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EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL INVISIBILITY IN FORMERLY INCARCERATED BLACK MEN

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EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL INVISIBILITY IN FORMERLY INCARCERATED
BLACK MEN

by

Dallas Wright

A Thesis Submitted
to the Faculty of
The College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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CHAPTER 1

Background of the Study

After decades of punitive revisions to criminal justice policy at the federal and state levels, tens of millions of individuals and families in the United States of America (USA) now grapple with the persistent threat of incarceration and its after-effects (Western & Muller, 2013). Black men—the term this study uses to describe men of African and/or Afro-Caribbean origin living in the USA as immigrants, descendants of immigrants, or descendants of enslaved persons who self-identify, or are identified by others, as Black—have been the population most besieged by the current penal regime (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005; Maylor, 2014). Inheriting the stratifying role of chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and urban ghettoization before it, mass incarceration legally and socially otherizes Black men (Crenshaw, 2011; Wacquant, 2001). Stints in jail or prison carry profound consequences for Black men in their public and private lives, negatively impacting their physical health, economic wellbeing and family relationships (Browning, Miller, & Spruance, 2018; Miller & Purifoye, 2016).

Incarceration experiences also jeopardize Black men’s psychological functioning. Exposure to violence, encounters with identity-destabilizing forms of discrimination, and other risk factors have been shown to produce elevated rates of mental illness in incarcerated Black men (Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018; Perkins, Kelly, & Lasiter, 2014; Weill & Haney, 2017). Realizing this, Anderson Franklin introduced his invisibility syndrome theory to illustrate how racism and its psycho-emotional effects can generate “an inner struggle with the feeling that one’s talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized” (Franklin, 1999a, p. 1). Franklin’s psychological invisibility, mobilizing his own case studies and the body of racial identity development literature, offers a means to conceptualize and treat Black men

striving to maintain a healthy sense of self despite confrontations with pervasive racism (Franklin, 1999).

If racial discrimination, material disadvantage and violence are indeed so closely associated with Black men's mental health struggles, there may not be an experience carrying more psycho-emotional risk to this population than incarceration (Gunnison, Helfgott, & Wilhelm, 2015; Nowotny & Kuptsevyeh-Timmer, 2018; Weill & Haney, 2017). Additional challenges lay in wait outside the correctional facility, as the widespread criminalization of Black men has marred their interpersonal and institutional interactions with stigmatization and suspicion (Miller & Purifoye, 2016; Miller & Stuart, 2017). Though Franklin's writings were published during the height of the modern mass incarceration era, his theory does not explicitly account for how imprisonment might influence psychological invisibility in this population. Thus, the research problem explored in this inquiry is the need to understand how formerly incarcerated Black men experience invisibility as they navigate their communities post-release.

Definition of incarceration. According to criminological literature, incarceration describes the forcible transfer of an individual into state custody after criminal charges or conviction, including “pre-trial detainees and shorter-term inmates held in jails” (Simon, 2011, p. 28). The predominant sites of incarceration in the USA are jails and prisons. Jails are municipally operated facilities used to detain individuals either awaiting criminal trial or serving sentences typically less than one year. Prisons are state or federal facilities that hold people convicted of mostly felony offenses for a period longer than one year (Larson, 2018). Modern-day correctional institutions have largely strayed from the rehabilitative aims of the late-19th century in various structural and cultural aspects (Meskell, 1999). At present, incarceration in the USA operates as a punitive force that imposes ranging sociopolitical penalties on the citizenry—

several scholars and policymakers argue that its preponderance constitutes a dire civil rights problem in and of itself (Gottschalk, 2011; Miller, 2014; Pettit & Western, 2004; Simon, 2011; Street, 2002).

Mass incarceration in the USA. United States incarceration levels exponentially increased between the years 1975-2010, resulting in a globally unique phenomenon commonly termed *mass incarceration* (Simon, 2011). Scholars have generally distinguished the mass incarceration era by three defining features: its abnormally high incarceration rates, its permeation through entire demographic subsets of the population (e.g. the Black and Latino/a populations), and its deployment of brute deterrent force to the exclusion of rehabilitative efforts (Simon, 2011). Experts have highlighted this phenomenon's massive scope through startling statistics. Western and Pettit (2010) measured the overall national incarceration rate at roughly 762 per 100,000 people—almost eight times the historical average measured between 1920 and 1970. Currently, there are an estimated 2 million people held in state and federal prisons (Nellis, 2016). On any given day, roughly 700,000 individuals find themselves inside city and county lockups, with a total of 12 million people admitted to USA jails annually (Spaulding et al., 2009).

When set against the rates and scale of incarceration found in other powerful nations, mass incarceration's severity comes into clearer focus. People living in the USA are nearly 10 times more likely to be imprisoned than residents of Western European democracies (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). By 2012, roughly one quarter of all incarcerated human beings on the planet were held in US jails and prisons (Travis et al., 2014). Indeed, the United States locks up its people more readily and for longer than any other industrialized country. Yet, the burden of mass incarceration is not felt evenly across the populace.

The effects of incarceration on Black men's well-being. While various racial and socioeconomic groups in the USA are impacted by mass incarceration, its disastrous effects upon Black lives and families are unmatched (Simon, 2011). Recent Census figures estimate the nation's Black population at 13%, yet 40% of the inmates in US prisons and jails are Black (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). By comparison, non-Hispanic Whites comprise 40% of the US incarcerated population, despite making up 64% of the nation's overall population (Sakala, 2014). Even more intensely overrepresented are Black men who, despite accounting for only six percent of the US population, are 36% percent of the nation's incarcerated population (Assari et al, 2017). In many states, at least one in 20 adult Black males are currently imprisoned—tenfold the rate of white men (Nellis, 2016). Commonly, such measurements are calculated using only state prison populations. Adding those Black men locked away in federal facilities would, according to Nellis (2016), dramatically increase and further skew the aforementioned rates. Given the highly punitive and incapacitating nature of mass incarceration, enormous numbers of Black men have likely incurred significant psycho-emotional and physical harm during the mass incarceration era.

While incarcerated, Black men are routinely exposed to severe trauma and chronic stressors known to cause psycho-emotional distress. Prolonged, persistent encounters with such stressors can trigger draining symptoms and mental illness if left unaddressed (Franklin, 2004). Rates of serious mental illnesses, including major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders, have been measured at levels significantly higher than those found in the general population (Wilson, Farkas, Ishler, & Gearhart, 2014). Such challenges, if they occur at pivotal developmental periods during early adulthood, can adversely impact healthy identity development (Arditti & Parkman, 2011). Exposure to violence, whether committed by prison

guards or inmates, poses a risk to incarcerated Black men's physical and psychological wellbeing. Boxer, Middlemass, and DeLorenzo (2009) cited extensive research on prison violence which estimates that nearly 20% of incarcerated persons have been victimized by violent crime while behind bars. Witnessing or suffering violence is a primary criterion in the diagnosis of trauma-related disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Anderson, Geier, and Cahill (2015) found that, even when compared to people with similar trauma exposure, and after controlling for other demographics, incarceration itself significantly increases one's lifetime chances of meeting PTSD criteria. For justice-involved (this term will be used interchangeably with "formerly incarcerated") Black men, these mental health risk factors coalesce with chronic physical ailments like hypertension, diabetes and kidney disease which Blacks already experience at higher rates than other ethnic groups (Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). Upon release, formerly incarcerated Black men often need access to holistic, rigorous systems of care to cope with this constellation of risk factors.

Formerly incarcerated Black men. Despite this need, many formerly incarcerated Black men return to urban communities lacking the resources necessary to support their healthy reintegration (Street, 2002). Decades of disinvestment, segregation, and militarized law enforcement practices have woven an "extended carceral mesh" in these areas, reinforcing the "centuries-old association of blackness within criminality and devious violence" (Wacquant, 2002, p. 55-56). In other words, de jure and de facto arms of mass incarceration have penetrated urban Black communities so deeply as to mold them in the image of the modern prison. This spatial arrangement helps to maintain the centuries-old material and symbolic demarcations between racial groups in the USA (Wacquant, 2002). Within already disadvantaged environments, mass incarceration's intensely deleterious socioeconomic impact has carved out a

new social underclass bonded by “shared experiences of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education” (Western & Pettit, 2010, p. 8). Cycled between prisons, jails and metro areas so profoundly deprived of material and social resources that Wacquant (2001) labels them “hyperghettos”, justice-involved Black men living in urban communities find themselves socially and morally banished from the polity (Hirsch, 1999). The stigma affixed to their criminal records stains nearly every interpersonal and institutional interaction with resentment, paternalization and alienation (Wacquant, 2001).

Psychological invisibility and formerly incarcerated Black men. The problem explored in this study is the need to understand how invisibility syndrome manifests within Black men who have returned home after incarceration. The assumption that formerly incarcerated Black men experience psychological invisibility is supported by the literature. Using case studies, Franklin (1999) illustrated how repeated encounters with interpersonal, structural and cultural racism could exacerbate invisibility in the broader Black male population. Incidences of discrimination, whether systemic or interpersonal, can destabilize one’s sense of dignity, legitimacy and identity—all of which are essential components of invisibility syndrome. Research has also shown how acquiring a criminal record can result in stigmatizing and discriminatory experiences resembling the racial slights associated with psychological invisibility (LeBel, 2012; Miller & Stuart, 2017; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). Compared to their racial peers who’ve never been locked up, formerly incarcerated Black men report higher levels of perceived discrimination (Taylor et al., 2017). Justice-involved Black men currently navigate a hostile sociopolitical milieu—demonizing stereotypes are mobilized into discriminatory policy, forming a sort of feedback loop which fosters the cultural sentiments that normalize their marginalization.

Microaggressions, defined by Pierce (1995) as unsettling interpersonal encounters in which one party feels unnoticed or disregarded, are key catalysts of invisibility syndrome. As individuals—in Franklin’s case, Black men—are repeatedly exposed to racialized microaggressions, the resultant psycho-emotional harm compounds. The failure to process and resolve these harms can trigger mental health issues like depression, race-related stress and substance abuse (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006). Such draining psychological responses may have serious ramifications for both individual and relational functioning, hindering “the effective utilization of personal resources, the achievement of individual goals, the establishment of positive relationships, the satisfaction of family interactions, and the potential for life satisfaction” (Franklin, 2004, p. 11).

Research has shown that Black men access mental health services at significantly lower rates than other populations (Parham, 1999). Several barriers, including ineffective clinicians, inadequate healthcare coverage and difficulty accessing health facilities all contribute to this phenomenon (Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). Studies have also detailed how lifetime prevalence rates of serious mental illness are elevated among people who have been spent time behind bars (Wilkinson, Glover, Probst, Cai, & Wigfall, 2015). Simply put, formerly incarcerated Black men face significant mental health risks, yet remain underserved.

Research Problem

The problem explored in this study is the need to understand how formerly incarcerated Black men experience psychological invisibility as they navigate their communities post-release. Chicago and its surrounding collar counties are especially illustrative of mass incarceration’s dramatic impact on Black men, their families and their communities. From 1980 to 2000—the height of the mass incarceration era—Illinois built 20 new prisons, and approved a 200% budget

increase raising its annual corrections spending to over \$1.3 billion (Street, 2002). By the turn of the century, the total number of Black males with a felony record equaled 55% of the Chicago metro area's overall Black male population (Street, 2002). The literature suggests that such intensely concentrated punishment, against the backdrop of the state's diehard structural and fiscal commitments to incarceration, results in psychological and material damages Black men post-imprisonment (LeBel, 2008; Massoglia, 2008).

Considerable research has been gathered on the stigmatizing effects of incarceration and other forms of criminal justice involvement (LeBel, 2012; Perkins, Kelly, & Lasiter, 2014). Wacquant (2001) analyzed the dehumanizing symbolic markers attached to Black men with criminal records, noting how the resulting surveillance and material deprivation of their communities is politically justified by their alleged criminality. However, limited research focuses on in-depth narrative data related to identity development among formerly incarcerated men (Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Abrams & Terry, 2014; Lea & Abrams, 2017; Flores & Cossyleon, 2017). Ways in which formerly incarcerated Black men experience forms of mistreatment associated with psychological invisibility have yet to be explored. Recognizing such an opportunity for exploration, this inquiry highlights *how* some members of this population—in their own words—understand themselves in relation to their past incarceration, and how they ascribe meaning to perceived discrimination.

Purpose of the Study

Despite receiving praise for its culturally informed theoretical basis and holistic treatment of painful encounters with racial discrimination, Franklin's invisibility syndrome has been relatively under-researched (Parham, 1999). In prior research on the subject, Parham (1999) pointed out the need for invisibility syndrome's theoretical bases to account for the profound

historical trauma (“MAAFA”) inflicted by global capitalism and White supremacy. Tovar-Murray’s and Tovar-Murray’s (2011) work demonstrates how the same discriminatory forces which produce invisibility also leave social space for intra-racial safe havens—like barbershops, religious organizations, and other gathering sites—wherein Black men might find psycho-emotional relief. This study examines themes of invisibility in the narrative accounts of formerly incarcerated Black men who’ve returned to an intensely segregated metropolis pervaded by criminal justice institutions. This study was framed by two key research questions: What is the meaning of invisibility from the perspective of formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago, and how do formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago experience invisibility? Through this inquiry, new clinical knowledge related to both invisibility syndrome and strategies for counseling formerly incarcerated Black men may be derived.

Significance of the Study

Even though 25% of Black adult males may spend time behind bars during their lives (Western & Pettit, 2010), no published studies were found that explicitly leveraged psychological invisibility to address this population’s mental health. Miller and Stuart (2017) imply aspects of invisibility while describing the devastating process of translation—which describes how, after arrest or incarceration, one’s criminal record effectively displaces other identities, rendering them recognizable to the larger society only as a presumed menace. This study adds to the literature by conducting the first in-depth exploration of how incarceration influences feelings of invisibility in Black men.

In addition to experiencing heightened levels of perceived discrimination (Taylor et al., 2017), formerly incarcerated Black men are subjected to a devastating array of structural and

social restrictions which render them a genuinely vulnerable population. Miller and Stuart (2017) describe this status as “carceral citizenship”, through which individuals are barred from public aid, employment opportunities, and educational resources. Without overlooking the need for policy reform to remedy such inequities, mental health clinicians should prioritize the assessment, stabilization, and restoration of this population’s psycho-emotional wellbeing. This study explores invisibility syndrome’s capacity to do just that, while also proposing reframed intervention strategies relevant to formerly incarcerated Black men. Using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method, this study centers the lived experiences of Black men and the meanings they construct related to their incarceration (Smith, 2004). Through this research and analysis, clinicians working with this population may explore new pathways toward effective mental health support.

Definition of Terms

Black. The word *Black* is used throughout this study to refer to people of African and Afro-Caribbean origin living in the USA—either as immigrants, descendants of immigrants, or descendants of enslaved persons—who self-identify or are identified by others as Black (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005; Maylor, 2014). This term is preferred over *African-American* for several reasons. *Black* functions as a political signifier which unifies various populations based upon similar encounters with structural racism and shared historical consciousness of those encounters (Maylor, 2014; Mirza, 1997). *Black* is therefore geographically inclusive, accounting for the trans-continental reach of the African diaspora. This point is particularly important given this inquiry’s focus on incarceration, as African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants also find themselves imprisoned in the USA.

