)

Job readiness/ employment preparation/job search skills- based in gained knowledge of resume writing, interviewing etiquette, and job search resources/behaviors ("Glossary of Terms", 2005)

Assumptions

Several assumptions have influenced this research. One, I have assumed that empowerment is what the research participants are most likely experiencing in the process of learning job search skills and knowledge due to my own experience in being empowered through conscious- based education. I assumed their experience may be similar to my own because we are all oppressed and have been given tools to mitigate that oppression which manifests into confidence and self-control/respect. Also, I have assumed that empowerment is necessary in order for these men to lead a legitimate productive life. Lastly, I have assumed that these men may ascribe to being the provider, therefore stressing the critical nature of advancing job search skills and acquiring employment.

Scope, Limitations, Delimitations

This study only surveyed African American males whom are former offenders, are fathers and have participated in the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program. These demographics are parameters of the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program, yet the current study is only interested in these men as African American former offenders. Therefore, the results of this study were only possibly generalizable to the population of men who have participated in this particular program, but not the general African American male ex- offender population. Another limitation to this study was my identity as a female and as a researcher, which may have affected how much, what details and accuracy of the insight of the participants. Participants may have wanted to display a certain image with respect to me as a woman, which may have interfered in the authenticity of their perceptions. Also, the formal setting of an interview, versus allowing these conversations to have occurred naturally in an organic setting, rather than within the site of the program, may have affected participants' responses.

Additionally, the research lacked an assessment of job search skills prior to entering the program, so progression was only assessed through information provided by the participant, which may not always be accurate. Lastly, the omission of service providers in this study may have neglected some necessary external insight and interpretation of the attitudes of the participants.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the research at hand. The mass incarceration of African American men has been a historical problem, and its' prevalence established it as a phenomenon warranting extensive research with viable non- deficit-based approaches to address this issue. This need for a culture- specific practical approach determined the use of Barbara Solomon's (1976) black empowerment framework within this study. This framework shaped the nature of the study's research questions, and the method in which answers were solicited. Assumptions also shaped the study, and limitations have been acknowledged and understood in relationship to the results. The following chapter examines the literature on disparities in sentencing, the effectiveness of job-related reentry services, and empowerment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contains a review of the literature on sentencing and recidivism disparities, the effects of reentry interventions and empowerment, which provides a backdrop to what is known, and what is missing. The review also demonstrates the relationship between these aspects, and will clarify what gaps require further research. In order to understand the current sentencing/ recidivism disparities, and the need for effective reentry programs and empowerment, an historical review of Black criminalization will be examined. In addition this examination will reveal the evolution of powerlessness among Black men, which warrants the current phenomenon: empowerment. Although Black criminalization will be the focus of this historical analysis, the work of Daniel Black (1997) in his examination of the historical emasculation of Black men, which also exposes their powerlessness, deserves notation. Black's delineation of the commitment of enslavement to deny Black men space for masculine performance parallels the effects of mass incarceration on the ability of Black men to provide, protect etc. The two analyses share a common nuance: powerlessness. The following review of the historical criminalization of Black men has provided the platform for the use of mass incarceration as a mechanism to disempower this population.

The History of the Criminalization of Black Men

Pre- Enslavement

Historically, Black men have been criminalized in America (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). Prior to enslavement, between 1619 and the 1780's, justification to enslave Blacks was created through the establishment of a racial hierarchy (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). Justification was sought through Biblical references that supported ideas of Blacks as heathen and less than human (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). This racial caste established a dichotomous system of good vs.

evil, which not only justified the enslavement of Blacks, but their capability of committing evil acts against society and therefore necessitating control. Including this time prior to enslavement, there were five major periods of Black male incarceration: pre- enslavement (1619-1780s), enslavement (1790-1865), Reconstruction (1865-1877), Jim Crow (1876-1965), and post-segregation or the period of the "war on drugs" (1965 to present) (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011).

Enslavement

During the period of enslavement, as result of alliances between white indentured servants and enslaved Blacks in the revolt against the elite, the racial divide and further criminalization of Blacks was indoctrinated (Buris-Kitchen, 2011; Alexander, 2010). Slave Codes were created to forbid enslaved Blacks from the right to vote, be educated, own property, travel, testify in a court of law, marry outside their race, own a firearm, buy alcohol, own animals, etc. (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011; McIntyre, 1992). To advance the racial divide, special privileges were given to poor whites and the elite relied less on their indentured labor (Alexander, 2010). Blacks were also punished more severely than Whites (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). Punishment in the form of lynchings, enslavement, re-enslavement, mutilation and whippings could arrive at any violation of the Slave Codes (Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). These same codes were reflected in the Reconstruction period.

Reconstruction

Upon the emancipation of enslaved African Americans, White fear of "… an angry mass of black men [rising] up and attack[ing] them or rap[ing] their women" justified old mechanisms of control in a new form (Alexander, 2010). Black Codes, vagrancy and convict laws were established. These codes were also a continuation of laws determined to criminalize Black men because Whites thought Blacks would not work unless by force (Alexander, 2010). Black codes

restricted the right to buy and own property, marry, make contracts and testify in court (only in cases involving people of their own race) (McIntyre, 1992; Blackmon, 2009). Vagrancy laws were instituted to incarcerate African Americans who were not employed or vagrant (Alexander, 2010). Once incarcerated, they were essentially drawn back into enslavement through convict leasing laws that allowed prisons to hire-out prisoners to plantation owners and private companies (Alexander, 2010). This would only motivate White plantation and business owners to target Black men and incarcerate them for minor incidents, which returned many Black men to enslavement. As a result, tens of thousands of Blacks were incarcerated during this period (Blackmon, 2009). This lack of control over their futures due to the likeliness of being incarcerated at the will of the law, fueled powerlessness among Black men. Although these codes were eventually deconstructed, laws limiting Black mens' humanity, self- actualization and self-control were reborn in Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow

Jim Crow laws essentially symbolized White men's ideologies of Black inferiority. In addition, Jim Crow laws were a reaction to a growing class alliance between poor Whites and Blacks that was reminiscent of the rebellion of white indentured servants and enslaved Blacks against the White elite prior to enslavement (Alexander, 2010; Buris-Kitchen & Buris, 2011). These laws barred African Americans from using the same facilities as Whites, predicating separate schools, churches, housing, restrooms, drinking fountains, cemeteries, hospitals, prisons etc. (Alexander, 2010). It is not clear how many African Americans were incarcerated as a result of these laws, yet during a span of direct protest to these laws, from 1961 to 1963, close to thirty-five thousand men, women and children were arrested (Alexander, 2010). These early incriminating laws, which stemmed from the preservation of a racial caste, shaped future

mechanisms and motivations to criminalize Black men for political and economic exploitation.

War on Drugs

The use of "tough on crime" rhetoric as a mechanism for political and economic advances under presidential administrations from the late 1960s to the present, has manifested as the "war on drugs". Initially, Republican administrations from the 1960s to 1980s justified this "war" with documents such as the Moynihan Report, as well as racialized language, to support ideas of Black pathology (Baum, 1997). These racialized ideas appeared to be substantiated by civil disobedience, immense unemployment, and the crack epidemic among Blacks as a consequence of civil rights protests, globalization and the Iran-Contra affair, respectively (Alexander, 2010; Baum, 1997; Marable, 2005). The deindustrialization of Black communities as a result of globalization and the influx of drugs into these communities in an effort to fund a US-sponsored coup in Nicaragua (Iran-Contra affair), contributed to unemployment, drug addiction, poverty, and violence (Sudbury, 2002). With limited jobs available, the economic opportunities in the crack trade were desirable to men in poor communities, in specific, Black men (Pettit and Western 2004; Alexander, 2010).

Historic conceptions of Black men as criminals, allowed for over policing of Black neighborhoods and the legislature to cell these Black men. This legislature gave law enforcement the ability to use seized cash and assets for police agencies, mandated five year minimum sentences for crack distribution of five grams as opposed to five hundred grams for cocaine, along with other discriminatory drug policies that produced disparate incarceration rates (Alexander, 2010). Due to the establishment of these forces, from 1974 to 1979, the number of Black males whom had ever spent time in jail/prison rose from 595,000 to 704,000 (Bonczar,

2003). This increase accounted for 8.9% of the adult Black male population by 1979 (Bonczar, 2003).

The extension of this "tough on crime" language which secured the election of Republican presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. was adopted by the Democratic administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, in an effort to break the trend of Republican dominance (Alexander, 2010). These administrations passed legislation which created new laws that mandated life sentences for three-strike offenders, new federal capital crimes and allocated gross amounts of money to the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010; Gabbidon & Unnever, 2011). As a result of these drug policies, from 1980 to 1998, 1.5 million drug offenders have been incarcerated, with African Americans constituting over half of this population of offenders (Human Rights Watch, 2008). As of 2010, 3,059 Black men for every 100,000 were incarcerated (Guerino, Harrison & Sabol, 2011). The creation of a racialized prison population has established the façade of a successful "war on drugs" that has substantiated stereotypes of the criminal Black man.

The political motive of presidential administrations used "tough on crime" rhetoric as a mechanism to attain presidency, and have manifested in the criminalization of Black men to demonstrate their effectiveness with mass incarceration. Due to the boom of the prison industrial complex in its' "war on drugs", the prison population has soared, with a racial composition of an overrepresentation of African American men. A total of 49% of prison inmates nationally are African American, compared to their 13% share of the overall population (Mauer, 1999; Alexander, 2010). These statistics also reflect disparate recidivism rates. The laws established over this timeframe furnish disparate incarceration rates among African Americans as well as the rates of African Americans returning to jail and prison.

Recidivism

The U.S. Department of Justice defines recidivism as: a recidivism rate may reflect any number of possible measures of repeated offending—arrest, court referral, conviction, correctional commitment, and correctional status changes within a designated follow-up period (i.e., states calculated rates for timeframes ranging from 3 months to 5 years) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). The recidivism rate for the African American male population is even greater as revealed in a study of racial disparities among ex- inmates (Jung, Spjeldnes & Yamatani, 2010). Findings revealed that the overall three-year recidivism rate was 55.9%, and Black men recidivated at a significantly higher rate than white men (Jung et al., 2010). At the state level, a 2007 study of recidivism rates for Georgia felons revealed the recidivism rates of these offenders to be 28% (Brinkman, Olaghere & Schirmer, 2010). This is low compared to the national rate, yet the race data on what percent of that state rate is composed of African American men should be further investigated. Specifically in Fulton County in Atlanta, GA, a large majority of juvenile cases (87%) are African-American youth ("Analysis of Juvenile"). Race data shows that African American Fulton County youth were more than twice as likely to have a second offense as a white youth ("Analysis of Juvenile").

Research has examined predictors or factors that predict recidivism among this population (Barrett, Hsu, Ju, & Dalun, 2011). Research has noted the age at first referral, family delinquency, and drug use history (Jung et al., 2010), old neighborhoods, financial strain due to low or unemployment, and living instability (Abrams, 2006), neglect, physical, other/mixed abuse (Brightt, Johnson-Reid, Nebbitt, Van Dorn, & Williams, 2010) as predictors of recidivism. These predictors are all factors that contribute to the likeliness of delinquency and recidivism, with many of these characteristics being especially prominent among African Americans due to

impoverishment (Barrett et al., 2011; Abrams, 2006; Brightt, et al., 2010). The need for reentry programs that reduce these recidivism rates is dire.

