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FROM THE SHADOWS OF INCARCERATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION:
ASSOCIATED INVISIBLE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

by

Andrea E. Blake

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Education and Human Sciences
and the School of Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of college students who have experienced parental incarceration and explore how they make meaning of their associated invisible identity in the campus environment at four-year institutions in the U.S. Traditionally socio-historical events and messages about system-impacted individuals, their families, and children have contributed to the invisibility of this population in educational settings. This study employed a narrative inquiry approach. Also, it applied Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) ecological model to explore the college experiences of ACIPs while not excluding wider societal and environmental factors that could shape their associated invisible identity and development. Nine themes were identified and outlined in response to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) proposed four interrelated components: process-person-context-time (PPCT) model. Findings suggest that participants' associated invisible identity was not more salient than other parts of their identity. However, participants revealed that interactions in the classroom, with faculty and administrators, and with family did contribute to their self-understanding of their identity at their respective institutions. Additionally, this study provides insight on the disclosure process. All participants expressed selective personal choice in how they dealt with the disclosure. Generally, participants felt disclosing their associated invisible identity was unique to the setting.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in the loving memory of my paternal grandmother, Geraldine Knight Blake, affectionately known as, Momo. Even in your absence you remain an inspiration in my daily life and work.

I further dedicate this work to my late maternal grandfather, John Calvin Berry, lovingly called, Daddy John. Your dream for his children's, children to further their education was a gentle quiet reminder to see this work through to the end.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACIP Adult Children of Incarcerated Parents

CIP Children of Incarcerated Parents

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The topic of mass incarceration, the incarcerated, and correctional conditions has sparked a wide range of conversations, movements, and policies in the lives of college students and higher education institutions across the country (Assefa & Ortiz, 2019; Parry, 2018). One of many catalysts is due to a significant number of publications through college and university common book reading programs. Campus-wide book selections have introduced students and professionals to books like New York Times best seller and 2019 film, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson (2014) and most notable, *The New Jim Crow: In the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (2010). The authors discuss race relations, socioeconomic inequality, and criminalization in America and its consequences on the criminal justice system. College and universities have also hosted documentary screenings of Netflix's 2016 Oscar nominated "13th" by Ava DuVernay, synthesizing the intersections of law, history, criminal justice, ethics, policy and African American studies, to a challenging discourse about the American prison industrial complex: past to present (McNary, 2017). Also, of importance, at the 43rd annual Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference, a town hall was held on *the College Attainment for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women of Color & Girls of Color*. This event was the first of its kind inspired by the conference theme "Envisioning the Woke Academy." More interestingly, many of these initiatives are being led and inspired by college students who have experienced parental incarceration. In some cases, their activism to reduce/end mass incarceration has encouraged their disclosure about their parental incarceration narratives (Assefa & Ortiz, 2019). With these efforts there is clearly a demonstrated effort in higher education to explore

challenging, and at times, uncomfortable discourse on the American prison system and system-impacted individuals. However, there is little understanding on how college students affected by parental incarceration negotiate their invisible identity in the campus environment. Considering the heightened political and social climate surrounding the criminal justice system and system-impacted individuals, there is a need now more than ever to understand the experiences of college students with incarcerated parents.

Regarding children of incarcerated parents (CIP) education, research across multiple disciplines have confirmed that CIP are at greater risk for academic and behavioral challenges than their peers with non-incarcerated parents (Nichols & Loper, 2012; Trice & Brewster; 2015). However, scholarship on CIP are heavily focused on the challenges they may face in early childhood and adolescents (Nichols & Loper, 2012; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Trice & Brewster; 2015). While development is considered critical during the formative years, the absence of educational persistence and resilience exclusive to primary and secondary education is bleak. Given such a narrow focus, less is known about CIP and their experiences in post-secondary education (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016). In their study, Hagan and Foster (2012) indicated that children of incarcerated parents (CIP) are only thought to comprise 2-15% of college graduates. Though these numbers do not account for a large portion of the overall US undergraduate graduation rate, at present, there is no central way to map the enrollment, progress, or completion of ACIP in any educational setting (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). However, in spite of the bleak educational projections, not excluding other contextual factors, some CIP overcome their circumstances and fare well socially and academically (Luther, 2016).

Ann Adalist-Estrin remarked that traditional research on CIP have generally gathered information from existing structures that support vulnerable populations. Further, she suggests that future research contributions should consider “less obvious avenues, such as by hosting focus groups at libraries, educational institutions or health clinics...” (Dandrea, 2017, p. 2) therefore, offering a more distinct sample and new diverse perspectives to the literature. In regard to who is most affected, mass incarceration and the sequential consequences disproportionately affect those who are economically disadvantaged and communities of color (Arditti et al., 2003; Pfaff, J. 2017; Sentencing Project, 2016; Wakefield & Wildeman; 2014).

The detrimental effects of parental incarceration have been widely addressed in academic literature (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Akesson et al., 2012; Bocknek et al., 2009; Clopton & East, 2008; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Hairston, 2007; Nichols & Loper, 2012; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Trice & Brewster; 2015; Siegel, 2011; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). While understanding risks is important and should not be ignored, scholars acknowledge there is greater need for research to address what positively contributes to long-term interventions and outcomes among this population, particularly as it relates to their educational experiences and pathways in secondary institutions (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016; Luther, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the college experiences of students at four-year universities who experienced parental incarceration. Generally, children who experience parental incarceration have been widely viewed as a group not readily seeking

higher education (Pierre, 2015). This study further explored how factors in the campus environment shaped their invisible identity and the disclosure process.

Research Questions

The design of this study was informed by one central research question: How do students who had or have an incarcerated parent experienced their college campuses and made meaning of their invisible identity? To address this focus, the following secondary research questions further guide this study.

1. How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their invisible identity?
2. What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their invisible identity development?
3. What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their invisible identity with others in the college campus?

Justification of the Study

This research study is most timely to higher education and can best be understood on a national, institutional, and individual level. Over the last several years, the nation has faced a heightened state of social and political unrest. Public awareness and advocacy across the country have advanced scholarly research on issues stemming from the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, immigrant detainment, and criminal justice reform in the US. As an overarching theme related to criminal (in)justice and its consequences, research attention given to parental incarceration is now described as a common American childhood experience (Wildman et al., 2018). Because colleges and universities are described as a microcosm of the larger society, they often reflect the same

ideals and expectations observed in the communities in which they operate (Sweet, 2001). As a result of nationwide calls to action concerning criminal justice in the US, a number of state, federal, and university policies (i.e. First Step, Second Chance Act, Ban the Box policies, public school zero tolerance policies, higher education prison divergent funding etc.), coupled by public awareness, have contributed to campus dialogue and activism around educational policies for both those indirectly and directly impacted by the criminal justice system (Assefa & Ortiz, 2019; Barnett & Meiners, 2016; Jaschick, 2018; Pettit, 2019). A more active approach has also contributed to educators understanding of illicit biases and the school-to-prison nexus (Stumbo, 2019). Historically, in the US, a college education remains a stepping-stone to upward social and economic mobility. Toward this end, researchers have indicated that post-secondary education is one pathway of intervention to lessen the stigmatization of parental incarceration (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016). This study then provided some context into the college experiences of ACIP while also examining wider societal issues that may shape their associated invisible identity development.

On an institutional level, this research considered a group often overlooked among the diverse student populations enrolled and completing higher education. While college completion rates for ACIP are significantly lower in comparison to peers with non-incarcerated parents (Hagan & Foster, 2015), there are many variables that can encourage or impede college retention and completion for students, regardless of their childhood background. Decades of student development research indicates that colleges and universities have long understood the value of diversity and are therefore encouraged to create spaces that welcome all student experiences (Evans et al., 2010). This study can

be used as a reference for executive administrators, practitioners, and researchers to better inform diversity policies and how to best implement these initiatives through culturally responsive pedagogy, programming, and institutional policies and practices. This study can further be shared with organizations working with this population and institutions who choose to establish and support dedicated services for this population and other invisible student populations. Echoing Lori Patton (2011) in her seminal work on Black gay men in higher education, working with ACIP in college indicates the “reality is that few institutions have disseminated enough information to adequately educate members of the academic community about the experiences and needs” (p. 78).

On an individual level, this research amplified the voices of ACIP college experiences in their own words. Essentially, this study offered a new light on a population overshadowed by their parent’s circumstances and overlooked in terms of their educational resilience. Though attaining a college degree is not the only way to assess ACIP success, similarly to previous research (Luther, 2016) this study takes a positive approach in exploring the educational experiences of ACIP. Centering the focus on ACIPs willingness to disclose their invisible identity and also illuminating what promotes and hinders their college experiences. This study then gave power to ACIP and sought to provide a first-hand account of their college experiences through their narratives.

Theoretical Framework

This research study adopted Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems theory (BEST, 1977, 1979, 1993) to illuminate the complex and multidimensional influences that coexist between ACIP invisible identity and the campus environment in which they participate.

BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) has been widely applied to early childhood development scholarship (Arditti, 2005; Siegel, 2011; Wildeman et al., 2018). Given the connection between developmental effects and early intervention, scholars who study CIPs have increasingly used BEST across a number of disciplines to understand and examine behavioral and mental outcomes (Wildeman et. al., 2018). Aside from BEST use on CIPs, to date, there are no student development theories that specifically incorporate the experiences of ACIP in higher education settings, especially as it relates to issues concerning invisible identities. The premise of BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) suggests the interactions that take place between an individual and their developing environment should not be understood in isolation but through various systems in which individuals may interact. BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) further asserts that interactions that take place within these interrelated dynamics such as family, work, cultural, political and socioeconomic systems cannot be ignored in understanding how an individual develops over time (Backonja, et al., 2015; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Torres et al., 2009).

Renn and Arnold (2003) specifically applied BEST (1993) to understanding college students' identity development. Like most college students, ACIPs bring their own values, experiences, and perspectives to the campus environment. These individual characteristics shape the context that in turn influence the process of student identity development (Evans et al., 2010). Because college campuses resemble larger societal norms, students are constantly shaped by external forces and the exchanges that happen among them (Renn & Arnold, 2003; Sweet, 2001). The use of BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) provided a platform that acknowledged ACIP as valuable contributors in shaping their own identity. Additionally, BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) considered other forces students

may encounter in the campus community that challenged or promoted growth and development (Renn 2003, 2004) particularly as it relates to their associated invisible identity. This framework along with accompanying theorists is described in detail in relation to higher education student development and how it can inform the invisible identity of ACIP in Chapter 2.

Limitations

The current study was not without limitations. First, given the population was considered hard-to-reach, the scope of the research study was limited to only a few existing studies, particularly as it pertains to college students. Second, given that the researcher was not a member of the population, gaining access to participants was heavily reliant on trusted gatekeepers and referrals from participants in this study. Third, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant. Following each individual interview, participants were asked to respond to a written prompt which only resulted in one response. While each interview provided in depth data, responses from all participants in this study through written responses would have added to the richness of the data. Fourth, given that each participants' development and worldviews prior to college are diverse and multilayered, the sample is not a representation of all ACIP college student experiences. Lastly, participants in this study were enrolled in or graduates of both private and public universities in different states in the US. Thus, the campus culture and region of the country participants resided in may have affected the participants' individual experiences.

Definition of Terms

- Associated invisible identity - also referred to as “invisible social identities” (Clair et al., 2005, p. 78). A social identity that characterizes a person or group by a non-visible identity through association of a stigmatized person (Clair et al., 2005).
- ACIP - abbreviation for Adult Children of Incarcerated Parents. Refers to individuals over the age of 18 who experienced parental incarceration to include jail and/or prison at some point during childhood (Luther, 2016)
- CIP - abbreviation for Children of Incarcerated Parents. Refers to a child under the age of 18 who experienced parental incarceration to include jail and/or prison (Luther, 2016)
- System-impacted – is defined “a person who is legally, economically, or familial affected in a negative way by the incarceration of a close relative. System-impacted also includes people who have been arrested or and/or convicted without incarceration” (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2020, Our Mission section)
- Stigmatization – “the act of treating someone or something unfairly by publicly disapproving of him, her, or it” (Hornby, 1995).

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter One introduces readers to the topic under study, explains the purpose of and justification for the study, lists the research questions, and defines terms that are common throughout the dissertations. Chapter Two will begin with an overview of the theoretical framework that will guide this study followed by a brief historical depiction

on the growth of mass incarceration and criminalization in the US. Although this study is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the American carceral state or the use of punishment, it is imperative to expand upon the complexities and multiplicity of factors that have led to socio-historical issues related to parental incarceration and factors that have given way to the unique experiences for some CIP/ACIP in context to the overarching framework. Chapter Two will then sync relevant literature concerning the educational experiences of CIP students that extends to ACIP completing higher education for this study. Additionally, Chapter Two will expand upon appropriate theories to best support understanding the study of ACIP students' invisible identity development in the college campus environment.

Chapter Three will outline the methodological design that will best complement the completion of this study and will further address in detail the methodology, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and will provide the researcher's positionality.

Chapter Four will present the findings of this study with excerpts taken from the participants interviews and written prompts.

Chapter Five will begin with discussion to include responses to the study's research questions. Lastly, implications for higher education and recommendations for future research will be provided to conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Having discussed the background and outlined the study's purpose in Chapter 1, this chapter will elaborate on the theoretical framework and review of literature that will connect back to goals of the study. Chapter 2 will begin by discussing the use for an ecological lens that will frame this study. Next, the chapter will provide a thorough review on BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) that will serve as the primary lens in which this phenomenon was understood. Then, a review of literature beginning with a brief history on the rise in mass incarceration. Finally, the chapter concludes with a draw on perspectives in identity development that will serve as an integrative approach to further help explain student development of ACIP college students.

An Ecological Approach

Scholarships that have provided insight on the educational experiences and academic outcomes of ACIP students is limited to a few disciplines in Sociology (Luther, 2016) Criminology (Hagan & Foster, 2012) and Psychology; including developmental and family inequalities (Wildeman et al., 2018). Researchers suggest the use of integrative theories that include more diverse populations will better help understand their developmental experiences in educational settings (Dandrea, 2017; Luther, 2016; Siegel, 2011; Wildeman et al., 2018). Several scholarships have used ecological approaches to examine populations traditionally overlooked in the campus environment (Fish & Syed, 2018; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Stebleton, 2011). A significant aspect to this study is that there are presently no student developmental theories that specifically address ACIP in post-secondary education. This study does not attempt to advance a new

theory of ACIP college students and, although BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) has been applied in earlier scholarships on CIP (Siegel, 2011), a need still remains for development theories that specifically account for college students that have experienced parental incarceration.

In the most fundamental sense, ecological frameworks assume that development cannot solely depend on individual attributes, but must also consider the environmental forces in which the individual is developing (Evans et al., 2010). In the context of higher education, Evans and colleagues (2010) asserted that ecological models “can be considered integrative in the ways that they account for multifaceted contexts for the development of the whole person” (p. 159). The authors further provide three primary ecological approaches for higher education professionals to consider: human, developmental, and campus ecology (Evans et al., 2010). Considering the varied experiences that students bring to the campus environment and the role of context in shaping an individual’s identity, an ecological approach is useful for theory and practice (Renn & Arnold, 2003; Torres et al., 2009).

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

One of the most widely cited ecological approaches is based on the scholarship of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977). Drawing from the work of his mentor, Kurt Lewin, BEST (1977) went through continuous revisions since its first inception until Bronfenbrenner’s death in 2005. In its initial application, BEST (1977) was primarily viewed from a psychology lens used to understand human (child) development (Arditti, 2012). It has since been broadly applied to other fields specifically to address the effects of children

impacted by parental incarceration including criminology (Hagan & Foster, 2012) and sociology (Wildeman, 2009). In regard to education, scholars have applied Bronfenbrenner's theory to examine the effects of parental incarceration on school behavior (Cho, 2011; Murray et al., 2012) performance, (Nichols et al., 2016) and school inequalities (Haskins, 2017) during primary and secondary education. This study will be the first attempt in which BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) is applied to understanding the experiences of ACIP development in post-secondary education. It will draw specifically from BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) original works and key players Renn and Arnold's (2003) reconceptualization of BEST (1977, 1979, 1993). The use of BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) as applied by Renn and Arnold (2003) can help higher education professionals analyze the person-environment interactions (processes) through the interrelated systems while simultaneously understanding invisible identity development (outcome) that some ACIP may come to experience in college.

In its earliest introduction Bronfenbrenner (1977) asserted that development could best be understood through four interrelated systems that came to be best known as micro- meso-, exo-, and macro-systems. Bronfenbrenner (1977) concluded that "the ecological environment is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (p. 514). The four systems collectively constructed an individual's developmental ecology. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) later added the chrono system which accounted for changes that occur to both individuals and the environment over time. Earlier scholarship using BEST (1977) were primarily centered on the context component of an individual's ecology. Bronfenbrenner (1977) continued

to reassess his ecological model and concluded that human development includes both biological and psychological factors that contribute to personal growth and development.

Due to Bronfenbrenner's understanding of both individual and environmental influences, BEST (1993) was later refined with more consideration given to four primary components: "process, person, context, and time" - PPCT (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p. 251). As concluded in Renn and Arnold's (2003) study on college student peer culture, taken together, PPCT and the interactions that happen within each system can advance or prohibit development as it operates from the inner layer and expands to the outer level (Evans et. al, 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). The remainder of the chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of how each component may influence development in the campus environment. The references are potential experiences of college students who have experienced parental incarceration. The examples should not be considered exhaustive or exclusive to every college student who has experienced parental incarceration.

Process

As Bronfenbrenner's (1993) theory evolved, he consistently contended that in order to achieve development individuals must routinely be engaged in activities that increasingly become complex and simultaneously foster mutual and emotional attachment over time (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Such processes can include human, symbolic, and interpersonal interactions. Student affairs research compares proximal processes as those that align with the most notable scholarships of Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Sanford's (1966) scholarship involving student challenge and

support (Evans et al, 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). For this study, students who have experienced parental incarceration, participation in the *Process* component might be demonstrated by joining a student organization that specifically supports students with incarcerated parents, challenging misconceptions about the criminal justice system or system-impacted individuals in classroom discussions. While these interactions are specific examples to support a better understanding of this study. Evans et al., (2010) pointed out that the way student development is exhibited in practice during the process component may look similar for any student. These examples offer a unique developmental experience that provides insight on how ACIPs associated invisible identity can be shaped in the campus environment.

Person

The person component involves individual attributes and personal experiences that ACIP's bring to the campus environment. These characteristics might include identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and past experiences prior to enrolling in college (Renn, 2003). Other less visible identifiers such as political and religious beliefs, academic aptitude, family structure (i.e. single, divorced, two-parent, same-sex parent, blended), home stability/instability background (i.e. homelessness, foster care, incarcerated parent, immigrant status) (Clair et al, 2005; Renn, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1993) referred to these attributes as "*developmentally instigative characteristics*" (Renn & Arnold; p. 268). It is here that Sanford's (1966) scholarship involving student challenge and support are more evident. Similarly, classical theorists like Banning and Kaiser (1974,) Tinto (1987, 1993), and Weidman (1989) who offer insight on the person-

environment fit (interactions) parallel Bronfenbrenner (1993) developmental investigative characteristics (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Within the person component, Bronfenbrenner (1993) asserted that “developmentally instigative characteristics do not determine the course of development; rather, they may be thought of as ‘putting a spin’ on a body in motion. The effect of the spin depends on the other forces, and resources, in the total ecological system” (p. 14). Drawing from Sanford’s (1960) original scholarship on challenge and support in college student development, Renn (2003) pointed out that these encounters point to the “environmental balance of forces (challenge) and resources (support) in the developmental process” (p. 387). Taken together, this approach positions student affairs professionals to look beyond traditional student demographics to better understand student development (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Particularly, as it relates to socially constructed visible identities and understanding some invisible identities (Clair et al., 2005). Particularly, for ACIP, the meaning and placement that individuals give to one aspect of their identity (i.e. individual attributes), coupled by their interactions in the campus environment, (i.e. internal stigma, anticipated stigma, disclosure reactions, etc) functions, in part, as developmentally instigative characteristics that students bring to the campus environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003; Torres et al., 2009) and, can provide insight on how ACIP may make decisions about self-disclosure.

