

“I’M A PERSON BEYOND MY PAST”: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN REENTRY AFTER INCARCERATION

by

OLUWAYOMI K. PASEDA

(Under the Direction of Dr. Orion P. Mowbray)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the experiences of Black women in the United States (U.S.), who often find themselves situated at the margins of society due to their minoritized status in terms of both gender and race. These women face discrimination and prejudice before incarceration due to their intersectional identities, reentry into society post-incarceration with complex challenges stemming from their double minority status and their history within the criminal legal system. Using interpretive phenomenological analysis, informed by Intersectionality and Black feminist thought theory, this study delves into the unique experiences of Black women as they return to their communities after incarceration. Through narratives shared by nine self-identifying Black women, six overarching themes were constructed, capturing the essence of their reentry experiences. Three themes address the first research question: What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry? (a) Experiencing identity-based inequities; (b) Challenges in securing housing; (c) Confronting health-related obstacles. Three overarching themes were consistently shown across the participant group regarding research question two: How do Black women experience empowerment in overcoming post-imprisonment barriers? (a) Finding strength through faith in God; (b) Fostering self-reliance, determination, and motivation in goal achievement; (c) Deriving

empowerment from familial, organizational, and communal support. The study findings are discussed, providing valuable insights into policy reform, reentry programming and practice, and directions for future research.

INDEX WORDS: Reentry, Black Feminism, Black women, Reintegration, Returning citizens, Reentry reform

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by

OLUWAYOMI K. PASEDA

BSW, Morgan State University, 2014

MSW, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2015

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OLUWAYOMI K. PASEDA

Major Professor:	Orion Mowbray
Committee:	Sarah Shannon
	Michael Robinson
	Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is a heartfelt tribute to the remarkable Black women whose stories have enriched this study. Their willingness to share their journeys with me reflects immense courage, and I am deeply grateful for their participation. Their selfless desire to pave the way for women to reintegrate into society is truly inspiring. I cherish their honesty, transparency, and the trust they placed in me to honor their narratives.

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Lastly, I dedicate this work to all the Black women tirelessly pursuing their dreams in areas that label them as "minorities." Remember, the realm of possibility knows no bounds when approached with intentionality. Surround yourself with those who uplift and empower you; Your journey is yours to claim!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter begins a dissertation investigation into the social reentry experiences of Black women following incarceration. It will underscore the impact experienced by Black women in the United States due to their intersectional identities. The chapter will introduce the research problem, present its rationale, and articulate the objectives guiding this inquiry. Furthermore, it will discuss the theoretical frameworks informing the study's approach and the chosen methodological strategies. Concluding with an overview of the dissertation's structure and a summary of forthcoming chapters, it is important to clarify that, for this dissertation, "Black women" encompasses individuals of African descent residing in the U.S., including those identifying as African American, Afro-Caribbean, or other Black ethnicities, as defined by Collins (2000). This dissertation uses the "criminal justice system" and the "criminal legal system" interchangeably.

Background and Context

Controlling images labeling Black women as promiscuous and aggressive promotes sexism, racism, and other inequalities as part of their daily lives (Collins, 2000). The appearance of these social injustices as social norms has led Black women to be historically marginalized, resulting in their unique experiences. A criminal label adds additional stigma and discrimination, worsening Black women's adversities. These combined negative labels burden Black women, leading them to be further oppressed (Brown, 2010; Miller & Stewart, 2017).

Black women, further challenged due to their positionality in multiple subordinate groups, underscores a need for insight into their experiences as citizens returning to society. Interviewing previously incarcerated Black women accounting for race and gender as interconnected grounds of their identity will result in detailed responses reporting their experiences. Knowledge of Black women's plight will provide evidence-informed practices and interventions to ensure sustainability in the community for Black women with a history of involvement in the criminal legal system. Findings from this dissertation study will inform implications for reentry policy and practice.

Research Problem and Rationale

Existing research on reentry among Black women highlights the unique challenges they face due to their intersecting identities of race and gender. These studies emphasize the complex obstacles these women encounter as they reintegrate into society after incarceration. Additionally, research sheds light on how Black women, oppressed by their identities, develop distinct strategies to resist oppressive situations. For example, Gurusami (2019) discusses "decarceral motherwork," a term she defines as the creative efforts of formerly incarcerated Black women to nurture their children's well-being despite challenging circumstances. Similarly, Garcia-Hallett (2019) explores the resilience and empowerment displayed by women of Color as they transition back into their communities post-incarceration.

Recognizing that Black women were marginalized even before their involvement in the criminal justice system underscores the importance of understanding how they maintain feelings of worth and empowerment after incarceration. While existing research on Black women's reentry acknowledges the significance of their identity in the transition process, it often overlooks the insights offered by Black feminist thought theory epistemology, which prioritizes

consciousness-raising and empowerment for Black women. This dissertation addresses this gap by employing Black feminist thought theory as a theoretical framework to study reentry among Black women. This approach is necessary for capturing how Black women navigate and overcome various forms of oppression. By utilizing qualitative research methods guided by Black feminist thought theory, this study aims to gather insights directly from the experiences of Black women, allowing their voices to be heard and providing a nuanced understanding of their reentry journey.

As Black feminist thought theory emphasizes the shared standpoint of Black women due to their identity, this study recognizes that while the specifics of the reentry process may vary, the overarching experience of being a Black woman remains constant. Centering Black feminist thought theory, this study seeks to uncover overlooked forms of activism and resilience among Black women, which can inform the development of programs and initiatives tailored to their needs.

Research Objectives

The first objective of this research study is to explore the intersectional experiences of Black women as they undergo the reentry process after incarceration. Through this exploration, the study seeks insight into how these women navigate their challenges when transitioning back into their communities. Additionally, the second objective is to offer recommendations for policy reforms, programming, and other initiatives geared towards addressing the distinctive needs of Black women during reentry and fostering their empowerment throughout the process. The research questions, which focus on the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry and their experiences of empowerment in overcoming barriers post-incarceration, will guide this study.

Theoretical Framework

There will be two theoretical frameworks guiding this study, intersectionality theory and Black feminist thought theory. Coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw; intersectionality underscores the importance of considering race and gender as interconnected aspects of identity when addressing issues concerning women of Color (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw argues that racism and sexism influence the experiences of Black women. This intersectionality exposes Black women to discrimination across multiple fronts, such as structural racial biases in employment and housing, compounded by factors like poverty, childcare responsibilities, and limited job opportunities. The failure to recognize and address these interconnected burdens perpetuates the disempowerment of Black women.

Intersectionality theory is an applicable framework to Black women's reentry because it suggests that social categories like race, gender, and ex-offender status are interconnected, compounding disadvantages for Black women (Brown, 2010). Black women, already subject to racial discrimination in these areas before incarceration, face further obstacles upon release. These intersecting identities compound the reintegration challenges, underscoring the uniqueness of their experiences.

Developed by Patricia Hill-Collins, Black feminist thought theory prioritizes African American women's experiences and perspectives in analysis (Collins, 2000, p. vii), with its foundation being the subjective knowledge of African American women as a standpoint epistemology. The first premise posits that Black feminist thought theory originates from Black women (Collins, 1986).

The second premise recognizes that Black feminist thought theory acknowledges shared experiences among Black women due to their identities. Those who acknowledge this common

standpoint engage in collective efforts to raise consciousness and empower Black women across various intersecting identities (Few, 2007). The third premise asserts that some Black women may not be aware of this shared standpoint, and it is the responsibility of Black women intellectuals to elucidate it (Collins, 1986). Overall, Black feminist thought theory aims to reinforce Black female-centered facts and theories, fostering critical consciousness among Black women and others.

Black feminist thought theory applies to Black women's reentry study because it examines how Black women, situated within three subordinate groups, resist, and thrive amidst various forms of oppression. This theory empowers Black women to engage in activism against intersecting oppressions, fostering resistance to overcome adversities during their transition to the community.

Methodological Approach

This research study utilizes qualitative methods to shed light on the unique experiences of Black women, influenced by the intersections of race, gender, and involvement in the criminal legal system (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Gurusami, 2019; Richie, 2001). Through qualitative methods, the study objectives are to amplify the voices of these marginalized women. Specifically, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the qualitative methodological approach; IPA focuses on understanding participants' lived experiences, uncovering their conscious life-world experiences from their perspectives. With IPA, the study authenticates participants' voices, fostering a deep understanding of their experiences. Given its emphasis on understanding lived experiences, IPA emerges as a suitable approach for exploring the reentry experiences of Black women. This methodology allows for a focused examination of participants' transition experiences from their viewpoints.

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter one introduces the dissertation study, outlining its key components. It commences with an introduction, followed by an exploration of the study's background, context, research problem, rationale, and objectives. Additionally, the chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding the study and the methodological approach employed. The dissertation's structure is presented, concluding with a summary capturing the core findings and contributions.

Chapter two offers a comprehensive review of literature pertinent to reentry and Black women and the theoretical underpinnings informing the dissertation. It begins with an introduction before delving into discussions on stereotypes, controlling image labeling of Black women, and the perpetuation of criminalization and violence within this demographic. The chapter also examines the study's philosophical and theoretical frameworks, explaining their relevance to the research.

Chapter three encompasses the research design and methodological framework. It begins with an introduction and explores the rationale behind the chosen research method. The researcher's role and ethical considerations are outlined, alongside detailed descriptions of the data collection method and data analysis plan. The chapter concludes with a summary and a visual representation of the data analysis plan.

Chapter four presents the findings derived from the conducted study. An introduction provides an overview of the study's participants before delving into individual themes and expanding upon group themes. The chapter incorporates tables depicting participant demographics and individual and group themes, culminating in a summary of the findings.

Chapter five focuses on the dissertation study's discussion, limitations, implications, and conclusion. The chapter begins with an introduction and summarizes the identified themes,

interpreting them within existing knowledge. Limitations are addressed, followed by discussions on the implications for policy, practice, and further research. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary.

Chapter Summary

In accordance with the social work principle of social justice, it is ethically imperative for social workers to confront and address social injustices, advocating for societal change to enhance human well-being, particularly for those who are vulnerable and oppressed (NASW, 2017). Social workers are crucial in combating discrimination, fostering awareness, and facilitating access to essential resources (NASW, 2017). Black women involved in the criminal legal system often find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, resulting in significant marginalization. This research study, rooted in Black feminist thought, aims to bolster the self-worth of these women, empower them to challenge oppression, and foster resilience by identifying strategies to navigate oppressive systems. This study amplifies their voices by employing qualitative research methods to delve into their lived experiences, shedding light on the need to empower this marginalized population.

The results from the research inquiry in this study proposes three overarching themes. Regarding the intersecting experiences of Black women upon reentry, the study highlights (a) encounters with identity-based injustices; (b) difficulties in securing housing; and (c) confronting health-related challenges. Concerning the empowerment of Black women in surmounting post-incarceration barriers upon reentry, the study identified (a) drawing strength from faith; (b) embracing self-reliance, determination, and goal-oriented motivation; and (c) gaining empowerment and support from family, organizations, and communities.

Furthermore, the findings suggest implications for reentry reform, proposing practical intervention strategies and programs tailored to the needs of reentry women, especially Black women. The research implications allow scholars to expand upon this study, offering a deeper understanding of the reentry journey among Black women and developing novel insights. In essence, comprehending the distinct obstacles women encounter and empowering them can transform societal perspectives, ultimately fostering more equitable treatment for Black women entangled in the criminal justice system.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter thoroughly examines literature and theories pertinent to Black women's distinct challenges upon reentry into the community following incarceration. The chapter begins with an exploration of stereotypes and controlling images of Black women in the United States. It delves into the criminalization and violence that disproportionately affect Black women, both within the criminal justice system and in broader society. These disparities exacerbate the complexities of reentry for Black women, thereby amplifying the challenges they encounter. The review concludes with an overview of the philosophical and theoretical framework that underpins this study.

Literature Review

Stereotypes and Controlling Images

During the era of slavery, numerous stereotypical misconceptions about Black women emerged, many of which persist today, shaping perceptions that label them as a societal issue (Jacobs, 2017; Middlemass, 2019). These stereotypes portray Black women as promiscuous, morally deficient, excessively aggressive, and inclined towards violence, leading to their unjust criminalization, mistrust, and mistreatment within legal and societal realms (Jacobs, 2017; Middlemass, 2019).

Literature from the slave era depicted Black women as "Jezebel," lacking control over their sexual desires, a notion that was used to justify rape (Jacobs, 2017, p. 47). Black women

were depicted as inherently suspicious and untrustworthy, in contrast to the innocent and virtuous portrayal of their white counterparts, perpetuating the view of Black women as inherently criminal and lacking credibility. Stereotypes such as that later emerged, including the "welfare queen" further stigmatized Black women with multiple children, contrasting with the praise given to white women for fulfilling traditional domestic roles (Middlemass, 2019, p. 151). The myth of Black women as aggressive and masculine arose from the strenuous labor endured by both Black men and women during slavery, leading to their equal exposure to punishment (Jacobs, 2017, p. 51). This belief continues with the portrayal of Black women as "Colored Amazons," unnaturally strong and prone to violent outbursts (Jacobs, 2017, p. 51). These historical racist stereotypes persist beyond slavery, depicting Black women as unworthy and problematic (Middlemass, 2019).

Criminalization and Violence

Racial stereotypes that originated during the era of slavery continue in American society, particularly impacting Black women by subjecting them to criminalization and heightened surveillance by law enforcement. Black women face a disproportionately high prevalence of police victimization, ranging from physical violence to neglect (Fedina, et al., 2017). Moreover, Black women are often unfairly perceived as the instigators in cases of intimate partner violence, leading to improper treatment by law enforcement officers, sometimes resulting in fatal outcomes for the Black woman (Crenshaw, et al., 2015).

Instances of violent policing against Black women are alarmingly common. Research by Edwards and colleagues (2019) found that Black women face a 40% higher risk of being fatally shot by police compared to their white counterparts. Crenshaw and colleagues (2015) emphasize that these incidents are often contextualized within a framework of racial profiling and the use of

lethal force by law enforcement. Tragically, many encounters with law enforcement end fatally for Black women due to the combined impact of racial stereotypes shaping officers' reactions towards them (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Stereotypes portraying Black women as "superhuman" and able to tolerate pain further compound the issue, leading to misguided perceptions of Black women as inherently problematic, even when they are victims in need of protection (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 7).

Beth E. Richie is a scholar and activist known for her renowned work on topics such as violence against women and the experience of Black women within the criminal justice system. Beth E. Richie's Violence Matrix (refer to Figure 1) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted violence experienced by Black women in the United States such as physical violence, structural violence, economic violence, and symbolic violence (Richie, 2012). This matrix underscores the diverse contexts in which Black women encounter abuse, encompassing interpersonal violence as well as structural violence perpetuated by institutional systems such as the criminal legal system. The consequences of violent victimization are profound, disproportionately affecting minority communities (Richie, 2022). The violence matrix is a tool that explains how Black women encounter interconnected and overlapping forms of mistreatment across different spheres of their lives.

In the household sphere, Black women experience heightened rates of direct assault and intimate partner violence compared to women of other races (Richie, 2012; 2022). In the community, they endure sexual victimization, aggression, and harassment, with 75% reporting some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime, often accompanied by threats, public shame, and humiliation (Richie, 2012; 2022). Within the social sphere, Black women confront pervasive stereotypes labeling them as "lazy, loud, and promiscuous," resulting in widespread disrespect

and mistreatment from both community members and authorities (Alang, et al., 2023, p. S32; Richie, 2022). Moreover, reliance on public assistance exposes Black women to increased discrimination and humiliation as they navigate state-controlled institutions such as public assistance agencies and the criminal legal system (Richie, 2022).