Reentry

There has been a renewed interest in offender reentry in the past decade by researchers and legislators, due to the mass number of ex-offenders returning to communities as well as the large number of ex- offenders under correctional supervision (parole and probation) (Kadela & Seiter, 2003). Kadela & Seiter (2003) define reentry as: correctional programs that focus on the transition from prison to community and programs that initiated treatment in a prison setting and have linked with community program to provide continuous care. In addition to this definition, it should be noted that reentry programs do not necessarily always begin while the individual is incarcerated and may not always be directly linked to or provided by a correctional department. Due to a revival in interest, legislators have recently allocated additional money for new pilot reentry programs, as well as money for those already established, through the Second Chance Act (Nunez- Neto, 2008). This act states:

> *The Act requires that states and localities match 50% of the federal funds provided; up to half of this state match (or 25% of the overall total funding) can be composed of in-kind contributions. The Act also directs the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and endows the agency with new authorities* (Nunez- Neto, 2008).

This act has provided funding for a number of reentry programs with various approaches.

Types of Reentry Programs

There are many reentry programs that serve offenders/ former offenders at different phases and in various areas, with some being more effective than others. These phases are known as pre- release, release, and post- release periods (Haas et al., 2007). Reentry programs may serve the offender while they are still incarcerated, while they are in transition (halfway houses etc.) and while they reintegrate back into the community (Haas, Hamilton & Hanley, 2007). The

various areas these reentry programs may cover are GED and post- secondary education, vocational education, counseling, job readiness, work placement/transition, drug treatment, mental health, sex crime treatment and more. Reentry programs may cover all these areas or just one, depending on the program. The best programs are said to begin at pre- release and extend through post- release (Nunez- Neto, 2008). From the research of "what works" literature, halfway housing, drug treatment and employment have been established as the most effective in deterring recidivism (Kadela & Seiter, 2003). Although these three types of reentry programs are the most effective, underlying issues with drug treatment/deterrence and transitioning from a halfway house, may be associated with employment.

Employment Challenges

In addition to quantitative research, qualitative interviews of former offenders find that employment is one of the most challenging upon release from jail/prison (Trimbur, 2009; Holland, Eacho, Mann, Moon, Shivy & Wu, 2007). Trimbur (2009) conducted an ethnographic study in which fifty African American and Latino men, who were reentering society from incarceration and between 17 and 27 years of age, were interviewed. These men resided in New York neighborhoods where unemployment and incarceration were pervasive. This study sought to examine how these reentering men of color perceive their social, political and economic possibilities, and the relationship these possibilities have with societal impediments and decisions to abstain or re- engage in crime.

Within Trimbur's (2009) study, these men expressed several challenges they faced in reentering: under- and unemployment, penalties of a criminal record such as limited access to financial aid and professional licensure, and technical parole/probation violations that return them to jail/prison no matter how minor the case. Similar to these challenges in Holland et. al

(2007) study were the relationship between status disclosure and job opportunities and the stereotyping and loss of privilege associated with having a felony conviction. Most of the men in Trimbur's (2009) study tried their best to abstain from criminal behavior, but at one time or another, "failed" due to the limits of their material conditions. The limited access to lawful employment, education and sometimes productive parenting caused these participants to engage in activities that they were able to fulfill successfully; often times those activities being illegal. From the perspective of these men, they did not perceive themselves as failing due to personal incapabilities or determination, but to their social reality, or racism and classism.

The study concluded that young men must trust the institutions set up to ease their transition, and their perceptions of what is actually possible within the established social, political and economic systems influence whether they will deter or re- engage in criminal activities. These findings give insight as to the cognition of young men of color who are struggling to reenter society. The research is profound in its disclosure of the reasons some men eventually re- engage in crime post- incarceration, and why they do not seek to deter from crime at all upon release. Few studies have conducted qualitative research on men of color and their experiences with reentering society. These studies should be utilized and built upon to modify reentry programs in such a way that they address the needs of former offenders, making them more effective in reducing recidivism. With that said, work-related reentry programs effectiveness will be the focus throughout this literature review. Effectiveness is most often measured in relation to the reduction of recidivism.

Work-related Programs' Effectiveness

Program effectiveness can be measured based on the percent it has reduced recidivism, how well it meets the goals set by the program, or how well the program connected former

offenders to social institutions (Nunez-Neto, 2008; Barrick, Cowell, Dawes, Lattimore, Steffey, Tueller & Visher, 2012). The "what works" literature uses certain guidelines to determine program effectiveness, which are:

> *...controlled for variables in their analysis that may have been the underlying cause of any observed connection between the program being studied and the outcome measures being analyzed; determined whether there are measurement errors resulting from problems with the study, including such things as participants being lost over time or low response rates to interview requests; and calculated the statistical power of the analysis to detect the program's effects on outcome measures. Included in this category are things such as sample size and the base rate of crime in the community* (James, 20011).

These guidelines help programs measure effectiveness, whether the goal is to reduce recidivism or connect offenders to reintergrative institutions. The use of these methods has been evident in numerous studies on work- related reentry program effectiveness.

Various evaluations of work-related reentry programs demonstrate their effectiveness (Uggen, 2000; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002; Kadela & Seiter, 2003; Berk, 2007; Jacobs & Western, 2007; Przybylski, 2008; Redcross, Yahner & Zweig, 2010; Yahner & Zweig, 2012). Work-related reentry programs include work placement, job readiness and vocational education/ training. Work placement is the employment of offenders in a job that has been granted to them with the help of the programs partnerships, or is a job within the program. Job readiness may include resume writing, interviewing etiquette, job search resources, and/or employer pairing. Within vocational education/ training, offenders are taught a technical skill or trade. Different types of work-related programs often include more than one of these elements, making it difficult to distinguish which element of work- related reentry programs work best. For the purpose of this study, work- related reentry programs that include a job readiness component are the focus in the following review.

Evaluations

Evaluations of employment reentry programs that contain elements of job readiness skills training suggest these programs are effective in reducing recidivism and/or helping participants obtain employment (Cohen and Eimicke, 2002; Yahner and Zweig, 2012). An evaluation of the America Works Criminal Justice program supports this assertion. As a result of this program, of the 501 participants who completed the first day of orientation, 77.7% obtained jobs, with 44% retaining their jobs for at least 90 days and 41.5% retaining employment for over six months (Cohen and Eimicke, 2002). Of the cohort of 90 ex-offenders that retained employment well over six months, only 30% recidivated (Cohen and Eimicke, 2002). Further support of reduction in recidivism and employment retention is evident in an evaluation of the Texas Project Re-Integration of Offenders (RIO) program which saw 48% recidivism compared to 57% recidivism, and 66% employment of African Americans compared to 30% employment of Blacks that were not in the program (Blakely, Carmichael, Menon & Silver, 1992). These evaluations demonstrate that program participants were able to obtain and retain employment, as well as avoid recidivism over a period of time, although it is not clear which element of the program contributed to these results.

Yahner and Zweig's (2012) evaluation of the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD) program is an exemplar of distinguishing which specific elements of work-related programs are most effective. This is in contrast to Cohen and Eimicke's (2002) evaluation of the America Works Criminal Justice program and the evaluation of the RIO program (Blakely et. al, 1992) which did not distinguish whether job readiness skills training, work placement, or both, were most effective in ex- offenders retaining employment and deterring from recidivism. Yahner and Zweig's (2012) study found that the job readiness element of the program was

associated with positive outcomes for unsubsidized employment, but not necessarily for recidivism. Findings from the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) found that the control group that only received job readiness services recidivated at higher rates than the CEO group that received job readiness services along with job placement (Redcross, Yahner & Zweig, 2010). These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of job placement programs with job readiness elements, but do not disclose how effective job readiness alone is on recidivism.

Limitations of the Literature

The quantitative research design of these studies does not give insight into why these results may have occurred. Cognitive insight could possibly improve these programs. Race differentiations along with these interviews could have demonstrated what barriers prevented job retention for different groups. A qualitative supplemental approach may have enabled the researchers to mitigate those extraneous factors. This is significant as different races have different experiences with employment. It would also be beneficial if the effectiveness of job readiness services could have been compared to other programs that lack this element (i.e. a work placement program or vocational training). In spite of this, these programs demonstrate promising results and the information provided could serve to make the case for the effectiveness of work programs in employing ex- offenders and potentially reducing recidivism of African American men, yet some improvements can make these programs even more effective.

From observations of reentry program evaluations, some nuanced research limitations can be recognized. Most of the reviewed evaluations sought to find out whether the program met its goals, reduced recidivism etc., as shown in the three previous examples. Most of the evaluations only use quantitative methods and compare minority groups to whites. This raises several concerns with these program evaluations. The first concern or limitation is the lack of

offender's voices within program evaluations. Also, when comparing the success of African American offenders to white offenders, the disproportionate level of discrimination of Blacks is not assessed and considered in the statistics presented. With that said, this raises the question of whether it is efficient to compare Black offenders to a group that does not face the same or even close to the same discrimination (Whites). These along with some program limitations deserve further research.

In addition to these research limitations, some limitations involving the structure of these programs should be examined. One limitation is the lack of cultural competency within reentry programs. Most programs are not tailored to address cultural concerns specific to certain ethnic groups i.e. African Americans, Latinos etc. In a study of formerly incarcerated persons perceptions of discrimination (LeBel, 2012), Black former offenders attributed discrimination to their race as well as their offender status, yet research suggests Blacks perceive race trumping ex-convict identities (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). In addition, research suggests these stigmatized identities mean there is a greater need for assistance because other barriers must be overcome to receive community- based services (LeBel, 2012).

Additionally, cultural competency may play a role in improving program efficacy. It may be beneficial to programs to allow offenders who have successfully reentered or can relate to program participants regardless of success, to serve program participants along with professional program servicers. In relation to this idea is the effect program servers can have on program participants, which may ultimately effect recidivism outcomes. Several meta-analytic studies have demonstrated that the involvement of an evaluator in program implementation and monitoring is a significant predictor of a program's success in reducing recidivism because it would ensure quality implementation (Andrews & Dowden, 2005; Andrews & Dowden, 1999;

2000; Lipsey, 1995; Haas et al., 2007).

Evaluators of the West Virginia Offender Reentry Initiative discuss a previous study of inmates and correctional staff of the WVORI program who were surveyed to assess whether correctional staff were utilizing evidence- based tools to provide adequate and effective intervention for inmates during reentry phases (Haas et al., 2007). Results indicated that adhering to correct implementation of service administration is imperative to the outcomes of those receiving the services. Under the management/ staff characteristics principle, results suggested that staff attitudes towards the WVORI effected the implementation of services (Haas et al., 2007). Client risk/need practices results indicated that correctional staff may not be referring inmates to the correct services based on the needs assessed by evidence- based tools, were not offering programming at appropriate rates, and little over half of inmates believed correctional staff did not adequately or genuinely try to be an effective liaison with transitional services. Further survey of inmates found that although prisoners were allowed to practice new behaviors, correctional staff did not set an example of these behaviors, and were not advocates for them in relationship to community service providers or practice problem solving techniques with inmates. This evaluation serves as to juxtapose the blame for recidivism on the administration of services by service providers.