Context

The context component is comprised of four systems that make up an individual's (student) ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) contended that development could best be understood within the context of these nested systems. The four systems are characterized as the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, and *macrosystem*. An important aspect within the context component is that Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) accounted for individual (student) development at the core of the model. As example, recognizing that no one experience is homogenous, by placing the developing student at the core accounts for varied interactions, responses, and developmental outcomes. The successive systems are then nested around the student, moving outward from the center. Each system represents the varied forces that shape the developing student (i.e. identity) through interactions and in context to these larger interactions that are shaped by external forces (Evans et al., 2010; Renn, 2003).

Microsystem. The first contextual system in the ecological model is the *microsystem* (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979). The microsystem is the innermost level and contains the developing individual. The microsystem represents the most active layer in which the individual is directly connected to on a daily basis. Traditional proximal contexts include home, school, peer groups, and religious organizations. For college campuses, Renn (2003) indicated the microsystem is closely linked to Astin's (1984) student involvement theory because of the interactions that happen between faculty, students, and staff. ACIP college student's potential influences in the microsystem may

be similar to students with non-incarcerated parents and could include college classes, place of residence, faculty/staff interactions, student peer groups, and family life.

Mesosystem. The next level in the context component is the *mesosystem* (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979). Mesosystems are essentially a collection of multiple microsystems. Simultaneous interactions take place across individual microsystems that reinforce the bidirectional interactions within the mesosystem. These forces can provide either additional or limited support to students. Additionally, these interactions can challenge the messages students receive that either promote or prohibit identity development (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Research on the effects of parental incarceration is associated with stigmatization in educational settings (Luther, 2015). Previous research has also indicated that college is one pathway to positive development and to minimize social exclusion among this student population (Hagan & Foster, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2015) As a result, ACIP college students may encounter interactions about having a parent incarcerated in one microsystem (college sociology class on social conflict and criminal offenders) that may be supported or challenged in another (campus-based service dedicated to ACIP college students). At the same time, these influences continue to converge and conflict with messages from family members, roommates, mentors, off-campus support groups, or peers where ACIP college student may interact more frequently (Renn, 2003). In Renn's (2003) study on mixed-raced students she noted that Bronfenbrenner's scholarship explored in higher education settings is also useful for examining how micro- and mesosystems may merge and conflict across campus institutions. For example, mesosystem for ACIP college students may support and

challenge students in different ways depending on the varied institutional types (PWI, HBCUs, single-sex, religious). Renn's (2003) study concluded that college and university campuses create a complex environment to examine Bronfenbrenner's (1993) "conflicting and converging micro- and mesosystem values" (p. 389) to understand identity development among marginalized populations like ACIP college students.

Exosystem Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) defined the next level outward in the context component as the *exosystem*. The exosystem accounts for influences in the environment that affect the developing individual indirectly. Interactions in the campus environment in the exosystem may act as college and university policies and practices, federal or state policies, parents'/guardians' workplace (Evans et. al., 2010, Renn & Arnold, 2009). Like many other student's, decisions about post-secondary educational opportunities are partly driven by access to financial capital. Anecdotal research indicates that a growing number of organizations have established scholarships to provide financial support to students affected by parental incarceration in college (National Resource Center for Families and Children of the Incarcerated, n.d.). Federal grants or state funding (i.e. community grants, non-profit fundraising) that support the continuation of these services and programs may influence the lives of ACIP college students who may receive financial assistance from these initiatives (National Resource Center for Families and Children of the Incarcerated, n.d.). While a small number of ACIP students participate in these programs, effects may include loss of grant-funding, students' ability to maintain eligibility for continuous funding, worry related to financial decisions, taking on additional work to cover remaining cost of tuition, etc. College and university

investments in private prisons and the prison industrial complex serve as another exosystem. For CIP college students, these investments may place some students in juxtapositions to choose between their college of choice and attaining a college degree from an institution that helps support the prison industry (Ortiz, 2020). Prisons also serve as an exosystem; policies related to family visitation, communications, and notifications may effect the daily lives of ACIP students. Particularly for ACIPs, the cost associated with maintaining communication with an incarcerated parent (i.e. travel, phone calls, mailing care packages, etc), anxiety associated with visiting parents in prison facilities while enrolled in college (i.e. prison lockdowns and closures), limited notification systems associated with the health and safety of their parent's incarceration (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016) are just a few examples of the exosystem in practice. Thus, the interactions that occur in the exosystem allow for the inclusion of diverse student experiences and the inclusion of external forces that are beyond the control of the student but may potentially effect development in the campus environment (Evans et. al., 2010).

Macrosystem. The final and largest level in the context component is represented by the *macrosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Within a given macrosystem, individual and group expectations are embedded in social and cultural norms, which in turn, influence actions and development in the mirco, meso, and exosystems. The macrosystem is the overarching structure that influences the other inner nested levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1993). As it relates to ACIP college students, macrosystem may contend that ACIP are not students seeking higher education because they are more likely to also become offenders if their parents were incarcerated (Conway & Jones,

2015). Now more than in the past, research supports the role that higher education institutions have come to play in providing support to students that have been traditionally marginalized (Evans et. al., 2010), to include students that may identify with “hidden” populations. Conversely, cultural and social factors in the macrosystem can often perpetuate one-dimensional portrayals (Renn, 1998) of system-impacted individuals and outcomes for their children that are reinforced in microsystem and across mesosystem contexts.

Time

The time component is represented by the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Though it is not considered a nested level, it acts as a liner measure that follows transitions in life. The chronosystem conveys the element of time by observing how events occur in the mirco-, meso-, and marco-systems. Time is considered an essential component that interacts with the process, person, and context which in turn influences development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). In higher education, time may shape enrollment, the institution (i.e. geographic location, institutional type, institutional values/norms etc...), and the external culture of the institution (i.e. national and global influences on institution/higher ed) (Evans et. al, 2010).

As an example, during the early 1980’s ACIP college students would have entered college during a heightened political climate surrounding tough on crime and the war on drugs policy era. Today, national attention given to decades of injustices in the criminal justice system has increased awareness prompting a criminal justice reform era (Alexander, 2010). Traditional stigmas and stereotypes against system-impacted

individuals remain prevalent in society (Berkely-Underground Scholars, 2020; Wakefield & Wilderman, 2014; Wildeman et al., 2018). Criminal justice policies continue to evolve and research on offenders and their families have received more attention since college attendance during the 1980s and 1990s. As noted in Renn's (2003, 2004) scholarship these changes create shifts in the macrosystem such as historical and political forces that evolve over time. In turn, these shifts influence proximal processes within the context (i.e. microsystem) in which students in this case, students develop and may receive messages about their identity (Renn, 2003, 2004).

Time might also be observed through a sequence of events that take place over an individual's life course. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) understood that individuals can share the same experience; but a shared experience is not indicative of the same responses and outcomes. Because development is directly linked to time, the factors associated with having a parent incarcerated will also have different effects on student experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). For example, time takes into consideration the age of the student when their parent was incarcerated, how long their parent was incarcerated, and/or how often the student had contact with their incarcerated parent, if at all. The sequence of these events that accumulate over time cannot be ignored in context to BEST (1993). The time component then considers sociohistorical and individual responses to development through the life cycle to include childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1993). As it related to this study more specifically the time component explored how ACIP identity potentially changed and

evolved over time as students engaged in more complex interactions in the campus environment.

Applying BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) offers a holistic understanding of individual experiences while considering the varied social and cultural forces that can influence development (Torres et al., 2016). Although BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) has not been applied to ACIP college students, it has previously been used to understand parental incarceration effects on minor children in educational settings (Seigel, 2011). Further, the use of Renn and Arnold's (2003) reconceptualization of BEST provides context for its application in higher education. Though BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) nor Renn and Arnold (2003) focus on invisible identity development, their scholarship provides insight on individual attributes - visible and invisible- and the unique experiences that potentially promote and prohibit development in the campus environment. For ACIP specifically, BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) uncovers the process in which they make meaning of their invisible identity as college students and how it has evolved over time.

As noted, BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) will serve as the overarching lens that will guide this study. Having outlined a comprehensive review of its components and application to ACIP college students' invisible identity development, the section that follows will provide insight into the background context that has further shaped parental incarcerations influence on educational experiences. This section will address (a) the rise of mass incarceration in the US, (b) the prevalence of parental incarceration in the US, (c) categorizing children of incarcerated parents and (d) emerging literature on hidden population in the campus environment.

The Rise of Mass Incarceration in the US

Given the current carceral state in the US and its implications for children and adults of incarcerated parents perspectives on the rise of mass incarceration provides a context from which to understand the sociohistorical and political climate of parental incarceration and some students' decision to self-disclose their associated invisible identity with others in the campus environment.

For the last four decades scholars and researchers have continued to dispute the causes of mass incarceration in the US. There is some agreement that the rising rate of mass incarceration began to grow substantially in the late 1970s, following a series of policies that enforced harsher sentencing for offenders (Alexander, 2010; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). These changes have come to mark the US as the world's frontrunner in mass incarceration (Enns, 2016). The US accounts for only 5 percent of the world's population, but also accounts for nearly 25 percent of the world's incarcerated (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). As described by the National Research Council (2014) "the growth in incarceration rates in the US over the past 40 years is historically unprecedented and internationally unique" (p. 2).

Between 1973 and 2009, state and federal correctional facilities estimated an incarcerated population increase from approximately 200,000 to 1.5 million (National Research Council, 2014). More current estimates by the *Prison Policy Initiative* noted that nearly 2.3 million people are under some form of US corrections (i.e. arrest, incarceration, parole, or probation). Breaking down these numbers even further *The*

Sentencing Project estimated that this represents a 500% increase over the last four years (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019).

Political Influence on Mass Incarceration

While most states began to experience incarceration declines by 2010, it was between 1980 and the early 1990s the rate of arrest and convictions was driven by a heightened political climate. Policy choices advancing the common agendas like *Tough on Crime* and the *War on Drugs* pitted crime and race relations at the center of US public policy and public opinion (Alexander, 2010). These policies, established at the height of the crack epidemic, underscored the racial, social, and political landscape in the US. Research has indicated that much of the pressure was backlash because of the gains being made on the hills of the Civil Rights Movement namely busing, desegregation, and affirmative action (Alexander, 2010; Steinberg, 1998; Wilson, 1996). Further, scholarship asserts that Republican party members found that a public campaign focused on crime, crack, and welfare attracted more working middle and poor class white voters to separate from the Democratic New Deal Coalition to join the Republican party (Alexander, 2010).

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Alexander (2010) argues that the war on drugs agenda was not considered a response to rising drug crime but a response to racial politics most apparent among poor, black communities. These changes remarkably increased funding to federal agencies enforcing antidrug and anticrime programs, gave way to state mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and for the first time, introduced longer prison sentences for minor violations and repeat offenders (Alexander, 2010).

Historically, one of the most widely documented examples of these policy changes was the powder cocaine versus crack sentencing disparity. Established in 1986 by way of the Anti- Drug Abuse Act (ADAA), the 100-to-1 drug quantity indicated the amount of crack versus powder cocaine the law designated to guarantee mandatory minimum sentencing. In 2015, the United States Sentencing Commission Report concluded that under ADAA, five grams of crack cocaine would, unjustly, warrant the same minimum sentence as 500 grams of powder cocaine (United States Sentencing Commission Report, 2015). Paradoxically, crack and cocaine are essentially the same drug with two stark differences. The first and more obvious difference is the form of the product. Second, the racial and social-class differences between sellers and users of the two products. Crack was largely known to have more distribution and consumption among poor communities of color, while the powder substance was considered a “higher” end drug of choice mostly distributed to and snorted by more affluent whites (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006).

The United States Sentencing Commission has since concluded that Blacks were more harshly punished by way of arrest, convictions, and sentencing, as opposed to Whites, despite the fact that studies have shown that Whites used and sold illegal drugs (including crack) at the same, if not, at higher rates (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006). Most scholars do not refute that possession was a clear violation of the law. Nor would many debate that crack was in fact considered a public health concern. What warranted the most attention was the realization that contemporary incarceration practices were maintained in response to racial politics. The result of these race-based policies further

imposed the scrutiny of, stigmatization on, and criminalization of racial minorities, more specifically Black men into a permanent second-class status, not unlike those experienced during the Jim Crow Era (Alexander, 2010). As such, Alexander (2010) argues that a closer examination of the current criminal justice system revealed that there are more African Americans under some form of criminal justice confinement than there were slaves in 1850.

Reflecting on the disparate treatment of minorities and more specifically, the inequalities and racial polarization in the criminal justice system, it is not hard to miss the historical practices among marginalized groups embedded in the American education system (Knaphus-Soran, 2017). Examining these two social systems has implications toward the educational pathways and experiences in post-secondary institutions that could further provide insight on how adult children of incarcerated parents (ACIP) negotiate their identity (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016). Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) asserted that the general lack of attention and concern about CIP in literature is because it is widely perceived as a non-White issue. While there are racial implications on the study of ACIPs' college experiences, this study will focus on the identity development for students among this population.

Mass Media Messaging on Perceptions of Mass Incarceration

Mass media has long played a role in shaping the idea of the American dream from everything Americans have come to purchase (i.e. consumerism), value (i.e. familial support, religious/spiritual practices), and believe (i.e. ideologies, political affiliation). As such, political rhetoric to rid the country of a perceived increasing crime epidemic

contributed to the narrative on crime and punishment (Alexander, 2010). In some cases, the increased fear was heightened by the media. Most notably, Alexander (2010) eloquently states that “most Americans only come to ‘know’ about the people cycling in and out of the prisons through fictional police dramas, music videos, gangster rap, and ‘true’ accounts of ghetto experience on the evening news” (p. 178). Further she noted that these images left deep seated falsehoods about violence, drugs, and the public’s perception about who drug dealers and users are, and this forever changed the landscape of criminal “injustice” in America (Alexander, 2010). For example, as it concerns policing, studies consistently show that people of color are more likely to be stopped at more frequent rates, and experience use of force at higher rates than Whites (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019; Sentencing Project 2016). Further, as it concerns the courts, research indicates prosecutors are more likely to pursue mandatory minimum sentencing for people of color. As oppose to other options available to Whites charged with the same offense (Foss, 2016; National Drug Alliance, 2019). And most evident, as it concerns corrections, there is a disproportionate number of African American males and rising numbers of African American women and people of color (i.e. Latinx) presently involved in some reprimand in the criminal justice system (Sawyer and Wagner, 2019; Sentencing Project 2016).

In regard to the perceptions of CIP and criminality in America, Conway and Jones (2015) point to previous literature in which it is referenced that children who have experienced an incarcerated parent are “seven out of ten” and “six times more likely” (p. 5) to also be involved in the criminal justice system. However, their study argues that

these claims are unsupported. The authors suggest such claims further perpetuate negative mass messaging about CIP/ACIP. Conway and Jones (2015) acknowledge that CIPs are at a higher risk than children with non-incarcerated parents to experience interactions with the criminal justice system, but parental incarceration should not be used in isolation of other contributing factors. Further, the authors also assert that a higher risk does not preclude that CIPs will interact with the criminal justice system at all, and in some cases, many do not have a history of criminal justice involvement. Conway and Jones (2015) conclude that the dissemination of more comprehensive and appropriately informed data concerning CIP and long-term outcomes for ACIP would begin to help minimize negative preconceived perceptions about their actual experiences. Additionally, through the stories of ACIP college students in this study, this begins to inform the academic community about their educational pathways less often noted in literature.

Although race, criminality, and the American criminal justice system were the primary focus of this study, it is critical not to omit historically who has been most affected by mass incarceration in the US. This context also provides an understanding of the social and cultural implications that have preceded the landscape of educational institutions, dominant student perceptions on mass incarceration, and the educational experiences of those directly impacted by these circumstances. The underlying issue of race in America is one of many factors that further contributes to the dominant narratives and societal messaging about who attends and completes college.

Contemporary Influences on Mass Incarceration in the US

Since the 1990s, the unprecedented growth of mass incarceration has drawn attention from activists, advocates, and policymakers not only for offenders, but for their families, children, and those in the community at large (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Political consciousness concerning this shift is evident through several legislative acts directly related to incarcerated individuals and offender reentry. For example, the Fair Sentencing Act (2010) altered statutory penalties and eliminated mandatory minimums for possession of crack cocaine. Also, the First Step Act addressed prison and sentencing reform, and the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018 provided additional funding to state and local organizations and governments to enhance offender reentry programs and services for federal offenders (Sinclair, 2018; United States Sentencing Commission, 2015).

On April 29, 2015 Barack Obama was the first sitting U.S. President to visit a federal correctional facility. Apparently moved by that visit, the following year Obama, through a Presidential Memorandum, established the Reentry Council. The main the goals of the Council are to further expand awareness of federal resources for those in the system, initiate new programs, and implement programs and policies to support ex-offenders' return to their communities with meaningful contributions for a second chance after being directly impacted by the criminal justice system (Federal Interagency Reentry Council, 2016). One essential focus and challenge of the Reentry Council is to provide intentional strategies that promote success for CIP and their families. Specifically, understanding the unique needs of CIPs, to dismiss myths and stigmas, and improving

adverse outcomes has further driven a public education platform for previously incarcerated individuals and their children and families (Federal Interagency Reentry Council, 2016; Johnston & Sullivan, 2016). It is clear that there have been significant strides to approve legislation and policies to improve the pathways for offenders' rights. Additionally, national attention has been given to their children since the White House workshop on parental incarceration in the United States (Federal Interagency Reentry Council, 2016) and mainstream media initiatives, like Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration on Sesame Street (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2014). These efforts are welcomed actions by the federal government, and show potential to address misinformation about CIP and improve their chances for success. Yet, much of these actions are focused on young children.

Far less attention has been given to young adult children of incarcerated parents (ACIP) who choose to enroll in institutions of higher education to improve their chances for success. Poehlmann and colleagues (2010) identified the need for scholarship that examines and reflects outcomes for CIP through adulthood across a range of viable outcomes. Given the increasing number of children affected by parental incarceration each year, and the rising diversity of student populations entering post-secondary institutions, it is critical now more than ever, that researchers and practitioners understand the experiences and needs among this population in a way that responsibly reflects appropriately disseminated information about their lived college experiences.

The Prevalence of Parental Incarceration in the US

While the causes of mass incarceration in the U.S. remain varied, the collateral consequences inevitably alter the lives of the families and children left behind (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). In 2010, an estimated 1.2 million people with minor children were incarcerated. Among them, fathers accounted for 1.1 million and mothers accounted for 120,000 (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Though the full scope of children affected by parental incarceration is unknown, a recent Annie E. Casey policy report, entitled *A Shared Sentence: the devastating toll of parental incarceration on kids, families, and communities* (2016), estimated that 5.1 million children in the U.S. (1 in 14) had, or are currently experiencing, a parent(s) incarceration at some point during childhood. In examining the totality of the criminal justice system – arrest, pre-trial detention, sentencing, probation, and parole - incarceration is only one layer of separation children and families may face during their interaction with the criminal justice system (Martin, 2017). Because there is no one entity responsible for collecting data on CIP, data are highly dependent on the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), state and federal prisoner surveys and incarcerated parents' willingness to self-identity their parental status (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Equally, the BJS excludes the estimated number of 700,000 parents being held daily in county jails, yet to be sentenced and parents in community correctional facilities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). Given this context, current data on parental incarceration is considered conservative; true estimates are believed to be much higher (Anne E. Casey Foundation 2016; Martin, 2017).

CIP Demographics

It is well documented that communities of color are disproportionately affected by mass incarceration, particularly Black men from financially disadvantaged communities (Pew Charitable Trust, 2010; Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Given less than ideal methods for collecting data and the sensitive nature of reporting, the number of children with incarcerated parents is inconclusive. However, reflecting on the communities that mass incarceration most generally impacts, a more thorough examination of BOJ estimates also mirrors that overwhelmingly, racial minorities and children living in poverty are more likely to experience parental incarceration (Annie E. Casey Report, 2016; Martin, 2017; National Resource Center for Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2014; Wildman et al., 2018).

Like other childhood experiences, having a parent who is incarcerated is not a homogenous experience. However, it has been generally documented that most CIP on average reside in a household with a young, single parent and live in a financially disadvantaged community of color, with little to no education (Annie E. Casey Report, 2016). More specifically, in 2014 the National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated (2014) estimated that 1 in 9 African American, 1 in 28 Hispanic, and 1 in 57 white children have an incarcerated parent in the US. Although data for American Indian children are less available on a national scale, a similar pattern indicates that in Oklahoma and the Dakotas, American Indian children are more likely to have a parent incarcerated than white children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016).

