ASU | Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
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Creating the Prison-to-College Pipeline:
Examining the Barriers to Post-secondary Education for Formerly Incarcerated Women
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College After Prison
Higher Education for Formerly Incarcerated Adults

BACKGROUND

The United States accounts for less than 5% of the world's population, but it is home to almost 25% of the world's prisoners (Walmsley, 2016). The number of women in state prisons has risen by more than 800% in the last four decades, and they are currently the fastest-growing segment of the overall prison population (Sawyer, 2018). Almost half of incarcerated women have not completed high school or obtained a GED, and only 31% have attempted some college, compared to the general public's 58% (Ewert & Wildhagen, 2011)

95% of prisoners will eventually be released back into their communities (Hughes & Wilson, 2017), but as a society, we spend quite a bit of time and money implementing new ways to punish, and we give seemingly little thought to what comes after incarceration, both for the individual and for the society as a whole.

There is ample evidence of higher education's positive impact on reducing recidivism and increasing the chances of a successful reentry into society; however, few studies have looked closely at the barriers to higher education, both perceived and experienced, for this population and the role of identity on the ability to overcome these barriers. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by examining the low educational attainment among formerly incarcerated individuals and the barriers that prevent enrolling in a post-secondary institution.

Women Under Control of the U.S. Corrections System, 2016

Prison	111,422
Jail	102,300
Probation	918,275
Parole	113,724
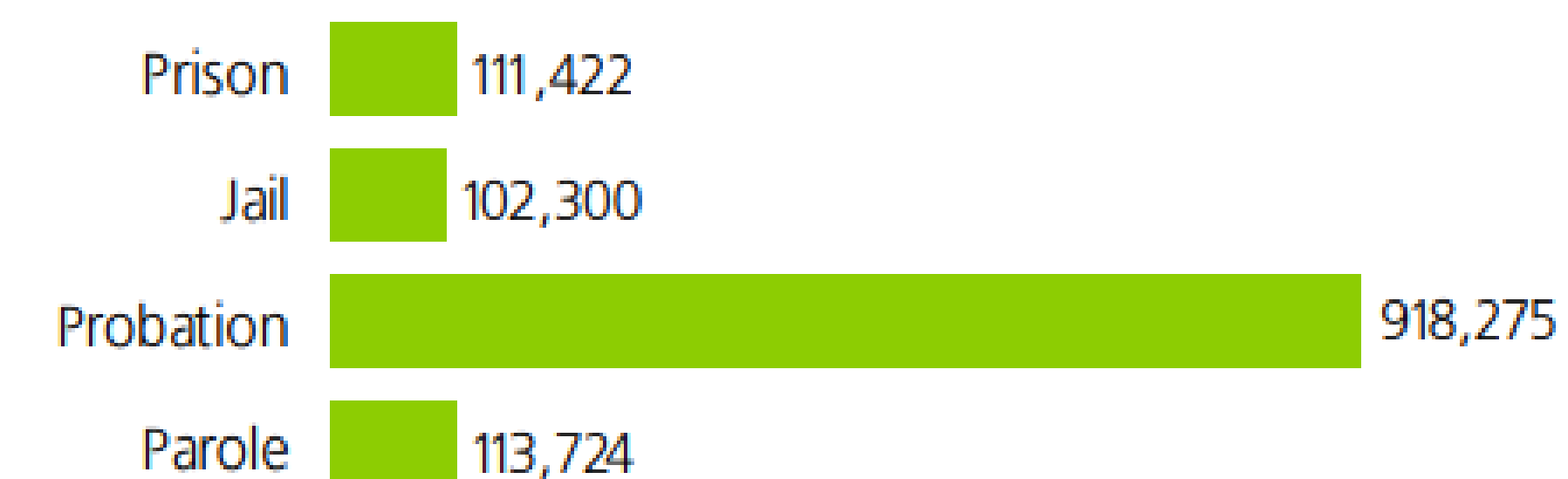
Source: Carson, E.A. (2018). *Prisoners in 2016*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Zeng, Z. (2018). *Jail Inmates in 2016*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Kaeble, D. (2018). *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2016*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

"Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings."
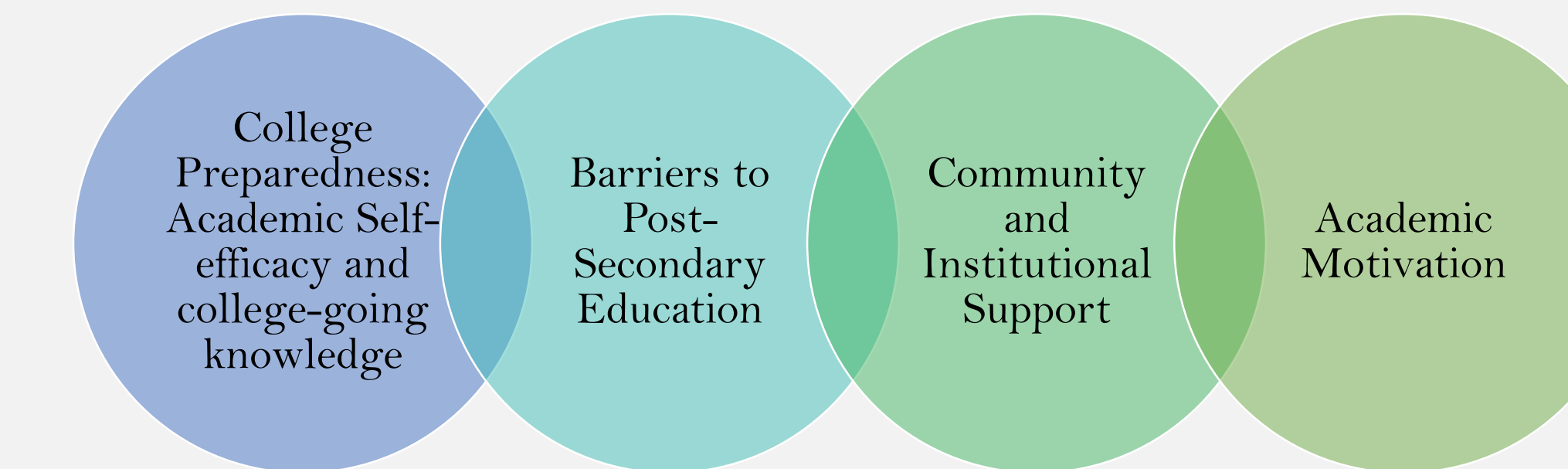Angela Davis

PURPOSE

To explore the academic identities of formerly incarcerated women, critically examine the post-secondary educational system through the lens of feminist standpoint theory and counter-storytelling, and develop recommendations for effective university outreach programs.

METHODOLOGY & DATA COLLECTION

Research Questions	Data
RQ 1: How do formerly incarcerated women describe their past, current, and future selves within the educational system?	Semi-structured Interviews Composite Narratives Educational Journey Maps Photo Essay Researcher Journal
RQ 2: How do formerly incarcerated women experience a college readiness program driven by Possible Selves and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)?	CAP Website resource utilization Post-workshop Debrief
RQ 3: How can colleges and universities develop and sustain outreach programs to best support formerly incarcerated women's expectations for degree attainment?	College Support and Barriers Questionnaire CAP Website resource utilization

Analysis

Qualitative
Systematic grounded theory approach to collecting and coding data

Quantitative
Descriptive Statistics
Spearman rho to explore possible associations

THE INTERVENTION: CAP

Burning Questions
• Understanding what is possible may serve to both raise academic self-efficacy and lower perceived structural barriers and all the participants to more fully engage with the next activities
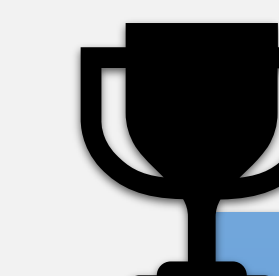
Possible Selves
• Exploring past, current, and future selves through educational journal mapping and group learning centered on motivation

SCCT
• Utilizing the me3 career and major exploration tool to show the participants what is possible in an engaging way to increase the perceived value of a college degree and facilitate the next step

Roadmap
• Working as a group to find the information necessary to take the next steps into college and giving the participants a small success in the form of a tangible document with a road map for going forward

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Likert 6-point scale and open-ended questions

- College Preparedness: Academic Self-efficacy and college-going knowledge
- Barriers to Post-Secondary Education
- Community and Institutional Support
- Academic Motivation

PARTICIPANTS

Phase One: Survey
Questionnaire open from June–August 2019
Convenience sample drawn from community and university organizations and population-specific social media groups

Phase Two: Interviews
Purposive sample comprised of consenting survey participants combined with snowball sampling through community contacts

Phase Three: Intervention
8-12 formerly incarcerated women
Snowball and purposive sampling

IMPLICATIONS

Many women entering the criminal justice system are educationally disadvantaged; a situation only made worse by incarceration. Addressing this problem benefits both the individuals and society, and an understanding of the barriers faced by formerly incarcerated individuals will be valuable as administrators look to create programs to remove these barriers.

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