A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY: EXPLORING ORGANIZATIONAL

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE FOR

INDIVIDUALS WITH A HISTORY OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

by

Heather Morton

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

November, 2023

APPROVED BY:

_____

Dr. Bethany Mims-Beliles, Committee Chair

_____

Dr. Laura Rolen, Committee Member

A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY: EXPLORING ORGANIZATIONAL

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE FOR

INDIVIDUALS WITH A HISTORY OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

by

Heather Morton

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

November, 2023

APPROVED BY:

_____

Dr. Bethany Mims-Beliles,, Committee Chair

_____

Dr. Laura Rolen, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Individuals with a history of criminal behavior often experience difficulties finding employment once labeled a criminal by society. Maintaining stable employment post-release has been found to lower recidivism rates, thus supporting safer communities. In concert, positive experiences with equity and inclusion in the workplace have further been found to support stronger social identities and belonging in the workplace. Currently, no study has specifically examined the impact of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion implementation and practices in the workplace among individuals with a history of criminal behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to better understand the phenomena of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace through the lived experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior. This study attempted to bridge this theoretical gap through the explication of participants' open-ended survey responses. Among individuals who reported contact with the criminal justice system, findings indicate an overarching theme of ongoing career challenges in regard to acquiring and maintaining employment post-contact, with varying experiences with equitable experiences, unfair experiences, and levels of inclusion in the participants' workplaces.

*Keywords:* organizational justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, recidivism

**Copyright Page**

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. I love you more than a unicorn. I hope that the

sacrifices you have made for me to pursue this journey will be rewarded with many

opportunities for happiness and success in our future.

**Acknowledgments**

To my husband, Brett, thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. To my mom and dad, Sandra and James, thank you for always believing in me. To my mother-in-law, Tamara, thank you for always providing a listening ear and being a wonderful cheerleader. To my children, Lillian, Amelia, and Adeline, thank you for your understanding when I was distracted and unable to be fully present during this project. I love you all so, very much. To Dr. Bethany Mims-Beliles, thank you for your support and feedback during my research and writing. Your help has been invaluable. To Dr. Laura Rolen, I appreciate all your support. You were a valuable asset to this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

## Introduction

The United States is the world's third most populous nation, with a multicultural population of around 332 million, embodying racial and ethnic diversity. Despite the expanding diverse society and strides toward inclusivity, citizens of different criminal backgrounds are experiencing socioeconomic oppression at significantly disproportionate levels (Jeffers, 2019). Moreover, the United States holds less than five percent of the world's population, yet accounts for more than 20% of the world's incarcerated and correctionally controlled population (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021c; Population Reference Bureau, 2020; Walmsley, 2018). Individuals who have experience in the justice system as a result of engaging in criminal behavior are often subjected to stereotyping, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization from their communities, thus making it difficult to obtain stable employment (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022). Job instability can contribute to housing insecurity, homelessness, and decreased means to provide for oneself, thus increasing the likelihood of the individual resorting to criminal behavior or recidivating to meet their needs (Adams et al., 2019; Anazodo et al., 2019; Weiman as cited in Young & Ryan, 2019).

Furthermore, individuals who have engaged in criminal behavior may perceive that they are unfairly excluded by their work peers or receive inequitable treatment due to the stigma that surrounds their past behavior (Schneider & Weber, 2020). These negative perceptions and experiences can contribute to decreased self-esteem, negatively impacting their social identity and interactions with others in their workplace (Fortune &

Yuen, 2015). Nevertheless, some organizations have taken strides to incorporate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) practices in their environments to improve social inclusion, equitable practices, and hiring processes, thus contributing to the perceptions of organizational justice (Espino et al., 2023; Haynie et al., 2019). This study strives to shed light on these lived experiences of people who have a history of engaging in criminal behavior.

## Background

Presently, there is ample research related to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace; however, some aspects of these practices have yet to be studied, including the experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior and their experiences with JEDI in the workplace. Fletcher and Beauregard (2022) suggested that future diversity research in the organization setting should use the theoretical perspective of SIT to complement broader psychology and sociological theory, such as intersectionality theory. This study uses SIT and intersectionality theory as the theoretical framework and Goodman's (2014) Tapestry Model as the conceptual framework to understand intersectionality. These theoretical perspectives will be the focal point of this research to better understand the descriptions of participants' experiences with justice and EDI practices in the workplace.

In addition, Fletcher and Beauregard (2022) recommended future diversity research to address neglected or significantly disadvantaged social groups, such as individuals with a criminal history or record. Baum (2021) discussed the need for workplaces to commit to a culture shift in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusionary practices within the workplace, especially toward individuals who have been historically

marginalized and discriminated against based on their racial identity. In addition, intersectionality theory was noted for workplaces to consider when changing and implementing diversity policies (Baum, 2021). Young and Ryan (2019) explored the gaps in knowledge regarding employment for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. The researchers noted several barriers for these individuals, including difficulty obtaining work and increased stigmatization and discrimination. Implications for future research noted the importance of a qualitative measurement to better understand the perspectives of jobseekers or applicants with a history of criminal behavior in relation to obtaining work following their involvement in the justice system. Baier (2020) examined the collateral consequences individuals face upon re-entering their communities after incarceration and found that many individuals are undervalued and face employment barriers due to blanket policies placed by organizations that disallow for hiring individuals with a criminal background. Their study examined the advantages and shortcomings of many policies designed to reduce employment barriers, including the Ban-the-Box statutes, decarceration initiatives, licensing reforms, and certificates of employability.

**Historical Significance**

In August of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated a message of hope during his iconic "I have a dream" speech, thus persuading the United States (U.S.) with a calling for the cessation of racism and implementation of economic and civil rights for non-White members of society (Adejumo, 2021). In an unfortunate turn of events, the start of mass incarceration of historically marginalized and oppressed groups began less than a decade later (A. Cox, 2020). Despite accounting for less than forty percent of the

population, non-White Americans make up for 67% of the prison population and are more likely to become incarcerated over their lifetime when compared to their White peers (Jeffers, 2019). Ironically, this mass incarceration phenomenon occurred after the U.S. government passed the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Kirk, 2021). This law was designed to prohibit the discrimination of individuals in the workplace based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, yet did not generalize to help prevent discrimination against those same individuals in other areas outside of the work environment (Baier, 2020).

Individuals with a history of criminal behavior are not protected under Title VII. To decrease discrimination of individuals with a history of criminal behavior in the workplace, a nonbinding policy statement from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) suggests employers to resist using criminal background checks during the hiring process as it can lead to discrimination against minority racial groups (Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). To combat discrimination in the workplace against individuals of oppressed groups, the EEOC implemented the Affirmative Action (AA) plan (Cropanzano et al., 2005). Businesses required to utilize AA plans include non-construction federal contractors or subcontractors who have 50 or more employees and provide services for $50,000 or more (United States Department of Labor, n.d.b). For example, federal contractors and subcontractors are supposed to incorporate AA plan policies to recruit and employ individuals of certain minoritized social groups, women, individuals with disabilities, and veterans (United States Department of Labor, n.d.a).

However, a meta-analysis conducted by Leslie et al. (2014) found that affirmative action and diversity programs can unintentionally contribute to negative consequences

such as labeling, stigmatization, perceptions of being stereotyped, and decreased group performance. A more recent meta-analysis by Mor Barak et al. (2016) found that only diversity management practices are associated with positive and negative outcomes, while diversity and inclusion practices correlate with more consistently positive results. Some of these positive outcomes include lower levels of emotional exhaustion and improved job satisfaction and commitment (Mor Barak et al., 2016). An article written by Bernstein et al. (2020) found that while diversity management practices can help reduce discrimination and social exclusion, there are inconsistencies related to which types of practices should be utilized and their effect on the organizations' social dynamics. A study conducted by Mousa (2021) found a statistically significant correlation between organizational inclusion and diversity management practices, as well as females holding more favorable perceptions of these practices than their male counterparts.

The Second Chance Act (SCA) was passed in 2007 under the Obama administration (Bureau Justice of Assistance, 2018). The Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person (FIRST STEP) Act was passed in 2018 under the Trump administration (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). These acts were established to assist in justice reform and improve the employability of individuals with a history of criminal behavior (Mancini et al., 2021). These Acts, in conjunction with the Ban-the-Box statutes, aim to provide justice-involved individuals the chance to attain gainful employment and positively contribute to their communities following the receival of criminal charges or reintegration after incarceration (Mancini et al., 2021; Young & Ryan, 2019).

**Organizational Justice**

Organizational justice is the perception of fairness within the workplace (Özkan, 2022). A recent study by Milesi (2022) showed strong correlations between procedural justice and work group identification, which can help to enhance self-esteem and group identity among organization members. Conte and Landy (2019) note the diverse types of organizational justice, including distributive, procedural, and interactional (subdivided into informational and interpersonal). Employees perceiving a lack of distributive justice are at an increased risk of experiencing stress that can negatively contribute to their workplace behavior (Cropanzano et al., 2005). Successful intergroup contact is also correlated with decreased prejudice and increased social inclusion at an individual, group, and organizational level, which can help enhance equitable practices and increase justice in the workplace (Bernstein et al., 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Dimensions of Organizational Justice*
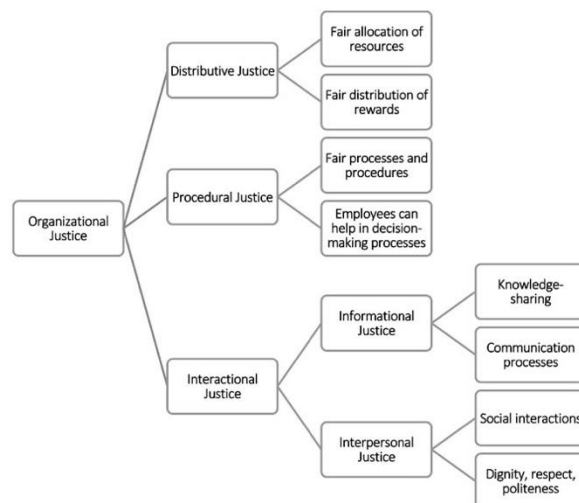


**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Equity is the process of implementing fair policies, procedures, and outcomes (Murphy, 2018), whereas organizational justice refers to the employees' perceptions of these policies, procedures, and outcomes being constructed and implemented fairly (Haynie et al., 2019). When ensuring that something is equitable, the needs and characteristics of the individual must be considered within the context of the situation (SHRM.org as cited in Baum, 2021). Equity is not synonymous with equality, however, as equity allows employees to access the specific resources and opportunities that apply to their unique situation to achieve success, rather than experiencing equal access the exact resources and opportunities as their peers (Livingston, 2020). It is important for workplaces to address the systemic inequitable treatment for individuals of minoritized and minority groups (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022).

Diversity refers to the differences between individuals, such as employees of varying backgrounds, which can lead to the perception that they are different from others (SHRM.org as cited in Baum, 2021). Fostering a diverse work environment requires employers to hire and retain employees of varying cultural, racial, gender, and experience differences (Mousa, 2021). Inclusion is the extent to which an individual has access to resources, information, and opportunities, their level of involvement in work groups, and their ability to contribute to decision-making and other essential workplace processes (SHRM.org as cited in Baum, 2021).

While promoting diverse groups is often associated with enhanced productivity and improved workplace cultures, implementing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives and practices does not always decrease discrimination and social exclusion (Murphy, 2018). The intergroup contact theory helps to explain how positive interactions

between different social groups within the workplace can help promote the social
inclusion and group cohesiveness necessary for successful EDI practices (Tropp et al.,
2022). Hundreds of replications of intergroup contact have shown successful prejudice
reduction, with strong evidence providing significant correlations between increased
contact and more positive intergroup relations (Pettigrew, 2021; Tropp et al., 2022).
While both positive and negative social contact correlates with stronger cognitive
dimensions of prejudice such as stereotyping (Aberson, 2015 as cited in Pettigrew, 2021),
some research has shown that positive contact can be a buffer from the adverse effects of
the negative contact (Arnadottir et al., 2018 as cited in Pettigrew, 2021). To further this,
research has shown a correlation between the quantity of negative contact and its
increased likelihood of prejudice when compared to the quantity of positive contact
correlated with a decrease in prejudice (Barlow et al., 2012 as cited in Pettigrew, 2021).

**Sociological Significance**

An individual's sense of self is derived from the social groups they identify and
associate membership with (Islam, 2014). Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity
theory (SIT) helps explain the process of social identification, categorization, and
comparison. Members of similar characteristics are considered members of in-groups,
with those of differing characteristics being their out-group (Montrey & Shultz, 2019).

Employees without a history of criminal behavior generally constitute the social
majority in-group within organizations, contrasting with employees with a history of
criminal behavior (representative of their out-group). This study will use SIT to
understand the social dynamic within the workplace and shed light on the lived
experiences of people who have a criminal record due to engaging in criminal behavior.

These individuals may also be part of the workplace out-group and potentially minoritized members of the workforce. Additionally, the out-group homogeneity biases, and in-group favoritism may be present in these lived experiences in relation to social inclusion, diversity in hiring, and equitable access to resources and opportunities (Montrey & Shultz, 2019; Schneider & Weber, 2020)

**Theological Viewpoint**

Understanding the lived experiences of JEDI can be seen through a theological lens by drawing upon Jesus' teachings in the New Testament. The book of James illuminates the notion that we are not to show partiality to others based on their social status in this life (*New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible* [*NRSVUE Bible*]*,* 2021, Jm 2:1-5). Furthermore, we are called to live like Christ—visiting those imprisoned, forgiving the sinners, and promoting the power of redemption (*NRSVUE,* 2021, Mk 2:17, Lk 19:9). Rather than succumb to the societal norms of promoting collateral consequences to those who have completed their sentencing requirements and have been given the chance to re-enter their communities, we should love one another just as Christ loves us (*NSRVUE,* 2021, Jn 13:34).

<div align="center">

**Problem Statement**

</div>

It is not known what practices correlate with enhanced employee perceptions of JEDI among those with a history of criminal behavior. Furthermore, absent from the literature is whether these practices differ from what creates these perceptions among individuals without a history of criminal behavior. In 2020, more than 3 million individuals were categorized as being on probation after engaging in criminal behavior (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021a). Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Americans re-

entered and reintegrated into their communities to adjust to the responsibilities of life

after incarceration (United States Department of Justice., n.d.). Difficulties can arise

when finding a balance between reunification between family and friends, acquiring

employment, and abstaining from criminal behavior (desistance) to avoid recidivating

(Adams et al., 2019). Steady employment is correlated with reduced rates of recidivism,

yet unfortunately, many of these individuals are subjected to stigmatization,

marginalization, and discrimination in their communities and in the workplace (Adams et

al., 2019; Anazodo et al., 2019; Kirk, 2021; Moore & Tangney, 2017; Rosen & Cruz,

2018).

Some strides have been taken to help these individuals reintegrate into their

communities and acquire work, including passing legislation, laws, and organization-

wide policies to help reduce the biases associated with hiring individuals who have a

history with the justice system (Mancini et al., 2021; Vuolo et al., 2017). Additionally,

while many organizations have adopted JEDI practices, these practices may overlook

individuals with a history of criminal behavior in favor of more "mainstream"

characteristics such as age or ethnicity (Young & Ryan, 2019).

One way to better help individuals adjust to finding work and stability after

experience with the justice system is to help reduce the stigmatization associated with

having a criminal background is through increased knowledge gained from equity,

diversity, and inclusion training for all employees (Adejumo, 2021; Ajunwa &

Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Baum, 2021; Vogel & Erickson, 2021). When individuals feel

welcomed, represented, and given fair opportunities within their organization, they are

more likely to perceive a sense of belonging that correlates with improved engagement in

the workplace along with better organizational commitment and retention rates

(Kennedy, 2021; Vogel & Erickson, 2021; Young & Ryan, 2019). Feelings of belonging

and increased retention rates are especially important for individuals with a history of

criminal behavior (Le et al., 2021; Schneider & Weber, 2020). This study will use a

survey using open-ended questions to find key words and themes to create a descriptive

summary to better understand the phenomena of JEDI in the workplace through the lived

experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to better understand the

phenomena of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace

through the lived experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior. These

findings were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA) and interpreted through

various lenses, including the social identity theory and other interrelated theories.