While there has been a consistent number of incarcerated African American fathers, more recent data indicates an increasing number of incarcerated mothers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). On average, CIPs are younger than ten years of age when their parent is incarcerated. At the time of the Casey Foundation study (2016), a higher percentage of minors had parents in state correctional facilities (20%) compared to the federal system (15%).

Common Observed Effects of Parental Incarceration

Studies on parental incarceration consistently indicate that it is a complex social issue that generally has adverse emotional, psychological, physical and financial outcomes on their children (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). As such, parental incarceration is recognized as an adverse childhood effect (ACE) (Anda et al., 2006). ACEs are described as one or more traumatic events that happen during childhood, such as physical or substance abuse in the household, witnessing suicide, or parental separation like due to parental incarceration. Studies consistently indicate that there can be long-term effects associated with one, or a combination of ACEs across all backgrounds from childhood through adulthood (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018; The United States Department of Health and Human Services). However, a key distinction that separates parental incarceration from other ACEs is the combination of trauma, shame, and stigma (Hairston, 2007). Consequently, the direct effect puts CIP at a higher risk for poverty, instability, reoccurring emotional distress, and poor physical and mental health issues (Haskins, 2017; Utrzan & Carlson, 2017).

Despite identifying that CIPs are likely to have a troubling start to life, these studies tell us little to nothing about what is downstream; they do not address, for example, alternative educational outcomes particularly for ACIP during post-secondary education. Moreover, extant research on ACIP is extremely dense concerning identity development in higher education.

Defining Children of Incarcerated Parents

Parental incarceration is generally defined as any kind of correctional confinement of a parent, typically excluding being temporarily held overnight (Murray et al., 2012). Research that examined long-term outcomes and consequences generally excludes temporary periods in local jails or parents awaiting sentencing (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016).

While a parent's incarceration appears to be clear-cut, what constitutes as a parental figure or how a child defines the dynamic of their "family" structure can be quite complex, and not always based on biology. In some research, parental incarceration considers non-biological parental figures or caregivers within the household that a child may have established a parent-child relationship (i.e. sibling, aunt, uncle, step-parent). In their definition of "parent," Johnston and Sullivan (2016), assigned parental status to both biological parents and primary guardians who may have been incarcerated for any length of time, at any point during childhood.

Further, CIP/ACIP are characterized by holding group membership among a "hidden" population. Hidden populations have been defined as groups that lack sampling boundaries (Heckathorn, 1997). Because confidentiality is a concern, this further makes

the size and scope of the population unknown and hard to access. A review of research also indicates that some researchers have defined hidden populations interchangeably with “hard-to-reach” (e.g. physical/social location, exclusive groups) and “vulnerable” (e.g. stigma, disenfranchised) populations (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey et al., 2015). In their study Ellard-Gray et al., (2015) noted there is no one way to classify any one group, particularly, as some individuals may hold membership in multiple categories simultaneously. ACIP in higher education may be considered a difficult population to study because of their social and physical location. For example, there are a limited number of student and social organizations that provide services specifically for this population on college campuses (hard-to-reach); 2) students may fear further stigmatization (vulnerable); and 3) there is no universal way to collect data on ACIP who attend or complete college (hidden). In studies of historically underserved college students, ACIP may overlap with a number of other hidden groups, while also holding membership in hard-to-reach, and vulnerable populations (Ellard-Gray et. al., 2015).

Undoubtedly, there are a number of variables that make this population hard to define and identify without self-disclosure. For the purpose of this research, CIP/ACIP specifically will be defined as young adults who had or have a biological parent (i.e. mother or father) or adoptive parent incarcerated in jail or prison for at least a year or more during childhood or adulthood in the US. The sample criteria for this study will be described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Literature on Hidden Populations and the Campus Environment

As college and universities engage with more diverse populations within the campus environment, scholarship has emerged on the complexity of addressing hidden populations on campuses (Enriquez, 2011; Klitzman, 2018; Patton, 2011). Some groups have also been identified as holding membership in other groups referred to as “concealable stigmatized identities” (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009, p. 2). Though not an exhaustive list, these identities may include sexual assault victims, mental illness patients, Veterans with PTSD, homeless, foster care, physical and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and formally incarcerated individuals (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Beatty and Kirby (2004) argue that in most cases, how individuals make sense of who they are is largely dependent on how others perceive their identity. As such some identities are visible while others remain concealed. The juxtaposition between how individuals see themselves and how the world views them can lead individuals to separate various parts of themselves in order to conceal multiple parts of their identity, even for individuals who have a close association to a stigmatized individual (i.e. family member), like CIP/ACIP. While there is an effort to reduce stigma and increase educational awareness, research on populations that may identify with other forms of concealed identities (i.e. LGBT) is expanding. Yet, ACIPs remain largely hidden across the academic community and understudied in academic literature (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016; Luther, 2015).

Up to this point, the review of literature has provided a historical overview of the underpinnings of mass incarceration, prevalence of parental incarceration, how

scholarship has categorized CIP/ACIP, and how scholarship has traditionally viewed hidden populations in the campus environment. The remaining sections that follow will further enhance this study by focusing on selected issues and trends that have contributed to understanding how the educational experiences of CIP/ACIP may be informed by interactions within the campus environment.

Stigmatization and A/CIP

“Having a parent incarcerated is like you’re always carrying around your own little bag of trauma” Kendell Tisdell, ACIP

Much of the research on ACIP educational pathways in higher education is explained in decades of stigma research (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). Goffman (1963) is most widely recognized for his scholarship on stigma. His scholarship has been studied among a variety of invisible identities (HIV, cancer, mental illness, former prisoners, sexually assaulted victims, etc.) that address how a stigmatized person manages their identity (Luther, 2015, 2016). Conversely, as noted by Luther (2016) fewer studies have focused on Goffman’s (1963) *courtesy stigma*. Goffman (1963) describes a courtesy stigma as the individual that “is related through the social structure to a stigmatized individual...” (p. 30) in which larger society may then “treat both individuals in some respects as one” (p. 30). In this study, ACIPs are directly connected to their parents' stigmatized identity as an incarcerated or former incarcerated individual. While this identity may be hidden to society-at-large, the CIP may experience courtesy stigma as they develop their own identity or in some cases begin to separate from their parents (Clair et al, 2005; Luther, 2016).

Since Goffman's (1963) scholarship, Phillips and Gates (2011) developed a conceptual framework specifically for understanding how the stigmatization of parental incarceration can affect children directly and indirectly. Phillips and Gates (2011) note that the stigmatization of parental incarceration does not end after adolescence, but it is felt well into adulthood in settings such as social interactions, peer groups, and academic environments, etc. Studies on the response to stigmatization vary by context, personal choice, and time (Luther, 2015; Phillips & Gates, 2010). Stigmatization is often tied to how closely an individual perceives oneself in contrast to socially constructed ideals that change over time. From this perspective, the decision for CIP/ACIP to self-disclose or seek support becomes much more complex even when campus-based services or allies are well intended (Phillips & Gates, 2010).

In one of the first longitudinal studies to examine the effects on stigma and social exclusion, Foster and Hagan (2007) used the disadvantage theoretical framework, coupled with the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) to examine the influence of parental incarceration on social exclusion from adolescence to adulthood. Foster and Hagan's (2007) findings suggested that parental incarceration and intergenerational educational detainment increases the likelihood of social exclusion among youth entering into young adulthood. Further Foster and Hagan (2007) also found that daughters who experienced the loss of a biological father to incarceration increased the chances of homelessness in early adulthood. The authors conclude that further research on parental strategies used to help CIP navigate traditional institutional structures and child social norms such as those in educational settings have the potential

to be beneficial. Foster and Hagan's (2007) scholarship are particularly useful in drawing from a large data sample and remains one of few studies that links adolescent findings to post-secondary outcomes. Their study, like most, contributes to the wealth of empirical studies as opposed to qualitative findings.

Conversely, in one of very few qualitative studies on college students a more in-depth examination explored stigma management. Luther (2016) indicated that how some CIPs come to manage their associated stigma may influence their resilience in adulthood. Luther's (2016) study on college students with incarcerated parents found that most CIP were consciously aware of the negative perception associated with having a parent incarcerated. Through social awareness her study suggested that students managed to counter the stigmatization of parental incarceration primarily in one of three ways: social distancing from the associated parent; parent served as role model; parent served as a deterrent.

Educational Experiences of A/CIP and the Campus Environment

"Children of the incarcerated like all humans are all at once like all others, like some others and like no others" – Emmanuel Lartey

In regard to their educational experiences Dallaire et al., (2010) found that when teachers were made aware of students' experiencing maternal incarceration, teachers had lower expectations for CIP than for children experiencing other forms of parent-child separation (i.e. divorce, death, or military). Further, Dallaire et al., (2010) noted that teacher stigmatization was higher among female students who experienced maternal incarceration than for male students. These findings suggest that students who experience

parental incarceration, particularly maternal incarceration, may be more vulnerable to teacher stigmatization. Additionally, students' decision to share their associated invisible identity may be further influenced by teacher-student interactions.

Given the growing rate of parental incarceration in the US, some scholars have focused on differences among paternal versus maternal incarceration outcomes among their children. Huynh-Hohnbaum et al., (2015) examined the high school graduation completion rate among children with incarcerated mothers. The authors assessed three specific hypotheses to address in previous literature. First, they hypothesized that children with either a mother and/or father incarcerated were less likely to complete high school in comparison to their peers with non-incarcerated parents. Second, the authors hypothesized that as parental incarceration becomes more prevalent in the US, that high school graduate rates will likely decline. And finally, they hypothesized that maternal incarceration would affect high school completion rates more than paternal incarceration. The authors reaffirmed all three hypotheses.

Shlafer et al., (2017) offered some insight on parental incarceration outcomes by school setting. The study found that students' academic achievement, anti-social behavior, and higher likelihood for disciplinary action varied based on whether students were attending public, alternative, or juvenile correctional facilities. The study found lower outcomes among public school students and mixed results among alternative schools, and no effects on students at juvenile correctional facilities. Although there are many possible reasons why CIP might experience low academic outcomes, Shlafer et al., (2017) offered one underlying explanation as differences in school-settings, due to

different levels of stigmatization. They inferred that parental incarceration is more “normalized” at alternative and juvenile correctional facilities than in comparison to public schools. Thus, students experiencing parental incarceration in public schools considered their situations out-of-school as more uncommon in comparison to their peers with non-incarcerated parents within the same school-setting.

Though adverse outcomes appear to be consistent, longitudinal studies on children who experience a parent’s incarceration indicate that educational outcomes vary. Murray et al., (2012), for example, undertook a meta-analysis of 40 empirical studies on childrens’ adverse behavioral outcomes in relation to parental incarceration. Specifically, they examined the effects of parental incarceration on childrens’ subsequent anti-social behavior, mental health, drug use, and educational performance. Their findings indicate that parental incarceration was highly associated with children’s anti-social behavior but was not consistently associated with mental health, drug use or educational performance. The authors called for more longitudinal studies that examine the effects of preventive measures of parental incarceration.

The research findings on educational outcomes during K-12 have presented a wide-range of adverse outcomes for CIP. These studies include associative stigmatization (Hagen & Myers, 2003; Luther, 2016; Phillips & Gates; 2010), professionals’ response to CIPs concealed identity, (Cho, 2011; Dallaire et al., 2010) distinctions between maternal versus paternal incarceration (Huynh-Hohnbaum et al, 2015), differences between community and in-school-settings (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Shlafer et al., 2017), and the academic performance and behavior in the educational setting (Murray et al., 2012;

Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Trice & Brewster, 2004). While the adverse effects of parental incarceration on educational outcomes are evident, the experiences of ACIP who persist to post-secondary institutions remain unclear and understudied.

Identity Development of ACIP College Students

“I get angry when people call us ‘children at risk’ I see us as children of promise” Emani Davis

The existing literature on ACIP college students has offered some explanation for educational resilience (Luther, 2015) and how stigma management techniques are constructed (Luther, 2016). These two studies focus on social support and social construction of ACIP invisible identity, respectively. A brief review of these studies provide a useful starting point on insight into the college experiences of this hidden population.

Within the literature on parental incarceration, Luther’s (2015) first study suggests that interpersonal relationships within educational settings can be used to understand what promotes positive development among ACIP college students. Luther (2015) used a resilience lens to analyze what prosocial factors contributed to educational persistence among ACIP. Participants in her study identified individuals such as teachers, coaches, and mentors who facilitated stability and promoted positive educational engagement despite societal markers of parental criminality and incarceration. Her study supports previous findings in primary and secondary educational settings (Morgan et al., 2014). Luther (2015) cautioned that previous research has primarily focused on how parental incarceration lends to educational risks rather than what contributes to positive

educational outcomes for this population. Though her study was not intended to specifically address identity development, it does provide a basis that clearly accounts for the experiences of ACIP college student populations. Moreover, Luther's (2015) scholarship begins to shift the focus from broadly studied deficient discourses while offering more positive insight on ACIP students' interactions beyond secondary educational settings.

In Luther's (2016) second body of work on parental incarceration, she identified techniques ACIP used to maintain a prosocial identity. Drawing from scholarship on courtesy stigma and stigma management, she explored how students socially "marked" by parental incarceration countered their invisible stigmatized identity. As noted, she contends that stigma management is directly linked to identity development. Specifically, her study revealed that students managed their invisible identity in one of three ways: through the creation of distance between themselves and their incarcerated parent, by regarding their incarcerated parent as an example (of what not to do), and/or turning parental incarceration into a positive experience.

Luther's (2016) work on stigma management is significant for the purpose of this study for several reasons. It is the first qualitative study to examine stigma management (identity) among ACIP in context to post-secondary education. Further, Luther's (2016) work offers an interdisciplinary link between sociology and student development perspectives. A sociology perspective on stigma management offers insight into how higher education practitioners working with this population can facilitate and provide helpful support and resources that meet students' needs. Student development

scholarships on inclusion and marginality support these findings (Astin, 1984; Cooper, 2009; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1986). Finally, her findings on prosocial identities of ACIP students enhances our understanding of the processes that promote identity and underscores the rationale for future research framed by an ecological lens.

Dedicated Services for CIP/ACIP

Primary and Secondary Efforts. Recent concerns for the increasing number of children affected by parental incarceration has led to the creation of various campus-based programs and non-profit supported initiatives (Turney, 2019). Efforts to establish dedicated services in primary and secondary education have been slow. Davis and Newell (2008) discussed the influence the educational system can play in providing support, mentorship, and consistency to a child with an incarcerated parent. They noted that some educational professionals can be unsure of their role in effectively meeting the needs of students while finding balance between maintaining institutional ethics and the confidentiality of students' private responses. Davis and Newell's study focused on student experiences and awareness for professionals in the K-12 educational setting. Their recommendations for collaboration between schools, professionals, and the larger community can be applied to post-secondary education. For example, the authors suggested that professionals should incorporate meaningful readings and programming that begin to counter predominant stereotypes and myths held about having a parent incarcerated. Easterling and Johnson, (2015) echoed implications on what it means to have a parent incarcerated should not be left only to family practitioners and social

services professionals but should begin to inform educators and other school practitioners in the academic environment.

Moreover, there are some noteworthy strides that have raised awareness for campus-based services and student-driven contributions on the educational pathways for this population. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), for example, has produced a resource guide to help K-12 school librarians support five specific marginalized groups. The student populations included: children in foster care, homeless children, CIP, children of migrant workers and children in non-traditional families (American Association of School Librarians Emerging Leaders, 2016). Although the AASL guide focuses on K-12 support, it also points to the need for faculty and practitioners in institutions of higher learning to understand the diverse needs of students and their responsibility to advocate for the creation of inclusive environments for the growing diversity student body.

Non-profit Organizations. In 1983, the Families and Corrections Network (FCN), was the first national organization established to support families affected by incarceration in the US. Currently, FCN operates as the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI) at Rutgers University-Camden. In 2014, NRCCFI noted that information on scholarships for CIP and formerly incarcerated parents (FIP) was the third most frequent request. At that time, NRCCFI listed only one organization via their web site that awarded scholarships specifically to ACIP pursuing higher education. By 2018, the NRCCFI web site listed seven organizations that supported financial aid assistance to ACIP. Scholarship-granting organizations for

children affected by parental incarceration for post-secondary education remain small. However, a growth in the number of organizations addressing this need in the last few years and the increase of students that identify as ACIP confirms this student population is pursuing higher education opportunities.

Higher Education. Along those same lines, student development research affirms the need to understand the unique needs of students by developing the whole student with particular attention given to identity development in college (Evans et al., 2010). Initiatives taken by higher education institutions to create campus-wide policies and programs for marginalized and underrepresented student populations is evidence of this movement. There has long been a focus on identities that are visible (i.e. race and gender). In more recent years, some colleges and universities have begun to increase awareness on invisible student populations in the campus community like foster care (Opsal & Eman, 2018; Salazar, 2012), homelessness (Juchniewicz, 2012; Pavlakis et al., 2017) and immigrant students (Ellis & Chen, 2013; Thomas, 2014).

While some ACIP may find that their identities intersect with other marginalized (stigmatized) populations, only a few institutions have publicly recognized the need for such inclusion among dedicated services for this population. For example, Berkeley Underground Scholars (BUS) was established to support Berkeley students directly affected by the criminal justice system to include formerly incarcerated students and students with incarcerated family members (i.e. ACIP) (Berkeley Underground Scholars, n.d.). In April 2019, The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) established the Serving Children of Incarcerated Parents (SCIP) student organization. SCIP is designed to support

Ole Miss ACIP, faculty and staff working with ACIP, and CIP in the local community (Smith, 2018). Aside from student organizations, Rutgers University offers a lecture course on *Children and Families of the Incarcerated*. Ann Adalist-Estrin, a notable contributor who has dedicated 30 plus years of service to CIP, leads the course. The course is described as “the only one of its kind in the country” (The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, n.d., p. 2).

Thus, the efforts made by a small number of institutions might suggest that the experiences of students with incarcerated parents may resonate with more students than previously recognized among American college campuses. This section describes a select number of organizations and higher education institutions that have created programs for students of incarcerated parents and what is known about the services they provide to support this population. Despite efforts to create social support and other networks for CIP/ACIP, there remains limited data on how effective these programs contribute to student inclusion in post-secondary settings. It should also be noted that providing support systems for students that are already marginalized can further create stigmatization (Clair et al., 2005), of which reaching students who need support can remain challenging even when professionals are well-intended.

Most recently, a workshop held at the White House in 2013 brought together notable scholars and practitioners on parental incarceration in the US. Hagan and Foster (2012) asserted from their study, “college completion is part of a pathway through which the effects of parental imprisonment and social exclusion, can be lessened or shed, which suggest a point of intervention” (p. 8). Pager (2007) extends this perspective by

illustrating how formal and informal “credentials” give way to social standing. Pager (2007) indicated that incarceration gives prisoners a negative credential record. Similarly, upon college completion, students receive a diploma or professional credential. These two vastly different identifications (i.e. college graduate, convicted felon) are enduring and operate in society as social markers both used to determine the rules for access and opportunity across various contexts (i.e. economic, social, and political) (Hagan and Foster, 2012). Higher education is well suited to bring about shifts that pull away from negative educational narratives for ACIP (Johnston & Sullivan, 2016; Luther, 2015). In that spirit, this study aims to inform student development researchers and practitioners in post-secondary institutions about the experiences of ACIP.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative research design and methodology used to understand the experiences and identity development of ACIP in higher education. This chapter will begin with a reintroduction of the qualitative research design and research questions. A brief rationale for the use of qualitative narrative inquiry will follow. Then, a discussion of participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the researcher's positionality related to this study.

Guiding this research is Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) theory regarding environmental influences on individual development. Bronfenbrenner's theory helps us locate the "social factors and the interactions" of ACIP who are in college (Mills, 1959 as cited in Siegel, 2011, p. 11), but does so without excluding development. To the researcher's knowledge this is the only study that has examined ACIP and their college experiences using the Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977, 1979, 1993).

The design of this study is informed by one central research question:
How do students - who had or have an incarcerated parent - experience college and make meaning of their invisible identity? To address this focus three secondary research questions will further guide this study.