African-American, though widely used in reference to this same population, has limitations rendering its use in this study inappropriate. Firstly, the invocation of an African cultural heritage is broad nearly to the point of meaninglessness (Smith, 1992). Paradoxically, *African-American* was proposed in the late-1980s by civil rights leaders for the purposes of identifying only persons from the lineage of enslaved Africans living in the USA. The term also—in its attempt to claim an ethno-cultural heritage—assumes that Black people have either not produced lingual, musical, historical and other forms of expression worthy of being considered culture, or that what constitutes Black culture is inferior to what might be called African culture. While *Black* has been criticized by scholars as potentially obscuring other important ethnic or cultural identities, its use provides appropriate breadth for this inquiry.

Discrimination. Negative actions directed toward a person or group based on prejudicial attitudes held toward them; or, preferential behavior toward a person or group based on favorable attributes held toward them (Franklin et al., 2006; Jones, 1997).

Incarceration. According to Simon (2011, p. 28), the forcible transfer of an individual into state custody after criminal charges or conviction, including persons held in prisons, “pre-trial detainees and shorter-term inmates held in jails.”

Formerly incarcerated (or justice-involved). An individual who was previously in a condition of incarceration per Simon’s (2011) definition.

Jail. These municipally operated facilities are used to detain individuals awaiting trial for criminal charges, or of those serving sentences typically less than one year (Larson, 2018).

Prison. These state or federally run facilities house people convicted of mostly felony offenses for a period longer than one year (Larson, 2018).

Parole. This form of conditional release occurs prior to the completion of a prison sentence, during which the parolee is supervised by a public official (Carlson, 2015). People released on parole may be returned to prison if they violate the conditions of their release. Parole differs from *probation*, which is a similar type of supervision used to punish individuals in lieu of incarceration.

Racism. A system based on racial stratification wherein the dominant group amasses or benefits from their societal power and privilege by preserving structures, ideologies, and behaviors that largely exclude non-dominant group members from equitable access to power, honor, status, and/or societal resources (Franklin et al., 2006; Harrell, 2000).

Supervision. Sanctions deployed by the state—including probation, parole, house arrest and pre-trial monitoring—used to manage the movement and behavior of justice-involved individuals (McNeill & Beyens, 2013).

Conclusion

Chapter Two reviews the literature related to the development of the USA's mass incarceration phenomenon, incarceration's impacts on Black individual and community life, and the reentry experiences of Black men living in urban areas. Chapter Two also explores mental health concerns pertinent to formerly incarcerated Black men, and ways in which invisibility syndrome has been theorized in response to race-related stress. Chapter Three discusses this study's methodological approach, while Chapter Four reviews and analyzes its results. Chapter Five offers discussion on clinical implications, opportunities for further research, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

The chapter provides a detailed review of the scholarly literature related to issues of mass incarceration, the racialized imprisonment of Black men, community reentry experiences, and psychological invisibility. First, the chapter will trace the evolution of incarceration in the USA, from its early stages in the 1800s to the modern era. A discussion on mass incarceration's multi-layered ramifications for Black men and their families will follow. Then, research will be presented explaining the myriad psychosocial challenges which confront formerly incarcerated Black men as they reintegrate into their home communities. Additionally, this chapter will explore the interactions between racism and incarceration as they influence Black men's mental health post-imprisonment. This literature review will then outline psychological invisibility and how it impacts formerly incarcerated Black men.

The reader may expect from this literature review to learn that formerly incarcerated Black men's various, pressing needs are often unmet by the institutions and interpersonal relationships ostensibly positioned as their supporters. This chapter also discusses how Franklin's invisibility syndrome—despite having never been deployed in therapeutic research involving this population—possesses great potential for facilitating psycho-emotional wellness in formerly incarcerated Black men.

The Evolution of Incarceration in the USA

This section outlines the development of incarceration practices in the USA over three centuries, beginning with its origins in the immediate post-colonial period. After establishing the system's ideological foundations, several shifts in incarceration policy and philosophy will be

discussed. The section will end with a detailed treatment of the rise of the modern-day mass incarceration phenomenon, its historical uniqueness and its impact on the broader social landscape in the USA.

The first wave of prison reform. Use of criminal incarceration in the USA finds its origins in the late-18th century. Enlightenment ideals fueled a growing disdain within intellectual circles for the public, often brutal punishments commonly meted out during the colonial era, which converged with the increasingly pertinent logistical challenges of regulating the growing settler population. Meskell (1999) points out that these factors, among others, created fertile ground for the utilitarian penal philosophies of Cesare Beccaria, William Bradford, and Dr. Benjamin Rush to spark the creation of a deterrence-focused model of incarceration, which leveraged hard labor as punishment for crime. The precursor to a more rehabilitation-focused model germinated concurrently in New York State, influenced heavily by the Quaker tradition. While maintaining the labor-as-punishment approach to a criminal population whose perceived character was essentially tainted, this model, championed by Thomas Eddy, also encouraged routines of religious worship and academic enrichment during the evening hours (Meskell, 1999).

Early-19th century prison reform. Early prisons in the USA suffered a constellation of structural and administrative failures, including drastic inmate overcrowding, riots and an appointee-based leadership structure that became rife with corruption (Meskell, 1999). These challenges triggered a second wave of prison reform in the early 1800s. States like Pennsylvania began building prisons and jails with features still common today—inmates housed individually inside small cells, the use of prisoner numbering systems, architecture which allowed for a small number of guards to closely monitor large numbers of inmates, and the threat of segregated

solitary confinement for prisoners deemed unruly and/or dangerous to others (Meskell, 1999). Yet, what distinguished this era was its unique philosophical ideal prioritizing the prisoner's character reformation (i.e. normalization). Separating prisoners from the outside world, and from one another, was no longer sufficient as an end. According to Perkinson (2010), incarceration and solitude became the means through which socially desirable habits and morals were to be inculcated within criminal yet redeemable men and women.

The rise of rehabilitative incarceration cannot be divorced from its sociopolitical context. While the scope of this paper cannot accommodate a thorough comparison of racial dynamics in the different regions of the antebellum USA, it is worth noting that New England had a significantly smaller Black population than the Southern states; its prisoner population was comprised overwhelmingly of White men; and its states had formally abolished chattel slavery by 1821 (Painter, 2006). Wacquant (2002) argues that a proper reading of incarceration in the USA requires the acknowledgment of its historical ties to slavery, which help explain the rehabilitative prison model's failure to gain traction in Southern prisons (Perkinson, 2010). The slavery regime, while subjecting men and women to labor and forcible confinement under the layered authority of both private citizens and the state, also "spawned a suffusive racial culture" which repurposed servitude into a tool of ethnic division (Wacquant, 2001, p. 100). This social and political climate shaped post-Emancipation incarceration in ways that cannot be ignored.

Racism and prison reform: Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era. The 13th Amendment plainly states that imprisoned individuals are reduced to slave status (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). Gilmore (2000) notes how this legislation's exception clause provided enough wiggle room for the state to exploit prison labor in ways similar to chattel slavery. Michelle Alexander (2010) cites several historical sources which demonstrate how, post-emancipation,

“the question of how to handle convicted Black law breakers” was of chief concern to Southern leadership (p. 28). During the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, Southern states enforced various Black Codes which explicitly ensnared formerly enslaved Blacks in exploitative, low-wage work arrangements (Blackmon, 2008). Violators of these petty, often arbitrary policies had their labor forcibly contracted out to White planters and other private businesses, who agreed to pay the associated fines under the system known as convict leasing. During this era, Southern prison populations exploded in size and became deeply racialized—increasing at 10 times the rate that of the general population, and becoming 95 percent Black by 1870 (Alexander, 2010; Delaney, Subramanian, Shames, & Turner, 2018)

In addition to accomplishing its goals of punishing and regulating an allegedly criminal population, this system generated tremendous profits for governments and private enterprises alike. Alabama’s case is particularly illustrative; convict leasing accounted for 10 percent of the state’s revenue in 1883 and, 15 years later, that proportion had ballooned to over 70 percent (Perkinson, 2010). Despite several states abolishing the practice in the 1920s and 1930s, instances of convict leasing persisted until the formalization of a 1941 directive written by Attorney General Francis Biddle urging federal prosecutors to investigate all cases of involuntary servitude (Blackmon, 2008). Monetizing Black bondage and simultaneously using incarceration to disrupt the sociopolitical stability of Black individuals, families and communities, Jim Crow-era imprisonment served as a precursor to the modern mass incarceration phenomenon.

Modern mass incarceration. David Garland (2001) is credited with introducing the term *mass imprisonment* to describe the distinct intensification of US incarceration during the final decades of the 20th century (Simon, 2011). Other terms, like *hyperincarceration* (Wacquant, 2009), have been proposed to correct for the implication in Garland’s terminology that the sharp

rises in incarceration rates have been shared equally across racial and class lines. *Mass incarceration* has become the widely accepted expression today among scholars and the public. It includes not only those imprisoned, but the multitudes of people held in pre-trial detainment and short-term jail stints (Alexander, 2010; Simon, 2011). This era is distinguished by its extraordinary divergence from historic incarceration rates (Simon, 2011; Zimring & Hawkins, 1993), and its systematic confinement of entire subsets of the general population (Garland, 2001; Simon, 2011). Alexander (2010) dubbed mass incarceration “The New Jim Crow” for these reasons—structural discrimination against Black people in the USA is upheld through this penal regime, despite its use of ostensibly racially neutral language. Distinct commitments to punitive deterrence and hyper-securitization also define mass incarceration—the present-day super-max prison facility embodies the facets of this phenomenon quite clearly (Reiter, 2012; Simon, 2011).

The late 1970s mark the beginning of the modern mass incarceration era. Against a backdrop of significant political volatility and transformative shifts in race relations, elevated arrest rates in several major metropolitan areas—particularly for drug offenses—thrust crime into the public policy spotlight. Lawmakers responded to the shifting cultural focus on security with a bipartisan, ideological commitment to tough-on-crime legislation (Miller, 2013). By the 1980s, most federal and state governments had established several mandatory minimum sentencing laws. The Truth-in-sentencing laws, the infamous 3 Strikes policies, and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act—written by then-Senator Joe Biden (D-DE) and signed by President Bill Clinton—underscored the increasingly punitive political climate of the 1990s (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). By the end of the 20th century, mandatory minimum sentences in excess of 25 years were not uncommon for drug offenses, violent crimes nor for the cumulative punishment of so-called career criminals (Pizzi, 2012).

Within merely four decades, our nation's prison population has swelled to over two million men and women, a staggering tenfold increase without any significant rise in the national crime rate measured during that time (Nellis, 2016). About 12 million people are now admitted to jails annually and, on any given day, at least 700,000 people find themselves inside city and county lockups (Spaulding et al., 2009). Nearly 20 million people in the USA have felony convictions, and 79 million have criminal records (Miller & Stuart, 2017). As incarceration figures have surged, so have the numbers of people subject to correctional supervision, including probation, parole, house arrest, and pre-trial monitoring. Research has estimated that 6.3 million adults in this country are presently under some form of active correctional supervision (Austin, Bruce, Carroll, McCall, & Richards, 2001). All such measures place drastic restrictions on individuals' movement and social behavior, and their violation often results in imprisonment. This array of institutional sanctions through which the state regulates criminally convicted (or charged) individuals has been theorized as mass supervision (McNeill & Beyens, 2013).

The explosion in the US jail and prison populations has been accompanied by infrastructure proliferation and surges in spending. Annual state expenditures on prisons skyrocketed from \$6.8 billion in 1984 to nearly \$43 billion in 2015 (Austin et al., 2001; Vera Institute of Justice, 2015). Accounting for the additional resources demanded by the police-related, litigious and judicial procedures involved with incarceration, the overall costs of mass incarceration weigh much more heavily. Wagner and Rabuy (2017) found that the mass incarceration regime costs the government and families of justice-involved people upwards of \$180 billion annually. Considering such figures, the goals of the criminal justice system—consisting of little more than crime prevention and the punishment of criminals—are remarkably humble (Western & Pettit, 2010). Such dogged commitment to the mass incarceration project

fundamentally contradicts several, generally agreed upon liberal ideals and policy goals, including poverty reduction, egalitarianism, racial integration, and education (Street, 2002).

What might life be like in the USA if such extraordinary investment was redirected toward the socioeconomic problems which beget suffering and indignity for so many millions of its residents?

Mass Incarceration and Black Americans

While mass incarceration impacted the entire U.S. population at globally unrivaled and historically unprecedented levels, Black communities have been especially ravaged. Census figures since the 1990s have estimated the country's Black population at about 13%, yet Blacks have consistently comprised over 40% of the nation's prison and jail population during that same period (Western & Pettit, 2010). This phenomenon has been fueled primarily by the racially biased enforcement of draconian drug laws, euphemized commonly as the War on Drugs. At the onset of the new millennium, nearly three decades into the mass incarceration era, there were an astounding 1,739 Black prisoners for every 100,000 people in the USA, compared to 217 White prisoners (Austin et al., 2001).

A detailed analysis of the many factors contributing to Black Americans' hyper-incarceration is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, the targeting and over-representation of Blacks at each stage of involvement in the criminal justice system cannot go unmentioned. Research has revealed gross racial disproportions in the frequency of street and traffic stops by police. Lambreth's (1998) study of the Maryland State Police found that—despite constituting less than 20 percent of the sample population of traffic violators, and possessing contraband at

rates similar to the sample at large—Blacks comprised nearly 80 percent of drivers who were stopped and searched.

Once arrested and convicted, Blacks are significantly more likely than Whites to be punished with incarceration, even when controlling for the severity of crime and prior criminal record (Chiricos & Crawford, 1995). Unjust drug penalty laws—the most (in)famous being the recently abolished 100-to-1 ratio used in punishing possession of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine—levied sentences upon Blacks 41 percent lengthier on average than those given to Whites (McDonald & Carson, 1993).

The pervasive, disproportionate, and predatory criminalization of Blacks is itself a civil rights crisis. Wacquant (2002) offers a sobering metric encapsulating the dire circumstances: taking 1990s imprisonment rates as a baseline, Blacks have a 29 percent lifetime cumulative probability of serving prison time. Based upon the same incarceration rates, White Americans have a probability of only four percent. This phenomenon has emitted calamitous shockwaves, causing “multidimensional collateral damage” which simultaneously produce and aggravate the socioeconomic struggles facing urban Black communities in particular (Street, 2002, p. 1).

Mass incarceration and Black men. This study focuses on Black men, because this population continues to be imprisoned at shockingly high rates compared to other racial/gender subgroups. Roughly 1.5 million Black men are today locked behind prison walls (Nealy, 2008). Assari et. al (2017) found that Black men, while accounting for only six percent of the U.S. population, constitute 36 percent of the prison population. Per Nellis (2016), in nearly a dozen states, at least one in 20 adult Black males is behind bars. Black men are incarcerated for drug crimes at rates of severe disproportion and inequity. A 2001 Human Rights Watch report discovered that Black males in 15 different states were up to 50 times more likely to be

sentenced for drug-related offenses, and comprised 80 to 90 percent of men imprisoned on drug charges (Browning, Miller, & Spruance, 2018).

