SECOND CHANCE: THE PARADOX OF FELONY CONVICTIONS

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SECOND CHANCE: THE PARADOX OF FELONY CONVICTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Every year hundreds of thousands of individuals with felony convictions are released into the community with the expectation that those re-entering society will be "successful" upon re-entry. Society tells persons with criminal backgrounds (PWCB) they have a "second chance" upon release, yet we are reluctant to provide the resources necessary to make this happen. Stigma is frequently identified as a potential obstacle to reentry, (DeFina, & Hannon, 20109; Shivy et al., 2007; Travis et al., 2001); however, research involving stigma surrounding conviction and the career development of individuals with felony convictions is lacking. Using Psychology of Working Theory as a framework, interviews with 14 males with felonies were examined to identify how the stigma associated with felony convictions has affected their work volition and career trajectory, including the potential barriers they experience to employment. Participants reported receiving a felony conviction before age 24 and experienced post-conviction obstacles, specifically employment/job-related obstacles. Participants discussed experiencing stigma related to their felony convictions and described strategies employed to mitigate that stigma. Participants' work history involved largely manual labor work and they discussed having career aspirations despite their felony

conviction. Implications for counseling, future research and limitations are discussed.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled "Second Chance: The Paradox of Felony Convictions," presented by Rebekah May Lee, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Review of the Literature

According to the world prison population list, the United States incarcerates more

people than any other country worldwide, both in total numbers and as a percentage of the

population (Walmsley, 2013). More than 2.16 million individuals are incarcerated in the

United States, in jails or prisons (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018), significantly more than the

runner up, China, which incarcerates roughly 1.5 million individuals (Walmsley, 2013). In

fact, the United States holds approximately one fifth of the world's total prison population.

The United States also leads in the rate of those incarcerated with 716 out of 100,000

individuals living behind bars (Walmsely, 2013). In his review of world prison population,

Walmsley (2013) reported that more than 54% of the 222 countries surveyed had rates of

incarceration lower than 150/100,000. This is staggering considering the United States

incarcerates at a rate 5 times this many.

As of 2016, an additional 4.5 million individuals were under community supervision

(probation and parole; Kaeble, 2018) for a total of 6.61million persons considered part of the

correctional population, which includes individuals under some form of adult correctional

supervision (probation, parole) as well as those incarcerated in prison, and jail (Kaeble &

Cowhig, 2018). In a report for the bureau of justice statistics, Kaeble (2018) indicated that

the number of those included in the adult correctional population has continued to decline by

roughly 1.2% annually over the last 10 years. Similarly, the bureau reports that the prison

population has declined to 2.16 million U.S. citizens from a high of 2.31 million in 2012

(Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). Despite this downward trend, as a nation we continue to

incarcerate individuals at the highest rate in the world. With over a fourth of the world's

prison population residing in prisons in the U.S., many researchers consider the rate of mass

incarceration in the U.S. as an epidemic (Appleman, 2018).

As a result of our nation's high incarceration rate, we release large numbers of

individuals with criminal backgrounds into the community each year. Every year we add to

the existing numbers of individuals with criminal backgrounds living within the community.

It is estimated that almost 20 million individuals have a felony conviction on their records

within the United States, which is roughly 6% of the total population (Shannon et al., 2011).

However, African Americans make up a disproportionate number of individuals with felony

convictions. Specifically, over 25% of the overall African American population and roughly

30% of African American males have felony convictions (Shannon et al., 2011).

For many reasons (and for the purpose of this study), it is important to differentiate

between the terms ex-offender and individuals with felonies. "Ex-offender" is frequently

used within the literature, but oftentimes without clear definition. "Ex-offender" appears to

be used as a general definition of one who has committed a crime, either misdemeanor and/or

felony. "Ex-offenders" may have been incarcerated as a result of their convictions, or they

may have served their sentence via other means (community service, probation etc.).

"Felon" refers to an individual who has received a felony conviction, either at the state or

federal-level. Similar to "ex-offenders", individuals with felonies may serve prison or jail

time as a result of their conviction or they may serve probation in lieu of incarceration.

However, felony convictions frequently carry a prison sentence of at least one year. As

previously stated, the terms "ex-offender" and "felon" are frequently found in the literature.

In order to not perpetuate the stigma of referring to individuals with felonies as "felons" and

its negative effects I have chosen to use the term "person with a criminal background" (PWCB) to refer to "ex-offenders" and persons with a felony conviction (PWFC) to refer to "felons". Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I will use *person with a criminal background* as an overarching and inclusive term to include any individual who have encountered the corrections system, whereas *person with a felony conviction* will be reserved for those individuals who have received a felony conviction, either state or federal.

A felony is defined as a conviction for a crime that is severe enough to receive a punishment of incarceration within a state or federal prison and typically carries a sentence of at least one year. This is in contrast to a misdemeanor, a lesser sentence, the punishment for which can include confinement in a local or county jail and/or a fine. Time served in confinement for misdemeanors is less than one year. Jails confine individuals awaiting trial, sentencing, or a plea agreement, and those convicted of misdemeanor offenses. In addition, jails also confine those who have received sentences of less than one year and those individuals sentenced to prison who are awaiting a transfer to a prison facility. In contrast to prisons, which house individuals convicted of felonies and sentenced to confinement of more than a year, jails typically confine individuals on a temporary basis (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.). Lastly, probation is a form of community supervision, typically used in lieu of incarceration. However, some individuals can receive a split sentence, whereby they complete part of their sentence while incarcerated, followed by a period of probation. Similarly, parole involves conditionally releasing a prisoner to the community where they serve the remainder of their sentence under community supervision. The decision to release a prisoner on parole is made either through a parole board decision or through a statute (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.).

Re-entry after Incarceration

In 2016, 626,000 individuals were released from jail or prison (Carson, 2018). Every year, similar numbers of PWCB are released with the expectation that they will re-integrate back into society. However, the literature on re-entry and/or recidivism has suggested that re-entry is anything but easy. Some have posited the difficulty in reentry is due to the incredibly stressful transition that PWCB face as they move from imprisonment to freedom; however most agree that the issues surrounding ex-offending re-entry are numerous and complex (Grommon, 2013). Some have argued that re-entry is the least understood aspect of corrections, noting that authors frequently cite the difficulties surrounding re-entry, but the thorough mechanics of what makes re-entry so challenging for many is largely misunderstood and under researched (Grommon, 2013). This lack of understanding has unfortunately resulted in little change in the how we view re-entry with many individuals unfortunately recidivating and back in prison within a few years. In 2005, 83% of individuals released from state prisons were re-arrested within 9 years of release with 44% being arrested within the first year of release (Alper & Markman, 2018). A similar study on individuals released from federal prison found that over an 8-year period, 49.3% of those released in 2005 were re-arrested, with 37% of those released being re-convicted and 24% re-incarcerated (Hunt & Dumville, 2016).

Different theories have emerged as to why individuals recidivate (are re-arrested or re-convicted depending on the definition); some believe that character flaws within the individual make them susceptible to re-offending, others have reported overly strict probation and parole guidelines that re-incarcerate individuals for the smallest infraction. Still others hypothesize that when re-entry is difficult, individuals are more likely to re-offend. Despite

different theories behind recidivism, one cannot argue with the complexity of the prison epidemic. For example, multiple factors have been found to contribute to the prison epidemic including: lack of education (Ewert et al, 2014; Jaggers et al, 2016), poverty, policing, and sentencing biases (Sutton, 2013). As there is not one factor that leads to incarceration, one factor alone cannot cause recidivism. Nor is there one identifiable contributing factor that leads to a successful reintegration after imprisonment.

Despite the lack of a clear understanding of the mechanics of re-entry, researchers agree that PWCB experience numerous challenges upon re-entry, including: policy restrictions, stable housing, access to health care, lack of social support, lack of education, unemployment, occupational license restrictions, poverty and loss of voting rights (Brown, 2011; Harris & Keller, 2005; Hlavka et al, 2015; Moore & Tangney, 2017; Varghese & Cummings, 2013; Rade et al., 2016; Rakis, 2005, Taxman, 2004; Travis et al., 2001). Many PWCB are without even the most basic needs like photo identification (La Vigne et al., 2009). Housing and employment are frequently cited as some of the most important aspects of re-entry (Grommon, 2013; Hlavka et al., 2015; La Vigne et al., 2009). These two interrelated and crucial steps to re-entry work to stabilize one another. Housing typically provides stability and a base to seek employment, whereas employment ensures a more stable living environment. The ability to find gainful employment can be challenging for individuals with criminal backgrounds, and yet earning a decent income is an established deterrent of reoffending (Hlavka et al., 2015; Sung, 2001; Travis et al., 2001). Sung (2001) theorized that procuring well-paying jobs or "decent work" (Duffy et al., 2016) as well as commitment to work and bonding among workers may make individuals more likely to conform to societal expectations and adhere to the law rather than obtain compensation from

illegal means. This argument is seconded by Grommon (2013), who suggested that employment provides structure to the ex-offender's day, which can provide some sort of social control, whereby individuals start to "buy in" to conventional society (Grommon, 2013). After all, having a successful and meaningful career, not only affords the opportunity to provide for an individual's basic needs, but contributes to one's identity, provides social status and structure to one's life (Drobnic et al., 2010; Duffy et al., 2016). It seems as though not only employment, but meaningful employment is crucial to giving PWCB an incentive to conform with societal laws and rules (Sung, 2001). The difficulty with this line of thought is that PWCB do not typically have access to the types of jobs that would give them a stake in conformity. Many PWCB are released into areas that have fewer employment opportunities and higher levels of overall unemployment (Grommon, 2013). However, even if PWCB were released into communities with a multitude of employment opportunities, we as a society seem unwilling to provide the type of jobs that would encourage PWCB to remain crime free (Decker et al., 2015; Pager, 2003).

The terms job and career are frequently used interchangeably, however, for the purpose of this study, I am choosing to define job as work for the purpose of earning money, which may result in less personal and emotional investment from the worker, whereas career is defined as work involving a long-term goal-oriented pursuit, which includes more investment of personal and emotional energy from the worker (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Although obtaining a meaningful career may be a long-term goal for PWCB, upon release, their primary goal is to find a job in order to cover their basic needs.

Employment and Reentry

As previously noted, finding gainful employment can be particularly difficult for

PWCB, even during a strong economy. Much ground has been gained with the "ban the box" campaign, which is aimed at advocating for PWCB by banning the question on job applications that ask about criminal background history. To date, 31 states, and over 150 cities (as of April 2018) and counties have adopted its fair-chance policy for employment and banned questions regarding criminal background on job applications; however, PWCB are still at a disadvantage. Pager (2003) found that White individuals with criminal backgrounds were 50% less likely to receive a call back than White individuals with no criminal background. However, Black individuals with criminal backgrounds were 66% less likely to receive a call back than their Black, crime-free counterparts and 85% less likely to receive a call back than their White crime-free counterparts. These findings were replicated by Decker et al. (2015) who found that with online applications, criminal background and race had no impact on hiring decisions, but in person, both criminal background and minority status (Black or Hispanic) decreased chances of a favorable response from employers. These findings indicate that having a criminal background decreases your chances of being offered a job and is compounded by already existing racial inequalities in hiring. Employers may view criminal behavior as markers of untrustworthiness (Brown, 2011), which is consistent with research suggesting that as many as 40% of employers would not hire a PWCB (Holzer et al., 2003).

Unemployment after Conviction

Estimates in unemployment after criminal conviction vary, but all estimates list unemployment within the PWCB population as significantly higher than that of the general population. For the first year after release, unemployment for PWCB ranges from 50% (Hlavka et al., 2015) to 70% (Young & Powell, 2015). After 5 years, unemployment levels

range from 13% (Couloute & Kopf, 2018) to 25% (de Vuono-powell et al., 2015). However, unemployment is not equally distributed among the PWCB population. Black women have the highest unemployment rate in the first two years post -release (43.5%) followed by Black men (35.2%), White women (23.2%) and finally White men (18.4%; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). As a comparison, unemployment in the general population ranges from the lowest levels for White men and women at 4.3% to the highest for Black men at 7.7% (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). All PWCB experience unemployment at significantly higher rates than the general population; however, the unemployment rate for Black men and women with criminal backgrounds is particularly staggering. This is consistent with research conducted by Pager (2003) and replicated by Decker et al. (2015), which found that a criminal background status for African American individuals significantly and negatively affected their employment opportunities.

Many PWCB were working prior to their arrest (Grommon, 2013; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010); however, many were working low-paying, low-quality jobs (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Low-quality jobs or "bad jobs" are defined as those that do not include a living wage, access to health insurance or retirement benefits (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Once released from prison, these already vulnerable individuals, who were previously working low-quality jobs, are at an increased risk of accepting jobs for which they are not well-suited or earning significantly lower wages than individuals with no criminal background (DeFina, & Hannon, 2009). Essentially, the barriers PWCB experience upon re-entry decreases their chance of securing decent work.

Psychology of Working Theory

Although there are many theories of how individuals navigate career decision

making, many of the existing career theories focus on career choice and how individuals make those choices. Much of the research within vocational psychology is conducted with college students, which may include a range of representations of race/ethnicities, but still largely includes those individuals for which one might argue have the privilege of career choice. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) has afforded more flexibility for the inclusion of individuals who may not have the same access or resources in career decision making, by including aspects within the model that include environmental factors (contextual factors and person inputs). *Psychology of Working Theory* (PWT) is a more recent theoretical base that attempts to explain the work experiences of all people, but specifically individuals who experience discrimination and marginalization and who are often forced to make work decisions because of their context (Duffy et al., 2016). For these individuals, Duffy et al. (2016) posited that contextual factors are the primary driving force in their ability to engage in "decent work" which is the core construct of the theory. PWT posits that for many, especially the working poor or people who are marginalized or discriminated against during their career ventures, career choices may be diminished because of environmental limitations. Although Duffy et al. (2016) would note that PWT is complementary to many already existing career theories, especially those like SCCT that incorporate contextual factors into the model, PWT is different, in that it places contextual factors at the forefront of the model, emphasizing them as the primary influence in career decisions.

Decent work. The key construct of the model of PWT is decent work. The concept of decent work comes from the International Labor Organization ([ILO]; 2012) which provides an aspirational statement regarding ideal work, with the following indicators: employment opportunities, adequate earnings, decent working time, combining work, family

and personal life, work that should be abolished, stability and security of work, equal opportunity and treatment in employment, safe work environment, social security and social dialogue (employers' and workers' representation). From the ILO framework, Duffy et al. (2016) defined decent work as consisting of: (a) safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), (b) reasonable hours that allow for work/life balance, (c) organizational values that complement family and social values, (d) adequate compensation, and (e) access to health care. Decent work, as the ideal is considered the goal of career choices and decisions. Decent work sits in the middle of the PWT framework, with contextual factors driving the pursuit to achieve decent work (see Figure 1). When/if decent work is achieved, it has many positive outcomes, including social connectedness, self-determination, work fulfillment and well-being (Duffy, 2016). PWT posits two predictors of decent work: Marginalization, and Economic Constraints.

Marginalization. Duffy et al. (2016) defined marginalization as "the relegation of people (or groups of people) to a less powerful or included position within a society" (p.132). Individuals with felonies are at increased risk of marginalization due to their criminal background, which jeopardizes their ability to secure decent work. However, this relegation is compounded by the intersection of the multiple marginalized identities that many individuals with felonies inhabit. Race, socio- economic status (SES), and education level (McCarter, 2017; Ou & Reynolds, 2010) are known factors that contribute to incarceration and criminal conviction. Individuals with felonies are likely to have aspects of their identity that were marginalized prior to their conviction, which may have previously affected their ability to obtain decent work, and increased the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system, but have since added "felon" to their marginalized identities.