## Research Question and Sub-Questions

This study was designed to understand the lived experiences in the workplace of

individuals with a history of criminal behavior through a descriptive qualitative

methodology.

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How do individuals with a history of criminal

behavior describe their experience in the work environment?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** What perceived implications does an individual's

history of criminal behavior have on their experience with inclusion in the workplace?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What perceived implications does an individual's

history of criminal behavior have on their experience with equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 5 (RQ5):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports diversity in the workplace?

**Research Question 6 (RQ6):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports inclusion in the workplace?

## Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

### Assumptions

In a research study, assumptions are the foundation for things the researcher accepts as true about the study, its participants, and parts of the process (Creswell, 2013). There are four assumptions for this research study. First, it is assumed that each participant will be at least 18 years of age. Secondly, it is assumed that each participant will live within the geographical limits of the United States of America. The third assumption is that all the participants will have had at least one job after experience with the justice system due to engaging in criminal behavior. The fourth assumption is that all participants who participate in the survey will provide detailed descriptions and lengthy commentary of their lived experiences without providing socially desirable responses, which is required for collecting quality data.

### Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses noted in a research design that could affect the analysis and presentation of the research (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). This research uses a qualitative descriptive design, which is less interpretive than more structured methodologies, such as a case study, grounded theory, or phenomenology. This design

requires more resources and time to collect and analyze data. Furthermore, this type of

research design is also associated with lower levels of validity and reliability than other

designs (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it is important to take measures to ensure qualitative

rigor (Hunter et al., 2019).

There is also the possibility of ambiguous responses, or several items being left

unanswered, making it difficult to identify keywords and common themes. Another

limitation of this study is the lack of research on the lived experiences of JEDI for those

with a history of criminal behavior in the workplace. While some studies address how to

improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace, few studies focus on

whether these initiatives are perceived as influencing their employees. Some studies have

focused on individual perceptions during attaining work or reasons not to seek

employment following a history of criminal behavior (Lilja, 2019).

**Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

The social identity theory (SIT) will provide the theoretical framework for this

study. Critical parts of this theory that will guide the research questions include the in-

group and out-group phenomena, out-group homogeneity effects, and intergroup contact.

Out-groups consist of individuals who do not identify or align with the characteristics of

the in-group members and may consist of underprivileged or oppressed individuals that

have one or more potentially stigmatizing characteristics such as poverty, low social

status, or racial differences (Collins et al., 2021; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Out-group

members are generally viewed more unfavorably than those within the in-group. The out-

group homogeneity effect—or judgmental accentuation that increases the salience of

distinguished group features, while simultaneously exaggerating the differences—can

lead to the formation of the out-group homogeneity bias (Islam, 2014). This type of bias posits that in-group members will generalize all members of a specific out-group as being the same (e.g., all people who experience poverty are without jobs, or all formerly incarcerated individuals are violent or untrustworthy). These biases can lead to unfavorable behavior, such as social exclusion and deprivation of certain groups, known as out-group derogation (R. Cox, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In contrast, in-group members are perceived to possess more positive qualities, thus contributing to the notion of in-group differentiation (Islam, 2014). In the context of this study, individuals with a history of criminal behavior or incarceration may be categorized into out-groups within their communities and workplaces because of their stigmatized experiences. Various social groups exist within a particular area, such as an organization's work environment. Social groups that are considered privileged likely consist of individuals who do not experience overt discrimination or negative biases and stereotyping (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals often have the desire to be part of a positively distinct group and not be associated with groups of low social status, including individuals with experience in the justice system (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Disengagement or cessation of certain characteristics that contribute to one's identity can lead to discrimination, misidentification, and social targeting, despite the individual's desire to form a new identity (Bubolz & Lee, 2021). Positive intergroup contact and interactions can help decrease exclusionary practices and dynamics, including stereotyping and stigmatization of out-group members (Bernstein et al., 2020).

## Conceptual Framework

**Goodman's Tapestry Model**

Intersectionality describes the various social identities that can affect an individual's perception and experiences of social oppression, thus influencing feelings of discrimination and stigmatization, or on the contrary, affecting one's social power, providing social privilege (Collins et al., 2021; Goodman, 2014). The intersectional aspect of social identities can be used to understand how various social categories interact simultaneously to shape individual's identities and perceptions of their lived experiences (Goodman, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is a common tendency when using an intersectional lens to gravitate toward a singular, pinpointed identity to understand oppression; however, Tapestry Model (TM) allows for exploration of each identity to be analyzed at a micro- and macrolevel (Goodman, 2014). Furthermore, the TM can be used as a lens to analyze and better understand how the intersection of multiple identities can influence the perception of inequitable treatment of individuals among systems of power.

## Definition of Terms

*Bias* – To exhibit favor or disfavor toward something, someone, or groups, such as out-groups and their members (Montrey & Shultz, 2019).

*Desistance* – The period during which a person refrains from the pattern of criminal behavior with the possibility of recidivism at the forefront of their decision-making; not synonymous with the termination of criminal behavior (Bersani & Doherty, 2018).

*Discrimination* – The unfair or unjust treatment of individuals, such as social exclusion, resulting from prejudicial beliefs (Schneider & Weber, 2020).

*Intersectionality* – "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

*Organizational Justice* – The act of recognizing and rectifying an unequal balance of power in the workplace using strategies to promote all employees' equitable and fair treatment (Peek et al., 2021).

*Marginalization* – The disparate or unfair treatment of an individual or group of people, such as formerly incarcerated individuals or people of varying races and ethnicities (Jeffers, 2019).

*Minority* – This term refers to a statistical minority social group in a particular community (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022).

*Minoritized groups* – A minoritized group may consist of individuals of a statistical minority in relation to their community or signify a social group that experiences oppression and inferior status from other dominant social groups of higher power (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022).

*Prejudice* – Inaccuracies, misconceptions, and misjudgments about individuals based on faulty or rigid thinking or unconscious biases (Verkuyten et al., 2020).

*Prison cycling* – The cycle of reoffending and entering back into the justice system; prevalent in areas of higher crime rates (Adams et al., 2019).

*Re-entry* – The process of being released from confinement and re-joining one's community following a period of incarceration (Addison et al., 2022; Palmer & Christian, 2019; Western, 2018).

*Recidivism* – Reoffending and reincarceration following re-entry from the penal system (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019).

*Reintegration* – The process of re-establishing meaningful social connections, in addition to the process of re-entering one's community after a period of incarceration (Palmer & Christian, 2019).

*Stigma* – An attribute, trait, or characteristic that discredits or devalues the individual's social identity (Goffman, 1963).

*Stigmatization* – The act of being labeled in a disapproving or oppressive point of view by others in society (Adams et al., 2019).

## Significance of the Study

This study has empirical and practical significance concerning research and practice of workplace experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals. Empirically, there is no study that examines the perceptions and lived experiences of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. Practically, this study may serve as a means to provide relevant insight into how perceptions of JEDI initiatives and implementation impact employees' experiences at work following re-entry and reintegration into their communities. The results of this study could contribute to what has already been researched on the topics of lived experiences and perceptions of JEDI for justice-involved individuals with a history of criminal behavior in the workplace.

Current JEDI research focuses on groups of individuals of varying genders, sexual orientations, religious affiliations, nationalities, among other protected groups as defined in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. While Title VII does not explicitly protect those with a criminal record, it does protect the individuals who are statistically more likely to become incarcerated over their lifetime. Individuals who are re-entering and reintegrating into their communities may seek to positively contribute to their communities through

acquiring meaningful work. Uncovering current perceptions and lived experiences can help employers, employees, and others better understand shared experiences and how they can foster a work environment that promotes JEDI practices.

**Empirical Significance**

Currently, no study specifically examines the experiences of organizational justice and EDI implementation and practices in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. This study will fill the gap and explicate the current lived experiences in the workplace of individuals with an additional intersecting social identity: experience in the justice system. The gap in the literature is a specific study on the experiences of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior.

**Practical Significance**

While this study has empirical significance, it also has the potential to help others better understand how JEDI initiatives are being experienced in the workplace for individuals of varying social identities, including but not limited to having a history of criminal behavior coupled with other historically oppressed social groups such as racial and gender differences. While research has shown that equity, diversity, and inclusion help improve workplace environments, perceptions of organizational justice are necessary to measure the success of equitable initiatives (Adejumo, 2021; Bernstein et al., 2020; Vaamonde et al., 2018). Moreover, social inclusion and diversifying one's workplace can positively contribute to an individual's sense of belonging and increase organizational commitment. Maintaining employment has been shown to aid in successful reintegration through reduced means of recidivating (Ramakers et al., 2017).

**Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion of the challenges and barriers individuals with a history of criminal behavior face in the American workplace, historical contributions to JEDI practices in society and the workplace, and the role stable employment has on desistance. The research questions were listed and discussed to explain the focus of this study. The problem and purpose of the study were identified, and the significance of the study was outlined. The current gap in the research points to the lack of understanding of the phenomenon of justice-involved individuals' perceptions of JEDI in the workplace. The assumptions and limitations were identified to note the assumed qualities and potential weaknesses regarding this study. The next chapter provides a review of the current and relevant literature is provided.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Overview**

This literature review outlines the empirical literature published about the history of the United States justice system, societal and economic impacts, and the impact these experiences have on perceived justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in the workplace, with most of the research published over a period of X years (e.g., 20XX-20XX). Current knowledge with the expansion of new knowledge, in conjunction with a supportive paradigm for knowledge sharing, is instrumental in facilitating the progress of society. Attempts to better understand the phenomenon of experience in the justice system and perceptions of JEDI at work have resulted in various ontological perspectives. The following section will explore many of the dominant viewpoints. The following interrelated concepts discussed in the theoretical framework aim to provide a better understanding of the motivation behind this research. While significant efforts have been made to foster JEDI in the workplace, justice-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals face significant barriers upon re-entering the workplace and their communities.

The review begins by discussing the theoretical constructs to include a wide range of concepts, from intersectionality to social identity formation theories. These theories better inform the understanding of JEDI initiatives in terms of their potential impact on systemic discrimination against justice-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, this literature review will explore how these theories can help guide policy decisions regarding creating a just, equitable, and inclusive work environment for all employees.

**Description of Search Strategy**

Throughout the research phase of the study, the Jerry Falwell Library was used to search for timely and relevant peer-reviewed articles related to the topics of JEDI, justice-involved individuals, the impact of employment due to their history of criminal behavior, and experiences of JEDI in the work environment. From the Jerry Falwell Library, commonly used databases used to extract relevant articles included EBSCO Host, APA PsychNet, Wiley, ProQuest, and Sage Journals. The primary criteria used for the searches were scholarly, peer-reviewed articles published within the past five years.

Common search terms were derived from key concepts and keywords from the research question and sub-questions. Keywords and phrases to begin the literature review search included: organizational justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, inclusivity, fairness, prison, incarceration, mass incarceration, justice system, prison system, perception of DEI, social identity, intersectionality, intergroup conflict, DEI training, JEDI, and social justice. Subsequent searches used various derivatives of the above words and phrases. When reviewing scripture to justify the need for this study, keywords were selected, including "equity," "fairness," "prison," and "transformation," and were searched on the online Bible Gateway site using the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (*NRSVUE*, 2021) to find relevant scripture. Each selected passage was then compared against the online version of the New English Translation of the Septuagint derived from the Greek understanding of the Hebrew Old Testament passages.

This literature review begins with a description of the guiding theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including their origins and development over the years, main concepts, interrelated theories, and grounds for using these frameworks. The remainder of

this literature review will address the themes related to justice-involved individuals re-entering society, JEDI, the social identity of justice-involved individuals, and the role the in-group out-group phenomenon plays on perceptions of JEDI in the workplace. While this section does not offer an exhaustive account of the postulations and theories surrounding the phenomena of perceived JEDI in the workplace for justice-involved individuals, it does provide a better understanding of the complexities and the myriad of ideas currently reflected in the literature.

## Theoretical Framework Research

### Social Identity Theory

In Chapter One, the social identity theory (SIT) was stated to be used as the theoretical framework of this study. This theory helps to explain social identity formation, intergroup interactions, and dynamics, such as in-group favoritism, out-group homogeneity bias, stigmatization, and discrimination. When an individual has different social identities, this leads to the concept of intersectionality.

### *Intersectionality*

While incarcerated, individuals are often given an identification number that is associated with their identity while in the justice system. Many women have expressed their perceptions of feeling dehumanized and generalized to every other member of the prison rather than being treated like individuals (Boppre & Reed, 2021). This can influence their intersectional identities and can influence recidivism upon re-entering society (Boppre & Reed, 2021). In the context of this research, formerly incarcerated individuals are more likely to experience frequent prejudices, marginalization, and stigmatization in their social environments, such as the workplace (Adams et al., 2019).

Intersectionality is a concept that acknowledges how an individual's various social identities, including gender, race, and age can influence their lived experiences. This also includes the unique challenges that formerly incarcerated individuals must learn to navigate when seeking employment and other social opportunities. Individuals with experience in the justice system may have intersecting identities that conflict with their day-to-day lives after re-entering society because of their treatment during incarceration (Boppre & Reed, 2021). A disproportionate number of Black and Brown Americans are arraigned, incarcerated, and re-entering their communities with uncertainty and worry about acquiring stable work and the ability to adjust to their new environment, thus creating an additional intersectional layer to their social identity (Adams et al., 2019; Addison et al., 2022; Jeffers, 2019).

The interconnected nature of social categorization as they apply to a social class or group can lead to overlapping and interdependent systems of prejudice or disadvantage to those within out-groups (Goodman, 2014; Islam, 2014). Adams et al. (2019) noted that individuals on parole and re-entering their communities are frequently labeled as criminals by members of society, despite completing their sentencing requirements and being deemed competent to return to their communities. Furthermore, the intersection between experience in the justice system or incarceration and the individual's mental health can play a role in the success of their re-entry (Adams et al., 2019; Addison et al., 2022). Therefore, these individuals are more likely to experience conflicting intergroup interactions because of the marginalization, stigmatization, and conflicting social identities surrounding them during the reintegration process (Islam, 2014; Jeffers, 2019).

**_Goodman's Tapestry Model_**

A tapestry is a woven canvas that uses various colored threads to create a work of art. In Goodman's TM, an individual will have a multitude of identities, each represented by a single color. For example, a 34-year-old formerly incarcerated Black man will have different colors representing his various social identities. His age may be represented by a red thread, his race by yellow, and history of criminal behavior represented by blue. Each aspect of his identity will have a distinct color that does not blend with others but instead retains its form and becomes interwoven with the other threads to create intersectional forms (Goodman, 2014). Identities can also be salient or central. Salient identities are more prominent or perceived in various contexts and situations, whereas central identities are maintained regardless of the context (Goodman, 2014; Tropp et al., 2022). In certain situations, such as seeking stable employment, his race and history may be more prominent, thus creating a green color to represent the overlap and intertwining of his yellow and blue identity threads. This intersection, coupled with the situational proponent, can contribute to the experience of privilege and oppression, and may result in the individual feeling more conscious of this particular social identity, even if they do not feel unfairly treated (Goodman, 2014).

The intersection of identity may be most salient in the moment as Black Americans generally face more discrimination and marginalization than White Americans; likewise, individuals with experience in the justice system are more likely to face discrimination and stigmatization than those without this experience (Adams et al., 2019; Adejumo, 2021; Goodman, 2014). However, particular social identities may not be as salient in other social locations, contexts, or situations, such as spending time with family. In this case, the green interwovenness of the threads may not be the prominent

color representing a sense of oppression. Still, other colors and interwoven combinations may be more distinct as those within their in-group surround the individual.

Moreover, discrepancies can be present in one's various intersecting social identities compared to how others identify and perceive the individual (Goodman, 2014). Mass incarceration experiences can intersect with the individual's race, social hierarchy, and gender to create unique social identities (A. Cox, 2020). Individuals re-entering their communities are more likely to be underprivileged, thus increasing their likelihood of stigmatization and oppression from those within their communities and workplace due to their history in the justice system (Adams et al., 2019; Addison et al., 2022; R. Cox, 2020). Social identities are fluid and ever-changing, thus continuing the process of altering and adding different threads representing the individual's evolving identities (Goodman, 2014). The justice system has been used to maintain the economic and social hierarchy within the United States thus contributing to the slippery slope of increased oppression and underprivilege resulting from experience in the justice system (R. Cox, 2020). Goodman's TM will be used as the conceptual framework in conjunction with SIT to better understand how various social identities and histories influence the lived experiences of individuals in the workplace and their perceptions of JEDI from their employers and coworkers.