Figure 1

Beth E. Richie's Violence Matrix

The Violence Matrix

The Violence Matrix	Physical Assault	Sexual Assault	Social Disenfranchisement
Intimate Households	1. Direct physical assaults by intimate partners or household members, victim retaliation	2. Sexual aggression by intimate partners or household members	3. Emotional abuse and manipulation by intimate partners or household members, forced use of drugs and alcohol, isolation, economic abuse
Community	4. Assaults by neighbors, lack of bystander intervention, availability of weapons	5. Sexual harassment, acquaintance rape, gang rape, trafficking into the sex industry	6. Degrading comments, hostile neighborhood conditions, hostile or unresponsive school and work environments, residential segregation, lack of social capital, threat of violence
Social Sphere	7. Stranger assault, state violence (such as police), lack of gun control policies	8. Stranger rape, coerced sterilization, unwanted exposure to pornography	9. Negative media images, denial of significance of victimization, degrading encounters with religious institutions and public agencies, victim blaming, lack of affordable housing, lack of employment and health care, mistrust of public agencies, poverty

Challenges of Reentry

In recent decades, the United States (U.S.) has witnessed a notable increase in the population of incarcerated women. While incarceration rates for males decreased by 9% from 2008 to 2018, they increased by 15% for females, as reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Zeng, 2020). Within the criminal justice system, women often endure trauma stemming from histories of child abuse and intimate partner violence (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Langan & Pelissier, 2001; Richie, 2001). Transitioning from incarceration to community reintegration proves complex for women, compounded by past abuse and intricate healthcare needs related to menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause (Mignon, 2016).

Research underscores that women face unique challenges hindering their successful reintegration. Gender-specific needs related to substance use, mental health, and victimization complicate women's pathways to success (Palmer, et al., 2015; Scroggins & Malley, 2010). Women offenders exhibit higher rates of substance use and mental health issues compared to both male offenders and the general population (Palmer, et al., 2015). Approximately 70% of incarcerated women meet the criteria for substance use disorder, while a similar proportion also experience mental health problems (Bronson, et al., 2017; James & Glaze, 2006). Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm are prevalent among women, while substance use problems, including crack cocaine and opiates, often stems from self-medication to cope with past trauma (Palmer, et al., 2015).

Health disparities among recently released women are well-documented in the literature (Brown, 2010; Palmer, et al., 2015; Richie, 2001; Visher & Bakken, 2014). Visher and Bakken's (2014) study on the reentry challenges of women with mental health issues revealed that many women often experienced concurrent physical and substance abuse problems, along with higher

rates of difficulty securing housing and employment compared to others. Moreover, women were less likely to receive support from family, necessitating public assistance. Navigating complex barriers to reentry, women must also fulfill mandated obligations such as employment, healthcare/mental health treatment, housing, transportation, and education (Richie, 2001; Scroggins & Malley, 2010; Wesely & Dewey, 2018).

Intimate partner violence, abuse, and substance use victimization are associated with women's involvement in criminal offending (Scroggins & Malley, 2010). Additionally, frequent incarcerations among women are linked to higher levels of unmet healthcare needs, homelessness, and poor mental health compared to those with fewer incarcerations (James & Glaze, 2006; Lambdin, et al., 2018). Upon completing their sentences, women reenter their communities burdened by the stigma of a criminal record, past trauma, and limited access to resources (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Richie, 2001). Many women were primary caregivers before incarceration, adding the challenge of balancing parental responsibilities with reintegration efforts (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Richie, 2001).

The history of mass incarceration within Black communities has shaped the experiences of Black women. The mass incarceration of Black men often leaves Black women as heads of households and primary caregivers before incarceration (Brown, 2010). Upon release, these mothers confront simultaneous challenges of regaining custody of their children, securing housing, and finding employment while complying with mandated treatment programs, further complicating their reentry process (Brown, 2010; Richie, 2001). Navigating these competing demands from various agencies in different locations sparks feelings of apprehension, fear, and compounded stress, exacerbating their challenges. The unique circumstances faced by Black women in reentry highlight the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic factors.

Situated as double minorities at the intersection of race and gender, Black women experience heightened marginalization (Christian & Thomas, 2009). Discriminatory stereotypes already burden Black women are exacerbated with their criminal histories upon reintegration into society (Collins, 2000; Garcia-Hallett, 2019). Media portrayals of Black women as sexually promiscuous contribute to their facing sexual harassment in male-dominated, “felony-friendly” workplaces, perpetuating the notion that they are sexually available and subordinate (Collins, 2000; Garcia-Hallett, 2019). Moreover, Black women grappling with issues such as high unemployment, addiction, poverty, and violence prior to incarceration create additional hurdles as they attempt to reintegrate due to their criminal records (Brown, 2010).

Women of Color encounter substantial barriers to employment upon reentry into society, primarily due to their triple minority status as women, women of Color, and former felons. A study conducted by Sered and Norton-Hawk (2021), which followed previously incarcerated women in Massachusetts, revealed that Black women faced challenges in securing employment due to their racial identity. One respondent, who had undergone training and applied for numerous positions, stated, "No one will hire an angry Black woman with a doo-rag" (Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2021, p. 180), underscoring the impact of negative stereotypes on Black women's reintegration.

Furthermore, Garcia-Hallett's (2019) study on the reentry experiences of women of Color shed light on the employment difficulties faced by this demographic. Women identifying as African American, Hispanic, West Indian, and Black report struggles in securing employment with a felony conviction, particularly in industries deemed "felony-friendly" but dominated by men. These jobs, often manual labor roles, subjected them to heightened risks of sexual harassment and treatment as sexual objects. Participants noted the pervasive preference for male

hires in such roles, necessitating them to work harder to be considered for employment opportunities.

Upon reentry into society, formerly incarcerated individuals, Black women, encounter a significant hurdle due to the lack of affordable housing (Lopez & Pasko, 2017). Black women, already burdened by housing discrimination stemming from stereotypes such as "Crack Mothers" and "Welfare Queens," face further challenges and stigma, limiting their housing options due to biases among landlords and housing managers (Brown, 2010; Garcia-Hallett, 2019).

Compounding these difficulties are federal laws like the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which impose restrictions on individuals with drug convictions, disqualifying them from housing subsidies. Additionally, public housing agencies are permitted to deny and evict individuals involved in any drug-related activity. These specific housing laws further oppress individuals with criminal records by prohibiting them from obtaining housing (Brown, 2010; Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Lopez & Pasko, 2017). Research indicates that housing instability exacerbates mental health issues, particularly given the heightened surveillance by law enforcement (Garcia-Hallett, 2019). In Garcia-Hallett's (2019) interviews with recently released women of Color, participants revealed heightened exposure to law enforcement, which contributed to the deterioration of their mental health conditions (Garcia-Hallett, 2019, p. 471).

Philosophical and Theoretical Framework

This section will discuss the philosophical and theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Hermeneutic Phenomenology is the grounding philosophical framework because it aims to understand a person's lived experience. The intersectionality theory considers the various social categories, such as race, gender, and ex-offender status, integral to Black women's reentry identities. Black feminist thought theory seeks to empower Black women by highlighting the

creative ways Black women engage in activism and empowerment while faced with intersecting systems of domination.

Grounding Philosophical Framework

The philosophical framework for this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology's primary focus is understanding a person's lived experience to discover and describe the conscious life-world experiences as it is defined from the individual's perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2011; Neubauer, et al., 2019). Hermeneutic Phenomenology, created by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is "grounded on the belief that knowledge-making is possible through subjective experience and insights" (Kafle, 2011, p. 194). The hermeneutic school of phenomenology allows for a preconceived understanding of the phenomenon, which permits the use of other theoretical frameworks in generating new knowledge.

Intersectionality Theory

Underlying Assumptions

Coined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw a law scholar, intersectionality emphasizes a need to consider race and gender as interconnected grounds of identity when working with women of Color. Crenshaw states, "the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the women's race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (Crenshaw, 1991 p. 1244). Crenshaw highlights that Black women face discrimination in racism and sexism, placing them in multiple subordinated groups. Black women face structural racial discrimination in employment and housing while burdened with poverty, childcare responsibilities, and lack of job skills (Crenshaw, 1991).

The lack of acknowledgment of racism and patriarchy's interconnected burdens further disempowers Black women whose experiences differ from White women and Black men.

Crenshaw documents the political dilemma faced by Black women by stating,

The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252).

Hill-Collins and Bilge (2020) emphasize the importance of intersectionality as a framework for analyzing public policies within the criminal justice system. This framework navigates complex and contradictory relationships among community members, government entities, and corporate stakeholders. They also illustrate how intersectionality reveals the interconnectedness of human rights violations with social inequalities, leading to violating prisoner rights and leading to phenomena like mass incarceration. Intersectionality provides insights into factors perpetuating disadvantages and criminalization among heavily marginalized populations. By employing intersectionality as an analytical tool, one can see the mistreatment of incarcerated individuals, discriminatory practices in law enforcement, and increased surveillance of marginalized groups. Ultimately, Hill-Collins and Bilge (2020) underscore how intersectionality exposes intersecting repressive forces that promote injustice, emphasizing the necessity of understanding intersectionality to develop solutions.

Major Tenets

There are two essential tenets to this theory: First is recognizing that an individual's social identity in multiple categories is interdependent. Intersectionality "highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed"

(Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). Crenshaw (1991) discusses how race and gender mix cannot be fully understood by examining each category separately. Crenshaw's (1991) exploration of Black womanhood in the intersections of Blackness and womanhood shows that one's belongingness in intersecting categories results in experiences that differ from those in the specific categories. Crenshaw (1991) uses the example of women in a shelter who share similarities of being underemployed or unemployed and burdened by childcare responsibilities and needing different intervention strategies due to Black women being further marginalized by racial discrimination when applying for employment and housing. This example emphasizes this need to account for the intersecting categories for those faced with compounding obstacles.

The second central tenet is the recognition of micro-level social identity intersection with macro-level structures resulting in inequalities. For example, Black women having a history of being portrayed as hyper-sexual beings on a social level influence conviction on a legislative level. The social discrimination of Black women depicted as sexualized beings present them as less believable in sexual assault cases. This misconception of being seen as bad women (whores) who cannot be raped results in lesser convictions and prison terms for their cases (Crenshaw, 1991).

Applicability to the Phenomenon

The intersectionality theory is relevant in this study of Black women's reentry post-incarceration because it indicates that various social categories such as race, gender, and ex-offender status are interconnected, causing further disadvantages for Black women (Brown, 2010). Black women return to the community already faced with multilayer forms of oppression due to being double minorities and having an added criminal record burden. A criminal record grants access to carcel citizenship, resulting in life-long labels and stigma shaping how

individuals with a criminal history engage in society (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 533). Miller and Stuart (2017) define carceral citizenship as beginning when an individual is convicted, causing them to be distinguished and restricted from the duties and benefits of citizens without criminal records (p. 533). Carceral citizens are subjected to "debt to society", leading them to live an alternate legal reality (Miller & Stuart, 2017). These multilayer identities further complex the challenges Black women face as they transition to the community, which is relevant to consider in understanding the uniqueness of their plight.

Black Feminist Thought Theory

Underlying Assumptions

Formulated by Patricia Hill-Collins, Black feminist thought theory "places African American women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis" (Collins, 2000, p. vii). Collins (2000) provides examples from everyday life and research highlighting the empowered womanhood Black women display to resist power and control systems. The first assumption is that Black feminist thought theory is produced by Black women (Collins, 1986). Black women's subjective knowledge as standpoint epistemology (Collins, 2000).

The second assumption is that Black Feminist thought theory acknowledges that there are commonly shared points among Black women due to their identity. Black women who recognize the common standpoint engage in collective initiatives that promote conscious raising and empowerment to liberate Black Women across different intersecting identities (Few, 2007).

The third assumption is that all Black women may not be aware of the shared standpoint, and it is Black women intellectual's roles to elucidate it to Black women (Collins, 1986). Black feminist thought theory bolsters Black female-centered facts and theories to produce critical consciousness by Black women for Black women and others.

Major Tenets

The Black feminist thought theory emphasizes Black women's self-definition and self-evaluation. "Self-definition involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood self-evaluation stresses the content of Black women's self-definitions-namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images" (Collins, 1986, p. 16). Black feminist thought theory emphasizes self-definition and self-evaluation as acts to resist mainstream interpretations to maintain oppressive power over Black women and allows for "rejecting internalized psychological oppression" (Collins, 1986, p. 18).

The Black feminist thought theory emphasizes the importance of Black women's culture. Black women's culture is significant in highlighting the creative ways Black women remained conscious and engaged in activism while faced with intersecting power systems. Black feminist thought theory explores and uncovers Black women's innovative ways of coping with oppression.

Applicability to the Phenomenon

Black feminist thought theory seeks to empower Black women by highlighting the creative ways Black women engage in activism while faced with intersecting systems of domination. Black feminist thought theory explores the daily acts of resistance Black women positioned within two subordinate groups displayed to survive and thrive. Black feminist thought theory highlighting how Black women overcame adversities is necessary in this study to understand how Black women experience empowerment to overcome barriers and achieve permanent reentry.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the literature and theoretical frameworks underpinning the dissertation study. It presented the key principles that inform these theories and their application to the phenomenon. The following chapter will delve into the methodology utilized to conduct the present study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's methodological framework, including the researcher's design, study rationale, sample characteristics, recruitment methods, and data analysis techniques. The chapter also discusses the practical execution of data collection methods and analytical approaches to highlight the methodological journey undertaken in this study.

Given Black women's compounded challenges due to their intersectional positionality, this study aims to gain insight into their experiences as returning citizens after incarceration by using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Through interviews with previously incarcerated Black women, this research seeks to illuminate the nuanced aspects of their reintegration into the community, considering race and gender as interconnected facets of their identities. Understanding these experiences could inform evidence-based practices and interventions, fostering successful reentry for Black women with criminal histories. The study's findings could also contribute to reentry policy and practice explicitly tailored to Black women, challenging stereotypes and promoting empowerment in overcoming barriers post-imprisonment. The research questions—"What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry?" and "How do Black women experience empowerment in overcoming post-imprisonment barriers?"—serve as focal points, driving the investigation forward.

Rationale for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative methodology that integrates insights from three primary theoretical frameworks: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, et al., 2009). The first major influence is phenomenology, which is deeply concerned with unraveling participants' lived experiences, aiming to uncover conscious life-world experiences as perceived from an individual's unique standpoint. Rather than focusing on theory generation, phenomenology prioritizes exploring lived experiences and their significance (Hays & Singh, 2011; Neubauer, et al., 2019). Rooted in the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), phenomenology centers on understanding consciousness and direct experience (Neubauer, et al., 2019).

The strength of the phenomenological research approach lies on its emphasis to describing, rather than explaining, phenomena from the participants' perspectives. This approach ensures that participants' voices are authentically represented, fostering an understanding of their experiences. The authentic nature of the data allows for a nuanced exploration of individual meanings. The phenomenological method comprises two primary approaches: descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology. While both approaches aim to describe experiences, they diverge significantly in their methods.

Transcendental phenomenology, led by Husserl, focuses on describing lived experiences, aiming to grasp the essence of phenomena (Neubauer, et al., 2019). Conversely, hermeneutic phenomenology, headed by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), aims to reveal and interpret meaning in the individual's lived experience with the world and how the participants make sense of the relationship between the meaning of their experiences within the world (lived experiences) (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018; Neubauer, et al., 2019).