Economic constraints. Duffy et al. (2016) posited that the concept of economic constraints is rooted in social class which includes, income, educational attainment or occupational prestige and is split into economic resources. Economic resources incorporates the monetary capital one has access to (income, wealth etc.), as well as the social/cultural capital one has access to (relationships and power one has irrespective of the money they possess). Economic constraints are defined as "limited economic resources (e.g., household income, family wealth, social capital) which represent a critical barrier to securing decent work" (Duffy et al., 2016, p.133). Individuals with limited economic resources tend to have had less rigorous educational experiences growing up (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010) that their well-resourced peers. In addition, individuals were often afforded fewer opportunities for internship and career exploration and may have had fewer resources for achievement like attending college, or vocational school (Duffy et al., 2016). Similarly, individuals with economic constraints do not possess the social capital necessary for academic achievement and occupational advancement that others may have had (Duffy et al., 2016). Given the known contextual factors that contribute to incarceration (e.g., lower SES, racial minority status, lower education levels; McCarter, 2017; Ou & Reynolds, 2010) many individuals with felony convictions likely experienced economic constraints prior to their conviction and incarceration. After all, the United States typically incarcerates individuals with the least amount of financial and social capital (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). However, once convicted of a felony, an individual's economic constraints are increased, both from lack of income as well as potentially losing social capital as a result of the stigma surrounding felony conviction.

The PWT framework is complex. The model proposes that the relationship between

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contextual factors (i.e. marginalization and economic constraints) and decent work is

mediated by both work volition and career adaptability. In addition, the relations between

contextual factors and decent work are moderated by certain psychological and economic

variables (i.e. proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic

conditions). Survival needs, social connection needs, self-determination needs, work

fulfillment and well-being are also included as additional outcomes of decent work.

Although a detailed description of the model is outside the scope of this study, for the

purpose of additional clarification, some of these variables namely work volition and career

adaptability will be briefly described in this section (see Figure 1). Work volition defined as

"an individual's perception of choice in career decision-making despite constraints" (Duffy

et al., 2016. p.135) seems important to highlight given the salience of career choice or lack

thereof within the population of study.   Theorized as a perception, work volition is

considered an attitudinal variable that is malleable; however, Duffy et al. posited that the

perception of how much choice someone has surrounding career decision-making is the

result of real barriers and constraints that individuals face within their career environment .

Individuals with marginalized or stigmatized identities are at increased likelihood of

experiencing barriers to decent work and as such, may perceive less work volition than others

of more privileged standing (Duffy et al., 2016). It would therefore seem that work volition

would be salient construct for those returning from prison with felony convictions, as they

are likely to experience decreased work volition as a result of the very real obstacles of

reentry, namely stereotyping and external stigma from society and employers. Career

adaptability is defined as "an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current

and anticipated tasks of vocational development" (Savickas, 2002, p. 156, as cited in Duffy et

al., 2016). Similar to work volition, career adaptability is thought to be shaped by one's environment; however, it is also hypothesized to be malleable. Duffy et al. (2016) noted that typically individuals from higher social class backgrounds, with limited marginalization experiences have more adaptive career attitudes. As previously noted, many individuals who are incarcerated come from racial/ethnic minority groups (primarily African American and Hispanic). In addition, individuals who are incarcerated frequently possess lower education levels and lower socio-economic status (Sutton, 2013). As such, PWFC are likely to have experienced marginalization based on their identity and/or group membership prior to incarceration. In addition, PWFC are more likely to have experienced economic constraints prior to conviction. However, receiving an additional stigmatizing identity (i.e., "felon") further limits their economic and social capital, placing PWFC at an increased risk of experiencing lower career adaptability.

Economic constraints and marginalization experiences are hypothesized to predict work volition and career adaptability, which in turn predict an individual's ability to obtain decent work. Securing decent work is linked to positive outcomes like wellbeing and psychological need fulfillment (Autin et al., 2018). As previously noted, upon release, PWCB must obtain work as part of their probation/parole, (Grommon, 2013, Hlavka, 2015) and face significant consequences if they cannot secure or maintain employment, including probation violations and possibly even re-incarceration (Grommon, 2013; Travis et al., 2001). Although, specific timelines for securing employment upon release and the consequences for failing to do so, are largely left up to an individual's probation or parole officer (Sutton, 2013), this places incredible pressure on PWCB to find work, any work, within a given timeframe to avoid recidivating. The stress of finding work can contribute to

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PWCB having to accept jobs for which they are not well suited or to accept employment with lower wages than individuals without criminal backgrounds (DeFina, & Hannon, 2009). Essentially the sense of desperation faced by PWCB to find employment may further limit their work volition and decrease their likelihood of engaging in decent work.

Psychology of Working Theory Research

Despite PWT being a new career theory, there is a growing body of knowledge investigating the applicability of the theory to different populations. To date, the research applying PWT to various sample populations appears somewhat mixed, with evidence for some tenets of PWT being applicable to various samples, while others not so. In a study exploring the applicability of psychology of working theory in 320 workers with chronic health conditions (Chiari Malformation-Type 1), Tokar and Kaut, (2018) found that individuals with higher economic constraints and marginalization experienced lower engagement with decent work and work volition. Additionally, researchers found that individuals with increased economic constraints experienced lower career adaptability, and lower engagement with decent work. The authors concluded that PWT appeared to be an appropriate framework for employees with chronic health conditions. However, it should be noted that, contrary to their hypothesis, participants' work volition was not significantly related to their engagement with decent work. Tokar and Kaut hypothesized that this finding may be specific to their study sample, which was comprised predominately of women (a more marginalized identity) and as such, participants' experiences of marginalization and economic hardships may have overshadowed their freedom in making career decisions (Tokar & Kaut, 2018).

Similar findings from a study exploring PWT tenets within a sample of 218 lesbian,

gay and bisexual people, found that individuals with greater experiences of marginalization experienced lower work volition and access to decent work (Douglass et al., 2017). Additionally, these researchers found that those individuals from higher social class had more positive links to work volition and decent work (Douglass et al., 2017). Somewhat surprisingly, career adaptability was not significantly associated with other study variables with the exception of work volition.

Duffy et al. (2018) investigated the tenets of PWT in a sample of 526 racially and ethnically diverse employees and found mixed support for use of the model within their sample. Specifically, and not surprisingly, they found that racial/ethnic minorities who experience marginalization and economic constraints experienced less access to decent work and experienced less freedom in their career choices than those employees who did not experience marginalization. This provides some preliminary support for the use of PWT within the population of racial/ ethnic minorities. Somewhat surprisingly, Duffy et al. (2018) did not find a significant link between economic resources and marginalization. However, they attributed these findings to issues with their sample, noting that their sample had higher than average levels of educational attainment and household income. Duffy et al. (2018) posited that results may have differed for an economically disadvantaged sample. Similar to Douglass et al. (2017), Duffy et al. (2018) also found that career adaptability was not significantly associated with other variables, with the exception of work volition.

In a qualitative study, Autin et al. (2018) drew from the PWT theoretical framework to explore career and educational barriers of undocumented immigrant young adults recruited from an immigration advocacy group on a university campus. Some of their findings highlighted educational constraints and marginalization as playing a pivotal role in

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participants' perception of their career development and work volition. Specifically, and within the domain of barriers, economic constraints and lack of transportation were *general* categories identified as being barriers to individuals' education (Autin et al., 2018). Similarly, lack of access to decent work and university support/infrastructure was identified as additional educational barriers. All participants cited finances as a primary barrier to their desired career paths and the majority reported economic constraints as precluding access to decent work (Autin et al., 2018). In addition, participants expressed economic constraints as impeding their freedom of career choice.

Stigma

Goffman (1963) first highlighted the *spoiled identities* of individuals, as those who are excluded from full society and subject to stigmatization; however, since then a plethora of research has been conducted on individuals who are considered "others" by society or labeled as bad, or lesser than "normals." Today a search can reveal various different ways of defining and operationalizing stigma, although there appear to be two distinct differences in the construct. The first type of stigma relates to more external stigma or stigmatization placed on the individual by society as a whole (Goffman, 1963). This variant will be classified as social stigma since it represents stereotypes and biases placed on the individual with the spoiled identity by others and society at large. The second type of stigma relates to the internal cognitive processes of the individual with the spoiled identity. This type of stigma has been defined in different ways; anticipated stigma – how much an individual expects to be stigmatized (Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2013; Quinn & Choudoir, 2009); stigma consciousness – how aware an individual is of their stigmatized identity during interactions with others (Pinel, 1999); internal stigma or self- stigma – how much of the

existing stereotypes are incorporated into the stigmatized individual's identity (Corrigan, Watson & Barr, 2006; Moore, Milam, Folk & Tangney, 2018); and perceived stigma –how much one believes that others hold negative views/stereotypes about the individual's spoiled identity (Moore et al., 2018; Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2013; Moore, Tangney & Stuewig, 2016). Researchers have also used the term self-stigma to refer to the overarching process by which stigma affects individuals specifically in terms of offenders (Moore, Tangney & Stuewig, 2016). Historically, the public view of PWCB has been overwhelmingly negative (Rade et al., 2016), which is a clear barrier to successful re-entry (Hlavka et al., 2015; Rade et al., 2016; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Additionally, stigmas are defined as concealable and non-concealable. Concealable stigmas (felony status, sexual orientation etc.) compared to stigmas one cannot hide (pregnancy, physical disability, obesity, race etc.) have implications for impression management such that the individual with the stigmatized identity must manage if and when to disclose their identity as well as manage the fear of being exposed (Baur et al., 2018). There is some disagreement as to whether concealable stigmas are more or less difficult to manage than non-concealable stigmas, however, most agree that the prolonged impression management associated with concealing a stigmatized identity is associated with negative outcomes like psychological distress and lower well-being (Baur et al., 2018; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Although social stigma affects the re-entry experiences of PWCB, for the purpose of this study, I am more interested in the internal cognitive processes of PWCB as it relates to stigma.

The Process of Stigma in Persons with Criminal Backgrounds. Moore, Tangney and Stuewig (2017) attempted to describe the process behind self-stigma (the overarching process of stigma) of criminal offenders based on the conceptualization of stigma by

Corrigan et al. (2006). The model proposed by Moore et al. (2017) hypothesized that offenders believe that others held stereotypes about them (perceived stigma), which leads to agreement with those stereotypes (stereotype agreement), the acceptance of those stereotypes (internalized stigma) and finally the expectation that others will stigmatize PWCB (anticipated stigma). Researchers found evidence to support the self-stigma process with PWCB. Although the model held up, there were differences in the paths between internalized and anticipated stigma for Black inmates versus White inmates. For Black inmates, but not White, internalized stigma was positively related to anticipated stigma, meaning internalizing stereotypes did not necessarily increase the expectation of poor treatment from others for White inmates but did so for Black inmates.

Research on Stigma and Incarceration. Until recently, stigma was cited as an issue for PWCB (Chiricos et al., 2007; DeFina, & Hannon, 2009; Grommon, 2013; Wakefield and Uggen, 2010, Shivy et al., 2007), but little research had been conducted on stigma and its impact on the PWCB, especially in terms of employment challenges upon reentry. Although the body of knowledge has increased and continues to increase, this kind of research is still in its infancy. This section will review the research to date on stigma surrounding criminal activity.

In an early study conducted by Moore et al. (2013), findings suggested that inmates perceived fairly high levels of stigma from the public. These findings appear consistent across multiple studies exploring stigma with PWCB (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008; Lebel, 2012) and across multiple demographic variables like race/ethnicity (Schneider & McKim, 2003). Moore et al. (2016) found similar results. In their longitudinal study of the influence of perceived and anticipated stigma on 371 inmates post release, individuals with higher

perceived stigma prior to release experienced poorer community adjustment. Inmates also experienced anticipated stigma, however, at much lower levels than that of perceived stigma. This finding suggests that although inmates perceive that individuals hold stereotypes against PWCB as a whole, they may not anticipate personally experiencing this stigmatization from others. However, it appears as though the consequences of stigma do differ across demographics, particularly race (Moore et al., 2016).

Stigma and Race in Persons with Criminal Backgrounds. Several studies have examined stigma and race among PWCB and found differing results across demographic variables, specifically in regard to racial/ethnic background. The findings of these studies are discussed in more detail below with a summary of their explanation of findings at the end of this section. It is important to note that the authors of these studies used the terms Black and African American interchangeably and also interchanged the terms White and Caucasian; however, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to replace the use of Caucasian with European American in order to be more culturally sensitive. A study conducted by Moore and Tangney (2017) found that anticipated stigma among incarcerated White participants predicted social withdrawal (i.e., withdrawal from society) from those without criminal backgrounds three months post release. Social withdrawal predicted poorer mental health outcomes one-year post release. Not surprisingly, social withdrawal at three months post-release predicted poor adjustment in the community at one year following release. However, these results were significant for White participants but not Black participants. Similarly, Moore et al. (2016) found that perceived stigma among European Americans with criminal backgrounds predicted anticipated stigma which predicted poorer post release functioning. However, this was not the case for African American participants. For African Americans,

perceived stigma was less predictive of anticipated stigma, which did not predict post release functioning.

The differing effects of stigma related constructs (e.g. anticipated stigma, perceived stigma) among PWCB of different racial/ethnic backgrounds is not isolated to Moore et al.'s (2016) study. For example, Moore et al. (2013) found similar results in that stigma appeared to have more negative consequences for White than Black participants in terms of post release functioning. Specifically, and somewhat surprisingly, perceived stigma was associated with higher employment both in terms of employment rate and total hours employed in African American participants, but not for White participants. In fact, no significant relationship between perceived stigma and employment was found in White participants. In other words, for White participants, an individual's level of perceived stigma did not affect their employment. The authors noted that although most research has suggested that perceived stigma is associated with negative psychological and social outcomes; under certain circumstances, perceived stigma can actually have positive outcomes (Moore, et al., 2013). For example, Moore at al. (2013) found that perceived stigma had positive effects on employment in African American PWCB in the year after their release. This finding did not support the authors' original hypothesis that greater endorsement of perceived stigma would result in more negative post-release functioning. However, the authors acknowledged that within models of the stigma process, individuals can respond both negatively (e.g., through the process of internalized stigma), or positively (e.g., through indifference and social activism), noting that some individuals may feel empowered by their stigmatized identity (Moore, et al., 2013).

In addition, Winnick and Bodkin (2009) found that White PWCB scored higher on

scales that measured anticipated stigma compared to their Black counterparts. White

participants were also found to be more secretive about their criminal records. That is, White

participants anticipated more stigma post release and were more inclined to conceal their

stigmatized identity than their Black counterparts (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009).

In addition, Chiricos et al. (2007) found that receiving the label of "felon" was more

detrimental for those who would be considered less likely to recidivate. Essentially,

individuals who have more to lose by receiving the label, tend to suffer more of the

consequences. Consistent with other research listed here, Chiricos et al. (2007) found that

African Americans as well as Hispanic PWFC were more impervious to the effects of being

labeled a "felon" than their White counterparts: non-White PWFBs did not experience as

many negative consequences of being labeled a "felon".

One possible rationale for the differential impact of stigma according to race is the

concealable nature of criminal background. Some researchers have noted that White PWCB

have the privilege of concealing their spoiled identity (Moore et al., 2013), whereas Black

individuals already experience social stigma as a result of their race. For example, Black

individuals may be more open to disclosing another stigmatized aspect of their identity given

that managing their ex-offender status may be less troubling than managing the stigma

surrounding their racial status (Chiricos et al., 2007; Winnick & Bodkin, 2009).

Additionally, Black PWCB may have more active coping strategies for dealing with stigma

due to the prior racial stigma experienced, which is considered a non-concealable stigma

(Moore et al., 2016; Moore & Tangney, 2017). Finally, because African Americans are

incarcerated at a much higher rate than European Americans, they may experience

anticipated stigma from society as a whole but experience less stigma and less social

withdrawal from their immediate community where incarceration is less of an anomaly (Moore & Tangney, 2017; Winnick & Bodkin, 2009).

