

STORIES FROM THE INSIDE: AN EXPLORATION INTO PRISONER IDENTITY,
NARRATIVE, AND THE VIOLENCE OF SILENCE

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to anyone who has ever felt like “the other.” You can rise above everything, come back from anything, and be someone who makes a difference, and matters. Complete silence is something chosen; your thoughts, intentions, and hopes are the first syllable of greatness.

This is also dedicated to Mark Brown. You are my hero.

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I must thank my communities. Even from behind the heavy presence of brick and steel you have uplifted me. To all who find themselves incarcerated, I acknowledge your potential—our potential. To those I have called brother and friend, you have helped mold me into the advocate, author, and activist that I am. For all who participated in this project, I acknowledge your bravery and your authenticity, and I thank you for it. To George Mason University and S-CAR, thank you for allowing me to be a part of your incredible community despite what some would call obvious reasons not to. My family, friends, teachers, mentors, and heroes...there are too many of you to name, but you know who you are; thank you for believing in me, inspiring me, and pushing me to think beyond what can be seen—I hope to make you all very proud. To the maximum-security prison in the Northeastern U.S., thank you, for all of it—the good and the bad—and thank you for giving me this chance to open new doors and pave new ways for people to discover their potential and share it with the world.

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ABSTRACT

STORIES FROM THE INSIDE: AN EXPLORATION INTO PRISONER IDENTITY, NARRATIVE, AND THE VIOLENCE OF SILENCE

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This thesis utilizes narrative and social identity theories, as well as research around the social impact of stereotyping, shame, and humiliation to evaluate the narratives of twenty-seven currently incarcerated men within a maximum-security facility in the Northeastern United States. According to Nelson (2001), how individuals view themselves within the frame of master narratives may restrict moral agency and the freedom to act, as well as one's view of what they can do. Identity becomes damaged through oppression and the deprivation of opportunity, and becomes twice damaged through internalizing the negative views that other people hold, resulting in an infiltrated consciousness.

The author, also currently incarcerated, designed and conducted the interviews with three questions in mind: 1.) How does an individual's self-narrative develop and change through their experiences within the system? 2.) Do prisoners begin to adopt the

negative stigmas and stereotypes impressed upon them by society at large? 3.) Is it possible, based on the findings, to create counterstories that might allow prisoners to de-infiltrate their consciousness, and reposition themselves in their own narratives despite a significant lack of moral agency and self-efficacy?

The aim of the counterstory, according to Nelson (2001), is two-fold; changing the oppressors' perception of a group, along with the oppressed individuals' perceptions of self. By discovering themes in the ways that inmate identities have been damaged, the author explores possibilities for the creation of counterstories which resist the master narratives ascribed to prisoners, build narrative bridges to their communities, and include the potential for narrative repair to occur. Through exploring authentic, and less simplistic narratives of prisoners, it may be possible to spark a new conversation about who resides behind the walls of America's prisons, and how the process of incarceration can be made less damaging, from arrest to reentry, ultimately reducing conflict by reducing recidivism in the age of mass incarceration.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the United States there are currently over 2 million people incarcerated in prisons and jails, and many more under the supervision of probation/parole after having been in confinement. In the era of mass incarceration researchers have long been attempting to uncover the reasons that people commit crimes, the various and wide-ranging effects of incarceration on offenders, and ways to create opportunities for transformation and change both during and after imprisonment; but doing research in prisons is not easy. According to Newman (1958); “For a number of reasons, some custodial, others bureaucratic, criminological research involving in-prison populations is neither as frequent nor as intense as is desirable to provide needed data on the complex problem of criminal behavior” (p. 127). Despite the fact that innumerable studies have been done in prisons since Newman’s thoughts in 1958, many obstacles still remain when it comes to obtaining quality, authentic, and valuable data from individuals currently incarcerated.