A significant distinction between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology lies in the researcher's role. While Husserl advocated for researchers to reflect on their experiences before commencing a phenomenological study to identify perceptions and assumptions about the phenomenon, Heidegger emphasized acknowledging the researcher's past experiences and interest in conducting the study. Heidegger believed that the researcher's knowledge and perspectives should inform the interpretation of the experienced phenomenon. Heidegger's ontological question revolves around human existence within practical activities and relationships, integral to how humans perceive and interpret the world (Smith, et al., 2009). He proposes that humans are born into a world that already exists, with objects, social connections, and relationships, rather than creating their reality from scratch (Smith, et al., 2009). Furthermore, human interpretations of their lived experiences and activities are subjective. Lastly, human experiences are dynamic and relational, influenced by perspectives, interactions, timing, and overall engagement with the world.

The hermeneutic circle, the second major influence of IPA, entails dissecting the transcript into parts to discern their connection to the phenomenon and the researcher's subjectivities (Cohen et al., 2000; Peat et al., 2019). According to Cohen and colleagues (2000), each interview is examined individually, followed by an analysis of the entire data set to grasp the interplay between the individual and the broader context. Engaging in the hermeneutic circle fosters a renewed understanding of the phenomenon and allows for the integration of other theoretical frameworks, leading to the emergence of novel insights (Peoples, 2021). By utilizing the hermeneutic circle, researchers underscore the significance of reflexivity in acknowledging and addressing their assumptions and biases. This reflexivity is demonstrated through practices such as journaling and member-checking to clarify participants' understanding and uncover the

phenomenon's essence. The hermeneutic theory of interpretation was employed for this study because it emphasizes acknowledging the researcher's assumptions and biases before data analysis. Hermeneutic phenomenology also enables the researcher's identity, intersectionality theory, and Black Feminist thought theory to be incorporated into the interpretation process to create a new understanding (Smith, et al., 2009).

Idiography, the third major influence of IPA, emphasizes its unique qualities and commitment to an individual's perspective in a specific context. It delves into the depth of analysis to detail the complexities of individual narratives, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of their subjective realities (Smith, et al., 2009). Influenced by idiography, IPA researchers uncover the richness of participants through a combination of questioning and empathy, termed "understanding" (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 33). Informed by idiography, an individual's circumstances in a given context can be analyzed and clarified to facilitate comprehension.

Given its emphasis on understanding lived experiences, the IPA method emerges as a fitting approach for this study of the reentry experiences of Black women. This method enables a focused examination of participants' transition experiences post-incarceration from their perspectives. By centering on the voices and perspectives of Black women, promising to illuminate the subjectiveness of their reentry journeys.

Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

Reflexivity is paramount in qualitative research to acknowledge one's influence and assumptions (Hays & Singh, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By embracing reflexivity, the credibility and validity of research findings are bolstered, ensuring that the study is authentic (Hays & Singh, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). While my past experiences and identity informed my research pursuits, I remained mindful of the potential for bias and committed to

representing the voices of Black women's reentry with integrity. Understanding the importance of reflexivity, I intend to navigate my shared similarities with the participants while recognizing and respecting the uniqueness of their experiences. My goal is to produce research that authentically captures and amplifies the voices of Black women in reentry.

As the investigator of this study, my responsibilities involved conducting interviews with participants to delve into their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives while safeguarding the authenticity of their lived experiences. I prioritized reflexivity from the dissertation prospectus until the study's conclusion, maintaining continuous awareness of my biases and perspectives. I crafted a positionality statement to articulate my stance (see positionality statement below). A positionality statement serves as a researcher's acknowledgment in qualitative research, disclosing their background, biases, perspectives, and other factors that could shape their interpretation of data or their position on the research topic. This statement is significant within IPA, as it aligns with the researcher's shared insights and perspectives, guiding the interpretation of the phenomenon (Smooth, et al., 2009). Following each interview, I engaged in reflective journaling to capture insights and reactions. Additionally, I participated in peer debriefing sessions with dissertation committee members throughout the research process. Next, I describe both reflexivity processes.

Regular reflexive sessions after each interview provided valuable opportunities for reflection on participant interactions. Following each interview, I engaged in both audio and written reflexivity. I recorded audios to journal my thoughts, feelings, and reflections, enabling me to understand each individual's experience comprehensively. Through this journaling, I engaged in self-reflection and self-awareness, documenting my perceptions, interpretations, and interactions with participants and noting their experiential similarities and differences. Audio

journaling also facilitated emotional processing, particularly given the sensitivity of the studied phenomenon. Some participants became emotional during the interviews. Audio journaling was instrumental in allowing me to process these emotions efficiently, manage stress, and reduce potential burnout throughout the research process. Furthermore, journaling summarized interview insights.

I also maintained a written journal using a Word document. Journaling serves as a method to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research and address ethical dilemmas (Hays & Singh, 2011). Engaging in reflexive journaling ensures accountability, honesty, and trust-building. Through this practice, the researcher can document internal thought processes and understand their influence on the research process. The written journal provided additional context and insights into the collected data. This approach facilitated the development of insights, patterns exploration, and connections identification. It also served as a detailed record of my research activities and generated ideas. I documented reactions and insights throughout the research process and recorded emerging ideas and implications for practice and further research.

Peer debriefing is my second form of reflexivity. It played a crucial role in upholding the integrity of the study. This involved discussions with dissertation committee members not directly involved in the research, focusing on methods, data analysis, and findings. These members were experts in qualitative research and had extensive experience working with individuals involved in the criminal legal system. From the early stages of developing this study, peer debriefing was integral in ensuring that ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed, given the participants' background in the criminal legal system. The guidance from these experts was instrumental in foreseeing potential ethical challenges that might emerge throughout the research process. These dilemmas encompassed upholding strict confidentiality and privacy

regarding participants' narratives and identifying details (Hays & Singh, 2011). Additionally, there was a need to remain mindful of the potential emotional distress the interviews could provoke to prevent re-traumatizing the participants. Peer debriefing played a pivotal role in shaping interview inquiries, crafting consent documents, and offering guidance when encountering hurdles in participant recruitment. Their support proved crucial in mitigating the pressures associated with conducting the research. Moreover, these experts provided essential quality assurance by providing feedback on the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The methodology experts' suggestions and feedback were instrumental in refining data analysis techniques. The expert and I met virtually for sessions to discuss the analysis steps together. Overall, the engagement in peer debriefing significantly contributed to the quality assurance of the study and facilitated my professional growth.

Researcher's Positionality

My personal experiences hold a significant influence on my interest in this phenomenon. My motivation to delve into research involving Black women within the criminal justice system stems from my professional background working with individuals involved in the criminal justice system and my identity as a Black woman. With several years of professional engagement as a social worker in various roles within correctional institutions and community settings, my practical experience is pivotal in conducting research within this demographic. I must acknowledge that my past interactions with this population may lead to bias as I undertake research endeavors.

Furthermore, my identity as a Black woman profoundly shapes my inclination toward researching Black women entangled in the criminal justice system. The shared identity as a double minority intensifies my commitment to advocating for equitable treatment for this

demographic. However, it is crucial to recognize that while I share similarities with these women, our experiences and perspectives may differ significantly. Hence, I aim to remain mindful of these parallels and effectively incorporate them into my research to accurately amplify Black women's voices reentering society.

Data Collection

Ethical Consideration

Before starting the research study, approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia. This approval is essential to ensure the researcher adheres to ethical guidelines when researching human subjects. Participants were provided with written informed consent, as detailed in the consent form (see Appendix C). The informed consent document outlines the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, benefits, privacy, and confidentiality measures. Participants were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary, and they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalty.

Recognizing potential confidentiality concerns, especially among participants with criminal records, I prioritized privacy to foster openness and honesty in responses (Kawulich, 2005). For example, pseudonyms were used to anonymize participant information, ensuring confidentiality. Moreover, participants were assured that identifiable study results would only be shared with project personnel, and such disclosure of personal information would occur only with the participant's written consent, except as required by law. These measures upheld ethical standards and safeguarded participant confidentiality throughout the research process.

Three steps were taken to protect participants' well-being. First, as the researcher, I am a trained and experienced licensed clinical social worker who conducted all interviews. Second,

the consent form provided each participant with the contact phone number of the reentry agency staff member and encouraged them to follow their mental health provider if the discussion prompted any unsettling feelings. Third, at the end of the interview, the interviewer ensured there were no signs of distress in the interviewer's tone and verbally checked in with them before concluding the interview. Safeguarding participants' well-being is necessary to uphold ethical standards and minimize harm. Ensuring the well-being of participants promotes trust between researcher and participant, resulting in high-quality research outcomes (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kawulich, 2005).

Recruitment of Participants

Inclusion criteria for participants included (a) women who identify as Black (people of African descent, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and other Black-non-Hispanic ethnicities); [Individuals who identify as both Black and Hispanic did not meet the criteria because they also identify as Latino/Hispanic. The inclusion of identifying with Hispanic/Latino heritage distinguishes them from those who solely identify as Black.] (b) being at least 18 years of age at the time of incarceration; (c) having been incarcerated for at least six months; (d) being released from prison or jail for at least six months; (e) and have not been re-incarcerated since their release from incarceration.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on the criteria outlined above. This method allowed me to purposefully choose individuals who met the requirements, resulting in a wealth of information about the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2011). The snowball sampling approach was also used as a convenience sampling strategy, where individuals who experienced reentry were asked if they knew others who met the inclusion criteria (Hays & Singh, 2011). The sample size was determined based on capturing in-depth findings, following the principle of "the

degree to which the research purpose is met" (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 172). Although the literature suggests a sample size of four to ten for Ph.D. projects, there exists a point of saturation where the researcher acknowledges "no new insights are forthcoming" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 101; Smith, et al., 2009, p.97). Out of the 17 participants, nine were considered for the analysis of this study (see "Data Analysis" below for a rationale). Each participant was given a \$25.00 Walmart gift card as a token of appreciation for taking part in the study.

Participants for this study were recruited through three channels. First, I contacted a nonprofit agency in Washington, D.C. The agency offers support to women transitioning home after incarceration, providing services such as transitional housing, release planning, health and wellness, HIV services, employment coaching, case management, family education, and emergency assistance. Additionally, the agency operates a Drop-In Center to address the immediate needs of clients and non-clients, as well as those with short-term requirements who may not need ongoing case management.

I contacted the executive director of the agency to discuss the research purpose, subsequently engaging with the research director to establish a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) between the agency and the researcher. Upon signing the MOU, the agency provided an official letter of support to facilitate participant recruitment. Recruitment efforts included distributing paper and electronic flyers (see Appendix B) at the Drop-In Center and office location and to staff members equipped to offer these materials to individuals meeting participant criteria.

Electronic recruitment targeted members of reentry organizations in Georgia and Washington D.C. I chose to focus on reentry agencies in Georgia because the University that approved the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is based there. Additionally, I targeted

Washington D.C. due to my existing contacts with individuals working in reentry in that area, as well as the fact that the agency with which I signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was located there. These organizations serve women reentering society post-incarceration. Third, participants were recruited through referrals from existing participants, an approach integrated into the interview process (see Appendix A).

The study flyers disseminated to potential participants contained inclusion criteria and the researcher's contact information, including email and Google Voice number, for interested individuals to initiate contact. Prospective participants expressed their interest either via email or phone, where I initially assessed their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. Upon confirmation of eligibility, I inquired about the participant's preferred communication platform, offering options of either phone or Zoom.

Data Collection Method

After participants were determined to be eligible for the study, a mutually convenient date and time for the participant and I were scheduled for the interview, with the participant receiving a copy of the informed consent form beforehand. Among the 17 participants, I conducted six interviews via phone and 11 via Zoom. At the beginning of the interview, participants were briefed on the study's purpose and interview procedures and read the informed consent form, including consent for recording. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants before proceeding with the interviews. The interviews were recorded via a digital voice recorder. Otter.ai transcription software was used to create a transcript of each interview.

The interview format for this study was semi-structured virtual zoom and phone interviews. Semi-structured interviews give the interviewer a general guide, allowing the interviewee to lead the discussion (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allow

the researcher to gain clarity and understanding through follow-up and probing questions. Semi-structured interviews provided a flexible framework, allowing the opportunity to delve deeper into participants' experiences.

I crafted the initial interview questions for this study based on the interpretative phenomenological research method and Black feminist thought theory (Collins, 2000). Following the question development, a pilot study was conducted involving three clients from the partnered agency who met the study's inclusion criteria and were included in the final sample of this study. The feedback from these participants during the pilot study was used to refine the interview protocol. The final version comprised 19 main questions, followed by 15 demographic questions.

Within this protocol, five questions were specifically designed to delve into the "essence" of the participants' experiences using the IPA approach. For instance, questions like "Describe your reentry journey thus far" and "How has your identity as a Black woman influenced your reentry journey?" encouraged participants to provide detailed and descriptive responses.

Additionally, the interview protocol incorporated six questions aligned with the empowerment principles outlined in the Black Feminist Thought theory (Collins, 2000). Questions such as "What internally motivates you during your reentry journey?" and "How do you manage stress throughout this reentry process?" aimed to foster personal expression and emotional outlet, reflecting the empowerment aspect emphasized in the Black feminist thought theory. Six of the questions were exploratory, aimed at delving deeper into the participant's reentry experiences. The remaining two questions sought feedback on the research study, specifically asking about how participants heard about the study and if they had anyone they would like to refer for participation.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the interviews, active member checking was implemented to validate interpretations and ensure alignment with participants' experiences. Member checking bolsters data validity and credibility, aligning with the methodology, as noted by Marshall and Rossman (2016). Member checking entails sharing data and interpretations with participants to ensure shared understanding and validation by capturing and honoring the lived experiences of the women in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This process also empowers participants, recognizing them as experts in their lived experiences and significant contributors to the research endeavor. By involving participants in member checking, the study's credibility is bolstered through invaluable feedback directly from the participant, thereby enhancing the quality of the study results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015). Member checking fosters trustworthiness and mutual respect between the researcher and participants by promoting transparency and facilitating collaborative engagement (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015). It signifies a commitment to openness, underlining the importance of respecting participants' perspectives and insights throughout the research process. The data collection method comprised semi-structured virtual and phone interviews, supplemented by member checking to enhance data validity and credibility. The approach prioritized participants' perspectives and insights while maintaining ethical standards and researcher-participant rapport.

Data Analysis

Below is a detailed breakdown of the data analysis process for conducting this IPA study. Before executing these steps, I sought guidance from a qualitative methods expert experienced in IPA methodologies to gain valuable insights and feedback. The following steps outline my

approach to identifying themes within each participant's narrative, aiming to comprehend their subjective experiences as they reintegrate into their community following incarceration.

For this dissertation study, the principal investigator included only nine participants. This choice stemmed from the fact that among the 17 individuals interviewed for the study, nine had been released within the past decade of the collection of interviews. This detail holds significance because, in 2008, the Second Chance Act was enacted into law. The Second Chance Act facilitates federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide reentry services such as employment assistance, healthcare treatment, and housing support, all geared towards enhancing reentry (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2018). The Federal Interagency Reentry Council, established in 2011, advocates for policies and programs that link returning citizens with educational and employment opportunities and ensure access to healthcare and secure housing (The National Reentry Resource Center). These councils and initiatives are crucial in reducing barriers to employment and housing and creating avenues to support reentry efforts through collaborative case plans.

As these programs expanded and collaborative case plans were implemented, regulations were put into effect, alleviating some of the challenges faced by individuals released from incarceration over a decade ago (Second Chance Act of 2008, 2007). Focusing on the nine recently released participants allows for a more current exploration of the reentry landscape, catering to the needs of those who will be released soon. I want to express my sincerest gratitude to the other eight participants who generously shared their reentry journeys for the study. A separate exploration of their experiences is forthcoming.