Stigma and Recidivism. In terms of stigma's impact on recidivism for PWCB, the research is mixed. Moore et al. (2013) found that perceived stigma did not predict recidivism, for most PWCB. However, inmates who perceived more stigma in jail prior to their release were more likely to commit violent offenses post release. The authors cited Lebel's (2012) results that individuals who were convicted of violent offenses, tend to endorse higher levels of perceived stigma than individuals convicted for non-violent offenses. The authors concluded that individuals who commit more violent offenses post release may also have committed violent offenses prior to incarceration. The act of committing offenses that are more violent may more closely fit the stereotype of a criminal, which may in turn increase an individual's perceived stigma. In the same study, White participants who reported higher levels of anticipated stigma were less likely to be arrested post release than White participants with low anticipated stigma. This finding was not applicable for African American participants (Moore et al., 2013). Likewise, Moore et al. (2016) found that neither perceived nor anticipated stigma predicted recidivism or substance use, despite it predicting community adjustment (e.g. employment and community engagement). These findings differ somewhat from Chiricos et al. (2007) who explored whether receiving a felony conviction (versus withholding adjudication/conviction) affected recidivism.

Based on labeling theory the researchers posited that receiving the label of convicted "felon" would increase recidivism. The researchers found evidence for their hypothesis; however, as previously noted, receiving the label of "felon" was more detrimental for White

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than for Black and Hispanic participants. Similar to prior studies that have discussed

differential outcomes of stigma across racial/ethnic backgrounds, the researchers argued that

those individuals who are already excluded membership from the dominant group due to

another stigmatized identity (e.g. racial/ethnic minorities) may be less affected by a formal

label. Additional results found that the effects of being adjudicated guilty and receiving a

label of "felon" on recidivism were more detrimental for women compared to men in that

women were more likely to recidivate after having been adjudicated guilty as a "felon"

Chiricos et al., 2007). Similarly, those with no prior convictions prior to age 30 were also

more likely to recidivate after a result of adjudication compared to those with prior

convictions. Essentially, results indicated that the consequences of labeling are greater for

those individuals who one would not expect to recidivate. Chiricos et al. (2007) posited that

those individuals who care more about the opinions of society as a whole may suffer more by

receiving a label.

Career Barriers

Career barriers are defined as physical conditions or cognitive thoughts and processes

that create obstacles to an individual's career goals. Swanson and Daniel (1996) described

career barriers as a means of interference with the career development process. As

previously mentioned, PWFC face external obstacles to obtaining gainful employment.

Some of these include discrimination in hiring practices, lack of career resources, and lack of

work experience. In addition, PWFC may experience additional internal states that

contribute to the difficulty that they may experience in finding employment, namely stigma.

PWCB who experience high levels of stigma may alter their behavior in such a way that they

send out fewer job applications, attend fewer job interviews, engage in fewer post release job

services, and overall experience more social withdrawal (Moore & Tangney, 2017). This finding is consistent with research on stigma, which has suggested individuals who anticipate being stereotyped by others may avoid those interactions in which they anticipate such stereotyping and stigmatization (Pinel, 1999; Moore & Tangney, 2017). Within the framework of PWT, career barriers both perceived and real greatly influence work volition or how much choice one perceives to have over their career. Stigma works as both an internal state (internal stigma) and an external condition (external stigma) which could lower work volition within the population of PWFC and affect their engagement with decent work. In addition, individuals with criminal backgrounds, but especially those with felonies are frequently excluded from many occupations, especially those involving licensing, such as lawyers, psychologists, teachers, physicians, nurses or even electricians, barbers and taxi drivers (Rakis, 2005, Harris & Keller, 2005; Hlavka, 2015). Although licensing boards do not always provide clear-cut guidelines regarding criminal conviction, language pertaining to the necessity of "Good moral character" is frequently found within licensing regulations (Harris & Keller, 2005). The subjectivity surrounding what constitutes "good moral character" means, a licensing board's decision to accept a request for licensure or not is largely subjective. This ambiguity surrounding whether or not a PWCB's application for licensing will be accepted or denied, may place PWCB at risk of completing additional higher education for the purposes of pursuing a professional degree or vocational certificate only to have their state license denied based on their conviction. These barriers to employment, especially employment associated with more social capital and prestige may further limit PWCB access to decent work.

Study Rationale and Purpose

In 2015, 1,415,297 men were incarcerated out of a total prison population of 1,526,792 individuals (Carson & Anderson, 2016). As of 2015, men comprised close to 93% of the prison population. In contrast, 111,495 women were imprisoned under state or federal correctional authorities in 2015, such that female offenders comprised only 7% of the total prisoner population (Carson & Anderson, 2016). The large numbers of men who are incarcerated as a result of their conviction translates into larger numbers of men being released every year and having to "re-enter" the workforce because of their conviction and subsequent incarceration. Because of the larger population of men with felonies re-entering the workforce, I have chosen to focus primarily on men for the purpose of this investigation.

Every year hundreds of thousands of PWCB are released into the community with the expectation that those re-entering society will be "successful" upon re-entry, however, as demonstrated earlier, the obstacles to successful reintegration are significant. As a society, we tell PWCB they have a "second chance" upon release into the community, yet we are reluctant to provide the resources and tools to make that happen; this is the paradox for the PWCB. Stigma is frequently identified as a potential obstacle to reentry; (DeFina, & Hannon, 20109; Shivy et al., 2007; Travis et al., 2001); however, until recently it has been less frequently studied in terms of its effects on recidivism and how it effects reentry. Despite more recent scholarly work on the stigma surrounding PWCB, research pertaining to stigma surrounding conviction and the career development of PWCB continues to be lacking. Although most of the literature on stigma within criminal justice populations does not focus exclusively on PWFC, others' and society's perception of PWFC may be more negative than that of individuals with misdemeanors since felony convictions are the consequence of

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committing more severe crimes. As such, PWFC may experience increased external and internal stigma compared to individuals with a misdemeanor. In addition, individuals with felony convictions are more likely to experience incarceration as a result of their conviction, which means more significant and detrimental career consequences resulting from their conviction. As such, PWFC seem to be an important focus of inquiry.

Specific constructs of Psychology of Working Theory, namely marginalization, economic constraints, work volition and decent work were used in the development of the interview protocol and to inform the purpose of this study, which was to examine the reentry experiences of men with felony convictions. I previously explored stigma consciousness quantitatively in a sample of men with felony convictions and based on the findings determined that a better understanding of their circumstances could be understood through a qualitative analysis (Lee, & Brown, 2018). In addition, because little research has been conducted on the re-entry experiences of PWFC, specifically in terms of the career development of PWFC after incarceration, qualitative methods of inquiry seemed appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of barriers PWFC face upon re-entry. To that end, I qualitatively investigated how the stigma associated with being labeled a "felon" related to work volition, career trajectory, and potential barriers to employment among a sample of men convicted of felonies. Specifically, my central questions and sub-questions were as follows:

1. How do PWFC make sense of receiving the label "felon"?

   (a) To what extent is stigma associated with receiving a felony conviction?

2. To what extent does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC pursuit of decent work?

(a) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC work volition?

(b) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC career adaptability?

(c) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC economic constraints?

CHAPTER 2

MANUSCRIPT

Literature Review

More than 2.16 million individuals are incarcerated in the United States, in jails or prisons (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018), more than any other country in the world (Walmsley, 2013). As of 2016, an additional 4.5 million individuals were under community supervision (probation and parole; Kaeble, 2018) for a total of 6.61 million persons considered part of the correctional population, (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). In a report for the bureau of justice statistics, Kaeble (2018) indicated that the number of those included in the adult correctional population has continued to decline by roughly 1.2% annually over the last 10 years. Similarly, the bureau reports that the prison population has declined to 2.16 million US citizens from a high of 2.31 million in 2012 (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). Despite this downward trend, as a nation we continued to incarcerate individuals at the highest rate in the world.

For many reasons (and for the purpose of this study), it is important to differentiate between the terms "ex-offender" and "felon". *Ex-offender* appears to be used as a general definition of one who has committed a crime, either misdemeanor and/or felony. "Ex-offenders" may have been incarcerated because of their convictions, or they may have served their sentence via other means like probation. *Felon* refers to an individual who has received a felony conviction, either state or federal. Similar to "ex-offenders", "felons" may serve prison or jail time or they may serve probation in lieu of incarceration. However, felony convictions more frequently carry a prison sentence of at least one year. The terms "ex-offender" and "felon" are frequently found in the literature, however, in order to not

perpetuate the stereotype and its negative effects we have chosen to use the term "person with a criminal background" (PWCB) to refer to "ex-offenders" and person with a felony conviction (PWFC) to refer to "felons".

Re-entry after Incarceration

In 2016, 626,000 individuals were released from jail or prison (Carson, 2018). Every year, similar numbers of PWCB are released with the expectation that they will re-integrate back into society. The literature has suggested that re-entry is anything but easy; however, the thorough mechanics of what makes re-entry so challenging are largely misunderstood and under researched (Grommon, 2013). This lack of understanding has resulted in little change in the how we view re-entry with many individuals recidivating within a few years. In 2005, 83% of individuals released from state prisons were re-arrested within 9 years of release with 44% being arrested within the first year of release (Alper & Markman, 2018). A similar study on federal offenders found that over an 8-year period, 49.3% of those released in 2005 were re-arrested, with 37% of those released being re-convicted and 24% re-incarcerated (Hunt & Dumville, 2016).

Despite the lack of understanding of the mechanics of re-entry, researchers agree that PWCB experience numerous challenges upon re-entry, including, policy restrictions, stable housing, access to health care, lack of social support, lack of education, unemployment, occupational license restrictions, poverty and loss of voting rights (Brown, 2011; Harris & Keller, 2005; Hlavka, Wheelock & Cossyleon, 2015; Moore & Tangney, 2017; Varghese & Cummings, 2013; Rade et al., 2016; Rakis, 2005, Taxman, 2004; Travis et al., 2001). Employment is frequently cited as one of the most vital aspects of re-entry (Grommon, 2013; Hlavka et al., 2015; La Vigne et al., 2009). The ability to find gainful employment can be

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challenging for PWCB, and yet earning a decent income is an established deterrent of reoffending (Hlavka et al., 2015; Sung, 2001; Travis et al., 2001). Grommon (2013) suggested that employment provides structure to the ex-offender's day, which can provide some sort of social control, whereby individuals start to "buy in" to conventional society. After all, having a successful and meaningful career, not only affords the opportunity to provide for one's basic needs, but also contributes to an individual's identity, provides social status, and structure to one's life (Drobnic et al., 2010; Duffy et al., 2016). Not just any employment, but meaningful employment is crucial to giving PWCB an incentive to conform with societal laws and rules (Sung, 2001). The difficulty with this line of thought is that PWCB do not typically have access to the types of jobs that would give them a stake in conformity. Many PWCB are released into areas that have few employment opportunities (Grommon, 2013). However, even if PWCB were released into communities with a wealth of jobs we as a society seem unwilling to provide these types of jobs for PWCB (Decker et al., 2015; Pager, 2003).

Pager (2003) found that White individuals with criminal backgrounds were 50% less likely to receive a call back after a job interview than Whites with no criminal background. However, Black individuals with criminal backgrounds were 66% less likely to receive a call back than their Black, crime-free counterparts and 85% less likely to receive a call back than their White crime-free counterparts. Similarly, Decker, Ortiz, Spohn and Hedberg, (2015) found that both criminal background and minority status (Black or Hispanic) decreased chances of a favorable response from employers. These findings suggest, having a criminal background decreases your chances of being offered a job, and is compounded by already existing racial inequalities in hiring.

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The difficulties PWCB experience in finding employment are highlighted in the

unemployment rates of PWCB compared to the general population. For the first year after

release, unemployment for PWCB ranged from 50% (Hlavka et al., 2015) to 70% (Young &

Powell, 2015). After 5 years, unemployment levels ranged from 13% (Couloute & Kopf,

2018) to 25% (de Vuono-powell et al., 2015). However, unemployment is not equally

distributed across the PWCB population. Black women have the highest unemployment rate

in the first two years post release of 43.5% followed by Black men (35.2%), White women

(23.2%) and White men (18.4%; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). As a comparison, unemployment

in the general population ranged from the lowest levels for White men and women at 4.3% to

the highest for Black men at 7.7% (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Although all PWCB experience

unemployment at significantly higher rates than the general population, the unemployment

rate for Black men and women with criminal backgrounds is particularly staggering.

Psychology of Working Theory

There are many career theories within vocational psychology. Much of the research in

the field is conducted on college students, which although may include other representations

of race/ethnicity, still largely includes those individuals for which one might argue have the

privilege of career choice. *Psychology of Working Theory* (PWT) is a more recent theoretical

base that attempts to explain the work experiences of all people, but specifically those

individuals who experience discrimination and marginalization and are forced to make work

decisions because of their context (Duffy et al., 2016). For these individuals, Duffy et al.

(2016) posited that contextual factors are the primary driving force in their ability to engage

in "decent work" which is the core construct of the theory. PWT posits that for many,

especially working poor or people who are marginalized or discriminated against during their

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career ventures, career choice may be diminished because of their environment.

Decent work. The key construct of the model of PWT is decent work. Duffy et al. (2016) defined decent work as consisting of (a) safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), (b) reasonable hours that allow for work/life balance, (c) organizational values that complement family and social values, (d) adequate compensation, and (e) access to health care decent work, as the ideal is considered the goal of career choices and decisions. Decent work is the goal of career choices and decisions with contextual factors driving the pursuit to achieve decent work. When/if decent work is achieved, it has many positive outcomes, including social connectedness, self-determination, work fulfillment and well-being (Duffy, 2016). PWT posits two predictors of decent work: Marginalization, and Economic Constraints.

Marginalization. Duffy et al. (2016) defined marginalization as "the relegation of people (or groups of people) to a less powerful or included position within a society" (p.132). Individuals with felonies are at increased risk of marginalization due to their criminal background, which jeopardizes their ability to secure decent work. Individuals with felonies are also likely to have aspects of their identity that were marginalized prior to their conviction (e.g. race, SES), which may have previously affected their ability to obtain decent work, and increased the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system, but have since added "felon" to their marginalized identities.

Economic constraints. Duffy et al. (2016) posited that economic constraints are rooted in social class, which includes income, educational attainment or occupational prestige. Economic constraints are defined as "limited economic resources (e.g., household income, family wealth, social capital) which represent a critical barrier to securing decent

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work" (Duffy et al., 2016, p.133). Given the known predictors of incarceration (lower SES, racial minority status, lower education levels; McCarter, 2017; Ou & Reynolds, 2010) many individuals with felony convictions likely experienced economic constraints prior to their conviction and incarceration. After all, we typically incarcerate individuals with the least amount of financial and social capital (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). However, once convicted of a felony, an individual's economic constraints are increased, both from lack of income as well as loss of social capital as a result of the stigma surrounding their conviction.

The PWT framework is complex. The relationship between contextual factors (i.e. marginalization and economic constraints) and decent work is mediated by work volition and career adaptability and moderated by proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions. In addition, survival needs, social connection needs, self-determination needs, work fulfillment and well-being are included as additional outcomes of decent work. Although a detailed description of the model is outside the scope of this study, for the purpose of additional clarification, some of these variables namely work volition and career adaptability are briefly described here (see Figure 1). Work volition defined as "an individual's perception of choice in career decision-making despite constraints" (Duffy et al., 2016. p.135) seems important to highlight given the salience of career choice or lack thereof within the population of study. Individuals with marginalized or stigmatized identities are at increased likelihood of experiencing barriers to decent work and as such may perceive less work volition than others of more privileged standing (Duffy et al., 2016). It would therefore seem that work volition would be salient construct for those returning from prison with felony convictions, as they are likely to experience decreased work volition as a result of the very real obstacles of reentry, namely stereotyping and external stigma from society and

employers. Upon release PWCB must obtain work as part of their probation/parole,

(Grommon, 2013, Hlavka, 2015) with significant consequences including probation

violations and possibly even re-incarceration for not doing so (Grommon, 2013; Travis et al.,

2001). This places incredible pressure on PWCB to find work, any work, within a given

timeframe to avoid recidivating. This pressure to find work may contribute to PWCB having

to settle for jobs that may not meet the definition of "decent work" (Duffy et al., 2016).