Despite lasting obstacles, the value and importance of such data is widely recognized (Sykes, 1958; Schlosser, 2008; Ross et al., 2014; Mandracchia, 2013; Newbold and Ross, 2012; Jones, 1995; etc.). But, the question of *who* is best suited to conduct prisoner related research remains a hot topic of discussion. According to Newman (1958) “the most valid research can be conducted by a trained outsider who has

no axe to grind on any aspect of correctional structure” (127). Newbold and Ross (2012), on the other hand, believe that research from outside professionals or academics often lacks the necessary perspective to make sense of the data collected; “policy makers and practitioners need to listen to, and take into account, the research-based opinions of men and women who have experienced what Sykes (1970) called the ‘pains of imprisonment’” (p. 4). There is much debate about what methodologies are the best fit for prison research; autoethnography done by offenders (Richards and Ross, 2001; Santos, 2003; Evans, 2001; Bosworth et al., 2005), participant observation or complete participant observation, and interviewing prisoners (Vanhooren et al., 2017; Maruna et al., 2006; Mapham and Hefferon, 2012; Ferrito et al., 2012; Haney, 2003; Harvey, 2011; Patenaude, 2004), pairing incarcerated individuals with researchers to collect and analyze data (Piche et al., 2014; Jones, 1995; Newbold et al., 2014); there is a multitude of opinions about how the best data should be collected and who may collect it.

A piece that seems to be almost entirely missing from this discussion is the idea that some inmates, could, quite possibly, be best suited to uncover and present the necessary data to the world, in regards to all things around incarceration and crime. The effect of stereotypes and humiliation will be discussed throughout this thesis, but it is worth mentioning that the near complete absence of research (aside from autoethnographic) coming from prisoners, as well as the absence of discussion that offenders may be able to carry out such research, serves to effectively confine them into the stereotype of being incapable of rising to the level of scholar-researcher-practitioner

while they are confined. This is a harm being perpetuated by the research community and academia, and a narrative that is in much need of undoing.

To discuss the possibility of incarcerated persons as an “amazing opportunity for research” (Mandracchia, 2013, p. 1); to have myriad articles about the possibilities of, obstacles around, and value in conducting prison research, while rarely recognizing the value and possibility of inmates-as-researchers, is damaging.

A few individuals have recognized the missing link in the field of prison-related studies. Lockwood (1991), cited by Jones (1995) noted that prisoners, once trained, could very well carry out research inside of prisons. According to Jones, “Inmates are currently an untapped resource in conducting research on prisons” (116). This thesis aims to support Jones’ belief that an inmate could also be a researcher, and perhaps even produce a piece of work that shows a more authentic view of the inner workings of prisons and prisoners alike. The specifics of what makes such a project authentic will be discussed later.

To understand who prisoners are, what they feel, how their sense of identity and self are formed, and what those things may mean in terms of crime, punishment, recidivism, and the likes, an in-depth narrative analysis is needed. Such an analysis would require access to a population considered “high-risk” in the research world, as well as researchers who understand the intricacies, language, and details of confinement and how prisoner narratives might fit into that complex world with time and place in context. In order to obtain such an understanding, the author, a long-term prisoner, designed interview questions aimed at uncovering narrative themes across a wide spectrum of

diversity within a maximum-security prison in the Northeastern United States. These interviews were meant to uncover themes in the master narratives about prisoners, and how they view themselves within those frames. There is a plethora of research in the academic community regarding stereotyping, shame, stigma, and the likes, but there is a significant gap in how this research may apply to incarcerated offenders, specifically due to the many barriers to conducting such necessary qualitative research.

Seeking a New Understanding

By conducting a study inside of a maximum-security prison, in the spaces that participants are living in and making sense of each day, the research is able to garner a level of authenticity into prisoner narratives that is vital if there is hope to understand how such narratives are constructed. The intersection of social identity and the experience of shame, humiliation, stereotype and stigma on the prisoner narrative is one that, if uncovered, could potentially map out numerous approaches to resolving conflict; whether that be addressing root causes of crime, shedding light on cycles of recidivism, or understanding the nature of the violent counter-culture of prisons in general—uncovering the authentic and complex narratives of prisoners is the first step towards intervention.