## Review of the Literature

### Social Dynamic

There is a multitude of social dynamics that contribute to the over-policing, incarceration, and mass incarceration of certain social groups. For example, major social problems that negatively influence the good of society include income inequality,

housing insecurity, low social class, discrimination, racial disparities, and mass incarceration (Adams et al., 2019; R. Cox, 2020). Poverty rates among White Americans are statistically lower than non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic Americans, who experience poverty two to three times more often than White Americans (R. Cox, 2020). While any race experiencing impoverishment is more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime, Black individuals are more likely to experience poverty and low economic status within the United States (R. Cox, 2020). Housing instability and homelessness also contribute to an individual's likelihood for engaging in criminal behavior, recidivating following release, and having increased contact with law enforcement (Baier, 2020). A multitude of barriers also prevents individuals from attaining meaningful jobs, thus providing an avenue to sustainability (Adams et al., 2019; Panicker et al., 2018).

### Social Change

Improving the social statuses of individuals in oppressed out-groups can help to improve their perceptions of intergroup contact, but this sort of feat does not occur instantaneously, but instead through the social effort to redefine the hierarchical and relational framework of society (Adams et al., 2019; Merrilees et al., 2023; R. Cox, 2020). Additionally, changes to remove barriers to the re-entry and reintegration processes can promote positive social implications, including supporting decarceration over incarceration as a first effort, revising or reforming the process of obtaining or re-obtaining occupational licenses and certifications, and low- to neutral-cost policy alterations to decrease the number of barriers justice-involved individuals face with acquiring employment (Baier, 2020). Increased appropriate intergroup contact has also

been shown to decrease prejudices held toward members of oppressed or underprivileged groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).

Social identities are multifaceted and do not operate in a vacuum. Therefore, the vastness of differing privileged and oppressed layers of an individual's social identity is present simultaneously and constantly intersecting (Goodman, 2014). Moreover, research into social identities can help explain the organization of multiple held identities and how certain identities remain salient throughout different situations and experiences (Goodman, 2014; Islam, 2014). Individuals can be part of many social groups based on various criteria, including race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, and occupation (Goodman, 2014; Islam, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The interconnected nature of social categorization as they apply to a social class or group can lead to overlapping and interdependent systems of prejudice or disadvantage to those within in- or out-groups (Goodman, 2014). This leads to the concept of the intersectionality framework that acknowledges that an individual can have their own unique experiences of oppression and discrimination based on certain groupings that could marginalize them, such as their gender, race, and experiences (Collins et al., 2021; Goodman, 2014).

### *Mass Incarceration and Prison Cycling*

From the mid-1920s to the mid-1970s, the average incarceration rate among state or federal correctional facilities averaged around 140 persons per 100,000 of the population; in contrast, the average incarceration rate in 2010 was over 400 persons per 100,000 (R. Cox, 2020). Each day, more than 450,000 individuals are held in jail and not officially convicted of their proposed crimes, yet they remain confined until they can post bail or pay their court fines (Sawyer, 2018). These scenarios lead the individual to be

essentially trapped until their court date, or they must place themselves into potential debt by working with a bail bonds company to secure their ability for re-entry (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018, 2021b; Rabuy & Kopf, 2016).

Mass incarceration in the United States has been bolstered and upheld by historical and systemic racism, economic inequalities, and social exclusionary and discriminatory practices among citizens toward stigmatized and marginalized individuals (Adams et al., 2019; A. Cox, 2020). From 1926 to 1993, Black Americans experienced a disproportionate rate of incarceration far above their representation within the United States (R. Cox, 2020). Racial biases, disproportionate poverty rate, and low socioeconomic status among socially oppressed groups within communities contribute to the disproportionate incarceration rate among members of oppressed groups (R. Cox, 2020; Jeffers, 2019). While mass incarceration may not have been intentional, its establishment can be stemmed from the systemic racism engrained in American history (A. Cox, 2020; R. Cox, 2020). Moreover, the incarceration rate for Black Americans increased from 100,000 to 900,000 since 1954 (Jeffers, 2019). Race-based social exclusionary practices among members of the American society have contributed to the overincarceration of Black Americans (R. Cox, 2020). Statistics show that a disproportionate amount of Black American males are more likely to become incarcerated or receive a felony charge when compared to White American males. One-half of all Black American males will likely be arrested by young adulthood, in comparison to the 38% of White American males (Kirk, 2021; Shannon et al., 2017).

***Laws and Policies***

Under the Laws and Policies section, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act was created to address discrimination against oppressed and minority social groups in the workplace (Baier, 2020). One year later, in 1965, President Johnson issued an order to prohibit employee discrimination in the workplace based on race, color, national origin, and religion, thus taking affirmative action (AA) toward oppressed and marginalized social groups (AAAED, 2023). In 1979, a race-centered AA effort was created to help restore balance to racial disparities in the workplace (AAAED, 2023). In 1990, over half of the individuals employed in the United States were women, immigrants, and those of minority social statuses (Thomas, 1990). Regardless of the workplace social dynamic, systemic racism still lingers within society beyond the 1964 Civil Rights movement that sought to prohibit discrimination based on their color, race, religion, sex, or national origin (Baum, 2021).

Some efforts have been taken to provide a more successful reintegration into society, including passing legislation such as The Second Chance Act and the Formerly Incarcerated Re-enter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person (FIRST STEP) Act to reduce stigmatization and discrimination when applying for jobs (Mancini et al., 2021). Furthermore, many states welcomed the "ban the box" law, removing questions from job applications inquiring whether the individual has had a criminal past (Mancini et al., 2021; Vuolo et al., 2017). Providing organizations incentives to hire individuals with a history of criminal behavior through the justice system can help to provide sustainable jobs and promote successful reintegration. Incentives include providing advanced tax credits and liability policies to employers who hire justice-involved individuals (Baier, 2020). Work Opportunity Tax Credits provide financial

benefits of up to $2,400 annually per hired individual to employers who hire those with a felony record within one year of their re-entry process (Baier, 2020).

Reducing discrimination in the labor market can be achieved by adopting racial impact statements to assess the inequalities, complexities, and consequences of passing specific legislation and policies (Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Policy alterations can also include the establishment of certificates of employment for individuals who have completed statutory requirements beyond their sentencing completion, such as completing a rehabilitation or job skills program (Baier, 2020). As of 2019, at least 15 states have adopted the use of certificates of employment to incentivize hiring justice-involved individuals (Baier, 2020). Ultimately, a culture change in all citizens of America must occur to prevent the unfair and often harmful treatment of people of color in and out of the workplace (Baum, 2021). Additionally, providing a path to reform or restore the voting rights of justice-involved individuals can help them to voice their opinions on what matters to them and aid in successful reintegration (R. Cox, 2020). While legislation is important to promote the opportunities for individuals to receive jobs after incarceration, positive intergroup contact, and social connections play a significant role in successful re-entry and reintegration.

**Successful Re-entry**

The act of punishing or incarcerating an individual protects the public and prevents future crimes from them; subsequently, justice-involved individuals reintegrating into society will have an even more challenging time in adjusting because of limited access to societal changes during their incarceration period (Miklósi, 2020; Scott, 2016). Successful re-entry following incarceration is essential for the individual's

progress and positive contributions to society, thus reducing the likelihood of recidivating (Case & Fasenfest, 2004; Schneider & Weber, 2020). Some individuals may find it difficult adjusting to their communities and embracing citizenship following their experience in the justice system, such as strict isolation during their confinement (Rudes & Magnuson, 2019).

Additionally, many individuals are faced with difficulty acquiring and affording necessities including housing, employment access, health care services, education, and transportation (Adams et al., 2019; Jeffers, 2019). While the individual may have experienced and became accustomed to deprivation in the penal environment, failure to acquire stable income to provide housing and other necessities can negatively contribute to the individual's ability to abstain from recidivating to provide for their needs (Adams et al., 2019; Rudes & Magnuson, 2019). Providing access to necessities, resources, and opportunities to justice-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals can positively contribute toward their successful re-entry and reintegration into society (Adams et al., 2019). The mark of a criminal record further isolates individuals already identified as members of oppressed groups (R. Cox, 2020). These initiatives recognize that justice-involved individuals deserve just as much opportunity to succeed in the workplace as those without a criminal record.

Upon re-entry, many individuals may struggle to find meaningful employment due to the lack of education, skills, and abilities necessary to obtain stable employment (Adams et al., 2019; Case & Fasenfest, 2004; Kirk, 2021; Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Additionally, individuals with other risk factors, such as substance use disorder, may have a more challenging time perceiving the need to attain a stable job and how it

correlates with recidivism (Lilja, 2019). As a result, these individuals face stigmatization, marginalization, and discrimination in the workplace and society which can negatively impact the success of attaining a job and successfully reintegrating into their communities (Anazodo et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015). On the contrary, individuals that are more resilient during adversities such as stigmatization are more likely to experience pro-social consequences, including a sense of achievement, belonging, and connections with their family and friends, thus decreasing their likelihood of recidivating (Palmer & Christian, 2019).

### *Desistance and Recidivism*

In 2016, more than 6.6 million citizens of the United States were involved in the justice system through various forms of supervision, including probation, parole, jail, and prison (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). Around 700,000 individuals reintegrate annually into their communities and seek stable employment (Adams et al., 2019; Young & Ryan, 2019). Every year of incarceration reduces an individual's chance of successfully reintegrating into the workplace by five percent, with each subsequent incarceration reducing the likelihood of successful integration into the workforce by 15% (Peled-Laskov et al., 2019). Individuals actively engaging in criminal behaviors often communicate their desire to abstain from reoffending (Bersani & Doherty, 2018). Many individuals re-entering society are unsuccessful as they have not been adequately prepared to support themselves and their families upon release (Adams et al., 2019). Around half of all incarcerated individuals who have completed their sentences will recidivate and become detained within a year of re-entering society (Adams et al., 2019).

Numerous factors can influence the process of desisting or recidivating; therefore, it is important to take a variety of aspects into consideration, including whether social identity theories, social-structural, cultural, and sociohistorical factors play a role in successful reintegration (Bersani & Doherty, 2018). It is important to note that the current understanding of the justice system's definition of successful desisting as "termination" of criminal behavior is not grounded in reality; on the contrary, individuals who abstain from criminal behavior do not normally occur in a complete cessation, and instead, their behavior becomes reframed as fewer or less severe instances of criminal activity (Bersani & Doherty, 2018). Sometimes, an individual will re-enter the prison system for reasons other than recidivating, such as failing to check in with their parole officer or making overdue payments for their outstanding fines (Adams et al., 2019; Esthappan et al., 2020; Jeffers, 2019). This can negatively impact the stability of the individual's job, home, and relationships, despite not engaging in new criminal behavior. Additionally, economic disparities for individuals with experience in the justice system can result in them needing multiple jobs to afford their basic needs (Adams et al., 2019).

**Challenges and Barriers**

Re-entry into society following a period of incarceration can be a challenging experience for many individuals. Those re-entering and reintegrating into their communities may experience feelings of hopelessness and fear as they work to rebuild meaningful connections with their families, peers, and communities (Addison et al., 2022; Palmer & Christian, 2019). Numerous barriers include educational and knowledge deficits that can hinder one's ability to acquire gainful employment, perceptions of and experiences with discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization that can negatively

influence social connections and employment opportunities (Adams et al., 2019; Jeffers, 2019).

Many factors, such as attaining safe and affordable housing, gainful employment, and social support, may take precedence over one's mental health, thus negatively impacting the success of their re-entry and reintegration into their communities (Adams et al., 2019; Addison et al., 2022). Other factors that can negatively influence the mental health of individuals with experience in the justice system include unemployment, negative police encounters, and discrimination (Addison et al., 2022). Additionally, racial identity and the intersection of other social identities can be a social structural catalyst for physical and mental health care inequalities (Abrams, 2020; Bowleg, 2020 as cited in Addison et al., 2022). The collateral consequences of a conviction are the disadvantages or penalties imposed upon aspects of an individual's life following their conviction or re-entry after incarceration (Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Examples of collateral consequences include housing insecurity or restrictions, revoked voting rights, employment barriers, business and professional licensing restrictions, and educational limitations, all of which can negatively impact the individual's ability to attain gainful employment and hinder the perceptions of social equity and inclusion (114th Cong., 2015).

### Education and Knowledge Deficits

Limited education and decreased cognitive abilities can contribute to one's necessary level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required to be successful upon re-entering their community. There are several factors associated with an individual's risk for incarceration, including their education achievement and abilities to read and

comprehend literature as early as elementary school (Jeffers, 2019; Kohlenberg, 2019). A 2012 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) knowledge, skills, and abilities distributed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD) found that the average American adult reads at a seventh- to eighth-grade level, with half unable to read a book written at a middle school reading level. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2021b) found that 62% of adults in the prison system are high school dropouts, with their average reading comprehension level less than a ninth-grade comprehension level (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). According to the National Juvenile Defender Center (2016), the written language of probationary orders frequently contains complex vocabulary and grammar that is above the justice-involved individual's reading comprehension. Providing access to quality education and job-skills training for individuals with a history in the justice system can help to decrease income inequality and reduce the likelihood of the individual recidivating (R. Cox, 2020).

### *Person-centered Language*

Combating discrimination in the workplace should be a priority to help retain employees and foster an environment that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and organizational justice. Crime-first terms such as "offender" and "criminal" present the individual as deviant, regardless of their current social status, such as an individual who is re-entering their community (Denver et al., 2017). Research has shown a correlation between language and cognition and the correlation with the individual's perception of what they are hearing (A. Cox, 2020). Furthermore, using crime-first language plays a role in negatively shaping the members of society's perception of individuals convicted of crimes or who have a history of criminal behavior, thus leading to increased

stigmatization (Denver et al., 2017). Using crime-first language can falsely allude that the individual who has been previously convicted of crimes or served time in prison are to remain outcasted or distinct from other members of their community despite their re-entry (Denver et al., 2017).

Using person-centered language can help to not only bring awareness to oppressed groups, but also help reduce the stigmatization of underprivileged and oppressed employees (A. Cox, 2020; Denver et al., 2017). Examples of shifting common terminology to a person-centered alternative, include swapping "prison" to "correctional facility" and "prisoner" to "formerly incarcerated person," as these shifts bring awareness to the individual as a person, not a dehumanized subject, therefore supporting connection with their peers (A. Cox, 2020; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Vuolo et al., 2017). These person-centered terms can have a positive influence on how the individual perceives themselves within their communities when they are met with less stigmatizing emphasis (Denver et al., 2017).

### *Discrimination, Marginalization, and Stigmatization*

Although strides have been taken to allow justice-involved individuals to attain gainful employment (through offering training programs, rehabilitation programs, and passing legislation), these individuals may still be met with discrimination (Rosen & Cruz, 2018). Because many justice-involved individuals identify as part of racially oppressed groups, the first step to addressing and diminishing the systemic racism in our community is recognizing that racial discrimination still occurs in our workplace and society today (Baum, 2021). Today, people of color contribute to around 37% of the United States population yet account for 67% of the prison population (Jeffers, 2019).

Black Americans are six times more likely to become incarcerated and Hispanic Americans are five times more likely to become incarcerated than white and non-Hispanic Americans, respectively (Jeffers, 2019).

Research has found that perceptions of discrimination predict distress and contribute to poor mental health, which is pervasive among individuals re-entering their community following incarceration (English et al., 2020 as cited in Addison et al., 2022). Furthermore, many individuals may minimize or hide their experiences with discrimination, fear, and distress to protect their social identities because poor mental health can be perceived as weakness or diminished masculinity (Addison et al., 2022).

The process of social categorization within the social identity theory is a key stage in which greater differences between in- and out-groups are discovered, thus contributing to the emergence of intergroup animosity and can lead to the formation of prejudices toward out-groups and their members (Verkuyten et al., 2020). Furthermore, Allport's intergroup contact theory posits that prejudices arise due to faulty generalization; therefore, successful intergroup contact allows members of different social statuses and groups to voice differing opinions and contribute to the group, leading to newfound understanding and appreciation of what other groups deem reasonable and acceptable (Allport, 1954; Tropp et al., 2022; Verkuyten et al., 2020). Focusing solely on changing the justice-involved individual will not sufficiently address the economic and societal barriers contributing to prejudice, oppression, and social exclusion (R. Cox, 2020; Tropp et al., 2022). Addressing implicit and explicit biases can help to diminish the root causes helping to sustain mass incarceration within the United States (R. Cox, 2020).