Data Analysis Steps

Smith and colleagues (2009) established five steps for IPA: reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, and looking for patterns across cases. The terminology in IPA has recently changed; this is documented in Smith and Nizza's (2021) book *Essentials of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. The steps have remained the same, but the terminologies have changed (Starr, 2022). The emergent theme is now the experiential theme; the Superordinate theme is now the Personal Experiential Theme (PET); and the Master Theme is now the Group Experiential Theme (GET) (Starr, 2022).

In Step 1 of the data analysis process, I engaged in data familiarization and initial noting. This involved thoroughly reviewing the audio recordings and transcripts, immersing myself in the content and comprehensively understanding the data. Utilizing memoing techniques, I notated my observations while exploring the data. I created a Microsoft Word document for each participant, where I compiled the interview questions and recorded noteworthy insights derived from the data. This included highlighting interesting points, significant quotes, and any elements that stood out as important based on the data.

Additionally, as I actively listened to the interviews and read through the transcripts, I summarized the participants' responses to the initial interview questions within these documents. This process involved capturing explicit meanings, identifying main ideas, and noting critical points reported by the participants. Moreover, I documented direct quotations that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. The result of the steps mentioned above was a Word document containing memos and summarized responses for each participant, which served as a resource throughout the stages of analysis.

During Step 2 of the data analysis process, I closely engaged with the participants' perspectives, as revealed in the transcripts, to understand their lived experiences. Employing this approach, I sought to illuminate the essence of their accounts, highlighting the significance of each line to capture its essence (Smith, et al., 2009). Experiential statements are expressions firmly rooted in the psychological essence of the participant (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 92). These statements emerge from the participants' authentic words and thoughts entwined with the analyst's interpretation. Experiential statements emerged from this stage as I condensed the data from the transcripts into succinct statements that directly address the research questions guiding this process: RQ1: Lived Intersectional Experiences - What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women reentry; RQ2: Experience Empowerment - How do they experience empowerment to overcome barriers during reentry? I started by opening the Word document containing the transcript. Going through it line by line, I highlighted the relevant text in Word, and inserted a comment in the comment box of the experiential statement.

In Step 3, I focused on identifying connections among experiential statements within each case. This resulted in the development of personal experiential themes (PET), which aimed to integrate these experiential statements to underscore the fundamental and captivating aspects of the participants' narratives. I transferred the experiential statements and relevant texts to another document by running a thematic analysis macro (Babbage & Terry, 2023). The thematic analysis macro is a coding process utilized within Microsoft Word software to move comment functions alongside the corresponding data to another Word document. (Babbage & Terry, 2023). I then crafted PETs by grouping similar experiential statements into a cluster and assigning a new title to that group (Starr & Smith, 2023).

The PETs were grouped through two analytic processes: abstraction and subsumption. The abstraction process groups similar themes and gives them a new name (Smith, et al., 2009; Starr, 2022). I applied abstraction methods to highlight an overarching theme by combining themes. For instance, if an experiential statement mentioned being "Supported by a reentry organization" and "Supported by the Christian community," these were categorized under *support systems*. The subsumption process happens when an experiential statement turns into a PET because it combines several related themes. (Smith, et al., 2009; Starr, 2022). For example, if an experiential statement mentioned experiencing "depression" and "mental breakdowns," these were categorized under *mental health challenges*. Furthermore, I incorporated insights from Black feminist thought theory to delve more deeply into the data. I refined themes to capture nuanced details, strengthening the study's rigor and reliability. This process entailed re-examining the PET themes to verify their alignment with the participants' experiences.

In Step 4, after completing the analysis of a single case and drafting a Personal Experience Transformation (PET) report, I purposefully take a step back for a minimum of 2 hours to engage in bracketing. Bracketing is a systematic process aimed at minimizing the influence of ideas derived from the analysis of the preceding case (Hays & Singh, 2011). By implementing this method, I create room for new themes to emerge organically during the analysis of each subsequent case (Smith, et al., 2009, p.100). Once the bracketing process is finalized, I repeat steps two through four, consistently applying these procedures to each successive case.

In Step 5 of the process, which involves identifying patterns across participants, Group Experiential Themes (GET) were constructed. The GET is formulated by linking PET across individual cases, creating themes representing the group's collective experiences (Smith, et al.,

2009; Starr,2022). To achieve this, I concentrated on the recurrence of PET within each participant's interviews, aiming to identify themes present in at least half or most of all interviews (Smith, et al., 2009; Starr, 2022). This examination of recurrence across cases was crucial for ensuring accuracy, particularly with a sizable sample size.

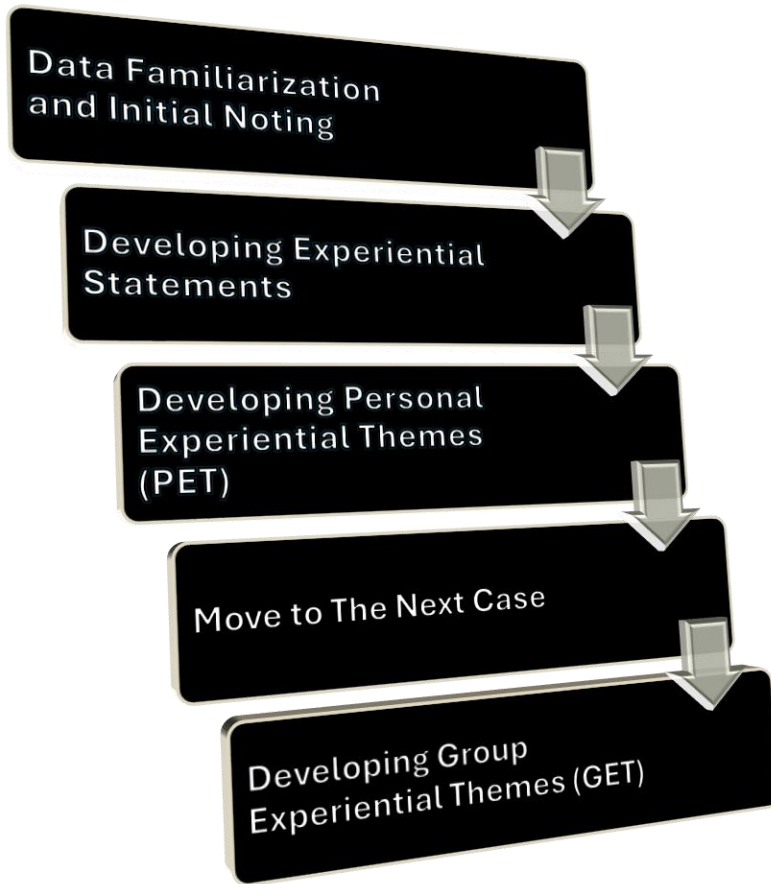
I also utilized numeration, which reflects the frequency of occurrences of the PET across the participants (Smith, et al., 2009). Utilizing numeration, I systematically tracked the frequency of theme recurrences across cases, facilitating the measurement of theme frequency (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 98). The process began with a numerical analysis of each PET frequency within each case, focusing on PET recurrence in over half of each participant's interviews (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 106). The data analysis flow chart is presented below (refer to Figure 2).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the researcher's plan and rationale for the study, including the selection of IPA methodology, research design, and data analysis steps. The researcher's role and handling biases and ethical considerations are discussed. Detailed information on participants, recruitment methods, and the investigative instrument used are provided. The next chapter will present the findings, offering a cohesive analytical narrative of the women's lived experiences.

Figure 2

Data Analysis Flow Chart



CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter delves into the research findings regarding the experiences of Black women following incarceration. An overarching summary of the study participants will be provided, followed by a detailed examination of each participant. The overarching research questions are "What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry?" and "How do Black women experience empowerment in overcoming post-imprisonment barriers?" This detailed analysis will introduce Personal Experiential Themes (PET), encapsulating the essence of their unique reentry experiences post-incarceration. To underscore the depth of their experiences from their perspectives, these PET themes will be accompanied by quotes extracted from the transcripts.

The chapter will conclude with the presentation of Group Experiential Themes (GET), which summarizes thematic patterns observed across all participants. These themes will be presented with supporting quotes. The essence of the phenomenon will also be reported. With the findings presented below, the reentry experiences of Black women are explored, as well as avenues for empowerment amid post-imprisonment challenges.

Participants' Descriptions

This study involved nine self-identified participants residing in the state of Maryland, Washington D.C., and Georgia. Of all participants, three lived independently, five lived with family, and one resided in a residential facility. Relationship statuses were diverse: three were

partnered/married, three were single, and three were divorced. Parental status varied, with two participants having no children and seven having between one and five children. Educational backgrounds also varied: six had some college education, two had high school diplomas, and one completed education up to the 11th grade. The current status of supervised release, which documents whether participants were on probation or parole, also showed variation. Participants' ages ranged from 32 to 71 years old. Employment situations also varied: two worked full-time, two part-time, three were self-employed, and two received financial assistance benefits. In terms of gender, all women self-identified as cisgender. Regarding sexual orientation, seven identified as heterosexual, one as lesbian, and one as bisexual.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Relationship Status	Education Level	Length of Incarceration	Year Released	Supervised Release	Employment Status
Jay	43	Married	HS Diploma	1 Year	2013	No	Full-Time
Gina	71	Single	College Graduate	10 Months	2021	No	Part-Time
Kay	55	Single	HS Diploma	24 Years	2018	No	Self-Employed
Nick	50	Divorced	College Graduate	5 Years	2022	Yes	Full-Time
Greece	32	Engaged	Some College	5 Years	2021	Yes	Part-Time
China	34	Divorced	College Graduate	2 Years	2020	Yes	Self-Employed
Ebony	50	Divorced	College Graduate	4.3 Years	2021	Yes	Self-Employed
Janee	41	Married	Eleventh Grade	6 Months	2019	No	Self-Employed
Domo	42	Single	Some College	7 Months	2016	No	Unemployed

All participants were at least 18 years old at the time of their incarceration. They were released within the past decade, with the latest release occurring in September 2022. The participants' charges upon incarceration were diverse, including property, violent crimes, drug-

related offenses, and public order infractions. Likewise, their lengths of incarceration ranged from six months to twenty-four years. Four participants were under supervised release at the time, while five were not under supervision.

Personal Experiential Themes

Jay

Jay is a 43-year-old Black woman who resides in Washington D.C. with her husband and seven children. She was released from jail in 2013. Jay reports a history of cycling in and out of jail before her release in 2013 due to her substance use addiction. Jay is in recovery, is receiving mental health therapy, and adhering to prescribed psychotropic medication. Reflecting on her reentry experience, Jay acknowledged the intertwined nature of her drug addiction and incarceration:

I was in and out of jail a lot But I guess it came with being addicted to drugs. So, it goes hand in hand. So once I stopped using I stopped going to jail, so, that was the solution for me. Stop using and stop going to jail.

Regarding the impact of her identity as a Black woman on her reentry journey, Jay highlighted significant challenges, particularly in securing employment:

So as a Black woman, no matter you know coming out of jail. Like I say it is not easy. It's one thing is it's hard to get a job, especially being a felon. I am a felon and it's very hard in the job.

Jay's empowerment throughout her reentry journey stems from her appreciation of freedom, peace of mind, and autonomy in daily choices. Her family, especially her husband and children, serve as sources of strength and motivation, providing emotional support and accountability:

And it's my freedom. Like I love my freedom. I love my peace of mind. I love to be able to go when I want to go a little bit and get up and go when I want to. I love to be able to eat what I want to I just love my freedom. my family just been able to hold them and kiss on them and love them and see them every day. He [Jay's Husband] stays on me. He makes sure that I'm always doing what I'm supposed to do.

Jay also draws strength from her faith:

I trust God I have a higher power. I believe in that I know that God it was nobody but Him that brought me this far because everybody does not make it this far.....So it was nothing but God that got me this far. And then I have a great support system.

In summary, Jay's reentry journey underscores the complex interplay between addiction, incarceration, identity, and empowerment, highlighting the importance of supportive relationships, and faith in navigating post-release challenges.

Table 2

Jay's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Transition challenges in motherhood and daily life	"You got to pay bills, you have to take your kids, you have to take care of you. You have to take care of your husband, you got to take care. You got to do things that that are normal."
Emotional challenges due to child separation and being incarcerated	"it was hard like my kids made me feel guilty that it was really hard to stop feeling guilty..... I'm very scared of the police"
Experiencing employment inequities	"it's been plenty of jobs and I really want it that I can get"
Commitment to sobriety in recovery	"I know that I won't go back to using drugs."
Empowerment and support from family	"And then I have a great support system"
Finding strength through faith in God	"I trust God I have a higher power. I believe in that I know that God it was nobody but him that brought me this far because everybody does not make it this far."
Appreciating autonomy and freedom	"I love my peace of mind. I love to be able to go when I want to go a little bit and get up and go when I want to. I love to be able to eat what I want to I just love my freedom"
Engagement in mental health treatment	"I have therapy. I take my medication"

Gina

Gina, a 71-year-old Black woman residing independently in Maryland, was released from a detention center in 2021. Reflecting on her reentry experience, Gina highlighted some adjustment difficulties, particularly in reintegrating into her church community. “Getting acclimated into the church environment was a bit different. Because....some of the responsibilities that I had...had been passed on to other people.” Despite these challenges, Gina's pre-incarceration establishment and ownership of property facilitated a smoother reentry process. She attributed her relatively favorable transition to her pre-existing social and economic standing prior to her incarceration:

I think I'm an anomaly. First of all, this was kind of late in my life because it's happened and I'm already established. [I] already own property and access to systems and society

Regarding empowerment, Gina emphasized her resilience in overcoming past adversities. She acknowledged the significance of her capacity to manage various challenges due to her lifetime of exposure to adversity; “To say I'm not trying to trivialize being detained and incarcerated. I'm just saying is that not very much you can put on my plate that I haven't had exposure to.” Her resilience underscores navigating the complexities associated with incarceration.

Table 3

Gina's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Strained relationship with sibling	“And she really said something that was very hurtful. She said something like I can't believe she's embarrassing family members or something”
Transition challenges in faith community	“getting acclimated into the church environment was a bit different.”
Support from family, organization, and community	“they paid for counseling, they pay the bills, they pay mortgage”
Self-reliance and determination to achieve goals	“I grew up being told there wasn't anything I could not do if I put my mind to it. So that's what I do”

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Empowerment through overcoming past adversities	“so not a whole lot you can show me as relates to the system that have not already been through and come out of”
Upholding a positive perspective	“Make sure you understand that life is worth living and don't dwell on the past but move forward.”
Finding strength through faith in God	“Always believe that God allowed something to handle this handle. If you allow that to happen, he's going to handle it for you.”
Established foundation including homeownership and financial stability	“this was kind of late in my life because it's happened and I'm already established. already own property and access to systems and society, which allowed me to own property, be a homeowner”
Engagement in therapy	“counseling that I do once a week.”
Finding fulfillment in daily engagement	“I run marathons and so I'm physically fit”

Kay

Kay, a 55-year-old Black woman residing independently in Maryland, was released from prison in 2018. Kay's identify as a lesbian woman who dresses in a masculine manner. She reports that her stereotypically masculine gender presentation adds complexity to her reentry experience. She reflects on the challenges of navigating societal assumptions and stereotypes, particularly regarding perceptions of Black women, “[a] Black woman is automatically assumed to be aggressive. And a lot of times people are defensive because they assume, [...] assuming that I'm a certain type of person” She continues about her identity:

Because there's so many dynamics with me being who I am, like, a lot of the women, you know, because I am a woman and identify as a woman and I'm living with women. That focus sometimes is on me, and you know, what I represent. So, sometimes I miss an opportunity to, you know, get what I need, because I'm having to, you know, be very careful that I'm not being perceived a certain way or that I'm not giving off a certain type of vibe, or that I'm not, you know, putting myself in a position where I could be, you know, accused of anything that you know.