Career adaptability is defined as "an individual's readiness and resources for coping with

current and anticipated tasks of vocational development" (Savickas, 2002, p. 156, as cited in

Duffy et al., 2016). Similar to work volition, career adaptability is thought to be shaped by

one's environment, although, it is also hypothesized as malleable. Duffy et al. (2016) noted

that typically individuals from higher social class backgrounds, with limited marginalization

experiences have more adaptive career attitudes. As previously noted, many individuals who

are incarcerated come from racial/ethnic minority groups (primarily African American and

Hispanic). In addition, individuals who are incarcerated frequently possess lower education

levels and lower socio-economic status (Sutton, 2013). As such, PWFC are likely to have

experienced marginalization based on their identity and/or group membership prior to

incarceration. In addition, PWFC are more likely to have experienced economic constraints

prior to conviction. However, receiving an additional stigmatizing identity (i.e. "felon"),

further limits their economic and social capital, placing PWFC at an increased risk of

experiencing lower career adaptability.

Stigma

Goffman (1963) first highlighted the *spoiled identities* of individuals, as those who

are excluded from full society and subject to stigmatization. Today a search can reveal

various different ways of defining and operationalizing stigma; anticipated stigma – how much an individual expects to be stigmatized (Moore et al., 2013; Quinn & Choudoir, 2009); stigma consciousness – how aware an individual is of their stigmatized identity during interactions with others (Pinel, 1999); internal stigma or self- stigma – how much of the existing stereotypes are incorporated into the stigmatized individual's identity (Corrigan et al., 2006; Moore et al., 2018); and perceived stigma –how much one believes that others hold negative views/stereotypes about the individual's spoiled identity (Moore et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2016).

Until recently, stigma was cited as an issue for the PWCB (Chiricos et al., 2007; DeFina, & Hannon, 2009; Grommon, 2013; Wakefield and Uggen, 2010, Shivy et al., 2007), but little research had been conducted on stigma and its impact on the PWCB, especially in terms of employment challenges upon reentry. Although the body of knowledge has increased, this kind of research is still in its infancy. In an early study conducted by Moore et al. (2013), findings suggested that inmates perceived fairly high levels of stigma from the public. These findings appear consistent across multiple studies exploring stigma within the population of PWCB (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008; Lebel, 2012) and across multiple demographic variables like race/ethnicity (Schneider & McKim, 2003). Moore et al. (2016) found similar results. In their longitudinal study of the influence of perceived and anticipated stigma on 371 inmates post release, individuals with higher perceived stigma prior to release experienced poorer community adjustment.

Stigma and Race in Persons with Criminal Backgrounds. Several studies have examined stigma and race among PWCB and found differing results across different racial/ethnic backgrounds. It is important to note that the authors of these studies used the

terms Black and African American interchangeably and also interchanged the terms White

and Caucasian; however, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to replace the use of

Caucasian with European American in order to be more culturally sensitive. A study

conducted by Moore and Tangney (2017) found that anticipated stigma among incarcerated

White offenders predicted social withdrawal (i.e. withdrawal from society) three months post

release. Social withdrawal predicted poorer mental health outcomes one-year post release.

Not surprisingly, social withdrawal at three months post-release predicted poor adjustment in

the community at one year following release. However, these results were significant for

White PWCB but not Black PWCB. Similarly, Moore et al. (2016) found that perceived

stigma among European American participants predicted anticipated stigma which predicted

poorer post release functioning. However, this was not the case for African American

participants. For African Americans, perceived stigma was less predictive of anticipated

stigma, which did not predict post release functioning.

Moore et al. (2013) found similar results that stigma appeared to have more negative

consequences for White than Black participants in terms of post release functioning.

Specifically, and contrary to prior findings perceived stigma was associated with higher

employment both in terms of employment rate and total hours employed in Black

participants, but not for White participants. In fact, no significant relationship between

perceived stigma and employment was found in White participants. In other words, for White

participants, an individual's level of perceived stigma did not affect their employment. The

authors noted that although most research has suggested that perceived stigma is associated

with negative psychological and social outcomes; under certain circumstances, perceived

stigma can actually have positive outcomes like social activism (Moore, et al., 2013), noting

that some individuals may feel empowered by their stigmatized identity (Moore, et al., 2013).

One possible rationale for the differential impact of stigma according to race is the concealable nature of criminal background. Some researchers noted that White PWCB have the privilege of concealing their spoiled identity (Moore et al., 2013), whereas Black PWCB already experience social stigma as a result of their race. For example, Black individuals may be more open to disclosing another stigmatized aspect of their identity given that managing the stigma surrounding their ex-offender status may be less troubling than managing the stigma surrounding their racial status (Chiricos et al., 2007; Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). Additionally, Black PWCB may have more active coping strategies for dealing with stigma due to prior racial stigma (Moore et al., 2016; Moore & Tangney, 2017). Finally, because African Americans are incarcerated at a much higher rate than European Americans, they may experience anticipated stigma from society as a whole but experience less stigma and less social withdrawal from their immediate community where incarceration is less of an anomaly (Winnick & Bodkin, 2009; Moore & Tangney, 2017).

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perceived stigma. These findings differ somewhat from Chiricos et al. (2007) who explored

whether receiving a felony conviction affected recidivism. The researchers posited that

receiving the label of convicted "felon" would increase recidivism. The researchers found

evidence for their hypothesis; however, as previously noted, receiving the label of "felon"

was more detrimental for White than for Black and Hispanic participants. Additional results

found that the effects of receiving a label of "felon" on recidivism was more detrimental for

women compared to men in that women were more likely to recidivate after having been

labeled "felon". Essentially, results indicated that the consequences of labeling are greater

for those individuals who one would not expect to recidivate and that those individuals who

care more about the opinions of society as a whole may suffer more by receiving a label.

Career Barriers

Career barriers are defined as physical conditions or cognitive thoughts and processes

that create obstacles to an individual's career goals. Swanson and Daniel (1996) described

career barriers as a means of interference with the career development process. As

previously mentioned, PWFC face external obstacles to obtaining gainful employment. In

addition, PWFC may experience additional internal states that contribute to the difficulty that

they may experience in finding employment, namely stigma. PWCB who experience high

levels of stigma may alter their behavior in such a way that they send out fewer job

applications, attend fewer job interviews, engage in fewer post release job services, and

overall experience more social withdrawal (Moore & Tangney, 2017). This finding is

consistent with research on stigma, which suggests individuals who anticipate being

stereotyped by others may avoid those interactions in which they anticipate such stereotyping

and stigmatization (Pinel, 1999; Moore & Tangney, 2017). Within the framework of PWT,

career barriers greatly influence work volition or how much choice one perceives to have over their career. Stigma works as both an internal state (internal stigma) and an external condition (external stigma) which could lower work volition within the population of PWFC and affect their engagement with decent work. In addition, individuals with felonies are frequently excluded from many professions, especially those involving licensing, like lawyers, psychologists, teachers, physicians, nurses or even electricians, barbers and taxi drivers (Rakis, 2005, Harris & Keller, 2005; Hlavka, 2015). These barriers to employment, especially employment associated with more social capital and prestige may further limit PWCB access to decent work.

Study Rationale and Purpose

In 2015, 1,415,297 men were incarcerated out of a total prison population of 1,526,792 individuals (Carson & Anderson, 2016). As of 2015, men comprised close to 93% of the prison population. In contrast, 111,495 women were imprisoned under state or federal correctional authorities in 2015, such that female offenders comprised only 7% of the total prisoner population (Carson & Anderson, 2016). The large numbers of men who are incarcerated as a result of their conviction translates into larger numbers of men being released every year and having to "re-enter" the workforce because of their conviction and subsequent incarceration. Because of the larger population of men with felonies re-entering the workforce, I have chosen to focus primarily on men for the purpose of this investigation.

Every year hundreds of thousands of PWCB are released into the community with the expectation that those re-entering society will be "successful" upon re-entry, however, as demonstrated earlier, the obstacles to successful reintegration are significant. As a society, we tell PWCB they have a "second chance" upon release into the community, yet we are

reluctant to provide the resources and tools necessary; this is the paradox for the PWCB.

Stigma is frequently identified as a potential obstacle to reentry (DeFina, & Hannon, 2009; Shivy et al., 2007; Travis et al., 2001); however, until recently it has been less frequently studied in terms of its effects on recidivism and how it effects reentry. Despite more recent scholarly work on the stigma surrounding PWCB, research pertaining to stigma surrounding conviction and the career development of PWCB continues to be lacking.

Specific constructs of Psychology of Working Theory, namely marginalization, economic constraints, work volition and decent work were used in the development of the interview protocol and to inform the purpose of this study, which was to examine the reentry experiences of men with felony convictions. The authors previously explored stigma consciousness quantitatively in a sample of men with felony convictions and based on the findings determined a better understanding of their circumstances could be understood through a qualitative analysis (Lee, & Brown, 2018). In addition, because little research has been conducted on the re-entry experiences of PWFC, specifically in terms of the career development of PWFC after incarceration, qualitative methods of inquiry seemed appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of barriers PWFC face upon re-entry. To that end, I qualitatively investigated how the stigma associated with being labeled a "felon" has affected the work volition, career trajectory, and potential barriers to employment among a sample of men convicted of felonies. Specifically, my central questions and sub-questions were as follows:

1. How do PWFC make sense of receiving the label "felon"?

   (a) To what extent is stigma associated with receiving a felony?

2. To what extent does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC pursuit of

decent work?

(a) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC work volition?

(b) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC career adaptability?

(c) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC economic constraints?

With attention to qualitative inquiry, I interviewed 14 men with felony convictions using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR). CQR is a qualitative research methodology that uses semi-structured interviews to obtain data from a pre-determined number of interviewees. At its essence, CQR is a methodology whereby members of the study team consensually agree upon coding. The methodology was originally proposed by Hill, Thompson and Williams, (1997) as a means to integrate the best features of existing qualitative methodology while being easy to learn. As such, CQR incorporates elements of grounded theory, phenomenological, and comprehensive process analysis. The main tenets involved in CQR include, (a) a semi-structured interview, (b) a panel of judges who are involved in the main data analysis, (c) the use of consensus to arrive at conclusions regarding study data, (d) at least one auditor who is independent of the panel of judges to minimize "group think", and (e) domains, core ideas and cross-analyses of the data analysis (Hill, 2005). Since its inception, CQR has been used across disciplines as a means of conducting qualitative research and is frequently cited in the counseling and career literature.

<center>**Method**</center>

Participants

Participants were 14 (eight Black, African American, five White, European, and one Hispanic/Latino) men with felony convictions at either the state or federal level, who resided in the Midwestern United States. Participant ages ranged from 23 to 67 ($M = 42.21$, $SD = 12.5$) and those who chose to respond ($n = 10$) reported an average total time incarcerated of 12.8 years with ranges between 14 months and 43 years. Two outliers skewed the average time incarcerated. One participant reported being incarcerated for a total of 30 years and another reported a total of 43 years incarcerated. In terms of the type of felony, seven participants (50%) reported receiving a state felony only, four participants (29%) reported receiving a federal felony only and three participants (21%) reported receiving both state and federal felony convictions. Twelve (86%) participants reported at least a high school diploma with five (36%) of these 12 participants also reporting college/Vocational training. Two participants (14%) reported not graduating high school. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Research Team

Researchers included a sixth year 37-year-old White, European American, female Counseling Psychology doctoral student, a 62-year-old Black, African American, female Counseling Psychology professor, a third year 44-year-old White, European American, female Counseling master's student, and a 30-year-old, White, European American, Transgender female, first-year Criminology, Law, and Society doctoral student. One of the research team members reported being arrested and spending time in jail. All other members of the research team reported interactions with individuals with criminal justice experiences.

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Specifically, research team members reported working and/or volunteering in jails, prisons, re-entry centers and other organizations with a high population of individuals in contact with the criminal justice system. Hill (2011) noted that differences in power can influence the team process especially when the team is comprised of faculty and students; however, other demographics can influence the team process including age of research team members, race, year in the program, prior experience with CQR and so forth. As recommended by Hill (2011) and in order to increase *trustworthiness*, the study team met to discuss personal biases, assumptions and expectations for the research, of which the team assumed participants would experience their felony conviction and incarceration negatively. A few research team members expected participants to feel judged by others for their felony background. Others expected participants to express more difficulty securing employment since receiving a felony.

Procedure

Hill (2012) recommended using sample sizes between 12-15 participants. For this study, inclusion criteria included 14 Male PWFC who are 18 years of age or older. After IRB approval was obtained, participants were solicited in person, from a local re-entry organization. Study participants were solicited through a monthly personal and professional development program. Potential participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, and that the study involved a brief demographic questionnaire and an interview that would last approximately 60 minutes. Participants were also informed that they would be compensated $30 for their time. Recruitment was conducted in person, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Men with felonies who expressed interest were scheduled for a face-to-face interview. Given the differences in the experiences of White and Black men

convicted of a felony, race/ethnicity was given consideration during the recruitment process. Specifically, I attended to how closely my sample mirrored the demographics of the recruitment organization. After recruiting 14 participants, the race/ethnicity of my sample closely aligned with the demographics of individuals seeking services at the recruitment site; therefore, no additional participants of a specific race/ethnicity were recruited. Had the sample not reflected the demographics of the recruitment organization, additional targeted sampling based on race/ethnicity would have been employed to ensure the sample accurately reflected the racial-ethnic makeup of the organization. This local re-entry organization works with PWCB in their transition from prison back into the community. Employees of the organization also provide training in prisons through the Missouri Department of Corrections as well as the Kansas Department of Corrections. In addition to case management, the training provided in prisons also included a two-week career development program. Upon release, individuals have access to additional services including: job leads, interview preparation, case management and mentoring. Participants are also provided professional clothing for job interviews and starting a new job.

I conducted interviews in a private office at local non-profit organization and informed consent was sought and obtained prior to conducting the interview. Participants completed a short demographic questionnaire and were asked to provide a pseudonym to aid in protecting confidentiality. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants were compensated $30 for their time. Recordings were uploaded immediately and stored securely on the University Box where they were only accessed by approved study team members. Interviews were transcribed using a transcription service, REV.com. All study related documents, transcriptions, demographic

questionnaires were stored electronically using a password protected Box system housed on the university's server.

Training of the Research Team

I spent the first few research meetings training other team members in the specifics of CQR. The first two training sessions lasted between one to two hours each. Prior to the first training, study team members were assigned exemplar CQR articles to read on their own prior to the team meeting. During the first meeting, the basics of CQR were reviewed and questions were answered. Power dynamics between the study team members were also discussed in order to encourage all members of the study team to participate in the process as freely as possible and to avoid novice researchers deferring to more experienced team members. These conversations continued throughout the study analysis phase of the research as needed.

During the second team meeting the study team discussed the process of analysis and cross-analysis (described below) in more detail with examples from prior studies. The study team practiced reaching consensus while developing domains and core ideas from previous research. Training continued as the study team reached each step of the analysis phase. For example, before assigning the interview transcripts for review for domain lists, study team members practiced how to review the transcripts to see if topic areas arose naturally.

Measures

Interview protocol. Using the core constructs of the PWT (i.e., Economic constraints, Work Volition, Marginalization, and Decent Work), an interview protocol was developed and is located in Appendix A. Questions were created to reflect these core constructs of PWT. For example: "*Share with me your job/employment experiences since*

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*receiving your felony/ies" w*as created to reflect the core construct of Decent Work; "*Tell me about your ability to pursue the jobs you want since receiving a felony"* was created to reflect Work Volition, and "*How prepared did you feel to enter the workforce after receiving your felony?"* was created to reflect the core construct of Career Adaptability. To reduce researcher bias and increase trustworthiness (Hill, 2011) the interview protocol was further examined for relevance and modified based on the review of three subject matter experts (e.g. leaders in the field of reentry). The first subject matter expert, who also had a felony record, was a program director of a local re-entry organization. The second subject matter expert was a tenured faculty member who conducts qualitative research in prisons and jails. The third person serving as a subject matter expert was a case manager who works with individuals with felony convictions and is aware of the barriers PWFC face upon reentry. See Appendix B for the interview questions and feedback form that was completed by subject matter experts. Their feedback included suggestions on readability, clarity on how well the question assessed the construct in question as well as the importance of the question being asked. For example, one expert recommended simplifying the language on a few of the questions to reduce the reading level. The feedback provided by subject matter experts was used to revise the interview protocol before recruiting and enrolling individuals into the study (see appendix A for final interview protocol).