1. How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their invisible identity?
2. What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their invisible identity development?

3. What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their invisible identity with others in the college campus?

Post-secondary education should not be perceived as the only path to success. However, multiple studies suggest that college attendance and completion is a pathway to success (Hagan & Foster, 2012). Nevertheless, very little research has explored ACIP college experiences (Easterling & Johnson, 2015). Little is known about the experiences of ACIP who attend college.

The use of narrative inquiry is employed to understand the college experiences of ACIP. Given that their own stories in scholarly literature are absent, narrative inquiry is an appropriate approach. Narrative inquiry allows us to amplify their viewpoints and aims to offer a deeper understanding about their higher education experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

This study employed the use of narrative inquiry to explore identity experiences of ACIP children in higher education. Notably, narrative inquiry was used effectively in educational research by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who explored the experiences of school educators. Their approach was informed by John Dewey's early scholarship which emphasized three common tenants—interaction, continuity, and situation – that are recommended for shaping narrative inquiries. Drawing on Dewey (1938), Clandinin and Connelly (1990) expanded his concepts to *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); and *place* (situation) to create a “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). They asserted,

Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters: they focus

on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry: and they occur in specific places or sequences of places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54).

The ability of the researcher to identify, connect, and illuminate the experiences of the narrative phenomenon within the three shared spaces is what uniquely characterizes narrative inquiry from other methodologies.

As narrative inquiry has broadened as a qualitative research approach, the adoption of many different types of narratives have been used to record and retell individuals' stories. Like many other qualitative research methodologies, narrative researchers may collect stories through a number of meaningful ways such as through documents, oral interviews, group conversations, and imagery. The researcher then acts as a storyteller in narrating the retelling of the documented stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narrative research as “both a phenomenon and a method” (p. 2). Specifically, narrative inquiry is considered a collaborative inquiry between the individual living out the phenomenon and the researchers' collection of their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With that, most qualitative researchers agree that narrative inquiry is both a process and a product. The process is reflected in the approach used by the researcher to collect participants' stories (data) and the product is reflected in the researchers' retelling of these stories. Narrative inquiry is often used to amplify the voices that are otherwise not in the dominant discourse (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Thus, narrative inquiry is not an attempt to

explain some outcome but merely to understand the participants' viewpoint or experience.

Narrative inquiry is most useful for this study because ACIP contributions to their own stories are few. Narrative inquiry provides a critical approach to privilege their viewpoints as relevant in the larger discussions on outcomes of children and families of the incarcerated. The use of BEST (1977, 1979, 1993) and narrative inquiry offers a design that provides a life-course perspective to understand the social and individual post-secondary experiences of ACIP while recognizing identity as multidimensional. Working within Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, complemented by BEST (1977, 1979, 1993), the stories of participants will not be constructed based on the researchers' or other societal preconceived notions about the college experiences of ACIP, but rather composed and negotiated in the research-participant relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry is also most appropriate for this study as examples of positive narratives can potentially be used as a resource for students, academics, researchers, and other professionals to learn from ACIP post-secondary experiences, despite the overwhelming picture of academic social and individual difficulties. The following subsections will provide details on the site, recruitment, and participants.

Participants and Interviews

A total of five students who experienced parental incarceration participated in this study. Participants were enrolled at four different universities located in California, Mississippi, and New Jersey. Two of the five participants were graduates from the same university in CA. Four participants identified as female, and one identified as male.

Participants included one undergraduate, one graduate student, and three recent graduates (within the last four years). Two of the three most recent graduates recently completed their master's degrees. All participants attended four-year universities and were between the ages of 22-28 who experienced parental incarceration of one or both parents before or during college. Interviews were conducted in spring of 2021 through the fall of 2021.

Data Collection

Data collection began after approval was granted through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi. Initially, it was proposed that participants would primarily be recruited through a direct connection with a professional staff member with the Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative (CTCIP) community-based initiative. Given that the focus of this study was on college students who have experienced parental incarceration; an organization that has been recognized for providing continued service and outreach for CIP/ACIP was ideal. CTCIP is one of seven organizations that provides financial assistance for post-secondary education for students who have experienced parental incarceration. Furthermore, scholarship recipients were Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) students who self-identified through the application process as experiencing parental incarceration, further providing the appropriate context for studying disclosure and identity. Understanding the importance of using multiple forms of data collection to gain access to this population, the researcher also asked for referrals from gatekeepers who worked with or knew potential college students who met the study's sample criteria. Gatekeepers were emailed the study's guidelines and were provided approval procedures and recruitment requests (Appendix A). During the period of recruitment, approval response and loss of access

between a CTCIP staff member and the researcher was limited due to a CTCIP staff member's short-term leave from employment. The researcher reevaluated the primary form of participant recruitment and shifted to referrals through various gatekeepers. This included the help of classmates, professional staff, administrators, and community advocates familiar with the researcher's study who volunteered to advertise the study's recruitment flier (Appendix B) on their social media platforms. Once participants gave consent, the researcher also used snowball sampling by accepting referrals from participants in the current study.

There is much in the literature on stigmatization and the challenges associated with identifying and gaining access to this population. With this in mind, this study made use of a purposeful, snowball sampling process to recruit a sample. Though these sampling methods are not without criticism, researchers who study hard-to-reach, hidden, and vulnerable populations support these approaches to gain access (Easterling & Johnson, 2015, Luther, 2016). The researcher expected that the use of several recruitment efforts would be necessary for a population that is less visible but would potentially yield varied participant experiences. Additionally, in consideration of the participant's time and that the population was hard-to-reach, the researcher provided a \$15 goodwill gesture once participants completed the interview and written statements.

Once potential participants showed interest in the study, participants received an invitation letter (Appendix C) via email, which detailed the purpose of the study and a link to an online consent form to access through Qualtrics. The online consent form restated the purpose and the exact nature of the study before asking participants to provide consent. After giving consent, participants were asked to complete an online

demographic questionnaire in Qualtrics and selected their own pseudonym. Once participants submitted their consent form (Appendix D), the researcher followed up to schedule an interview at a time convenient for each participant. Interviews were conducted via Zoom Video Communications. On the scheduled interview day, the consent form, along with the purpose of the study, and how the collection of data would be used was reread out loud with each participant prior to starting the recorded interview. Participants were then given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and its use. Participant interviews lasted anywhere from 35-60 mins.

This study takes into account the varied ways experiences can shape identity. As such, it was important to use a variety of data collection methods. Although the primary method of data collection was through individual interviews, this study also employed an online survey, and made use of documents and written statements. The combination of data methods was intentionally used to encompass a holistic perspective of the participants' lived experiences.

With written permission, the researcher adapted the current study's interview questions and the following methods from Renn's (1998) published dissertation. The specific details of each method are described in more detail as follows.

Individual Interviews

To understand the experiences of college students of incarcerated parents, semi-structured interviews were employed. Since narrative inquiry is the primary methodology, semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to gather more detailed data as opposed to structured interviews. This method also positioned the participant to shape their own narrative along with the researcher as opposed to dominant narratives

that have customarily contributed to defining their experiences by other individuals and larger society (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly; 2000; Huber et al., 2013). The researcher also made use of an interview script (Appendix E). The purpose of the guide was to help organize participant narratives and to ensure the researcher consistently asked the same questions with each participant. It also helped to keep the researcher organized in gathering responses directed at the study's research questions. The guide was revisited throughout the interview process and adjusted as deemed appropriate to ensure the study's central research question was addressed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used as another source of data collection to add depth to this study. Each participant was asked to bring a personal or popular culture item that they felt captured their experience being a child of an incarcerated parent. Item examples might have included letters, calendars, books, poems, photographs, art, songs, journal articles, word art, or other symbolic materials that they want to use to express their experience. Document analysis was used to explain how participants came to make meaning of their invisible identity by sharing items that have personal meaning for them. Additionally, this posed as an ice breaker to engage with the participants during the interview. Research also indicates that providing a personal item can add value when participants express their "attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 166), especially as it relates to experiences of trauma, stigma, and loss (Worth, 2011). While this form of analysis may not directly inform the researcher of participants' experiences in the campus environment, it can offer insight into other ways participants

believe society has produced meanings about their invisible identity through cultural and historical documented depictions. Two of the five participants shared a personal item during the interview.

Written Statements

The final source of data collection considered participants' written responses (Appendix F). After each individual interview, participants were emailed with instructions to complete a written response to a prompt. Participants were asked to respond by email within the week following their individual interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to these documents as research-generated documents with the aim of adding depth and breadth to the situations, persons, or events under study. One participant provided a response to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Most qualitative researchers agree that qualitative analysis begins when data is in the process of being collected (Stake, 1995). Taking this into consideration, each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim with the exclusion of some ums and uhs. The researcher then began reviewing journals, margin notes, and other written responses made prior, during, and following data collection. This process is also called epoche and attempts to remove the researcher's biases to illuminate the voices of each participant (Creswell, 1998). This process was followed by reading through each participant's transcript multiple times. During the first read, the researcher elected not to take notes. The researcher then reread each transcript as many times as needed to highlight, circle, underline, notate with asterisks or to make comments and connections on how participants made meaning of their invisible identities as ACIP during college.

The goal during this structural process was to become familiar with the data, while making some preliminary insights and labeling of data (Saldana, 2013).

Next, general common categories were identified from each individual interview. Based on Renn's (1997) scholarship on mixed race identity of college students using Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) theory, the researcher anticipated that similar codes would emerge on academic work, campus involvement, and identity development. From the onset, relevant codes were identified, coupled together and were represented by the following themes:

- Pre-college academic experiences
- Familial relationships
- Peer relationships inside and outside classroom
- Disclosure inside and outside campus environment
- Perceptions of national and social responses to CIP/ACIP
- Campus connections
- Post undergraduate social and academic experiences
- Stigma
- Associated invisible identity salience

Later, final codes were consolidated into themes that were used to support Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) theory. For this study, the current themes were further presented in reference to ACIP college experiences through Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) five systems- Process, Person, Content, Time (PPCT) model. These themes are:

1. Process
2. Persons
 - a. Pre-college enrollment experiences and perception of associated invisible identity
 - b. Parental incarceration salience
3. Context
 - i. Microsystem
 1. Classroom experiences
 2. Academic faculty and staff administrators
 3. Student involvement
 4. Parent and family influence
 - ii. Mesosystem
 1. Interactions across microsystem context
 2. Disclosure processes
 3. Influence on majors and professional career paths
 - iii. Exosystem
 1. Policy influences
 2. Prison policy influences
 - iv. Macrosystem
 1. Stigmatization of parental incarceration
 2. Normality of parental incarceration
 3. Influence of language
4. Time

It should be noted that themes presented in this study summarize patterns in the data; however, it is not to suggest that every pattern detailed was found across all five interviews. Generally, the following themes most consistently represented the participants in the current study's ACIP college experiences. The final themes used in this study are presented in detail in Chapter IV.

Trustworthiness

Varied methods adopted by the qualitative concepts of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *credibility* (internal validity), *transferability* (external validity), *dependability* (reliability) and *confirmability* (objectivity) were employed to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. One common method used to enhance credibility in qualitative research is the use of multiple methods of data collection. Qualitative researchers also refer to this process as triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using multiple methods provided each participant with varied techniques to express their invisible identity development experience. For the purpose of this study interviews, written responses, and document analysis were used to increase credibility. Interviews provided an opportunity for participants to respond to open-ended questions that further guided the interview process and shared how participants made meaning of their invisible identity. Document analysis (pre) and written (post) responses served as another way for participants to express their experiences through reflection in their own unique way. Trustworthiness was increased by using multiple sources of data (i.e. multiple participants, students from multiple colleges and universities).

A second strategy to increase trustworthiness involved maintaining a reflective journal. In qualitative research this practice is also referred to as reflexivity (Dowling,

2006; Patton, 2015). Dowling (2006) asserted this process is both a concept and a practice. It is a continuous task in which the researcher makes notes about the process that incited questions to revisit, thoughts, feelings and other reactions and reflections that may affect the research process. This practice was important to remain consciously aware of how personal biases and experiences may influence interpretations of the data. To adjust for this, the researcher enlisted a researcher familiar with qualitative research on CIP/ACIP, one ACIP graduate student, not invited to participate in this study, who was asked to critique and process the researcher's interpretations.

Additionally, to increase trustworthiness in this study a commonly used method in qualitative research is member checks (Miriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks involved working closely with participants to collaborate between the participants and the researcher on the final interpretation of data presented in this study. Following the transcription of each interview, participants were emailed a copy to approve and challenge the authenticity of participants' interpretations. Responsive participants had little to no critiques on the researcher's findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with appropriate policies regarding research conduct, data and safety monitoring, safeguards and reporting of information involving human subjects. Approval from The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (Appendix G) was obtained before data collection began. Additional ethical concerns were accounted for to maintain confidentiality and privacy throughout the study. Given the primary form of data collection was individual interviews conducted via Zoom teleconferencing, a password was created and shared

only between each participant and the researcher when scheduling each interview. The personalized login password provided an additional layer for security and data privacy during the recording of interviews while using an online platform. Before each individual interview the researcher ensured the interview was conducted in a location that was also designed to protect the confidentiality of participants while the interview recording was in progress. Before the scheduled interview, participants in the current study also chose their own pseudonym. To ensure participants in this study were not coerced into participating in this study, at the start of each interview, participants were verbally asked to give permission to record. Participants were advised that the recordings could be paused or stopped and at any point, and they were free to discontinue the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

The identification of names and files associated with participants in this study were stored on a password protected file. All additional participant data (physical or electronic) collected such as journaling, field notes, email correspondence, participant consent forms used to conduct this study was stored in a fire-proof locked safe. In the case where physical documentation was used, participant names or other personal identifiers such as participants' university or email addresses were redacted from physical notes before being stored.

Positionality

My interest in students affected by parental incarceration (or children and families of system-impacted individuals) began several years ago from my work as an analyst at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). It was there during a debriefing with an offender that he stated his biggest regret was the effect that his actions would have on his

children. As analysts we are trained to separate our emotions from our cases. This was not always easy for me to do. Given the circumstances, I often heard the stories of the offenders. I doubt I would have been interested in pursuing this area of research if I had not been sensitized to also seeing these individuals as more than the stories of their accused crimes (not always justly) but also as parents (siblings, sons, daughter, etc.). When I decided to leave the FBI to pursue a doctoral degree, I wanted to revisit this topic of interest as it related to college student experiences. I noticed very early on that this population and the campus environment was understudied. Given the current state of consciousness concerning the totality of the criminal justice system and the injustices playing out across the country, I felt this topic was most timely and relevant.

In addition to my previous career in government, I have gained professional experience in student affairs in multiple functional areas to include admissions and recruitment, new student and retention programs, academic advising, student conduct, TRIO services, diversity and inclusion, and adjunct teaching. Through this work, I recognize that we all hold membership in multiple socially constructed categories- visible and invisible. Each part of ourselves who we may come to identify with overlaps, intersects, and changes over time. I share a concern that students experience salient events (i.e. parental incarceration) that come to shape their identities. This however does not mean these experiences define who we are or that any one part of our identity is the most prominent aspect of how we may come to see ourselves.

In addition to my professional identity, as a middle-class formally educated African American heterosexual woman, I am aware of how my worldviews may influence how I approach this study and how I may interpret the data. With that, there are

likely biases that I may be unconsciously aware of that may affect the construction of this study through my professional and educational experiences.

I have also considered the work of Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009), who address the benefits and challenges of a researcher's membership status. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle assert that an "outsider" is best described as a researcher that does not share the common experience of the group they are studying. While an "insider" is closely connected to the experience. This is not to presume that any one shared experience should be treated as the same among all members of the group. However, it is to suggest that any one commonly held experience may share some similarities. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest a more obvious challenge for an outsider is the ability to gain access to the population even when approval is permitted through direct channels. Their work also considers the approach of the researcher as "both insider-outsider rather than insider or outsider" (Corbin & Buckle, 2009, p. 54). While I acknowledge gaining access as a potential challenge in the current study as an outsider, I echo Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) in understanding that, "one does not have to be a member of the group being studied to appreciate and adequately represent the experience for the participants" (p. 59). From this position they state,

the core ingredient is not insider or outside status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experiences of one's research participants, and committed to accurately representing their experience. (p. 59)

Using this quote, I illustrate the importance of my positionality in this study. While I do not identify as a CIP/ACIP, I, like many other adults, am not an outsider to an ambiguous loss (Bocknek et al., 2009). I do not approach this study as the expert, but I consider each

participant in this study experts in their own experiences (Corbin et al., 2009). I see myself as a lifelong learner and that growth is cultivated when we educate ourselves and others about experiences that are not like our own. It is my hope that in collaboration with each participant, I will accurately share with others what can be learned through their narratives and that this scholarship will be a meaningful contribution to the academic community. To account for these professional and personal biases, I have included approaches as outlined in the trustworthiness of this study to ensure the views of the participants are a true reflection to the knowledge I anticipated gaining from each participant.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of college students who have experienced parental incarceration and how they make meaning of their invisible identity in the campus environment at four-year institutions in the US. Because the experiences of ACIP in post-secondary settings are few, a qualitative methodology was best suited to detail participants experiences, in their own words. Specifically, the study employed a narrative inquiry approach.

The current study made use of convenience and snowball sampling to recruit ACIP who self-identified with parental incarceration before enrolling in or during their college experience. Because of heightened stigmatization and challenges associated with identifying and gaining access to this hidden population, this sampling method was most appropriate to ensure representation. A combination of data methods was intentionally used to encompass a holistic perspective of the participants' lived experiences. Individual interviews, written statements, and the researcher's journal notes were analyzed to

identify commonly held themes of ACIP identity and development in college. Lastly, the researcher's positionality related to this study concludes this chapter.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the college experiences of students at four-year universities who experienced parental incarceration. More specifically, the study seeks to explore how factors in the campus environment may shape their associated invisible identity and the disclosure process.

Using narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodological approach, the design of this study was informed by one central research question: How do students who experienced parental incarceration make meaning of their associated invisible identity in the college campus environment? To address this focus, the following secondary research questions will further guide this study.

1. How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their associated invisible identity?
2. What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their associated invisible identity development?
3. What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their associated invisible identity with others in the college campus?

Using methods described in detail in Chapter III to analyze participant interviews, written responses, and document analysis, responses were then identified to best describe the lived experiences of participants in this study. This chapter will explain the findings in response to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) proposed four interrelated components: process-person-context-time (PPCT) model in detail using excerpts taken from participant interviews. In some sections excerpts are purposely extended to ensure the full scope of participant responses are echoed. Some components will be further

supported by sub-themes that emerged in summarizing patterns in the data. It is important to note that this study does not attempt to generalize the experiences of participants in this study to represent the experiences of all college students who have experienced parental incarceration. The findings outlined in the remaining chapters help to explain patterns found in this study only. Further, the findings do not suggest having been identified across all five interviews which strengthens the goal of transferability. Chapter V will then provide responses to the study's research questions, implications for this study, and conclude with recommendations for future research and practice. The themes are:

1. Process
2. Persons
 - a. Pre-college enrollment experiences and perception of associated invisible identity
 - b. Parental incarceration salience
3. Context
 - i. Microsystem
 1. Classroom experiences
 2. Academic faculty and staff administrators
 3. Student involvement
 4. Parent and family influence
 - ii. Mesosystem
 1. Interactions across microsystem context
 2. Disclosure processes

3. Influence on majors and professional career paths
- iii. Exosystem
 1. Policy influences
 2. Prison policy influences
- iv. Macrosystem
 1. Stigmatization of parental incarceration
 2. Normality of parental incarceration
 3. Influence of language
4. Time

Participants

A total of five college students who experienced parental incarceration participated in this study. Participants were enrolled at four different universities located in CA, MS, and NJ. Four participants identified as female, and one identified as male. Racial make-up included two participants who identified as African American, two identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Hispanic. Participants included one undergraduate student, one graduate student, and three recent graduates (within the last four years). All participants attended four-year universities and were between the ages of 22-28 who experienced parental incarceration of one or both parents before or during college. Interviews were conducted in Spring of 2021 through the Fall of 2021. Before each individual interview participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire of which they self-selected pseudonyms used in the descriptions that follow.