The last observed concern of reentry program evaluations is how programs track or measure recidivism. Most reentry programs base their success on the rate at which they reduce recidivism, but include the re-incarceration of individuals due to technical probation violations, or revocation. This is problematic because these individuals could be on the right track, yet a violation as minor as missing a probation appointment or the inability to pay the probation fee could result in re-incarceration (Alexander, 2010). Two thirds of parole violators were returned

for technical violations as the one described (Alexander, 2010). Only one third of returns were due to a new conviction (Alexander, 2010). This raises the question of whether it is fair to include these technical probation violations in determining the success of African American offenders whom have participated in a reentry program. It may not be fair, particularly because these men experience much higher degrees of discrimination that may contribute to these technical violations (i.e., failing to maintain employment etc.). It is not only enough to have the skills to find employment, it is also important to recognize the role of what offenders perceive themselves being capable of in the face of discrimination.

Collectively, these limitations underscore the need for additional research and reentry program approaches. The lack of inclusion of offender's voices calls for the need to consider their perspective in research and in program conception. This perspective could be helpful in strengthening current interventions so that they are more useful to participants. Ex- offenders, specifically African American men, need the tools to not only find employment, but to help them deal with the adversaries they may go through in the process, which warrants the need for a resilient attitude. Research supports this idea with a "growing consensus that empowerment oriented, proactive, and collective attempts to change public perceptions and create a more positive identity are increasingly being thought to be stigmatized persons' "most effective and enduring route to reducing prejudice" (Major, Quinton, McCoy, & Schmader, 2000; Shih, 2004; LeBel, 2011). The proposed phenomenon for mitigating this experience is empowerment.

The high rates of incarceration and recidivism among African American males have warranted the need for effective reentry programs. Currently, the most effective reentry programs are work-related programs as well as halfway housing and drug abuse treatment programs. Although research supports the effectiveness of work-related programs in job retention and

recidivism reduction, the literature suggests these programs do not address racial discriminatory barriers that may block opportunities for employment. The lack of qualitative studies on the perceptions of African American former offenders of these programs does not allow for the disclosure of racist or disempowering relationships or practices of program service providers.

The absence of African American males perceptions justifies the current study's utilization of a qualitative approach, and hypothesizes empowerment as a framework that could potentially improve the effectiveness of these programs. Empowerment has been examined in a number of disciplines, yet the focus of the following empowerment literature will be empowerment within the social work discipline.

Empowerment

Black men have historically been disempowered in America, through the use of various mechanisms and motivations to criminalize them. Powerlessness in this context is defined as "persons deprived of adequate social solutions to the problem of individual growth and development" (Solomon, 1976). In addition, powerlessness describes someone who is not able to perform social roles in which they value due to lack of skills, knowledge and/or material resources (Solomon, 1976), which may be impacted by material conditions. Criminalization can block the development and growth of Black men, as well as block access to skills, knowledge, and/or material resources. In no way is it intended to negate the plight of Black women and children during this time, but the focus of this research is Black men and therefore they will be discussed in particular. An examination of empowerment literature will demonstrate the evolution of empowerment in research, and will justify the use of Barbara Solomon's empowerment theory as the best option for analyzing the empowerment of African American male former offenders.

Empowerment Across Disciplines

Empowerment has been defined and analyzed by many scholars, at many levels, in various fields of study. The lack of homogeneity of a definition of this phenomenon requires a brief examination of conceptualizations from various disciplines. An overview was provided by Mann Hur (2006), of a synthesis of empowerment within each discipline.

Within political science, empowerment is described by Weissberg (1999) as: learning physical and intellectual skills, joining community organizations, and mobilizing their skills for upgrading the social status of the disadvantaged over the advantaged. Essentially, political scientists see empowerment as a process in which individuals gain physical and intellectual capacities and gear them towards gaining power (Weissberg, 1999).

For the field of social work/welfare, the researcher states that not theories are abundant, yet studies of actual processes of empowerment are scarce. The researcher therefore emphasizes the work of Freidmann (1992), where empowerment is studied in terms of two steps: first mobilizing the poor and then transforming their social power to political power.

Within community psychology the researcher found these commonalities from several studies that focused on the process of empowerment: first is that empowerment practices in a community have led to changes from community diversity to community integration, and the second is that the intermediate step before community integration or community building is participation in or involvement with community activities (Hur, 2006).

The gist of empowerment processes for the field of Health Studies was presented by the author as: discovering reality, developing the necessary knowledge, fostering competence, and employing confidence for making their voice heard; and alienation, awareness, participation, and sense of community. Also, the literature on management basically describes the process as

sharing information, setting up parameters, and developing teams, and creating autonomy through boundaries (Hur, 2006).

According to Hur (2006), as far as the field of education is concerned, Paulo Freire's work is most notable. His work describes the process of empowerment as: the oppressed or the disadvantaged can become empowered by learning about social inequality (i.e., conscientizing), encouraging others by making them feel confident about achieving social equality, and finally liberating them. Or in other words, "power within" is consistent with *conscientizing;* "power with" is compatible with *inspiring;* and "power to" is in accord with *liberating*" (Hur, 2006).

Although an examination of empowerment across all disciplines is necessary in order to provide the scheme of the phenomenon from an array of prospectives, this examination is valuable in justifying the following examination of empowerment in the field of social work.

Empowerment in Social Work

In a historical analysis of empowerment in social work by Barbara Levy Simon (1994), it is demonstrated that the development of empowerment has been influenced by numerous social events. These social contributions to the field have not occurred lineally, but simultaneously. Simon (1994) notes that the Protestant revolution, merchant and industrial capitalism, Jeffersonian democracy, transcendentalism, Utopian communities, anarchism influenced the development of empowerment. Also, some influential ideologies such as populism, the social gospel, unionism, feminism, pragmatism, the Niagara movement of W.E.B. Du Bois, Freudianism, Black Nationalism, existentialism, Marxism, and socialism were noted as contributors to empowerments' historical development (Simon, 1994). In addition, Brandsford (2011) gives partial credence to Barbara Solomons (1976) empowerment model, as one that formally introduced empowerment as an intervention and strategy. From here, various

empowerment approaches evolved.

One approach or perspective of empowerment proposed is the "strengths perspective" which focuses on "clients strengths, rather than vulnerabilities to determine how these strengths can be further developed" (Bradsford, 2011; Saleebey, 1992). This approach seeks to promote independence and authority of the "client" and is said to have shifted the paradigm of how empowerment is conceptualized and practiced (Bradsford, 2011). In contrast, some approaches critique this concentration on strengths as negating the "clients" past, which is vital in understanding how to move forward (Simon, 1994). This is also the critique of the "solution-focused" approach, in which clients "identify unique outcomes" for problems (Bradsford, 2011). This approach is similar to the "wellness theory" approach in that it encourages the client to identify their own solutions, yet this approach emphasizes social, psychological, biological, and spiritual factors in clients identification of their problems as well as their own solutions (Bradsford, 2011). It also emphasizes the collaboration with the social worker as a liaison to resources (Bradsford, 2011). It is evident that although there are various approaches to empowerment, these approaches must all address power, self- help, relationships with service providers and other themes. The two works that have set the premise for these developing approaches are the works of Paulo Freire and Barbara Solomon, which will be further investigated in the subsequent sections.

Freire's Contribution to Empowerment

Due to Paulo Freire's prestige and the foundation his work has provided in the exploration of empowerment, his ideas will be further investigated. His book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2004) examines themes of dehumanization, oppression, internalization, banking education and self- liberation through critical thinking and reflection, or what he terms

conscientization. These ideas are found throughout empowerment theories and frameworks in all disciplines.

Freire discusses how dehumanization is a reality that must be recognized in order for the struggle towards liberation to take place (2004). He argues that the struggle for humanization does not exist in the conquering of the oppressor, yet it lies in the humanization of all (Freire, 2004). Freire recognizes that the struggle may frighten the oppressed, due to their familiarity with acting in accordance with what they have been prescribed versus acting on their own choices. He describes this action as internalization.

Internalization occurs when oppressed peoples adopt the ideas of the hegemonic society. These ideas may reflect how the oppressed are perceived by the hegemony, the standards by which the oppressed should be measured or adhere, and would not necessarily be what the oppressed would think of themselves if they critically assessed these hegemonic ideas (Freire, 2004). He observes the duality of internalization in that the oppressed may often attack other oppressed peoples in an attempt to indirectly attack their oppressors because they embody all that the oppressor has created and limited them to (Freire, 2004). On the other hand, the oppressed aspire to imitate the oppressor as much as possible in an effort to be accepted and obtain the same power exercised by the oppressor (Freire, 2004). In addition, by the oppressed internalizing or believing how the oppressor perceives them is true, they negate their own epistemology, and perpetuate the oppressors knowledge as undisputable (Freire, 2004).

This idea of one epistemology is problematic because it allows for what Freire calls "banking education" (Freire, 2004). Banking education is essentially teachers filling, or "depositing", information into students. Students' knowledge is then based on how well they can reiterate the information that was "deposited" in them (Freire, 2004). This is problematic because

it stunts the creativity and creation of knowledge by the student, which perpetuates the idea of one way of knowing (Freire, 2004). This system lacks shared power in learning between student and teacher and negates their humanness by inhibiting their ability to critically think for themselves. This works in favor of the oppressor because it stunts the conscientization of the oppressed, making it impossible to challenge the oppressor.

Conscientization is the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action (Freire, 2004). Freire (2004) argues that self- liberation occurs through conscientization, as critically assessing reality allows for action that can transform oppressed peoples reality and progress freedom from oppression. He states, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (Freire, 2004), which demonstrates that the oppressed must act on behalf of themselves for full liberation, or else it will be forever limited to what is "given" by the oppressor. The ideas of Freire are prevalent in empirical empowerment studies throughout the social work field as well as Solomons (1976) empowerment theory.

The examination of empowerment within various disciplines, as well as within social work particularly, exposes the necessity of an empowerment approach that addresses the issues and themes the proposed Black empowerment theory is able to tackle. Other theories have not addressed the experiences of African Americans in particular, as this theory has due to other theories approaches desire to be accessible by all ethnicities. This may not be effective because different ethnic groups have different experiences in the world, along with subgroups of these groups that have different experiences as well. This justifies the use of Barbara Solomons (1976) Black empowerment theory.

Theoretical Framework

The use of Barbara Solomons (1976) Black empowerment theory is conducive to the interpretation of research participants' responses in the current study. Solomon (1976) describes empowerment as the participation of the "client", or reentering Black males, in their process of gaining control over and transformation of their reality in an effort to reach self- actualization. This theory is used to identify language used by participants that may reflect empowerment, identify empowering relationships with service providers, and how they may deal with discriminatory institutions.

The utilization of the following definition, allows for the identification of empowerment through the use of language that reflects the following attributes:

> *… the clients perception of his own intrinsic and extrinsic value; the clients motivation to use every personal resource and skill, as well as others in his command, in the effort to achieve self- determined goals; and finally, a conviction that there are many pathways to goal attainment and as long as one makes the effort, failure is possible but the more effort one makes, success is probable.* (Solomon, 1976).

This study identifies language that demonstrates value of self, the utilization of gained knowledge and skills, and expressions of agency. The researcher also identifies language that rejects negative assessments of clients/participants by themselves, friends, family and social institutions. The identification of language that reflects a non- paternalistic relationship with service providers also helps determine empowerment.