In her reentry journey, Kay emphasizes the importance of having a support system, “Having a support person to know that you just know that you have someone to fall back on” She also draws strength from her faith, “And I trust Him [God] because He's already provided me with so much evidence that He exists to me.” Kay's experiences sheds light on the intersectionality of identities and the nuanced dynamics she encounters as a Black lesbian woman reintegrating into society post-incarceration.

Table 4

Kay's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Challenges in adapting to the digital age and changing social dynamics	“I prepare for a world that don't even exist anymore...I was just in a culture shock”
Experiencing identity-based inequities	“it means that you have to accept, you know, being treated a certain way”
Caregiving through mother's cancer diagnosis and passing Challenges navigating healthcare accessibility and treatment	“Compelled to just take care to take care of her” “and then he has to navigate to this, you know, by yourself and feeling and trying to figure out, you know, everything when things are just completely different than what you would you draft, you know what I mean”
Challenges securing housing	“but every place I applied to denied me because either my credit or no rental history”
Challenges affording basic necessities	“having an apartment but I'll have no furniture I don't have you know, even just basic things.”
Challenges accessing resources	“tapping into those resources has been challenging to because like, nobody tells you about it, you got to figure it out”
Embracing personal identity and growth	“we grew. We both grew in both fields. And we both was able to get an understanding”
Support from organizations and professional staff	“how he changed my life and how what he did for me”
Engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors	“They basically incubated a business idea”
Finding strength through faith in God	“And I trust him because he's already provided me with so much evidence that he exists to me”
Empowerment through overcoming past adversities	“My favorite quote is fall down seven times get up eight.”
Upholding a positive perspective	“falling out on my back, because if I can look up, I can get up”

Nick

Nick, a 50-year-old Black woman residing independently in a transitional home, was released from prison in 2022. Reflecting on her reentry experiences, Nick highlighted instances where she observed racial biases affecting transitioning individuals, particularly Black women, from the halfway house to an independent home. “I see that there's so much bias against [Black women].” “Like those who went home without problems [were] Caucasian and those who stayed and had problems [were] mainly Black.” In terms of empowerment, Nick expressed a strong desire to reconnect with her children and grandchildren. She viewed her family as a source of motivation and empowerment, emphasizing her determination to create a better life for them and make up for lost time spent incarcerated:

Just my family just a way to be better for them and just to make sure that I don't waste any more time I've lost five years you know excited to connect with my grandchild and try not to spoil so much just want to give back my family is empowering because I so want to like rebuild my life you know

Nick's aspirations to rebuild her life and contribute positively to her family underscore the significance of familial bonds in the reentry journey of formerly incarcerated Black women facing systemic barriers based on race and gender.

Table 5

Nick's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Challenges securing and maintaining housing	“you created homelessness for me, because I don't have anywhere else to go”
Challenges in family reunification due to housing restrictions	“And then you can only have two persons one kid so my boys never saw me.”
Recognition of identity-driven inequities	“I'm just scared to put it that is a black owned business by a black female that wants to promote black independency”
Limited access to resources due to supervision status	“the library didn't want that responsibility. So I wasn't able to do it”

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Finding strength through faith in god	“God has something better for me”
Support from family, and organizations	“Catholic Charities paid for me”
Engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors	“I went to the library one day to do some research on how to start my business and register”
Self-reliance, determination, and motivation in goal achievement	“So I literally had to leave halfway house every single day, go to the library. do my own research”
Finding fulfillment in daily engagement	“I do a lot of journaling”

Greece

Greece, a 32-year-old Black woman residing with her minor child in Georgia, was released from incarceration in 2021. As a practicing Muslim who wears a hijab, Greece faces intersectional challenges stemming from her identity, race, religion, and criminal justice involvement. Reflecting on her reentry experience, Greece expressed frustration with societal perceptions, feeling marginalized and stereotyped due to her race, gender, and religious beliefs:

Well, it's been difficult. This is difficult in the aspect of anytime is mentioned that I've had anything to do with incarceration. You know, it's like, sometimes I feel like a monkey. You know, when I mentioned that I'm black or something to people, you know, they don't really take us seriously. You know, it's like, they expect for you to be a certain way or act a certain way or, you know, and I've tried to get jobs and I was turned down and I felt that was the reason why not just from me being incarcerated, but like you say, because I'm a Black woman, you know, so we automatically got points against us, you know, but I still hold my head up high, you know, it's but it's hard.

Despite these challenges, Greece finds empowerment in her commitment to personal growth and resilience. She emphasizes her gratitude for her current circumstances and the strength derived from acknowledging her blessings:

What empowers me is knowing that I will never go back for real, because I don't have those intentions anymore. You know, and I, I'm looking forward every day. You know, I

got a sense of identity. And of course, my gratefulness. You know that empowers me....what I mean by that is I had to keep telling myself how grateful I am, you know, that empowers me in itself because it could always, always tell myself it could always be worse..... So, I just had to tell myself well, I'm grateful. You know, for all I've been through, I still got my mind. You know, I haven't lost it yet.....Just count my blessings, my blessings.

Greece's biological mother's struggles with substance abuse serve as a reminder of resilience and the potential for positive change. She draws inspiration and support from her family members:

Yeah, definitely my fiancé and my daughter, but I also want to add to that list, my mother and I'm speaking about my biological mother, you know, because anytime I think about her and her mind state and all that she's been through, that's definitely one of those situations that tell myself it could always be worse because, you know, it's not me. So it's like, you know, that's empowering for me to know that hey, this somebody I came from, you know, I may have her genes and this and that. And, you know, I but I don't have a certain things I've heard that I don't have, you know, and so that gives me another foot to move forward.

Greece's narrative underscores the complex interplay of identity, adversity, and empowerment in the reentry process of formerly incarcerated Black women.

Table 6

Greece's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Challenges Securing Housing	“but the stipulation was that couldn't be pre you can't be pregnant. You have to be a single adult”

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Lack of extended family support	“And I really, I really had a hard time when I got out. Because I'm from up north.... and I have no family down here”
Experiencing Employment inequities	“I applied for security job....And I mentioned you know that I was incarcerated, and obviously I'm black so, but they automatically turned me down”
Experiencing identity-based inequities	“And then I'm Muslim too. So that's, that makes this another you know, difficult thing that I have to deal with, you know, a lot of biased opinions and stuff like that.”
Mental Struggles due to anxiety and depression	“You know, just just trying to come out of that depression and, you know, anxiety and all of that”
Experiencing consequences due to lack of sexual autonomy	“if I would have got caught when I was in the halfway house and I was pregnant, and it would have found out would have had to finish my whole time[in prison]....I hid my pregnancy. And when I got out, I was eight months. And I had heard her next month. Wow. And she came out healthy. I didn't have no pregnancy, no prenatal care and nothing”
Empowerment and Support from nuclear family and organization	“my daughter and my soon to be fiance just the thought of you know, what, what we can have as our own unit of a family. You know, that's really heartwarming to me, you know, that. Just the thought of that it empowers me internally”
Gratitude for Life's Opportunities and Loved Ones	“I had to keep telling myself how grateful I am, you know, that empowers me in itself because it could always, always tell myself it could always be worse”
Upholding a Positive perspective	“I still have more potential in me, you know, to do some better”
Embracing Personal Identity and Growth	“really getting to know myself, finding out what my niches where my weaknesses are and my strengths and you know, really gaining insight on everything that I've missed for last five years.”
Empowerment Through Overcoming Past Adversities	“being raised to 17 and ultimately homeless”
Finding strength through faith in God	“I did ask God to show me what exactly my purpose is”

China

China, a 34-year-old Black woman and recent divorcee, resides with her five minor children in Georgia following her release from prison in 2020. Reflecting on her reentry experience, China highlighted the compounded challenges faced by Black women in reestablishing themselves after incarceration:

But being a Black woman to reiterate it I feel like that extra strike against us is hard as well. That are really hard. doesn't want me to get a good job, a good paying skill, you

know, to be to be compensated for what you you're worth as a woman. I feel like we are really not there equally. So being a convicted felon, a Black woman. It was extremely hard to get a good paying job

In terms of empowerment, China underscored the significance of her freedom as a source of strength and autonomy. She also drew inspiration from her children and family, finding encouragement in their support and pride in her achievements. Completing her probationary period emerged as a milestone of empowerment, marking a significant step towards reclaiming autonomy in her life post-incarceration:

My freedom empowered me. Like just being able to, you know apply for this or apply for debt on my own, to be able to go into this place and do this and do that your freedom I loan. My Freedom alone has helped me a lot like I can't overlook that. That empower me a lot. Being locked up, and then being free. Yeah, that's power. Let's see what else my kids empower me like my family. My loved ones, you know, just seeing them and being like, I'm proud of you, [China]. You're doing good encouraging words empowered me. They're just looking back, you know, especially once I complete this probation, when I complete my probation, I'm empowered.

China's narrative underscores the intersectional challenges faced by Black women reentering society after incarceration and the importance of freedom, familial support, self-determination, and self-motivation throughout the reentry journey.

Table 7

China's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Challenges securing housing	“housing that's a problem in itself. You can't get nowhere to stay really as a convicted felon”

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Experiencing employment and pay inequities	“The basic job won't cut it. You know, the jobs that I do offer women who are being re entered into society won't cut”
Supervision restrictions hindering progress	“last probation the last 10 years and that alone have taken a whole toll on my life just from being a probation”
Self-reliance, determination, and motivation in goal achievement	“I've I got an education and this and that so I could just put stuff together and make things happen”
Engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors	“the first thing I did was file an LLC. And that's how I started my business. I found my LLC”
Finding strength through faith in god	“Yeah, praying, praying listening to gospel music”
Community support and belongingness	“They make you feel like you're a part of something just by having on a t shirt that Other women have on we have on the same T shirt that alone make you feel like a group. ”
Paying forward support and empowerment	“the convicted felon woman..... Them the women that I'm gonna employ for my company. You got to be a convicted felon to be hired. That's that's the people that I won't I won't repeat that need help.”
Empowerment and support from family	“my kids empower me like my family. My loved ones, you know, just seeing them and being like, I'm proud of you...You're doing good”

Ebony

Ebony, a 50-year-old divorced Black woman residing with her four children in Georgia, was released from incarceration in 2021. Reflecting on her reentry experience, Ebony mentioned the intersecting challenges faced by Black women, particularly those who have been incarcerated. She highlighted the societal perceptions that strip incarcerated women of their femininity and societal roles, diminishing their sense of worth and belonging:

As being a black, a woman of color, you know, that's more hurdles on top of it, okay, where I wasn't given that I don't have equality as a woman. Now, I further don't have, further away from that equality line as a woman of color . And I'm very much even further away from that equality line as a formerly incarcerated women of Color. So all these things have pushed me further further back, a woman that a woman period that has gone to prison, they in in society's mind, they crossed this social gender line. And a lot of

times, man, the way how we're treated while we're in prison and even coming home, it's it's like we are no longer deserving to be treated kind and looked at as, as a woman, as a mom as a nurturer.

Despite her challenges, Ebony found empowerment in the resilience of those who overcome adversity. Ebony's determination to leave a positive legacy for her children, grandchildren, and future generations fueled her sense of empowerment, emphasizing the importance of resilience:

You know, when people overcome, like we was talking about earlier, to be able to overcome from something that has been gone to something and overcome. That's, that's what I want to be a part of. That's what empowers me because it lets me know, it gives me hope that I say that, Oh, you know, the song says in that I resume, the sun will come out tomorrow. And every day the sun comes out. That's a new opportunity to make a stamp on this on this world to bring forth another chapter in my story. And also to give a story to my children and my grandchildren, great-grandchildren that's coming along. That's what empowers me.

Ebony's narrative underscores the complex interplay of race, gender, and incarceration in shaping the reentry experiences of Black women. Her journey highlights the importance of resilience, and positive outlook in navigating the challenges of reintegration into society post-incarceration.

Table 8

Ebony's Personal Experiential Themes

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Mental struggles due to anxiety and depression	“you're constantly fighting depression, you're constantly fighting anxiety”
Challenges in role transition and societal scrutiny	“here we are, we have all this on our back as women, and doing all this watch, trying to be a mom, while I

Personal Experiential Themes	Quotes
Experiencing identity-based inequities	try and be a grandmother, I in everything, all those roles that we play as a woman” “I was working on a project I was referred to as a formerly incarcerated woman. And I had to go back to the director and I said, Can you please give me a name? Can you please write my name”
Experiencing employment inequities	“. And they've had several job openings. And I've applied for two of them while doing the work and have been the job bypassing me and have been given to men. There's five staff members on this organization. I'm the only woman I'm not even a staff. I'm on contract.”
Challenges maintaining housing	“I got kicked out my other house and because somebody shot was outside shooting, and two bullets came through the apartment. And instead of them looking at us as a victim, they looked at because they knew I was on parole. You know, and the housing, fair housing. You know, policy says this, that if you are especially an apartment complex, if you are found to be formally incarcerated, then they have the right to evict you so that way they can keep the community safe.”
Self-initiated empowerment and social engagement	“you know, nationwide. And I that was me researching and being affiliated to cohorts and fellowships with different organizations, reentry organizations”
Engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors	“So I have, I built two organizations. One is an LLC, where it's open, it's on consulting, it's still on social justice consulting, which is open to everyone. And then I have one I have my nonprofit which speaks up you know, my story, and that's domestic violence, leading into incarceration for women”
Finding strength and purpose through faith in God. Empowerment and support from family, organization, and community	“I know God will bless me and God has sustained me” “they provided me with a laptop, so I can, you know, do my job searching get used to things they provided me, you know, helping trying to help me with my housing situation”
Upholding a positive perspective	“And I know it's gonna be one day that I just got to keep going at it until until that door opens”
Embracing personal identity and growth	“I made it my promise to myself that once I came home, I was gonna come home as a new definition of love to myself and to my children.”
Finding fulfillment in daily engagement	“I pay attention to the little things in life, I pay attention to how the leaves blowing a tree, I pay attention to be in being able to get in the car, to open the refrigerator, to look in my pantry and see who I pay attention to be able to pay to pay a bill brings me joy, to know my bills are paid, to be able to have a paycheck to be there for my children”
Paying forward support and empowerment	“You know, I'm not afraid to say my journey, because I'm hoping that it will help someone else.”

Janee

Janee, a 41-year-old Black woman residing with her husband and three children in Georgia, was released from incarceration in 2019. Reflecting on her reentry experience, Janee highlighted the pervasive stereotypes and societal expectations placed on Black women, particularly those who have been incarcerated:

I mean, because, you know, we wear this title, angry Black woman or Black woman with an attitude or, you know, Black woman is unteachable, the Black woman with the big mouth, the Black woman, they don't listen, you know? And so, Absolutely, it was. It definitely it definitely tied together as far as you know, being a Black woman...because...they expect you to reenter and kind of do the same thing over again.

Despite facing these obstacles, Janee found empowerment in her sense of purpose paying it forward for others. Janee drew strength from her faith and belief in a higher calling, recognizing her obligation to pave the way for others seeking to overcome facing similar hardships:

One of the one of the key things that empowered me first of all to keep going on was because I knew this journey was for me and so many black women that that was fighting the same fight that I had fought. the empowerment of knowing that I could no longer be selfish and make this about just me. Because this was no longer about just me. I was reentering for every black woman who had ever tried to re enter and make something of herself and make a name and leave a legacy. My reentering simply was because I knew God had ordered me to do so. I knew that I had a calling over my life. And I had to answer that call. And that was one of the things that was probably first the fact that I

knew God had put this call in all my life. And then because I knew I had to do it for so many others who had tried and failed

Janee's narrative underscores the impact of societal perceptions and stereotypes in shaping the reentry experiences of Black women. Her journey highlights the importance of resilience and the role of faith in navigating the challenges of reintegration post-incarceration.