As an offender himself, the researcher has a different level of access to such narratives, while also having a different level of context and understanding. However, the researcher's understanding of imprisonment is not nearly enough to make sense of the offender experience as a whole, the stories of numerous others is required before some semblance of understanding may be claimed. By interviewing a diverse group—and

diversity was a key part of the recruitment process—of inmates within a maximum-security prison in the Northeastern United States, themes could be analyzed that speak to the effects of stereotype and stigma, and possibly even shame and humiliation on the social identity of inmates, and how they make sense of their experiences on the inside. Once themes have emerged, a new understanding can also emerge as to which aspects of incarceration are the most damaging to the identities of prisoners, and what a narrative repair process to such damage might look like.

What follows is an attempt to create a new avenue for research; that of offenders/prisoners making sense of a “high-risk” population and environment that so many others have trouble accessing. By conducting research within this environment, with a foundational knowledge of the inner workings, and a pre-established trust with a population that suffers from an extreme hesitancy to allow outsiders in, perhaps new theory will arise. Authenticity is the *goal* of this research. Making meaning of narratives from a place grounded in intimate knowledge about the surroundings, the language, and the culture, is the *purpose* of this study. Allowing themes to emerge that shed a new light on how prisoners are affected by the process of imprisonment is the *hope* of this thesis. Regardless of the outcome, the experience was revelatory, the stories were profound, and the process was full of obstacles and lessons that could pave the way for future studies, the potential of which is limitless.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will cover what the author views as important research regarding the major components of the project; stereotyping, stigma, shame, humiliation, social identity, and the use of narrative in conflict resolution. Hilde Nelson's book, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, will be used to explore how these theories can apply explicitly to the processes of damage done to inmate narratives, and the implications for repairing those narratives through the creation of counterstories. An in-depth discussion of Nelson (2001) will be included.

Stereotypes, Stigma, Shame, and Humiliation

Theories about the effects of processes such as stereotyping and shame, as well as the role that humiliation plays in conflict and violence reach far back into the history of psychology and the social sciences alike. Allport (1954) is considered by many to be the researcher who set the stage for groundbreaking writing around prejudice and the role that it plays within society. His book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, is cited by many (Dovidio et al., 2005; Oakes et al., 1994; Crocker and Major, 1989; Steele, 1997; Greenwald and Banaji, 1995) as foundational for their studies regarding the social impact of stereotypes and stigma, why they exist, how to defeat them, and the extent of harm that they can cause.

Stereotype and Stigma

According to Allport (1954) a stereotype can be defined as “an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category” (p. 191), whether that is conduct in favor of, or detrimental to, the stereotyped person or group. He goes on to say that “the stereotype acts as a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening or selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and thinking” (pg. 192). Other researchers have also explored definitions of stereotypes; Greenwald and Banaji (1995), for instance, state that stereotypes are socially shared beliefs about specific traits that characterize members of certain social categories; they also cite Katz and Braly (1935) as considering stereotypes as fixed impressions “which conform very little to the fact it pretends to represent, and results from our defining first and observing second” ; and Secord (1959)

believes a stereotype can be described as “a categorical response, i.e., membership is sufficient to evoke the judgment that the stimulus person possesses all the attributes belonging to that category” (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995, pg. 14).

One of the most descriptive definitions cited by Greenwald and Banaji (1995) is that of Snyder (1981). “In stereotyping, the individual: (1) categorizes other individuals, usually on the basis of highly visible characteristics such as sex or race; (2) attributes a set of characteristics to all members of that category; and (3) attributes that set of characteristics to any individual member of that category” (ibid). In their evaluation of Allport’s seminal work on prejudice, fifty years after the fact, Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman (2005), have said that “The overwhelming effect of stereotypes, therefore, is to perpetuate prior beliefs and prejudices; the status quo is bolstered through information processors’ reliance upon stereotypes as a convenient way of organizing information about the social world” (pg. 210). Categorization occurs, certain traits (especially negatively perceived ones) are assigned to members of the categorized group, and as such, simplicity occurs and stereotypes serve as a defense mechanism against complicating an individual’s assessment of people belonging to certain groups. Without categorization and stereotypes, the social world becomes a very complex place requiring an incredible amount of cognitive activity needed in order to make sense of individuals, groups, and the many differences and similarities that exist between people. Allport (1954) believed, “we cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it” (pg. 20), and according to Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994); “Given that groups are real, not to represent them would be inaccurate. It is no more wrong to categorize people

as groups than it is to categorize them as individuals” (pg. 189), however, what is recognized is that depending on the content and tone of those categories, and the beliefs, assumptions, and actions that follow the process of categorization, much violence can be done by way of stigma.