Demographics questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) was used to describe the sample. The following information was collected: age, gender, educational background, total number of years incarcerated, type of felony, time since last incarceration, and current employment status.

In accordance with Hill (2011) each study team member reviewed the data (interview transcripts) to see if any topic areas arose naturally. Once each team member reviewed each transcript and made lists of topic areas (domain lists), the study team met to compare lists and discuss the rationale for each of the domains listed until the team arrived at a master domain list that best fits all the data. The study team continued to use the domain list with additional interviews and revised the domain list until the list remained stable.

Coding the Data

Once the interviews were transcribed, the data were analyzed using CQR to identify domains, categories and subcategories. A list of potential domains was created to aid in further coding. Once the domain list was finalized and audited, the study team independently coded the data using the domain list before meeting as a study team to review and reach consensus. The first step of coding was conducted by each study team member individually grouping sections of transcript data into relevant clusters in order to create *domains*. Irrelevant data were initially coded as "other" until it was either included into an appropriate domain or intentionally excluded from analysis. Very little data were excluded from analysis; however, there were instances where a few participants rambled somewhat tangentially, which did not provide additional content specific to the topic at hand, and therefore these data were excluded. Once domains were agreed upon by the research team the data from each interview were coded, and a final consensus version of each interview (case) was agreed upon. The study team continued this process until domains, (large general clusters of data) categories (smaller clusters of data within the larger domain) and subcategories (even smaller clusters of data within a category) were identified within the

data. Next, *core ideas* (i.e. general succinct summaries used to describe the gist of the

transcript) were constructed by summarizing the narrative from the specified domain. This

was done by "editing the participant's words into a format that is concise, clear, and

comparable across cases" (Hill et al., 2005, p.14). Once the domain list was finalized, the list

and the consensus version of each case, with domains and core ideas provided, was sent to

the auditor for review. The auditor was a 62-year-old Black, African American, female

Counseling Psychology professor and faculty advisor to the student investigator. The auditor

had extensive experience conducting and publishing research using CQR research

methodology. Once feedback was received from the auditor, the study team reviewed

suggested edits and discussed to determine whether or not the auditor's recommendations

should be incorporated (Hill et al., 2005). For example, recommendations that were

implemented included renaming categories to better describe the content and combining

some categories to reduce redundancy and bolster the categories under investigation.

Cross-Analysis

All cases were compiled into a single document and organized according to domain

with the core ideas from each case listed sequentially. The raw text was then deleted from

the outline. The study team then conducted the cross-analysis one domain at a time in

accordance with Hill (2011). Each study team member reviewed the core ideas within the

domain and organized them by similarities across cases. After each study team member

created categories, the study team met again to work toward consensus to determine which

categories should be included and what they should be named. For each domain, the study

team added each discrete core idea from each participant into the corresponding category.

The core ideas that did not fit within named categories were placed in an "other" category for

later review to determine if additional categories were warranted for classifying the

remaining core ideas. The cross-analysis was repeated for each domain identified within the

data. Again, after the cross-analysis was completed by the study team, the auditor reviewed

the cross-analysis and offered feedback, at which point the study team met again and argued

to consensus changes identified by the auditor. Finally, representativeness of the categories

was determined. This was completed by calculating the frequency of participants who have

core ideas within a category.

Results

Six domains were identified from the interview data: (a) external factors, (b) effects

of conviction, (c) stigma experiences, (d) making meaning, (e) work experiences, and (f)

vocational development (see Table 2). Categories that were endorsed by all or all but one

participant were labeled as *general*. Categories that consisted of core ideas from at least half

of participants and up to the *general* cut off were labeled as *typical*. Those categories

consisting of core ideas from at least two participants up to half of the participants were

labeled *variant.*

External Factors

Participants discussed concerns related to external factors that influenced their

behavior in some way. Within this domain of external factors, three categories were

identified. Participants *typically* reported receiving a conviction before age 24. Zjopher

reported receiving a felony conviction before he received his high school diploma, a

sentiment shared by Daniel who reported "I received a felony before I even had a job".

Participants *typically* reported at-risk environmental factors. Mickie reported that almost

everyone he knew "got somebody in their family that been in prison" which normalized prison sentences and felonies within his community. Big "H" described getting in trouble as a normative experience in his neighborhood growing up, noting "it was the thing to do in our neighborhood in the 80's and 90's…catch a case, go to jail, do your time…it was like a badge of honor". Contrary to some participants describing their surroundings as contributing to them getting in trouble, others described positive family environments as a *variant* category. Kinfolk described positive family interactions noting

> It was nine of us in the house. We probably didn't have big Christmases, but we always had good, clothes and shelter, and we always had each other…we got a lot of games at Christmas so the family could play and stay together.

Effects of Conviction

Under this domain participants discussed concerns related to ongoing and lasting effects of their felonies. Broadly they discussed obstacles the participants experienced upon reentry as well as the continued punishment many returning citizens continued to experience even after their formal punishment had been served. Specifically, five categories were identified. Participants *generally* discussed job obstacles as an effect of their conviction. This category discussed topics related to research question 2(a): How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC work volition? Mickie described his experience trying to get hired at Ford Motors shortly after being released from prison:

> I got out in '74. I applied for a job with my father… He was a foreman at Ford Motors... I filled out the application and since I have my felony in 1974 they didn't hire me because I had a felony conviction, so I went back to robbing.

> Similarly, many of our participants discussed being paid significantly less than their

peers without criminal backgrounds or being denied promotions due to their felony which affected their ability to earn living wages. Participants *typically* discussed post-conviction obstacles which included obstacles related to transportation, housing and lack of education and the absence of life documents such as a photo identification or birth certificate. Greg indicated "I don't have a job yet. I'm still looking for my ID and stuff. Well actually working on that today." Chucky, shared similar struggles to other PWFC in terms of difficulties with housing noting, "I'm staying with my fiancé right now and she's in government housing. And I can't get put on the lease because I'm a felon." Participants *typically* reported experiencing negative financial effects of their conviction. This category discussed ideas related to research question 2(c): How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC economic constraints? Daniel reported owing "over $21, 000 in child support…because it accumulated for 12 years while I was incarcerated" whereas Lucas recalled paying a $20,000 bonding fee. Other *variant* categories included: perception of loss or displacement and extensions of punishment after time served. In terms of perception of loss or displacement Zjopher recalled being "left behind" after being incarcerated for quite some time:

> Because I've done so much time…especially having spent so much time in prison away from technology. They didn't have phones when I got incarcerated. I had a pager. So, to come out and see this and you can touch anybody in the world on this apparatus here is mind-boggling to me.

In terms of extensions of punishment after time served, Daniel reported "having to register as a violent offender" in the state of Kansas. Initially he reported that he "had to register for 15 years and they changed the law again…and so I have to register forever in Kansas." Similarly, Lucas described difficulties maintaining employment due to the extra

criminal justice related appointments he had to keep with probation and parole. Big H shared

the injustice he felt as a result of the continued punishment received post-conviction:

> You sent me to jail for what I did. So why am I still paying for this so many years
>
> after I get out? Why am I still being labeled for this after I already did my time?
>
> That's where my injustice comes with it.

Stigma Experiences

Participants *generally* discussed experiencing stigma. This domain addressed

research question 1(a): To what extent is stigma associated with felony convictions? Some of

the participants reported experiencing stigma related specifically to their felony conviction,

however, others reported different types of stigma including racial stigma. Under this

domain five categories were identified. Participants *generally* mentioned experiencing

stigma as a result of their felony conviction. Participants *typically* reported engaging in

coping mechanisms to reduce self-stigma, these included using people's negative perception

of PWFC as a motivator or they attempted to "brush off" society's negative view. When

asked how other people's perceptions affected his re-entry Tyrone responded "it's actually

pushed me and motivated me to strive for more…So when I know people doubt me, that just

encourages me to prove them wrong… I get more gratification out of proving them wrong."

Some described a *variant* category of belief that stereotypes about PWFC are true. Lucas

noted, "I agree with people's perception… Like if I own a business, especially if my family

was around this business, it's a wise decision to not put your family in that position (around

felons)." Other *variant* categories included belief in a hierarchy of felonies and experiencing

racial stigma. In terms of holding the belief in a hierarchy of felonies, participants

highlighted that some felonies are viewed as "worse" than others, often ranking murder and

rape as the worst, Keebs noted:

> Maybe you got drunk and did some ignorant stuff and people don't really look at that
> seriously. But if you get a violent crime or a theft or like a robbery or something like
> that, then people tend to not trust you and they tend to judge you a little bit more.

In terms of experiencing racial stigma, Zjopher described his experience:

> Yeah, okay. I was a civil rights baby too. Sprayed with a water hose. Watched my
> uncles get beat with a hose. So, I mean, that's far more scarring to me than me having
> a felony and trying to fit into what society's rules are, especially when I come from
> that culture and you've forced all of us to live in this section of town and don't leave.
> So, this, for me as a Black man, there's things bigger than felonies.

Making Meaning

Participants broadly discussed how they make sense of their felony and the time they spent incarcerated. This domain addressed research question 1: How do PWFC make sense of receiving a felony? Under this domain participants discussed experiences falling into four different categories. Participants *typically* reported giving back as being an important part of their ability to make meaning out of their experience. Some participants reported having the desire to not see younger generations make the same mistakes they did, while others expressed a desire to mentor others. Micki described talking to younger men he meets, recalling a specific incident:

> "You ain't no more than what, 22? 23 years old?"…He walking around with a AK47.
> He tell me, he'd rather get caught with it than without it. I said, "Say that when the
> police pull up and catch you with it, and they take you to jail, and then they're going
> to file that RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations charge) on you,

and you'll never get out of prison."

Participants also *typically* discussed experiences of personal growth and accountability. When reflecting back on his youth and how he viewed his life as a young man compared to now, Lucas opined "I don't know why they don't teach kids in school. When you catch charges like this, you're not just catching charges like this. You're literally ruining your life. Even if you make it for the better, people are always going to look at you like that." Similarly, Zjopher recalled "I can see the error of my ways…I done got a lot older. A lot of years have traveled by me that I can't get back." When reflecting on his own growth and accountability, Daniel stated, "but we grow up, and we take responsibility for our actions, and some people, they feel guilty about some of the things that they've done. And I'm one of them people."

Other, more *variant* categories included the criminal justice system as broken. DC discussed the system being broken in part because those involved in the system frequently engage in illegal and/or unethical behaviors themselves; he noted:

I don't know why so many people that incarcerate you are not incarcerated their selves because let me tell you, it's a very corrupt system, very corrupt… I don't know about Missouri, but I know Kansas at that time, up until I got out there, are getting paid $32,000, a year per bed. They have private industries in prison where they send you out on a job. You making $7 an hour, $7.25 an hour, and they're charging you rent…then you got the companies now that's buying prisons, and their guarantee is, 'We'll guarantee you that your prison will stay 98% full at all times'.

Another *variant* category participants discussed was spirituality. When discussing the importance of religion, Daniel noted "So what helped me out a lot is, church…Prison

didn't help me but, when I got out …that's when I found the Lord." When discussing how prepared he was to reenter society, Terry noted feeling a sense of faith that God had was in control of reentry noting, "I'm real hopeful that I feel that God's prepared the way. It's good. So I just got to need to keep doing the next right thing."

Work Experiences

Participants *generally* discussed the types of jobs they worked. Three categories related to work experiences arose from the data. The domain addressed research question 2: To what extent does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC pursuit of decent work? Participants *generally* discussed working manual labor type jobs. Every participant described working manual, low wage jobs at some point in their life. Most participants reported working construction, and/or landscaping jobs whereas others described different types of manual labor like welding. Participants *typically* discussed altering their job seeking behavior because of their felony. Lucas mentioned:

> You need to go talk to people in person. Even if you fill out an application, like I always go straight to the manager, give him my application and talk to him because I know that they're going to find out about it [the felony].

Along similar lines Keebs discussed lying on job application about his work history in hopes of landing a job:

> I usually lie on my applications and I'll kind of fill in some bullshit into where I got some type of work history. Even if it's just working in the kitchen in prison, I'll put something there and then I know they can't get ahold of the prison because there's too many directory assistance dial buttons and they're not going to do that.

Additionally, participants described the *variant* category of engaging in illegal work

which may or may not have resulted in their felony conviction. Zjopher recalls being asked why he sold drugs during a parole hearing, he indicated, "excuse me sir, if they had told me I could have sold pencil erasers and made the same amount of money to sustain a living and raise my family off of, I would have done that".

Vocational Development

Participants *generally* discussed career development both in terms of before and after their felony conviction. Four categories arose from the data. This domain also addressed research question 2: To what extent does receiving a felony conviction affect PWFC pursuit of decent work? Participants *generally* reported having career aspirations. John described his desire to own his own construction business:

> I used to do work for this guy and I was a teenager probably 15, 16. And he owned his own concrete masonry business. And I used to work for him a lot on the weekends and stuff. And ever since then, man, it's just something I've always been into. So yeah, I like the kind of physical laboring type of work, so that's definitely something I've always wanted to do.

Participants *typically* expressed experiencing low work volition or a decreased sense of choice over the types of jobs/career they could pursue with a felony conviction. This category discussed experiences related to research question 2(a): How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC work volition? Lucas described how receiving a felony affected his ability to pursue the career he desired, "It's definitely kept me from going onto a different career path…honestly, the only thing I ever wanted to do was join the military and it kept me from joining the military."

Participants *typically* expressed workforce reentry preparedness. This category

addressed research question 2(b) How does receiving a felony conviction affect a PWFC career adaptability? Participants were almost equally split with five participants expressing high preparedness reentering the workforce and five participants expressing low preparedness to reenter the workforce.

Finally, participants discussed the *variant* category of career satisfaction. Tyrone discussed his current work:

> I'm actually in the field where I actually get to work with individuals who are coming out of prison that have criminal backgrounds, that need a second chance, that need to be inspired. And so yes, I'm actually living the dream, and I just got a chance to be the Mayor!

Discussion

This dissertation, based on the PWT by Duffy (2015), used a qualitative research design to examine how the stigma associated with felony convictions has affected work volition and career trajectory in PWFC, including the potential barriers they experience to employment.

Stigma is frequently identified as a potential obstacle to reentry, (DeFina, & Hannon, 20109; Shivy et al., 2007; Travis et al., 2001) both in terms of establishing employment and other aspects of reentry for example, housing. Given that PWFCs experience stigma, and are frequently marginalized from mainstream society, this study explored the role of stigma and how it affected aspects of reentry in general as well as specific job-related aspects of reentry for example, job readiness, work volition and career satisfaction. Tokar and Kaut, (2018) found that individuals with higher economic constraints and marginalization experienced lower engagement with decent work and work volition. Securing decent work is linked to

positive outcomes like wellbeing and psychological need fulfillment (Autin et al., 2018). In addition, the perceived choice in job and career development (work volition) has previously been linked to career satisfaction, person-environment fit and increased work meaning (Duffy et al., 2016). Finally, previous research has linked the perception of readiness and adaptability to work fulfillment (Duffy et al., 2016). Study results are intended to help stakeholders, therapists, and other helping professionals effectively work with PWFCs.