Stereotypes and racist perceptions of clients on behalf of the practitioner, or person providing the service/intervention, have a direct affect on the empowerment process because they may influence what the service provider conceives the client is capable of. Language that expresses a relationship with the service provider/practitioner where power and knowledge is shared, versus imposed, are identified as empowerment. This idea of shared power could be

recognized as the client expressing the role of their input in identifying problems and creating solutions for themselves with service providers. Also, language that demonstrates a practitioner displaying negative valuations of clients within this relationship is identified as disempowering for the client. It is important to identify aspects of these relationships as these relationships may reflect or influence how the client compromises social institutions.

Lastly, the utilization of Black empowerment theory allows for the interpretation of clients abilities to maneuver within discriminatory social structures. This is identified by the articulation of discriminatory systems and the client's knowledge of how to navigate within them or mitigate the affects they can potentially have on the client's life. As stated by Freire (2004), empowerment stems from consciousness of an oppressive system, which can relinquish some of the blame for failure yet provide the client with the capacity to address the oppression or discrimination.

The reviewed literature brings the purpose of this study full circle. The historical criminalization of Black men in America through the utilization of a racial caste has made it feasible to incarcerate these men at disparate rates with support of legislation. This gross number of Black men released from confinement has been met with limited reentry services that have had some positive effects on recidivism. In particular, work-related reentry programs have been effective in reducing recidivism and retention of employment, yet there is limited research on the effects of job readiness specifically on those variables. In addition, the lack of this populations' voice in the literature prevents disclosure of the influence of discriminatory ecological barriers on these recidivism and job retention results, and the potential of empowerment as a framework to curtail these and personal barriers. This necessitates a methodology that addresses these limitations, which will be detailed in the following section.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore if and how job readiness preparation influences empowerment in the job search process leading to employment. The desire to understand this process was significant because the voices of African American former offenders have limited presence in the current literature. In order for populations to be served at the most effective levels and represented accurately within research, their ideas, feelings, and perspective need to be taken into consideration. As the research in this area is limited, this study has the potential to serve as a germinal stage for future, more generalizable research, which can be utilized to enhance job readiness programs that target this population. Also, this study will add to the limited literature on African American men, the job search process and empowerment that may initiate further research by others on this area of interest. Particularly within the African American Studies discipline, this research will serve as a contribution to knowledge about African American excarcerated men, which can manifest in praxis within programs that service this population and will ultimately positively affect African American communities.

This chapter describes the steps in which the research was conducted. It discusses the study's design, study sampling, research design, data collection, and analysis.

Research Method and Design Appropriateness

This study took on a narrative design in an effort to gain insight of the experiences of African American male ex-offenders during and upon completion of a job readiness program. The research question for this study was: Does job readiness empower Black men to seek employment? Overarching questions were:

1. Does job readiness affect empowerment during job search?
2. Does empowerment affect job search/outcome?

Data was collected using an interview guide that inquired about the participants' experiences, along with focused questions that revealed empowerment within these experiences. Data was collected in the form of a one-time semi-structured interview. Interviews were the most appropriate approach to centralize the voices of the participants in this study. The existing literature on recidivism lacks representative voices from black male offenders. In an effort to fill this gap, this study sought to investigate the phenomenon using a reflective narrative approach. Quantitative measures alone would not properly convey *why* or *how* participants experience empowerment in the job search process as efficiently as qualitative methods. Also, the exploratory nature of this research called for a qualitative approach because of the lack of literature on this experience, which make quantitative variables difficult to identify at this stage.

Population and Sampling

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty African American men who were:

- No more than 90 days released out of jail/prison in Atlanta, Georgia
- 18 and older,
- Fathers
- Non- violent felony (no sex offenses)
- Completed the job readiness program at the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program

As stated in the Introduction, the MILA Fellows Reentry Support program targets African American former offenders who are fathers. The program provided job readiness, parenting and other classes to help them reintegrate into society. These specific demographics were parameters set by the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program, not by the current study. The current research employed this program to gain access to the population of interest: simply African American formerly incarcerated men who had completed a job readiness program. This criterion

was chosen because it does not require parental consent, and involves less vulnerability because the participants are legal adults and are no longer within confinement. The participants' contact information was solicited through the Program Director of the MILA program, and was directly contacted by the researcher. Participants were not asked self-incriminating questions, coerced to answer uncomfortable questions, or had their responses shared with any members of the justice system or the MILA program. Interviews were held at the site of the MILA program, due to inability to meet at a private or non-affiliated location.

Participants who took part in this study completed an Informed Consent Form that was stored in a locked cabinet in the home of the researcher, along with their interview recordings. The physical and psychological risks to this project did not exceed the risks one experiences in a normal day of life.

Procedures

Only participants who had completed the MILA job readiness program were solicited for the study. I contacted Tracey Mosley, Program Director of the MILA program, to obtain the names and contact information of eligible participants residing in the metropolitan Atlanta area. I personally contacted the potential participants, explained who I was and where I got their contact information from, explained the purpose of the research, and solicited their participation in the study. Those who agreed to participate were notified of the compensation. Study compensation included a $10 MARTA or Kroger gift card. I scheduled a date and time for the interviews. On the day of the interview, I explained to the participant what to expect. All interviews were conducted in a private office of the MILA program site.

I began the interview with a 5-minute icebreaker exercise that allowed me to introduce myself and background, and impetus for this study. The Informed Consent form was

read and explained to the participant, and I answered any questions regarding the interview and its purpose. I began to ask questions from the interview guide, which is described later in the Measurement section.

Participants were interviewed in order to understand their experience from their perspective. Observations did not exceed notable gestures that occurred during the interview. Justification for interviewing participants, versus observing them within the program, is that the research seeks to focus on perceptions of self and their behavior, versus an interpretation of observed behavior from the researchers perspective. The theoretical lens used in this study was interested in change in cognition, not observable behavior change, which further substantiates the justification for this research design.

Measurement

Data was collected using a structured interview guide that inquired about the participants' demographics, experiences with employment and incarceration, as well as perceptions of their job readiness and potential recidivism. I sought a conversational tone for the interview in an effort to encourage reflection. In an effort to solicit reflective responses, the participants were asked to give examples and elaborate on their responses. Participants were also asked how the current job readiness experience had affected their job search process and its potential impact on their employment outcome.

The instrument included both fixed format responses as well as open-ended questions. This format allowed the researcher to capture routine information (e.g., age, education, criminal history, etc.) in a standard format that easily allows for aggregation. The open-end questions were also used to capture more illustrative information about participant's experiences. A survey was not used due to the phenomenon of interest not being explicitly known as a shared

experience within the population. Empowerment may be latent, meaning unrealized or unconscious, and would need to be discovered through conversation and defined by the participant. A survey or open-ended questionnaire alone would not be able to represent these experiences in-depth, for critical understanding. The validity and reliability of the instrument lies in its' ability to be asked in different ways, yet still focus on the same aspect.

A limitation of this study was that the size of the sample was too small to generalize the results to the rest of the offender population.

Data Analysis

In Vivo coding was chosen to analyze this data because it is said that it is appropriate when interviewing marginalized groups, groups who use terms native to their group and for novice researchers (Saldana, 2009). All those qualifications apply to this study. At this phase, the data was categorized as "Before Intervention" and "After Invention". The objective was to distinguish between perceptions participants had of themselves before they experienced the job readiness program, how they perceive themselves after and in the future. This allowed for a broad distinction of the data so that it was less difficult to focus on more specific categories.

Focused coding was used to further analyze the data due to its' ability to allow for the development of major themes from the data. This type of coding allowed for categories to exist that are said to not take away attention from the actual data. Categories created were shaped by the definition of empowerment, which includes elements such as: shared power, self-esteem, autonomy, self-efficacy, consciousness, and utilization of gained knowledge. Other themes that emerged from this process were coded according to what they represent.

Reliability

The researcher ensured validity and reliability by summarizing the responses of the participants after each question to make sure there was an agreement regarding how their response was interpreted. In order to secure authentic results, the study utilized a qualitative approach and used In Vivo coding to analyze the collected interviews. Participants from the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program were interviewed to gain insight into this phenomenon. The lack of representation from the target population in this study demands the need for the established design within this study.

The In Vivo analysis was presented in the form of a chart, along with a chart of the basic demographics of the studied population. There was also a "Focused Coding" chart that emphasized particular themes found throughout the In Vivo analysis. Each theme presented in the focused coding stage was explained and examples of statements that support these themes were synthesized. These findings gave support to the latter discussion.

4 FINDINGS

This study investigated if and how Black men experience empowerment throughout the process of an employment preparation program. The research questions for this study were:

1. Does job readiness affect empowerment during job search?
2. Does empowerment affect job search/outcome?

These questions were proposed in order to answer the overarching question: Does job readiness empower Black men to seek employment?

Nine MILA program participants were interviewed between December 2012 and February 2013. This study employed a reflective narrative approach, due to the inability to conduct pre- program interviews. Although the goal of this study was to interview twenty participants, only nine participants were interviewed due to the lack of up to date contact information provided by the MILA program, along with some participants having moved away, or dropped out of the program. The study and its' purpose was announced at one of the weekly program meetings, and those who were interested signed up for a date and time listed on the recruitment sheet. Seven men were recruited through this announcement, and two were recruited when asked by the Program Director to come in to complete paperwork from their past participation in the program. All interviews took place at the MILA program meeting site out of mutual convenience to the participants' and researcher. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

During the interviews participants' were asked 20 questions from the interview guide. The interview questions covered background questions including, the participants experience with the criminal justice system, work history, perceptions of themselves, MILA program impact, and stigmas associated with incarceration and race. Upon completion of the interviews,

participants were allowed to ask any questions they may have regarding the study and were given $10 for their participation. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by myself, the researcher.

In the next section, a description of the average participant and background information about each participant gives an overall participant profile, as well as shares their individual stories. Each participant was given a pseudonym by the researcher as to adhere to the terms of the Informed Consent document. In addition, the following section gives an analysis of these stories, as they take shape in overarching themes in correspondence with each research question.

Participants

Nine African American males who have a history of contact with the criminal justice system, primarily in Atlanta, GA, agreed to partake in this study and were interviewed individually. Table 1.1 in the Appendix offers a chart of the demographic information of each individual in the order in which each participant was interviewed. The following section describes the typical program participant, as well as the range, to set the parameters of these characteristics.

The Average Joe

A general analysis of the participants' demographic characteristics, in Table 1.1, established the profile of the average MILA program participant, or, "the average Joe." The average Joe is about 34 years old, with a range of 24 to 52, and has a high school diploma or GED, yet ranged to some college. Fourteen years of work experience was the average, yet the range was from 2 to 30 years work experience. The average program participants' age at first arrest was 19 and the range was from 13 to 30 years old. The average participant did not have juvenile detention experience, and served an average of 24 months in jail or prison, yet ranged

from 3 to 40 months, non-consecutively. In addition, the average Joe is currently on probation, and desires to avoid further criminal activity. Analysis of the interviews revealed the average Joe has a history of "moving around a lot". Although all these characteristics offer an idea of the typical program participant, these men have individual stories that are just as important to share in order to gain insight into their life experiences. The following section captures their journeys to their current state, in a nutshell.