Participant Descriptions

This section provides a table and summary of each participant follows in the order in which they were interviewed and their connection to this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics of the Sample

	Pseudonym	CJ	AJ	Nicole	Dandelion	Diana
	Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
	Age	28	27	27	22	27
	University Type	Public Research	Public Research	Private; religious	Public Research- public Ivy	Private Research
17	Major and classification	Criminal Justice; recent graduate	Public administration; graduate student	Nonprofit Leadership and criminal justice; recent graduate	Criminal Justice with a concentration in ethnic studies, communications studies and politics; undergraduate	Education Counseling; recent graduate
	Parent (s) incarcerated; prior/during college	father; prior	mother and father; prior	mother and father; prior	mother; prior	mother and father; prior

Table 1 continued

Charges; years served	Aggravated DUI; 5 years	Drug and gun charges; 4-5 years collectively	Federal embezzlement; 4 years and 20 years, respectively	DUI/manslaughter; 10 years	Drug distribution and gang enhancement; 10+ years
Participant current employment	Law Enforcement officer in Texas	Program assistant at law firm	Non-profit program associate	Undergraduate student	Non-profit program associate

CS identified as a 28-year-old white male. He graduated from a midsize public research university in MS with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He experienced paternal incarceration prior to enrolling in college. CS's father was incarcerated for five years and charged with aggravated DUI. CS currently resides in Texas and works in law enforcement.

AJ identified as a 27-year-old African American female. She completed a bachelor's degree in Journalism (public relations) at a small public university in New Jersey. At the time of her interview, she was enrolled in graduate school pursuing a master's in public administration. AJ experienced both maternal and parental incarceration prior to enrolling in undergraduate studies. Collectively, her parents were incarcerated between 4-5 years for various drug and gun charges. She is employed with a lobbying arm of a law firm that assist justice impacted individuals with getting released from prison.

Nicole identified as a 27-year-old white female. She completed a bachelor's degree in music vocal performance from a private, religious affiliated university in California. She recently completed a dual master's in nonprofit leadership and criminal justice from a different private research university in California. She experienced both maternal and paternal incarceration prior to enrolling in undergraduate studies. Her mother was incarcerated for four years while her father was incarcerated for 20 years on federal embezzlement charges. Nicole is a program associate at a philanthropic foundation in California where she oversees restorative justice grants.

Dandelion identified as a 22-year old African American female. She is currently a junior at a "public Ivy League" school in California (Staffaroni, 2021). She is pursuing a

dual bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a concentration in ethnic studies, communications studies and politics. She experienced maternal incarceration prior to enrolling in college. Her mother was incarcerated for 10 years and charged with DUI/manslaughter.

Diana identified as a 27-year old Hispanic female. She recently completed her master's in education counseling from a private research university in California. She experienced both maternal and paternal incarceration prior to enrolling in undergraduate studies. Her parents were incarcerated for 10 plus years for drug distribution and gang enhancement. At the time of our interview, Diana was working for a non-profit where she planned alternative community-based programming for vulnerable juveniles.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) theory of development attributes development to four components that must routinely be at work between an individual and their surrounding environment. Likewise, Renn and Arnold (2003) applied Bronfenbrenner's model to higher education to understand how contextual factors in college can influence college student development. After completing a thorough analysis of individual interviews, journal notes, and written responses, Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) PPCT model outlines participants' narratives to examine the experiences of parental incarceration on college student identity and student development in the sections that follow.

Process and Person

At the core of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) model is the Person component which involves individual attributes and personal experiences that participants bring to the campus environment, including their racial and gender identities,

previous academic experiences, family dynamics, and any previous experiences that were identified with being a CIP inside or outside of academia. Within the *person* component, discussions centered around pre-college enrollment experiences and perceptions of their associated invisible identity and the role that parental incarceration played in shaping their identity. Like most college students, ACIPs bring their own values, experiences, and perspectives to the campus environment. These individual characteristics shape the context that in turn influence the *process* of student identity development (Evans, et al., 2010).

Pre-college Enrollment Experiences and Perceptions of Associated Invisible Identity

In examining the college experiences of ACIP it was important to understand participants made meaning of their associated invisible identities and personal experiences prior to college. Each interview began with asking general questions in regard to the participants' educational experiences in K-12 in relationship to being a CIP. Moreover, participants were asked to describe their K-12 educational experiences and how they were similar or different from their college campus at which they attended. Nicole described her pre-college experiences as “dichotomous.” She explained,

So, I'll say, I was adopted by my grandparents on my biological mother's side, grew up pretty dichotomous lifestyle, and because of that, didn't talk about my parents' incarceration at all. I grew up in a small, private school, pre-K, K through 12th grade, in Texas. I kind of ignored the fact that all of that was happening in my life outwardly, but inwardly really struggled

Dandelion mentioned that prior to college she was heavily involved in sports

Yea, I feel like I'm still very sociable person. I go to a PWI, or like a Hispanic-serving institute. I'm not sure the statistics, but I think there's like only 3% Black people at that campus, or like less than 3% of the campus. Yeah, so it was really different from my high school. I went to [redacted name high school], which is kind of in the South Bay area, and it was mainly Black and Latinx kids, and then other ethnicities. So it's pretty different, but I feel like I'm still very sociable, or just volunteering, like having jobs on campus. I don't run track or play any sports here, so that's different.

Similar to Dandelion, AJ elaborated on her extra-curricular involvement prior to college.

So I was doing lots of activities every sport you could think of basketball, cross country track like all year round I was in sports I was involved with pretty much any type of activity that it was like oh sorry we may have you out till 5:00 PM and I'd be like perfect like sign me up like most people like I'm ready to go home and I'm like no I'll I'll be at school UM and so yeah before I got to college school came like fairly easy took you know like lots of AP classes and stuff like that UM one example that I can remember is whenever I was a junior in high school I started applying for the FASFA always forget if it's fas-fa for fas-sah on my own like I was doing that kind of like you know when it's my senior year how am I going to like figure this out.

Parental Incarceration Salience

In further understanding individual attributes of each participant's identity prior to college, participants were asked how they would best describe their identity and how

their family life was shaped by parental incarceration. Unless directly asked, respondents rarely, if at all, referred to being the child of an incarcerated parent. Dandelion emphasized race and gender as her primary identity descriptors. She stated,

I guess first I'll probably describe myself as Black because I'm Black. What else?

Yeah. I'll also identify as female in terms of my gender. Those are kind of like the primaries.

As she continued, Dandelion elaborated more specifically on race salience. She emphasized,

I think for me, yeah, I'm black, obviously. You can't miss it. So, I'm proud to be Black, and that's how I navigate the world, and that's also how people perceive me to be. I feel like it's shaped my identity because, like just growing up, I've learned so much about Black history and even me being the eager learner or just want to learn more, just kind of deeper my understanding of my grounded-ness and Blackness, and what does it mean to be Black, because it's not one thing. It's not a monolith, and there's so many cultures and things like that.

Similarly, AJ shared her awareness that race and gender worked collectively to make up her most salient forms of her identity. She explained:

I would probably say Black woman right off the bat and I always put those things together because I'm someone [that's] a very big believer of intersectionality.

There's no like part of my identity that's kind of like more important except for me being a Black woman. Like those two things together are probably the most important parts of my identity.

When asked directly about her identity in relation to being a CIP, AJ pointedly stated, “this is a part of my identity, but it doesn't make up the whole cross of who I am”.

Diana also led with race and gender descriptors but emphasized the challenges that come with being mixed race. She stated,

I'll usually always say like identify as female and I always say like I am Latina so kind of like more dominant side of my culture yeah and I also identify as white as well 'cause my dad so that could be a little confusing sometimes like being too different things.

Unlike Dandelion, AJ, and Diana, CS the only male participant in this study, never put emphasis on his race or gender. He stated,

I'm super quiet. I'm super reserved. I'm introverted, determined, hardworking but it takes a lot for me to get out of my shell and be comfortable around people

Similarly, Nicole placed more emphasis on non-physical descriptors such as her competitive nature and academic/personal performance. She offered,

The perfectionist thing is definitely something in the classroom that I... I'm extremely competitive scholastically. For instance, I just finished two master's programs.

She went on to explain:

I never feel like I'm necessarily competing with others. It's more so I don't care if somebody else gets the same GPA, but it's more so I want to be my best self and I want to show up as my best self.

When asked directly about her identity in relation to being a CIP, Nicole explained that she found meaning in acknowledging this part of her identity as she became an adult,

particularly as a graduate student, and added that she recognizes it as a unique strength rather than a deficit. She stated, “Definitely it's a part of my identity now, but it's part of my identity now because I see it as a strength.”

Likewise, Diana expressed her enthusiasm in being able to openly speak about her parents' incarceration and how she also sees it as a personal strength. Diana stated, “I think my identity is kind of became stronger.”

Two of the five participants specifically shared the importance that being a CIP played in shaping their identity prior to entering college. Other responses revealed most participants in this study placed little importance on parental incarceration as an individual identity marker. In most instances the respondents placed more importance on socially constructed visible identities such as race and gender. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Person component in relation to parental incarceration demonstrates how each participant in this study associated, and in some cases, disassociated their associated invisible identity prior to enrolling in college and how they each processed their environment which led to their development.

Context

The third component in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) model contains four systems that make up an individual's ecological environment of which the person is placed at the center. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1993) contended that development could best be understood within the *context* of these nested systems. The four systems are characterized as the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, and *macrosystem*. At each level ACIPs gather information about their identity. Simultaneously, each level presents processes within and across systems that challenge and support student development

(Renn, 2003; Renn & Arnold, 2003). The next section will outline influential factors and experiences that were consistent among participants at their respective institutions.

Microsystem

The first contextual system in the ecological model is the *microsystem*. The microsystem is described as the innermost level and contains the developing person (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1993). The developing person in this study will hereby be referred to as CIP/ACIP. The microsystem represents the most active layer in which the ACIP is directly connected through daily interactions. ACIPs in this study made meaning of their associated invisible identity by exploring specific majors related to supporting justice and system-impacted individuals, contributing to classroom discussions, offering additional insight to faculty curriculum development, and by creating campus resources to dismantle parental incarceration stereotypes within the campus community. The primary microsystems for this study are explained through four groups these include: classroom experiences, college faculty and staff administrators' interactions, student involvement, parent and family interactions. Generally, place of residence is considered a primary influence within the microsystem. Participants in this study did not highlight this as a contributing factor to their identity. Responses related to their living arrangements generally fell within discussions around family interactions.

Classroom experiences. Through classroom assignments and class discussions participants found some influences inside the classroom where faculty and peers played an integral role in ACIP's students' identity development. Diana emphasized that parental incarceration was a group in the campus community that was often overlooked. She emphasized that through various written assignments she liked to bring more awareness

to both faculty and her peers about the importance of this population in higher education like any other marginalized group. She emphasized,

Yeah, so pretty much it would be like something about like there isn't counseling or just to talk about a student subject so you would hear people talk about like undocumented students or LGBTQ but nobody would really bring up formerly incarcerated so that's what I would write about it and I felt like I would bring it to light a lot.

AJ articulated that it was not until graduate school that she felt more inclined to incorporate this part of her identity into her classroom assignments. For example, she purposefully drew on her knowledge that she brought to the campus environment to reflect on what she knew about the prison industrial system or her thoughts and experiences about the criminal justice system. She described how she chose to write around the topic of mass incarceration more in graduate school rather than in undergrad because she realized how it impacted more than just people like her. She explained:

I think in economics and my economics paper my final paper was on prison telecommunications systems. Like how they're pretty much just like taking all of these money from families. I did a paper on organizational and community leadership. In that paper [it] was just like on looking at different nonprofits that kind of like where on this work. Another class that I took was American Governance and I did that about the nonprofit industrial complex. Like I found a way to pretty much like there's some type of prison component to the papers that I'm writing. Literally my public information technology I did it on like tablets that people incarcerated use.

Similarly, Nicole reflected on opportunities through in-class assignments and discussion that contributed to her identity. She spoke passionately about her professors and peers' empathy in speaking to her experience as a CIP/ACIP and offering her insight to broader discussions even when others disagreed. Nicole elaborated,

all of my professors were super open to hearing me talk about my experience. I talked about my experience frequently in discussion posts. I feel like you get both sides of it, where it's more of the policing side and then more of the, "Hey, we need more humanity within the criminal justice system," fully believing that will help change, not overnight, but long term it will hopefully change something about what's happening. But people were mostly open. I don't think I ever got...

Once I mentioned my personal experience, people never-tried to shame you about it. They never tried to shame me, they never tried to back me into a corner. It was like, "Okay, you have a lived experience in this area. I respect your opinion." And obviously that's what it's about. You don't want everyone to agree with you. That's not the point of education. You want to be challenged in your viewpoints. That's what helps you create your viewpoints.

These excerpts illuminate the associations that participants made to the classroom experience microsystem. In Diana's case, she felt it necessary to inform others in the campus environment about nontraditional forms of marginalized groups like ACIPs in higher education. AJ wrote extensively in graduate studies about the prison industrial complex and the complexity of issues that remain unresolved. Similarly, Nicole indicated that within her classroom experiences incorporating her associated invisible identity became more relevant in graduate coursework. Generally, her views were respected, and

in cases where they were challenged, she saw that as an educational opportunity. Challenging viewpoints even those of faculty in greater detail is explored the next microsystem.

Academic faculty and staff administrators. In the academic faculty and staff administrator's microsystem, participants described their experiences interacting with both faculty members and other college administrators at their respective institutions. Student development research supports a host of variables that work collectively inside and outside the campus environment in shaping students collegiate experience. Along with student involvement, relationships with academic faculty and other administrators equally contribute to developing the whole student in college. Participants consistently mentioned that faculty and administrators played a central role in their development by serving as instructors, advisors, and in connecting them to other resources outside of the classroom. Dandelion was involved in student organizations for CIPs in high school and spoke about what she observed as the difference between the support of high school administrators and college faculty.

I feel like in college, it's very different. Like you're not going to see your professor walking around with you, or they're not going to be checking up on you, whereas like in high school, you're walking around, and you see faculty so often, and if they know that your dad's incarcerated or your parent is incarcerated, they might reach out to you a little bit more, like try to give you support.

Though she made this observation, she also shared that while having faculty support was important in the campus community, she felt involvement in high school could be

overwhelming and reiterated that it was easier to create safe boundaries between faculty and other administrators in college.

But if there's some type of support you need, it's just very difficult to set boundaries and things like that. So that's why I say in college, like meeting people or just meeting faculty who are researching and doing studies on these different things, it was very looser, and I didn't feel that much pressure as I felt in high school.

Diana spoke about a professor sharing his own personal experience with incarceration and described their classroom “coming out” process.

the teacher was formerly incarcerated 'cause when I said it about myself the teacher was honest and said, “I'm formally incarcerated and I'm glad that you said that.” Like yeah, I'll never forget that day, everybody was like what? They like said, you were formally incarcerated? That's crazy! And I found like me coming out and you know he came out and that was was cool so, I asked if I could bring my dad and he was like yeah, you could bring him in as a guest, you know?

Diana felt the transparency her professor shared as a system-impacted individual showed his commitment to support all students. More importantly, it allowed her to be more open to building rapport with faculty members in ways that she had not been before.

Overall interactions with faculty were perceived to be positive. In other interactions faculty curriculum proved to be unwittingly challenging. Nicole recounted an incident where she was triggered by an assignment. While describing the effects the assignment had on her, she explained that being transparent with her professor and his accommodation and empathy was important.

there was one time where we were assigned a video that I got five minutes into and had to stop watching because I was so triggered, and flat-out emailed the professor and was like, "This is my experience. I am not doing this assignment because I can't watch this." Super responsive, super great. Gave me an alternative assignment, I did that assignment, no problem, but I definitely was open about, "Hey." Because some things I think, I don't want to say are triggering in a good way, but triggering in a way that you're like, "Okay, it's exposure. I can kind of work through that trigger. I'm in a safe space," but that was like... I was like, "I can't. I can't watch."

The idea of being involved, whether on or off-campus and the ability to connect with institutional agents lends to the next microsystem.

Student involvement. This microsystem explains participants' perspectives on being involved in campus activities related to CIP/ACIP. Whether they were involved on-campus, off-campus, or not at all, participants responded both positively and negatively to their experiences joining social groups for CIP/ACIPs during college. The student involvement microsystem is discussed in two sub-themes: ACIP specific-organizational involvement off-campus and ACIP dedicated on-campus resources.

ACIP specific-organization involvement off-campus. Being involved in college has consistently been considered an important aspect of college (Astin, 1984). In addition to interactions inside the classroom, participants like Dandelion, the only current undergraduate student in this study, discussed how her classroom assignments rarely, if ever, involve her speaking to her identity. Much of her learning took place outside the classroom through involvement in specific off-campus programming for ACIPs.

Specifically, conference attendance was where her academic and her associated invisible identity most often merged. She explained:

Dandelion: I feel like the most extent that goes into my papers or my studies is me critiquing the prison industrial complex and how it impacts black people. That's probably the furthest. I've attended conferences, like as an undergraduate student, like the Arizona Chapter for the CIPs, like Children with Incarcerated Parents

Andrea: Yeah, I'm familiar with that conference.

Dandelion: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, I've attended that, and I've given presentations about my experience, but it's, like as an undergraduate student in different places, but I feel like in my papers, or even in my classes, I haven't taken a class like that to kind of go in depth, or just even ask that prompt. Yeah. So, for me, it's like mainly just critique that. Really sharing my experience.

Nicole was not only involved in off-campus student organizations for ACIP, but she also entered the pageantry world where she developed her advocacy platform around parental incarceration. She reflected on how adopting this topic led her to understand more about her biological parents, herself, and other areas within the criminal justice system that now she has come to examine more closely. She stated:

I used strength in separation to further relationships between incarcerated parents as a kid as my platform, because I felt like one of the reasons I was so incredibly disconnected from my parents and struggled to build that relationship with them was because I didn't frequently visit my parents, was because once my dad had been incarcerated for longer periods of time, I stopped going to see his side of the family completely. My parents just kind of cut that, sorry, my grandparents. The

adoptive parents just cut that out. But when I adopted it as my platform, it was one of those things where I was like, "Well, no one's researching this. No one's doing anything about this, so I am going into open waters and I'm going to make it what I make it," and thankfully was incredibly ignorant about the amount of people doing work in the States. Having [inaudible 00:26:54] into reentry organizations, it opened my world to criminal justice and the injustices of the criminal justice system, which opened my world to my parents' experience, even.

While discussing why she selected this platform, Nicole emphasized the importance of finding community through a shared experience with others at the same conference where Dandelion had also been a presenter. She elaborated,

I think that taking on that platform, I was able to speak at the National Conference for Children of Incarcerated Parents, and what was mind-blowing about that weekend is it was so funny. I'm in the airport in Arizona bawling on my way home to LA. I knew nobody at the conference before I went, but it was just the fact that I was surrounded by people like me.

It makes me emotional, because you grow up feeling so isolated, but all these people had a shared experience and I didn't have to explain why I felt a certain way, or I didn't have to justify something. It was like, "[name redacted], we understand. We had the same experience. We understand." So I think that conference is what redefined shame and stigma as resilience, and something that I was like, "You know, I've gone through this and I've come out stronger and I can be an advocate for this and demonstrate that you have other people who are going through this.

Similarly, Diana shared that she was intentional when it came to speaking both in-class and off-campus about her identity as CIP/ACIP. She stated,

Every time I get to like make a speech or talk about myself or [speak] in a classroom or workshop panel conference presentation, anything. When I introduce myself, I would say like my name, where I'm from like specifically like South Central... like this specific community and I always also say like you know, I come from a family of incarceration.

ACIP dedicated on-campus resources. Prior to enrolling in college, four of the five participants in this study were involved with social organizations that specifically work to advocate for CIP/ACIP. For some participants their interactions with other ACIPs on campus was initiated by their own interest. In most cases, at the core of creating, participating, or finding support on campus fostered their associated invisible identity. For example, Diana stated that she helped start an organization to support formerly incarcerated individuals on her college campus. Initially the program was not as well received by the institution. After some time, it became a platform where faculty and students were able to come together to bring more visibility to this hidden population on her campus. She explained,

I really wanted to start like a student org for formerly incarcerated students. It was a little frustrating when people would be like, “oh we don't want you know the same thing like we don't want those criminals to be organizing on our campus” but then they would you know people would just be honest and be like “I'm formerly incarcerated” and I remember like so many of my classmates, I would just be like “whoa” like I was shocked.