Table 9

Janee's Personal Experiential Statements

Personal Experiential Statements	Quotes
Experiencing identity-based inequities	"And he's threatened multiple times to get my business license taken away."
Experiencing inclusion inequities	"I belong at this table, just as much as you do. And having to go the extra mile to prove that,"
Commitment to sobriety in recovery	"I'm a woman in long term recovery"
Empowerment and support from family and criminal justice professionals	"I've had a man amount of support from the justice system, like the judges, the lawyers, the DBAs, who remember, right. And so they get to see me now in this new light.....And it gives them a sense of, you know, people do overcome the system."
Embracing personal identity and growth	"I had to start to identify myself as the mother I had to do and start to identify myself as a child of God, you know, so it was like I had to reintroduce myself to myself in order to have a new identity for myself"
Engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors	"Today I'm on owner director"
Finding strength through faith in God	"My reentering simply was because I knew God had ordered me to do so. I knew that I had a calling over my life. And I had to answer that call."
Self-reliance, determination, and motivation in goal achievement	"But it gave me strength is at the same time you know, I am motivation because I was determined to get out here and not just recover in and get my life on track"
Paying forward support and empowerment	"I'm one of the ones that made it out and then wanted to be the trendsetter, the blaze the Trailblazer to show them the way out."

Domo

Domo, a 42-year-old bisexual female residing with her mother in Washington D.C., shared insights into her reentry experience. Reflecting on her journey, Domo acknowledged the complexities surrounding race as a factor in some instances but not always. This suggests the

nuanced nature of racial dynamics within the reentry process, indicating variability in its impact. “I mean, sometimes it was a race was an issue but sometime race wasn't.”

Despite not residing with her, Domo identified her children as the primary motivators in her life. “My children...I mean that motivate me they make me do the things I need to do for myself. They make me want to take care of myself.” Her children are a driving force, inspiring her to prioritize self-care and take necessary steps for her well-being. Domo's narrative contributes to the understanding of the multifaceted nature of reentry experiences, emphasizing the interplay of factors such as race, family dynamics.

Table 10

Domo’s Personal Experiential Statements

Personal Experiential Statements	Quotes
Challenges navigating the legal system	“Going under different court dates dealing with the fact that I'm not going to have my case no more like yeah, I went through a lot.”
Facing health-related obstacles	“I can't fill just HIV prescription for you”
Challenges securing housing	“I lost my house”
Empowerment and support from family	“If it wasn't for the support that I have now. I wouldn't be where I am today without them.”

Group Experiential Themes

In this section, Group Experiential Themes (GET) shared by the participants are described, shedding light on personal and group perspectives. The themes, based on the corresponding research questions, offer insights into the narratives of Black women navigating reentry into society.

Three prevalent themes were constructed among all nine participants regarding research question 1: What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry? (a) Experiencing identity-based inequities; (b) Challenges in securing housing; (c) Confronting health-related obstacles. Three overarching themes showed consistently across the participant

group regarding research question 2: How do Black women experience empowerment in overcoming post-imprisonment barriers? (a) Finding strength through faith in God; (b) Fostering self-reliance, determination, and motivation in goal achievement; (c) Deriving empowerment from familial, organizational, and communal support. These thematic patterns not only offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Black women upon reentry but also illuminate the sources of resilience and empowerment within their narratives.

Tables 11 and 12 provide an overview of the GET findings corresponding to the two research questions investigated in this study. Table 11 delves into research question one, focusing on the lived intersectional experiences of Black women during reentry. Table 12 addresses research question two, which explores how these women experience empowerment to overcome barriers throughout their reentry journey. Following a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, three Group Experiential Themes (GETs) were identified to address each of the research questions. Tables 11 and 12 display these three GETs, each of which was observed in at least half or more of the participants' narratives. Under the "Group experiential themes" heading, the three GETs are outlined, providing a succinct summary of the overarching themes derived from the data. Additionally, under the "Quotes" heading, excerpts from participants' responses are presented to illustrate and support each specific theme, along with the corresponding participant identifier. Next, a summary of each GET is discussed, supported by participants' quotes.

Experiencing Identity-Based Inequities

Among the participants, five out of the nine individuals disclosed encountering identity-based inequities. For example, Kay, who self-identifies as a lesbian and presents herself in a manner typically associated with masculinity as per societal standards, shared experiences of being misgendered while seeking resources. She expressed frustration, stating, "A lot of times,

people mistake me for a male, and I'm not identified as a woman. No, I'm not transgender. I'm just a gay woman." Kay further elaborated on experiencing discrimination based on her sexual orientation, remarking, "That is something to discriminate against because it was, you know, my sexual orientation." Kay highlighted the challenges she faces in accessing essential resources to address her reentry obstacles due to these barriers:

You know, as far as like getting into, you know, like transitional housing and stuff like that. It's always very, you know, difficult and challenging for me to navigate through because there's so many dynamics with me being who I am...a lot of times I don't get the benefit of the doubt.

Greece and Ebony share similar experiences grappling with inequities in a second-chance setting (companies that hire individuals with felony records). Greece, a woman of Black descent who follows Islam and chooses to wear a hijab, shares her experiences of experiencing additional marginalization because of her religious beliefs. She expresses, "And then I'm Muslim too. So that's, that makes this another difficult thing that I have to deal with, you know, a lot of biased opinions and stuff like that." This statement underscores the additional burden Greece faces due to her religious beliefs, despite applying to an environment presumed to be accepting of her intersecting identities.

Ebony, an employee at a second chance company, shared her experiences facing inequities within the organization because she has a criminal record:

So what does that say to me is that they're not, you know, I'm not looked at as capable to handle these jobs, even though I'm doing it. And I'm not I'm not looked at as worthy enough to be employed. And they keep me in this pocket of just up consulting. But I can never reach the point to where I can be embraced as an employee.

Ebony reveals that while the company recruits individuals with a criminal history, the full-time staff predominantly consists of individuals without such records. She explains that she and others with criminal records are hired as contractors, denying them benefits and any prospects for advancement. This quote reflects Ebony's sense of feeling "unworthy" as she struggles with the inequities she encounters:

I value your experience and what you bring to the table, but we don't want you as a permanent entity within the organization. And when it was...I was working on a project I was referred to as a formerly incarcerated woman.

Ebony recounts an incident where she is acknowledged solely for her status as a returning citizen. Her experiences underscore the persistent inequities present in environments assumed to be safe havens for individuals with a criminal history.

Janee encountered identity-based inequities within the community, despite her efforts to establish an agency aiming to offer a secure environment for women in recovery. She shared her distressing experience of facing harassment and exclusion due to her identity as a woman in recovery. Janee expressed, "There is this box, this bubble that they put you in when you are a Black woman on drugs. They put you there, and they expect you to stay there." Despite the overarching objective of rehabilitating women in recovery, Janee finds her identity as a Black woman in recovery, presenting obstacles as she strives to pursue her goals for the betterment of humanity.

Nick's encounter with inequity differed, due to reentry exposing her to racial disparities in the United States. Unlike the other participants, Nick did not grow up in the U.S. She was raised in a country where most residents were Black mostly, shielding her from racial inequities. In her interview, Nick recounted observing disparities in sentencing and opportunities to individuals

based on race. She noted that at the reentry center where she stayed, minorities, particularly Black women, encountered housing challenges, while Caucasian individuals seemed to be released without incident. "Like those who went home without problems were Caucasian and those who stayed and had problems... mainly Black," she remarked.

Challenges Securing Housing

Among nine participants, six encountered some form of housing insecurity during their reentry journey. As an example, Ebony was evicted because of her past criminal record, even though she was a victim of an unsafe housing environment. Her eviction, justified under community safety, showcases how laws can be misapplied, thereby hindering the efforts of individuals working to reintegrate into society:

I got kicked out my other house and because somebody shot was outside shooting, and two bullets came through the apartment. And instead of them looking at us as a victim, they looked at because they knew I was on parole. You know, and the housing, fair housing. You know, policy says this, that if you are especially an apartment complex, if you are found to be formally incarcerated, then they have the right to evict you so that way they can keep the community safe.

China, a mother of five, struggled to find housing due to her probation status, resorting to having a relative pose as the tenant to secure a safe residence. While fortunate to have family support, many in similar situations end up unhoused due to discriminatory housing laws during reentry.

I actually have my house in a relative's name I have to live on of a relative name. I can't get nowhere to live in my name right now as a family. I have about maybe eight more months on probation and I'll actually be done when I'm able to get my broker a sponge

After being discharged from the hospital with a newborn, Greece was also unhoused with her infant child:

We didn't stay in hospital, maybe three days after I had her. That's just stipulation after you have a baby. They keep you in there to do tests or whatever. So they let me go with her. I go back to the shelter and we ended up being homeless for like over a year before I finally got my apartment

Domo also faced instability, relying on her mother's home and friends while seeking permanent housing through an agency.

Nick's housing challenges was caused by institutional failures. Despite assurances from her legal team, parole officers refused assigning her to her preferred housing, and the reentry center failed to provide suitable alternatives, prolonging her reintegration process. “Well, you created homelessness for me, because I don't have anywhere else to go.” Nick was initially released to a reentry center with the understanding that she would stay there for five days before moving in with her daughter. However, her stay extended to five months at the center before she eventually she herself found and moved into a residential home, a process in which she received no assistance.

Kay's lengthy incarceration history hindered her from securing housing due to poor credit and lack of rental history. “Every place I applied to denied me because of either my credit or no rental history. And when I did find it...it's so expensive.” While awaiting assistance, she faced homelessness or emergency shelter stays, disrupting her path to reintegration. The challenge of obtaining necessities like housing hinders Kay's journey toward contributing to society.

Facing Health-Related Obstacles

Six out of nine participants reported facing physical and mental health challenges, impacting their well-being upon reentry. Kay and Domo both have been diagnosed with conditions that are fatal without treatment (cancer and HIV). Kay reflects on her initial reaction upon learning of her diagnosis, expressing, "The very first thing that crossed my mind was, 'Oh God, I'm going to die.' It completely shifted my entire thought process and perspective on everything." Both Greece and Ebony opened up about their challenges with mental health as they reintegrated into society. Greece described her battle with depression and anxiety, saying, "You know, just trying to come out of that depression and, you know, anxiety and all of that." Ebony shared her struggles, revealing, "I sit in my bed some days and not wanting to move, not wanting to do anything, you know, the anxiety not wanting to go outside my door, because the world is so cold." Despite not receiving formal treatment, both women expressed experiencing mental health struggles during reentry.

Jay and Janee, both women in recovery, faced unique challenges during their reentry process. Jay disclosed that she received treatment for a co-occurring mental health condition while striving to maintain sobriety. Reflecting on her journey, she expressed, "and I tried for so many years, you know, stay out of jail. But I guess it came with being addicted to drugs. So it goes hand in hand. So once I stopped using I stopped going to jail so that that was the that was solution for me. Stop using and stop going to jail." Janee shared her perspective, saying, "I was recovering from more than just drugs, I also had to recover from the lifestyle." oth women had to navigate the complexities of sustaining their overall well-being as they embarked on their reentry journey.

Finding Strength Through Faith in God

Most participants, with one exception, drew empowerment from their spirituality. Kay expressed, “God allowed me to, you know, work through and healed from so much.” Ebony echoed, “Is God, knowing that I can do anything through him.” Jay affirmed “I trust God I have a higher power. I believe in that I know that God it was nobody but him that brought me this far because everybody does not make it this far.” These testimonies underscored their reliance on faith for comfort and hope during challenging reentry periods.

Gina explained “But I believe in God . And so my Scriptures with dreaming those things, kept me grounded.” China reported, “Yeah, praying, praying, listening to gospel music.” Greece stated “the best outcome for me is to stay in good standards with you know, my Creator and prayer, meditation.” Faith in God empowers Black women to reclaim their self-worth, agency, and dignity. Nick relied “God has something better for me.” Janeé stated “I knew God had ordered me to do so.; God sent me a man that is of your own heart, that believes in you, that can love me past my pain.” Despite facing societal barriers, stigma, and stereotypes, their faith serves as a source of strength, reaffirming their sense of worth as valuable individuals.

Self-Reliance, Determination, and Motivation in Goal Achievement

Six out of nine of the Black women lean heavily on their self-assurance to sustain resilience amid multiple hurdles and attain their aspirations. Gina has this mindset: "I grew up being told there wasn't anything I could not do if I put my mind to it. So that's what I do. I put my mind to it and do it." She draws upon their resilience and inner strength to navigate the challenges of reentry. Similarly, China emphasizes the importance of structured planning, stating:

Yeah, I wrote my plan down...I had a book that I wrote next, but what I'm doing it it'd be probably like number one, get my ID number to go take this test number three, go down to DFCS. Number four, look up this, you know, I'm sorry, I literally wrote everything out.

Empowerment through self-reliance and determination underscores the autonomy and leadership of Black women. Janee exemplifies this when she discusses her empowerment as a woman in recovery, aiming to be a trailblazer and a mentor in that space. She states:

I'm one of the ones that made it out and then wanted to be the trendsetter, the trailblazer to show them the way out. I also teach a women empowerment class inside the same jail...and talk to some of the same women who look like me, the women that don't look like me, being able to go in there and say, Hey, I used to be an inmate...And I wore your shoes and I've slept on your same bed... But today I'm a woman in long term recovery...Today I'm a director...I'm a mother...it carries more weight. When they can see that you overcome from where they are. It carries more weight to be the change that they need to see.

Janee's engagement in recovery empowers her to serve as a role model and leader for other women in recovery. Through her perseverance, she can share her journey of self-empowerment and resilience with others.

Ebony defines successful reentry:

Society says," Okay, if you have a job, if you have some place to live, and you're not getting in trouble, check, that's somebody that has successfully reenter society." But for me, when I feel that I have successfully entered is when my dreams, and my all my dreams and my goals that I have for myself, are met. Because other than that, all I'm

doing is checking off your check boxes based on what you feel that I need. And if not, it does not make me feel good about myself.

Ebony's clarity regarding her personal definition of successful reentry speaks volumes about her sense of control and agency over her own life.

Nick demonstrates self-reliance when faced with homelessness after being unable to be housed at her initial housing option. She recounts, "So I reached out to a friend ...I was really asking for resources. Because, like I said, I have always sorted for myself." Nick's reliance on her own resourcefulness and determination to find housing highlights her self-reliance. Self-determination further reinforces the belief in one's ability to achieve goals and overcome challenges. Kay articulates this, stating, "I know this... determined to do something you know to make it someday...I'll find a way around it. That won't give up." Kay's self-determination underscores her confidence in navigating obstacles and finding solutions.

Empowerment and Support from Family, Organization, and Community

All participants in the study reported empowerment and support from family, organization, or community members. Gina recounted the instrumental support she received from her brother during her incarceration, stating, "basically family has been supportive...Brothers have been, younger brothers, been very supportive financially" She highlighted her brother's role in managing her properties while she was incarcerated and his presence to take her home upon release. Similarly, Domo expressed receiving housing support, noting, "I always had keys for my mother's house. I always could go to my mom's house. Like I have a room at my mother's house" when she discussed having housing insecurity issues.

Moreover, Jay emphasized the significance of emotional support from her nuclear family, stating, "my family just been able to hold them and kiss on them and love them and see them

every day.” She adds being empowered by the interactional support provided by her husband, “He stays on me. He makes sure that I’m always doing what I’m supposed to do.”