Individual Interviews

The following section details descriptions of the lives of the men participating in this study. A narrative of their individual backgrounds along with anecdotal excerpts provide for a birds-eye view of their personas. These brief narratives are necessary in order to gain insight into the circumstances and dispositions of these men that may have predisposed them to the path they took.

Lonnie. Lonnie is 30 years old and lives in Atlanta, GA. He describes his life as the "typical Black man story", full of dysfunction. He described how he had been in and out of shelters since the age of five, living with different families in various areas of Georgia from time to time. He described a significant time in his life when he "didn't give a f***" and was the leader of a reckless childhood clique, until he went to live with his cousin in Sandy Springs, GA. He parallels this experience to that of a culture shock, because it was the polar opposite of all that he had experienced growing up.

Lonnie's cousin was a college graduate and military man, with a wife and child of his own. He showed Lonnie a different approach to life by exposing and nurturing his skills and encouraging him to achieve things Lonnie did not conceive of himself. When Lonnie left his cousins care, he kept those values he had learned from his cousin with him, and upon moving in

with his father, he went back to school, got pretty good grades, and graduated. Although things were looking up, at the end of his senior year, Lonnie ended up homeless because he and his father "didn't see eye to eye", so he ran away. This did not stop Lonnie's path to success because "it taught [him] survival"; and he soon enrolled himself in Atlanta Technical College, got a job at the airport and a new girlfriend.

Lonnie reveals how his relationship with his new girlfriend was somewhat a distraction from what he had been working towards:

> *Distractions is what stopped all that. One would be my babymomma. I'm not blamin' her but she was definitely an unnecessary distraction. I wasn't ready for it. She was a slick muthafucka. [laughs]. So basically I became the caretaker, and she wasn't in a stable environment so I felt responsible. But she got pregnant, while she was on birth control.*

Moving forward, Lonnie described cases of domestic violence that were manifestations of frustration from his childhood. He started drinking and smoking to cope with these frustrations, but they only exasperated his temper, and his susceptibility to trouble. With this, he ended up with his first felony at the age of 22, and has been struggling to attain employment ever since. He says the fact that he cannot expunge his record is stopping him from securing employment, yet he cannot afford to do this because he does not have a job. He gives credence to his daughter and inspirational stories shared within the MILA program meetings for helping him "keep hope alive" and God for "getting [his] mind back right", yet he shares that he has limited control of avoiding jail. His control is limited because the stress of probation payments and basic needs may draw him back into certain illegal activities, but he absolutely wants to avoid criminal activity.

AJ. AJ is 28 years old and begins his story from his transition from the suburbs of Atlanta to Fulton County. He grew up fighting to "get [his] name out there so people [would] leave [him] alone", yet he always kept his grades up and was on the honor role up until 6th grade. By the age of thirteen, AJ started "messing up and cuttin' school to hang wit' my lil' crew", but he always got his homework before he left. He moved on to high school, did well, and played football and ran track, but was discouraged by family members to pursue sports due to their lack of knowledge regarding his diabetes. They were afraid of what may happen to him as a result of playing sports, which led to him giving it all up and aligning himself with "the other crowd".

Soon after graduating high school, AJ had a child on the way. He had been working since age 14, so he was not a stranger to legitimate work, and he continued to work until he had his second child. Upon breaking up with the mother of his second child, he states, "Then everything started goin' down hill from there. So instead of workin' I had to pick up a hustle to pay rent and supply the lifestyle I liked to live so I just jumped to the streets."

Being in the streets cost AJ a drug charge and a prison sentence. He did not receive any vocational or job training during this sentence, yet he was allowed to work to earn money, but refused to work for such little pay. He struggled with staying out of jail and even enrolled into a local community college, yet was interrupted by another period of incarceration that was drug-related. Upon his release he went back to selling drugs to pay for his probation and diabetes medication; but he also signed up for the MILA program in an effort to avoid that way of life. While AJ is not confident that he will stay out of jail because he may have to "take a chance in order to keep some money in [his] pocket, and buy medicine", he is confident that the MILA program will help him find a job.

Josh. Josh is 47 years old and is one of three brothers and five sisters. His father passed when he was 12 years old, and by 16 started a family of his own. With the birth of his two children, Josh immediately obtained his first job. He left home at 18 and continued taking care of his children. During this time he "got in a lil' trouble" and spent 8 months in jail. This experience forced Josh to realize that he needed to "turn [his] life around", and that he did. He received his Commercial Driver's License by the age of 23 and had been driving ever since.

About 14 years in, Josh encountered a new barrier. Due to unnamed reasons, Child Support Services withheld his license. This is when his life took a turn. Since his license was taken away, Josh has been struggling with finding and keeping a good job. His dream is to get his license back so he can drive, and he plans to get his record expunged and enroll in school with the help of the MILA program. Josh is adamant about not returning to jail and was confident that the program would help him.

Brian. Brian is 35 years old and was born in Chicago, Illinois, yet raised in Watts, California. He is one of seven children; he had three older brothers, one younger brother and two younger sisters. By the time his mother remarried and had her last two girls, Brian's two older brothers were in foster care and he felt she was trying to get rid of him too. And that she did; from age 9 to 11 Brian and his older brother went back and forth from his mother, who now lives in Atlanta, Georgia, to their fathers' custody, in Chicago, where they were physically abused. The two brothers ran away from this environment, only to be sent to a grouphome. Their mother eventually gained custody of them again.

Living a "nomadic" life, fueled by his mother's lack of care, Brian was forced to fend for himself for most of his life. In order to survive, he took a chance with selling drugs, and eventually served a three- year prison sentence. Since this sentence Brian has struggled with

securing a job for more than a two-year span. He states it is because he "get[s] in a lil' trouble" every now and then, but mainly his background check is the cause of him being let go. He is currently employed in food service at the Marriott Marquis in downtown Atlanta, and has plans to go back to school to receive his GED and pursue a trade at Atlanta Technical College.

Ashton. Ashton is 32 years old and describes his life as:

> *Life was, to normal people, dysfunctional. Mother and father bickered. Normal environment according to their standards. Culture of confusion and disarray. I look at it like a fortunate upbringing. I could cry and feel sorry for myself but if I didn't experience those things I wouldn't be who I am today.*

He asserts he was raised in spirituality, but his parents did not take the time to understand him. His parents were very strict, and he claims that bred rebellion in him, yet he knew he never wanted the life his parents had, he had plans to do it the right way. It was difficult to gauge what events led up to his various offenses of trespassing, carrying a concealed weapon, and aggravated stalking due to his use of overgeneralized language and vague details. Above all, he gave his own analysis of his upbringing, versus providing details of actual events, but did not disclose an explicit connection to his criminal behavior. By no means does this suggest this was intentional, yet this can suggest Ashton has developed an abstract understanding of his experiences.

Austin. Austin is 24 years old, and is the youngest participant in the MILA program. He was born in Memphis, Tennessee, but when his father was killed, his mother moved the family to California, and they stayed there for about 10 years. Austin has also lived in various states for periods in his life, and spent 8 years in Memphis before moving to Atlanta, GA.

His mother finally settled in Atlanta to find work, since jobs were scarce in Memphis; although they were not as abundant in Atlanta as she assumed. Since moving here at the age of

18, Austin has had three beautiful children. He does not get along with the mother of his children, which has resulted in his domestic violence charge and his 4-month sentence. In addition, he is "on child support" and, he too, struggles to find permanent employment; yet he disclosed that he does not really desire to work:

> *I really don't wanna work, to tell you the truth. I really don't. Really I'm workin' now because of child support 'cause I feel like if I don't work they'll try to lock me up. So I feel like a slave right now, like forced labor.*

Austin conveys greater knowledge of an unjust "system" which may give insight to his thoughts about employment. In addition, it is apparent that Austin does not possess much faith in "the system" from his continuous reference to how it has worked against him or has been unfair to him and people in general.

Milo. Milo is 52 years old. He was raised by his grandparents and lived a normal childhood, attending "Sunday school, church and all that." He does not share what he has been arrested for specifically, but does insinuate that his charges are associated with alcohol abuse. He discloses that he attends meetings that help him "stay clean" through reverence to his "higher power" with meditation, prayer, and daily "moral inventory sheets." Milo has never had trouble finding work, besides the period in which he had a warrant, and has recently received certification for forklifting; which he owes a great deal of his current employment.

Nye. Nye is 32 years old and has, like some other participants, suffered from physical abuse and unstable living situations. He recalls being abused from age 4 to 12, while moving from different relatives homes to foster homes. His grandmother raised him when he got out of the foster care system and recalls how strict she was, "I didn't get away wit' nothin'!" Also, his childhood was consumed with fighting, due to his "bad temper." This was the very reason for his

initial arrest, at age 14. In spite of all this, and his mother passing when he was 17, he graduated highschool and began working.

Nye had held jobs at a bakery and the airport, and was able to maintain them for about three years respectively. Since he has acquired a felony on his record for charges related to drug possession, Nye has not been able to hold a job for more than 4 months unless he works under the table as a painter:

> *I don't have a problem gettin' the job, but it's just my record. They'll come back and say, "Mr. Lee we got your background check back and we won't be able to keep you." Same results. Good jobs too.*

His longest period of incarceration was a year and 3 months in which he did not receive any job training or reentry programming. He described how he would "train" himself, through self-education at the law library during this confinement. Nye is currently looking for work, but in the meantime, he is pursuing his dreams of becoming a hiphop artist.

Quinton. Quinton is 29 years old and is familiar with the struggles of poverty. He was raised by his mother, who spent a lot of time at work to provide for her children, allowing Quinton to take advantage of this time to explore his fascination with street life. Quinton refused to be a "house man" and often left the house to hang with the "wrong crowd" against his mother's wishes, while she was at work. He stressed the need for him to experience street life for himself, despite his mothers warnings, because he was curious, "had to get it on [his] own 'cause [his] momma was cheap", and needed to gain his respect in his neighborhood.

By 13 years old, Quinton had become accustomed to hanging out in the streets, which led to his first arrest. He recalls that he was sitting outside with his friends one day, and a woman rode up in a taxi and accused him and his friends of breaking into her house. Although he and his

friends did not commit the crime, he claims he went to jail because he was a Black man. He stayed overnight in a juvenile detention center, and ultimately "beat the case." He claims he continued on a troubled path, and it eventually caught up to him.

At age 16, Quinton found himself awakening from a month long coma, in result of his car flipping over 13 times while trying to evade police. Although he states that this incident slowed him down mentally, he recollects it did not slow down his behavior; and at 17 he received his first charge as an adult. Since this undisclosed charge, he has been in and out of jail, but had been able to secure jobs with an animal hospital in highschool, as a vendor at Turner Field and a seasonal job with the city of Atlanta. He has been incarcerated for cashing fraudulent checks and a drug charge. During the year he spent in county jail, he did not receive any job training, he says, due to the arbitrary nature of sentencing in jail.

Quinton is currently seeking employment, and explicates his struggle with avoiding jail:

> *You never know if you gon' go back 'cause it's like if you not workin' you gotta take penitentiary chances but I don't wanna go back so I gotta try to get somewhere in life. I gotta try to turn this around-- improve. But at the same time I am who I am my record speaks for itself. I dunno how confident I am 'cause I gotta get it how I can. But I hate bein' locked up it take a lot outta me. If I did go back to jail it ain't gon' be on no major charge, its gon' be on some money.*

From the previous narratives, emerging themes can begin to take shape. With the theoretical framework of empowerment in mind, the following section is an overview of these themes.