For several subsets of Black men, incarceration has become a “normal life event” whose intensely injurious impacts have forged a new social underclass bonded by “shared experiences of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education” (Western & Pettit, 2010, p. 11). Analysis of federal and state-level data has revealed that young Black men are the segment of the USA’s population perhaps most frequently incarcerated (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). Pew Center (2008) research reports that, while incarcerated persons comprise less than 1% of the nation’s total population, more than 10% of Black men aged 20 to 34 are behind bars (Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). Low educational attainment is another significant risk factor facing this population. Pettit and Western (2004), after polling Black men in their early 30s who had not completed high school, found that nearly 60 percent of their sample had been imprisoned. Miller’s (1996) expanded projections included men who’d been to jail, and posited that fully 80 percent of male, Black high school dropouts would experience incarceration before reaching 40 years of age.

Black men living in Illinois (the state wherein this study was conducted) experience some of the nation’s most extraordinarily imbalanced incarceration rates. In 2001, the state incarcerated Black males at an astounding rate of 1,550 per 100,000—over 10 times the rate that White male Illinoisans were locked up (Street, 2002). While Black men make up only four percent of the state’s population, they account for roughly 57 percent of all Illinois’ federal and state prisoners, and nearly 90 percent of drug offenders sentenced to prison terms (Street, 2002). The true social impact captured by these numbers is more clearly understood when compared with Black men’s involvement in other state institutions. At the time of his eye-opening study on

mass incarceration in Illinois, Street (2002) reported that “there are more Black males in the state’s correctional facilities on drug charges than the total number of black males enrolled in undergraduate degree programs in state universities,” (p. 12). Most of this study’s participants were born and raised in the Chicago area, and navigated critical developmental stages in such racially disparate conditions. In addition to confronting these troubling social realities, Black men who experience incarceration often face considerable threats to their physical wellbeing.

Incarceration has disastrous health consequences for Black men. Travis, Western, and Redburn (2014) found that incarceration was associated with substance abuse, serious mental illness and infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis. Prison studies have measured prevalence rates of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension and asthma at three times the rate found in the general US population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). Incarcerated persons may be 10 times more likely to contract infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, herpes, and Hepatitis B and C (Vail, Niyog, Henderson, & Wennerstrom, 2017). Recent research estimates that one in three prison inmates—and perhaps two in five people in jail—have a physical or cognitive disability (Bronson & Maruschak, 2015; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). In addition to high prevalence rates of infectious and chronic diseases, Black men are often exposed to physical and sexual violence while incarcerated. In terms of sheer prevalence, scholars have noted rates of physical victimization as high as 20% (Wolff, Blitz, Shi, Siegel, & Bachman, 2007; Boxer et al., 2009). According to the most recent reports, about 40,000 federal and state prisoners and over 15,000 people confined to local jails said that they were sexually victimized by corrections officers (Beck, Berzofsky, Caspar, & Krebs, 2013; Weill & Haney, 2017). While imprisoned Black men may be witnesses or victims of violence exacted by fellow inmates, corrections officers also routinely perpetrate violent non-sexual acts.

Weill and Haney (2017) shed light on some of the brutal conditions facing imprisoned Black men in the mass incarceration era. New York City’s notorious Rikers Island Complex serves as an archetype; 93 percent of its occupants are male, and 54 percent of them are Black (New York Department of Corrections, 2019). Over the past two decades, reports of officer use of force increased 240 percent, despite a steady decline in the jail’s total population (Weill & Haney, 2017). Equipped with stun guns, pepper spray, body armor, and other nonlethal, technologically advanced weapons, Rikers Island correctional officers uphold an ingrained “subculture of violence” wherein inmates are reduced to threats in human form requiring management (Weill & Haney, 2017, p. 292). Not unlike other big city jails, more than three-fourths of Rikers Island inmates are pre-trial detainees, 52 percent of that population being Black (Pinto, 2017). In other words, the majority of Black men at Rikers Island have not been convicted of a crime. The life and death of Kalief Browder—a teenager who committed suicide after spending three years at Rikers Island unable to post bond for charges of stealing a backpack—grimly illustrate the catastrophic threats that mass incarceration poses to Black men (Pinto, 2017).

It is important to address here how criminal justice involvement corrodes the social capital of Black men. Wacquant (2002) labeled mass incarceration as the modern USA’s predominant “race-making institution”, which harnesses the racial, material and symbolic divisions generated during the chattel slavery and Jim Crow eras to produce a new demarcation between *felon* and *citizen* (p. 54). Miller and Stuart (2017) developed the *carceral citizenship* framework to illustrate incarceration’s wide-ranging effects on Black men’s lives. Carceral citizenship is a unique political status assigned to individuals convicted of a crime, and it severely curtails the social and physical mobility of incarcerated Black men. The carceral citizen

is also saddled, perhaps for life, with societal expectations that they repay an abstract, symbolic “debt to society” (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 533).

Miller & Stuart (2017) aptly note that carceral citizenship can be diluted, if not avoided, through the mobilization of racial and class privilege. In addition to the potential for lighter supervision requirements, well-resourced yet justice-involved individuals often avoid the damaging stigma associated with incarceration (Miller & Stuart, 2017). In short, people with privilege can navigate society without being labeled as criminals. Black men with criminal records generally lack this valuable social privilege, and are thus barred from its mitigating effects. These intersectional disadvantages inherent to Black male carceral citizenship can magnify feelings of personal dishonor and social marginality, both of which are key elements of invisibility.

Mass incarceration and the Black family. The mass incarceration of Black men has had grievous repercussions for Black family life. Nearly half of Black extended family systems have at least one member who has been incarcerated over the past four decades (Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). The spouses, partners and children of imprisoned Black men often experience negative financial, social and health outcomes which accumulate over generations (Raphael, 2011). As this collateral damage stockpiles, many Black family units have been destabilized to such an extent that some scholars have conceptualized an intergenerational cycle of incarceration (Western & Pettit, 2010; Sampson & Laub, 2005).

Western and Pettit (2010) described how male incarceration is strongly associated with separation and divorce, given the considerable burdens placed on the remaining partner. Studies analyzing household income levels have attributed significant financial losses to the father’s incarceration. In Raphael’s (2011) report, average family incomes plunged \$9,000 and their

poverty rates increased 50% following the male head-of-household's imprisonment. (Raphael, 2011). Such economic hardship—on top of the protracted relational strain of separation—has been connected to elevated levels of obesity, heart disease, hypertension and other chronic illnesses in women with incarcerated partners (Lee, Wildeman, Wang, Matusko, & Jackson, 2014; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). Experiences with financial hardship and racial stigma coalesce with the myriad negative impacts in ways that scholars have connected to declining Black marriage rates (Franklin, 2004; Franklin et al., 2006).

Roughly 60 percent of prisoners have children under the age of 18, and Black children experiencing parental incarceration bear considerable burdens (Glaze and Maruschak, 2009). Black children are six times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than are White children (Western & Pettit, 2010). Separated from their fathers and weathering the resultant distress, Black children—particularly the males—are susceptible to behavioral challenges and delayed development (Western & Pettit, 2010). Here, mass incarceration's human cost to Black families can be more clearly understood. Consider again the impact of the under-resourced urban communities in which many Black children with incarcerated fathers live. Not only are they exposed to multiple risk factors associated with physical and mental illnesses, but, due to mass incarceration's socioeconomic consequences, many Black children don't have adequate access to much-needed care.

Research has shown that kids experiencing parental incarceration are 26% more likely to have unmet medical care need than those without an imprisoned parent, and 60% more likely to have unaddressed mental health needs (Turney, 2017; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). Other studies have linked such cumulative disadvantage—when combined with parental incarceration—to criminal involvement and imprisonment during the teenage years and early

adulthood (Sampson & Laub, 2005; Dallaire, 2007). Left unsupported, children of formerly incarcerated Black men encounter the very risk factors to which their fathers are exposed. These challenges make very difficult the generational continuity necessary for community-level stability.

Mass incarceration and Black communities. As mentioned earlier, incarceration significantly impacts the lives of Black men, and those effects are amplified through the collateral damage to their family systems. This comprehensive harm has also pervaded the Black community, especially in urban environments whose residents are locked up at disproportionately high rates. Given that the majority of justice-involved Black men reside in low-income urban communities—and considering that every participant in this study was born and raised that context—the literature discussed in this section will not address rural or exurban populations (Street, 2002). Mass incarceration’s effects upon inner cities in the USA are both invisible and cumulative (Western & Pettit, 2010). This complimentary dyad reinforces sentiments of surveillance and fear, compounds socioeconomic privation, and marginalizes entire communities in a manner that has radically altered urban, Black community life (Wacquant, 2001; Western & Pettit, 2010).

Incarcerated persons from urban areas are rarely held in facilities near their home communities, and this common physical dislocation from city neighborhood to rural prison warps understandings of key population metrics (Western & Pettit, 2010). Prisoners held outside their counties of residence are excluded from Census counts, distorting demographic understandings which inform broad policy decisions (Travis, Western & Redburn, 2014). Skewed labor market data provides a useful example of mass incarceration’s invisible effects. Major unemployment surveys have measured joblessness rates at roughly 60 percent among

young Black males with low educational attainment; when jail and prison inmates were added, that figure jumped to about 75 percent (Western & Pettit, 2010). Due to a felony record's potentially disenfranchising effects, many formerly incarcerated Black men may be ineligible to vote—in other words, a significant chunk of urban Black communities have little to no say regarding their political representatives (Travis, Western, Redburn, 2014). Effectively obscured from policy discussions and partially excluded from legislative representation, high-incarceration Black communities are sapped of real political power.

Western and Pettit (2010) also explain how incarceration's socioeconomic costs accumulate, drastically reducing lifetime employment and earning opportunities within low-income Black communities. Job candidates with a criminal record are 50 percent less likely to receive a callback from potential employers, and incarceration has also been associated with diminished hourly wages and job tenure for those who may secure employment (Western & Pettit, 2010). According to recent National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data, formerly incarcerated men enjoy the least upward class mobility of any measured group—only one in four escaped the lowest quintile of annual income by 2006 (Western & Pettit, 2010). In contrast, two-thirds of low-income men who had never been incarcerated eventually rose above the bottom quintile (Western & Pettit, 2010).

Chicago is somewhat archetypical of such cumulative socioeconomic injury. As recently as 2002, half of the city's adult Black male population and a stunning 80 percent of the adult Black male workforce have a felony record (Street, 2002). Racial and class segregation have persisted in Chicago since mass Black migration from southern states began in the early 20th century. Reflecting this trend, nearly all of Chicago's formerly incarcerated men return to low-income communities—three-fourths of city-bound releases resettle in just 15 zip codes, most of

which rank at the top of key poverty indices (Street, 2002). Sociologist Loic Wacquant conducted fieldwork on Chicago's South Side during the 1980s, as mass incarceration was approaching its most intense period of growth. His ethnographic study traces the structural devolution of the city's mid-20th century Black Belt ghetto, finding nearly 70 percent adult unemployment only a generation later and disintegrated cultural institutions which had once shaped a vibrant communal identity (Wacquant, 2001). Mass incarceration has blurred the boundary between the prison and this new urban formation: the hyperghetto (Wacquant, 2001).

Low-income communities in cities like Chicago and the expanding prison state have transformed into what Wacquant (2001) calls a carceral continuum, wherein many young Black men are entangled in a “never-ending circulus between [these] two institutions,” (p. 97) The hyperghetto functions in many ways as an “ethnoracial prison”, forcibly confining and stigmatizing Black men; while the prison resembles a sort of “judicial ghetto” that banishes and marginalizes the criminally convicted (Wacquant, 2001, p. 103). This symbiosis is further evidenced by the prison and hyperghetto's mutual social and cultural evolution. Wacquant (2001) notes the carceral atmosphere within high-incarceration community institutions (e.g. schools and public housing facilities), replete with armed guards, sophisticated surveillance apparatuses and confining architecture. Meanwhile, the hyperghetto's impact upon sites of incarceration is witnessed through the influence of street gangs, whose operations behind bars have helped deteriorate prison life into chaotic relations defined by racially stratified violence (Wacquant, 2001). People navigating the prisonized ghetto/ghettoized prison continuum understandably habituate their worldviews and adapt their behaviors in a manner powerfully described by Hassine (1999):

...where men forgot about courts of law or the difference between right and wrong because they were too busy thinking about living, dying, or worse. Reform, rehabilitation, and redemption do not exist in a ghetto. (p. 41)

Such a cultural fusion poses significant challenges to justice-involved Black men as they attempt to successfully re-enter their communities post-incarceration.

Community Reentry After Incarceration

This section discusses common challenges faced by formerly incarcerated Black men re-entering their home communities. Racism will be examined as a particularly key influencer of systems at multiple levels of Black male reentry—from education and housing to employment and family relationships. Finally, this section will mention the ways in which these obstacles impact formerly incarcerated Black men's mental health.

Nearly all incarcerated persons will eventually be released from their jail or prison cells (Petersilia, 2003; Miller & Purifoye, 2016). Therefore, as the number of US prisoners has climbed into the millions, sociological and criminological literature has increasingly focused on the community reentry process. More than 700,000 people—35,000 of whom are released in Illinois—return home from incarceration annually (Vigne et al., 2003; Raphael, 2011). McNeill and Beyens (2013) estimate that up to 80 percent of people released from state prisons are discharged under the conditions of community supervision—an umbrella term describing state sanctions used to monitor and manage the actions of justice-involved individuals. Wacquant (2001) asserts that the preponderance of extended, post-release supervision mirrors the punitive tenor of the tough-on-crime mass incarceration ethos. Parole services direct far less attention and resources toward addressing matters of employment support, housing assistance, and addiction

treatment. These conditions have wide-ranging implications for individuals, families and communities.

Formerly incarcerated persons often struggle to secure and maintain stable housing, at times relocating several times in the years immediately following their release (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2014; Miller & Purifoye, 2016). Housing, while perhaps the most pressing need for individuals returning home from incarceration, is but one of many concerns this population must address upon release. Given the diminishing opportunities for formal schooling available to those behind bars, educational gains rank as a high priority for formerly incarcerated persons. Raphael (2011) estimated that 54 percent of this population has earned a high school diploma. Yet, only one-fifth of formerly incarcerated youth across the country eventually earn that degree, or its equivalent (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010).

Certainly, health challenges remain pertinent after individuals are released from jail or prison. The US Department of Justice (2001) reported that roughly three out of every four formerly incarcerated persons suffers from a chronic health condition which normally requires continuous medical care (Vail, Niyog, Henderson, & Wennerstrom, 2017). Nearly half of the formerly incarcerated population presents symptoms meriting a mental illness diagnosis (James & Glaze, 2006, Miller & Purifoye, 2016). Considering these and other factors, Evelyn Patterson (2013) asserted that a year of incarceration could reduce a person's overall lifespan by a full two years (Miller & Purifoye, 2016). Dumont, Brockmann, Dickman, Alexander, and Rich (2012) commented on the lethality of this confluence of risk factors—within the first two weeks of their release, formerly incarcerated persons are an astounding 147 times more likely than the average adult to die of a drug overdose, and have an overall mortality rate 11 times higher than people who have not been imprisoned.