Individuals may experience the effects of racial profiling when encountering police and law enforcement. There are few instances in which racial profiling can lead to effective crime reduction and efficient police resources without creating a ratchet effect (R. Cox, 2020). The disparate treatment of individuals of differing races and ethnicities contributes to public distrust of the justice system and its officials and increased instances of the ratchet effect (Jeffers, 2019). Harcourt (2004) describes the ratchet effect as a case in which racial profiling leads to the proportion of supervised population (e.g., Hispanic Americans) being larger than the actual proportion of the proposed crimes they are committing. In America, the systemic racism and sustained sentencing policies have contributed to a disproportionate number of Black Americans being incarcerated (Adams et al., 2019; R. Cox, 2020).

**Employment Following Re-entry**

Individuals with a history of criminal behavior are often noted as valuable and productive members of the workforce yet continuously face stigmatization and being undervalued by their employers during their adjustment to societal and workplace culture, norms, and expectations (Baier, 2020; Rudes & Magnuson, 2019). Upon completing their sentencing requirements, justice-involved individuals often face collateral consequences or a lifetime impediment of punishment beyond their sentencing, such as increased stigmatization, difficulty acquiring gainful employment, and finding safe and sustainable housing upon re-entry to their communities (Adams et al., 2019; Baier, 2020). These collateral consequences can lead to the individual viewing themselves as less than a full citizen or member of society and negatively impact their social identities (Fortune & Yuen, 2015).

Despite the discrimination, marginalization, social exclusionary practices, and staggering barriers stacked against individuals with experience in the justice system or incarceration, businesses and communities can take actionable measures to support equity, inclusivity, and diversity perceptions. While employers are required to abide by the policies and standards set by the EEOC and AA, justice-involved individuals may be turned away from potential employers, in ways such as disclosing their criminal history during the application or interviewing processes. Employers seeking to increase diversity in their hiring practices may hire individuals with a criminal record or experience in the justice system, thus reducing the risk of violating Title VII and engaging in potentially negligent hiring accusations (Baier, 2020; Otaye-Ebede, 2018).

The type of job a formerly incarcerated individual acquires correlates with the likelihood of recidivating (Ramakers et al., 2017; Young & Ryan, 2019). Individuals who return to their former employer following re-entry or decide to maintain one stable position are less likely to recidivate than those who do not maintain steady employment (Ramakers et al., 2017). It is not always possible for individuals to return to their work position following incarceration, sometimes due to severed relationships with the organization or staff members, other times due to the loss of professional licensure (Baier, 2020).

A common observation noted in related research is the tendency for organizations and sectors to utilize incarcerated individuals as free or cheap labor, yet not hire those very individuals upon their re-entry into society (Adams et al., 2019; Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Baier, 2020). Adams et al. (2019) furthered this by detailing the prison-industrial complex, or the overlapping interest of businesses with the U.S. justice

system that is contributing to the mass incarceration and prison cycling within America. Over 50 percent of federally incarcerated individuals engage in some form of prison work, thus contributing to the $2 billion annual profit generated through the low- to no-paid prison labor (Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

Finding stable work after incarceration can be a difficult feat due to loss of professional licensing, gaps in work history, and work skills deficiencies. Circling back to the prison industrial complex, the question is raised of whether businesses benefitting from prison labor should have the option to bar the very individuals (who gained the relevant experience) from applying to the same positions within the organizations during their re-entry (Ajunwa & Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Prison cycling correlates with increased dysfunction in various social relationships, including maintaining cohesive connections with family, coworkers, and members of the community, which contribute to decreased social equity and inclusion (Adams et al., 2019; Schneider & Weber, 2020).

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace*

Many individuals re-entering and reintegrating into their communities are more likely to face stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization (Adams et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Schneider & Weber, 2020). Additionally, they may experience social exclusion and decreased support, thus contributing to feelings of loneliness, fear and isolation, and a more challenging time successfully reintegrating (Addison et al., 2022; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Schneider & Weber, 2020). Furthermore, discrimination can negatively influence an individual's sense of self in relation to intergroup contact (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When attempting to decrease discrimination and prejudices toward out-group members in the workplace, an intersectional approach that supports the multidimensional aspects of individual and group identities have been shown to be successful strategies to combat out-group oppression, discrimination, and promote tolerance of out-group members (Ehrke et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2020). Tolerance is not synonymous with ignorance, apathy, or indifference toward individuals of differing beliefs and worldviews, but instead the process of intentionally restraining from hindering, preventing, or interfering with the actions of outgroups (Verkuyten et al., 2020). Allport's (1954) contact theory could be applied in work settings to increase social interactions with those considered part of the out-group (e.g., justice-involved, and formerly incarcerated individuals) and could help shape the employers' perceptions of these members of society (Anazodo et al., 2019). Positive intergroup contact and utilization of tolerance-based approaches can be utilized to decrease prejudices toward individuals of oppressed out-groups, yet it is important to note that tolerance of others should not replace the need for mutual recognition and appreciation through social inclusionary practices (Verkuyten et al., 2020).

Marginalization and social exclusion can hinder the individual's ability to access opportunities and resources, participate in social activities, and experience alienation from decision-making and isolation from their community (Adams et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015). Employers who provide equitable resources and opportunities can positively contribute to social justice and ethical business conduct that can incentivize personal development of all employees (Bernstein et al., 2020). Moreover, positive

intergroup contact could potentially foster a better sense of egalitarianism between in-and out-groups (Verkuyten et al., 2020).

### *Social Inclusion*

Incarceration in the United States is correlated with increased social exclusion, racial-economic inequality, loss of citizenship, and employment barriers (Adams et al., 2019; R. Cox, 2020). Furthermore, social exclusion and racial inequality are correlated with racism as a tool to dehumanize and oppress others for the gain of more privileged groups. Increased social exclusion has caused more significant disparities in incarcerated populations and may have bolstered the existence of policies and laws related to sentencing requirements (R. Cox, 2020).

In the organizational environment, there is a synergistic relationship between promoting diversity and inclusive practices among employees (Panicker et al., 2018). Positive intergroup contact can help individuals of marginalized and oppressed out-groups to experience increased social inclusion in their workplace, thus supporting the movement for diversity within their organization (Allport, 1954; Tropp et al., 2022). However, diversity efforts without inclusionary practices or equitable access to opportunities and resources do not provide individuals with an adequate means to experience belonging and cohesion in their workplace (Mousa 2021; Murphy, 2018).

When diverse intergroup contact occurs, it is not merely enough to engage in superficial interactions, but instead meaningful and substantial interactions must be promoted to inhibit social exclusionary practices among members within the presence of diversity, thus hindering effective change (Bernstein et al., 2020). These meaningful and essential interactions can move organizations and their social environments from being

diversity-focused to more inclusive and equitable to all employees, thus supporting a sense of organizational and social justice (Adams et al., 2019; Bernstein et al., 2020). In addition, social inclusion can only occur once economic justice, social equality, and social structural changes are addressed and revised within communities and workplaces (R. Cox, 2020).

### *Employee Development*

Justice-involved individuals may have access to various educational and training opportunities while incarcerated, including GED, vocational training, and job search training; whereas following re-entry, post-employment training programs following gainful employment can include training programs provided by their employers or non-employer-related training (Flatt & Jacobs, 2018). Access to educational experiences, such as job- and life-skills programs for justice-involved individuals, should be one of the first steps to promoting successful reintegration for individuals to establish gainful employment, thus reducing the likelihood of recidivating (Case & Fasenfest, 2004; Peled-Laskov et al., 2019).

Workplaces seeking to be more inclusive can utilize training opportunities for employees to better understand the stigma associated when using crime-first instead of person-centered language. Moreover, employers that raise awareness to the importance of identifying discrimination, whether racial, ethnic, or toward other oppressed groups, and how to combat this by using person-centered language can help reduce the negative connotations and biases surrounding certain groups of individuals (Denver et al., 2017; Palmer & Christian, 2019). Social equity and inclusion can be supported in the workplace through effective organizational leadership practices that promote shared employee

purpose and common intergroup identities that are salient above other identities (Bernstein et al., 2020).

Case and Fasenfest (2004) noted the importance of providing psychological support to help individuals navigate their experience with real and perceived stigmatization and self-esteem issues that can arise from having a history with the justice system. Moreover, justice-involved, and formerly incarcerated individuals who utilize employee training programs can decrease the likelihood of experiencing income reduction from stigmatization (Adams et al., 2019; Flatt & Jacobs, 2018).

Utilizing JEDI-focused training that emphasizes the importance of members of oppressed groups, such as individuals with prior history of criminal behavior, can help to improve perceptions of fairness and inclusion in the workplace (Adams et al., 2019; Adejumo, 2021; Baum, 2021; Vogel & Erickson, 2021). To help create practical and effective efforts for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, employers can utilize team-building activities to encourage employees to engage in behaviors that discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and increase cohesion among employees of in- and out-groups (Baum, 2021).

Programs such as values affirmation interventions have been shown to correlate with increased prosocial behaviors, social inclusion, and decreased discrimination and attitudes toward oftentimes marginalized out-groups (Schneider & Weber, 2020). Additionally, diversity management training and practices were created in North America and designed to replace the stereotypical nature of EEOC and AA practices in the workplace (Otaye-Ebede, 2018). Diversity training and diversity management have been shown to increase awareness of in-group privilege and improve attitudes toward

disadvantaged out-groups, which can lead to increased social cohesion and likelihood for inclusion in workplace privileges, such as decision-making practices (Adams et al., 2019; Ehrke et al., 2020; Fortune & Yuen, 2015). Employers that utilize positive diversity management policies, strategies, and practices can also help provide adequate representation of minority groups, thus fostering a sense of fairness and perception of the organization valuing individual differences (Otaye-Ebede, 2018).

### *Perceptions of Justice*

Organizational justice is the perception of fairness and equitable decision-making, interactions, opportunities, and resources in social settings, such as the workplace (Conte & Landy, 2019). Perceptions of justice can differ among employees of different status within the company. For example, managers and other high-level employees may perceive their work environment as fair, equitable, and inclusive, whereas their employees may have contradictory perceptions of organizational justice and inclusivity (Le et al., 2021). This can lead to the employees perceiving their thoughts and opinions as less valuable, thus hindering a sense of community (Le et al., 2021; Schneider & Weber, 2020). Perceptions of discrimination also contribute to intergroup conflict and impede perceptions of social justice (Schneider & Weber, 2020). For individuals with experience in the justice system or incarceration, adjusting to their work environment may be difficult as they are navigating the different social dynamics in relation to their own intersectional social identities (Goodman, 2014; Panicker et al., 2018). Organizations that wish to provide a more inclusive and equitable environment may utilize programs such as diversity management to improve diversity, social inclusion, and overall business performance (Otaye-Ebede, 2018).

Successful re-entry and social justice have a causal relationship, meaning the success of the individual re-entering and reintegrating into their communities support social justice, and social justice supports the success of the individual's re-entry (Schneider & Weber, 2020). To help foster a fairer environment, employers should encourage all employees to be involved in the decision-making processes and voicing their opinions about workplace concerns can help to improve perceptions of inclusiveness and belonging (Le et al., 2021). Additionally, supporting cohesive relationships and creating change can be promoted through feedback to allow for better decision-making abilities in the workplace that are inclusive to the vast array of individuals within the organization, thus increasing perceptions of organizational justice (Adams et al., 2019; Flores & Cossyleon, 2017; Le et al., 2021). Taking actionable steps to decrease social exclusion and discrimination have been shown to improve economic performance and support equity, thus promoting social justice and individual development (Bernstein et al., 2020). Fostering a sense of community through social inclusion can also decrease the likelihood of justice-involved individuals engaging in new criminal behavior (Flores & Cossyleon, 2017).

**Social Identity and Organizational Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Criminal behavior is interconnected with perceptions of justice and inclusion (R. Cox, 2020). Experiences in the justice system can impact the individual's social identity by creating intersections that conflict with their social connections during the re-entry and reintegration processes. Research has shown correlations between resiliency and a sense of belonging (Palmer & Christian, 2019; Vogel & Erickson, 2021). A sense of belonging can be fostered through increased social inclusion, equality, and community, whereas

resiliency is improved through adapting and refining one's expectations following adversities (Adams et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Palmer & Christian; 2019). Shifts in power imbalances between social groups can occur through diversity management practices, thus shifting the organizations and communities' social norms, expectations, and perceptions around traditionally held social roles (McCandless et al., 2022). The self enhancement motive of the social identity theory can also be seen when individuals perceive their work environment as diverse, fair, and supportive, thus supporting a positive work identity and fostering organizational commitment (Otaye-Ebede, 2018).

One's social identity is an integral aspect of their self-concept and can also influence their perceptions and experiences, such as their workplace interactions and relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Acquiring gainful employment is crucial for reintegration and reinforcing positive social identities (Palmer & Christian, 2019). Individuals with experience in the justice system can also be encouraged to replace their potentially stigmatized identities with more socially positive and congruent identities to better experience social inclusion and belonging (Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Goodman, 2014). Because social identities are fluid and change in relation to one's life experiences, individuals are likely to undergo various identity transformations through their unique experiences. Strategic intervention and behavioral changes can help them to become more sustainable, successful members of their communities (Adams et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Goodman, 2014;). These experiences and changes can contribute to how these individuals perceive themselves and the world around them following incarceration.

**Biblical Foundations of the Study**

From a biblical standpoint, we are called to be like Jesus; rather than avoid the negativity of the world and pretend that it did not exist, Jesus gravitated toward those who were hurting, outcasted, and in prison. He told his followers that he was not here to call on the righteous, but to offer healing and forgiveness to those who engaged in sinful behaviors (*New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible* [*NRSVUE Bible*], 2021, Mark 2:17). Jesus calls for everyone to be treated as equals and to show no partiality toward others based on their social statuses (*NRSVUE Bible,* James 2:1-5). Whether we identify as part of more privileged social groups or not, we should strive to abstain from showing favoritism and instead offer help to those in need.

Additionally, we have been called to remember those who are in prison and to love and treat one another as Jesus considers the way we treat others as the way we treat him (*NRSVUE Bible*, 2021, Heb. 3:1-3, Matt. 7:12, Matt. 24:34-40). Each member of the workplace are individuals make up the entirety of the group in similarity to how we all belong to the one body of Christ (*NRSVUE Bible,* 2021, 1 Cor. 12:12, 27). None of us are too far from God's grace and forgiveness, therefore, we must promote the truth that we are all equal and worthy of a second chance (*NRSVUE Bible,* 2021, Eccl. 4:13-15, James 2:1-5).

### Summary

The social identities of justice-involved individuals or those previously incarcerated can influence how they perceive their work environment following re-entry. This dissertation uses the social identity theory as the theoretical framework and Goodman's Tapestry Model as the conceptual framework. Background on the frameworks was presented, along with an evaluation of the main concepts, including

discrimination, challenges and barriers to employment, and the role of social identity for individuals with prior convictions or incarceration in the workplace. In addition, a biblical framework was provided to assess the biblical foundation for this study. In this sense, the biblical basis of this study is supported upon the notion that all individuals should have access to rehabilitation and second chances at righting their wrongs within society. This can be better fostered through justice-involved individuals being granted access to resources and opportunities similar to those of their peers who have not been involved with the justice system. Additionally, social inclusion and more positive social identities may be experienced when businesses and organizations support organizational justice through the employees' perceptions of equity in the workplace.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

**Overview**

This study aimed to illuminate the descriptions of the participants' lived experiences and derive meaning related to the common themes identified. When assessing which methodological design to use for this study, I determined that a quantitative description would limit my ability to give rich descriptions and meaningful interpretations of the collected data, as there is a sharper line between exploration and description (Sandelowski, 2000) than what I could present from analyzing the data using a qualitative approach. As such, the qualitative descriptive methodology was selected to use for the purpose of this study. In addition, while the interpretation process of a qualitative descriptive approach is not as interpretive as the data analysis processes used in methodologies such as phenomenology or grounded theory, the data analysis process involved a more interpretive analysis of the data than what would be reached using quantitative descriptive analysis.