Overview of Themes

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of empowerment in the job search process of re-entering African American men who received job readiness training. Unfortunately, the program of interest, the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program, did not meet the standards of the proposed definition of job readiness. The program did not train these men in interview etiquette, resume writing, etc., yet it did support their job search process by providing transportation and clothing for interviews, discussing job leads, and trying to establish better relationships with their children and co-parents. The program provided participants the space to discuss job leads, personal stories, and anything else they desired to address. Lawyers, employers, and other members of certain social institutions were also invited to speak to these men and give as much insight into these systems as possible. Also, the program assisted in record expungement and child support by serving as an advocate at court hearings to attest participants' progress. As a result of this, the findings will address what the program *did not* achieve in regard to job readiness, and discuss the themes that emerged from what the program *did* accomplish.

From this investigation, three themes emerged that were associated with whether job readiness effected empowerment during participants' job search: Tenacity, Barriers, and Coping. In reference to whether empowerment effected participants' job search/outcome, themes of Stigma and Agency emerged. Although none of the program participants recidivated, and five out of nine participants were either partially or fully employed at the time of the interview, it is necessary to determine why this outcome occurred. The table below, Table 1.2, illustrates the codes that shaped each theme, and each themes relationship to the research questions.

Table 1.2

Factors	Themes	Research Questions
Before program confidence	TENACITY	**Does job readiness effect empowerment during job search?**
After program confidence		
Program Motivation		
Optimism		
Expunging record	CHALLENGES	
Flawed system*		
Trouble w/ Co-parent		
Avoiding criminal activity		
Job < 1 year*		
Crime for survival*	COPING	
Fellowship		
Pro-active parent		
Shared power		
Race	STIGMA	**Does empowerment effect job search/outcome?**
No control of others views		
Pro-activity	AGENCY	

* Code had a frequency of 44%, yet further inquiry may have possibly increased frequency.

The following sections analyze these themes within the context of the research question that they address.

The Effect of Job Readiness on Empowerment

In order to explore the effect job readiness has on empowerment during the job search process, questions asked sought to discover whether participants were motivated, optimistic, or confident despite the barriers they faced, as a result of the program. Several themes emerged from this dialogue: tenacity, challenges, and coping.

Tenacity

All participants showed they possessed various aspects of tenacity through expressions of motivation, confidence and/or optimism. These expressions emerged within discussions of tenacity before and after program participation. It was difficult for some of the participants to give credence to the program for this characteristic, as some stated they held some degree of

tenacity prior to the program. This does not negate those participants who did explicitly state the surge in tenacity they experienced as a result of the program. This ambiguity changes the nature of the study from seeking to asses this phenomenon before and after for the purpose of gaging the programs impact, to simply assessing whether participants possess this quality regardless of its' derivation. An excerpt from Nye's interview provides the general attitude and perspective of the 6 out of 9 participants who were confident prior to, and those whose confidence increased, in reference to how the program affected their confidence and motivation:

> *The program motivates me to get a job and the faith to get a job with a felony, I got prime examples of people who have. I had confidence but it* [the program] *has built it.*

In addition, in regard to confidence in not returning to jail before the program, Nye explains, "Yea I was confident. I'm a leader and the experiences you go through humble you to make the right decisions". Milo and Josh were also confident before the program. Milo, because he goes to "alotta meetings and take these steps and moral inventory sheets, its like a prayer and meditation" and Josh, because "jail ain't for me [him]". Austin compares his boost in confidence within the MILA program with another fatherhood program he participated in:

> *Yea the program made a difference. Just network and meetin' up and the vibes you get from other people, inspirational stories and experiences in life. Like at the Fatherhood program they don't really talk about life. It was like random; if you wanna say somethin' you say somethin'. It's more intimate here. It's just business there.*

Brian describes how his confidence was "below zero" when he arrived at the program, and that is "what led [him] to the program. I saw the ad in the library and went to see if I was eligible to participate and I was." Upon completion of the program, the majority of participants, gave an answer similar to Brian's:

> *I'm very confident that I won't go back to jail but there's always something lingering in the back of my mind, like you know you gotta keep it together 'cause at any moment it can happen.*

That "something lingering in the back" of Brian's mind, in various cases, is having to take a chance due to a lack in sufficient income for survival or to avoid a probation violation for non-payment. Three out of nine participants expressed that, although confident, they may take a chance with criminal activity, if all other options were exhausted. AJ rationalizes this very well in this excerpt:

> *Somethin' can happen where I might have to take that chance, but I ain't gon' do it like I used to. I might do somethin' small 'cause I gotta buy food, medication and keep some money in my pocket. I might not slang or nothin' like that, I might just jug.*

Quentin's response agrees with AJ, in that taking a chance is a possibility when he states, "...it's like if you not workin' you gotta take penitentiary chances; but I don't wanna go back so I gotta try to get somewhere in life."

These men were motivated and confident about their futures, yet, through overt statements, knew returning to jail was a possibility, although they were committed to desistance. These excerpts expose the reality of their situations: no matter how confident, committed or motivated these men are to desist, they are subject to re-incarceration due to probation and/or child support payment obligations. This assertion does not assume that the sole alternative to unemployment is criminal activity, yet without stable employment, not only is re-engagement in crime more likely, legitimate alternatives to financial security may be insecure, in which they essentially remain vulnerable. Lonnie exemplifies this vulnerability with this excerpt concerning his perceived control over his situation:

I feel like I'm in control, well no I don't. I'm on probation now. Which requires that I pay the probation fees. So that would be the reason why I go back.

Ashton affirms this feeling of vulnerability expressed in Brian, AJ and Quentin's excerpts and lack of control in Lonnie's statement, when he says, "Yes these challenges are beyond my control while I'm economically challenged; because the answer to all problems is money." Lack of control is a characteristic of vulnerability; this speaks to vulnerability these men face due to difficulty in securing financial stability.

The objective of this analysis is to return the discussion to the context of the research question: Did job readiness effect empowerment? To answer this question simply, no, job readiness did not effect empowerment. This is because the MILA program did not embody the traditional structure of job readiness discussed throughout the literature. However, the program did establish a support network for participants that played a critical role in the confidence they spoke of in their excerpts. Participants A more in-depth question this study should address is: *How* did job readiness effect empowerment? In an effort to unpack the word empowerment, tenacity was used to describe language that reflected confidence, motivation and/or optimism, which are all elements of empowerment. With this in mind, it can be concluded that the majority of participants either gained tenacity from the program, or the program built on tenacity they already possessed. In addition, regardless of how conscious they were of their vulnerability, they remained tenacious. However, their level of tenacity may be effected, positively or negatively, by their consciousness of their vulnerability, which deserves further investigation.

Challenges

The most pertinent challenges these men explicitly stated they faced were finding secure employment, expunging their records, and a dysfunctional relationship with the mother of their

child/children. These various challenges do not share a linear relationship, but a very complex one. Herein lies the catch 22: Men with felony records who are on probation are required to make probation payments. Failure to make these payments results in revocation. It is difficult for these men to make these payments due to their inability to obtain employment, which is impeded by their status as a felon. In order for these men to expunge the felony from their record, they must pay a fee, yet this is also difficult because they may not have the money to pay the fee due to the interference of the felony with employment. Lonnie touches on the complexity of this situation with this statement:

> *But job referrals would be greater 'cause you know research shows that if a person can reintegrate into society quickly enough that could diminish the chances of them repeating another offense. Most people do it for survival, gotta eat. If I can't get it the legal way then I'ma have to get it another way. I'm just a man trynna survive and I wrestle with this. You know being locked up for 10 months is an experience! I definitely ain't trynna fuck up on this probation but at the same time I might fuck up 'cause I can't find a job to pay this probation. So yea, it can become very stressful. And that stress can lead to desperation.*

Quentin sees not having a job or money as "the only challenge I [he] see[s]." In addition, "Paying court fines, classes, probation bills; If I could get them felonies off my record I would be good." These excerpts demonstrate the power felony status has in inhibiting employment, which thus, effects other areas of life. In addition to this cyclical system, some participants not only had trouble gaining employment, but maintaining it as well. Brian describes how,

Since the felony came up I haven't been able to hold a job for more than 2 years. Somethin' always comes up, mostly on my part. They'll be like, "Wait a minute, you didn't tell us about this." So now I'm just upfront and honest.

Nye also experiences this same situation when he is finally able to gain employment:

I keep some good jobs, but it's my record. Just my record everytime they'll come back, "Mr. Lightfoot, uummm, this record came back and we're not gonna be able to keep you." Same results.

AJ also touches on this challenge, among others when he comments, "Everyday a challenge. Living situation, job, child support. It ain't gone last long. Probably last about 6 months and everything will be straight." He identified what he saw as challenges for him, yet displayed optimism. The same consequences for failing to make probation payments apply to child support payments too; though they are not the only source of the participants troubled relationships with the mother(s) of their child(ren).

All but two participants discussed their relationship with the mother(s) of their child(ren). Those who did were not currently in monogamous relationships with the mother(s). Various reasons for this strained relationship was apparent throughout the participants interviews, such as: cases of domestic violence, not allowed to see child(ren) for mothers own reasons, not allowed to see child(ren) often; essentially the inability to get along. While co-parenting was not the focus of this study, it clearly affected the father/child relationship. Austin exposes how his trouble with the mother of his children has escalated in the past:

Me and my babymomma don't really see eye to eye and we always argue about dumb shit. That's why I say I might as well be away from 'em 'cause sometimes I get locked up behind arguing wit' her and it might get a lil' physical and I look like the bad guy and get

> *taken away from my kids anyway; so I look at it like shit I might as well stay away from her.*

Josh expresses how he also has trouble with the mother of his child, though it has not escalated to violence as in Austin's case:

> *When I was payin' child support I still didn't have any visitation rights. Why am I paying child support and I can't see my child. She let my child go outta town for a year and she don't even tell me. Women got the control and we don't got no rights.*

Here, Josh depicts the pitfalls of the child support system in its negation of his rights as a father, which is a challenge due to its affect on his sense of agency. His identification of mothers having control over the fathers ability to see their own child(ren), acknowledges some degree of powerlessness in this situation. Yet, Josh's effort to gain visitation rights demonstrates proactivity, also an element of empowerment.

In relationship to the research question, these challenges may be inhibitions to empowerment. The previous discussion regarding tenacity demonstrates the minimal affect these challenges have on the motivation, confidence and/or optimism of the participants, which may or may not have been mitigated by program participation. As for the possibility of strained relationships with their child(ren), research has shown that stronger familial ties increases their likeliness for employment and reentry success (Gosnell, 2007). This suggests that the lack of power these men have in seeing their child(ren) may be disempowering. Yet, it would be insightful to investigate how this disempowerment and proactivity as Josh showed, reconcile. This means the necessity of the program in addressing these challenges is critical to the impact of the program, as well as, the resilience of the participants.