Stigmatization can be said to be the process that occurs once a group has been stereotyped to the extent that the negative views about the group begin to affect the quality of life and extent of social opportunities for the group. For Crocker and Major (1989), who discuss the affect of social stigma on self-esteem, stigmatized individuals “receive disproportionately poor interpersonal or economic outcomes relative to members of the society at large because of discrimination against members of the social category” (pg. 609). The important thing to remember about stigma specifically, is that individuals and groups are not simply devalued or negatively positioned by certain other groups, but by the “broader society or culture,” as well (ibid). This process, although not explicitly named as stigma in some texts, is certainly alluded to in Allport’s (1954) work, and much that followed—as opposed to calling it stigma, the relationship of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotype has been explored by the majority of researchers cited thus far. In numerous laboratory studies Oakes et al. (1994) found that bringing attention to real or perceived social categories was, in itself, often enough to produce discriminatory behavior towards outgroup individuals, and attitudes that favored the believed in-group of the participant. In this process, “stereotype content is suffused by prejudices reflecting the motivational and social needs of the perceiver” (pg. 187), and when the content is

adopted by many perceivers who comprise a majority in-group, then the prejudices begin to spread and create stigmas.

It is important to define another key term in the process of stereotype and stigma; prejudice, which is an extremely important factor in the creation of these processes, is defined by Allport (1954) as; “an avertive or hostile attitude towards a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group” (pg. 7). Prejudice, as discussed by Allport, is separate from prejudgment in that it resists evidence, or “new knowledge” which contradicts it. Prejudice, then, is the source of much conflict that is fueled by stereotype and stigma, and also the reason that such conflicts can be extremely hard to resolve. Prejudgments rarely produce emotional response in the face of new information, whereas a prejudice may be taken to the grave in spite of a bevy of new, contradictory information about the basis of the prejudice.

According to Dovidio et al. (2005), “negative stereotypes are not the cause of prejudice. Rather they are a consequence of prejudice” (pg. 126). As such, Allport’s (1954) view that prejudice is the “process of thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant” (pg. 6) is supported as it occurs “when people are placed at some disadvantage that is not warranted by their individual actions or qualifications” (Dovidio et al., 2005, pg. 23-24). Unfortunately, and as will be discussed later in this thesis, the concept of “sufficient warrant” is almost impossible to define and/or measure. What the research typically fails to ask or uncover, is how the individual’s actions who is prejudiced are actually measured in the pre-stigma stage. We have a plethora of research about how

behaviors, actions, beliefs, and words are categorized, post-stigma, since prejudice refuses to acknowledge newly acquired information or evidence to the contrary, but perhaps what is needed is a more comprehensive discussion about what constitutes sufficient warrant. This discussion would first need to discuss “kernels of truth,” and how the concept possibly fuels an unreasonable adoption of what sufficiently warrants a stereotype that places someone in a category vulnerable to stigmatization and mistreatment. Once individuals enter into stigmatized groups in the eyes of the broader culture, it is incredibly difficult to escape the stereotypes which confine them. “System-justifying forms of stereotyping and prejudice render cultural practices and institutions legitimate, rational, and sometimes even necessary and noble” (Dovidio et al., 2005, pg. 216). These system-justifying stereotypes will be discussed at length as they apply specifically to offenders/prisoners.