The qualitative descriptive methodology was selected to allow the illumination of rich descriptions and personalized meanings to the lived experiences related to JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. (More information regarding this selection process will be detailed in the Research Design portion of this chapter.) After identifying and selecting appropriate participants, a survey with open-ended questions provided the rich qualitative data necessary to better understand the how, what, and when perceived JEDI are experienced by individuals with a history of criminal behavior.

**Research Question and Sub-Questions**

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe their experience in the work environment?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** What perceived implications does an individual's history of criminal behavior have on their experience with inclusion in the workplace?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What perceived implications does an individual's history of criminal behavior have on their experience with equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 5 (RQ5):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports diversity in the workplace?

**Research Question 6 (RQ6):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports inclusion in the workplace?

**Research Design**

The overview of this study's design began with participant sampling using purposeful, maximum variation sampling and possible snowball sampling. Data collection was conducted through a survey with open-ended questions administered to participants, and data analysis was performed using reflective thematic analysis and re-presenting the data through common themes and a descriptive summary of the findings. While many different methodologies were considered, a detailed overview of this selection process will be provided in the following section.

The descriptive qualitative methodology more closely aligns with this study's needs than the ethnographic, grounded theory, or case study methodologies. While the

ethnographic approach can be used to identify shared patterns within cultural groups, it

was considered an inappropriate methodology for this study as the focus was not on

culture. The grounded theory methodology was also inappropriate as there was no plan to

propose a theory. Moreover, while the case study approach allows for a detailed analysis

of a particular case or numerous cases, this approach did not fully meet the requirements

of my study, as the focus was solely on the participants' lived experiences. A similar

methodology to the qualitative descriptive methodology was also considered, known as

the exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) methodology. Hunter et al. (2019)

discussed EDQ research as it combines two types of qualitative research and analysis:

Stebbins' (2001) explanation of exploratory methodology and Sandelowski's (2000,

2010) descriptions of qualitative descriptive methodology. Rather than inappropriately

categorize this study as a phenomenological or exploratory-descriptive qualitative

method, I have selected the qualitative descriptive research design to guide the research

questions, data collection, and data analysis process.

The qualitative descriptive approach is considered a distributed residual category,

meaning it is a methodology that already exists but may not be formally represented, thus

elucidating the importance of describing and supporting its use for this study

(Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Unlike transcendental phenomenological methodologies, the

qualitative descriptive methodology allows the researcher to have pre-knowledge of the

phenomenon being studied (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). In addition, qualitative

descriptive analysis involves a low inference interpretation as opposed to the analytic

process utilized in other qualitative designs such as grounded theory, case studies, or

phenomenological research (Sandelowski, 2000).

While descriptive research is typically depicted in research text as being a lower level of research design hierarchies or merely subjective, this methodology need not be viewed as preliminary or an entry point to other qualitative studies but can be used to illuminate the phenomenon using rich description and explanations (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Unlike quantitative descriptive research, preselected variables, and descriptive statistics are not used to create the study's framework. Instead, data collection consisted of administering a survey with open-ended questions to qualifying participants. Reflective thematic analysis (TA) helped generate common themes from codes identified in the collected qualitative survey data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

## Participants

The participants in this research study comprised of a purposive sample of individuals with a history of criminal behavior who are actively working part- or full-time (Creswell, 2013; Hunter et al., 2019). Purposeful sampling aims to select participants who will provide information-rich data necessary to adequately describe the intended phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). Enough participants were selected to participate in this study to achieve data saturation. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) mentioned snowball sampling to add instances of the same phenomenon until no new information is learned or saturation is reached. This type of sampling, along with maximum variation sampling, helped during the participant selection stage of this research study. The participants were recruited through online social media and professional networking sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn and through snowball sampling.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Given the specific method for collecting the qualitative data from study
participants, inclusion criteria for my study were as follows: being 18 years of age or
above, reside physically within the United States of America, have a history of criminal
behavior that resulted in a criminal record, be employed full- or part-time within the
United States, and have the ability to converse with the researcher in a verbal capacity
without any intervention, use of interpreter, or guardian present. Likewise, exclusion
criteria were as follows: younger than 18 years of age, living outside of the geographical
limits of the United States of America, have no criminal background or history of
criminal behavior, not currently working in a full- or part-time job, or be unable, whether
physical or intellectual, to converse verbally with the researcher.

**Sample Size and Saturation**

Creswell (2013) notes that the number of participants used in a qualitative study
varies by methodology; for example, narrative research may use one or two participants,
phenomenological studies recommend between three and 10 participants, and grounded
theory studies recommend using 20 to 30 participants. Due to the flexible nature of
qualitative descriptive research and analysis, it is the researcher's responsibility to justify
the rationale for the sample size and ensure it fulfills the purpose of the study (Hunter et
al., 2019). For qualitative descriptive research and analysis, purposeful sampling and
maximum variation sampling are used to ensure saturation (Creswell, 2013; Denzin &
Lincoln, 2018). Maximum variation sampling is the process of selecting participants that
meet the requirements of this study and will provide a broad range of phenomenological
and demographic variances across participants (Sandelowski, 2000). It is essential to gain
enough participants to achieve data saturation, or the point at which no new information

is being shared (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019); therefore, the number of participants will likely range between five and 15 participants in total.

## Study Procedures

Data for this investigation was collected directly from the study participants. These participants were recruited through various methods, as mentioned above. These participants acted on their desire to participate in this study. There was a hyperlink that participants had access to review the following: an information sheet, prescreening questionnaire, and a survey with open-ended questions. The researcher's contact information was provided on the information sheet to encourage participants to express any questions concerns prior to engaging in the study. Individuals who met each eligibility criteria were encouraged to continue to complete the survey and provide their workplace experiences. Participants were informed of their right to decline answering any question or terminate their involvement in this study at any point in time, and their identity would remain confidential in both the preliminary research and final publication of this study.

## Instrumentation and Measurement

### Information Sheet

An information sheet was provided to each participant at the start of the survey process. This information sheet included the title of the study, what to expect when participating in this research, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and anonymity, and whom to contact in case of any questions or concerns. (See Appendix A to view the full Information Sheet.)

### Prescreening Questionnaire

All participants were given an online prescreening questionnaire prior to completing the survey that will be used to assess their age and geographical location, whether they have experience with the justice system due to a criminal record, and if they have had at least one job after their criminal record. (See Appendix B to view the Prescreening Questionnaire).

**Survey Design**

While semi-structured interviews and focus groups are common data collection options for qualitative descriptive research, it is not always feasible for participants' schedules. Surveys are a commonly used tool in social research, providing a convenient and inexpensive way to collect qualitative data, making them an alternative to semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Braun et al., 2021; Siedlecki, 2020). While qualitative research is often underutilized and underdiscussed in methodological discussions, there are advantages to this sort of research method that provides the participants with the flexibility to share their experiences on their own time and with improved social comfort (Braun et al., 2021). Due to the nature of the topics discussed in this study, some participants feel uncomfortable discussing their experiences in a face-to-face setting where they could be overheard by their peers. Therefore, providing the option to complete an online survey on their own device in a private setting can help participants feel more secure and comfortable.

The online survey was designed by the researcher and administered to participants via a hyperlink. The survey questions were reviewed by the researcher's supervisor prior to administration. The survey began with the information sheet, providing the purpose of the study, what is to be expected, potential risks and benefits, privacy protection

considerations, and the voluntary nature of this survey (see Appendix A). Upon moving

forward with the survey, a prescreening questionnaire was presented to ensure

participants meet the minimum criteria for this study. Participants who selected that they

did not meet the study criteria were unallowed to proceed further and prompted to exit

out of the window browser. This includes the participant's age, geographical location,

experience with the justice system because of criminal behavior, and whether they have

worked a part- or full-time job since their justice system experience (see Appendix B).

If participants met the minimum criteria for this study, they were presented with

the survey. The survey contains 17 open-ended items, with each item focusing on the

topics of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in the workplace.

In addition, aspects of their personal identity were inquired in the open-ended items.

Items 1 through 9 covered the general overview of the participant's work industry,

identity, perceptions of JEDI, and their perception of how their workplace supports JEDI.

Items 10 through 17 followed a set of directions that prompted participants to read each

item and answer what is applicable. For items describing experiences they have not had,

the participant is instructed to leave the item blank or type "N/A" (see Appendix C).

**Data Collection**

Each participant completed the online prescreening questionnaire and survey.

Prior to completing the prescreening questionnaire and survey, participants were given

information and instructions to use during the survey process. After data saturation was

attained, keywords and common themes were identified to detail the commonalities and

differences in the participants' lived experiences. Ethical considerations during data

collection and analysis involved concealing the participants' identities. As noted in Duers

(2013, as cited in Hunter et al., 2019) article, further ethical considerations regarding confidentiality included not asking for any identifying information and using pseudonyms for any identifiable information provided by the participant. Qualtrics XM allows for anonymized responses to be used for the survey, which omits the participants' IP addresses, location data, and contact information. This feature was selected to further aid in the participants' confidentiality.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was drawn from naturalistic inquiry rather than assumptions derived from various theoretical or philosophical views (e.g., phenomenology or grounded theory). To know any phenomenon or experience-at-lived requires the researcher to have some preconceived knowledge about the phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). However, there are no facts outside of a particular context that gives those facts meanings; therefore, descriptions always depend on the perceptions, sensitivities, and inclinations of the person who has lived the experience. Sandelowski (2000, 2010) touched on the importance of identifying any hues, tones, and textures from other qualitative methodologies to serve as overtones in the research process yet ensuring not to provide any theoretical rendering of the phenomenon.

Any theoretical leaning toward phenomenology need not confuse this study's design with anything other than a qualitative descriptive approach; these phenomenological overtones were merely noted to provide context as to the inclinations toward certain assumptions that were noted throughout the methodology process. Therefore, it should be noted that overtones from hermeneutic phenomenological reflection may be presented in the data analytic process, such as revising preconceptions

about the intended phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, two different variations of

data analysis were initially considered to analyze the collected data from participants:

qualitative content analysis (QCA) and reflexive thematic analysis (TA).

Sandelowski (2010) describes QCA as an interactive and reflexive strategy that is

used to analyze collected data. The QCA strategy can be used to understand the

participants' known experiences and latent content. The overall goal of QCA is to

summarize the information gathered from the collected visual data (Sandelowski, 2000).

While quantitative description measures the means and frequencies of collected

data to analyze results, QCA offers a more interpretive analysis in that it will not only

identify common experiences (e.g., frequencies of events between participants), but also

identify patterns and regularities between participants' experiences-at-lived

(Sandelowski, 2000). However, unlike other qualitative methodologies, such as

phenomenology or grounded theory, interpretation within a qualitative descriptive study

is low-inference or data-near. Sandelowski (2010) noted that using the QCA strategy will

not be as interpretive (e.g., transformed into theories or other interpretations) but instead

present summaries of the collected data (e.g., concerns will remain concerns and

perceptions will remain perceptions). To clarify, the QCA allows for a summative

description to be shown from the data derived from participants rather than have the

researcher make inferences to what the participants may wanted to convey.

Another type of data analysis that was researched is reflexive thematic analysis

(TA) which allows for the formation of codes that will be used to create themes (Hunter

et al., 2019). In addition to codes and themes, the analysis process can include

categorizing commonalities, and identifying patterns and meanings (Ewens et al., 2014).

Reflexive TA allows the researcher to identify and describe participants' experiences concerning the intended phenomenon by analyzing main statements (Hunter et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, the reflexive TA methodology has been selected for the data analysis process in this study. Braun and Clarke's (2021) recommendations on properly conducting a reflexive TA of the transcribed textual data guided the interpretation process. More about this process will be covered in Chapter 4: Results.

**Reliability and Validity**

All surveys are subject to errors, such as measurement error, and biases, including research bias, nonresponse bias, recall bias, and self-report bias (Story, 2019). Therefore, reliability and validity are used in quantitative research and analysis to measure the consistency and accuracy of a measure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In qualitative research, qualitative rigor can be used to describe the validity of what is being measured (Hunter et al., 2019; Peoples, 2021). In this research, descriptive and interpretive validity was essential in collecting and analyzing the results. Descriptions must accurately convey the collected data in its proper sequences to the researcher and participants to uphold descriptive validity, whereas interpretive validity is determined by adequately expressing the participants' intended meaning attributed to the events expressed by participants (Sandelowski, 2000).

**Ethics**

In addition to ensuring reliability and validity within this study, five criteria will be considered and upheld throughout the methodological process to ensure reliability and validity: authenticity, credibility, criticality, integrity, and reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hunter et al., 2019). This is important as shared information further enhances the

current body of knowledge and provides a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being studied (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Authenticity refers to the notion of allowing participants to write their experiences freely and maintain ethicality within the realm of this study. The authenticity of this study will uphold the ethical standards to minimize the risk of any adverse effects, including but not limited to breaches of confidentiality, conflicts of interest, power differentials or imbalances, and the use of incentives (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Peoples, 2021).

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the collected data and data analysis process. Integrity and criticality refer to the level of critical appraisal applied to the research decisions, and both can be improved through the researcher reflecting upon any biases related to the research, member checking (having participants review their transcripts to ensure accuracy), and peer review (Hunter et al., 2019; Peoples, 2021). Finally, reflexivity considers the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and experiences through the keeping of a reflexive diary, similarly to how diaries are used in phenomenological research to identify and revise preconceptions, fore-conceptions, and other held biases regarding the research topic (Hunter et al., 2019; Peoples, 2021).

**Data Re-presentation**

A descriptive summary of the collected textual data provides information and organization to the collected data that best fits the data (Sandelowski, 2010). Depending on the collected data of this study, Sandelowski (2000) presented different options to present the data. For example, some researchers may present the analyzed data chronologically from most-to-least prevalent themes or from broad-to-narrow contexts (or experiences). The data re-presentation process is shown in Chapter 4.

**Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are essential components to be aware of when conducting a research project. They provide the researcher with an understanding of the scope and direction that their study will take. These are factors that the researcher is in control of. In my study, the demographic I am focusing on for this study are adults (individuals who are 18 years of age and older), employed part- or full-time within the United States; any other age groups or locations outside of the United States will not be included in this study.

The shared information will further enhance the current body of knowledge and provide a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being studied (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Ethical considerations will be maintained throughout the entire research process by providing participants with a pre-survey information sheet, concealing their identities, and maintaining ethical guidelines in the survey questions and transcription processes (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

**Assumptions**

The assumptions that I have surrounding this study stem from my experience of knowing individuals who have experienced challenges and limitations following re-entrance into the workforce after engaging in criminal behavior or returning to work after a period of incarceration. It is my current understanding that individuals with a history of criminal behavior experience more social exclusion in the workplace and are limited in the different opportunities and resources that their non-justice-involved coworkers may experience. Aside from the preconceived knowledge about the topic of this study, there are four additional assumptions that were identified. The first assumption is that all the

participants will be at least 18 years of age. The second assumption is that all participants will reside within the United States of America. The third assumption is that all participants have had experience with the justice system due to engaging in criminal behavior and attaining work after this event. The fourth and final assumption is that all participants who participate in the survey will provide detailed descriptions and lengthy commentary of their lived experiences in the open-ended questions, which is required for collecting quality data.

**Limitations**

This research uses a qualitative descriptive design, which can pose difficulty during the analysis and interpretation process. This design is not as interpretive as other, more structured qualitative designs, yet allows for more interpretation than a quantitative descriptive analysis. Furthermore, this type of research design is also associated with lower levels of validity and reliability when compared to other designs (Creswell, 2013).

Another limitation of this study is the lack of research on the perception of JEDI for people in the workplace who have previously engaged in criminal behavior. While there are studies that address how to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace, few studies focus on whether these initiatives are perceived as having an influence on their employees. Some studies have focused upon perceptions of individuals who are seeking employment or reasons to not seek employment following their engagement in criminal behavior.