External Factors

Almost all of our participants reported receiving a felony conviction before the age of 24, with nine participants reporting a felony conviction in their teenage years. Felony conviction before age 24 seemed important to highlight as an external factor because individuals who receive felonies during their adolescent and young adult years may experience certain external or contextual influences that predispose them toward criminal activity at an early age. For example, race/ethnicity, SES, and negative family environment have been previously shown to be predictors of Young Adult Male Crime (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Although our participants did not explicitly discuss what they believed contributed to their early contact with the criminal justice system, it is plausible that some of these external factors may have played a role. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Reaves, 2013) the average age of individuals with felonies in 2009 was 32. However, these statistics include data points for individuals with multiple felonies, which potentially skews the data upward. In contrast, our sample reported receiving their first felony at a significantly younger age. Age of conviction seems important to note, because as Daniel reported, he received a felony before he ever started working. Although the effect of age of first felony offense on recidivism does not appear to have been previously researched, given that our

participants reported significant obstacles to employment upon conviction, it suggests that

employment post-conviction could be even more challenging for those PWFC who had no

work experience before receiving a felony, which in turn may incentivize work by illegal

means.

Our participants described at risk environmental factors as external factors affecting

their engagement in felonious activity. Although living in a community with a large

percentage of PWFC could be perceived as placing individuals at risk for future criminal

behavior, previous research has suggested that it may be a protective factor in terms of the

stigma that individuals experience. Research has suggested that Race moderates the effects

of stigma surrounding felony convictions on social withdrawal at 3 months post release and

adjustment into the community (Moore et al., 2017).   The literature does not provide a clear

rationale for why race moderates the effects of stigma on social withdrawal and post release

functioning. However, some scholars have argued that receiving a felony is more normative

in certain subcultures within wider society (i.e. communities of color, specifically African

American); consequently, the effects of stigma related to felonies may be ameliorated to a

degree by normative experiences in their immediate community (Moore & Tangney, 2017;

Winnick & Bodkin, 2009). Almost two thirds of the participants of color (5 of 8) in the

current study reported that felony convictions were normative within their community,

compared to only one White participant (1 of 5) who reported felony convictions as a

community norm. This appears to highlight that within communities of color, felony

convictions are more normative compared to communities that are predominately White.

Despite felonies being more normative within communities of color and this being discussed

as a protective factor in terms of stigma that PWFC experience, it is important to note that

almost all of our participants still described experiencing stigma as a result of their felony. Therefore, it is unknown how much community norms actually help to curtail or alleviate the stigma PWFC experience.

Four participants reported growing up in a positive family environment. Previous research links weak family bonds and family instability with increased risk of incarceration (National Research Council, 2014). Contrary to previous research, some participants indicated that despite their positive family upbringing, they still engaged in illegal activity. When discussing the family environment in which he was raised, Zjopher noted:

> The culture that I came up with, they put rules and regulations in the household and gave us a solid foundation. They didn't fail me; I failed them. I took the tools they gave me and put my own twist to it. That's how I got incarcerated. Actually, I'm the only one in my family out of seven kids that's ever been incarcerated. You know what I mean? That's not a reflection of my parents or my siblings.

Although some factors are closely related to incarceration like education level, parental incarceration, poverty and so forth (National Research Council, 2014), it may be inferred that family stability would perhaps be a protective factor. However, growing up in a positive family environment did not prevent four participants from engaging in illegal activity.

Effects of Conviction

All but two participants reported experiencing negative financial effects related to their felony and/or incarceration. Many reported accruing debts while incarcerated, like child support payments, while others reported receiving fines and restitution for the crimes of which they were convicted. Still others described financial consequences resulting from their

inability to find work post release, or the difficulty accessing work that pays a living wage.

Existing research has mostly suggested that the financial consequences associated with

conviction and subsequent incarceration are largely the result of decreased employment and

earnings and that the negative financial burden peaks immediately post release and decreases

over time as long as PWFC are not re-convicted and re-incarcerated (Brown, 2019; Holzer,

2009). Specifically, Brown (2019) suggested that the financial effects of conviction and

incarceration caused by decreased earnings and employment are at least partially ameliorated

over the course of time. In addition, Brown's study findings revealed that over the duration

of the study period (~20 years), individual earnings of those who had been incarcerated were

largely in line with projected earnings of those with no conviction, provided individuals did

not recidivate. This seems important to note given that many of our participants were

recently released from prison; therefore, the negative monetary effects of their conviction

may have been more salient. However, there were still others who were further removed

from their conviction and continued to express financial difficulties that they attributed to

their felony.

Participants also reported significant debt accrued while incarcerated (e.g., child

support) as well as court fees and restitution fees which affected them negatively. de Vuono-

powell et al. (2015) estimated that the average costs related to conviction, which included

courts and attorney fees as well as restitution and so forth was $13,607. However, this does

not take into account additional fees related to living in the halfway house, house arrest or

probation and/or parole fees. It is estimated that as many as 85% of those returning citizens

owe some kind of criminal justice debt (Evans, 2015). Moreover, the majority of individuals

who are incarcerated as a result of their conviction are fathers (70%); many of whom are

non-custodial parents, who owe as much as $10, 000 in child support fees upon incarceration (Evans, 2015). While incarcerated, this amount will continue to grow due to continued accrual of fees and interest, such that a returning citizen could easily owe more than double the initial debt upon their release (Evans, 2015). Although the immediate and negative effects of reduced wages, and increased debt may seem obvious, PWFC face additional nuanced obstacles due to their financial obligations. Depending on the state in which the PWFC resides, these consequences could include but are not limited to: re-incarceration due to non-payment of criminal justice related debt, continued disenfranchisement of voting rights until all debt is paid, not being able to obtain occupational licenses, decreased prospects of attaining public health benefits, potential license suspension and inability to apply for a pardon or record expungement (Evans, 2015). One of the major concerns highlighted in the literature is the relationship between criminal justice debt and recidivism. As reported by our sample of participants, many of them turned to illegal means of work when they were either ineligible for legal work or could not make a living wage. When individuals are saddled within increasing costs associated with their conviction and reduced ability to pay off their debts by legal means they are at significant risk of recidivating (Evans, 2015).

All but one of our participants reported experiencing job obstacles related to their felony conviction. These included being denied jobs and being fired from jobs based on their felony conviction. This seems consistent with previous research previously cited that PWFC experience fewer job opportunities in terms of call backs and job interviews (Decker et al., 2015; Pager, 2003). Within this category of job obstacles, individuals did not simply express difficulty with obtaining or maintaining employment; they also expressed concerns over

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workplace equity issues due to their felonies, discussing issues related to being paid inequitable wages compared to peers or being denied promotions due to their conviction. This is important to highlight as it adds credence to Brown's (2019) suggestion that there are significant financial effects of receiving a felony conviction. In addition, the finding that PWFC continue to be passed up for promotions even years down the road suggests that the financial consequences of receiving a felony may extend past that initial reentry period and may challenge researchers' previously held belief that the first two years after release from prison are the most detrimental to a person's wages and earnings (Brown, 2019; Evans, 2015; Looney & Turner, 2018).

"Invisible punishment" (Travis, 2002, p.16), "Legal extensions of incarceration" (National Research Council, 2014, p.306) or as described by our participants "extensions of punishment after time served" reflect the experiences endured by PWFC; for most, punishment does not stop once released from jail/prison. Many PWFC will continue to experience some form of punishment, either in probation and parole appointments, fees, court dates or in the loss of certain rights and privileges (e.g. voting rights). Arguably, many of the obstacles individuals face upon reentry could be lumped into this "continued punishment" category; however, the responses provided by participants in this study reflected punishments specific to those formally mandated by the court. For example, Daniel noted having to register as a violent offender, and Lucas discussed his difficulties finding and keeping jobs that did not penalize him due to frequent visits and justice related appointments with probation and parole.

Participants also discussed post-conviction obstacles. Specifically, they reported housing, transportation and life documents as obstacles resulting from conviction. Consistent

with past research, which has highlighted the obstacles returning citizens face (Grommon, 2013; Hlavka et al., 2015; La Vigne et al., 2009), many of our participants noted being without essential life documents, like a photo ID or the ability to secure housing. As previously noted, when discussing his issues with securing housing, Chucky, was not able to secure housing by himself or to be added to his fiancé's lease due to his felony record.

Finally, participants discussed feeling a sense of loss and displacement after having been incarcerated. Participants reported feeling as though they had lost time they could not get back, and that part of their lives had been wasted. Not surprisingly, the two participants who were incarcerated for many years discussed significant changes to society that occurred while incarcerated. For example, Zjopher reported feeling "left behind" in terms of the technology of smart phones, noting that right before he was incarcerated, he remembered using one of the first cell phones that was the size of a brick.

Although the prison culture is not frequently viewed through the lens of a cross cultural experience, arguably prison life is a very real subculture, with rules and social norms. When individuals are released from prison, part of their reentry is their cultural readjustment into "everyday" society. Culture shock refers to the cultural adjustment an individual faces while living/visiting a culture different from their own. Reverse culture shock involves the cultural adjustment back into one's culture of origin. Similar to the way in which an expatriate has to readjust back into American culture after living overseas for many years, individuals who have been incarcerated experience a reverse culture shock of sorts as they readjust to the social norms, attitudes and even the technological advances of the culture in which they once resided.

Stigma Experiences

All but one participant reported experiencing stigma as a result of their felony conviction. Although stigma associated with felony convictions has previously been identified as an obstacle to successful reentry and the present findings also support this assertion, some participants highlighted additional aspects of stigma as it relates to reentry. Interestingly, although felony conviction would be defined by most as a concealable stigma because most individuals could not readily identify someone with a felony conviction, four participants discussed their felony as a visible stigma; as if someone could know they had a criminal background by simply looking at them. Although one participant noted that he felt as though individuals could tell by the way he carried himself, it is unclear from the other participants whether they truly felt like they had an identifying attribute related to their felony, or perhaps their experience of the stigma related to their felonies was so salient that they perceived others to "see" their stigmatized identity.

A few participants acknowledged feeling that society as a whole was less stigmatizing toward them currently than 5 years prior. This is important since it suggests societal perspectives toward PWFC are changing. However, caution should be taken when interpreting this as these interviews were conducted during a time (Dec 2019 – Feb 2020) in which unemployment levels of 3.5% were the lowest since 1969. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) and anecdotally, employers seemed very eager to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds due to a labor shortage. One of the major ways that participants described perceiving stigma related to their felony status was in job related activities; therefore, they may have perceived less stigma in general due to the labor market being more welcoming to those with criminal backgrounds during the interview timeframe. As

previously noted, marginalization, especially in the workplace is hypothesized as a potential

threat to securing decent work (Duffy et al, 2016). Specifically, decent work is linked to

career satisfaction and overall wellbeing (Duffy et al., 2016). Although it is not as

prominently highlighted, Duffy et al. (2016) hypothesize that decent work also affects

marginalization. This theoretical relationship appears to fit our study findings in that, if the

workplace is the primary vehicle through which individuals experience marginalization, by

securing decent work, (by definition a workplace free from such marginalization), we would

expect marginalization experiences to decrease.

       Notably, participants discussed engaging in coping mechanisms to reduce self-stigma.

Whether individuals attempted to "shrug off" the stigma they experienced noting they did not

pay attention to the opinions of other people, or whether they attempted to use the negative

perceptions of others as a means of motivation, our participants appeared to engage in certain

cognitive tasks in an attempt to reduce the deleterious effects of the stigma they experienced.

This appears consistent with some models of the stigma process, by which individuals can

respond both negatively (e.g., through the process of internalized stigma), or positively (e.g.,

through indifference and social activism), noting that some individuals may feel empowered

by their stigmatized identity (Moore, et al., 2013).

       Despite these attempts at "rejecting" or coping with self-stigma, some participants

acknowledged believing some of the held stereotypes of individuals with felonies (e.g., being

a "nobody", undeserving of certain jobs, needing to be skeptical of individuals with felonies).

Internalized stigma is a three-stage process that includes awareness of stereotypes, followed

by personal agreement, and self-concurrence has been identified by Corrigan et al (2011).

By study participants agreeing with some of the negatively held stereotypes toward PWFC

according to Corrigan et al (2011) they may have been in the progressive process of internalizing the stigma they experienced.

Along similar lines, almost half of participants expressed an ideology of a moral hierarchy of different felonies. Although the hierarchy differed somewhat for each individual, most participants who discussed this category labeled crimes related to rape, murder, and the abuse of children as worse than other felonies. Research on the social hierarchy of felonies is limited. However, Trammel and Chenault (2009) suggested that at least for individuals with a conviction of sexual crimes against children, their status in the prison hierarchy is much lower than others and sometimes their safety can be in jeopardy from other prisoners seeking justice. Trammel and Chenault (2009) suggested that in labeling some offenses as "good" or "bad," prisoners can elevate their own social standing. As such, individuals with felonies may result in labeling other felonies as "worse" in order to elevate their own status and ameliorate some of the stigma they perceive from others; this may be a coping mechanism aimed at reducing self-stigma.

Finally, almost half of participants of color described experiencing stigma related to their race. Some, but not all of these participants described their race related stigma as worse than their felony related stigma. This is important to note, as it adds to the existing literature, which has informed that People of Color (POC) with felonies do not experience stigma related to felonies as detrimentally as White individuals. As previously noted, race/ethnic background appears to be somewhat of a protective factor when it comes to felony related stigma in that POC who have felonies appear to be more impervious to the stigmatizing effects of their felonies (Chiricos et al., 2007). That is not to say that these individuals do not perceive stigma related to their felonies, after all, all but one of the participants reported

perceiving stigma from others related to their felonies. However, Zjopher may have said it best: "As a Black man, there's things bigger than felonies."

Making Meaning

Participants discussed the important role of religion/spirituality in order to make sense of their experience. Many participants reported trusting in God to lead and direct them or finding comfort in the sense that God was watching over them. Although spirituality in prisons is not heavily researched, the available literature has suggested that spirituality may serve as a coping mechanism mitigating the stress of incarceration (Eytan, 2011). Some scholars have argued that chaplains and spiritual volunteers provide individuals a link to the outside world as well as continued support post incarceration (Becci & Dubler, 2017).

Additionally, participants reflected on the importance of giving back which included volunteer work and mentoring both formally and informally. Participants also emphasized a strong desire for younger generations to learn from their mistakes. Similar to research in which female prisoners were given the opportunity to share their stories in different high schools (Bove & Tyron, 2018), our participants noted how rewarding it was to be given the opportunity to share their story as part of this study. . Given the opportunity to reflect on their lives and experiences, participants not only commented on how rewarding it was to be able to share their story, but also identified areas of personal growth and accountability in their interviews. Some participants recognized being more mature than their younger selves or having a "new identity" in which they traded in their former self for a new one. A number of our participants took personal accountability for their actions, recognizing they should not have engaged in illegal activity. Research to this point appears scant on how PWFC make meaning out of their incarcerations and convictions; however, clearly many of our

participants recognized change within themselves throughout the process, frequently citing themselves as "better" now than they were previously. Although their sense of positive change appears genuine, it could also function as a means by which they can distance themselves from their spoiled identity and thus mitigate the sense of shame they experience. For example, if a PWFC can identify that they have grown, changed for the better and participate in activities that confirm this positive change like spirituality and giving back, perhaps they can psychologically distance themselves from the spoiled identity, thus mitigating self-stigma.

Finally, a few participants discussed how the criminal justice system is broken and/or corrupt. Many participants highlighted corruption within the prison system, whereas others discussed the poor conditions of the prisons, and that the staff do not treat the prisoners like human beings. A search of the literature revealed that prison corruption is well documented in the academic literature (Fuller, 2017; Galinato & Rohla, 2020; Satz, 2013) as well as mainstream media and pop-culture for example the movie Shaw Shank Redemption (Darabont, 1994), which our participants also endorsed.