Research has demonstrated the numerous, often urgent needs of formerly incarcerated persons reintegrating into their communities. Poverty and the sociopolitical penalties attached to a criminal record often stifle formerly incarcerated persons' attempts to procure basic necessities, like employment, housing, healthcare and education. The literature also shows that the majority of formerly incarcerated Black men are released into urban centers destabilized by years, if not generations, of systemic disadvantage (Peck & Theodore, 2008; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010; Miller & Purifoye, 2016).

Race, racism and community reentry for Black men. Previous sections of this literature review have mentioned how exposure to disease, violence, material hardship and other significant risk factors place formerly incarcerated Black men in vulnerable positions as they reenter their communities. Regardless of incarceration history, racism poses tremendous challenges to identity development for many Blacks in the USA (Parham, 1999; Crenshaw, 2011). Franklin (1999) describes the primary threat to Black identities as the agonizing attempt to comport their authentic selves with Eurocentric cultural demands. Such a task is perilous, given that many Black's physical identity markers are still considered distinct and thus render full conformity unattainable. Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) put forward a holistic model showing how perceived racism can trigger various psychological and physical stress responses which, if left unresolved, can cause significant harm (Franklin et al., 2006; Sue et al., 2008; Crenshaw, 2011). With the stigma of a criminal record similarly generating distress for formerly incarcerated Black men, the transition back into community life is an uphill battle for many members of this population (Wacquant, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Miller and Stuart's (2017) work on carceral citizenship provides a useful framework for understanding the numerous obstacles which stymie formerly incarcerated Black men as they

reintegrate into their communities. Carceral citizenship is a unique form of civic and social membership attached to the criminally convicted, inserting them into an “alternate legal reality” defined by a distinct set of obligations and prohibitions (Miller & Stuart, 2017, p. 533). This condition of exclusion is intensified by the entrenched racial segregation and economic stratification pervading the environments of many formerly imprisoned Black men, hampering their efforts to meet their various needs.

The Black, male carceral citizen’s new status arrangement is established and maintained through formal legislation. Demonstrating this, the American Bar Association found that over 48,000 laws and sanctions in the USA restrict people with criminal records from labor market access and public welfare support (Assari et al., 2017). Put another way, once an individual is convicted of a crime and “translated” into a carceral citizen, they are no longer interpreted by the state as someone due the rights necessitated by full citizenship (Miller & Stuart, 2017). Racialized mass incarceration has re-solidified the longstanding, symbolic linkage between dangerousness and Black masculinity (Kennedy, 1997; Wacquant, 2001). The criminal symbol manifests in the mainstream cultural imagination as a young Black male, and thus a Black man living in an urban community is generally read as a criminal threat without consideration of their actual behavior (Wideman, 1995; Wacquant, 2001).

Research has shown that formerly incarcerated persons seeking employment and relief from debt are actively discriminated against in the labor market (Street, 2002). Racism’s effects are observed in what Lageson (2016) refers to as digital punishment—wherein even men with arrest records absent any convictions are assigned antisocial attributes like treachery and physical aggression by potential employers, and thus frequently rejected. Despite recent legislation disallowing many employers from explicitly excluding justice-involved applicants, formerly

incarcerated Black men remain vulnerable to discrimination. Raphael (2011) discusses how hirers may utilize more informal measures to eradicate so-called criminals from their applicant pool, bypassing those with attributes believed to correlate with criminality (e.g. young, Black men with relatively little work experience).

Racism is inseparable from the development of high-incarceration communities; what Wacquant (2002) describes as a “single carceral continuum” which perpetuates criminal justice involvement among Black men (p. 52). Within such communities, wherein perhaps 80% of young Black men have a criminal record, parole and probation are the most common forms of supervision (Gottschalk, 2011). Street (2002) found that two-thirds of Chicago’s top zip codes for prison releases also featured the city’s highest unemployment figures, most intense levels of violent crime, and lowest median income levels. The officers carrying out this supervision are given power to regulate the lives of carceral citizens, often according to their own discretion. In many cases, supervision officers coercively influence where their subjects reside, with whom they reside, the nature of their cell phone usage and the frequency with which they are drug tested (Gottschalk, 2011). Black men under supervision are also excluded from Fourth Amendment protections, allowing typically militarized law enforcement officers patrolling high-incarceration communities to execute warrantless searches of residents on parole or probation (Gottschalk, 2011).

The specter of mass supervision covers the fulfillment of basic needs and completion of mundane tasks. Recalling the process of translation—which brands the formerly incarcerated person as criminal, and thus requiring management—even one’s closest family, friend and civic relationships become imbued with undertones of surveillance and punishment (Miller & Stuart, 2017). Vulnerability becomes a near-constant—an outburst in the presence of a social worker, or

an argument with a relative could threaten a formerly incarcerated Black man's access to shelter and food, or trigger their return to prison (Miller & Stuart, 2017). These interpersonal and institutional interactions are tinged with racialized, preconceived notions about formerly incarcerated Black male population, making successful reentry even more difficult. It is then unfortunate yet unsurprising that nearly 70 percent of formerly incarcerated adults nationwide are back behind bars within five years of their release (Martinez & Abrams, 2011).

Mental health and community reentry for Black men. Incarceration—even a short-term jail stint—is often a deleterious psycho-emotional experience, significantly elevating lifetime prevalence rates of severe mental disorders, even after controlling for racial and socioeconomic variables (Wilkinson, Glover, Probst, Cai, & Wigfall, 2015). Research on inmates' exposure to prison violence suggests that one in five incarcerated persons are physically victimized, a figure inclusive of sexual violence incidents (Beck, Berzofsky, Caspar, & Krebs, 2013; Nowotny & Kuptsevykh-Timmer, 2018; Wolff et al., 2007). Violence exposure is a key criterion for the diagnosis of PTSD, anxiety disorders and other mental illnesses (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Boxer et al., 2009). Black men—particularly those returning to racially segregated urban communities—face systematic structural and social disadvantages that may aggravate existing symptoms. Assari et al. (2017) assert that membership in a highly stigmatized group like formerly incarcerated Black men intensifies perceptions of discrimination, triggering a state of elevated and prolonged sensory arousal. This hypervigilance—rooted in past trauma, and reactivated by encounters with systemic racism and interpersonal violence during reentry—has been associated with various psychiatric illnesses and chronic physical ailments (Assari et al., 2017).

Even in the absence of trauma symptoms, identity confusion and cognitive dissonance may arise in formerly incarcerated Black men due to the contradictory relationship between social norms behind bars and the behavioral expectations often dictating the terms of their release. The very actions and attitudes adopted for protection by many Black men during and after their imprisonment carry the risk of re-incarceration (Phillips, 2001). Tolerance for perceived slights, violation of trust and transgression of property rights must be swiftly developed and practiced by formerly incarcerated Black men navigating their new, high-stakes carceral citizenship on the outside.

Despite complex stressors and high rates of mental illness, formerly incarcerated Black men are significantly underserved. States like Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi combine some of the highest rates of Black incarceration with alarmingly low levels of access to mental healthcare (Nellis, 2016). In a study of mostly Black formerly incarcerated Baltimoreans, 30 percent of respondents expressed a desire for mental health treatment, and 25 percent reported struggles with serious anxiety or depression; however, only 10 percent of the polled group had private health insurance, and less than five percent held government-based insurance (Wilkinson et al., 2015). Within only one year of release, roughly half of formerly incarcerated people with serious mental disorders are back in prison; given their demonstrated lack of access and increased exposure to risk factors, it would not be unreasonable to project an even higher rate for Black men returning home from prison (Hirschtritt & Binder, 2017).

Existing research suggests that, even when formerly incarcerated Black men do access mental health resources, they are at a significant risk of incorrect conceptualization and misdiagnosis (hooks, 2004; Payne, 2011). Perkins, Kelly, and Lasiter's (2014) narrative exploration of depression symptomology highlights another important yet understudied

consideration—their interview subjects discussed the racialized social detriments associated with a depression diagnosis, and described how they consciously substituted traditionally recognized symptoms like sadness and somber affect with outbursts of anger to avoid being perceived as weak. Nearly one-third of respondents admitted to suicidal ideation either during or after their incarceration (Kendrick et al., 2007). Re-entry is a thoroughly social process, and interpersonal distress—caused by individuals’ beliefs that other community members do not even care about their pain, let alone recognize it—is an especially salient source of psycho-emotional anguish for formerly incarcerated Black men (Radloff, 1977; Perkins, Kelly, & Lasiter, 2014).

Theory of Psychological Invisibility

Sanchez-Hucles (1998) described racism’s antagonistic, denigrating societal messages as abusive toward and traumatic for ethnic minorities. Members of marginalized groups frequently modify their behavior in hopes of acceptance from the dominant population. Having these efforts rejected and eclipsed by less mutable social attributes deemed more salient can create confusion and despair (Franklin, 1999a). Anderson Franklin introduced *invisibility syndrome* in an attempt to more effectively conceptualize Black male clients experiencing such rejection.

Psychological invisibility. Drawing inspiration from Ralph Ellison’s seminal novel, *Invisible Man*, invisibility syndrome describes “a psychological experience wherein the person feels that his or her personal identity and ability are undermined by racism,” which then produces “an inner struggle with the feeling that one’s talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized,” (Franklin, 1999a, p. 761). In the dynamic interaction between external confrontations with racism and their consequent psycho-emotional reactions, Black men form and adjust their identities and worldviews (Yeh, 1999). Acknowledging this process,

Franklin (1999) assessed for the presence or absence of seven key elements—recognition, satisfaction, legitimacy, validation, respect, dignity, and identity—when determining (in)visibility. Rather than pathologize Black men experiencing self-doubt and identity confusion (Yeh, 1999), invisibility syndrome normalizes this struggle as an expected response to regular encounters with racial discrimination (Franklin, 1999a).

Psychological invisibility emanates from encounters with racism at three interconnected levels: individual, institutional and cultural (Franklin et al., 2006; Sue et al., 2008). Individual racism is understood as the manifestation of racial prejudices in a person's actions and attitudes towards non-dominant or minority populations (Franklin et al., 2006). Microaggressions are key elements of individual racism. These racial slights express a type of disregard for the value and personhood of their victims, and are vexing due to their clear ties to prejudicial beliefs (Franklin et al., 2006). Frequent exposure to microaggressions at the interpersonal level can eventually lead to persistent self-doubt (Franklin, 1997; Pierce, 1992).

Individual racist views, once imbued with sociopolitical power, give rise to systems of discriminatory policies that constitute institutional racism (Franklin, 1999a; Franklin et al., 2006). Spheres of society, from law to economics, begin to intertwine and entrench racial hierarchy. The 2013 closure of 50 public schools in Chicago demonstrates this, as the closures primarily targeted schools with predominantly low-income Black student populations under the pretense of holding allegedly failing schools accountable (Vaughan & Gutierrez, 2017).

Institutional racism operates so pervasively that many members of the dominant White majority in the USA fail to recognize it—the arrangement is perceived as a natural order of sorts (Jones, 1997).

As racial stratification is normalized, the prevailing arrangement is maintained and justified through cultural racism. Franklin et al. (2006) describe this as the dominant groups use of power to determine values, beliefs and customs for itself and ascribe to them inherent goodness. This assertion of morality stigmatizes other cultural expression and legitimizes their subjugation due to an alleged cultural inferiority (Crenshaw, 2011). A cyclical relationship is thus established between individual, institutional and cultural racism—pathologizing formerly incarcerated Black men as destructive and violence-prone, policymakers mold institutions to manage their perceived danger, thus providing the context alerting individuals to acceptable ways in which to treat these social outsiders (Miller & Purifoye, 2016).

Psychological invisibility and formerly incarcerated Black men. Applying the invisibility model to formerly incarcerated Black men reveals some noteworthy overlapping. Clark et al. (1999) asserted that one's perception of racism does not solely rely upon the presence of clearly identifiable discrimination; rather, subjective encounters with beliefs and symbols connoting a subtler racism can also cause significant stress. Incarceration history has been associated with elevated levels of perceived racism, which exacerbates depressive symptoms and other forms of mental illness (Assari et al., 2017).

This dynamic interplay yields several relevant cases. Many Whites in the USA believe in an unbiased post-Civil Rights socio-legal system, while maintaining subconscious beliefs that Black Americans are inferior—the allegedly impartial institutional arrangements which support mass incarceration have clearly criminalized Black men more than any other group, thus reinforcing the dominant narrative that Blacks are innately devious and deserving of punishment. In addition to the crucial identity development task of acquiring social acceptance among their racial in-group, formerly incarcerated Black men are often legally bound by conditions of their

release and subsequent supervision to satisfy the behavioral expectations of the dominant White culture. Failure to accomplish these goals can cause a profound sense of invisibility (Franklin, 1999a).

As a dynamic process, invisibility involves multiple variables. Formerly incarcerated Black men commonly exhibit risk factors, including poverty and substance abuse, which can negatively impact responses to invisibility (Parham, 1999). However, Franklin et al. (2006) highlight strong familial ties, personal resiliency and opportunities to foster healthy racial identity as factors protecting against this psychological challenge.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the evolution of incarceration in the USA from a means of rehabilitation and penitence to one of punishment and racial domination. Modern mass incarceration's destructive impacts on Black men, their families and their communities situate it within a socio-historical lineage alongside chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Considerations around Black men's eventual return to their home communities were then addressed, in particular the many ways that systemic racism complicates successful reentry and threatens this population's already vulnerable mental health. Franklin's theory of psychological invisibility was then introduced, and connected to the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men. Finally, counternarrative strategies were posited as especially effective interventions geared toward protecting against invisibility.

CHAPTER 3

The issue of mass incarceration sits squarely at the intersection of race and law in the USA. The political campaign known as the *War on Drugs*—perhaps the most effective catalyst toward Black hyperincarceration—was defined by strict legislation and harsh punishment, subtly and overtly deployed in ways that ensnared millions of Black men (Rowell-Cunsolo, Szeto, McDonald, & El-Bassel, 2018). As mentioned in previous chapters, Black men are drastically overrepresented in US jails and prison, despite committing drug crimes and other offenses at similar, if not lower, rates than Whites (Millett, Flores, Peterson, & Bakeman, 2007; Millett et al., 2012; The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2010; White et al., 2014).

In addition to enduring physical removal from their families and communities, justice-involved Black men also have their voices and life experiences deleted from the public consciousness. From behind prison walls and from within the margins of urban communities, the humanity of justice-involved Black men often goes unseen and unheard. Thus, centering and uplifting the stories of this population becomes critical to not only their own healing, but also essential for clinicians to more clearly understand incarceration's impacts.

Goals and Research Questions

The goal of this exploratory study was to more clearly understand how formerly incarcerated Black men experience psychological invisibility after returning to the home communities. The research questions put forward to accomplish this goal and guide this study were:

1. What is the meaning of invisibility from the perspective of formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago?
2. How do formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago experience invisibility?