Furthermore, Nick stresses the empowering nature of reuniting with her family, particularly her children and grandchildren. She expresses:

Just my family just a way to be better for them and just to make sure that I don't waste any more time I've lost five years you know excited to connect with my grandchildren and try not to spoil so much just want to give back my family is empowering.

Nick finds empowerment in engaging with and maintaining connections to her family members.

Ebony and Greece's interactions with organizations dedicated to reentry support provided them with comprehensive assistance. Ebony recounted her experience, stating:

And when I came home, I got in touch with them, they provided me with a laptop, so I can, you know, do my job searching get used to things they provided me, you know, helping trying to help me with my housing situation . You know, with school, like, you know, what did I want to do? How do I want to, you know, go for it...They look at me as a person, and made me feel safe. And it made me feel that I know that I was, you know, I was someone of value, that there was a community of people like my family.

Similarly, Greece's experience with another reentry agency showcased the extensive support provided. Greece shared:

They’re been supportive as far as like any goals that I have. I can reach out to them. Like I was planning on thinking about going back to school, until I found out about the loan situation[.....] I had to reach out to the community to you know, ask a lot of questions that anybody know about this. What should I do about this, you know, this and that

they've been supportive you know, with things that I've been trying to do. And like, I was trying to get my apartment, I had to ask them for a resource list of housing communities because there's only certain places that accept the housing voucher been supportive in that aspect. Okay, that's good. Yeah, maybe I can call one of them right now. You know, just to talk if I wanted to, they are, you know, they're like family. They actually had offered me a job in January.

China highlights the sense of sisterhood fostered within an organization catering to the needs of reentry women. She expresses:

So they put me inside of a sisterhood and I needed to begin with women who are all just who you know got the same type of situations going on. And I actually felt like, you know, I feel like I belong...That's the type of group I want to be the type of people I want to be with. They serve in a purpose. You know, I'm saying they're not forgetting about the people that's incarcerated, who ain't got nobody to say about them...They're not judging you. They're not trying to look down on you. They ain't trying to get to your business . Like they're not being nosy they make you want to be around like they make you feel welcome. They make you feel like you matter.

Furthermore, Kay highlighted the invaluable support she received from a reentry program, stating, "They basically incubated a business idea. They gave you a business plan. How do you go about planting, marketing, business funding? They taught you how to get revenue[...]it was a great program." She emphasized that this organization played a significant role in turning her entrepreneurial aspirations into reality.

Janee's received support from professionals in the criminal legal system, she shared:

When I was coming towards the end of finishing my time of probation, you know, a lot of them will tell me, I see you going places. And I told them what I was planning to do. And mostly all of them say, you're going to do this, you're going to be great, you know, you got the patience, you speak well, you know, I can tell your passion is there. So they were encouragers that was on probation side. As far as with public defender's office, some of the attorneys who have defended me a time or two, they then once I started taking in clients, they will stand up in court and say, I know her story personally. And I know she has what it takes to help these women through what they're going through, And so they vouch for who I am. They spoke life into who I am, and they spoke life into my program and they believed in me enough to believe in my program.

Janee's encounter with members of the criminal legal community highlights the significance of cultivating relationships between representatives of the legal system and individuals reintegrating into society.

Essence of the Phenomenon

The essence of the reentry journey for these Black women, shaped by their lived intersectional experiences, underscores the added challenges they face due to the complexities of holding multiple marginalized identities. The accumulation of marginal identities amplifies their struggles. While they may find strength in their support systems, faith, and self-reliance, they encounter obstacles upon reentry because of the marginalized identities they carry. These identities manifest as barriers at micro, mezzo, and macro levels, exacerbating their hardships. For instance, they might receive financial assistance for housing, only to face eviction due to discriminatory housing laws targeting individuals with criminal histories. They may have access to health insurance for medical needs, yet multiple obligations as returning citizens compel them

to prioritize pressing matters over fatal health concerns. We must advocate for Black women who deal with more oppressive identities that further complicate their reentry journeys.

Summary of Findings

The study's findings offered a comprehensive overview of each participant involved. This included demographic details and a summary highlighting key aspects of each participant. Subsequently, the findings presented personal experiential themes and quotes from each participant, addressing their lived experiences and experiences of empowerment in response to the research questions. Through these individual narratives, the collective journey of the nine Black women as they navigate the complex challenges of reentry post-incarceration was captured. Accompanying the group experiential themes were quotes that depicted the participants' lived experiences, providing further insight into their reentry journey.

Through these findings, each participant's individual and shared narratives that bind their experiences together have been presented. Furthermore, the empowering strategies these women employ as they navigate the reentry pathways. These insights not only enrich our understanding of the complexities in the reintegration process but also underscore the resilience and agency within the narratives of Black women in transition from incarceration to the community.

Table 11

Group Experiential Themes for RQ1: The Lived Intersectional Experience of Black Women Upon Reentry

Group Experiential Themes	Quote
Experiencing Identity-Based Inequities	Nick: "I see that there's so much bias" Janece: And it [business she owns] was in smaller towns than I do in some of the old mindsets. To say the least, of the black white thing, Ebony: "I'm not looked at as worthy enough to be employed." Kay: "discriminate against because it was you know, my sexual orientation" Greece: ", I felt rejected, but it's like my presence."

Group Experiential Themes	Quote
Challenges Securing Housing	China: "I actually have my house in a relative name I have to live on of a relative name. I can't get nowhere to live in my name right now" Domo: "housing was kind of hard" Greece: "we ended up being homeless for like over a year" Ebony: "You know, even when it took me a year and a half to find somebody that were rent to me" Nick: "but my home plan was not approved by my probation officer"
Facing Health-Related Obstacles	Kay: "And then I also got diagnosed with liver cancer" Janece: "the I was recovering from more than just drugs" Ebony: "the anxiety not wanting to go outside my door, because the world is so cold" Domo: "That HIV care imprisonment sucks in jail, and general it sucks." Jay: "I went through a lot of programs" Kay: "And then I also got diagnosed with liver cancer" Greece: "I kind of had a few mental breakdowns"

Table 12

Group Experiential Themes for RQ2: How Black Women Experience Empowerment In Overcoming Post-Imprisonment Barriers

Group Experiential Themes	Quotes
Finding Strength Through Faith In God	Kay: "I feel like thank God gave me an opportunity to you know, work through and healed from so much," Janece: "I promise God that if he saved my life, I promise God" Nick: "God loves me" Ebony: "Is God knowing that I can do anything through him" Greece: "I thank God everyday" Gina: "But I believe in God" Jay: "So it was nothing but God they got me this far. So I have to give him back what he gave me"
Self-Reliance, Determination, and Motivation in Goal Achievement	China: "I thank God that I made that that's the hardest thing in life I ever had to do" Gina: "So a lot of my resolve had to come from within." China: "The growth that I think for myself motivates me to keep going and motivate me you can do better." Kay: "I can win. I can win" Ebony: "when I feel that I have successfully reentered is when my dreams, and my all my dreams and my goals that I have for myself, are met" Nick: "And I just started doing the webinars and how to go and stuff like that"

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and Community

Janece: “: I know it was put in my heart to do that I know I can do and I want to do it”

Domo: “I had good case managers. If it weren't for the Family Life Center, if it wasn't for like, you know, the women's collective”

Gina: “most people have been over overly kind and overly supportive”

Kay: “the thing that empowered me was knowing that there are resources out here that will help, you know, you break down some of the barriers that being incarcerated”

Ebony: “they just opened a lot of doors and for me”

Nick: “my family had to give me money for hygiene”

Greece: “And they were the ones that helped me with to find somewhere to go until I could, you know, substantiate stable housing”

Janece: “There's a couple pastors actually, that that are some of my biggest motivators and encourager couple pastors.”

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation provides the findings derived from data collection and analysis on the reentry experiences of Black women post-incarceration. This study was undertaken to illuminate the intersectional dynamics shaping Black women's transition from incarceration into society. This study also explored their encounters with empowerment amidst intersecting post-incarceration challenges to provide an understanding of their journey. This chapter will examine the study's implications for practical interventions, policy reform, limitations, and avenues for further research.

Discussion

The United States (U.S.) presents a complex landscape for Black women, who find themselves positioned on the margins due to the intersecting factors of gender and race. This marginalization persists as they navigate the transition from incarceration back into the community. The challenges faced by Black women post-imprisonment are multifaceted, reflecting their identity and involvement in the criminal justice system. Recognizing that Black women are marginalized both before and after incarceration underscores the need to comprehend their distinct experiences as members of society upon reentry.

Through an interpretive phenomenological analysis, this dissertation explores Black women's unique journeys as they return to their communities following imprisonment. Central to this inquiry are two questions: What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women upon reentry? and How do Black women experience empowerment in overcoming post-imprisonment barriers? This study engaged with the narratives of nine Black women residing in

Washington, D.C., Georgia, and Maryland capturing the diversity of their experiences. Their ages, educational backgrounds, relationship statuses, and durations of incarceration vary, reflecting the richness and complexity of their stories.

Group Experiential Themes

After conducting interviews with nine women, six overarching themes were constructed, using interpretive phenomenological analysis to uncover the essence of their experiences. These themes offer insights into their intersectional encounters and the pathways through which they navigated empowerment. The first set of themes addresses their intersectional experiences, encompassing (a) Experiencing identity-based inequities, (b) Challenges Securing Housing, and (c) Facing Health-Related Obstacles. Five of the nine participants revealed experiencing inequities rooted in the oppression of racism and sexism. Six individuals dealt with various forms of housing insecurity throughout their reentry process. Moreover, six out of the nine participants reported confronting physical and mental health challenges, significantly affecting their well-being upon reintegrating into society.

The second set of themes that capture their empowerment experiences include (a) Finding strength through faith in God, (b) Self-Reliance, Determination, and Motivation in Goal Achievement, and (c) Empowerment and Support from Family, Organization, and Community. All but one of the participants reported empowerment from their spirituality. Six of nine relied heavily on self-confidence to maintain resilience amidst challenges and achieve their goals. Additionally, all participants in the study highlighted experiencing empowerment and support from family, organizations, or community members.

Experiencing Identity-Based Inequities

These women navigate additional layers of marginalization, intensifying the complexities of their reentry process. For instance, Kay, who identifies as a lesbian and adopts a "masculine" appearance according to societal norms, recounted instances of being misgendered while seeking resources. Kay discusses the challenges she faces in housing situations, where her sexual orientation and appearance lead to her being singled out among other women. She recounts being unfairly perceived as an aggressor or potential threat solely because of her sexual orientation and dress style.

Kay faces judgment based on her sexual orientation and appearance, which aligns with previous research reflecting the impact of the persistent stereotype of Black women being perceived as aggressive and angry (Collins, 2000; Jacobs, 2017). Kay's sexual orientation and dress style further marginalize her, leading to unfair treatment and barriers to accessing essential resources. Greece shares similar experiences grappling with inequities in a second-chance setting (companies that hire individuals with felony records). Greece, a Black woman who practices Islam and wears a hijab, recounts feeling further marginalized due to her religious practices and clothing. This relates to previous research on the significant harm stereotypes can have on the reintegration of Black women into society.

Research by Sered and Norton-Hawk (2021) conducted on formerly incarcerated women in Massachusetts highlights the hurdles faced by Black women in obtaining employment, often attributed to their racial identity. One of their participants, despite undergoing training and submitting multiple job applications, expressed her frustration, stating, "No one will hire an angry Black woman with a doo-rag" (Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2021, p. 180), indicating the significant influence of harmful stereotypes on the reintegration of Black women into society.

The necessity for in-depth research becomes apparent as these women navigate through disrespect and encounter heightened reentry obstacles due to their compounded marginalized identities. There is a critical need to explore the complex consequences faced by Black women who are further marginalized due to their intersecting identities.

Challenges Securing Housing

The success of individuals post-incarceration is often dependent on securing safe and affordable housing. The ability to fulfill obligations like parole supervision, employment, childcare, health management, and accessing necessary services depends on stable housing (Lutze & Lau, 2017; Richie, 2001; Wesely & Dewey, 2018). The challenges with securing housing faced by the women in the study varied due to legislative barriers, complexities, and limitations associated with prolonged incarceration. The challenge of obtaining necessities like housing hinders the women's journey toward contributing to society. Crucial life necessities become inaccessible without access to safe, secure, affordable housing. Lutze and Lau's (2017) research emphasize the importance of safe, secure, affordable housing for successful reentry. Such housing provides physical protection, longevity, and financial stability, which are crucial for individuals navigating the complexities of reintegration. Failure to meet these needs poses significant hurdles, hindering the success of reentry efforts.

Greece, lacking family support, found herself unhoused with her newborn after leaving the hospital. Her year-long stay in a shelter exacerbated her mental health struggles as a new mother and recent parolee. Greece's experience aligns with literature that underscores how difficulties in obtaining housing can trigger a series of psychosocial difficulties. This domino effect often results in setbacks in various areas, heightening the risk of significant obstacles that

may lead to re-incarceration. (Lutze & Lau, 2017; Scroggins & Malley, 2010; Wesely & Dewey, 2018).

Laws like the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which allow public housing agencies to deny or evict individuals based on criminal records, perpetuate discrimination against those involved in the criminal legal system, impeding their successful reentry. For instance, Ebony was evicted due to her criminal record, despite being a victim of unsafe surroundings. Her eviction due to a perceived belief about "keeping the community safe," exemplifies how laws can be misused, creating obstacles for those striving to reintegrate into society. China, a mother of five children, struggled to find housing due to her probation status. This challenge of securing housing amongst participants aligns with literature reporting additional barriers to accessing affordable housing place reentry persons at risk for housing insecurity, homelessness, and, ultimately, re-incarceration (Weiss, 2018).

Facing Health-Related Obstacles

Research documents that Black women reintegrating into their communities encounter significant obstacles in maintaining their health and well-being (Oser, et al., 2016; Scroggins & Malley). These challenges are compounded by their intersectional marginalized identities as Black females involved in the criminal legal system. Factors such as inadequate health services during incarceration and difficulties accessing healthcare upon reentry lead to adverse health outcomes among this demographic (Oser, et al., 2016; Richie, 2001; Scroggins & Malley).

Findings from this study relates to previous literature on the difficulties regarding healthcare access and treatment during reentry, participants Kay and Domo both have been diagnosed with conditions that are fatal without treatment. Domo, aware of her diagnosis prior to incarceration, expressed struggles with inadequate health treatment while in prison, emphasizing

her urgent need for treatment upon release. Kay reported prioritizing immediate challenges such as housing and employment over attending to her healthcare needs. Kay's focus on these pressing issues leads her to neglect her healthcare needs to fulfill other essential obligations, which aligns with prior research that states that Black women delay addressing healthcare needs in the community, due to addressing competing urgent demands (Oser, et al., 2016). Greece and Ebony both discussed their struggles with mental health conditions during their reentry. Despite not receiving formal treatment, both women expressed experiencing mental breakdowns, anxiety, and depression. Similar to other research, these conditions place them at a higher risk of difficulties securing housing and employment, and they are more likely to engage in criminal activities (Visher & Bakken, 2014).

Finding Strength Through Faith in God

With only one exception, most participants derived empowerment from their spirituality, a factor strongly correlated with reduced engagement in criminal activities (Rodermond et al., 2016). The Black church, recognized by Collins (2000) as a women-centered African-influenced institution, promotes expression and support for Black women, historically offering leadership opportunities, particularly for less educated members, crucial for community development. Participants' faith in God was a source of spiritual resilience, as evidenced by their testimonies highlighting reliance on faith for comfort and hope during challenging reentry periods, consistent with prior research (Dalmida, et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002).