Andrea: Yeah, that is interesting. So do they do they actually have a student organization at your campus?

Diana: We ended up like after meeting all the other students came together and we created the underground children's [university name redacted]

Diana: it was so cool because the first year, I felt like we received a little bit of push back. Like we would have meetings and we would just have like random people come in and like take notes, or take pictures, and walk out, or just grab food. So, I think just kind of popping in and out. But then it started becoming really cool because we would have workshops and then professors would start coming and some of the coolest professors I knew would be like “yeah, I was formerly incarcerated” and I’d be like that identity is everywhere. I would just feel like it was so hidden like.

Dandelion understood the importance of creating a space where students could express the effects of being CIP/ACIPs since she had been instrumental in establishing a student led organization at her high school. She described her involvement in college as “looser”.

So, in high school, I brought a program to my high school to assist children with incarcerated parents, to process their emotions. When I got to college, I, Yeah, so when I got to college, I actually got involved a little bit more and I was able to kind of meet friends and meet faculty who are working on these different things. So, I feel like it was the same, but I feel like it was different. The experience, it was different of meeting people who have their parents incarcerated. I don't know.

It [college] just like felt more looser, like the vibe wasn't ... It was very looser. It wasn't like, "Oh my gosh"-

For other participants like AJ, her participation in student led organizations specifically for CIP/ACIP on her campus was not motivated by her social interest but rather her professional interest. She was clear that her involvement initially came about as an intern opportunity. In this role she assisted a non-profit organization with finding college tutors for formerly incarcerated individuals. While looking for tutors she discovered a student group for ACIPs on her college campus. She explained:

I met a professor like Dr. [redacted name] she was running the program children [of] incarcerated parents at the university and the work that I was doing was working with pretty much looking for college tutors. So, whenever I reached out it was very much like "I'm interested in this work from a professional standpoint, not because I identify with it" Like I didn't even, I can't think of the word. I didn't even disclose that I was like a child of incarcerated parents just that I was interested in this work type of thing. And then when I started coming to the meetings, well the first meeting I was like, "okay, I'm going to do like a recruitment type of thing and then I just kept coming back 'cause I was like hold on, wait a minute, this is very much like uhm related to me and everything

While AJ previously expressed, she had no desire to participate in on-campus groups specifically, she later found that her experience cultivated a network that was beneficial both personally and professionally.

"Yes, some of those relationships grew once you start like talking about those types of things both in like strengthening relationships and also like providing like

peer mentorship like which came as a complete surprise to me. People being like “oh you have this role or this position” Like you know you're similar to me. Like what advice do you have for me now? Like there's people that I look up to like what am I supposed to do for people but it's helped me like understand like yeah even experience that I can have can help somebody else like out.”

CS was involved on campus but did not feel the need to participate in campus related activities for ACIPs. When asked about his involvement either on or off-campus with ACIP specific student organizations, he stated, “...no as far as like targeting people like me or you know similar organizations now not not anything like that”. Differing from other participants in this study he further explained why he chose not to participate in groups associated with CIP/ACIPs. CS explained,

Now personally, I wouldn't have I would have had no interest in that because I don't like to use my past as a crutch and I'm not saying being a part of the group like that is a crutch but my personality that's how I see now would have seen it as a weakness joining something like that then.

In general, like most college students, participants' choices varied in interest by which groups they chose to become involved with as it related to their associated invisible identity. Participants explored issues around identity and development from both organizations on and off-campus that challenged and supported their associated invisible identity. Consistently, respondents reflected on finding community by connecting with other ACIPs in the student involvement microsystem even when it was unintentional. These examples represented participants interactions with finding supportive campus environments through student interactions with peers, faculty

members, and other advocates. Student development scholarships on inclusion and marginality (Astin, 1984) and student success in college (Evans et al., 2010; Kuh et al., 2005) support these findings. All but one participant in this study found having a campus group for ACIPs on their college campus was beneficial. Previous research that examined social support among ACIP (Luther, 2015) indicated social activities and key adults such as faculty and staff contribute to educational resilience. Other support systems that contributed to participants identity and development in college is reflected in the next microsystem.

Parent and family influence. This microsystem describes the views that participants shared about their incarcerated parents or other family members' influence. Though family members are not generally considered members in the campus environment, many colleges and universities are beginning to incorporate family and parent programming into their best practices strategies to promote college success. As such, participants consistently referred to their relationships with their parents or other guardians who provided support and development during college. Even for participants who discussed the strains parental incarceration played in their parental relationships, most respondents still sought their parents' approval in their academic choices. By way, these influences extended into their beliefs about how they held space for their identity as ACIP in academic settings both prior to college and during college. For example, Nicole reflected on how parental incarceration affected her feelings of self-worth from an early age. This was a key factor in how she viewed her identity and internalized her need to prove herself through her academic success.

I feel like I put a lot of my self-worth into school. I knew that I was good at school, and so I knew that I would be validated and I knew that people would encourage me and give me what I needed, what I thought that I needed.

Later in our conversation she further discussed a shared experience she had at a conference for ACIPs. Again, she drew connections to her own feelings of self-worth and the difference it would have made in her academic experiences for her parents to have been more candid about their incarceration.

I remember at the conference, there was a panel where the panel list were children of incarcerated parents as adults. I'm obviously not a child any longer, but I was on the panel and it was researchers asking us questions, which was super honoring, I felt, to our experience. A researcher asked us, "How did your mom tell you about her experience when she was incarcerated?" I came out and was like, "She didn't. I would have loved that, but actually, me and my parents have never, my biological parents, still have never had an in-depth conversation about it." Almost every person on that panel was like, "That's my exact same experience." Things like that, where you're like, "Okay. I don't have to say it, because they get it." I think that it would have been life-changing for me in undergrad, especially because that was such a part of my life I ran from and didn't realize that that can be a part of me that I'm almost proud of. I owned that experience; it was who I am. People can judge me for it if they want, but at the end of the day, I know that it made me stronger. I experienced that."

Like Nicole, AJ spoke about her grandparents being the greatest influence for her and her siblings while her parents were incarcerated.

So, my Dad was incarcerated when I was older and my Mom was in and out more whenever I was younger and I think some of that attributes to like yeah, my Mom had me.. I'm the oldest, my Mom had me when she was like 15. So, it's like, the times that she was incarcerated and they were separated, I was living with my grandparents and either 1) don't remember it or 2) I remember living with them and didn't have the context until I was older about why I was living with them. So, my maternal grandparents have always been around. Like I call my grandmother every single day, she's probably tired of me calling. I'm obsessed with my grandparents and so...it didn't feel like weird to be like spending this time with like my grandparents.

AJ, also credited her academic success to being a role model for her younger siblings. This role created a sense of pride and contributed to not being defined by their parents' circumstances.

I think that part of my academic success first I should say I'm the oldest of six

Interviewer: ok

So, I think part of my academic success was trying to pave that like y'all do it like this or like give them an example because growing up we didn't have an example of like what it means to be like academically successful

I think my mom maybe has like a little bit of college experience education and my dad has like none and so I really wanted to kind of like push for my siblings to be like you know get your education in that type of thing

Though Diana's parents did not have college experience they were her biggest supporters in empowering her educational endeavors. She reflected on her involvement in high school programs that provided support to underrepresented students who wanted to pursue college and how her parents reinforced this goal.

I always kind of like to join like upper bound programs because I knew that I wanted to go to college and my parents would always encourage me like you know they didn't know much but they would just encourage me like find out go to counselors or "like you need to go to college or you know we recommend you go so I will take their advice"

Though the influence of parent and family contributed to each participant's associated invisible identity varied, there was a consensus among respondents that their biological parents and other family members were critical in providing a positive support network. Even in instances where participants lived with other family members during their parent's incarceration, ACIPs still considered their incarcerated parents' views as a resource for advice, and in some instances, as an example to strive for more. In other examples, like AJ, her siblings provided a sense of responsibility to model a positive educational example. In Luther's (2016) study on how CIPs manage stigmatization in college she indicated that parents served as either role models or as deterrents support these findings.

Mesosystem

The next level in the Context component is the *mesosystem*. Bronfenbrenner (1977) essentially describes mesosystems as a collection of multiple microsystems. Within this level, interactions across microsystems creates a mesosystem. For participants

in this study mesosystems were increasingly engaged at the intersections of students' classroom experiences and student involvement. In turn the interactions across mesosystems provided development that facilitated and challenged the disclosure process and participants' career choices. Messages on how participants associated invisible identity interacted across the various microsystems across contexts in the next section will follow.

In an early study (Renn, 2004) on mixed-raced students' college experiences using Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) scholarship was used to examine how micro- and mesosystems interacted to form what Renn (2004) defined as the mesosystem of peer culture. Though her study explored how participants made meaning of their visible identity (i.e. race), similar findings were identified in the current study among ACIPs in reconciling how their associated invisible identity was shaped by the campus culture. For example, mesosystems for ACIPs in this study supported and challenged students in different ways depending on the varied institutional types. Renn's (2004) study concluded that college and university campuses create a complex environment to examine Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1993) "conflicting and converging micro- and mesosystem values" (p. 389) to understand identity development among marginalized populations.

Participants in this study associated invisible identity became most visible across their classroom experiences and student involvement context. Depending on the campus culture and the disclosing process of their associated invisible identity further determined how they came to see their identity in varied ways and experienced peer interactions and reactions at their respective institutions. For instance, AJ who was involved in one

campus group specifically for ACIPs discussed that she did not always feel as if she had the agency to speak on this part of her identity as others. AJ explained this by referring to her brief stint at an Ivy league. She said:

I just don't think that it's been that much of my identity versus if we were in a room and somebody was like oh how many of you here have gone to an Ivy League school? And I did one semester at Princeton. That's how I feel. I feel like there are people here that have graduated from Ivy leagues and they have their masters from Ivy leagues and they are the experts not me that has one semester at Princeton.

AJ reiterated that agency was important in how she considered her identity and the spaces on campus that she became involved in. As she stated, “I felt like [others] had more parental incarceration experience and I wanted them to kind of be able to like talk about their experiences.”

Participants like Diana became intentional about sharing her associated invisible identity and welcomed dialogue that advanced opportunities for her to engage in most identity-based spaces both on and off campus. As she stated, “I always also say like you know I come from a family of incarceration so then usually people will always come to me after and ask about it.”

Along the same lines, interactions across mesosystems created opportunities for participants to educate others and, in some instances, dispel negative connotations associated with being a CIP/ACIP. Consistently, participants discussed situations where they were intentional about challenging inappropriate language used from one microsystem to another. For example, Nicole commented,

There were some things, like I took a class that was juvenile offenders. I was like, "No. They shouldn't use the word offender. We're studying social abling theory. Why are we using this? It's hypocritical." There were older white men who would say things that I was like, "This is not okay. You can't say," I mean, I would obviously not say this is not okay, I would try to be... because you have to meet people where they're at or [inaudible 00:38:26] to get them to listen to you. That's a whole other thing.

For other students, challenging societal norms across microsystems demonstrated the importance of the campus climate in how participants made meaning of their associated invisible identity. The concept of what was perceived as “normal” was referenced by participants frequently when they disclosed their associated invisible identity with others. Some participants saw the use of certain language as a way to scale up or down their sense of identity against societal expectations. Specifically, Diane commented on an experience where preconceived notions by her peers around the negative statistical outcomes among ACIPs made her more aware of challenging her associated invisible identity. These assumptions, even by those who had a shared experience, heightened her interest in researching CIP statistics in graduate school. Diana explained,

I'd be like well, like I had no clue and they'll tell me the same thing. Like oh we had no clue because you know you seem like normal and that's what kind of started like kind of more of my research in grad school and people are like your normal, like you know was I supposed to become a statistic.

Similarly, AJ found that the views of some of her peers discouraged her from speaking about her experience and interacting in certain identity-based spaces on her campus. Specifically, she felt that many of her peers only saw individuals who had been incarcerated from one lens which she described as “monstrous” regardless of the alleged crime. She shared,

I remember being in like the first class that I took I think it was like victims and victimology or something like that and yeah the way we talk about like policing and people that are incarcerated it's very otherly, it's very like monstrous like these people were not good people in these people are murderers or like rapist and killers and things like that and I was like oh that's doesn't explain either one of like my parents and so it wasn't directly tied to me telling my story but seeing how other people reacted to incarcerated people previous incarcerated people made me think like well I'm never telling anybody that I'm associated to this type of thing.

Another interaction across mesosystems was the process of how participants disclosed, if at all, in the campus environment. Again, through classroom experiences and student involvement context the disclosure process was most visible.

Disclosure. Participants revealed to whom they may have shared their associated invisible identity with and the rewards and challenges of exposing this part of their identity with others. All participants agreed that there was no sense of urgency regarding disclosure. Nicole simply stated, “Yeah. I think there are things you tell and then there are things you don't.” She highlighted that in telling her own story she is always mindful

not to expose too much of her parents' story. In that she expressed that a part of her parents' story should only be theirs to share. Nicole responded:

I mean, I've shared that with my close circle, but I feel like that's not my story to tell, so I don't disclose that. When I do talk about my parents' incarceration, I'm pretty open about it for the most part. There's not much that I don't disclose, but that's kind of intentional.

AJ commented,

This probably sounds like super shallow but like sometimes I don't want to deal with the prodding questions post answering that sometimes I just want to drop that on the table when just generally talking like it doesn't have to be some grand reveal

She reiterated the importance of having agency in spaces to speak as an expert on her experience as opposed to others.

you know it could just be coming up afterwards and sometimes I just don't wanna deal with the like oh what was this experience like you know things like that also I think times that I've not disclosed have been times where I felt like there were people around I know I've said this before and that I felt like [they] had more parental incarceration experience and I wanted them to kind of be able to like talk about their experiences because I don't have a similar experience

Dandelion noted that she generally sticks to “the broad topic” when discussing parental incarceration and shared disclosure is infrequent:

I feel like it's very rare that I would say that, like me personally. I feel like on the most part, unless it's with that specific group of people and they already know, they already know. Yeah. So, I feel like it's just, yeah. It's like kind of debating the broad topic, and then sometimes, maybe you would be like, "Oh yeah, this person," or something like that, but I feel like it's not like, "Oh yeah, let me open up and tell you what all this happened." I feel like it's just kind of very on the national level and then maybe sometimes we'll share, but I feel like for me, I don't think, maybe I've shared a few times, like with mentors. They were in my dorms, stuff like that. Yeah, maybe. Yeah, so I feel like it's very rarely for me still

Diana offered another perspective on her process for disclosure and its benefits.

It wasn't until college that I just kind of got tired of just lying and I just wanted to say the truth. Like you know they're incarcerated at the moment they can be you know things like that so when people always asked. I would be shocked because like some of my closest friends would be like “oh like do you know my dad?” “Or like or like my brother is in prison and my cousin or like they're doing life for this crazy thing” and I'd be like well, like I had no clue and they'll tell me the same thing.

All participants expressed selective situational choice in how they dealt with the disclosure process. Some participants discussed the inherent salience of disclosing their associated invisible identity to others. One participant shared that their own transparency

has helped them to decipher how to speak to other things that are less talked about in being a CIP like mental health. This in turn has also benefited others:

When I spoke to the high schoolers, I always brought up PTSD and my mental health and my attachment disorder because I feel like that's something that's super not talked about and something that's super experienced. For me, it was really important that they knew that other people had gone through that, because their peers might not be talking about that. To me, that was something I needed to really echo. When it comes to I think how difficult the experience was, I protect that a little more than I would just the experience of the whole.

Influences on majors and professional career paths. At the start of each interview, participants were asked to share a little about who they were. This process was intended to simply get to know each participant before asking the semi-structured interview questions. Participants who were employed also shared their current career profession, even though they were not directly asked to do so. Responses revealed that every participant in this study worked within the criminal justice system or for an organization that supported system-impacted individuals. Generally, work interactions fit into a microsystem; however, it is outlined in the mesosystem as it was the result of the interactions that took place across the various microsystems (i.e. classroom experiences, student involvement, parent and family influences) that contributed to participants associated invisible identity and their career/major choices. Participants expressed various reasons for their interest in their current career paths. For Nicole and AJ their passion was directly linked to their passion to assist other system-impacted individuals and families like their own. For example, the ability to understand the structure of the

criminal justice system and how to advocate for those directly impacted by the courts, police, and correctional systems aided Nicole in pursuing a double masters in Non-Profit Leadership and Criminal Justice. As she stated in her interview, she wanted to be “fully prepared to work in both” as the two areas of focus often overlap. At the time of our interview, Nicole worked for a non-profit organization that supports justice impacted individuals in California.

Similarly, during an ice breaker AJ recounted her response when she was asked to share why she was interested in doing her current role. AJ explained.

So, I remember saying that I do this work for myself and other children of incarcerated parents and I think for this job I literally started this job in February. That was the first time that that was something that I lead with me not [saying] something that came up through casual conversation. I lead with I do this work for 5-year-old me that didn't know what was going on. Or 13-year-old me that was confused about, you know if my dad loved me [he] wouldn't be going you know, if he loved any of us [he] wouldn't be doing this going to go to prison, you know? All of these types of things. I I do it for them.

Unlike Nicole and AJ, for CS, a Texas police officer, his career in law enforcement was attributed to a second option to his military interest. He stated.

I wanted to join the military growing up and then and not really know kind of there was no like triggering event or whatever I just like hey I'll go to college first 'cause I can always do the military later and then I didn't really have any interest because I was always told that set on going into the military and it's like a

criminal justice sounds interesting I'll do that and then I became a police officer and hadn't looked back

Though participants in this study may not have been asked directly about their professional career paths, all participants unbeknownst to each other revealed their future career goals or current professions were directly associated with advocating for or providing services for system-impacted individuals and their families. Thus, interactions that took place within the campus environment and the communities in which participants were directly involved influenced how each participant made meaning of their identities and in the career paths they chose.

ACIPs in this study were represented by four different campuses where participants were challenged and supported in identity-based spaces across the mesosystem in which they engaged. Research on the effects of parental incarceration is associated with stigmatization in educational settings (Luther, 2015). Previous research has also indicated that college is one pathway to positive development and to minimize social exclusion among this student population (Hagan & Foster, 2012; Nicholas et al., 2015). For ACIPs in this study, the mesosystem revealed a dynamic interaction across context between classroom experiences and student involvement which in turn influenced participant responses to disclosure and major/career choices. The next section will lend to how participants' identities were shaped by external influences.

Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) defined the next level outward in the context component as the *exosystem*. The exosystem accounts for influences in the environment that may influence the developing individual indirectly. In the exosystem many of the

social forces resembled in the mesosystem are extended into this level. While the developing individual is not directly at the center of the interactions taking place in the exosystem, such factors can have a meaningful influence in cultivating or inhibiting development. Generally, interactions in the campus environment in the exosystem may be revealed through college and university policies and practices, federal or state policies, parents'/guardians' workplace (Evans et. al., 2010). Interviews of participants in this study revealed little, to no, influence on ACIPs associated invisible identity and development at this level. One factor that provided some insight on how external influences shaped identity and development was through policy. These factors were revealed through participants' discussions about policy at their respective institutions or through legislative changes at the state level.

Policy influences. Participants shared how policy changes affecting justice impacted individuals influenced their interactions at their respective campuses and how they internalized others responses within the campus community. Diana shared a classroom experience on legislative changes in her state that contributed to her father's release. She incorporated the discussion of recent policy change and how it was relevant to her in her classroom presentation. The voting outcomes of the policy, whether favorable or not to her family, affected her home life and campus experience. She offered:

And I remember like one time when I was doing a presentation like I I mentioned it an after class like I mentioned like oh and you know this relates to my parents I was talking about propositions, or it was like around like voting time and typically I said why voting is important because proposition 57. So, I talked about

problems and that because of proposition 57 my father was able to come home. Because he had three strikes, he was facing life in there but the strikes really were just kind of gang and drug related. It wasn't a violent crime so it [proposition 57] said if you don't have a violent crime you know, you can't stay in there forever you could go home.