With such goals and questions in mind, this research project contributes to the existing literature related to psychological invisibility, and seeks to inform the creation of more effective therapeutic interventions for formerly incarcerated Black men.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework which guides this inquiry is Anderson Franklin's invisibility syndrome. Invisibility syndrome was selected due to its emphasis on ways that interpersonal and structural racism assume seemingly benign yet encompassing forms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Franklin, 1999a). This shape-shifting hegemony engenders in minority populations both perceived and material powerlessness, which can fracture healthy identity development processes (Franklin, 1999a). Invisibility syndrome is also well-suited for counseling-focused qualitative inquiry due to the centrality of lived experiences and narrative-counter-narrative dialectics in its approach (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Counter-narrative storytelling is another critical component aligned with invisibility syndrome and relevant to Black men who've experienced incarceration. Without doubt, many of the microaggressions that Black men endure are informed by racially discriminatory narratives. The ability and opportunity to confront, analyze and counteract these widespread racial myths is a key stage in healthy Black male identity development (Parham, 1999; Franklin, 1999b). Recalling Miller and Stuart's (2017) translation, justice-involved Black men are constantly

subjected to obtuse readings by the larger society. The invisibility syndrome model provides this population with conceptual support as they re-assert their agency and define their own identities.

Methodology

In accordance with invisibility syndrome's emphasis on lived experience and contestation of hegemonic truth claims, this study employed a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism's ontology is relativist, acknowledging multiple realities; its epistemology is subjective, meaning that what is known of human experience is socially constructed yet experienced as real (Lee, 2012). Such a paradigm is useful in counseling psychology research because it prioritizes context and subjectivity when assessing truth claims, which similarly occurs in psychotherapy (Morrow, 2007).

There is an important ontological distinction within constructivism: what is meant by multiple realities. This inquiry will not adopt the more literal interpretation which affirms that "the very raw stuff of our world created by one cognitive agent" differs from that created by his or her peers (Lee, 2012, p. 407). Rather, this study is guided by the view that, while there is just one reality "out there" occupied by all humans, the "raw stuff" constituting that single reality can be categorized in a countless number of ways (Lee, 2012, p. 403). This decision is informed by invisibility syndrome's fundamental assertion that racial oppression is an ontological fact, despite claims of social progress (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

The subjective epistemology's focus on individuals' meaning-making efforts establishes a clear link with phenomenology (Lee, 2012). The phenomenological epistemology holds that events cannot be fully understood disconnected from the experiences of those involved (Schram, 2003). By centering the voices and narratives of formerly incarcerated Black men, this study is

guided by the assumption that deeply reflective discussion and counternarratives can uncover the essential, underlying meaning(s) of their shared experiences with invisibility (Schram, 2003).

Within this frame of constructivism and phenomenology, this study elicits Black men's narratives detailing how their incarceration continues to affect their identities and lived experiences. The expectation is to better understand how their past incarceration influences these men's senses of invisibility—and its constituent clinical markers of recognition, satisfaction, legitimacy, validation, respect, dignity, and identity.

Methods

The researcher used phenomenological interviewing to gather data during this inquiry. The phenomenological approach is highly interactive interview style that attempts to uncover thorough experiential descriptions of a particular phenomenon (Cypress, 2018; Patton, 2015; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology's chief concerns are the meanings and essence ascribed by the interviewees to their experiences, with the accuracy of spatial or temporal facts being of much lesser concern (Cypress, 2018; Schram, 2003). Locality—meaning a distinct, identifiable context—is essential to the phenomenological method, as such specificity allows for deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Qu & Dumay, 2011). To satisfy the need for such comprehensive, localized interviews (Smith, 2004), the sample size for this method inquiry typically does not exceed 10 participants.

According to Morrow (2007), phenomenological interviewing is also an emic (discovering meanings revealed by the participants themselves) approach. Emic studies focus on how meaning making is understood through the cultural context of the subject (Niblo & Jackson; 2004; Smith & Bond, 1993). The concepts and categories considered meaningful to the interview

subjects constitute the data that emic researchers then analyze (Chilcott & Berry, 2016; Lett, 1990). To prioritize subjects' meaning making, the emic approach commits to conserving their authentic, distinct voices (Chilcott & Berry, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) found that narrative storytelling is an especially effective interview tool to illuminate subjects' language.

Given this inquiry's constructivist methodology and invisibility syndrome-guided theoretical lens, phenomenological interviewing is the ideal means to achieve the stated research goals. As participants describe and ascribe meaning to their lived experiences with invisibility post-incarceration, the researcher's constructivist approach supported the preservation and prioritization of their cultural context. As an emic study, this inquiry's focus on highlighting the sample population's genuine voices aligns with invisibility's use of counternarrative storytelling to deconstruct negative images attached to racial minorities in the USA. Given this research project's distinctive sample population, phenomenological interviewing produced data sufficient in breadth and depth to identify themes related to how formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago experience invisibility (Robinson, 2014).

Site Context

This research study was conducted at a mid-sized, not-for-profit organization located on Chicago's southwest side. The site is located in a neighborhood with about 19,000 residents—two-thirds of them being non-White Hispanics, one-quarter being Black, and less than 5% being non-Hispanic Whites (Statistical Atlas, 2018). The site's neighborhood is classified as a low-income community—median household annual income hovers around \$34,000, well short of the citywide median of \$51,000 (Statistical Atlas, 2018). More than 12% of the neighborhood's

population is unemployed, and that rate doubles to 24% of work-aged Black men (Statistical Atlas, 2018).

The research site does not identify as a faith-based organization, yet openly states that its mission and values are rooted in the Islamic religious tradition. However, the organization also draws upon diverse political and cultural legacies to inform its social service efforts. Its service recipients identify with many different faiths, and some with no faith at all. This organization has been in operation since 1997.

The site offers job readiness training, transitional housing and healthcare services to formerly incarcerated men. At the time of this study, 100% the site's program participants identified as Black. Program staff is comprised of vocational instructors, case managers, housing coordinators, career coaches and administrators. All staff at the time of this study identified as Black, save for one vocational instructor who identified as non-White Latino.

The site's programming consists of a 12-month, paid training course in various vocational skills. The program runs four days per week, and for seven hours each day. One day each week is dedicated strictly to what they described as "soft skills development", during which participants are engaged by mental health practitioners and outside contractors using cognitive-behavioral and narrative interventions. These interventions are made available in both individual and group settings. The researcher was given access to the site by the site administrators and reentry program supervisors after presenting to them a brief overview of this inquiry.

Procedure

Sample population. This study explored how formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago experience invisibility syndrome. Thus, the sample population was derived through

nonprobability, purposive sampling—participants were recruited from a Chicago-based reentry program geared toward Black men. Due to the racial, gender and geographic specificity of this inquiry’s research problem and sample universe, nonprobability-purposive sampling was justified (Robinson, 2014). However, the researcher remained mindful not to make broad, unwarranted assertions based on the data analysis (Schram, 2003).

Scholars have established that relatively homogenous sample populations are befitting the IPA approach (Robinson, 2014; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Given this study’s research focus, the sample population exhibits demographic and life history homogeneity (Robinson, 2014). In other words, the sample population shares gender and racial identities, in addition to having a common experience of incarceration. Participants had to meet three primary inclusion criteria to qualify for this study: to identify as male, identify as Black/African-American, and have been convicted of and incarcerated for a crime.

Chicago and its county seat, Cook County, are areas with some of the highest concentrations of formerly incarcerated Black men (Street, 2002). Study participants were active members of a re-entry program designed specifically to support the economic and socioemotional wellness of formerly incarcerated men. Understanding how the participants in this study experience invisibility may help similar sites in similar urban communities to more effectively engage formerly incarcerated Black men.

Participants. A total of seven participants were interviewed. All but one participant in this study were a part of the site’s reentry program during their interviews—the participant not in the reentry program worked at the research site as a community organizer, particularly around criminal justice issues. All participants identified as male, and all identified as Black. The youngest participant was 23 years old, while the eldest had recently reached 50 years of age. All

participants had been incarcerated more than once during their lifetimes in a jail, prison, and/or juvenile correctional facility. Three of the participants had each been incarcerated for less than a total of 10 years, while four of the participants had served more than 20 years behind bars.

Once study participants were recruited, additional data was collected. Two participants reported being married, and five of the seven reported that they were fathers. One participant reported earning a bachelor's degree, four participants had completed some college courses outside of a correctional facility, and all but one participant reported earning a high school diploma.

Recruitment. Participants were recruited using nonprobability, purposive sampling. The sampling method can also be considered convenient because of its proximity to the researcher and reasonably predictable readiness to be interviewed (Robinson, 2014). Due to the relative narrowness of this study's sample universe (e.g. Black men in Chicago returning home after incarceration), this sampling frame is appropriate (Schram, 2003).

Potential participants were informed about the purpose and procedure of this study during a presentation conducted by the researcher. This presentation took place during the reentry program's daily morning check-in session, and with the permission of the program supervisors. Given the study's sensitive subject matter—the researcher engaged potential participants face-to-face in order to establish trust (Robinson, 2014). Potential participants were given the ability to ask questions during and after the researcher's presentation. To avoid various ethical issues related to incentivized participation, no material compensation was offered to participants (Robinson, 2014). The researcher provided his personal contact information at the end of the recruitment presentation, and instructed anyone hoping to participate in the study to confidentially contact him.

Informed consent. Participants were provided details explaining the research intent, and asked to sign informed consent documents before interviewing. Each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about the nature and implications of partaking in the study. The researcher discussed the incentives of participation with each interviewee, which include benefits to the development of clinical support relevant to people with similar life experiences. Participants were informed of potential risks associated with participation in this study, which include experiencing uncomfortable emotions and feelings of vulnerability. They were then made aware that they could retract their consent at any time. The researcher—a graduate-level counselor-in-training with hundreds of hours of supervised clinical experience—possessed the skills to recognize the signs of participant distress, and implement appropriate best practices when necessary in accordance with trauma-informed therapeutic principles.

Data collection. This study's research data was gathered from transcribed interviews. Single, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants. Such a sample size is in accordance with scholarly recommendations for the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method, permitting for each participant's voice to be distinct (Robinson, 2014). Each interview utilized an IRB-approved protocol consisting of open-ended questions informed by the inquiry's central focus; the researcher occasionally asked strategic probing questions depending on participants' responses (Cypress, 2018). This flexibility is a particular strength of semi-structured interviewing, facilitating a thorough uncovering of each participant's lived experience (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). However, the interview guide and protocol determined—for the researcher and the participants—the soft boundaries of discussion for each interview (Kallio et al., 2016; Taylor, 2005).

Each interview was roughly 60 minutes long, and was captured using a digital audio recorder. Each interview was conducted at the reentry program site, in a private room normally utilized for case management and therapy services.

Instrumentation. The researcher developed an interview protocol using previous knowledge of invisibility syndrome in Black men. The interview protocol was assembled using two related levels of question: primary themes and follow-up questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Questions related to the study's primary themes were constructed in alignment with the essence of the stated research goals—they were concerned with meaning making and the participants' subjective experiences—and informed by the seven elements of which Franklin's (1999) psychological invisibility is comprised. To promote consistency across interviews, these thematic questions were standardized in the protocol. The researcher also asked spontaneous yet strategic probing questions in order to clarify participants' comments and redirect them toward the study subject (Kallio et al., 2016; Smith, 2004—see appendix). The full interview protocol may be found in the appendix.

Data analysis. First, the researcher transcribed the interviews by hand, typing them into a Word document. Seeking patterns in participant responses, the researcher manually coded then reduced the data thematically (Cypress, 2018). The data was consolidated into five main themes, per Creswell and Poth's (2017) recommended limits. Following the IPA method's recommendation of a strict, text-based analysis, the researcher again reviewed the coded data and emergent themes (Jones, 2016; Smith, 2004). Finally, the researcher conducted a more critical, interpretative analysis of the data. Smith (2004) points out that this dual-layered analysis often produces a more holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences.

It was essential this research to determine how the participants interpret their lived experiences, and how those understandings influence their identity development (Jones, 2016). Thus, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed to draw out themes and patterns in participants' meaning-making efforts. Consistent with IPA's embrace of researcher interpretation, memoing was used to explore and identify emergent themes in the data (Cypress, 2018). Also, the researcher highlighted emblematic quotes from participants which capture the essence of each theme.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher had a prior relationship with several participants, due to their membership in a weekly trauma support group led by the researcher. Other participants—specifically those working as staff at the research site—had less familiarity with the researcher. Following Knox and Burkard's (2009) suggestions, and given this inquiry's subject matter, the researcher made a concerted effort to treat participants compassionately without blurring the lines between interview and therapy session. Also, risking participant safety, therapeutic interventions used during interviews could have possibly encouraged participants to disclose more information than what is safe for them (Morrow, 2007).

To avoid these pitfalls, the researcher consulted his thesis chair before and after interviews. The researcher also practiced professional reflexivity, occasionally stepping away from engaging the data to provide himself with analytic and emotional space (Haverkamp, 2005; Knox & Burkard, 2009; Sciarra, 1999). Following Robinson's (2014) opinion regarding incentives, participants were not offered any financial compensation for completing an interview. As previously mentioned, this inquiry took place in a low-income community at a site that

primarily serves individuals enduring economic hardship. To minimize the risk of participants fabricating information—and to also avoid goading interviewees into accessing distressful memories—no monetary incentives were offered (Robinson, 2014). However, during recruitment and informed consent procedures, the researcher explained to each participant benefits of their involvement related to improving clinical therapy interventions for other formerly incarcerated Black men in Chicago.

Confidentiality

Identifying information able to be concealed—including first names, last names, nicknames, job titles, gang affiliations, and neighborhoods of residence—was not recorded during the interviews. To disguise participants' names, they were assigned an alias only after consent forms were completed and received by the researcher. Recorded interviews were securely stored and encrypted on a password-protected thumb drive, which was then stored in a locker secured by a combination lock accessible only to the researcher.

Credibility

Credibility, transparency and honesty are essential to sound qualitative research; and this was established by the researcher clearly explaining research procedures, noting measures taken to ensure rigor, and discussion on the trustworthiness of data analysis (Creswell, 2008; Jones, 2016). The researcher thanks the members of his thesis committee—themselves multidisciplinary research scholars—for their willingness to review the interview data and offer feedback on the themes proposed by the researcher: the valuable task of member checking. Thorough development and implementation of the interview guide, combined with rigorous

collection of data, enhanced the trustworthiness of this study (Gibbs et al., 2007; Kallio et al., 2016). Guidelines for a thorough development process which demonstrates the inquiry's coherence were gleaned from the writings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Kallio et al. (2016). The primary researcher acknowledged decisions related to sampling and recruitment, important steps that increase transparency (Robinson, 2014).

Limitations

The main limitations of this study involved the researcher's personal biases. The researcher previously worked at the research site, and thus had prior relationships of varying degrees with the study participants. While there was nothing to be done to alter that history, the researcher utilized analytic memos to better understand how those prior relationships may influence the interview experience (Maxwell, 1996; Schram, 2003). The researcher also consulted with thesis committee members during data analysis in pursuit of critical feedback on the feasibility of his interpretation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this inquiry was to highlight the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men participating in a re-entry program in Chicago, and to explore how they experience invisibility due to their past incarceration. Understood through Franklin's invisibility syndrome model (1999a, 1999b, 2004), these lived experiences shed light on the meanings ascribed by participants to their identities as formerly incarcerated Black men. Using counternarrative strategies, participants were given space to reconstruct their relationships to dominant narratives and assert their own subjectivity regarding their lived experiences. Chapter 4

will review the data generated by participant interviews, discuss the thematic coding process, and provide a detailed explanation of the themes using illustrative quotes from each participant.