The Kernel of Truth. This term, used originally by Allport (1954) requires some discussion. Cited by many authors and researchers, the “kernel of truth” is, generally, what a category starts to grow from, “and enlarges and solidifies itself through the increment of relevant experience...irrational categories are formed as easily as rational” (Allport, 1954, pg. 22). According to Oakes et al., “this emerging ‘kernel of truth’ hypothesis gained strength from a number of studies showing that stereotypes were quite sensitive to changes in international relations brought about by World War II” (pg. 4). Oakes et al. cite Prothro and Melikian as suggesting that “stereotype content ‘constitutes a kind of socio-psychological truth’ in appearing to reflect the realities of intergroup relations” (pg. 16), and throughout the 1940’s and 50’s the idea that stereotypes were

based in a kernel of truth was tested by the likes of Fishman (1956), Klineberg (1951), and Schoenfeld (1942). The following evaluation of stereotype studies is given by Oakes et al.;

The conclusion generally drawn from findings such as these was that the factual basis of stereotypes was negligible, if not non-existent. Schoenfeld (1942) remarked ‘to the extent that a stereotype corresponds to objective facts, it is not a stereotype at all’ (p. 12). In a similar vein, Klineberg (1951) opened a discussion of ‘the meaning of stereotypes’ by commenting that ‘they may occasionally contain some truth, but if they do so, it appears to be largely by chance (p. 505). In an even more scathing analysis, Zawadzki (1942) commented:

The stereotype as a concept of what is a typical member of a group is a very poor device in thinking...[T]raits are selected, not because they are actually most found among members of the group, but because they serve best the malicious intent of ridiculing or discrediting the group. (p. 130).

Amidst a plethora of research into the kernel of truth issue, Oakes et al. decide that “it is the social values of the researcher which largely determine both perceived accuracy of stereotypes and the perceived appropriateness of any measure of accuracy in a given context” (pg. 24). Ford and Stangor (1992), however, assume that the kernel of truth hypothesis presented by Allport (1954) speaks to the presence of real differences between groups, and that uncovering those differences plays an important role in the formation of stereotypes. The trouble with such logic, however, is that differences are *always present* in individuals and groups, and the seeker of differences will always

determine which differences are found, and what weight those differences are afforded, with context, place, and time playing a role. As such, the stereotypes of Blacks and Jews found in Katz and Braly's (1932) study may have been based on a kernel of truth, but that kernel was determined by the participants in the study, and relevant to time and place. "Kernels" are also influenced by what information is afforded to the perceiver—to this point, Allport (1954) writes, "Several surveys have disclosed a common trend in the handling of the Negro in American daily newspapers—a heavy concentration upon crime news and slight attention to achievement" (pg. 201). Such delivery of negative kernels denies opportunities for other kernels to make their way into the picture—but depending on the perceiver, all available information will be sifted through until a picture or a stereotype of the perceived is obtained which does not jeopardize the perceivers sense of social reality; recall Oakes et al., "stereotype content is suffused by prejudices reflecting the motivational and social needs of the perceiver" (pg. 187).

There is a need to study real intergroup differences, especially as they relate to the field of conflict resolution, but resorting to the kernel of truth argument seems to only simplify conflict narratives and prevent them from adding complexity, and working towards resolution and reconciliation. Because groups are irreducible to the individuals which comprise them, it is important that evaluations of group membership "should be employed only where it is accurately and rationally likely to indicate the true attributes of the single individual person" (Oakes et al., 1994, pg. 194). To stereotype the individual based on an inefficient amount of information, i.e. a "kernel of truth," is to reduce the individual's identity and complexity. To stereotype a group based on kernels of truth

about individuals is to even further the simplicity of the collective. Thus, the kernel of truth argument appears to exacerbate the process of stigmatization, which for the prisoner (as will be discussed later) is extremely detrimental.

Shame and Humiliation

Scheff and Retzinger (1991), in the introduction to their text, *Emotions and Violence*, argue that “protracted violence occurs under two basic conditions. One, the parties to the conflict are alienated from each other and are in a state of shame; and two, their state of alienation and their shame go unacknowledged” (pg. xviii). The type of shame that fuels the negative effects of stereotype and stigmatization is precisely what they discuss; unacknowledged shame. The metaphor used on the next page does well to describe a common occurrence for individuals in prison’s, as well as those suffering under the heavy weight of stigma upon release;

Shame may be analogous to oxygen in the chemistry of the elements. Just as oxygen in combination with hydrogen and carbon forms the basis for living cells, so shame is a necessary part of personality and culture. But oxygen can also be destructive, since it is necessary for combustion. Shame, in combination with anger, can play a similar role in destroying relationships and societies.