While AJ actively began to consider how she could support more justice impacted individuals in her work, she also began to question the university's policy on enrolling formerly incarcerated individuals. AJ explained,

I was like well I want to go do this or how can I help children of incarcerated parents this way? Or how can I bring more advocacy to this type of thing? Or how can I be on these colleges about like you need to be providing resources and support groups for these students and not just the students of incarcerated parents but the general public. Because working in that education sector all of my students were like, oh do you think I'd be able to go to school whenever I get out? How do I answer that if the university that I go to was like still asking people on the application if they were previously incarcerated? So just wanting to create a broader kind of like platform to kind of like bridge incarcerated people with higher education where people were like these people are going to be a menace to it and we can have these people staying on campus and you know all this other stuff. And so then that's when it just went like full force and like everything that I was doing was working around like incarcerated people their children like changing policy like oh never thought I would be doing policy work.

Diana and AJ's sentiments reflect how participants' associated invisible identities were challenged by various policies. Though their experiences were different, family life and work serve as extensions from other levels and were equally impacted by decisions external to the interactions that participants were engaged in at their respective campuses. In both instances this further incited development. For Diana, during an election year, she expressed how the outcomes of voting results could influence her father's incarceration sentence. While AJ expressed incongruent feelings on her work with incarcerated individuals and her university's policy on enrolling students who had a criminal history.

Prison influences. Another factor revealed in the exosystem through participant interviews was how prison policy indirectly influenced identity. Though it was not a direct question, participants spoke about their interactions with the prison industrial complex in connection to their feelings on how the system functioned as a challenge. Policies related to family visitation, communications, and notifications may affect the daily lives of ACIP students in terms of cost associated with maintaining communication with an incarcerated parent (i.e. travel, phone calls, mailing care packages, etc.), anxiety associated with visiting parents in prison facilities while enrolled in college (i.e. prison lockdowns and closures), limited notification systems associated with the health and safety of their parent's incarceration, and so forth. Thus, the interactions that occur in the exosystem allow for the inclusion of diverse ACIP student experiences and the inclusion of external forces that are beyond the control of the student but may potentially affect development in the campus environment (Evans et. al., 2010).

Nicole, recounted how her work with a community organization brought more awareness to prison system policy. As a result, she elaborated on her passion for prison visitation and how prison policies affected her outlook on issues around visitation.

I was in San Francisco and went to an organization called Community Works West. They have a one family program, which what they do is it was a pilot program, where they have a playroom in jails. They have child-friendly visitation, but instead of being, "Empty your pockets, knock your shoe," whatever, which makes you feel criminalized, it was, "Hey, do you have candy in your pockets? Let me see," or, "I bet your feet smell." You're going to have to take off your shoes so I can smell them," things like that. The correctional officers that were within that visitation were in street clothes, which was huge. The parents were in street clothes because we can all dream, but a full hour and a half, full contact visit. Dads interacted with kids, volunteers sat to the side, really were only there if the dads needed something and felt overwhelmed, didn't know what to do. That kind of experience, I was like, "Wow. Why is it not like this?" Why do we hear about the eight-year-old girl getting strip searched? Kids don't want to go see their parents. They're incarcerated, sure, but a lot of it is because it's so traumatic to visit your parents. Seeing that that was possible made me really passionate about specifically visitation reform. I did a lot of research on that throughout grad school and was very vocal.

Nicole's excerpt reflects how work, school, and visitation prison policy (external factor) collectively worked in action to convey messages around her identity as an ACIP.

Macrosystem

The final and outermost level in the context component is represented by the *macrosystem*. Within any given macrosystem, individual and group expectations are embedded in social and cultural norms, which in turn, influence actions and development in the micro, meso, and exosystems. The macrosystem is the overarching structure that influences the other inner nested levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). Though participants' ideas about their associated invisible identity was not the most salient form of their identity, their perspectives on parental incarceration was informed by social and cultural values and beliefs. For some participants the messages that they received in the *micro, meso, and exo* systems reinforced societal norms about traditional higher education values and beliefs on issues about their associated invisible identity. The areas that follow will highlight the differences through interpretations of stigmatization of parental incarceration, normality of parental incarceration, challenging societal norms, and the influence of language.

Stigmatization of parental incarceration. Interviews with participants revealed that cultural and societal messages associated with parental incarceration had an impact on identity. In general, participants routinely felt the idea that they had to counter predominant stereotypes and myths held by having incarcerated parents. Diana recalled her frustration when asked to explain her parent's absence from school events in her formative years. She stated,

Yeah there were times against' cause it would get frustrating. Like when certain people would ask like where's your mom and dad? Or even in class as well, I would always write letters to them and just you know a lot of times like the kids

that didn't have parents incarcerated or maybe teachers that didn't know or couldn't be late they would always question it. Like you know like where's your parents? So just saying like "Oh my parents are in jail" like you just always give people some type of reaction like they'll be shocked

Though Diana reflects on an experience that happened prior to attending college, the idea that traditional stigmas and stereotypes against system-impacted individuals and their families remain prevalent in society continued to emerge. Other participants addressed similar encounters. AJ emphasized that in general society imposes stigma on justice and system-impacted individuals. She added that those with criminal history are also stereotyped by the type of crimes they have committed. Adding her own view of how she compared her parent's criminal history to others she shared,

a parent that's been incarcerated and there's a stigma around what your parent is incarcerated for. Like I would be like yeah, my parents you know my parents [were] incarcerated for selling drugs or not paying child support like that doesn't seem as like whatever as much as like [if you] took someone's life. So, it's like not only is there a stigma to say that but when people ask oh, what did they do? Some people be like ohh selling drugs. But to me the type of life that I like grew up in. I'm like someone you know yeah they selling drugs and doing the time. Yeah so who wants to share their parent has taken someone else's life

As she continued, she summed up messaging she associated with her identity solely to nothing more than societal beliefs around guilt by association.

I know what it looks like to go on a visit and have to go through this search like you think that those are the types of things and maybe they would have been

helpful for people to understand but then you're kind of like marked with that that like Red C of child of an incarcerated parent you know? People talk about like the A of like the adulterer, it's like your nail associated with that kind of like incarceration which can make people look at you a certain type of way even though you've had no incarceration experience like of your own

Nicole added another perspective on processing stigma and her feelings of isolation only to discover so many others had a shared experience.

I think for most of my life, I saw it as stigma and shame and something that I didn't know how to process and something that no one else went through. I remember being like, "There's no one else like me." Come to find out, funny enough, even in my small school there were people that had incarcerated parents, of course, that's how it goes, but typically no one talks about it.

Nicole's perspective on how to have her own voice was important. As she continued, she provided insight on societal messages and cultural differences about who experiences parental incarceration and how other parts of her racial identity began to intersect at a conference for CIP/ACIP. She offered,

That weekend I think was most transformative for me in the sense of realizing the racial divide within the system. It was the first time I experienced being really guilty because I was White. At first [I] was like, "I feel really excluded," because a lot of the conversation was, "Well, this affects Black populations. This disproportionately affects Hispanic populations," which is all true and I academically knew it was true, but all of a sudden I'm the only white person in the

room and feeling excluded from the conversation, and then I got to where I was like, "Well, that's my experience, too."

Normality of parental incarceration. Elaborating on shame and stigma, participants discussed the normality of parental incarceration in their neighborhoods, academic settings, and in some instances, in their peer groups. For example, AJ's academic experiences prior to transitioning to college, AJ stated, "K through 12 everybody's daddy was locked up, and her mom was in. So, it's like it was the norm and it was like nobody was going to have this like type of reaction." She went on to explain how she learned to distance herself from the experience in more detail.

Yeah so people either parents were currently incarcerated or had been previously incarcerated or like in and out and...I feel like in my neighborhood that was the norm, in my school that was in the norm but being that I was in these predominantly White AP classes that was not an experience or like how I would describe myself. Like that wasn't coming with me into those spaces like as far as they knew I was a [redacted name] you don't need to know anything about my home life I'm not like these other people at this school that have like an incarcerated parent 'cause you want to separate yourself from it and you're young so you're very much like I want to stay away from people judging me and things like that so yeah it was it was very much the norm for people.

Diana also considered her neighborhood to be one where most families identified with parental incarceration more than not. She stated,

I would create like my own groups even growing up in elementary school in middle school like through my journey I would somehow always run into other

students and we all had similarities like pretty much I feel like a lot of my friends we all have parents incarcerated so many times they were first similarities like gang activity or things like that so I kind of understood the culture. I feel like a lot of our parents like one like we all came from single household and the other parent would most always likely be there deported or if not they were be in jail. That kind of seemed like patterns a little bit so yeah

Conversely the notion of challenging societal norms was also how she later came to understand cultural awareness of her identity. For Diana she countered the notion of the idea of what society deemed for CIPs to her ability to defy the odds. In college, after disclosing her parents had been incarcerated, Diana internalized the notion of what is the standard for normal and who gets to define it, when her classmate stated, “oh we had no clue because you know you seem like normal.”

The influence of language. Whether or not participants acknowledged stigmatization as a social challenge, some expressed how culturally sensitive language with others was central to understanding their identity. For example, Nicole conveying the importance of using appropriate language was critical in how peers, advocates, and educators imposed their perceptions of justice impacted individuals. As she stated, “it [classroom interactions] was a chance to educate others, as well. Like, “Oh, why'd your parents go to prison?” Being like, “Hey, you're not really supposed to ask that.” She expanded upon how she repeatedly felt that she had to ask others to be culturally sensitive. Nicole elaborated on this point.

Like, I told them my parents went to federal prison. I told them my mom committed fraud. It was the same for my dad.” I feel like you can volunteer that

information, but it's not something you ask. Or using the word inmate, let's never use that word. Let's eliminate it completely. But being able to explain why that's not appropriate language to be used. I feel like there was a lot of me saying, "Can we please stop using the word inmate? I'm kind of tired of asking. I feel like it shouldn't be a word that we use."

Time

The last and final component in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecological frame is represented by *time*. Though it is not considered a nested level, it acts as a linear measure that observes a sequence of events that take place over an individual's life course. Additionally, time takes into consideration the changing cultural and social influence on development. Time is considered an essential component that interacts with the process, person, and context which in turn influences development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In higher education, time may shape enrollment, the institutional values/norms, institutional choice, and the external culture of the institution such as the national and global influences that shape higher education culture (Evans et. al, 2010).

Participants in this study were represented between the ages of 22-28, graduate and undergraduate students, and were represented by both public and private four-year institutions. Participants also had various academic and social experiences during and prior to entering college. This made the study findings reflective of varied life transitions and campus dynamics that evolved over time. This was congruent with Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) understanding that individuals can share the same experience, but a shared experience is not indicative of the same responses and outcomes, particularly as time evolves. For instance, Diana and Nicole both graduated from California universities,

experienced incarceration of both parents, and both participated in student organizations prior to enrolling in college that supported CIPs. Though they had those commonalities, Diana's family was much more transparent with her and her siblings about their incarceration. This also contributed to her ease in speaking more vocally about parental incarceration despite the associated stigma. Contrary to Nicole, who was raised by her grandparents, she shared those conversations about her parents' incarceration were absent in her home. In these two examples, time takes into consideration the age of the student when their parent was incarcerated, how long their parent was incarcerated, and/or how often the student had contact with their incarcerated parent, if at all. The sequence of these events that accumulate over time cannot be ignored in context to development and identity.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the college experiences of students at four-year universities who experienced parental incarceration. More specifically, the study sought to explore how factors in the campus environment may shape their associated invisible identity and the disclosure process.

Using narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodological approach, the design of this study is informed by one central research question: How do students who experienced parental incarceration make meaning of their associated invisible identity in the college campus environment? To address this focus, the following secondary research questions further guided this study.

1. How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their associated invisible identity?
2. What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their associated invisible identity development?
3. What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their associated invisible identity with others in the college campus?

Using methods described in detail in Chapter III to analyze participant interviews, written responses, and document analysis, responses were then identified to best describe the lived experiences of participants in this study. The following themes were identified and outlined in response to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) proposed four interrelated components: process-person-context-time (PPCT) model. The themes are:

1. Process
2. Persons
 - a. Pre-college enrollment experiences and perception of associated invisible identity
 - b. Parental incarceration salience
3. Context
 - i. Microsystem
 1. Classroom experiences
 2. Academic faculty and staff administrators
 3. Student involvement
 4. Parent and family influence
 - ii. Mesosystem
 1. Interactions across microsystem context
 2. Disclosure processes
 3. Influence on majors and professional career paths
 - iii. Exosystem
 1. Policy influences
 2. Prison policy influences
 - iv. Macrosystem
 1. Stigmatization of parental incarceration
 2. Normality of parental incarceration
 3. Influence of language
4. Time

This chapter begins with a discussion of the study's research questions and themes that emerged from the data. Next, implications for this study are offered. Lastly, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and practice.

Research Question 1

How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their associated invisible identity?

Findings in this study indicated that participants' perceptions of their associated invisible identity varied prior to and after enrolling in college. As described in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) *Person* component, prior to college, most participants did not place high importance on their associated invisible identity. All participants articulated some form of stigmatization and shame associated with acknowledging their parent's incarceration. This corroborated literature on how ACIPs may frame parental incarceration since they understand society generally views parental incarceration as a negative experience. This in turn contributes to how they may see their own associated identity whether positively or negatively (Luther, 2016). Moreover, identity importance was given to other socially constructed visible identities such as race and gender. Within the *Person* component two things were revealed: 1) participants indicated that they understood their associated invisible identity as the byproduct only as a result of their parent's actions, and 2) and even when linked to the language of being the CIP/ACIP that its significance was situational and influenced by the environment. As an example, in the *Person* component respondents demonstrated how in some cases, they disassociated from their associated invisible identity prior to enrolling in college and how they each *Processed* their environment which led to their development in college. One of

the clearest examples of this was revealed through AJ's narrative in which she characterized her identity as, "I would probably say black woman right off the bat and I always put those things together." As our interview continued, and we discussed her college experiences she also reflected on how she did not see her associated invisible identity as anything she used to define her identity. This perception was challenged mostly in her microsystem interactions with peers in the classroom where she framed her identity around dismantling statistical outcomes and myths among her peers concerning ACIPs: AJ stated:

I think that's been hard for people to understand about people especially children of incarcerated parents. Where it's like you're a child incarcerated parent or you're not locked up right now or dead and it's like Huhhh.... this is a part of my identity, but it doesn't make up the whole cross of who I am

AJ was clear throughout her interview that she did not perceive parental incarceration as a significant component to her identity. She did articulate that as she evolved and entered graduate school she began to see where her work and being CIP overlapped. It was during her graduate studies coupled with her current work supporting system-impacted individuals, that she perceived her invisible identity as significant.

The *Context* component revealed how other participants that previously placed little importance on this part of identity prior to college, later indicated they saw this part of their identity as a "strength." This finding also supports Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) chrono system in which he accounted for the changes that occur to both individuals and the environment in which they are developing in over time (K-12 to higher education). This was revealed through Nicole's narrative which she revealed her feelings

around her perceived identity was magnified with stigma and shame, not realizing how many other students in her school were also dealing with similar home life situations. It was not until she began to speak about being a CIP that her perception of her associated invisible identity became a positive identifier.

Regardless of how each participant perceived their associated invisible identity in the *Person* component prior to college, there was some consensus that after enrolling in college participants became more comfortable, in some cases, even more vocal about how they perceived and were challenged in the *Context* component in how they internalized their identity.

Research Question 2

What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their associated invisible identity development?

Overall, the *Context* component provided the most interactions in the nested systems (*micro-meso-exso-macro*) where participants encountered both support and challenges for development of their associated invisible identity. This finding is consistent with previous research (Renn, 2004) on understanding identities through a developmental lens. Most participants indicated that interactions that took place in the microsystems promoted their connection to their associated invisible identity. These activities were mostly incited by exploring specific majors related to supporting justice impacted individuals, actively engaging in classroom discussions, and by creating campus resources to dismantle parental incarceration stereotypes within the campus community. Most participants indicated that classroom experiences in the microsystem promoted their associated invisible identity. In Diana's case, she felt it necessary to

inform others in the campus community about other marginalized groups like ACIPs in higher education. Generally, participants expressed that their views were respected. In instances where they were challenged, participants perceived these encounters as educational opportunities to dispel misconceptions about justice impact individuals.

Consistently, respondents reflected on finding community by connecting with other ACIPs in the student involvement microsystem even when it was unintentional. Student development scholarships on inclusion and marginality (Astin, 1984) and student success in college (Evans et al., 2010; Kuh et al., 2005) support these findings. All but one participant in this study found having a campus group for ACIPs on their college campus was beneficial.

Generally, participants also indicated that parent and family also promoted their associated invisible identity varied. There was a consensus among respondents that their biological parents and other family members were critical in providing a positive support network. This microsystem was most significant given that it is often understood that children are separated and have little, to no, contact with their parents during their incarceration. When participants shared details about their home life, the majority expressed the role of grandparents, aunts, or other significant adults who provided support that contributed to their associated invisible identity while they attended college. This finding was also supported in Luther's study (2015) on examining social support among ACIPs.

The mesosystems also provided participants in this study with opportunities to increasingly assess their associated invisible identity. This was mostly observed at the intersections of students' classroom experiences and student involvement. In turn the

interactions across mesosystems provided development that facilitated and challenged the messages on how participants associated invisible identity interacted across the various microsystems across contexts. The most significant challenge that impeded development was exhibited in the mesosystem. Most participants reflections consistently identified inappropriate or mixed messaged concerning language. For instance, challenging societal norms across microsystems demonstrated the importance of the campus climate in how participants made meaning of their associated invisible identity. The concept of what was perceived as “normal” was referenced by participants frequently when they disclosed their associated invisible identity with others. Some participants saw the use of certain language to scale up or down their sense of identity against societal expectations. For some participants, views of some of peers discouraged participants from speaking about their experience and interacting in certain identity-based spaces on their respective campuses.

Overall, participants were actively engaged in their classrooms, in student organizations, and extra-curricular activities with their peers where their associated invisible identity was not often challenged at their respective institutions. This is highly likely due to the invisibility of this part of identity. Equally, the *Person* component extends to each micro- and meso system and is indicative of each participant’s interest in self-identifying. How each participant perceives their identity prior to enrolling in college also contributes to how they likely responded to messages that may have inhibited their associated invisible identity.

As it relates to the exo- and macrosystems, participants expressed less influences that contributed to their identify development. This is congruent with Bronfenbrenner’s

(1977, 1979, 1993) model that suggests the developing individual is affected but has little control as they are further removed from direct interactions that take place in these outer systems. More specifically, one factor that provided some insight on how external influences contributed to identity and development was through policy. These factors were revealed through participants' discussions about policy at their respective institutions or through legislative changes at the state level, particularly policy related to prisons and incarcerated individuals.

Research Question 3

What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their associated invisible identity with others in the college campus?

The process of disclosure was observed across multiple microsystems. Participants revealed to whom they may have shared their associated invisible identity with and the rewards and challenges of exposing this part of their identity with others. All participants agreed that there was no sense of urgency regarding disclosure. Generally, disclosure was always in one-on-one settings with either a higher education professional or peer with whom the participants expressed a higher level of comfort in disclosing. More importantly, all participants expressed selective personal choice in how they dealt with the disclosure process. Equally, participants expressed they were cautious about who they chose to share with in the campus environment due to the associated stigmatization.

Some participants discussed the inherent salience of disclosing their associated invisible identity to others. For those participants, disclosure was more beneficial in minimizing stigma across microsystem context. Disclosure also served as way for

participants to set a positive example to others who may have shared a similar experience but may have been less willing to self-identify.

Other participants noted that they generally stick to discussing parental incarceration as a “broad topic” and shared disclosure in the campus environment was infrequent, if hardly ever internally brought up by others. This again, is likely that unless other members of the campus community were already made aware of participants associated invisible identity that there would not be a reason to disclose. Overall, the disclosure process in the campus environment was unique to each participant.

Limitations

Given the population is considered hard-to-reach, the scope of research study is limited to only a few existing studies, particularly as it pertains to college students. The limited number of existing studies makes this study the first baseline on understanding ACIPs in higher education context using an ecological framework. Second, given that the researcher is not a member of the population, gaining access to participants was heavily reliant on trusted gatekeepers and referrals from participants in this study and whether participants were willing to self-identify if they had an incarcerated parent. Third, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant. Following each individual interview, participants were asked to respond to a written prompt which only resulted in one response. While each interview provided great details, responses from all participants in this study through a written response would have added to the richness of the data. Fourth, given that each participants' development and worldviews prior to college are diverse and multilayered, the sample is not a representation of all ACIP college student experiences. Lastly, participants in this study were enrolled in or

graduates of both private and public universities located in California, Mississippi and New Jersey. The small sample size and limited representation of other regions of the country does not permit for analysis across cultural differences that may exist from one region to another. Thus, the campus culture and national and local culture may have affected the participants' unique experiences.