Research indicates that Black women often turn to spirituality to confront and accept reality during hardships (Dalmida, et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002). Faith in God acted as a coping mechanism, with participants reporting that prayer, listening to gospel music, reading the Bible, and meditation helped them navigate stress and uncertainty, echoing findings from previous

studies on spirituality's role in assisting Black women during difficult times (Dalmida, et al., 2012; Mattis, 2002). Ultimately, faith in God empowers Black women to reclaim their self-worth, agency, and dignity, reaffirming their identity as valuable individuals deserving of second chances despite societal obstacles, stigma, and stereotypes.

Self-Reliance, Determination, and Motivation in Goal Achievement

Self-reliance, determination, and motivation form the foundation of one's belief in their capacity to conquer challenges and achieve objectives. In the journey of re-entry after incarceration, six out of nine Black women lean heavily on their self-assurance to sustain resilience amid hurdles and attain their aspirations. Their self-reliance aligns with the tenets of Black feminism thought. Black feminist thought theory underscores the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-evaluation. Collins (1986) explains that this involves challenging externally defined, stereotypical images of Black womanhood and replacing them with authentic representations. Empowerment through self-reliance and determination underscores the autonomy of Black women. Empowerment through self-reliance fosters a sense of agency and control over one's life. It emphasizes resisting mainstream interpretations that perpetuate oppressive power dynamics and enables rejecting internalized psychological oppression (Collins, 1986). Self-reliance, determination, and motivation contribute to building self-efficacy. Self-determination further reinforces the belief in one's ability to achieve goals and overcome challenges.

One participant, China highlights the importance of structured planning to maintain her focus during reentry by documenting her plans. She meticulously outlines her tasks in a book, ensuring every step is accounted for. This emphasis on focus aligns with the findings of Garcia-Hallett's (2019) study on prisoner re-entry and the resilience of women of Color. Garcia-Hallett

observed that by "remaining focused," these women could effectively confront the social-structural inequities encountered during their re-entry journey (p. 475). This underscores the significance of establishing clear, attainable goals to sustain focus, motivation, and a sense of empowerment throughout the re-entry process.

Empowerment and Support from Family, Organization, and Community

Prior research documents the pivotal role of family support in reentry. Research highlights three key facets of family support: interactional, instrumental, and emotional (Mowen, et al., 2019). Interactional support can involve offering guidance and assistance, instrumental support can encompass housing and transportation, and emotional support can foster love and a sense of belongingness (Naser & LaVigne, 2006; Mowen, et al., 2019). All participants in the study reported empowerment and support from family, organizations, or community members. Positive family dynamics were particularly noted to foster empowerment through strong familial bonds, emotional support, practical assistance, and access to necessary resources.

Gina recounted the instrumental support she received from her brother during her incarceration. Gina's experience corroborates findings from a study by Clone and DeHart (2014) on the social support networks of incarcerated women, which frequently cited support from siblings, encompassing various forms such as emotional support, housing, a sense of belongingness, financial assistance, and guidance throughout re-entry. Similarly, Domo expressed the importance of instrumental support, particularly in housing. Research has shown that having family provide essential needs like housing reduces the likelihood of exposure to risky situations, significantly aiding in the reentry journey (Clone & DeHart, 2014; Lutz & Lau, 2017).

Community-based organizations and advocacy groups offering job training, education, counseling, housing, and financial assistance play a vital role in supporting reentry. Since the implementation of the Second Chance Act in 2008, numerous organizations and agencies have received government funding to provide reentry services, including employment assistance, healthcare treatment, and housing support, all aimed at facilitating successful reintegration into society (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2018). The experiences shared by participants in this study highlight the benefits of such programs in aiding their reentry journey.

Greece, Ebony, and China's testimonies about reentry organizations as a community underscore a sense of belonging they experience as members of these organizations. Finding support from fellow members in navigating emotional or practical challenges is invaluable to them during their reentry journey. The organizations provide tangible assistance and empowerment for these women. Their reliance on the support of fellow members who are also Black women emphasizes the need to foster peer-to-mentor relationships or establish support groups within this population to cultivate a sense of community and belonging among Black women in reentry. Participants expressed that this support made them feel empowered and valued, a necessity well-documented in the literature (Clone & DeHart, 2014; Mowen, et al., 2018). The empowerment experienced by these women through connections with other reentering Black women aligns with the tenet of Black Feminist Thought, which advocates for access to individuals who can provide survival wisdom (Collins, 2000). Consequently, individuals with similar lived experiences are considered credible experts in navigating these complex realities.

Janee's experience of support and empowerment from professionals within the criminal legal community further emphasizes the importance of fostering connections between legal

system representatives and individuals reentering society. Berman's findings on gender-responsive strategies for women advocate for establishing systems that cultivate positive and supportive relationships between reentering women and staff members (Berman, 2005). Janee's endorsement of the assistance from staff in the criminal legal system underscores the significance of supportive networks and social connections in fostering empowerment and resilience.

Limitations

While the findings from this dissertation add to our understanding of Black women navigating reentry, it is important to acknowledge several limitations in this qualitative research. Since Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is the chosen analytic tool, interpreting participant narratives is subject to the researcher's biases and assumptions. Additionally, the researcher's understanding of women's reentry primarily stems from professional background rather than firsthand experience. Despite identifying as a Black woman, the researcher's lack of direct lived experience may affect the interpretation of participant narratives. The researcher's preconceptions could lead to selective interpretations of participants' experiences, thus influencing the study's outcomes.

The second limitation concerns self-report bias among participants. While the narratives shared by participants are highly valued and respected by the researcher, there is a possibility that participants may provide responses they perceive as socially desirable. This tendency might be influenced by the nature of the topic, as women involved in the criminal legal system may feel compelled to conform to societal norms. Additionally, participants are aware of the researcher's lack of firsthand experience within the criminal legal system, which may affect the validity of their self-reports. Furthermore, although efforts were made to refine interview questions through a pilot study, the wording of the questions may still impact the accuracy of self-reported data.

Conducting interviews virtually and over the phone in participants' residences introduces another layer of complexity, potentially affecting the validity of participants' responses, as they may be concerned about who might overhear the conversation.

The third limitation concerns the geographical location of the participants, who were either in Washington, D.C., Georgia, or Maryland. This geographical limitation may introduce bias because each jurisdiction offers different assistance possibilities for individuals returning to society after incarceration. For instance, the Reintegration Report Card assesses and ranks U.S. jurisdictions based on their laws regarding rights and opportunities for those with a criminal record (Love & Schlusel, 2020). In this report, Georgia was ranked 32nd, and Washington, D.C., was ranked 40th. According to the report, Washington, D.C., has some of the nation's most stringent record relief laws and enforces strict regulations regarding criminal records in employment. The discrepancy in rankings and opportunities afforded to returning citizens influences their reintegration period.

To address research bias, the researcher leveraged the extensive professional background working with reentry citizens, offering a perspective shaped by prior experiences. Additionally, as a Black woman, the researcher shared a sense of connection with the participants, fostering empathy and reducing bias. Furthermore, engaging in member checking, peer debriefing, and journaling served as safeguards against potential biases and assumptions. Despite these considerations, the researcher successfully conducted a study to explore and comprehend the subjective experiences and perspectives of Black women post-incarceration.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for policy, social work practice, and research. Starting with policy implications, there is a clear need for anti-discriminatory measures to be incorporated into policies aimed at protecting the public from inadvertently

discriminating against individuals with a criminal record. As an example, regulations such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, enabling public housing agencies to refuse or expel individuals due to criminal records, continue to foster bias against those entangled in the criminal justice system, hindering their effective reintegration. An anti-discriminatory measure could allow tenants to present their case before a judge or a neutral housing authority to determine whether the eviction is discriminatory.

Although these implications may also apply to men, existing literature acknowledges gender differences in the services required by men and women during reentry (Berman, 2005; Brown, 2010; Scroggins & Malley, 2010). The first implication for reentry programming is the necessity of adopting a person-centered approach by case managers at reentry agencies/organizations. Rooted in the principles established by theorist Carl Rogers, a person-centered approach recognizes each individual as an expert in their own life and acknowledges their potential for self-actualization (Rowe, 2017). In this approach, case managers serve as empathetic facilitators, offering unconditional support to help clients achieve their goals. This approach fosters empowerment, positive self-worth, and self-esteem, ultimately leading to self-sufficiency and personal growth.

Adopting a person-centered approach to reentry will result in a comprehensive case management strategy tailored to the needs and strengths of these women. Black women with intersecting marginalized identities require such an approach due to the complex challenges they face upon reintegration into society. Furthermore, implementing a person-centered approach enables the promotion of spirituality in the reentry process. A reentry program catering to Black women that embraces a person-centered approach will be culturally competent and sensitive to faith-based practices, acknowledging the importance of spirituality in fostering resilience,

empowerment, and holistic well-being during reintegration. This approach will involve providing religious and spiritual resources while recognizing the additional challenges faced by Black women with intersecting marginalized identities, such as those who identify as members of the LGBTQ community.

Incorporating peer-to-peer initiatives is imperative in reentry programs. Peer support involves aiding based on mutual understanding, respect, and reciprocal empowerment among individuals facing similar circumstances (Barrenger, 2019). Reentry programs should highlight success stories of other Black women achieving their goals post-reentry to offer inspiring examples of strength and empowerment. There is a need to cultivate peer-to-mentor relationships or establish support groups within this population to foster a sense of community and belongingness among Black women in reentry.

In terms of research implications, it is imperative for researchers to further investigate the distinct experiences of Black women during reentry. These women grapple with intersecting identities in a society that frequently perpetuates oppression against them. Future research could broaden its scope by examining a larger cohort of participants across various geographical locations to advance beyond the current findings. This approach would provide insights into how differing rights and opportunities available to Black women during reentry impact their experiences.

There is a pressing need for research to delve deeper into the nuanced impact on Black women who face further marginalization due to their identities. Further insight is required into the experiences of other marginalized groups, such as transgender Black women reentering society amidst a lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and services; and Black women with disabilities encountering barriers to accessing accommodations. Research focusing on these

topics will provide valuable insights into the interconnected challenges faced by these individuals, allowing us to work towards solutions that address systemic inequalities and provide inclusive support services for successful reintegration.

Another important area for research pertains to the healthcare needs of women during reentry. Women's healthcare needs are multifaceted due to factors such as pregnancy, menstruation, and menopause. A study examining the impact of health conditions on the reintegration process found that 90% of female participants, over half of whom identified as Black, suffered from chronic diseases requiring treatment or management (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). Additionally, 60% reported experiencing a combination of physical, mental, and substance abuse conditions. Many of these women did not receive treatment for their conditions while incarcerated, and post-incarceration treatment rates decreased (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). Given the potential fatality associated with health diagnoses, it is imperative to gain further understanding of the healthcare needs of Black women during reentry, particularly considering the prevalence of chronic diseases among this population. Understanding their health-seeking behaviors is essential to addressing medical concerns threatening their well-being.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter presents the findings derived from the dissertation study focusing on the reentry experiences of Black women post-incarceration. Utilizing the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, six distinct themes emerged from the narratives of the nine participants. Three of these themes centered on the intersectional experiences of the women, while the remaining three highlighted aspects of empowerment. The themes were further discussed thoroughly, and participant quotes were included to bolster the findings. Moreover, common limitations inherent in qualitative research have been acknowledged. Lastly,

implications for reentry programming, policy development, and future research have been outlined, offering valuable guidance for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to foster equity, justice, and successful reintegration for individuals reentering society following incarceration.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions:

1. What are the lived intersectional experiences of Black women once they return to the community after a period of incarceration?
 2. How do Black women returning to the community after imprisonment experience empowerment to overcome barriers, if any?
-

Pseudonym:

Interview Questions:

1. Describe to me your reentry journey thus far.
2. Tell me how your identity as a Black woman has impacted your reentry journey?
3. Tell me about significant challenges or hardships you faced during your reentry journey?
 - a. Please provide examples
4. Tell me about challenges you believe you have faced due to your identity (as a Black woman) during your reentry journey?
 - a. Please provide examples
5. Tell me how you overcame or are overcoming the reentry challenges you have faced?
 - a. Provide an example
6. Based on your reentry journey, and the challenges you faced, If there was a reentry program tailored to you and your needs, what would it look like?
 - a. Which of your needs would it address?
7. Throughout this reentry process, how have you been able to relieve stress? (Emotional outlet)
8. Can you tell me about activities you participate in because they represent you and give you a sense of aliveness and wholeness (personal expressiveness)
9. Who would you identify as your tribe/community?

- a. How, if any way, has being a member of his community helped with your reentry experience?
10. Tell me about any person or group of people that were not Black women that you connected with during your reentry journey?
 - a. How did the connection come about?
 - b. What was the connection like?
11. Tell me about any professional staff or agencies that were skilled and competent in helping you in your reentry journey?
 - a. What skills did they display?
 - b. What made you believe they were skilled and competent?
12. In your words, what would you say empowered/empowers you during your reentry journey?
13. In your words, what would you say motivates you internally during your reentry journey?
(personal expressiveness)
14. I am curious to know about who, if anyone, has helped you be empowered Throughout your reentry journey.
15. What would you say was most helpful in keeping you from reincarceration?
16. What would you say has made you resilient?
Resilient means: able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions.
17. What else (if anything) would you like to add?
18. How did you hear about the research study?
19. Is there anyone you would like to refer for the study?

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. How do you identify?
3. What is your sexual orientation?
4. What is your relationship status?
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
6. What charge(s) were you incarcerated for?
7. How long were you incarcerated for?
8. What month & year were you released?

9. Do you reside in the State/ District you were incarcerated in?
10. Do you currently reside in a community you would consider “home” prior to incarceration?
11. Did you require any special services during your incarceration? (mentally ill, developmentally disabled, seriously or chronically ill, physically disabled, trouble performing activities of daily living, or who are a danger to themselves.)
12. Are you on supervised Release?
13. What is your current employment status? (Mark all that apply)
14. What is your current living situation?
15. Are you a parent?
If you are a parent, is someone co-parenting with you?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Black Women Reentry Following Incarceration Research Study

This study explores African American women's experiences to understand how their identity impacts their reentry and how they experience empowerment following a period of incarceration.



WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- Women who identify as Black
- At least 18 years of age at the time of incarceration
- Incarcerated for at least 6 months
- Have been released for at least 6 months and have not been re-incarcerated since release
- Women under supervised release/parole/probation

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire about themselves and discuss their experience returning home following a period of incarceration. Participants will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute in-person interview.

INTERESTED?

Please contact Yomi Paseda at 202-695-3151 or oluwayomi@uga.edu.

Participants will receive a \$25 Wal-Mart Gift Card

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM
The Lived Experiences of Black Women Reentry

Researcher's Statement

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything unclear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Principal Investigator: Oluwayomi Paseda, LMSW
School of Social Work

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Orion Mowbray
School of Social Work

Purpose of the Study

This study explores Black women's experiences to understand how their identity impacts their reentry and how they experience empowerment following a period of incarceration. This study will inform implications for reentry policy and practice tailored to Black women and shape the narrative of stereotypes placed on them.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual in-person interview that should take approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded. Your involvement is voluntary, and you can stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You should know that the contents of this interview can be made public as part of the researcher's scholarly presentations and/or publications but that all aspects of the interview will be stripped of personal identifiers to protect your confidentiality.

Risks and Discomforts

We know that discussing your reentry experience can be a very sensitive topic. Some people may experience different feelings after talking about life events. If you wish to talk to someone further after discussing these topics, you may talk to your current mental health provider (if applicable), or contact agency to connect you with resources. You may skip questions that make you uncomfortable and you can discontinue participation at any time.