When thought about in the context of prisons, where (as will be discussed later) social bonds and group formation are a process with their own difficulties and dangers, one can see how prevalent shame and anger may be. Not only has the prisoner been cast aside from society at large, shipped off, been rendered voiceless, and gone through a systematic process of humiliation upon arrival to a prison, but all that he endures has

been unacknowledged as unjust, unfair, inhumane, or wrong in any way, by the masses. With his attachment theory, Bowlby (1980), cited in Scheff and Retzinger (1991), implies that “the nearer people are to a state of bondlessness, the more likely it is that violent emotions and behavior will arise. To the extent that people literally have no one to turn to, they are likely to become violent or mentally ill or both” (pg. 26). This experience is one that the prisoner is bound to go through. Even when one feels part of a group with his fellow prisoners, there is always moments, distanced from one’s primary in-group, the place where they feel a sense of belonging, that the prisoner will feel as if there is no one to turn to. When that feeling overcomes him or her, they will experience the rush of unacknowledged shame, and it is likely that anger and violence will arise; maybe not in action, but certainly in thought and fantasy.

Bigliani, Moguillansky, and Sluzki (2013), discuss bullying and the effects it has on the receiver. According to them, an executive who has experienced bullying at the hands of an authoritarian boss, “has temporary outbursts of aggression against his wife or daughters, displacing in these acts the repressed violence in the asymmetrical relationship he had with his boss” (pg. 11-12). The outbursts are due to the shame which the executive experienced, coupled with the sense of helplessness to do anything about the bullying at the source. This exact kind of scenario is lived every day in prisons; the authoritarian system bullies the prisoner with an attitude of justification, and the prisoner, experiencing extreme levels of shame and humiliation, displaces the anger in all directions but the source (usually), often leading to varying degrees of violence. This cycle manifests in prisoners, “a paradoxical behavior in which he imagined he won when

he lost, reinforced the inhibition of his aggression, and was setting himself up for a destiny as a loser” (pg. 13). The violence gains one a reputation that is “valuable” in prison, but it results in a whole series of losses, ranging from isolation and solitary confinement, to additional time in prison, or even revenge-violence from the victim and/or his social group; a whole series of irrational events, all rooted in the institutional shame and humiliation that comes with imprisonment.

A sensation experienced often by the prisoner is that of desertion. At numerous steps of his/her experience towards imprisonment, he/she likely felt deserted by an array of different parties. Once imprisoned, people often externalize their pain and suffering through blame, and anger and resentment at all the “responsible” parties. Despite the fact that the prisoner’s breach of the social contract is what landed them in their predicament, shame research tells us that desertion and humiliation are a dangerous combination; “He tries to justify his vengeful ideas on the grounds that he was terribly hurt...Humiliation due to desertion comes together with a feeling of shame, where the dominant component is the public element, the gaze of society and the family, from which there is no escape” (Bigliani et al., 2013, pg. 23). This feeling of being violated by society’s shaming of him/her can lead to a search for someone to blame; “Through projection, he starts a crusade of accusations to put to shame the person who has shamed him” (pg. 24). Such displays are seen of prisoners in mass media, setting the stage for the stereotype of someone unwilling to accept responsibility, with little understanding of the way that shame and humiliation affects narrative and identity.