Work Experiences

All participants reported working manual labor jobs, which ranged from welding to painting, construction, landscaping or even shoveling manure. Only two participants reported working white collar jobs, which included one participant who had owned his own business and another participant who was the mayor of a local town. Notably, even those participants who reported working white collar jobs had also worked manual labor jobs at some point. It is somewhat unclear from the literature why PWFC work more manual labor jobs. It is plausible that the exclusion of many PWFC from some sectors of the professional

workforce is due to numerous professional and state licensing boards that prohibit licenses to PWFC. Many participants described some jobs, specifically construction jobs, as being "felon friendly", which may also suggest that PWFC are drawn to industries more likely to hire them. This appears consistent with previous literature, which has suggested that individuals who have felonies are more inclined to work lower skill jobs that require less education (Looney & Turner, 2018) and are more physical. Although manual labor jobs do not always mean lower wages, our participants noted that due to their convictions, they were precluded from job promotions and higher wages. This also appears consistent with the literature that indicates PWFC do not fare particularly well in the labor market, at least initially, working lower skill, lower paying jobs and thus earning fewer wages than their counterparts without a criminal background (Evans, 2015; Looney & Turner, 2018).

Previous research has also highlighted the importance of decent work as being a deterrent to recidivating (Grommon, 2013; Sung, 2001). Logic follows that if an individual earns a living wage in a job they find fulfilling, they will be less inclined to resort to illegal work. Illegal work does not attract much attention in the literature and is difficult to study for obvious reasons; however, it is important to highlight what drives an individual to engage in illegal work. At least for participants in the present study who engaged in illegal work, many of them discussed how they were unable to make ends meet working a regular 9-5 job. Still others reported they were financially dissatisfied with the types of work they were offered by legal means and thus resorted to illegal work to supplement their incomes.

Finally, participants reported altering their job seeking behavior due to their felony. Like other concealable stigmatized identities some participants indicated trying to hide their felony from potential employers. Previous research has indicated that medical professionals

will frequently encourage their patients to conceal their mental health diagnosis from employers to avoid stigmatization (Wheat et al., 2010). However, unlike some concealable stigmatized identities like a mental health diagnosis, which may be truly invisible, when applying for jobs, PWFC are frequently confronted with a dilemma: when to reveal their criminal background. Because many employers use background checks as part of their employment process, the issue for PWFC when it comes time to apply for jobs is not whether or not they should disclose their felony, but when and how. Some reported trying to talk to a manager in person, whereas others discussed applying to many different types of jobs even within the same company to increase their chances of being hired, still others reported lying on their resume to fill in gaps in their work history due to incarceration. It is unknown how effective these strategies are in aiding in job seeking, but some PWFC feel the need to modify their job seeking behavior because of their conviction.

Vocational Development

All but one participant reported having career aspirations. For many, these career aspirations included being business owners. However, for others, their goals were less lofty and included wanting to be an over the road truck driver, work in construction or landscaping. Still others simply expressed the desire to work in a job where they could be paid a living wage, provide for their family, afford a house, and save for the future. Although almost all the participants indicated having career aspirations, some of those participants also reported how their career aspirations changed once they received a felony conviction. These individuals noted that they were no longer able to pursue the types of jobs they had held prior to their felony and therefore needed to pivot. Additionally, more than half of participants indicated having low work volition or perceived less choice in pursuing

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the jobs they wanted since receiving their felony. One participant was denied entry into the military, and another was prevented from pursuing his chef's license. Despite having career aspirations, the reality for PWFC is that they perceive less choice in their ability to pursue those aspirations. The perceived choice in job and career development has previously been linked to career satisfaction, person-environment fit and increased work meaning (Duffy et al., 2016). PWFC with low work volition may be less inclined to engage in meaningful work which may diminish their engagement in decent work.

Five participants reported experiencing career satisfaction after receiving a felony conviction. A few study participants reported experiencing career satisfaction while also acknowledging experiencing low work volition. Although few participants endorsed both categories (low work volition and career satisfaction), this finding is somewhat surprising given that previous research has found a relationship between career satisfaction and work volition (Duffy et al., 2016).

When discussing workforce reentry preparedness, responses were split, ranging from participants reportedly feeling very prepared to completely unprepared. It should be noted that many of the study participants were recruited from a career development program designed specifically for PWFC. Participants in the study were at varying degrees of completion of the program designed to prepare them to reenter the workforce. Had I recruited participants prior to them starting the program or after completion of the program, their responses may have been more consistent. Some participants acknowledged that they felt ill prepared prior to entering into the career development program but felt prepared after completion of the program. According to Duffy et al. (2016) the perception of readiness and adaptability is also linked to work fulfillment. Therefore, PWFC who reenter the workforce

feeling ill prepared, may be less likely to engage in decent work. Regardless of whether or

not participants were prepared, the search for meaningful employment that provides decent

wages, fulfillment, and work satisfaction (i.e. decent work) is incredibly challenging for

PWFC.

Limitations and Future Research

The participant sample was composed of individuals enrolled in a career development

program in a reentry organization from the Midwestern United States. Although participants

were recruited and interviewed at varying points throughout the curriculum, the content of

the program includes cognitive behavioral interventions to address the stigma surrounding

felonies, which may have primed certain participants in discussing the topic at hand. Our

sample included a wide range of different ages, race/ethnicity, and time incarcerated, as well

as time since release. However, it may be helpful for future research to more exclusively

focus on a specific subset of the population (e.g. PWFC with more than 10 years of

incarceration, PWFC with less than 1 year since reentry) to determine if there are differences

between subsets of the population. Although our sample includes some diversity in terms of

race/ethnicity, the majority (57%) of participants were African American/Black. Though

Black men disproportionately comprise the prison population, their representation is closer to

33% with White representation in prison being close to 30% and Hispanic being 23%

(Carson, 2020). Despite the race/ethnicity of participants in the current study being skewed

towards more African American/Black participants (57%) than is represented in the prison

population (33%), the sample closely reflects the population served by the recruitment site.

In their end of year report for 2019, the recruitment site reported that 50% of their clientele

identified as African American, 30% as European American, and 6% identified as Hispanic.

Similarly, participants in the present study identified as 57% African American, 36% European American and 7% Hispanic. It is unclear why African American/Black men seek services at the recruitment site more frequently than European American/White participants. However, African American/Black men experience unemployment at higher rates than European American/White men, which may equate to them seeking more career development services, which in turn reflects their representation in the current sample. Another plausible explanation may be that Black/African American PWFC may have fewer social supports or social networks compared to their White counterparts, which may have contributed to more Black/African American PWFC seeking services at the recruitment site than their White peers. We surmise that limited social support and social networks may be a byproduct of the intersections of race and SES at play. Given that the PWFC who identify as African American/Black experience the stigma surrounding conviction differently than their European American/White counterparts, caution should be used in generalizing these results to the wider racial/ethnic population. Similar caution should be made in generalizing these results to a wider geographic population, given the geographic limitations of the study. Given the different experiences of European American/White and African American/Black PWFC, future research should continue to explore how felonies and reentry obstacles differ among groups.

As previously noted, although religion and spirituality in prisons is not heavily researched, study participants discussed making meaning of their convictions and incarceration with the help of their own spiritual and religious practices. Religion and spirituality is an under researched area of focus which appears to provide significant coping to those who are incarcerated (Eytan, 2011). Future research should explore

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spiritual/religious practices as an important and positive way of mitigating stress due to incarceration and reentry and potential aid for PWFC as they reenter society in bridging the divide between prison life and society as a whole. As previously discussed, participants were recruited during various stages of participation in the site's career development program. The program is a cognitive behavioral program aimed at addressing the cognitive aspects of reentry as well as equipping and preparing PWFC to reenter the workforce. As such, I anticipate that individual responses may have been different, especially in terms of their perception of preparedness to enter the workforce, had all participants completed the study before beginning the career development program.

This study exclusively interviewed men. However, women with felony convictions are an important and often overlooked portion of the populations of PWFC. Women have unique reentry needs and experiences. Future research should explore women's reentry experiences specifically in terms of career development.

Although I collected the type of felony in terms of state or federal conviction, I did not collect data on specific charges related to the felonies, nor did I collect data regarding how many times participants had been incarcerated or time since last incarceration. Not requesting specific demographics related to conviction and time since last incarceration was intentional for two reasons. Firstly, many of our participants received multiple felony convictions and it would be difficult to differentiate the effects of one felony conviction compared to another. Secondly, in order to quickly build rapport, I thought it important to allow participants the freedom to disclose details related to their felony conviction(s). However, because I did not collect specific data on the participants' types of felony convictions, I have no way of knowing whether those individuals with a felony against a

person (e.g., murder, rape) perceived more stigma and obstacles to employment compared to individuals without felonies against person (e.g., theft, possession of an illegal substance). Similarly, by not collecting specific details regarding frequency of incarceration/re-offense and time since last incarceration, I do not know how those aspects of conviction affect the re-entry process, specifically and most importantly in terms of employability. Future research should explore how these specific aspects of conviction (i.e. type of felony, personal recidivism rate and time since incarceration) may affect reentry experiences specifically in terms of perceptions of stigma and the subsequent effect on employability.

The current study findings add to the existing literature related to the stigma experiences of men with felonies. However, it is important to note that participants of color, who experience stigmatization on a regular basis due to their skin color, experienced stigma related to their felonies differently than the White participants. Specifically, some participants noted racial stigma as more prominent than stigma related to their felonies. Future research should further explore the mechanism of stigma related to felony convictions in both White and Black PWFC. For example, those aspects of White and/or Black culture that are hypothesized as being protective factors (i.e. community norms surrounding felonies) against internalizing stigma should be further investigated.

As previously noted, participants described societal perceptions of PWFC as less stigmatizing than in years prior. Perhaps this can in part be explained by the labor market being more welcoming to PWFC during a time of low unemployment. Future research should investigate societal perceptions of PWFC during times of economic constraints/ higher unemployment to assess what affect the labor market has on the perceived stigma that PWFC experience.

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Implications and Conclusion

Many implications come to mind when considering the findings of this study. The first and perhaps most salient is that of stigma. All but one of our participants described experiencing stigma related to their felonies. As such, clinicians working with individuals with felonies would benefit from helping PWFC process aspects of their stigmatized identities. This could include processing past stigmatizing experiences, or roleplaying situations in which PWFC may anticipate being rejected because of their felonies (e.g. job interviews). Counseling professionals should encourage their PWFC clients to explore aspects of their conviction, incarceration and reentry as well as the continued stigma they experience, thereby, helping PWFC work through and make sense of how they are likely to be perceived by society. Specifically, research has suggested that cognitive behavioral interventions can be effective in treating the negative effects of stigma. In their review of stigma-reduction strategies, Heijnders and Van Der Meij (2006) discussed the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) based approaches in reducing stigma on the individual level (i.e., self-stigma). They highlighted previous research that has shown success in treating self-stigma both in individual and group counseling modalities with CBT interventions in different stigmatized populations including serious mental illness and HIV diagnosis (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006).

Additionally, PWFC could benefit from being connected to support networks. As previously noted, incarceration and felony status are more normative within certain subcultures within the US. It has been suggested that more normative felony status could serve as a protective factor in terms of stigma (Moore & Tangney, 2017; Winnick & Bodkin, 2009) as communities with higher numbers of residents with felonies may hold less

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stigmatizing views toward them. An alternative to a more supportive, less stigmatizing community could include therapy groups, support groups and support networks for PWFC, which could all help provide a safe space for them to share experiences and gain support from others who understand their experience, which may be significantly lacking in everyday life. In their study of the perceptions of newly diagnosed people living with HIV and the role of support groups, Kave et al., (2019) found that support groups mitigated the effects of self-stigma and accelerated the diagnosis acceptance among its participants, which ultimately resulted in participants seeking care and remaining in the health care system in South Africa. Similarly, PWFC could benefit from the social support provided by interacting with other PWFC. Although in person support groups/counseling groups may be preferred, some research also suggests that meaningful online support groups can provide a viable alternative when other social support is unavailable (Knepper & Arrington, 2020). The consideration of online support groups is particularly meaningful in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby individuals are restricted in terms of social mobility and in-person contact. Irrespective of what specific interventions are used or which modality is employed, processing the stigma appears crucial in helping PWFC move past their "soiled identity" following release from prison and reintegration into society (Brown, 2011, p. 4). Although receiving the label of "felon" would be considered a blemish on an individual's identity, our participants made meaning out of their felony status in terms of what they learned while incarcerated and during the reentry process. Clinicians are well-situated to help PWFC make sense of these stigmatizing experiences. In other words, the mere act of sharing their story related to conviction, incarceration and reentry proved meaningful for many of our participants and thus clinicians are encouraged to support their storytelling. One individual

noted "I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders." In a previous study, in which female prisoners told their stories to others, findings suggested that storytelling had a profound impact on a PWFC ability to reconstruct their spoiled identity (Bove & Tyrone, 2018). PWFC can frequently feel invalidated and unheard within mainstream society which treats them as second-class citizens. Storytelling may provide space for PWFC to feel heard and accepted as they work through what it means to have a felony.

In addition to the internal, cognitive-affective aspects of re-entry, participants reported concrete, practical post-conviction obstacles. Some of the obstacles highlighted included being released from prison without essential documents in their possession such as birth certificates and social security cards, as well as finding stable housing and decent work. In addition to therapy and support, PWFC also have an immediate need for practical, wrap around services (i.e., comprehensive community support organizations aimed at working together to provide holistic care for an individual's physical and emotional wellbeing). Although, wrap-around services are present in most major cities, returning citizens may not be released into cities they are familiar with, or the wrap around service organizations may have changed and/or moved during their incarceration. Individuals working with PWFC would serve them well by ensuring PWFC have access to community resources, organizations, and mental health professionals who can help them access their essential documents and meet their practical needs once released.

Along similar lines, many of participants discussed turning to illegal work when legal work could not provide a livable wage. As previously noted, PWFC are saddled with incredible costs associated with incarceration and those costs and the financial burden contribute to individuals recidivating (Evans, 2015). Similarly, decent work has been

inversely related to recidivism (Grommon, 2013). Providing living wage employment that

also allows for time-off and adequate access to health care (decent work), appears to greatly

reduce recidivism. As of 2020, eighteen states and other municipalities have voted to

increase the minimum wage incrementally until it reaches a living wage (typically $15/hr.)

(National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020).   Increasing the federal minimum wage to

a livable wage could help ameliorate the financial burden associated with incarceration and

reentry, which may in turn reduce recidivism. Policy makers and social activists should

continue fighting for increased wages, more access to healthcare via employment and

adequate work-life balance.

As an additional means of creating equal access to employment, policy makers should

consider how important it is to preclude PWFC from holding state licenses for various

occupations. Many professional jobs (lawyers, psychologists, nurses) require state licenses

and/or certifications, which have requirements for background check or ambiguous language

regarding past criminal convictions. For example, in the state of Missouri, many statutes

related to professional licensing include language indicating that individuals can become

licensed provided "no disqualifying criminal history appears on the family care safety

registry" (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 337.315). However, no example of what kind of criminal history

would disqualify an individual from licensure is given. Many PWFC who may be interested

in pursuing careers that require higher education and/or professional licenses may be

inadvertently discouraged from pursuing such career paths because it is unclear whether or

not the state will license individuals with felonies. However, depending on the state,

additional professions (barbers, cab drivers, estheticians, etc.) also have background check

requirements for state licensure, which further limits PWFC ability to secure employment.

Policy makers should work with licensing board officials to reestablish state licensure requirements for jobs that necessitate criminal background checks and provide additional clarity on what kind of criminal offenses exclude PWFC from being license eligible.

Finally, the only way to eradicate the deleterious effects of felony conviction and incarceration is to radically alter the way in which we incarcerate individuals within the US. Advocates for criminal justice reform have long strived for diversion programs and sentencing policy that is rehabilitative rather than simply punitive. Although a significant undertaking, policy makers should address the mass incarceration of individuals with non-violent and drug related crimes, so that individuals who need mental health and substance related services are not sentenced and incarcerated for simply having a substance use disorder or mental health disorder. It is estimated that nationwide 45% of individuals are currently incarcerated due to a probation/parole violation (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019) within the state of Missouri alone, 54% of individuals are currently incarcerated due to probation violations (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019). An additional 20% of prisoners are currently incarcerated due to non-violent drug related crimes (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020) meaning roughly 65% or more of individuals who are currently incarcerated are incarcerated due to substance related crimes and/or probation/parole violations, many of whom could easily be diverted to more appropriate services. Activists should continue to work to end mass incarceration, especially for those crimes related to mental health/substance use disorders and probation violations.