<div align="center">

**Summary**

</div>

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the qualitative descriptive methodology that will be used to collect and analyze the data provided by participants. Inclusion and

exclusion criteria for the participants was clearly defined. Given the recommendation of selecting enough participants to reach saturation, purposeful and maximum variation sampling (with the option to use snowball sampling) will be used to recruit between five and 15 participants to participate in this research survey. Chapter 4 will detail the results of the analyzed qualitative data using reflexive thematic analysis to show themes and a descriptive summary.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

**Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to better understand the

phenomena of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace

through the lived experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior.

Participants were recruited to participate in this study if they met the following criteria: 1)

were 18 years of age or greater, 2) physically reside in the United States of America, 3)

had a history of criminal behavior that resulted in having experience with the justice

system, and 4) had obtained a part- or full-time job since their experience with the justice

system. After completing the prescreening questionnaire, eligible applicants were

instructed to complete the online survey. Data was collected through online open-ended

surveys. These findings were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA) and

interpreted through various lenses, including the social identity theory and other

interrelated theories. The subsequent paragraphs will explore the participants' lived

experiences and answer the research questions established in the previous chapters.

The following research questions guided this study:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How do individuals with a history of criminal

behavior describe their experience in the work environment?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** What perceived implications does an individual's

history of criminal behavior have on their experience with inclusion in the workplace?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What perceived implications does an individual's

history of criminal behavior have on their experience with equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports equity in the workplace?

**Research Question 5 (RQ5):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports diversity in the workplace?

**Research Question 6 (RQ6):** How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports inclusion in the workplace?

## Study Findings

After receiving 16 responses to the survey, 15 were able to be used in the analysis and interpretation process. One survey was discarded because the participant disclosed the law had not yet caught their instance of criminal behavior. This contradicts the eligibility requirements. The remaining 15 surveys were exported and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (TA). More on the reflexive TA process will be discussed under Study Results.

## Study Results

Reflexive TA uses six phases to analyze the extracted data. (See Table 1 for a description of each phase.) After extracting the data, I began the familiarization phase, reading and re-reading the survey results for each item. After reading through the data several times, I noted words repeated within each individual item. The repeated words became key words used as the basis for defining codes. The codes were as follows: Challenges, Diversity, Exclusion, Inclusivity, Unfair Experiences, Equitable Experiences, Organizational Justice, and Change.

The themes presented in this section were derived from the codes identified during the coding phase of the reflexive TA process. These themes are as follows:

Ongoing Challenges, Diversity, Exclusion, Inclusivity, Unfair Experiences, Equitable

Experiences, and Desire for Change. These themes were used to answer this study's

research questions and develop a descriptive summary. The codes are defined below,

followed by a description of themes that answer each research question. The descriptive

summary is presented in Chapter 5.

**Table 1**

*The Six Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

| Phase | Process |
|---|---|
| Familiarization | Read and re-read the data |
| Coding | Generate initial labels identifying key features |
| Generating initial themes | Examine codes to find patterns, or potential themes |
| Reviewing themes | Determine patterns of shared meaning of a central concept |
| Defining and naming themes | Develop a detailed analysis of each theme and select an informative name |
| Writing up | Tell a story with the rich, descriptive representation of the data within each theme |

**Codes**

*Code 1. Challenges*

This code surfaced unanimously amongst the survey responses. Challenges were

explained to be present in everyday life, including the workplace, after having experience

with the justice system. Participant 1 exemplified this code through their response, "It

means you get hired on for less starting pay, and it's easier for management to take

advantage [of] you because they know it's hard for you to find another job."

*Code 2. Diversity*

This code stood out in many of the participants' responses. For instance, while

some reported working for an employer that supported diversity, others touched on the

difficulties of working in diverse organizations due to their history. Participant 15

described their general understanding of diversity in the workplace as having "a variety

of peoples," with Participant 8 furthering this notion by stating that diversity means having people of "different backgrounds, perceptions, experience[s], and race[s]." Four more participants touched on diversity being associated with different races. Another two participants mentioned employers providing equal opportunities.

### Code 3. Exclusion

This code is described as the process of not being included in a group within a social setting. This code can be seen in Participant 7's statement, "Felonies exclude you from higher paying positions even if you have the experience and exceed the qualifications."

### Code 4. Inclusivity

Inclusion is defined as the extent to which a person is included within a group. In addition to social inclusion, inclusionary practices in the workplace include having access to information, opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes. Participant 5 stated their employer "has included me in every way possible and trust me to help run things." Nine participants noted feeling part of their team in the workplace. Participant 5 noted that they believe their opinions are valued on their team.

### Code 5. Unfair Experiences

This code is defined as having experienced unfair situations or circumstances in the workplace that were perceived to be directly related to one's criminal record or history of criminal behavior. This was present in Participant 13 notion that having a history of criminal behavior makes people "somewhat limited on better/higher positions or opportunities."

*Code 6. Equitable Experiences*

This code refers to the extent employees have fair access to resources, opportunities, and information. Of the 15 respondents, three explicitly noted their workplace not providing a fair allocation of opportunities and resources. Others described the allocation of opportunities and resources as being "fair" and available to anyone. Participant 6 exemplified this code by stating their employer "gives everyone the same opportunities" and "a chance to get on their feet."

*Code 7. Organizational Justice*

This code was seen in many responses. While analyzing the extracted data, several instances of perceived organizational justice were identified. For instance, key words indicating organization justice include "fairness," "equality," "integrity," and "treating people the way you want to be treated." Participant 2 demonstrated this code in their response, "Applying rules equally across all groups and having procedures to hear out explanations or other considerations."

*Code 8: Change*

This code was seen in the participant responses indicating changes they have made or the desire for change to happen. For instance, two participants noted lying to change their social identity to avoid social exclusion or disparate treatment at work. This code is supported through Participant 1's statement, "I lie about my background all the time to try and find more opportunities."

Aside from modifying one's social identity, other participants expressed their desire to see change happen after their involvement with the justice system. Participant 1's response supports this, as they stated, "I believe the criminal justice system should be

reformed to strive for rehabilitation, instead of punishing people inside jail/prison, and for the rest of their lives due to background checks after they serve their time."

**Themes**

Participants were asked to discuss their experiences with JEDI in the workplace after having experience with the justice system due to engaging in criminal behavior. Reflexive TA revealed seven themes that answered the six research questions: Ongoing Challenges, Diversity, Exclusion, Inclusivity, Unfair Experiences, Equitable Experiences, and Desire for Change.

**Figure 2**

*Clustered Representation of Themes and their Definitions*

| Theme | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Theme 1. Ongoing Challenges** | Used to describe the participants' challenges, barriers, and obstacles faced in the workplace after having a history with the justice system. |
| **Theme 2. Diversity** | Defined by respondents' perceptions of diversity through different experiences, races, opportunities, and lack of discrimination. |
| **Theme 3. Exclusion** | Used to describe the participants' experiences being excluded from social groups, opportunities, or resources. |
| **Theme 4. Inclusivity** | Describes the participants' experiences being included in workplace social groups and having access to the same resources and opportunities as those without a history with the justice system. |
| **Theme 5. Unfair Experiences** | Used to describe the participants' experiences of having unequal access to jobs, resources, opportunities, and other aspects of the workplace due to their history with the justice system. |
| **Theme 6. Equitable Experiences** | Defined as the participants' experiencing fair and just opportunities, access to resources, and other aspects of the workplace despite their history with the justice system. |
| **Theme 7. Desire for Change** | Describes a want or longing to change some aspect of one's own life or a system outside of their control (e.g., the justice system). |

*Research Question 1: How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe their experience in the work environment?*

Most participants worked in manual labor positions (e.g., construction, n = 4; tree work, n = 2; manufacturing, n = 3; painter, n = 1; detailer, n = 1). The remaining participants worked in entertainment, education, medical, or restaurant positions. Almost all of the participants (80%) indicated that their history of criminal behavior has impacted their ability to acquire and maintain a job. Participant 1 supported this by responding, "Every single day of my life, yes. I've never obtained a job without lying on the application about being a felon and just hoping they don't background check me. Otherwise, they seem to throw the application away."

One theme that emerged to support how participants described their experience in the workplace is ongoing challenges. When asked to describe what it means to be an employee with a history of criminal behavior, Participant 7 stated they feel "prejudged" and "scrutinized," and Participant 3 described employment as someone with a history of criminal behavior as "aggravating." Participant 1 stated, "You get hired on for less pay, and it's easier for management to take advantage of you because they know it's hard for you to find another job." Participant 11 further described ongoing challenges in their statement, "...we have to live with the choices and consequences of our actions and being overlooked based on our decisions..." Participant 1 describes the challenge of "finding a better job that provides a living wage while also having a felony." Participant 14 reiterates this by saying it is "hard to get a job with benefits being a felon."

Another theme that emerged to describe the participants' experiences in the workplace was the desire for change. Participant 8 stated, "I hope that something can change this pattern that we get stuck in..." indicates hope for those to succeed in the workplace after having experience with the justice system. Two participants noted that they used to have issues but have since changed their opinions on the matter. These paradigm shifts correlate with the desire for change theme. Participant 9 stated that they identified with "people who have had a history but want to change."

***Research Question 2: What perceived implications does an individual's history of criminal behavior have on their experience with inclusion in the workplace?***

People might make changes to their identities to avoid being excluded from particular social groups. Some participants described ways they modified or changed their identities to adapt to their work environment. While reading the responses, the theme of desire for change describes the following experiences: Four participants noted making changes to become sober (from drugs or alcohol) to help them better adapt to their workplace. Participant 8 noted that while they have taken action to change their identity (e.g., becoming sober), their previous history of criminal behavior resulted in a denied opportunity for advancement within the company. This was detailed when they stated, "An opportunity come up for advancement and I was considered for it until my background was run."

In contrast to the behavior changes noted above, participants also made changes to their social identities to improve their workplace experiences. Two participants noted that they resort to lying about their background to adapt to the workplace. Participant 2 responded that they "make up a more palatable background" and create "a persona and

timeline" and "don't reveal my [family] structure." Even if their experience is highly relevant to a situation, Participant 2 does not "tell people about my experience with the justice system."

Another notable theme that emerged in the responses was exclusion. When describing a time they experienced exclusion in the workplace, Participant 2 also mentioned perceiving class barriers between themselves and their coworkers (e.g., "I felt excluded when people would ask what my father does for a living … or what college I went to … when the majority of people went to ivy [league college] … We would have fancy client dinners and in effort to be inclusive they brought in a dining teacher … and [it] felt targeted to me.").

As for the notion of feeling included in their workplaces, many participants described times in which they experienced being part of their work team. The theme of inclusivity emerged in many responses. Participant 6 replied with how often they feel part of their work team, stating, "Every day. Because of my extensive work knowledge." Two more participants quantified their experiences of workplace inclusion using the words "every day." Participant 2 explained that they have "...worked in a lot of teams and loved them. [In] my current role we have meetings every 3 days to align ourselves in a project."

***Research Question 3: What perceived implications does an individual's history of criminal behavior have on their experience with equity in the workplace?***

Some participants detailed unfair access to resources and opportunities. This led to the emergence of the theme of unfair experiences. Participant 2 detailed an experience they perceived as unfair in their statement, "...I expressed interest in leaving my current department and moving to work that was more interesting to me and aligned with my

education, I was loaded with "bad work" (hard, unglamorous, resources strained

projects). I felt this was unfair because they attracted me to the role by promising that I

could pursue my pains within the company."

Participant 2 has also experienced rejection in their workplace, "I have been

rejected from jobs (5 jobs), internships, and graduate programs once I reach the

background check and past the offer stage." Participant 7 found difficulty acquiring a

full-time position due to their history of drug use. Participant 8 has a similar experience,

detailed in their statement, "My felonies have prevented me from being hired on by the

actual company. I am working through a temp agency with the same company for 4

months without being absent or tardy."

Other participants noted different meanings for equity in the workplace after

having a history with the justice system. Participant 4 noted their employer "gives

insurance and [the] opportunity to move up [in their job]." Participant 5 stated their

"...work is very fair." Participant 10 also describes the allocation of opportunities and

resources in their company as being "freely" available. These experiences align with the

theme of equitable experiences.

***Research Question 4: How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe
how their employer supports equity in the workplace?***

When asked how their employer supports an equitable workplace, many

participants responded with positive experiences. These responses led to the emergence

of the equitable experiences theme. Participant 15 noted that their workplace provides

fair access to opportunities and resources "through the scheduling website," and

Participant 6 noted their workplace "gives anyone a chance to get on their feet."

Participant 2 discussed their workplace's initiative to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace in their response, "They make it a mission and have a number of staff dedicated to this mission and improving metrics across the university. They hold themselves accountable by tying these measures and goals [to] funding." Participant 12 stated their employer "[shows] everyone the same respect," and Participant 6's employer "...gives everyone the same opportunities."

Some participants explained the difficulty of receiving fair pay and opportunities to advance in their workplace, thus correlating with the theme of unfair experiences. Participant 1 described an experience they had after working at a company for two years, making $10 per hour, only for their employer to hire a teenager with no experience at $11 per hour. Participant 9's response exemplified this code, stating, "So far there are no opportunities other than general labor in my company. If you have a criminal background, it's very hard for advancement."

*Research Question 5: How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports diversity in the workplace?*

Survey replies revealed two common themes related to how their employer supports diverse employees in the workplace. The first theme that emerged was diversity. Participant 13 noted their workplaces hire felons, and two participants specifically mentioned their workplace not discriminating against people. Participant 11 said their workplace provides "...equal employment based on skill level." Participant 1 noted that "illegal immigrants work in the back, the felons and teenagers work in the front." This statement indicates a sense of diversity in the workplace, yet the employees are placed in different roles based on their circumstances.

The second theme that emerged to describe how participants describe how their employer supports diversity was ongoing challenges. Participant 9 provides a different experience in their workplace, with the statement, "...a criminal background is very hard to have diversity in my workplace." A few participants noted experiencing "very little" to no support for diversity by their employers.

*Research Question 6: How do individuals with a history of criminal behavior describe how their employer supports inclusion in the workplace?*

Survey responses revealed around half of the participants experienced an inclusive workplace. The two themes used to answer this research question are inclusivity and exclusion. The theme of inclusivity is supported by Participant 5's experience with their employer, stating they have "...included me in every possible way and trust me to help run things," signifying the level of trust between the employer and participant (employee), despite their history with the justice system.

Exclusion is another theme to support the answer to this research question. Participant 13 noted that while their workplace limits advancement opportunities for employees with a history of criminal behavior, they "hire felons." A felony conviction often prevents individuals from obtaining work in many organizations; therefore, the employability of those with felony convictions can be a first step to providing a more inclusive workplace. Participants 1, 8, and 14 described their workplace experiences, stating that their felony convictions made it more difficult to acquire a job, thus contributing to exclusion.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I included a description of the data analysis using key words and themes extracted from the open-ended survey. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to find key words, which led to the emergence of the following themes: Ongoing Challenges, Diversity, Exclusion, Inclusivity, Unfair Experiences, Equitable Experiences, and Desire for Change. These themes informed the answering of the research questions related to the experiences of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. In addition, these findings were used to answer the research questions detailed at the beginning of this chapter. Chapter 5 will discuss the results of this study along with its implications.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

**Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to better understand the phenomena of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace through the lived experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior. This chapter presents these findings, including the descriptive summary comprised from key words and themes extracted from the data. In this chapter, the results of this study will be compared to the lived experiences and social norms detailed in the empirical literature presented in Chapter 2. Subsequently, this chapter presents this study's implications and limitations, and connects these to recommendations for future research. Finally, the conclusion will present key findings from this study, tying in how we can use these findings to reshape the rehabilitation and reintegration processes in the United States of America.

**Summary of Findings**

In this study, I used a qualitative descriptive design to explore the experiences of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. The setting for this study was limited to participants physically residing in the United States of America. Seven themes informed my answers to the six research questions. The themes of ongoing challenges and desire for change informed the answer to research question 1. Many participants described challenges to acquire and maintain employment following their history with the criminal justice system. Additional challenges after acquiring a job include the ability to advance within their position or feeling judged by their peers.

A desire to change their thoughts and wish for change within the judicial system was shared amongst many participants. The desire to change theme also helped inform the answer to research question 2. Some participants shared their experiences of lying about their identities to improve their chances for jobs, advancements, and inclusionary practices. The themes of exclusion and inclusivity also informed the answer to research question 2. The themes of unfair experiences and equitable experiences helped inform the answers to research question 3 and research question 4. The answer to research question 5 was informed by the themes of diversity and ongoing challenges. While many participants shared their experiences of their employers hiring felons and those with criminal backgrounds, some of these participants described this as being non-discriminative and having equal opportunities, others noted their ability to become hired, yet unable to advance. Finally, the themes of inclusivity and exclusion helped to inform the answer to research question 6.