Braithwaite (1989) researched the difference between reintegrative shaming and pathological shaming, and how it effects crime. Building on Lewis' (1976) work around pride and shame as attachment emotions, Braithwaite “found that stigmatizing shame damages the bond between the punisher and the punished, leading to the formation of criminal subgroups” (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991, pg. 30), as a result of alienation. This process happens at multiple levels for prisoners, as the “punisher” is not a single entity, but ranges from the police, to the prosecutor(s), judges, county jail officers, prison guards and administration, and even society at large. The continuous feeling of punishment may lead to an extreme form of alienation, which stereotype and stigma only exacerbate, resulting in entirely new, and often detrimental, processes of social identity formation with a foundation in alienation. If Scheff and Retzinger (1991) are correct in their assumption that, “in all interaction, either the social bond is being built, maintained, or repaired, or it is being damaged” (pg. 64), and we evaluate what effects the process of imprisonment has through its many levels of interaction, then it becomes increasingly obvious that the prisoner goes through a series of damage to their social bonds. The physical, mental, and emotional separation that incarceration brings, further damages the prisoner; “For more than a century theorists have argued that separation induces conflict (Marx 1844; Simmel 1955; Coser 1956; Coleman 1957; Kreisberg 1973). As Simmel put it, ‘separation does not follow conflict...conflict [follows] from separation’ (1955: 47)—that is, conflict results from lost social bonds” (ibid).

Scheff and Retzinger capture eloquently the process and potential effects of shame in the following quote;

Shame is intricately connected with *social separation* and threats of abandonment—responses to *alienation* from others.

When shame is ignored, not only does one feel separated from the other person and hurt, but identification with the other becomes difficult. The *other* person is then experienced as the source of the hurt; only the part the other person plays may be seen. Each person reciprocates with a more vehement assault against the perceived attack: withdrawal, sarcasm, blame, demeaning criticism, threat, or worse. Each tactic communicates disrespect and separates them further from one another, generating strong emotion. This formulation should not be taken lightly. People kill for social reasons: lost affection, lost honor, and other highly moral reasons (Lewis 1976; Katz 1988)...Rage, a reaction against an injury to oneself, is a protective measure used as an insulation against shame (pg. 66).

Bigliani et al. (2013), differentiate between guilt, shame, and humiliation;

guilt is the emotion that accompanies our belief that we did something wrong, *shame* emerges when believing (publicly or at least in front of our judging self) that we are, somehow, bad, and *humiliation* emerges when, regardless of whether we did something wrong by commission or omission or even by being bad, we are being unfairly debased by the other (pg. 69).

Humiliation itself was defined by the same authors as, essentially, the emotion experienced when an image presented by the other does not line up with the way that the self views a circumstance or situation, and as such, “we experience the other’s behavior

or assumptions inappropriate and our degradation by them unfair” (pg. 68). The danger of humiliation as part of the system of imprisonment is that;

humiliation is associated with an experience of attack against dignity, pride, or power, and triggers motions (actions or at least fantasies) of retaliation or revenge...In scenarios of humiliation, the behaviours, attributes, and intentions of (or attributed to) the *perpetrator* are at the centre of the critical discourse of the humiliated, rather than his/her own traits (pg. 70).

This emotional/psychological process of shame and humiliation makes it incredibly hard for individuals to internalize the discussion towards what needs to change within, and instead focuses attention on all the ways one, and one’s group, has been and continues to be, wronged. With nobody to bear witness to the injustice that the humiliated feels he/she is enduring, the feelings of shame and humiliation compound and become externalized, leading to “disruptive, aggressive, destructive, and, broadly speaking, anti-social interventions” (pg. 77-78). When shame is used appropriately, there is a possibility for the preservation of ego, as in Braithwaite’s concept of reintegrative shaming. But, when shame leads to humiliation, Bigliani et al. (2013) believe that the ego is shattered.

Ultimately, the research on shame and humiliation show that they are, “human emotions that play an important role in the relationship a subject has with himself as well as with others. They play a role in the adjustment each one of us makes to his self-esteem and to the assessments we feel we receive from the human community we are a part of and with which we interact” (Bigliani et al., 2013, pg. 131-132). In this way,

shame and humiliation are pivotal to our understandings of how stereotype and stigma affect individuals, and how it also plays a role in social identity formation inside of places such as prisons.

Social Identity

According to Tajfel (1981), stereotypes serve five basic functions in terms of social identity;

for the individual, stereotypes served the *cognitive* function of systematizing and simplifying the environment, and the *motivational* functioning of representing and preserving important social values. At the group level, stereotypes contributed to the creation and maintenance of group beliefs which were then used to *explain* large-scale social events and *justify* various forms of collective action. They were also involved in the creation and maintenance of *positive intergroup distinctiveness*, the tendency to differentiate the ingroup positively from selected outgroups (Oakes et al., 1994, pg. 85).