Although this research study is not without limitations, the results highlight the experiences of men with felony convictions and the significant obstacles they face during reentry. Individuals who are convicted of felonies continue to experience the negative effects

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of incarceration including stigma, job obstacles, difficulties with housing and ongoing punishment related to their conviction, among others. Despite the overwhelming negative effects conviction and incarceration appear to have on PWFC, many of our participants were able to make sense of their conviction and the resulting stigma by giving back, establishing a new sense of identity or pulling strength from their belief in God/spirituality. Implications range from interventions focused on targeting self-stigma at the individual level to advocacy for criminal justice reform and improved working conditions for all at the federal level. Social activists have worked tirelessly to highlight the injustice of our current system and have achieved success in emphasizing the broken system that is the US criminal justice system. Despite the significant progress made in recent years, there remains monumental work ahead as radical reform is required to truly change our current system. Even with its limitations, this study has contributed to the current literature by addressing stigma and career development challenges in this often-neglected population.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I am going to ask you some questions about how receiving your felony/ies conviction affected your job/career pursuits. First, I will ask you about some general questions about what kinds of jobs you had before receiving your felony/ies and incarceration and then I will ask you more specific questions about how receiving your felony/ies affected different aspects of your life and employment. If you have more than one felony conviction please answer these questions in terms of the felony that had the most impact on your life.

1. Tell me about the types of jobs you had before your first felony *(Decent Work)*

   a. What jobs/careers have you aspired/dreamed about or what jobs/careers, if any, were you working towards before receiving your felony/ies?

2. How do you think others view you since receiving your felony? *(Marginalization/Stigma)*

   a. To what extent do you agree with how others view you?

3. Some people use the word "stigma" to describe how people look at them differently after receiving a felony. What role if any has stigma played in your reentry experience? *(Marginalization/Stigma)*

4. Share with me your job/employment experiences since receiving your felony/ies *(Decent Work).* These experiences may include; finding a job, looking for a job, keeping a job or attitudes about jobs among other things.

5. Tell me about your ability to pursue the jobs you want since receiving a felony. *(Work Volition)*

6. What challenges or barriers, if any, have you experienced in your job/career pursuits since receiving your felony? *(Work Volition)*

7. What changes, if any have you experienced in the kinds of jobs/career you would like to pursue as a result of your felony? *(Work Volition)*

8. How, if at all, has receiving a felony affected you economically? *(Economic Constraints)*

9. How prepared did you feel to enter the workforce after receiving your felony? *(Career Adaptability)*

10. What does it mean in your community to be convicted of a felony?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview Questions Feedback Form

Interview Question	Assessment Question	1 Not at all	2	3	4	5 Very Much So
Question 1 **Tell me about the types of jobs you had before your first felony**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses an individual's job experiences before receiving their first felony?					
Question 1a. **What jobs/careers have you aspired/dreamed about or what jobs/careers, if any, were you working towards before receiving your felony/ies?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses an individual's career pursuits before receiving their first felony?					
Question 2 **How do you think others view you since receiving your felony?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses how an individual perceives others' opinions of them since receiving a felony?					
Question 2a **To what extent do you**	How important do you think this question is?					

agree with how others view you?	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses how much an individual agrees with others' opinions of them since receiving a felony?					
Question 3 **Some people use the word "stigma" to describe how people look at them differently after receiving a felony. What role if any has stigma played in your reentry experience?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses the effect of stigma on an individual's reentry experience?					
Question 4 **Share with me your job/employment experiences since receiving your felony/ies**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses an individual's job experiences since receiving a felony?					
Question 5 **Tell me about your ability to pursue the jobs you want since receiving a felony.**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses how much career choice an individual feels they have after receiving a felony?					
Question 7	How important do you think this question is?					

What challenges or barriers, if any, have you experienced in your job/career pursuits since receiving your felony?	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses how an individual's career choices are affected by receiving a felony?					
Question 8 **What changes, if any have you experienced in the kinds of jobs/career you would like to pursue as a result of your felony?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses how much freedom an individual experiences in their job choices as a result of their felony?					
Question 9 **How, if at all, has receiving a felony affected you economically?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses the economic impact individuals with felony experience?					
Question 10 **How prepared did you feel to enter the workforce after receiving your felony?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses the individual's readiness and resources for coping with vocational tasks after receiving their felony conviction?					
Question 11	How important do you think this question is?					

What does it mean in your community to be convicted of a felony?	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses what an individual's community thinks about receiving a felony conviction?					
Question 12 **Is there anything else you would like to add?**	How important do you think this question is?					
	How clear do you think this question is?					
	How well do you think this question assesses for any remaining input from participants?					

What additional feedback/input do you have, if any?

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity:
- ☐ White or European American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ Multiracial (please specify)_____
- ☐ If not listed, please specify_____

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*
- ☐ Some high school/ No Diploma
- ☐ High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- ☐ Some college credit, no degree
- ☐ Trade/technical/vocational training
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS, AB, BSW)
- ☐ Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MSW, MFA)
- ☐ Professional degree (e.g., J.D.)
- ☐ Doctorate degree (e.g., M.D. Ph.D., Ed.D,)

What is your current employment status?
- ☐ Employed full time
- ☐ Employed Part time, but looking for full time
- ☐ Employed Part time and not looking for full time
- ☐ Unemployed, but looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed and not looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student
- ☐ If not listed, please specify

If you are currently employed, what is your salary?
    A. Per hour _____

      OR

    B. Per year _____

Total number of years spent in prison (including all time incarcerated in jail and/or prison throughout your lifespan)?

Type of Felony
    ☐ State
    ☐ Federal

Were you incarcerated as a result of your last felony?

    ☐ Yes
        o Length of sentence:
        o Time served:
    ☐ No

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT/FLYER

Recruitment Script/Flyer

Hello, my name is Beki Lee. I am a graduate student at University of Missouri-Kansas City in the counseling psychology doctoral program. I am doing a research study on the job and career experiences of men with felony convictions. You are invited to take part in this research study, which explores how the stigma of receiving a felony affects career choices. You are able to take part if you are:

a) Male

b) 18 or over

c) Have received a felony conviction

d) Have been released from prison and/or jail

The study involves a short survey and an interview that will last roughly 60 minutes. Individuals who take part will receive a $30 Visa gift card to compensate them for their time.

If you are interested in hearing more about this study please contact the investigator (Beki Lee) at: 786-514-5580 or leerebek@umkc.edu.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Second Chance: the paradox of felony convictions

Chrisanthia Brown, PhD
Rebekah Lee, MA

Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted by researchers at *University of Missouri- Kansas City*

The researcher in charge of this study is Dr. Chris Brown. While the study will be run by her, Rebekah Lee will be conducting the interviews and most of the study procedures.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you have a felony are 18 years of age or older and identify as male. Research studies only include people who voluntary choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher or study staff will go over this consent form with you. Please ask him/her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

Men with felonies face unique experiences when looking for and finding employment. We would like to interview men with felonies to gain a richer understanding of what it is like to find employment and/or pursue a career after receiving a felony conviction.

You will be one of approximately 15 participants in the study.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore how the stigma of receiving a felony affects job employment and career choices.

Procedures

You will be asked to meet the student researcher (Beki Lee) in person or via telephone for an interview. You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire before taking part in an interview. The interview should take about 1 hour while the questionnaire should take about 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the interview you will be compensated $30 for your time. The interview will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded

you cannot be in this study. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the interview so your identity can remain confidential. After the interview has been transcribed, you may be asked to review the document to make sure we accurately documented your responses. All audio recordings, questionnaires and transcripts of the interviews will be stored electronically on UMKC's cloud server.

If you agree to take part in this study, the total time you will be involved in this study will be about 90 minutes

Participation is voluntary, you may refuse to answer certain questions and may stop being in the study at any time.

If you are on probation, parole, or house arrest, participating in this study will not have any affect (either positive or negative) on your probation, parole or house arrest.

Risks and Inconveniences

Loss of confidentiality is the main risk of this study. We have tried to lower this risk by asking you to choose an alternative name for the interview, as well as storing all study related documents in a secure, encrypted cloud-based system.
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks of being in this research study are not expected to be more than the risks in your daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study.

Benefits

There are no benefits to you for taking part in this study.

Fees and Expenses

There is no cost to you for being in this study

Compensation

You will be compensated $30 for completing the questionnaire and the audio-recorded interview

Alternatives to Study Participation

Your alternative is to not take part in this study

Confidentiality

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional

Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for the interview so your identity can remain confidential. After the interview has been transcribed, you may be asked to review the document to make sure we accurately documented your responses. All audio recordings, questionnaires and transcripts of the interviews will be stored electronically on UMKC's cloud server. Only the PI and her research team will have access to your data. The data will be stored for 7 years after the study has been closed. At which point all electronic records will be deleted.

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the Office of UMKC's Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher Chris Brown, PhD at 816-235-2491 or Rebekah Lee at 816-235-6150 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call them if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. The researchers, doctors or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so. They may do this for medical or administrative reasons or if you no longer meet the study criteria. You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Chris Brown, PhD at 816-235-2491 or Rebekah Lee at 816-235-6150. By continuing with the study and taking part in the interview, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. When you are ready I will start the audio recorder.

Figure 1. Psychology of Working Theory Constructs of Interest
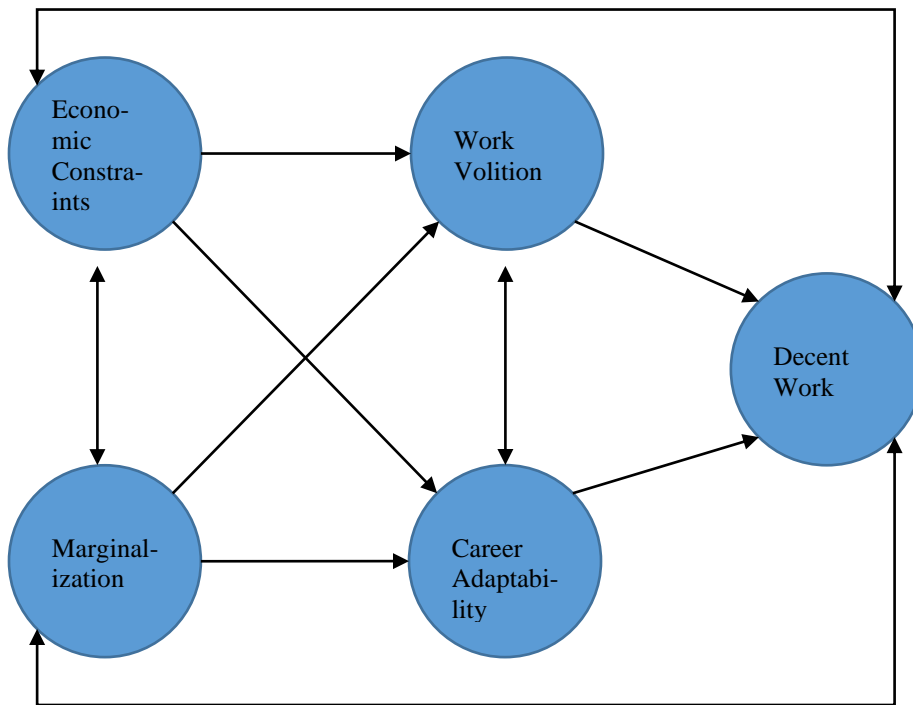
Economic Constraints, Marginalization, Career Adaptability and Work Volition are
theoretical predictors of Decent Work and constructs of interest in this study.

TABLES

Table 1 *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym and participant #	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Highest degree/schooling	Current Employment Status	Type of Felony	Total number of years incarcerated	Time spent in last incarceration
Daniel Participant 1	39	Hispanic/Latino	HSD/ VOTECH	Unemployed, not looking	State	12 years	6 months
Leandre Participant 2	31	Black/African American	HSD/Some college	Unemployed, looking	State	14 months	4 months
Big H Participant 3	48	Black/African American	HSD	Employed p/t, looking for f/t	State	12-15 years	5 years
D.C Participant 4	63	Black/African American	HSD	Unemployed, looking	State	DR	7 years
Mickie Participant 5	67	Black/African American	Some high school	Unemployed, not looking	State	43 years	35 years
Zjopher Participant 6	55	Black/African American	Some college	Unemployed, looking	State & Federal	30 years	28 years
Tyrone Participant 7	32	Black/African American	HSD	Employed f/t	State	DR	3 years
John Participant 8	39	White/European American	HSD	Unemployed, looking	Federal	DR	12.5 years
Kinfolk Participant 9	48	Black/African American	Some high school	Unemployed, looking	Federal	3 years	3 years
Chucky Participant 10	41	White/European American	HSD	Unemployed, looking	State	DR	DR
Keebs Participant 11	34	White/European American	HSD/Votech	Unemployed, looking	State and Federal	13 years	6.5. years
Carey Participant 12	44	White/European American	HSD/some college	Unemployed, looking	Federal	6 years	4.5 years

Greg Participant 13	23	Black/African American	HSD	Unemployed, looking	Federal	5 years	57 months
Lucas Participant 14	27	White/European American	HSD	Unemployed, not looking	State	3 years	6 months

DR indicates declined to respond

Table 2 *Summary of Domains and Categories*

Domains, Categories, Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
External Factors														
Felony before age 24 (G)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
At risk Environmental factors (T)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X			
Positive family environment (V)				X	X	X			X					
Effects of Conviction														
Post-conviction obstacles (G)				X	X	X		X		X		X	X	
Job obstacles (G)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Negative financial Effects of conviction (T)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Extensions of punishment after time served (V)	X		X		X					X	X			X
Perception of loss or displacement (V)		X		X	X				X	X				
Vocational development														
Career aspirations (G)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Career satisfaction (V)	X					X	X	X	X					
Low work volition (T)	X				X	X			X	X	X	X		X
Workforce Reentry Preparedness (T)		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
Stigma experiences														
Belief that stereotypes about PWFC are true (V)	X							X				X		X
Coping mechanisms to reduce self-stigma (T)		X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Perceived stigma as a result of felony (G)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Belief in a hierarchy of felonies (V)		X	X							X	X	X		X
Racial Stigma (V)	X	X				X								
Making Meaning														
Personal Growth and Accountability (T)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Spirituality (V)	X			X			X		X			X		
Giving back (T)	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Criminal Justice system broken (V)				X	X	X						X		
Work Experiences														
Manual Labor (G)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Illegal work (V)	X	X					X				X		X	X

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Altered job seeking behavior because of felony (T)   X   X   X   X   X   X   X   X   X

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VITA

Rebekah Lee was born February 9, 1983, in St. Louis, Missouri. She was educated in Howell's School Llandaff Cardiff, Wales. She then pursued an undergraduate degree in Chemistry and Marine Science and obtained a Bachelor's of Science degree from the University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL in 2005. After living overseas in India for a few years, she returned to school to obtain a Masters in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Missouri- Kansas City in 2013.

Ms. Lee entered the University of Missouri at Kansas City Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program with a desire to learn more about psychological research and treatment and to receive continued therapeutic training. Upon completion of the Doctor of Philosophy degree, Ms. Lee plans to work as a clinician at a local hospital where she would like to serve those with substance use disorders and severe mental health issues.

During her doctoral training, Ms. Lee completed clinical training in various treatment settings including; an outpatient clinic for adults and children, a University counseling center, an inpatient psychiatric unit and a residential substance use treatment facility at a VA. Her final pre-doctoral internship was completed at the Leavenworth site of VA Eastern Kansas where her experiences included Home Based Primary Care, Primary Care Mental Health Integration, Personality Assessment, Neuropsychological Assessment, Disease Prevention Health Promotion and Geripsychology.

In addition to her graduate studies, Ms. Lee is actively involved in her church where she serves as Co-Chair of the outreach team. Ms. Lee also volunteers at local reentry organizations like "Connections to Success" where she is a mentor. Rebekah is a mother to three beautiful and wild children in whom she finds much joy.