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).

93% 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 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.

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**Methodology & Data Collection**

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

**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.

**“Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings.”**
Angela Davis