## Discussion of Findings

The results of this study provided insight into the lived experiences of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. These findings were examined through the lens of the social identity theory, intersectionality, and Goodman's Tapestry Model (TM). When relating these findings to the social identity theory, many participants noted that they identified as "hard working citizens," "...had a history but want to change," "people on the up and up," and "professionals" in the workplace. None of the participants noted identifying with someone with a history of criminal behavior or other terms such as "felon," "offender," or "criminal." Intersectionality is a concept that acknowledges how an individual's social

identities can influence their lived experiences. This concept was exemplified in this study's findings through Participant 9 response, "It is very hard to find a good job," describing what it means to be an employee with a history of criminal behavior. Participants 13 and 14 discussed how their history of criminal behavior negatively impacts their ability to acquire a job with benefits or an advance position. According to Goodman's TM, individuals can have salient or central intersectional identities. In the results of this study, participants are more aware of their past when negatively impacted as a result of their history (e.g., unfair treatment or not being considered for an opportunity based on their past criminal behavior).

Many participants discussed their workplace having diverse employees, whether seen through individuals of different races or experiences, such as those having a criminal background. However, diversity without equitable access to opportunities and resources or inclusive practices can hinder employee belonging and group cohesion (Mousa 2021; Murphy, 2018). While many participants discussed experiencing equitable access to opportunities and resources and feeling included, others did not have this experience in their workplace. Participant 1 noted that "illegal immigrants work in the back, the felons and teenagers work in the front." This statement indicates a sense of diversity in the workplace, yet the employees are placed in different roles based on their circumstances.

Some participants discussed how having a felony conviction has further prevented job opportunities and the ability to progress in their careers. A felony conviction often prevents individuals from obtaining work in many organizations; therefore, the employability of those with felony convictions can be a first step to providing a more inclusive workplace. Participant 1 describes the challenge of "finding a better job that

provides a living wage while also having a felony." Individuals with a felony conviction are often limited to the types of jobs they can obtain and who will hire them. For instance, Participant 9 responded, "there are no opportunities other than general labor in my company if you have a criminal background." These limited job opportunities can further limit their ability to attain a job that is at or above the federal minimum wage ($7.25 per hour) or state minimum wage (ranging from $5.15 to $16.50 per hour) (Statista, 2023). This correlates with previous research findings indicating many individuals with experience in the justice system facing difficulties acquiring and affording necessities, including stable housing, employment, health care services, education opportunities, and reliable transportation (Adams et al., 2019; Jeffers, 2019).

Individuals with a history of criminal behavior are more likely to face stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization (Adams et al., 2019; Fortune & Yuen, 2015; Schneider & Weber, 2020). The findings from this study indicate some participants experience social inclusion in the workplace (47%), with others stating that their workplace inclusionary practices are "lacking" and "very low" (33%). The remaining participants declined to answer this item, with one responding with "I don't know yet." In terms of equitable practices, 60% of respondents replied with experiencing some sort of allocation of resources and opportunities. The remaining participants stated their work does not allocate resources and opportunities or individuals with a history of criminal behavior are not eligible for the same resources and opportunities as other employees.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this manuscript, perceptions of equity can vary among employees of different social statuses or identities within an organization. Employees without a history of criminal history might be more likely to experience and

perceive greater opportunities for advancement and access to resources than individuals with a history of criminal behavior. Employees with a history of criminal behavior may find it difficult to adjust to their work environment as they navigate the different social dynamics with their own intersectional social identities (Goodman, 2014; Panicker et al., 2018). To help foster a fairer environment, employers should encourage all employees to be involved in the decision-making processes about workplace concerns to help improve perceptions of inclusiveness (Le et al., 2021). Participant 5 provided examples of their workplace following this notion in their statement "...I'm really included in everything" and "...my opinion is valued."

There are several spiritual implications of this study. Revisiting the biblical examples referenced in Chapter 2, James 2:1-5 (*NRSVUE, 2021*) calls for everyone to treat others as equals, showing no favoritism or partiality to those of higher social statuses. Psalm 146:7-8 states, "Who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free." Many individuals who have experience with the justice system continue to be punished through discrimination and stigmatization, even after fulfilling their sentencing requirements. God seeks to set prisoners free—not only from their physical prison and sentences, but also from their imprisonment by ignorance, rebellion, and misguided choices. As followers of Christ, we should seek to uphold this sense of freedom for our peers.

## Implications

While the results of this study are insightful and build to the small body of knowledge surrounding the lived experiences of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior, all areas of this work should be thoroughly

investigated—for the benefit of academia and society. More specifically, future research must be conducted to explore this topic using different research methodologies for a more comprehensive understanding of phenomenon. The limitations section noted that qualitative descriptive methodology is not as reliable as other methodologies, such as quantitative methods or other, more popular qualitative methods. However, this study's findings serve as foundational knowledge toward deeper exploration and understanding of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior.

## Limitations

This research uses a qualitative descriptive design, which can pose difficulty during the analysis and interpretation process. This design is not as interpretive as other, more structured qualitative designs, yet allows for more interpretation than a quantitative descriptive analysis. Furthermore, this type of research design is also associated with lower levels of validity and reliability when compared to other designs (Creswell, 2013). Another limitation of this study is the lack of research on the perception of JEDI for people in the workplace who have previously engaged in criminal behavior. While there are studies that address how to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace, few studies focus on whether these initiatives are perceived as influencing their employees. Some studies have focused on perceptions of individuals seeking employment or reasons not to seek employment following their engagement in criminal behavior. A final limitation of this study was the lack of demographic data collected to differentiate between gender, age, race, education level, state or region, length of time between the participant's experience with the justice system and the time of the study,

type of criminal offenses (e.g., misdemeanor, felonious), and sentencing type (e.g., fine paid, probation, jail, prison).

## Recommendations for Future Research

While the result of this study adds to the knowledge surrounding individuals with a history of criminal behavior and their perceptions of JEDI in the workplace, future studies could further build upon this topic. For example, a more detailed study could collect demographic data, including gender, age, race, education level, state or region, length of the criminal record, type of offense, and the type of sentencing requirement. Demographic analysis can provide a better understanding of the research respondents and create a clearer reflection of the targeted population, thus leading to greater understanding. This understanding can help guide policy recommendations (whether in the workplace or society) and identify inequitable, exclusionary, or ineffective practices.

Other studies could focus on the prison industrial complex (PIC), its correlation with attaining meaningful work, and employee perceptions of the PIC. Moreover, studies could further understand how the foster care system correlates with the PIC. For example, children in the foster care system are more likely to become pregnant, homeless, runaways, increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior and serving time in the juvenile detention center (Adams et al., 2019). This can become a potential catalyst for prison cycling if precautions and preventative measures, such as education, job and life skills training, and rehabilitative services, are not provided (Adams et al., 2019).

Additionally, research can be conducted on the topic of functional illiteracy and its correlation with increased negative social behaviors and likelihood of becoming involved with the justice system, and even incarceration (Kohlenberg, 2019). Further

research could be also conducted to better understand the percentage of justice departments that provide a high school diploma equivalency, job skills trainings, higher education, emotional regulation trainings, life skills trainings, etc. for those who are serving time in these systems (Case & Fasenfest, 2004; Peled-Laskov et al., 2019; Ramakers et al., 2017).

Moreover, different research and analysis methods can be selected to explore the topic of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. For instance, quantitative measures, such as surveys or observations, can help provide more reliable and generalizable conclusions. In contrast, different qualitative measures, such as transcendental or hermeneutical phenomenological research, can use interviews and focus groups to gather more data and compare the analysis to the findings from this study.

## Summary

At the time this summary was written, as many as 78 million, or one in three, Americans, have some type of criminal record (Alliance for Safety and Justice, 2023). Individuals who have a history with the justice system because of engaging in criminal behavior often face many barriers to attaining stable work. While the purpose of the justice system is to protect society, punish offenders, and rehabilitate individuals who have engaged in criminal behavior, the punishment tends to last long after the punishment has been served. This elicits the question, "How can the American society best protect its citizens while ensuring individuals who have paid for their crime can have fair opportunities to reintegrate and minimize recidivism?" and, "What makes some organizations more JEDI-focused than others?"

This study adds to the growing body of literature dedicated to answering these questions. In this study, a descriptive qualitative method was used to explore the experiences of JEDI in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior. However, more studies should be conducted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employees' experiences with JEDI in the workplace after having experienced with the justice system. If nothing more, the voices of the participants must be heard; their challenges addressed and their ability to successfully reintegrate strengthened, with the call to improve workplace practices.

## References

114th Cong. (2015). Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016, S.524.

https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/524/text

AAAED. (2023). Affirmative action policies throughout history. AAAED.

https://www.aaaed.org/aaaed/History_of_Affirmative_Action.asp

Abrams, J. A., Tabaac, A., Jung, S., & Else-Quest, N. M. (2020). Considerations for employing

intersectionality in qualitative health research. *Social Science & Medicine*, *258*, 113138.

Adams, M., Klinsky, S., & Chhetri, N. (2019). Barriers to sustainability in poor marginalized

communities in the United States: The criminal justice, the prison-industrial complex and

foster care systems. Sustainability, 12(1), 220. https://doi-

org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.3390/su12010220

Addison, H. A., Richmond, T. S., Lewis, L. M., & Jacoby, S. (2022). Mental health outcomes in

formerly incarcerated Black men: A systematic mixed studies review. *Journal of

Advanced Nursing*, *78*(7), 1851-1869.

Adejumo, V. (2021). Beyond diversity, inclusion, and belonging. *Leadership (London, England),

17*(1), 62-73. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020976202

Ajunwa, I., & Onwuachi-Willig, A. (2018). Combating discrimination against the formerly

incarcerated in the labor market. *Northwestern University Law Review, 112*(6), 1385-

1415.

Alliance for Safety and Justice. (2023). Voices of redemption: A national survey of people with

records. Alliance for Safety and Justice. https://asj.allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/people-

with-records-survey/

Allport, G. W. (1954). The nature of prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

American Civil Liberties Union. (2018). The prison crisis. https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-

    justice/mass-

    incarceration#:~:text=Despite%20making%20up%20close%20to,outpacing%20populatio

    n%20growth%20and%20crime.

Anazodo, K. S., Ricciardelli, R., & Chan, C. (2019). Employment after incarceration: Managing

    a socially stigmatized identity. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International*

    *Journal, 38*(5), 564-582. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-09-2018-0175

Baier, S. K. (2020). Reducing employment barriers for people with criminal records. *The Journal*

    *of Corporation Law, 46*(1), 219-246.

Mor Barak, M. E., Lizano, E. L., Kim, A., Duan, L., Rhee, M. K., Hsiao, H. Y., & Brimhall, K.

    C. (2016). The promise of diversity management for climate of inclusion: A state-of-the-

    art review and meta-analysis. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership &*

    *Governance*, *40*(4), 305-333.

Baum, B. (2021). Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies: Are organizations truly committed to

    a workplace culture shift? *Journal of Business and Behavioral Sciences, 33*(2), 11-23.

Bersani, B. E., & Doherty, E. E. (2018). Desistance from offending in the twenty-first century.

    Annual Review of Criminology, 1, 311-334. doi:10.1146/annurev-criminol-032317-

    092112

Bernstein, R. S., Morgan, B., Salipante, P., & Weisinger, J. Y. (2020). From Diversity to

    Inclusion to Equity: A Theory of Generative Interactions: JBE. *Journal of Business*

    *Ethics, 167*(3), 395-410. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04180-1

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2018, April). *Correctional populations in the United States, 2016 - Bureau of Justice ...* Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://Bureau of Justice Statistics.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus16.pdf

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2021a, May 11). *Total Adult Correctional Population 1980-2020.* Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/data/key-statistics

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2021b, December). *Profile of prison inmates, 2016 - survey of prison inmates*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://Bureau of Justice Statistics.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ppi16.pdf

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2021c, December). Prisoners in 2020 – Statistical tables - Summary - Bureau of Justice. Prisoners in 2020. https://Bureau of Justice Statistics.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p20st_sum.pdf

Boppre, B., & Reed, S. M. (2021). "I'm not a number, I'ma human being:" A phenomenological study of women's responses to labeling. *Feminist Criminology*, *16*(2), 191-215.

Bowleg, L. (2020). Reframing mass incarceration as a social-structural driver of health inequity. *American journal of public health*, *110*(S1), S11-S12.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative research in psychology*, *18*(3), 328-352.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International journal of social research methodology*, *24*(6), 641-654.

Bruneau, E., Hameiri, B., Moore-Berg, S. L., & Kteily, N. (2021). Intergroup contact reduces dehumanization and meta-dehumanization: Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and quasi-

experimental evidence from 16 samples in five countries. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *47*(6), 906-920.

Bubolz, B. F., & Lee, S. (2021). "I still love my hood": Passive and strategic aspects of role residual among former gang members. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 48(6), 846-863. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854820959115

Bureau Justice of Assistance. (2018, April). Second chance act (fact sheet). Bureau of Justice Assistance. https://bja.ojp.gov/library/publications/second-chance-act-fact-sheet#:~:text=The%20SCA%20authorized%20up%20to,that%20pose%20risks%20of%20reoffending.

Case, P., & Fasenfest, D. (2004). Expectations for opportunities following prison education: A discussion of race and gender. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 24-39.

Collins, P. H., da Silva, E, Ergun, E., Furseth, I., Bond, K. D., & Martínez-Palacios, J. (2021). Intersectionality as critical social theory. *Contemporary Political Theory, 20*(3), 690-725. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00490-0

Conte, J. M., & Landy, F. J. (2019). *Work in the 21st Century: An introduction to industrial and organizational psychology*. John Wiley & Sons.

Cox, A. (2020). The language of incarceration. *Incarceration*, *1*(1), 263266632094085. https://doi.org/10.1177/2632666320940859

Cox, R. (2020). Applying the theory of social good to mass incarceration and civil rights. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *30*(2), 205-218.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.

Cropanzano, R., Slaughter, J. E., & Bachiochi, P. D. (2005). Organizational justice and black applicants' reactions to affirmative action. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90,* 1168 – 1184.

Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist theory*, *9*(1), 67-85.

DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health, 7*(2), e000057-e000057. https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057

Denver, M., Pickett, J. T., & Bushway, S. D. (2017). The language of stigmatization and the mark of violence: Experimental evidence on the social construction and use of criminal record stigma. *Criminology (Beverly Hills), 55*(3), 664-690. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12145

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Ehrke, F., Ashoee, A., Steffens, M. C., & Louvet, E. (2020). A brief diversity training: Raising awareness of in-group privilege to improve attitudes towards disadvantaged out-groups. *International Journal of Psychology, 55*(5), 732-742. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12665

English, D., Carter, J. A., Bowleg, L., Malebranche, D. J., Talan, A. J., & Rendina, H. J. (2020). Intersectional social control: the roles of incarceration and police discrimination in psychological and HIV-related outcomes for Black sexual minority men. *Social Science & Medicine*, *258*, 113121.

Espino, D. P., Keene, B. C., & Werbowsky, P. (2023, April). Change the Museum: Examining Social Media Posts on Museum Workplace Experiences to Support Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Efforts. In *Advances in Quantitative Ethnography: 4th*

*International Conference, ICQE 2022, Copenhagen, Denmark, October 15–19, 2022,*

*Proceedings* (pp. 331-346). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Esthappan, S., Lacoe, J., Zweig, J. M., & Young, D. W. (2020). Transforming practice through

culture change: Probation staff perspectives on juvenile justice reform. *Youth Violence*

*and Juvenile Justice, 18*(3), 274-293. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204020901761

Ewens, B., Chapman, R., Tulloch, A., & Hendricks, J. M. (2014). ICU survivors' utilisation of

diaries post discharge: a qualitative descriptive study. *Australian Critical Care*, *27*(1), 28-

35.