CHAPTER 4

This study sought to elicit the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men and explore how they experience invisibility related to their past incarceration. In accordance with invisibility syndrome's emphasis on lived experiences and confrontation with racialized truth claims, this study employed a constructivist paradigm which prioritized the participants' voices and meaning-making processes. Through convenience sampling at a community organization on Chicago's South Side, seven participants completed semi-structured phenomenological interviews lasting roughly 60 minutes each.

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher reviewed and manually coded the data into over 125 codes. He then reduced these codes thematically according to emerging patterns in the data—these eventually came to be labeled as subthemes (Cypress, 2018; Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2011). The researcher again reviewed the data, this time gathering the subthemes around their conceptual commonalities to develop “superordinate themes and corresponding master themes” (Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2011, p. 27). Analytic memos were written throughout the data collection, processing and analysis stages, helping the researcher derive new, useful understandings of emergent themes. Specifically, the researcher reviewed his analytic memos for interpretive insights that aided the organization of the many subthemes into larger master themes. In pursuit of analytical trustworthiness and the reduction of bias, the researcher sought two professors—each with over 10 years of qualitative research experience—to perform member checks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2011). Each consulted professor received the deidentified interview transcripts and the researcher's proposed thematic structure. The researcher received feedback on the emergent themes from the consultants, and held follow-up conversations with them until they arrived at mutual agreement.

Findings

Data analysis during this study produce five superordinate themes which group participants' responses according to conceptual similarities: invisibility is painful (Code 1), invisibility is pervasive (Code 2), attuned to power relations (Code 3), coping with invisibility (Code 4), and counseling is a resource (Code 5). These themes were then coded with their associated master themes and subthemes—see Table 1 for a full outline of this thematic structure. To ensure anonymity and protect study participants, aliases (for the participants, persons they mentioned by name, places they referenced, etc.) were used during data analysis.

Table 1
Organizational Structure of Interpretive Phenomenological Approach Themes

Code and Super-ordinate Theme	Code and Master Theme	Code and Subtheme
*1. Invisibility is painful	1.1 My humanity is overlooked	1.1.1 Hard work doesn't pay off 1.1.2 Tolerated, not accepted 1.1.3 "I feel expendable"
	1.2 "It's almost like anger and hurt"	1.2.1 Close relationships strained 1.2.2 Low self-esteem
2. Invisibility is pervasive	2.1 Encountering microaggressions	2.1.1 Harmful stereotypes 2.1.2 Feeling reviled
	2.2 Constant dilemmas	2.2.1 Restraint is practical, but exhausting 2.2.2 Tempted to act "out of character"
3. Attuned to power relations	3.1 Recognizing hierarchies	3.1.1 Credentials don't prove anything 3.1.2 Feeling powerless
	3.2 Identifying with the oppressed	3.2.1 Black people suffer injustice 3.2.2 Being an advocate
4. Coping with invisibility	4.1 Internal resources	4.1.1 I control my narrative 4.1.2 Incarceration had benefits too 4.1.3 Knowledge is power
	4.2 External support	4.2.1 God has a plan 4.2.2 Validation from peers
5. Healing is important	5.1 Counselors are helpful	5.1.1 Therapy is beneficial
	5.2 I can do it myself	5.2.1 I know about mental health

*Code signifies thematic hierarchy

Invisibility is Painful (Code 1)

My humanity is overlooked (1.1). Each of the seven participants discussed experiences wherein they thought or felt that their skills, potential and essential value went unrecognized by those around them. More disheartening than merely feeling misread, Terry captured the group's perception saying, "People don't even listen to try and understand me. I feel like to be misunderstood, people have to try to at least understand you. I feel like I'm just...looked over." For all but one participant, the feeling of being overlooked was reinforced through experiences suggesting that, for them, hard work does not pay off (1.1.1). Devin, who was incarcerated for 20 years, exemplified this by saying,

No matter how hard I work, it's like...you're the convict. Ain't nobody paid attention, and I've gotten certified as an instructor. I'm a certified weatherization tech...and I did this all while busting my ass every day working.

Another theme frequently mentioned by participants was that invisibility meant being tolerated, yet not truly accepted (1.1.2), especially at work. Despite having access to social gatherings or professional spaces, participants felt that others did not genuinely welcome their presence. Mark described exchanging business cards with a local politician and said, "when I go out into the foyer area, I see my business card on the ground. Right there on the floor in front of me." Along with other participants, Gary said he often felt tokenized, if not exploited, in work settings due to his incarceration status: "We're a commodity. We're numbers, we're numbers, we're numbers. That's all it is." Devin illustrated the disillusionment resulting from this sentiment, said that he declines participation because "what difference does it make, if what I'm saying will be taken as, 'This peasant has no place at our table. Why is he speaking?'"

Nearly every participant reported that this lack of recognition—whether blatant or more subtle—caused them to feel expendable (1.1.3). Kareem, a young man in his early 20s who has been incarcerated multiple times, described this powerfully by comparing himself to a tissue:

Like once you got shit on some tissue, it's useless. So like, these people use you for a purpose, but once it's done you just...they treat you like shit, literally.

After Terry was robbed around the corner from his job, he said, “Nobody came and asked me if I was okay.” He said he often reflected on the memorialization of a former coworker, and that, “I don't feel like they're going to be dedicating a house to me if I were to get shot.”

“It's almost like anger and hurt,” (1.2). Participants described an array of emotional responses to invisibility, and all of them mentioned feeling angered and harmed by their experiences. The participants expressed these feelings in two contexts: relationships with family and romantic partners, and their relationship with themselves. Feelings of invisibility placed significant strain on close bonds with family members, spouses and partners (1.2.1). Rather than serving as a refuge from invisibility-producing encounters, participants' intimate relationships were also triggering at times, which Mark experienced after work one day as he said, “then I come home to my wife and she's telling me that [i.e. things about my past incarceration].” Many participants mentioned directing angry outbursts at their significant others, and Devin described his guilt over such angry outbursts toward his wife:

Why did I do that? Why did I snap on her? She didn't mean no harm. I know she didn't mean things that way, she's just trying to articulate things in a way that I understand.

Participants also commonly mentioned incurring harm from those closest to them without returning an outward response. Terry said, regarding frequenters of a mosque he attended immediately after his release from prison, “I felt like they were pushing me away.” Kareem

shared regret over disclosing a suicide attempt to the mother of his child, and said that she weaponizes that against him: “She’ll say some slick shit, like oh you tried to kill yourself. But she’s not looking at the circumstances.”

Invisibility also bore heavily on the participants’ sense of self-image, with five of them mentioning battles with low self-esteem (1.2.2). Devin described the impulse to turn inward when seeking explanations for constant mistreatment, saying, “I think about it like...what is it about me? Right? That's where I'm at now. What is it about me that makes all this okay?” Terry said that feeling invisible makes him, regarding his own wellbeing, “question why I care, or if I *should* [emphasis added] care.” Invisibility commonly produced disenchantment about participants’ own assessment of their worth and ability, as expressed by Kareem:

I used to mumble a lot, because I always second-guessed myself. A lot of opportunities I didn’t take, because I didn’t think I was worth it. Felt like a failure, really. Ready to give up.

Invisibility is Pervasive (Code 2)

Encountering microaggressions (2.1). This master theme described the persistent, often subtle affronts to their dignity experienced by participants. Terry described how these perceived attacks are informed by biases related to their incarceration histories and racial identity, saying, “They have this stereotype of how Black people are supposed to act if you’ve been to prison.” The participants mentioned that such experiences were the primary triggers of their invisibility. All of them shared stories about having been engaged by others according to harmful stereotypes (2.1.1). Four of the participants mentioned that people with whom they interact expect them to be

“ignorant” or, as Kareem put it, “Like I don’t know what’s going on.” Gary said, “Some people don't expect you to think. They definitely don't expect you to rebut something they said.”

Mark—a man sporting gray hair who spent over 20 years behind bars—said that he feels infantilized and patronized by those around him: “Someone would speak to me as if I was a newborn child still trying to learn how to speak. Like I had no knowledge at all.”

Several participants also described encountering the menacing, Black brute stereotype. “I don’t know, people just expect me to act wild all the time, or to be turned up all the time,” said Terry, who is in his early 30s. Mark commented on how this caricature noticeably influences the behaviors of those with whom he interacts:

They are like self-conscious of how to speak to me, because they're thinking I'm like overly violent. I have no inhibitions, no self-control. That was like beyond frustrating. Five participants specifically mentioned feeling reviled by those around them (2.1.2). In some cases, the violent nature of some participants’ past crimes caused this reaction, as when people look at Mark “like I shoulda never came home. Someone like me is supposed to be in prison.” Devin said that, to others, “I’m just a dumbass convict. I’m the monster, I’m the filth.” Mark also raised the sexualized nature of the assumptions to which he is subjected:

What's the first thing people think of you after doing over 20 [years]? They know you've been there for over 10, 20, 30 years. What's the first thing they think about you? Either you was a victim or you was preying on people.

Constant dilemmas (2.2). The second master theme related to invisibility’s pervasiveness was the constant quandary regarding how (or if) to respond to perceived slights; as Terry put it, “it’s a lose-lose.” Or, in more impassioned language, Devin details the decision as follows:

The reality is...shit...what do I do? I mean, do I continue to be myself? Do I continue to be myself at the expense of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness? Or do I get in and get grimy, right?

Every participant described situations during which the exercising of restraint, while practical, was psychologically and emotionally exhausting (2.2.1). Devin shared a favorite quote of his, which he used to explain why he normally chooses to let affronts slide:

“Everybody notices when you react, nobody notices you when you're provoked.” Now this is a cold message, right? “Nobody notices when you're provoked” was a message to me, like, “Listen, you got to quit reacting because don't nobody notice when you're provoked.”

Jacque, a man approaching 30 years of age who spent his late-teens in and out of prison, said that he usually chose to remain quiet when confronted with microaggressions, and didn't perceive much use in pushing back. He likened those interactions to an experience he had in prison when a case worker insulted him:

I had to let her go on her little rant, because I'm actually cuffed up behind my back while she's talking. I'm like, “You really just don't understand me.”

However, not asserting themselves and challenging perceived slights still had psychological costs. Kareem described this when he said, “Just bottling up everything I was going through. Sometimes it would come out the wrong way.”

Given the regularity of these indignities and their accumulation, all but one participant mentioned frequent temptations to lash out. Devin, comparing himself to a firecracker, encapsulated this subtheme with his challenge: “Let's see how you handle it when it explodes,” (2.2.2). This eruptive potential was characterized by Gary in a way that acknowledged the

racialized context of his invisibility, as he said: “I always tell them that I can easily do that other stuff. I keep my nigga suit in my back pocket, so don't have me pull that joint out.”

For several participants, the allure of direct confrontation against microaggressions was the promise of acknowledgment. Terry said, “I truly feel like if I was to cause a big scene and get more loud, get more upset, then maybe people would care.” Some participants recalled situations wherein violence seemed justified, however such ideation then became worrisome. Mark mentioned this when recalling a false accusation of sexual misconduct leveled against him:

They ain't going, they ain't gonna make it. And then for me to even have to think like that was upsetting. Because I'm not that person. But I'll be damned if I let somebody take advantage of me like that.

Attuned to Power Relations (Code 3)

Recognizing hierarchies (3.1). This master theme describes participants’ recognition and critical analysis of the hierarchical relationships in various spheres of their lives. These relationships were how participants understood why certain people treated them as invisible. Power dynamics were discussed primarily in work or education settings, and nearly all the participants expressed that credentials often leveraged in these contexts don’t prove much about a person’s worth (3.1.1). Devin affirmed status symbols of his own, but highlighted their inapplicability in his current life, saying:

I got street letters. I got generals, assistant princes. I got those kind of letters. These cats got PhDs and BAs and MAs. So that means we're playing on a different level. So no matter how intelligent I am...I got different letters.

Jacque attended a community college and, due to his divergent understanding of race and history, found himself consistently at odds with his degreed teachers. He said, “A lot of times they’d throw information out there and expect you to believe it, because they’re the teacher.” Gary, elaborating on this power disparity, seemed to ascribe narcissism to people possessing socially desirable credentials with whom he interacts:

They kinda elevate themselves over you and they feel---they got their pictures and plaques and all that---so they expect you to be intimidated, don't question them, definitely don't think.

Several participants appealed to moral authority and alternative standards for making judgments. Devin made his views plain, “If you're worthy of respect, you're gonna be respected.” Gary questioned the value of conventional credentials by comparing them to less material qualities:

If you put all your energy into these plaques that you're striving to achieve, and you leave your humanity, you love, and your compassion for people or yourself outside of the room, then you're nothing. Because it ain't nothing but papers on the wall.

Despite critically analyzing these power relations, participants also frequently discussed feeling powerless to counteract them (3.1.2). Nathan, who also served a sentence in excess of 20 years, said that “there will always be people who look at you differently” because of an incarceration history. Kareem described those with power over him affirming his perceived inability, as he said, “They just get bold. They say, well there’s nothing you can do, even though you have the knowledge.”

Interestingly, Devin indicated a fatalistic outlook on his circumstances, saying “It is what it is, I gotta accept it. It ain't going to change.” Yet, he still held out hope that he could overcome

the obstacles facing him. He later said, “That's what life is. And I'm content with it, but I just have to figure out a way to rise above it.”

Identifying with the oppressed (3.2). All participants but one made explicit mention of their membership to a group of oppressed peoples. This ascription most commonly took the form of an affirmation that Black people in the USA suffer injustices (3.2.1), both historically and in the present era. Jacque evoked the processes of colonialism and chattel slavery, and said, “we speak English, but we're not from England. How did we get this language? It was forced upon us.” Kareem used language of invisibility when he described the mistreatment of Black people in the USA, and said:

We built this country and we still get overlooked and shot down. Nobody does nothing about it. We get leaders and they step up and they get killed, but nothing happens. A repeated cycle.

Jacque perceived a global system of anti-Blackness, and said, “Even outside the United States, it's ‘Oh you're Black? You're inferior to us.’” Nathan offered a powerful reflection on his own incarceration experience, describing himself as an unrecognized forerunner of today's most prominent victims of police brutality:

Long before you heard about all the Laquan McDonalds and the stuff that's come out in recent years. The miscarriages of justice, and the travesties of justice. So I knew about that from personal experience, like this is the system. They have power over your life or your freedom.

Several participants—particularly the elder participants—mentioned their commitment to being an advocate for others in need of support (3.2.2). Mark, a community organizer, discussed how

he began advocating for others while he was incarcerated. He framed his work by paraphrasing a quote:

"How much sense does it make that a man can defend himself with his own hand, but he can't defend himself with his own mind." So I want to help defend those who can't defend themselves with their own minds.

For Nathan, who now serves as a caseworker for young Black men labeled "at risk", sharing his background is a mutually motivating force:

They can see that, "Man, you overcame that?" And it provides hope for them. It provides inspiration for them, and I think as long as I continue to make the right decisions and do the right things, it better impacts them.