Coping

Coping emerged as a theme to depict language used by the participants to describe the strength in fellowship, parenting and shared power. In relationship to empowerment, coping represents the ability of participants to mediate the effects of their social conditions through these three patterns. These themes appeared continuously throughout participant interviews, demonstrating their influence on the participants' resilience. Some participants admit to dealing with their situations through fighting, alcohol and/or drug use previously-- although currently is unknown. Yet, all participants credit the program for providing that space to share their experiences, what works for them, and their knowledge of certain social institutions that may help others in the same predicament. Ashton depicts the gist of the participants' thoughts on what keeps them going:

> *I have a support system, a safety net. Someone to call when I need certain resources. Knowing we come together to discuss problems. You see they're doing something positive; it's motivational. You know now that you're not the only one going through it.*

In addition to motivation and support, shared knowledge regarding various social systems was utilized. Josh and Quinton express this in the following comments:

> Josh: *I had started to give up before I joined this program that's why I joined cuz I was like, "I better get some job contacts cuz I'm givin' up." It gives me better hopes (the program), gave me alotta opportunities that's why I keep comin' here. They showing me the steps to get more information.*

and,

> Quinton: *Yeah, it has had an impact. I can't have no rights wit' my son and stuff I just learned a lot from the program.*

The fellowship the MILA participants developed amongst each other was critical during a time when it was almost conducive to them actively looking for work or remaining optimistic. This idea is apparent in AJ's statement:

> *Everybody can help each other. When men come together, it's alotta knowledge in that circle. But when you spread out you got alotta obstacles and you really can't think straight but when everybody put they mind together there's no limit to what you can do.*

In addition, shared power was just as important within this fellowship. The service provider gained the trust of the program participants through his transparency, and non-paternalistic facilitation. He shared the floor with all participants, and did not assume that he had the solution to their problems. Participants were able to create solutions to their own problems, which within empowerment, is critical in wielding power to seek control of their situations. An excerpt from Nye supports this assertion of Mr. Jefferson:

> *Mr. Jefferson was like the definition of a real man. Havin' a good head and his style of doin' stuff makes you trust him. He's straight up. And everything he couldn't do he let me know when he could do it.*

Austin's statement also illustrates shared power within the program through its' informal structure. The flexibility in the programs structure and democratic nature is a critical aspect of empowerment:

> *Ain't no real community, that's why I respect stuff like this. Place so people can actually network and congregate stuff like that, other than outside influences cuz these folks don't even tell you what to talk about they let us talk about what we wanna talk about. They might wanna talk about they story and life and its open, whatever you wanna say, its not*

> *no, "This is what I want y'all to talk about, this what we doin' today." It can be about jobs or personal stuff. I feel this more open.*

Lastly, parenting as a motivator was not as predominant as the other nuances, yet further inquiry surrounding parenting and its role in looking for employment may have revealed greater frequency in the code patterns. The fact that this code developed organically, without explicit interrogation, justifies its' notability. From questions concerning motivation, active participation in their child(ren)'s lives and providing for them were noted motivators by 4 out of 9 participants. Quinton demonstrates this when he says, "My son is why I'm here in this program. He's some of my motivation. You know, I gotta think about my son; set the right example." This idea of children as motivators was also apparent in Lonnie's discussion of his daily struggle with remaining hopeful and optimistic about finding employment and life in general. He stated, "It's a freakin' battle to keep your hope alive, and be optimistic. My daughter definitely helps me."

In addition to explicit discussions of children as motivators, the interviews of all except one participant revealed their proactive, or desire to be proactive, roles in their children's lives. This aspect is just as important to acknowledge, especially in light of the existing research, which supports better reentry outcomes for those with greater familial ties (Gosnell, 2007). Milo, Austin, Brian, and Nye imply a relationship with their child and make sacrifices for them. Brian's excerpt is an example of their general thoughts on the matter:

> *Yeah I got a good relationship with my kids. This release period is different 'cause I'm older now, I got three kids, and I've let go of that dream of being a rapper and I'm just trynna stay afloat and provide for my children.*

Josh depicts his desire to be more active in parenting his child by trying to get visitation rights with the help of Mr. Jefferson:

> *I stay in contact with 'em. I wish I could spend more time with one of 'em. His mom makes it hard. But me and Mr. Jefferson is workin' on it to get visitation rights. When I was payin' child support I still didn't have any visitation rights.*

As for Ashton's relationship with his children, he explains that it has been strained due to his hostile relationship with his ex-wife. He claimed he was uncertain of where his ex-wife and children are residing at the time, and until he "has [his] stuff together" he will not attempt to locate them.

This analysis further supports the program's effect on empowerment. The participants were able to utilize shared information from the fellowship of the program, especially in mitigating child support, negative ways of coping with stress, and becoming or remaining pro-active parents. The programs ability to foster fellowship among this group, provided the space in which participants built community and were able to teach and learn from each other, an element of empowerment stressed by Freire (2004). Their utilization of this knowledge, through proactivity, in "transforming their world" (Freire, 2004), is too, indicative of empowerment. Also, articulation of the fellowship of the program as motivational indicates empowerment, as well as the identification of positive relationships with their children as potential for greater probability of employment and reentry.

Empowerment Affect on Job Search/Outcome

Questions regarding participants' experiences during the job search process solicited answers centered around two themes: stigma and agency. Stigma was articulated in terms of race and conviction status, and was explicitly investigated within the interviews. Signs of agency were explored through interrogation of how participants perceived their degree of control over life outcomes.

Stigma

Two types of stigma exist among this group: being Black, and a felon. All participants agreed that race played a role within the job search, on a macro level, yet not at the micro level. They agreed that although the African American race may be viewed stereotypically, they did not allow how people perceived them effect their individual journey to employment. A macro view of Black men when discussing the role of race in the job search is evident in Ashton's statement, which represents the general attitude of the participants:

> *That's why I say with all the stereotypes of black men of course they're gonna look at us like a threat because according to stats and eyewitness accounts, many black men are threatening. You can't tell the intentions of anybody just by looking at them but because you hear so many more reports than other races.*

Participants believed there is a general attitude and stereotype of Black men, yet they do not allow this to effect how they view themselves and their motivation to find employment. This is also apparent when Quentin calmly states, "I'm not stuntin' what the crowd say. I'ma get me a trade somethin' they can't take away from me that's gon' market me."

Two participants perceived race as a stigma that could potentially affect their likeliness to secure employment, only depending on the demographic of the area in which they apply:

> *Race plays a role in the job search based on where you're applying. Like if you in Buckhead; they don't want no darkies in there.*

This goes back to the premise of participants not being able to control how others perceive them, and therefore not allowing those assumptions hinder their search for employment. In addition to this, Brian, Lonnie and Quinton saw race as an excuse, although they have no control over how people perceive them:

> *If I say its 'cause I'm Black that's just an excuse to me. But if I say 'cause of who I am you might look down on that you might not wanna give me a chance. You never know what people's thoughts are. You can't let people stop you. You gotta be self-motivated.*

Lonnie goes on to explain that he does not care how people view him because he would rather not "go to an interview and feel forced to be something [he is] not."

All participants agreed that race as a factor in the job search affected Blacks, yet they did not perceive themselves as inhibited by this stigma. This is due to their lack of control of employers' discernments, which ultimately had no effect on how they saw themselves and their potential.

Adversely, participants saw their status as a felon as a barrier to employment that they did not have control over. Ashton was able to capture the essence of this shared reality when he stated, "It does not affect me how other people view me, doesn't affect my morale or self esteem, but it affects me when convicted felons can't even apply for a job." Utilizing previous interpretations of participants' resilience in job searching in spite of the hindrances of a felony, this statement suggests that although the felony does affect their chances of employment, or even application, it does not effect self-perception. They do not allow the negative valuations of society, specifically employers, effect their determination in searching for employment and how they perceive themselves.

In sum, participants believed race did play a role in macro-level stereotypes, though not individually. Yet, their status as a felon trumped race as a barrier to employment because they did not have control of how potential employers, or people in general, view them. They did not care how employers viewed them in terms of race, because they did not view it as a risk factor,

yet they did express concern about their status as a felon in employment prevention. This concern does not prevent them from continuing their search, as shown by AJ in this excerpt:

> *It really just depends on how they feel. They don't stop me from goin' out. They tell me I can't work at the airport but I still go out and apply even with the felony. Only time I have to worry about that is when they come with I got your background check back.*

To answer the second proposed research question, empowerment did effect the job search. This is evident throughout interview discussions that demonstrate the participants resilience. In addition, self-efficacy is evident due to participants value of themselves and their capabilities that will ultimately assure they will reach their goal: employment. Along with self-efficacy is the display of self-esteem among this group. Participants exhibited that they believed in themselves, regardless of assumptions of others. Resilience, self-efficacy and self-esteem are elements of empowerment, which validates its' presence among these men.

Agency

Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. Utilizing this definition, participants' language that indicated proactive job searching, parenting (previously discussed) or any other activity where they took initiative was identified as a form of agency.

The men involved in this study demonstrated their sense of agency through their attitudes and actions. The following statement by AJ illustrates one example of accountability and agency:

> *I made this step myself to come here, ain't nobody put me on to this I did this myself 'cause I know I need help.*

All participants provided accounts of active job searching, yet Lonnie, Brian, Milo, Josh, and Ashton mentioned their proactivity in getting into school, obtaining some type of certification or specialized license. Participants were either in the process of figuring out how to get back in school, about to enroll in school, or working to get their certification. Milo speaks about his recent certification and its' effect on his job search, "Now that I got my certification I been job searchin'", while Josh is trying to get in school so he can get his Commercial Driver's License reinstated, "Well really I'm trynna get these felonies expunged 'cause it's hard to get in school wit' these felonies." In addition, Brian realized the value of school in moving forward with his life by stating,

> *I don't have my GED in my real name, but I need to get that handled so I can be eligible for HOPE and I coulda pretty much got my life started by now. I've been trynna get a job wit' the city of ATL for the longest.*

This demonstrates that Brian has created his own solutions fro himself, and is willing to take the steps to execute this solution. These are examples of proactive actions various men have initiated.

It can be determined that the participants in the MILA program did experience some level of empowerment, which had some effect on their job search. They were able to able to create solutions for themselves, and took the initiative to resolve these issues. They all were actively looking for employment, and most considered school or certification to enhance their chances. This demonstrates the agency they possess over their lives, even in the face of adversaries. It could not be determined whether they relied heavily on the help of the program facilitator, Mr. Jefferson, which may relinquish some of their agency, but the fact they took it upon themselves to enroll in the program speaks to a degree of agency.

5 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to uncover the role of empowerment in the job search process. This study hypothesized the impact of a job readiness program would effect program participants empowerment, which would then effect their approach to their search for employment. In order to distinguish empowerment, this study identified language that confirmed confidence, motivation, optimism and proactivity. To conclude this study, this chapter will review the findings, discuss their relationship to the literature, and provide future recommendations for theory, policy and research.

This study unveiled empowerment through the following themes: tenacity, challenges, coping, stigma and agency. Tenacity identified signs of confidence, motivation and optimism in participants' language, and in spite of their conscious vulnerability, concluded the program as the impetus and/or catalyst to participants' determination. In addition, the challenges faced by these participants did not appear to have an effect on their tenacity. Participants were able to cope with these challenges through the fellowship established among the men of the program by utilizing shared information, motivational stories and positive ways of dealing with stress. One challenge in particular, stigma, revealed that participants valued themselves and their abilities regardless of others prejudice and proactively engaged in the job search, certification and/or their child(ren)s lives, which revealed agency.