Federal Bureau of Prisons. (2019, March). *Federal Bureau of Prisons*. BOP.

https://www.bop.gov/inmates/fsa/overview.jsp

Flatt, C., & Jacobs, R. L. (2018). The relationship between participation in different types of

training programs and gainful employment for formerly incarcerated individuals. *Human*

*Resource Development Quarterly, 29*(3), 263-286. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21325

Fletcher, L., & Beauregard, T. A. (2022). The psychology of diversity and its implications for

workplace (in) equality: Looking back at the last decade and forward to the next. *Journal*

*of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *95*(3), 577-594.

Flores, E. O., & Cossyleon, J. E. (2017). "I went through it so you don't have to": Faith-based

community organizing for the formerly incarcerated. *Journal for the Scientific Study of*

*Religion, 55*(4), 662-676. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12294

Fortune, D., & Yuen, F. (2015). Transitions in identity, belonging, and citizenship and the

possibilities of inclusion for women leaving prison: implications for therapeutic

recreation. *Leisure/Loisir*, *39*(2), 253-276.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Goodman, D. J. (2014). The tapestry model: Exploring social identities, privilege, and oppression from an intersectional perspective. *Intersectionality and higher education: Theory, research, and praxis*, 99-108.

Harcourt, B. E. (2004). Rethinking racial profiling: A critique of the economics, civil liberties, and constitutional literature, and of criminal profiling more generally. *U. Chi. L. Rev.*, *71*, 1275.

Haynie, J. J., Flynn, C. B., & Baur, J. E. (2019). The organizational justice-job engagement relationship: How social exchange and identity explain this effect. *Journal of Managerial Issues, 31*(1), 28-45.

Hunter, D., McCallum, J., & Howes, D. (2019). Defining exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) research and considering its application to healthcare. *Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, *4*(1).

Islam, G. (2014). Social identity theory. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, *67*(1), 741-763.

Jeffers, J. L. (2019). Justice is not blind: Disproportionate incarceration rate of people of color. *Social Work in Public Health*, *34*(1), 113-121.

Kaeble, D., & Cowhig, M. (2018). Correctional populations in the United States, 2016 (NCJ 251211). Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Kennedy, J. T. (2021). Belonging: The secret to building engagement for employees of all backgrounds. *Leader to Leader, 2021*(99), 45-51. https://doi.org/10.1002/ltl.20552

Kirk, E. M. (2021). Community consequences of mass incarceration: Sparking neighborhood

    social problems and violent crime. *Journal of Crime & Justice, 45*(1), 103-119.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2021.1887751

Kohlenberg, M. (2019). Booked but Can't Read:" Functional Literacy," National Citizenship, and

    the New Face of Dred Scott in the Age of Mass Incarceration. *NYU Rev. L. & Soc.*

    *Change*, *44*, 213.

Le, H., Palmer Johnson, C., & Fujimoto, Y. (2021). Organizational justice and climate for

    inclusion. *Personnel Review, 50*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2019-0546

Leslie, L. M., Mayer, D. M., & Kravitz, D. A. (2014). The stigma of affirmative action: A

    stereotyping-based theory and meta-analytic test of the consequences for performance.

    *Academy of Management Journal, 57*(4), 964–989.

Lilja, M. (2019). Formerly imprisoned polydrug users' narratives about unemployment. *Journal*

    *of Substance use, 24*(3), 336-340. https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2019.1572802

Livingston, R. (2020). How to promote racial equity in the workplace. *Harvard Business Review*,

    *98*(5), 64-72.

Mancini, C., McDougle, R., & Keegan, B. (2021). A first step, a second chance: Public support

    for restoring rights of individuals with prior convictions. *International Journal of*

    *Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 65*(16), 1736-1755.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X20969948

McCandless, S., Bishu, S. G., Gómez Hernández, M., Paredes Eraso, É., Sabharwal, M., Santis,

    E. L., & Yates, S. (2022). A long road: Patterns and prospects for social equity, diversity,

    and inclusion in public administration. Public Administration (London), 100(1), 129-148.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12830

Merrilees, C. E., Taylor, L. K., Klotz, M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings, E.
M. (2023). Timing is everything: Developmental changes in the associations between
intergroup contact and bias. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*,
01650254221146409.

Miklósi, M. (2020). The importance of social organizations in law enforcement for promoting
the reintegration of inmates. Journal of Psychological and Educational Research, 28(1),
125-138.

Milesi, P. (2022). Identity leadership, procedural justice, and group identification in uncertain
organizational contexts. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 52*(9), 886-911.
https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12897

Montrey, M., & Shultz, T. R. (2019). Outgroup homogeneity bias causes ingroup favoritism.
*arXiv preprint arXiv:1908.08203*.

Moore, K. E., & Tangney, J. P. (2017). Managing the concealable stigma of criminal justice
system involvement: A longitudinal examination of anticipated stigma, social
withdrawal, and post–release adjustment. The Journal of social issues, 73(2), 322.

Mousa, M. (2021). Does gender diversity affect workplace happiness for academics? The role of
diversity management and organizational inclusion. Public Organization Review, 21(1),
119-135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-020-00479-0

Murphy, W. (2018). Distinguishing diversity from inclusion in the workplace: Legal necessity or
common sense conclusion? *Journal of Business Diversity, 18*(4), 65-83.
https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v18i4.247

National Juvenile Defender Center. (2016, September). *Promoting positive development - NJJN*.

Issue Brief: Promoting Positive Development. https://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-

library/Promoting_Positive_Development.pdf

*New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible*. (2021). *New Revised Standard Version*

*Updated Edition (NRSVUE)*. Bible Gateway.

https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-Updated-

Edition-NRSVue-Bible/

Otaye-Ebede, L. (2018). Employees' perception of diversity management practices: Scale

development and validation. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology,

27(4), 462-476. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1477130

Özkan, A. H. (2022). Organizational justice perceptions and turnover intention: A meta-analytic

review. *Kybernetes,* https://doi.org/10.1108/K-01-2022-0119

Palmer, C., & Christian, J. (2019). Work matters: Formerly incarcerated men's resiliency in re-

entry. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion an International Journal, 38*(5), 583-598.

https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-10-2018-0177

Panicker, A., Agrawal, R. K., & Khandelwal, U. (2018). Inclusive workplace and organizational

citizenship behavior: Study of a higher education institution, India. *Equality, Diversity*

*and Inclusion an International Journal, 37*(6), 530-550. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-03-

2017-0054

Peek, C. J., Allen, M., Pacala, J. T., Nickerson, W., & Westby, A. (2021). Coming together in

action for equity, diversity, and inclusion. *Family Medicine*, *53*(9), 786–795.

https://doi.org/10.22454/fammed.2021.569762

Peled-Laskov, R., Shoham, E., & Cojocaru, L. (2019). Work-related intervention programs: Desistance from criminality and occupational integration among released prisoners on parole. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 63*(13), 2264-2290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19845762

Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide*. SAGE.

Pettigrew, T. F. (2021). Advancing intergroup contact theory: Comments on the issue's articles. *Journal of Social Issues*, *77*(1), 258-273.

Population Reference Bureau. (2020, July). PRB's 2021 World Population Data Sheet released. Population Reference Bureau. https://www.prb.org/news/2021-world-population-data-sheet-released/

Rabuy, B., & Kopf, D. (2016, May 10). *Detaining the poor: How money bail perpetuates an endless cycle of poverty and Jail Time*. Detaining the Poor: How money bail perpetuates an endless cycle of poverty and jail time | Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incomejails.html

Ramakers, A., Nieuwbeerta, P., Van Wilsem, J., & Dirkzwager, A. (2017). Not just any job will do: A study on employment characteristics and recidivism risks after release. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 61*(16), 1795-1818. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X16636141

Rosen, J. D., & Cruz, J. M. (2018). Overcoming stigma and discrimination: Challenges for reinsertion of gang members in developing countries. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 62(15), 4758-4775. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18785517

Ross, P. T., & Bibler Zaidi, N. L. (2019). Limited by our limitations. *Perspectives on Medical Education, 8*(4), 261-264. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-00530-x

Rudes, D. S., & Magnuson, S. (2019). Scapegoating culture: Misunderstanding organizational culture as the problem in carceral institutions and beyond. Sociology Compass, 13(2), e12657-n/a. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12657

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in nursing & health*, *23*(4), 334-340.

Sandelowski, M. (2010). What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in nursing & health*, *33*(1), 77-84.

Sawyer, W. (2018, August 15). How does unaffordable money bail affect families? Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2018/08/15/pretrial/

Schneider, C. R., & Weber, E. U. (2020). Reducing discrimination and fostering prosociality towards Ex-Prisoners in Nigeria and the United States. *Journal of Social Issues, 76*(1), 172-199. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12374

Scott, K. J. (2016). Corrections and education: The relationship between education and recidivism. *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines*, *15*, 147.

Shannon, S., Uggen, C., Schnittker, J., Wakefield, S., & Massoglia, M. (2017). The growth, scope, and spatial distribution of people with felony records in the United States, 1948-2010. *Demography.*

Siedlecki, S. L. (2020). Understanding descriptive research designs and methods. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, *34*(1), 8-12.

Statista. (2023). Minimum wage rates in the United States in 2023, by state (in U.S. dollars). Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/238997/minimum-wage-by-us-state/

Story, D. A., & Tait, A. R. (2019). Survey research. *Anesthesiology*, *130*(2), 192-202.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel & L. W. Austin (Eds.), Psychology of Intergroup Relations (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Thomas, R. R., Jr. (1990). From affirmative action to affirming diversity. Harvard Business Review, *68*, 107–117

Turner, J. C. (1984). Social identification and psychological group formation. In H. Tajfel (Ed.). *The social dimension: European development in social psychology.* New York. Cambridge University. Press.

Tropp, L. R., & Pettigrew, T. F. (2005). Relationships between intergroup contact and prejudice among minority and majority status groups. *Psychological science*, *16*(12), 951-957.

Tropp, L. R., White, F., Rucinski, C. L., & Tredoux, C. (2022). Intergroup contact and prejudice reduction: Prospects and challenges in changing youth attitudes. *Review of General Psychology*, *26*(3), 342-360.

United States Department of Justice. (2016, November). *Federal Bureau of Prisons Education Program Assessment*. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons. https://www.justice.gov/archives/dag/page/file/914026/download

United States Department of Justice. (n.d.). *Prisoners and Prisoner Re-Entry*. USDOJ: FBCI: Prisoners and prisoner re-entry. https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html

United States Department of Labor. (n.d.a). *Affirmative action*. DOL. https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/hiring/affirmativeact

United States Department of Labor. (n.d.b). *General Affirmative action programs frequently asked questions*. DOL. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/faqs/general-aaps

Vaamonde, J. D., Omar, A., & Salessi, S. (2018). From organizational justice perceptions to turnover intentions: The mediating effects of burnout and job satisfaction. *Europe's Journal of Psychology, 14*(3), 554-570. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v14i3.1490

Verkuyten, M., Yogeeswaran, K., & Adelman, L. (2020). Toleration and prejudice-reduction: Two ways of improving intergroup relations. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 50*(2), 239-255. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2624

Vogel, K., & Erickson, S. (2021). Well-being, EDIB, and the promise of leadership development. *Journal of Library Administration, 61*(8), 1008-1016. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1984145

Vuolo, M., Lageson, S., & Uggen, C. (2017). Criminal record questions in the era of "Ban the box". *Criminology & Public Policy, 16*(1), 139-165. http://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12250

Walmsley, R. (2018). *World Prison Population List twelfth edition Roy Walmsley*. https://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/wppl_12.pdf

Western, B. (2018). *Homeward: Life in the year after prison*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Young, N. C. J., & Ryan, A. M. (2019). Criminal history and the workplace: A pathway forward. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 38*(5), 494-504. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-04-2019-0140

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET

**Directions:** Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.
**Title of the Project:** A qualitative descriptive study: Exploring organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace for individuals with a history of criminal behavior
**Principal Investigator:** Heather Morton, Doctor of Philosophy Student, Psychology Department, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. To participate, you must:
- Be 18 years of age or older.
- Physically reside in the United States of America.
- Have experience in the justice system after engaging in criminal behavior, resulting in a criminal record.
- Acquired at least one full- or part-time job after involvement in the justice system.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?
This study aims to understand the workplace experiences of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for people with a history of criminal behavior.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
- Participate in an online survey.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. Benefits to society include:
- Understanding employees' experiences in the workplace following a history of criminal behavior.
- Understanding how different social identities can influence workplace experiences.
- Expanding the current knowledge of workplace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion policies and practices.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?
The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include:
- The possibility of psychological stress from being asked to recall and write experiences related to your engagement in criminal behavior.
*I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm oneself or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.*

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by not asking for identifying information, such as names and identifying company details.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer or in a locked file cabinet. After seven years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Content will be stored on a password-locked computer for seven years and then erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to choose not to answer any question, for any reason, or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. If you choose to withdraw from this study, the data collected from you will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Morton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at █████████ ███████████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Bethany Mims, at ████████████████████

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

## APPENDIX B: PRESCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Are at least 18 years of age

- Physically reside in the United States of America

- Have experience with the justice system because of a history of criminal behavior

- Worked at least one part- or full-time job since your experience with the justice system

  Please select one choice.

❑ I meet all the above criteria

❑ I do not meet the above criteria

APPENDIX C: SURVEY

**Directions:** Please complete this 30-minute survey. Your responses are confidential, and you can skip questions you are uncomfortable with. Thank you for your participation.
1.      What type of industry do you work in?
2.      How would you describe what it means to be an employee with a history of criminal behavior?
3.      What professional, demographic, or social groups do you identify with at work?
4.      Describe what the term justice means in your workplace.
5.      Describe how your work allocates opportunities and resources to employees.
6.      How would you describe what diversity means in your workplace?
7.      How would you describe social inclusion in your workplace (social inclusion is the level of participation you are given in a social setting, such as your workplace)?
8.      In what ways, if any, has your employer supported a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace?
9.      Have you ever felt that your history of criminal behavior has influenced your ability to acquire or maintain a job?

The following items may or may not pertain to your experience in the workplace. If you have not experienced these, please leave it blank or type "N/A."

10.     Describe a time you experienced unfair treatment from your managers or coworkers.
11.     Describe a time you experienced exclusion from your managers or coworkers.
12.     Describe a time when you experienced being part of a team at work.
13.     Describe any barriers in the workplace that have prevented you from progressing in your career or your ability to fully participate in work activities.
14.     Describe ways your workplace recognizes and addresses injustices that occur in the workplace.
15.     Describe ways in which you have modified or changed aspects of your identity to better adapt to your work environment.
16.     What resources, if any, have you experienced as helpful in overcoming challenges in the workplace following your history of criminal behavior?
17.     Is there anything else you would like to share about how your experience in the justice system following engaging in criminal behavior influences your experience with justice, equity, diversity, or inclusion in the workplace?

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION REQUEST

[Date]
[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient],

As a graduate student in the Psychology department/School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is A Qualitative Descriptive Study: Exploring Organizational Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Workplace for Individuals with a History of Criminal Behavior. The purpose of my research is to understand the phenomena of organizational justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace through the lived experiences of individuals with a history of criminal behavior. These findings will be seen through various lenses, including the social identity theory and other interrelated theories. I am writing to invite eligible individuals to participate in my research.

Participants must be 18 or older, live in the United States of America, have a criminal record, and have experienced the U.S. justice system because of such behavior. In addition, participants must have obtained at least one job after obtaining a criminal record and are fully capable of participating in the online survey. It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study to ensure the participants' identities remain confidential.

To participate, please contact the researcher, Heather Morton, by phone at ██ ███████████████████████ for more information.

An information sheet will be provided for you in a separate email if you are determined eligible. The information sheet contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Heather Morton
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E: SOCIAL MEDIA POST TEMPLATE

Research Participants Needed

Exploring Organizational Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Workplace for

Individuals with a History of Criminal Behavior

Are you:

- 18 years of age or older?

- Located in the United States of America?

- Have experience with the justice system due to a criminal record?

- Have you had at least one job after obtaining a criminal record?

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

This research study aims to better understand the workplace experiences of justice,
equity, diversity, and inclusion for people with a history of criminal behavior.

Participants will be asked to complete a brief screening questionnaire and survey.
The study is being conducted online, with the survey available to complete at your
convenience.

An information sheet will be provided prior to completing the survey.

Heather Morton, a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty
University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Heather Morton at ███████████████████████████ for more
information.

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