Coping with Invisibility (Code 4)

Internal Resources (4.1) Participants mentioned several emotional and cognitive strategies that they use to cope with the challenges of invisibility. For five of the participants, invisibility was mitigated when they asserted ownership over their personal narratives (4.1.1). Devin expressed this in clear terms, disassociating himself even from language used in social justice movements related to mass incarceration:

I'm not the person that people say I am. I'm not an animal. I'm bigger than a convict or a returning citizen. I know we use the nice, pretty language--but I'm not that either. I ain't left nowhere. I've been a citizen the whole time.

Mark described a conflict with a coworker who once disclosed his incarceration history without seeking permission during a fundraiser, saying, "[I told him] If you share my story man, be more

strategic. Don't just do it out there.” Nathan mentioned the inspiration he draws from the life of Malcolm X:

Malcolm once said that, "There is no shame in having been a criminal. The shame is in remaining a criminal." So the fact that I know that I'm not engaged in that lifestyle anymore, it doesn't hinder me.

Nearly every participant discussed how their incarceration experiences, while challenging, had also yielded significant benefits (4.1.2). Gary said that he felt more resilient against challenges when he reflected on his imprisonment: “I just would say, ‘Damn, I did 20 years without this, this, or that.’” Terry mentioned several protective factors that he attributes directly to his time behind bars:

I feel like prison taught me a lot, about myself and about life. It taught me independence, strength, and some better outlets for anger. Meditation too...it gave me some confidence.

Participants also described their incarceration as a sort of blessing in disguise, removing them from a path they believe was leading to a more destructive end. Gary said about his life before prison, “I was at that point, like I knew I was going to jail or I was going to get knocked [killed].” Nathan expounded on this point, and leveraged as proof the condition of his past associates:

I think about the people that I ran with before I went to prison. They all ended up in life sentences in a federal system. And I say to myself, had I not been arrested for this, then I'd probably be serving life. So I just count my blessings, you know.

Education—specifically self-education—held great importance for all the participants. Indeed, for them, knowledge is power (4.1.3). Mark described how his passion for learning was strengthened in the prison library, where he studied social sciences, math, and law. He said, “I

read everything I could get my hands on. Invested into myself with a lot of books.” Jacque said that education led to an “epiphany” that “changed my whole understanding” about the world, his own behavior, and the actions of those around him:

I thought about why I’m not supposed to be selling drugs, why I shouldn’t try to hurt people who look like me—or anybody for that matter. Why am I looked at this way. It came mostly during studying that I was able to advance my understanding.

External support (4.2.) Each participant also mentioned utilizing support systems outside of themselves to cope with invisibility. Spirituality was raised as an essential meaning-making tool used by participants to remind themselves that God has a plan for their lives (4.2.1). Spirituality here is categorized as an external support because of what is implied by the participants’ language: that spiritual strength comes from religious learning, and through a connection with a God distinct and outside of themselves.

Jacque mentioned his deep reliance on religious insights, saying “He teaches us, and I filter everything someone says through Him.” His commitment to religiosity produced a profound shift in his personal narrative and self-image:

For Him [God] to say, “No, you’re not what they’re telling you that you are. You’re a prince, you’re a king.” That changed my whole understanding, like I’ve been lied to the whole time and made to seem like I’m on the bottom, when in reality I’m much more.

Devin attributed some of his successes to his belief in various lessons from Islamic scripture. He said, “Allah says in the Qur'an: ‘Indeed, after hardship comes relief.’ Sometimes, faith in that is rewarded.” Nathan revealed that he draws strength from the biography of a prophetic figure acknowledged in Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions:

The story of Yusuf [Joseph]. How he was wrongly incarcerated, but from that he emerged. He emerged as a successful person, and I see that myself in the same vein, in the same light.

Mark also mobilized verses of scripture to keep him “grounded”, and said, “Man plans, Allah plans, and Allah is the best of planners.” He described his intimate, active relationship with The Creator which relieves worries:

I truly believe there is nothing Allah would not do for me. That I actually don't even worry about it—without being at the level of arrogance—that I expect this coming. I might make a prayer or a du'a [a request of Allah], and I'll walk away and forget about it, knowing that eventually it will be addressed.

Validation from other people (4.2.2) was another vital resource in the participants' struggles against invisibility. Jacque spoke about finding others with whom he shares a spiritual worldview, and said, “If we can have a conversation on this type of level, then I'm happy because I found another brother or another sister that I can relate with.” Devin spoke with deep appreciation for his supervisor at work, referring to her as “a blessing” who recognizes his value:

Because, when she don't have to, she goes out her way to mention me. She won some award, and she posted it up on Facebook, and she gave me praise. It was more than just Facebook. When she got whatever prize it was, she broke it down the middle and gave it to me...half of it.

Kareem expressed a deep appreciation for encouragement and mentorship from other formerly incarcerated Black men:

I hear the older guys say things like, “We're capable of this, so y'all must have it in you too.” It makes me wonder about everybody's stories. I learn about them and I understand

why they did what they did before... That helped me understand myself, so now I'm looking back like maybe it's not something wrong with me.

Healing is Important (Code 5)

People should seek counseling (5.1). Four of the seven participants had previously accessed counseling services after returning home from prison. Six of the seven participants agreed that, on the whole, therapy was beneficial (5.1.1). For Terry, it was “helpful to have someone that is willing to listen.” Elaborating on this, Kareem mentioned that counseling was a safe place for him, both to express himself and to seek feedback:

Sometimes I'll go and speak it up just to hear myself, because I can't really go to nobody else and tell them because they'll think I'm crazy. So that helped me, because I'm really seeing stuff happen. And then some of the things that's bothering me, just to get that out and hear a response from somebody else, that helps me too.

Jacque shared his belief that counseling helps people adopt new thinking patterns, saying, “Counseling can be a way to open up people's mindsets.” Gary took a strong stance regarding therapy's appropriateness for people who've experienced incarceration: “I think anybody who did at least 5 years should consult with somebody.”

I can do it myself (5.2). Despite holding positive opinions about counseling, several participants mentioned that they choose to address their mental health on their own. One reason for this given by participants was that they already understood enough about mental health (5.2.1). Jacque, who had seen a therapist at the research site, said, “These are things I'm already doing, so it's more just a conversation.” Nathan pointed to his own credentials, and said:

I graduated from Roosevelt with a degree in psychology. So based on what I learned, I think I'm able to heal myself. And that's not to negate that maybe professional help is needed at some point. But I just never felt the need to go to a counselor or go to a therapist, because I'm learning how to just cope with it on my own.

Participants also linked their apprehension toward therapy to their lack of confidence in counselors' to "really understand the totality of what happened," as Devin said. Mark, the only participant to express a negative view of counseling, said he "refused" to attend therapy because:

It involves me sharing personal information that I don't want that person to know, because I don't know that person. So, I don't trust you. My philosophy is that it takes me close to 3 years before I begin to open up.

Conclusion

This study elicited the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men and explore how they experience invisibility related to their past incarceration. After data processing and analysis was completed, five superordinate themes were identified which group participants' responses according to thematic similarities. Chapter 5 will offer detailed discussion on the study's findings, including their connections to prior research, relevant implications for counseling professionals, and opportunities for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 5

That formerly incarcerated Black men experience psychological invisibility was a key assumption upon which this study rested, and the findings of this research indicate that the participants do in fact experience psychological invisibility as described by Franklin (1999a)—reporting, in various ways, that they wrestle with the feeling that their “talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism,” (p. 761.) This inquiry’s goal was the exploration of two issues: what meaning(s) this population ascribed to their invisibility, and how they experience invisibility. For the participants, being invisible meant feeling expendable; the strengths and dignity which they saw in themselves often went undetected by those they interacted with on a daily basis. The participants reported experiencing invisibility through repeated slights pertaining to their racial identity and/or incarceration history, a discouraging sense of vulnerability to the prejudices of others, and a pervading feeling that they are tolerated—due to the utilitarian benefit that their labor and social status may yield others—but not genuinely accepted.

Connections to Prior Research

Supporting psychological invisibility literature. The results of this study are consistent with prior research on psychological invisibility in many ways. Similar to Franklin’s (1999a), as well as Tovar-Murray and Tovar Murray’s (2011) findings, participants in this study considered their Blackness a salient aspect of their identities. As implied by their use of the pronoun “we” in reference to the collective Black population in the USA, the participants not only acknowledged their race’s primacy, they also considered themselves part of a broader Black community. Many of the participants’ stories revealed another consistency with previous invisibility literature: the

affirmation that anti-Black racism “was forced upon us”, and significantly affects their lived realities.

Participant responses in this study supported Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray’s (2011) finding that invisibility makes Black men feel like outsiders. Mark’s words capture the strain induced by such marginalization: “I’m walking around trying to reconnect to a society that don’t even see me for my self-worth.” The manner in which their outsider status is communicated to formerly incarcerated Black men was explained by this study’s theme suggesting that invisibility meant being tokenized by the broader society—their inclusion being merely superficial. Devin reported being invited to meetings at his job, but then chastised for voicing his well-researched, yet dissenting opinion.

Both Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray’s (2011) and Franklin’s (1999a, 2004) invisibility studies highlight the central role that microaggressions—unanticipated, intermittent slights informed by racism and prejudice—play in the development and exacerbation of psychological invisibility. This study’s findings confirm this connection, as participants described experiencing these affronts constantly and across various spheres of their lives. The ubiquitous indignities produced what participants described as anger, hopelessness and low self-esteem, among other negative psychic reactions.

These responses to demeaning encounters are among the many symptoms that Franklin (2004) identified as signs of an individual besieged by invisible syndrome. The participant narratives generated during this study indicate the presence of nearly all of Franklin’s symptoms.

Chronic indignation was found in Devin’s copious stories about perceived injustices leveled against him by work supervisors, including one situation where he—despite being a vocational teaching assistant—was ordered to do janitorial work: “Can you imagine somebody

coming and telling you that the toilet stinks, clean the toilet down there?” Kareem described the immobilization mentioned by Franklin when discussed how feelings of invisibility caused him to feel “stuck.” Anger and hopelessness—invisibility symptoms which Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2011) coded as “intense emotional reactions”—are found in Mark’s outburst after his wife mentioned his criminal record, and in Terry’s doubts whether, given others’ apparent lack of concern for his wellbeing, he should care about himself either (p. 28).

Such intense negative emotions also support several of Perkins et al.’s (2014) findings about Black male depression. Their interviewees described outbursts of anger and aggression similar to those mentioned by the participants in this study. Particularly in response to perceived slights by their romantic partners, participants like Mark and Devin described later regretting fits of rage which, in reality, were masking depressive symptoms. Kareem and Terry shared that they felt a lack, if not absence, of concern for their psycho-emotional struggles—closely mirroring the “invisible depression” posited by Perkins et al.’s work (2014, p. 169). Kareem’s attempted self-harm also underscored concerns that suicidality among Black men is increasing, yet largely unacknowledged by clinicians and the broader society (Perkins et al., 2014).

Elements of invisibility. Seven dynamic elements—*recognition, satisfaction, legitimacy, validation, respect, dignity, and identity*—are primary indicators of how invisible, or visible, a particular individual feels at any given moment (Franklin, 1999a, 2004). Participants in this study shared many experiences which demonstrate this psycho-emotional ebb and flow essential to the psychological invisibility model. Franklin’s (2004) patient, Kevin, sought *recognition* from various alternative sources when denied that from his community. Likewise, in this study, Jacque described how his spiritual understandings were affirmed by fellow Hebrew Israelites when “my older brother kind of shut me down.”

Devin's stories very closely resemble those of James—one of Franklin's (2004) cases who, despite consistently displaying technical acumen at work, was never rewarded nor promoted by his supervisors. Devin reported a direct link between his dissatisfaction with unacknowledged skills and his feelings of invisibility. This lack of *satisfaction* contributed to another element of invisibility for Devin: doubt about his own *legitimacy* in the workplace. Legitimacy for Franklin is indicated by self-talk like “this is where I should be,” (2004, p. 16). Devin, after repeatedly being denied managerial opportunities despite his high-level construction skills, questioned whether or not he should dare to keep seeking “a seat at the table.”

Regarding *validation*, Franklin highlights the importance of sanity checks—or the use of peers as a “personal sounding board”—as a key mechanism used by Black men to confirm that others share one's worldviews (2004, p. 17). In this study, Mark shares a story illustrating how receiving validation from peers can ease the disorienting effects of psychological invisibility. After being turned down by multiple employers despite positive feedback on his resume and during job interviews, he instinctually determined that his violent criminal record was to blame. Yet, as time progressed and more rejections piled up, Mark became unsure about his assessment of the situation—he was, after all, living in the “Ban the Box” era. Confused and unable to reconcile the encouragement he received from hirers with his continued joblessness, Mark consulted another Black man who'd been incarcerated for homicide: “[Uncle Ray said], ‘You know ain't nobody gonna hire no serial killer!’” Just like Franklin's (2004) case describing his client Tim, this sanity check utilized humor and exaggeration to confirm for Mark his suspicions that he was being discriminated against due to his incarceration history.

Feeling *respected* is a powerful protective factor against the harms of invisibility. Franklin defines respect as “being treated as a person of value and worth,” (2004, p. 18), and its

psychic benefits can be seen in Nathan's comments about the acclaim he receives from some people who discover that he spent 25 years behind bars due to police misconduct. Esteemed by others for his resilience and fortitude, Nathan said that he now proactively (yet strategically) discloses his incarceration history and withstands attempts to denigrate that aspect of his identity—"Man, that's your problem. That's not my problem."

Kareem narrated a vivid story which depicts an act of flagrant disrespect which aggravated his already vulnerable sense of *dignity*. During the funeral procession of a peer killed in a gang conflict, Kareem and others were pulled from their vehicle by the police. The officers "disrespected" his older cousin: "They grabbed her purse, dumped all her shit out in the grass...then they took the car." This explicitly prejudicial and aggressive act violently prevented from his friend's burial, sending Kareem a clear message that the cops saw his racial identity and past street involvement rather than his need to grieve.

Franklin (1999a) theorized that a firmly developed racial *identity* can "serve as a buffer against the deleterious internalization of racism" which fueled the invisibility syndrome he saw in his clients (p. 781). In this study, Jacque described the "psychological bounce back" in Franklin's model as he critically analyzed popular imagery's association of beauty with European physical features (1999a, p. 788). His assertion—"It's breathtaking to look out at Black people as a whole and see how beautiful we all are,"—in the face of cultural racism bolsters Franklin's argument that supporting Black men's racial identity development can be highly effective against invisibility. As mentioned earlier, participants like Gary and Nathan combatted microaggressions seeking to disparage their criminal background by embracing their past incarceration and the characters strengths they acquired through that experience.

However, each of the participants in this study also discussed their incarceration history's centrality to their identity. Their past imprisonment was often viewed as the target toward which discriminatory slights were aimed, even when they shared racial, religious and/or employment with the aggressing party. Devin made this clear, asking rhetorically about his mistreatment at work: "What else could it be other than my criminal background?" This perception of their incarceration history obscuring other identity components and functioning as the determining factor for treatment received from others supports Miller and Stuart's (2017) theory of translation, a process through which one's criminal record comes to define their essence in the eyes of those with whom they come into contact. Further reinforcing this, Mark described his frustration with coworkers'—several of whom shared his Black and Muslim identities—thinly veiled suspicions about his integrity "because I came home from prison." The participants' attribution of frequent, invisibility-triggering, prejudicial slights to their incarceration history is a key addition offered by this study to the existing literature.