The thematic findings of this study suggests a relationship between empowerment and recidivism. Although it is not conclusive whether the program alone had an effect on the empowerment of the participants, it is apparent that empowerment did in fact, have an effect on the job search, and ultimately job search success: employment. The body of literature on the job search and success of job seekers, suggests the influence of self-esteem, self-efficacy, perceived

control, ability, and social support on the job search and outcome (Brown and Lent, 2005). The suggestive influence of these aspects are all elements of empowerment as described by Solomon (1965) within Black empowerment. With the established relationship between empowerment and the job search/outcome, the relationship between empowerment and recidivism becomes evident: Due to an empowered job search approach, employment is probable; and reentry literature supports employment as a deterrent of crime and an abatement of recidivism (Redcross, Yahner, & Zweig, 2010; Uggen, C. 2000; Jacobs, & Western, 2007; Berk, 2007; Yahner & Zweig, 2012; Eimicke & Cohen, 2002). Further investigation of the relationship between empowerment, job search/outcome and recidivism, controlling for extraneous influences, may reveal significant association among these variables.

In relationship to the reentry and empowerment literature of Chapter 2, this study's findings are partially supported. This study does not support the literature on the effectiveness of job readiness because job readiness was not the focus of the MILA Fellows Reentry Family Support program. Although the program did try to help participants find employment by assisting in record expungement, interview attire, public transportation giftcards, and the location of potential employers and community resources, by definition, the program did not meet the standards of job readiness: gained knowledge of resume writing, interviewing etiquette, and job search resources/behaviors ("Glossary of Terms", 2005). Because the program did not possess the general elements of job readiness, it may not be considered a job readiness program, and therefore cannot add to the literature regarding the effectiveness of job readiness; yet it can add to the literature regarding empowerment.

The findings of this study provide germinal insight into the job search experiences of reentering African American males. Various studies have endeavored the role of empowerment

within disadvantaged groups, and although it is a highly nuanced phenomenon, it has been broken down to practical elements. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-control, consciousness, pro-activity, and resilience are all some elements that have been extracted from this phenomenon for measurement. This study's quest to discover empowerments' relationship to the job search of African American men with felonies was interpreted by the proposed Black empowerment model. This frameworks emphasis on shared power and rejection of negative valuations of program participants is supported in the findings of this study. Participants of this study demonstrated how they were able to teach and learn in the program, and that they did not allow the perceptions of others impede their path to success or employment, by continuing to apply for jobs. However, their rejection of these negative valuations and denial of race as an impediment may be problematic within Freire's (2004) framework.

Freire's (2004) work on empowerment emphasizes the necessity for conscientization in pursuit of true power. Participants in this study demonstrated they were aware of race as problematic for the Black community, yet they denied its' effect on them personally. This way of thinking may be problematic in pursuit of self-liberation because refutation of oppression does not destroy it; the critical assessment of hegemonic ideas that dictate pragmatism, does. Because one may not see race as a barrier does not diminish its operation as one. It is critical for these participants to be able to identify and critique both race and conviction status' influence in their pursuit of employment in order to mitigate the effects of both and maneuver through this system. Further inquiry of perceptions of race, the origin of their epistemology about race and experiences with race, may have drawn conclusive findings and should be included in future studies.

Although findings in reference to race were inconclusive, Freire's (2004) work also sheds

light on the power of fellowship. Freire's (2004) theory of "conscientization", the "process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action", unfolded within the program. These men engaged in exchanging information and ideas, teaching and being taught, in an effort to articulate their "social reality". This articulation set the platform for wielding the power to "transform" their social reality, and potentially foster transformation on a larger scale. Within the interpretation of Freire's (2004) "conscientization", these actions cultivated by this fellowship are not stagnate; these men are engaging in a process which has the potential to reach the community level. Articulation of this interpretation warrants the need for the use of Friere's (2004) work along with Solomon's (1976) empowerment model to understand findings of future research in this area. This recommendation, along with the following, are necessary for future illustrative findings.

Many lessons from this study provide for richer studies on empowerment, reentering Black men and the job search. As in Trimbur's (2009) study, interrogation in a more organic setting, i.e., during the program, may have revealed richer findings. In addition, the findings of this study agreed with Trimbur's (2009) in that participants sought to abstain from criminal activity, yet their material conditions (limited access to employment) failed to allow them to do so. This is similar to those participants who admitted to having to take that chance with criminal activity in order to survive. Findings from both these studies can inform policy in that they expose the catch 22 in the process of reentry: People with records are required to make probation and/or child support payments shortly upon release, yet their record inhibits their ability to secure employment that would allow them to make these payments. This paradox also exposes the un/conscious negation of class within policy. Although payment may not be a problem for offenders from an upper class, or with family from this class, it is a significant problem for those

these policies disproportionately effect: impoverished Black men.

In regard to research methodology, many improvements could establish stronger findings. A limitation of this study is the lack of a pre-assessment. This information could have ascertained a comparative point of reference in assessing the programs impact. In addition, program observation would have revealed how accurate participants' interview accounts were in relationship to their actions and how they express themselves among their peers, in a less formal setting. A 3-month follow-up may have disclosed the pragmatism piece to empowerment, by assessing the manifestation of empowered language of participants and the reality of recidivism. Despite the limitations of this study, survey of a larger, younger group (18 to 24 years old), in the future may reveal generalizable results, as well as expose a different relationship between empowerment and those with less job skills and experience.

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APENDIX A

Georgia State University

Department of African American Studies

Informed Consent

Title: The Role of Empowerment in the Job Search Process of Reentering African American Males

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sarita K. Davis

Student Investigator: Chloe A. Jackson

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to is to find out how Black fathers experience empowerment. You are invited to participate because you African American, are not in jail/prison, are 18 and older, and took part in the MILA program. A total of 20 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 60 minutes of your time.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer 16-20 questions about how ready you are to enter the workforce and your sense of empowerment during the program. You will not be forced to speak with any other persons also taking part in the study. The interview will be held in one day, for 60 minutes at an agreed date and time. The interview will be audio-recorded and will be held at the MILA program. At the end of the interview, you will receive your $10 MARTA card for your participation. You will not be asked any information that may tell your identity or the identity of people you know.

III. Risks:

There are no known physical risks. During the interview, it is possible that information may come out that could make you feel uncomfortable. If a moment should occur you can be referred to services that may help you deal with these emotions. Participation or not participating will not impact your parole or probation status. If any questions asked make you feel uncomfortable at any time, you do not have to answer them.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you. It may allow you to see what you got out of the program. Overall, we hope to gain information about programs that keep people from returning to jail.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Partaking in research is up to you. You do not have to be in this study. If you change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. Your information will be destroyed. You may skip questions. You may also stop the interview at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits. Also, participation or not participating will not impact your parole or probation status.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The PI, Dr. Sarita Davis, and student PI, Chloe Jackson, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use numbers rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be in a locked cabinet in the home of the student P.I. We will save electronic files on password and firewall-protected computers. Audio recordings will be kept in a secured location in the home of the student P.I. After we make written notes, and no longer than a year, the audiotapes will be destroyed. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Sarita K. Davis at 404.413.5134 or saritadavis@gsu.edu and/or Chloe Jackson at 323.347.9886 or cjackson102@student.gsu.edu, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audiotaped, please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX B

Table 1.1 Demographic Information

Participant	*Age*	*Age 1st incarceration*	*Yrs. Work Experience*	*Length of Incarceration (Non-consecutively)*	*Level of education*	*Probation?*	*Avoid incarceration?*	*Juvenile facility?*
1/ Lonnie	30	13/14, 22	15yrs	10 months	HS grad., Some college	Yes	Yes	Yes
2/ AJ	28	17-County, 26-Prison	14yrs	27 months	HS grad.	Yes	Try to	No
3/ Josh	47	34	30yrs	39 months	HS grad.	Yes	Yes	No
4/ Brian	35	17	15yrs	40 months	GED	Yes	Yes	No
5/ Ashton	32	17	21yrs	29 months	GED, 2yrs post-edu	Yes	Yes/No	No
6/ Austin	24	18	2-3yrs	3 months	GED	No	Yes	Yes, 1day
7/ Milo	52	30	15yrs	32 months	HS grad.	Yes	Yes	No
8/ Nye	32	14	16yrs	24 months	HS grad.	Yes	Yes	Yes
9/ Quinton	29	13	2-3yrs	>15 months	HS grad.	Yes	Yes	Yes

APPENDIX C

Table 1.2 Relationships of Findings

Factors	Themes	Research Questions
Before program confidence	TENACITY	**Does job readiness effect empowerment during job search?**
After program confidence		
Program Motivation		
Optimism		
Expunging record	CHALLENGES	
Flawed system*		
Trouble w/ Co-parent		
Avoiding criminal activity		
Job < 1 year*		
Crime for survival*	COPING	
Fellowship		
Pro-active parent		
Shared power		
Race	STIGMA	**Does empowerment effect job search/outcome?**
No control of others views		
Pro-activity	AGENCY	

APPENDIX D

Participant Interview Questions

Interviewee:

Interviewee Pseudonym _____

1. Age _____

2. Age at first incarceration? _____

3. Years of work experience?

___months ___ years

4. Length of incarceration?

___ less than 1 year ___ years

5. Highest level of education?

_____

6. Are you on probation or parole?

___YES ___NO

Here I am going to ask some questions about you.

1. Please tell me about yourself, where are you from? What was it like growing up?

2. What is your incarceration history? (e.g., probe type of crimes/length of imprisonment, job skills/training etc.)

3. Do you want to avoid further criminal activity? Why or why not?

    a. Do you think this is possible in society today?
        i. Do you think you being a Black man has some effect on this? Having been previously incarcerated?

4. What is your employment experience? How many jobs have you had and for how long?

5. Black male incarceration rates are very high. More than 60% of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. For Black males in their 30s, 1 in every 10 is in prison or jail on any given day.
    a. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being "not very confident", 5 being neutral, and 10 being "very confident", how confident are you that you will not go back to jail/prison?
    b. Before you began participation in this program, how confident were you?
    c. Does the job readiness training you received play a role in your confidence? Explain.

Here I will ask you questions that relate more to your thoughts on looking for work as a convicted felon.

6. What are some of the challenges you face being a convicted felon?
    a. Which of these challenges do you feel is beyond your control?
    b. Were these challenges the same before you entered the program? Explain why.
    c. Do you think this is true for all Black men? Explain.
7. What strengths/ resources do you have access to that can help you overcome these challenges? Before this program?
8. Is there anything different about this release experience from previous experiences? Explain.
9. To what extent are you personally committed to not going back to jail/prison? Did you feel differently before participation in this program?
10. Thinking about being a convicted felon looking for work, tell me in a sentence or two about what comes to mind when I say the following prompts.
    a. Church
    b. Money
    c. Friends
    d. Love
    e. Stigma
    f. Race
11. Do you feel prepared to enter the workforce because of the MILA job readiness program? How did you feel before you entered this program? Explain.
12. What impact has the MILA program had on how you view yourself and your ability to find employment?
    a. How did you feel about yourself and your ability to find employment before this program?
    b. Do you think race will affect your ability?
    c. What about your record?
13. As far as your relationship with the service provider, do you feel they held negative perceptions of you?
    a. Did you feel there was an even exchange or that you were under his direction?
14. Do you have any questions for me?