Implications for Higher Education

This study raises several implications on how students, faculty members, administrators, and research can best understand the experiences of ACIP college experiences. To the researcher's knowledge this study is the first to examine this college student demographic using Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) ecology model coupled with the technique of narrative inquiry. This makes the current study unique as it advances understanding in what we have come to know about ACIPs in and beyond college. Previous research (Dallaire et al., 2010) indicated teachers had lower expectations for CIP than for children experiencing other forms of parent-child separation like divorce, death, or military. It is essential that the dissemination of more comprehensive and appropriately informed data concerning CIPs and long-term outcomes for ACIP would begin to help minimize negative preconceived perceptions concerning their actual educational resilience. These findings contribute to a limited scope on student development literature on identity and student development, particularly among invisible identities and other hidden populations in the campus environment.

Although this study focused on the experiences of college students with incarcerated parents, it is likely that other students who identify with other hidden populations can relate to the experiences and reflections described by the respondents.

Findings from this study indicated that participants unless directly asked rarely, if at all, referred to being the child of an incarcerated parent. Even when viewed as less salient to other more visible forms of identity, the general view was positively framed in the sense of pride and strength in shaping their holistic view of themselves. Luther's study (2016) found that ACIPs found ways to manage their courtesy stigma through a prosocial identity that supported their educational success and persistence. The positive frame that participants in this study also described supports Luther's finding. Additionally, these findings also contribute to higher education professionals understanding of how to provide wrap-around services, programming, and curriculum for ACIPs and other students that identity with other similar forms of invisible identities.

Findings also indicated that participants were engaged in on and off-campus specific activities/organizations that specially supported CIP/ACIP. Three participants attended universities that had specific student organizations for system-impacted individuals, of which one was established by a participant in this study. Participants described the sense of belonging and understanding of their shared experiences in the campus community by being a part of specific ACIP organizations. This experience was echoed by participants who also initially indicated they had no desire to join student campus organizations for ACIPs. However, it is critical that students, faculty members, and higher education administrators refrain from perpetuating negative stereotypes around establishing system-impacted student organizations on their campuses. For example, justice impacted student services may support formally incarcerated students, students who have criminal backgrounds, and students like participants in this study who have otherwise been impacted by the justice system by association. While most

institutions are still coming to understand if there is a need and how to best address justice impacted student needs, the findings in this study support the idea that having student organizations for ACIPs has nurtured students' sense of belonging and development.

Another implication is that higher education professionals should, at best, be more consciously aware that words do matter. Though this study focused on students with incarcerated parents, the notion that the use of appropriate and respectful language when referring to all justice-impacted individuals was powerful to participants in this study. Research on using humanizing justice impacted individuals supports this finding (Tran et al., 2018). Oftentimes engagement through classroom interactions with faculty and staff in the microsystem provided participants with opportunities to address and educate others about system-impacted individuals, and in some instances by challenging the views concerning life outcomes for CIP/ACIPs. Whether or not participants acknowledged stigmatization as a social challenge, some expressed how culturally insensitive language with others was central to understanding their associated invisible identity and how others at their respective institutions may have perceived it. This finding suggests the need for initiatives that invite culturally responsive pedagogy, programming, and institutional policies and practices surrounding system-impacted individuals of those who may otherwise be impacted by the criminal justice system. Higher education professionals can be key players in supporting ACIPs in their daily interactions whether they serve as advisors, professors, mentors, etc. and can assist in minimizing the stigmatization that students face in the micro and meso systems they may encounter.

Lastly, this study deepens our knowledge on the Huynh-Hohnbaum et al., (2015) study of high school graduation completion rates among children with incarcerated mothers. In the current study four out of five participants experienced maternal incarceration. Also, three of four participants experienced both maternal and paternal incarceration. One participant, AJ, explained that parental incarceration is often assumed to be associated with a father's incarceration rather than maternal. While this study does not focus on high school graduation rates across the US, and does not attempt to compare high school completion rates among students who have experienced maternal incarceration rather than paternal, it did find that that most participants 1) experienced maternal incarceration, and 2) graduated from high school. This finding, however, should not be generalized to the larger ACIP population; it is safer to follow the logic of (Huynh-Hohnbaum et al., 2015) and conclude that differences educational success may vary when one considers combinations of paternal and maternal incarceration. Since attending and graduating from college is considered one predictor of academic achievement, participants in this study provide positive examples of college student development despite experiencing maternal incarceration. Specifically, as it relates to this study, the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) model allowed flexibility of each participant's background (i.e. paternal vs maternal) in considering various factors that contributed to their identity and development while in college. Taken together, participants who experienced maternal incarceration did not perceive their associated invisible identity any more or less than participants who experienced parental incarceration. Nor did they indicate that the disclosure process was challenged any more or less than participants who experienced parental incarceration.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study raises several new opportunities for future research. This study focused on the experiences of ACIP and how influences in their environment shaped their associated invisible identity in college. This study did not elect to limit the study criteria to any one racial/ethnic group that experienced parental incarceration. Current literature (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014) notes that the general lack of attention to race about CIPs in literature had led to the erroneous, yet widely-perceived supposition that ACIP is a non-White issue. Nicole, a White female, expressed feelings of exclusion from speaking openly about being an CIP/ACIP among other non-White ACIPs. Generally, much of the public conversations surrounding who is mostly affected by parental incarceration has centered on how mass incarceration disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities. Future research should examine the experiences of White ACIP to explore racial differences, if any all, in and beyond their educational experiences.

In the current study participants represented public and private four-year colleges and universities. One participant attended a majority Hispanic serving institution while other participants attended Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Further research should expand on exploring the experiences of ACIP at other higher education establishments that include participants who have received education outside of traditional private/public four-year universities like community colleges, military colleges, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Previous studies (Renn, 2003) have indicated that the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) model in higher education settings is useful for examining how micro- and mesosystems may merge and conflict across campus institutions. For example, mesosystem for ACIPs

college students may support and challenge students in different ways contingent on the values and climate established at each institution. Continuing to expand the literature on ACIPs and the characteristics of the campuses they attend may help higher education professionals understand how to support students, identify campus specific programming, and add to existing literature on the educational outcomes for ACIPs beyond high school.

A relevant microsystem in this study indicated that participants were actively engaged in student organizations specifically for ACIPs both on and off campus. This involvement provided meaningful opportunities to interact with other ACIPs and, therefore, enhanced participants associated invisible identity during college. Students articulated that joining student organizations specifically for ACIPs validated their shared experience. For some just the idea that the university provided a safe space to connect with other system impacted students created a sense of belonging even when participants did not intentionally seek out support. Future research should examine university-based programs and their efforts to support ACIPs and other system impacted individuals. Research should consider exploring both students and the professional staff who work with students to understand both perceptions of their university and the programming support. Researchers and higher education professionals can use this data to begin to identify college and universities that provide specific support and what programming, and services are provided. Consideration of these programs should explore student benefits, campus need, and administrator support and outcomes. Additionally, research on dedicated services for ACIPs in college will also further contribute to the findings in this study on we understand shapes ACIPs college experiences, identity and development at their respective university.

Further with respect to recommendations, future studies should make some effort to broaden the sample size. Gaining access to participants in this study proved, at times, challenging to the researcher's "outsider" status. Expanding the study to include leaving the study open for a longer period of time may result in increasing the sample. Along the same lines, the current study was heavily reliant on trusted gatekeepers and referrals from current participants. By leaving the study open longer and collaborating with other ACIPs future studies may offer a wider reach of more potential participants.

Additionally, document analysis used in this study prove to be inconsistent. The purpose of incorporating documents (artifacts) was used as an opening prior to introducing the semi-structured interview questions to each participant. Participants who shared a personal item expressed their beliefs about their experiences as an ACIP through pictures, letters, and other visual artifacts. Future studies should explore how such documentation can directly inform the research of participants' experiences in the campus environment.

Lastly, following each individual interview, participants were asked to respond to a written prompt which only resulted in one response. While each interview provided great details, future research that can capitalize on written responses from all participants would add to the richness of the data.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of college students that have experienced parental incarceration and how they make meaning of their associated invisible identity in the campus environment at four-year institutions in the U.S. Because the experiences of ACIPs in post-secondary settings are few, a qualitative

methodology was best suited to detail participants lived experiences. Specifically, this study employed a narrative inquiry approach. The application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) ecological model provided a novel way to explore the college experiences of ACIPs while not excluding wider societal and environmental factors that could shape their associated invisible identity and development.

The findings suggest that participants associated invisible identity was not more salient than other parts of their identity. However, participants revealed that interactions in the classroom, with faculty and other administrators, and with family did contribute to their self-understanding of their identity at their respective institutions. Additionally, this study provides insight on the disclosure process. All participants expressed selective personal choice in how they dealt with the disclosure. Generally, participant's felt disclosing their associated invisible identity was unique to the setting. Participants also made mention of processing how beneficial they felt it would be to share with others, if at all. While this is the first study to use an ecological framework (EF) to examine invisible identities for ACIPs, EF may be an appropriate frame and guide to better inform diversity policies through culturally responsive pedagogy, programming, and institutional policies and practices among other hidden populations in higher education. Finally, this study can further be shared with organizations working with justice impacted students and institutions that choose to establish and support dedicated services for ACIPs and other groups that may have invisible identities.

APPENDIX A – Gatekeeper’s Email

Dear _____,

I am writing to bring your attention to a unique research opportunity. My name is Andrea Blake and I am in the initial stages of completing my dissertation for a doctoral degree in higher education administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. My research study examines the college experiences of students with incarcerated parents attending or graduates of four-year colleges and universities.

As you may know, there is very little written in academic literature on students with incarcerated parents’ educational experiences in post-secondary settings. It is my hope that this research will help students, administrators, and researchers better understand the experiences and needs of this population on college and university campuses. With that, I am soliciting your assistance in seeking potential participants.

Students that are interested in this study will be asked to participate in an individual interview via zoom lasting anywhere from 60-75 minutes. Additionally, students will be asked to complete a background questionnaire and a brief written reflection following the interview. After transcribing the interviews and compiling the data, I will provide a copy of the transcription for each participant to offer their review and responses with me.

In presenting the results of this study, any identifying information about the participants will be obscured and each participant will select a pseudonym of their choice to represent any information I use in the publication that represents their responses. Please know, participation is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants will also receive a \$15 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time once they have returned the written prompt response.

I would appreciate you sharing both this email of interest and the participant invitation letter inviting students and graduates that you may know that has experienced parental incarceration. Please contact me directly by phone: (601) 329-XXXX or via email at andrea.blake@usm.edu, or my advisor Thomas O’Brien, at thomas.obrien@usm.edu should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Andrea Blake, M.P.P.A
Higher Education Administration Program, USM

**ARE YOU A COLLEGE STUDENT OR
RECENT GRADUATE THAT HAS
EXPERIENCED PARENTAL
INCARCERATION?**

IF SO, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

PLEASE CONSIDER PARTICIPATION IF YOU ARE:

- A student enrolled at or a recent graduate of a four-year college or university; and
- You have experienced parental incarceration at any point during childhood to present

WHY?

The reality is few institutions have disseminated information to adequately educate members of the academic community about the experiences and needs of this hidden population.

For more information or to express interest in the study, please contact:

Andrea Blake
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Southern Mississippi
andrea.blake@usm.edu
This study has been approved by USM's IRB. Protocol number (20-371)

****Compensation Provided****

APPENDIX C – Participant Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

I am emailing to bring your attention to an important research opportunity. My name is Andrea Blake. I am a doctoral candidate in the higher education administration program at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am kindly asking for your participation in a study that I am conducting on the experiences of college students of incarcerated parents enrolled at or graduates of four-year institutions. Respecting the concern for privacy around this topic, I have requested professionals who work with this population or referrals made by other trusted adults in support of this study to send this invitation to you on my behalf.

As you know, there is very little written from the perspective of college students that have or had an incarcerated parent. Considering you are the experts of your own experiences, with your participation in the study, I hope to learn how to better inform the academic community about your experiences in context to higher education student development.

If you agree, your participation in the study involves completing a basic demographic questionnaire, conducting an interview lasting between 60-75 minutes, and your response to a written prompt. Interviews can be conducted by Zoom communications or via phone at your convenience.

In presenting the results of this study, any identifying information about you will be obscured and you will select a pseudonym of your choice to represent any information I use in the publication that represents your responses. Please know, participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. As a participant, you will receive a \$15 gift card as a token of your appreciation for your time once you have returned your submission of the written prompt.

Before you decide to accept this invitation, please take a moment to read the Informed Consent Statement at the link provided carefully. You will be asked to sign (electronically) the consent form prior to completion of the demographic questionnaire and interview. If you are interested in taking part in the study, or if you would like to find out more about the study before proceeding, please feel free to contact me directly at (601) 329-XXXX or via email at andrea.blake@usm.edu with the subject line “sharing my own narrative”.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Andrea Blake, M.P.P.A
Higher Education Administration Program, USM

APPENDIX D – Consent Form

I understand that:

1. I will take part in a research study which is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the doctoral degree in higher education administration under the direction of Andrea Blake in the Department of Education at The University of Southern Mississippi;
2. I am aware that the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of college students or graduates of four-year institutions that have or had an incarcerated parent;
3. If I agree to participate in the study, I will be asked to complete a basic questionnaire, an interview that will last between 60-75 minutes, and completion of a written response following the interview;
4. The study is completely voluntary, and I can withdraw from the interview at any time or choose not to respond to a particular question by informing the principal researcher, Andrea Blake at any time;
5. I may withdraw completely from the study at any point by informing the principal researcher, Andrea Blake;
6. I give permission for my collected stories/observations to be used by Andrea Blake for publishable purposes;
7. My identity will be kept confidential and all personally identifying information will be altered in all written and verbal reports of this study. Additionally, all recordings and transcriptions will be password protected and stored in a locked file for increased security;
8. If my reflection on my experiences causes uncomfortable feelings in the course of the interview or in responding to a written reflection, the researcher is prepared to provide me with a professional contact for community and/or university mental health services; and
9. I can contact the principal researcher, Andrea Blake, by phone at (601) 329-XXXX or via email at andrea.blake@usm.edu at any time in order to ask questions or discuss my concerns or participation in the study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Sam Bruton at samuel.bruton@usm.edu with the Office of Research Integrity.

_____ Participant's initials

My signature below indicates I fully understand the risks to me in participating in this research and I freely and voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form for my records.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant (over 18)

Date

To my knowledge the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participant in this research study.

Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX E – Interview Questions and Script

Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

My name is Andrea Blake, I am a doctoral candidate in the higher education administration program at The University of Southern Mississippi. I want to begin by thanking you for your willingness to participate in a study that I hope will provide students, professionals, and the academic community about the experiences and needs of college students of incarcerated parents.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to go back over how today's interview process will work. This interview is expected to last approximately 60-75 minutes. Everything that you discuss with me during the interview is confidential. This is your experience and I consider you the expert not me, so there are no right or wrong responses, or desirable or undesirable responses. You can share as much or as little as you feel lead to share.

In order for me to accurately document the interview, I would like to record our conversation so that I can provide a detailed transcript of our interview with you. If at any point you would like the recording turned off, please feel free to simply let me know at that time. I will not produce any written or verbal reports with any identifying information and if direct quotes are used from your transcription, you will be referred to by your chosen fictitious name.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

General Background Information

1. Tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

Probes:

- What city, region of country?

2. How would you describe your high school educational experience?

Probes:

- Was your high school public or private?
- What aspects about your high school experience made you feel connected?

3. In what ways was it similar to or different from your college campus?
Probes:
 - Was your high school public or private?
 - What was the student body size? Demographic makeup?

Research Question 1: How do college students who have experienced parental incarceration perceive their invisible identity?

Personal Document Item

4. As a part of the interview process you were asked to select a personal or popular culture document that you feel captures your experience being a child of an incarcerated parent. Please tell me about the significance of the personal item you selected for our conversation.
Probes:
 - Tell me why you selected this document out of all the other things you could have chosen?
 - Tell me more about what it means to you in relationship to being a child of incarcerated parent?
5. Describe how your family life was shaped by your parent(s) incarceration? (*mesosystem and exosystem constructs*)
Probes
 - What was your relationship like with your parent prior to their incarceration? And after? And what does that relationship look like now?
 - How has having or not having a relationship with them shaped your academic experience? Expand?
 - What does your support system look like in your academic community? And what about in your local community?
6. Tell me how you would describe your identity? (*questions prompt toward intersection of identities*)
Probes
 - What are the visible identities that first come to mind? And how have these shaped who you are?
 - What are non-visible identities that first come to mind? And how have these identities shaped who you are?

The College Campus Experience

Research Question 2: What factors in the college campus environment promote or impede their invisible identity development?

7. Reflecting on when you entered your college campus. Has your description of identity changed since you first entered college/graduated from college?
Probes
 - Can you share any specific activities that have contributed to how you feel about your invisible identity as an ACIP while in college, if at all?
 - Has attending college played a role in further illuminating or separating this aspect of identity?

8. In what ways, if at all, has being an ACIP contributed to your relationships with your peers on campus? (*mesosystem constructs*)
Probes
 - If so, in what way(s)? If not, why not?
 - Have you participated in other social groups for ACIP within the campus community?

9. Please share with me any activities you are involved in on or off campus? In what ways do your activities reflect or contribute to your identity as ACIP student? (*question prompt toward Astin's student involvement*)
Probes
 - Are you aware of university support services that provide support for students in this population?
 - Have you participated in any campus resources or services that support ACIP? If so, why or why not?

10. Please share with me your academic experiences. Have you ever had classes, assignments, or participated in classroom discussions that made you reflect on being an ACIP? (*mesosystem constructs - question prompt toward Schlossberg's marginality and mattering*)
Probes
 - Have you ever incorporated this aspect of your identity into your academic assignments? If so, in what way?
 - Have you participated in other discussions inside the classroom around this aspect of identity? If so, was it positive or negative? What did you make of that?

11. In terms of community responses and awareness, have any national, state, or local issues impacting those affected by the criminal justice system impacted your

experience as an ACIP college student? If so, what? And in what way(s)?
(*macrosystem constructs*)

Probes

- If at all, have these national issues contributed to/inhibited your identity in the campus environment? If so, how?

Research Question 3: What factors, if any, have contributed to their decision to disclose, or not disclose their invisible identity with others in the college campus?

12. In terms of disclosure, how do you make decisions about disclosing, or not disclosing, this part of your identity to someone in the campus environment?
(*mesosystem and macrosystem constructs*)

Probes

- How does social messages about criminal justice offenders and their children play into your willingness to disclose this part of your identity with others in the campus community?
- Campus conversations?

13. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about yourself or your experience as a college student at _____?

This concludes the individual interview. Thank you very much for participating and entrusting me with a safe place to share your life story narrative. I will transcribe the digitally recorded interview and share the typewritten transcript with you to check that I have accurately reflected your narrative. This is a collaborative process so your input is truly valuable and important in the dissemination of the published study.

Do you have any additional question for me at this time? If not, I will email you further instructions for the written response which will finalize the completion of the study.

APPENDIX F – Directions for Written Prompt

Please provide a minimum 1-page written response to the following prompt. Please feel free to use as many pages as you like beyond the minimum and use any writing style that is most comfortable for you. Please return your response within one week to the principal researcher, Andrea Blake at andrea.blake@usm.edu.

Prompt: Describe a time since you enrolled in college that you were challenged by and/or successful in educating others about the “norms” of having an incarcerated parent? Then, tell me what that situation meant to you. (feel free to use any experience that comes to mind from inside or outside the classroom)

APPENDIX G –IRB Approval Letter

Office of
Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- Face-to-Face data collection may not commence without prior approval from the Vice President for Research's Office.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-371

PROJECT TITLE: From the Shadows of Incarceration to Higher Education: Identity Development of College Students of Incarcerated Parents

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin

RESEARCHER(S): Andrea Blake, Thomas O'Brien

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: February 5, 2021

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Sacco".

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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