Hypervigilance. This multilayered experience of invisibility stemming from both race-based and incarceration-related discrimination is also seen when considering the "sixth sense" Franklin (1999a) describes Black men deploying toward the "intuitive detection of racial intent and acts of prejudice," (p. 777). Participants in this study, like Jacque, comment on their constant awareness that the "society considers us inferior." This exhaustive vigilance can also be implied in participants' numerous references to "feelings", "energy", and "vibes" they perceived from others' actions or words. Interestingly, incarceration experiences seemed to supercharge this sixth sense, making several participants even more intensely attuned to the subtlest of nonverbal messages. Mark described this when he said:

“Because the length of my time in prison--and most people who've spent decades--we pick up on body language instantly. We pick up on energy instantly. That's survival, we hone those skills. We do it as second nature.”

This hypervigilance—while a practical, if not necessary, adaptation behind bars—can become a psycho-emotional vulnerability outside of correctional settings as microaggressions occasionally slip past one’s radar (Franklin, 2004).

Overcoming invisibility. Another commonality found between this study and Franklin’s (2004) conceptualization of invisibility was the “brotherhood to manhood” identity development trajectory. Brotherhood is understood as a “safety net” utilized by Black men, a survival resource leveraged in the face of invisibility-related adversity (Franklin, 2004, p. 22). Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2011) describe sites of brotherhood activities like churches and barbershops as “safe havens” wherein the challenges of and successful resistance against racism are discussed (p. 31). In this study, Jacque describes enjoying brotherhood with his racial and religious in-group, while Kareem speaks fondly of the elder formerly incarcerated Black men whose life stories help him better understand his own experiences.

Franklin (2004), however, distinguishes between this brotherhood and “manhood”, which he describes as an “ultimate goal” achieved when Black men’s “feelings, thoughts and behaviors serve to the interests of our family, friends, and community—not only our self-interests,” (p. 22-23). Manhood also entails characteristics including “assertiveness, decision-making powers, determination and perseverance,” (Franklin, 2004, p. 61). Interestingly, yet perhaps unsurprisingly, this study’s eldest participants—all of whom spent upwards of 20 years in prison—were those who most clearly exhibited these manhood traits. Nathan said: “I always thought that, if I really focused in and put my mind to it, I could overcome any limitation that

this society placed on me.” Gary, when engaged by a security guard lobbing racially and criminally charged stereotypes at young men whom he mentors, declared, “You’re talking to me like it’s a ‘me’, and it’s a ‘them.’ I’m with them.” Both of these men mentioned embracing their past incarceration as a motivator and proof of their resilience, demonstrating the self-acceptance essential to the cultivation of Franklinian manhood.

Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2011) found that the Black men they interviewed used several other coping skills to mitigate the effects of invisibility. Some relied on spiritual relief from religious communities, while others sought out spaces like barbershops where they could safely discuss racism’s challenges. Similarly, the formerly incarcerated Black men in this study mobilized their spirituality and sought out peers with shared experiences. However, the spiritual coping discussed in this study points to an involved, personal relationship with God (Whom participants also referred to as Allah and The Most High), rather than active membership in a religious institution. Franklin (1999b) argued that “spirituality has been intrinsic to the internal and external world of African Americans and our very essence of living and surviving,” and the narratives produced during this study confirm spiritual meaning-making’s critical role in overcoming the prejudicial affronts which Black men commonly face (p. 821).

Psychological effects of incarceration. The participants’ responses also recalled theoretical points and research findings in sociological and criminological literature. Devin lamented his perceived inability to escape the social stigma attached to his felony conviction, referring to himself repeatedly as “the convict”. His comments, along with the narratives of others, illustrate Wacquant’s assessment that incarceration in the USA today carries a seemingly inextricable “stain” which, similar to racial identity, attaches itself permanently to the body of the formerly imprisoned (2001). The meaning that Kareem gave to the impact of incarceration on

his lived experience supports this theory: “Coming out of jail, you go in as a clean slate, like that piece of tissue. But then you come out stained, losing value, and you’re useless.”

Winnick and Bodkin (2008) identified various types of supportive relationships through which formerly incarcerated individuals seek relief from the judgment and denigration experienced in their daily lives. Participants in this study indeed mentioned benefitting from three of these supports—romantic partners, formerly incarcerated friends, and religious communities—when they engaged them. While none of the aforementioned relationships were perfect, participants like Terry shed light on the healing potential of such support systems in his struggle against symptoms of psychological invisibility. During his interview, he shed tears when describing the seemingly unconditional positive regard and restorative nurturing consistently provided by his live-in girlfriend.

Though this inquiry was concerned primarily with Black men’s experiences outside of jail or prison, every participant also shared encounters behind bars that either triggered psychological invisibility, or, through reflection and reframing efforts, help them withstand the microaggressions they encounter in their present lives. These stories indicate that experiences of behind bars—the violent, traumatic nature of which were discussed at length in Chapter 2—are key when seeking to understand how formerly incarcerated Black men experience invisibility post-release. Kareem and Terry said that they felt demoralized by the customary strip searches in prison, which harshly reaffirmed to them their position as “an identity of low status and obedience,” (Phillips, 2001, p. 15). Participants described several distressing encounters at work, home, and social settings which signaled to them that other people considered their past criminal convictions sufficient to disqualify them as societal peers (Weill & Haney, 2017). They also cited experiences indicating an institutional culture similar to that described by a prison chaplain

in Weill and Haney's research: "prisoners are treated like animals, without souls, who deserve whatever they get," (Gibbons & Katzenbach, 2006, p. 101; Weill & Haney, 2017, p. 289). Mark revealed some of the dire circumstances facing Black inmates subjected to such a dehumanizing environment—the Ku Klux Klan presence among prison guards was so entrenched during his time in the penitentiary that federal law enforcement was called in to execute raids and arrests among the corrections staff.

Implications for Counselors

Given the insights into significant traumas, persistent stressors and challenging invisibility symptoms mentioned by the study participants, there are considerable implications for helping professionals who counsel formerly incarcerated Black men. Firstly, therapists should take an ecological systems approach to conceptualize and treat clients. Counselors should also consider utilizing narrative interventions and support groups to foster healthy identity development among clients from this population. Throughout their work with formerly incarcerated Black men, counselors should maintain an acute awareness of their therapeutic use of self, in accordance with the profession's ethical guidelines (American Counseling Association, 2014).

An ecosystemic approach. Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2011) were correct to recommend the adoption of the ecosystemic model when counseling Black men around issues of invisibility. The formerly incarcerated Black men interviewed in this study reported their senses of self being impacted in many ways across various spheres of their lives. The ecosystemic approach, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s, is ideal for this population, as it calls clinicians to understand the individual in the context of the systems with which they interact

(Christensen, 2010; Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2011). Using this model could aid counselors as they formulate a comprehensive intervention plan to meet the mental health needs of formerly incarcerated Black men (Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2011). Several suggestions for such interventions will now be discussed.

At the microsystem level, counselors could engage clients from this population around the nature of communication between themselves and their romantic partner. Recalling the effectiveness of spouses and partners as protective factors against invisibility, therapists should consider suggesting couples therapy if their clients disclose frequent microaggression-anger outburst communication patterns. At the mesosystem level, Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray's (2011) recommendation to engage community resources commonly accessed by Black men is also well-suited for work with the population considered in this study. Given that many formerly incarcerated Black men access various forms of re-entry programming—especially during the months and years immediately after release—counselors could amplify their impact by forging strategic consultation partnerships with organizations serving this population. Given the study participants' do-for-self approach to psycho-emotional stress related to their incarceration histories, conducting life-skills workshops or mental health “first aid” trainings may also be effective means of support in lieu of individual therapy. When appropriate, advocacy is considered ethical professional behavior by the American Counseling Association (2014). Making this type of macrosystem impact is certainly appropriate for this population, and is recommended in the form of anti-racist advocacy within the realm of criminal justice.

Narrative and group interventions. This study's phenomenological approach elicited rich narrative data concerning the participants' experiences with psychological invisibility. Their responses offered insight into how they understood themselves, their pasts, their futures and their

associated meanings. Battling feelings of invisibility, participants like Kareem reminisced about past dreams of becoming a lawyer or President, until incarcerated rendered, in his estimation, such potential null and void. Others shared similar struggles to imagine themselves realizing their aspirations. Narrative therapy was developed to help clients counter damaging perceptions of themselves—whether generated from within or received from others—and counselors working with formerly incarcerated Black men should take advantage of the opportunity to co-create a “counterspace” wherein clients can (re)learn to craft positive, empowered self-narratives (Case & Hunter, 2014).

Franklin (2004) formed support groups that proved quite effective in mitigating the symptoms of psychological invisibility. Responding to the validation, acknowledgement and respect offered by the group, his clients were able to engage in healthy racial identity development (Franklin, 1999a). Clinicians serving formerly incarcerated Black men should follow his example and, if possible, strive to form intergenerational groups. By gathering elder and younger men in a support group setting, participants could collaboratively process their experiences with invisibility in a mutually healing way. The older participants would receive visibility-promoting respect and esteem, while modeling for their younger groupmates how to share and receive others’ vulnerability in a productive way. At the same time, the younger participants may realize that they are not “terminally unique” in their struggles, thus finding stable ground upon which to proceed along the journey “from brotherhood to manhood,” (Franklin, 2004, p. 17). Kareem gives a glimpse of this intervention’s promise when describing how hearing the stories of older men in his re-entry program helping to more clearly understand his own life.

The therapeutic self. Franklin (2004) cautioned therapists to audit their personal behavior and attitudes toward Black men. This warning underscores the crucial role that the therapist's self plays in treatment effectiveness. Nonverbal communication weighs heavily on the therapeutic alliance, and this study's results support the recommendation for clinicians to diligently control their body language, eye contact, and the ever-salient "energy" of which participants reported being so vigilant. With sensitivity toward nonverbal cues sharpened by their incarceration, Gary and Mark shared their disappointment with individuals whose words of support and allyship were betrayed by their unspoken messages. Such an incidence could be perceived as a microaggression, and part A.4.a. of the ACA Code of Ethics demands that helping professionals take necessary precautions to minimize unanticipated harm to clients.

Counselors working with this population should also, in Gary's words, "keep it real." Clinicians sometimes sacrifice authenticity through their well-intentioned attempts to express to clients their allyship, empathy, and understanding. To avoid this pitfall—and still communicate to formerly incarcerated Black male clients a level of genuine concern—counselors should educate themselves about the criminal justice system. This is especially important given that it is not uncommon that members of this population are mandated to attend therapy by conditions of their parole or probation. Gary offered concise, yet comprehensive advice in this regard: "If you come as you, then you get further."

Future Research

This study explored psychological invisibility in a population not yet examined through that conceptual lens, and its results point toward phenomena needing further research. The role of racial identity development in Franklin's model is essential as a tool for coping, and as a

canvas upon which the effects of invisibility are witnessed. While participants in this study attributed importance to their Black racial identity, their incarceration history was also conspicuous. Future qualitative research could explore the interaction between race and incarceration history in the identity development process, and how that dynamic influences individual self-esteem and perceptions of discrimination.

Given participants' frequent mention of their religiosity as an antidote to psychological invisibility, additional inquiry into that reality is warranted. A similar phenomenological approach could be used to explore in more detail what specific spiritual understandings by formerly incarcerated Black men leverage to maintain a stable identity. Mixed methods or quantitative inquiries could also yield useful insights into the extent of religious coping's effectiveness among a larger sample size.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study involved the researcher's personal biases. The researcher previously worked at the research site, and thus had prior relationships of varying degrees with the study participants. While there was nothing to be done to alter that history, the researcher utilized analytic memos to better understand how this familiarity possibly influenced the interview experiences (Maxwell, 1996; Schram, 2003). The researcher also consulted with thesis committee members during data analysis in pursuit of critical feedback on the feasibility of his interpretation.

The research site from which participants were recruited—and at which they were interviewed—is located in a large urban center. Thus, the formerly incarcerated Black men living in rural settings were not included. It is possible, even likely, that their experiences would differ

significantly from the participants interviewed in this study. Finally, it must be noted that this study was conducted at a community organization that, while not a religious institution, publicly aligns itself with Islamic principles. This may partly explain the near-unanimous mention of religiosity as a coping skill, and the various forms of religious meaning-making present in participant narratives.

Conclusion

This study intended to explore how formerly incarcerated Black men experience psychological invisibility. After situating the research in the context of historical developments related to criminal justice, Black mental health, and Dr. Anderson Franklin's invisibility syndrome model, the narratives of seven formerly incarcerated Black men living and working in the Chicago area were analyzed. Five themes emerged from their stories: invisibility is painful (Code 1), invisibility is pervasive (Code 2), awareness of power relations (Code 3), coping with invisibility (Code 4), and counseling is a resource (Code 5).

The results of this study support many findings in the existing literature on psychological invisibility and Black male mental health. In addition to affirming previous research, this study also captured several phenomena which should catch the attention of counselors seeking to fulfill their profession and ethical duty to provide informed, culturally competent support for their clients. Further research and the implementation of this study's recommendations will be of particular benefit to formerly incarcerated Black men seeking counseling.

Appendix 1

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions: What is the meaning of invisibility from the perspective of formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago? How do formerly incarcerated Black men living in Chicago experience invisibility?

- Please tell me about yourself and your background.
- What was returning home like for you?
- Tell me about a time when you felt stereotyped based on your past.
- Tell me about a time when you felt disrespected based on your past.
- Tell me about a time when you felt devalued based on your past.
- Tell me about a time when you felt your dignity was challenged based on your past.
- Tell me about a time when you felt that someone considered you inferior based on your past.
- How has that experience impacted your identity?
- Do you think life would be different if you were never incarcerated?
- (If yes) How would life would be different if you were never incarcerated?
- How do you cope with stress that is related to your past?
- What has counseling been like for you?

Appendix 2

TABLE 1
Organizational Structure of Interpretive Phenomenological Approach Themes

Code and Super-ordinate Theme	Code and Master Theme	Code and Subtheme
*1. Invisibility is painful	1.1 My humanity is overlooked	1.1.1 Hard work doesn't pay off 1.1.2 Tolerated, not accepted 1.1.3 "I feel expendable"
	1.2 "It's almost like anger and hurt"	1.2.1 Close relationships strained 1.2.2 Low self-esteem
2. Invisibility is pervasive	2.1 Encountering microaggressions	2.1.1 Harmful stereotypes 2.1.2 Feeling reviled
	2.2 Constant dilemmas	2.2.1 Restraint is practical, but exhausting 2.2.2 Tempted to act "out of character"
3. Attuned to power relations	3.1 Recognizing hierarchies	3.1.1 Credentials don't prove anything 3.1.2 Feeling powerless
	3.2 Identifying with the oppressed	3.2.1 Black people suffer injustice 3.2.2 Being an advocate
4. Coping with invisibility	4.1 Internal resources	4.1.1 I control my narrative 4.1.2 Incarceration had benefits too 4.1.3 Knowledge is power
	4.2 External support	4.2.1 God has a plan 4.2.2 Validation from peers
5. Healing is important	5.1 Counselors are helpful	5.1.1 Therapy is beneficial
	5.2 I can do it myself	5.2.1 I know about mental health

*Code signifies thematic hierarchy

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