Concomitantly, in an earlier publication, Tajfel (1972) made the argument that social categorizations were meant to infuse group relationships with certain meanings, and the result, or what followed the establishment of those meanings, depended upon the meanings or implications of the intergroup relationship (Oakes et al., 1994, pg. 84). With this evaluation in mind, Dovidio et al. (2005) show that stereotypes serve group-justifying ends; “they are used to rationalize discrimination against outgroup members, enhance positive ingroup distinctiveness, and allow for people to feel good about

themselves and their fellow group members through intergroup social comparison processes” (pg. 215).

Taking it one step further, Rothbart and Korostelina (2006), write;

one finds one’s place in the world of virtuous figures by projecting responsibility for evil deeds to a stigmatized group. As an added bonus, the moral sanctity of the ‘untainted’ ingroup is solidified. Stigmatization, the practice of marking certain individuals or groups as tainted, diminishes the moral worth, political autonomy, or social status of those groups and individuals. Character traits of individuals are converted to negatives of the stigmatized group. The group is viewed as unjust, immoral, uncivilized, or possibly inhuman simply because of their membership, their assigned social identity (pg. 36).

Thus, the process of stereotype and stigma serve to increase positive feelings for the ingroup who has set the negative perceptions of the stigmatized group, but at a great cost—“stigmatized groups are marginalized, viewed as threatening, and often reassigned to a separate social space” (ibid). The trouble for prisoners specifically, in terms of social identity and stigma, is that the stereotype and stigma are not what reassigned them to a separate space, it was a violation of the social contract in one form or another that relegated them to that space—unfortunately, the kernel of truth sensation that occurs after crime, through mass media representations of criminals, keeps them marginalized into a complete separate space even once released from prison. First, the walls and fences contain them and fuel the stigma, then, once released, the stigma continues to hold them captive.

According to Crocker and Major (1989), “social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) are also compatible with the prediction that social stigma has negative effects on self-esteem” (pg. 610). Stigma, combined with environmental factors in prisons, make it extremely hard for the prisoner to positively position himself into a feeling of cohesion with an ingroup. “Marked by mistrust, fear, high levels of verbal and physical victimization, physical and emotional deprivations, boredom, overcrowding and intense lack of privacy, the prison setting presents particular obstacles to cohesive social relations” (Phillips, 2007, pg. 79). The prisoner is, in many ways, incapable of pursuing chosen ingroups which may fulfill psychological needs in a genuine way. The idea of “primary social identity” discussed by Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) provides a sense of security and moral legitimacy, but for the prisoner, whose moral legitimacy has been jeopardized by the actions which led him to prison, positive self-images, and understandings become more difficult to obtain; “Generative alternatives to self-understanding, self-image, and lifeworld are further suffocated under oppressive and stigmatizing social conditions” (Rolling, 2016, pg. 2). If Tilley (2016) is correct, that “Attitudes dispose people to action; social structures enable them to act on these dispositions” (pg. 67), then prison, as a social structure, severely restricts one’s ability to establish positive attitudes, and the ability to act on them. Additionally, because categorization of the self into the role of an ingroup member “entails assimilation of the self into the ingroup category prototype and enhanced similarity to other ingroup members” (Ashmore et al., 2001, pg. 20), one must find an ingroup with a prototype that is emotionally, culturally, and psychologically appealing. Beyond appeal lies one’s

needs; universal human needs extend beyond that of shelter, food, and physical safety, and require one to find recognition, acceptance, and respect, what Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) call the “iron laws of human nature” (pg. 368). For the prisoner, who is severely restricted in choosing a prototype or an ingroup to assimilate to, the options can seem very daunting; sacrifice some aspect of self in order to fit into a group one might otherwise not assimilate into, or, intentionally exclude oneself from ingroup inclusion and the prospect of finding recognition and acceptance. Navigating their incarceration under the weight of exclusion from society at large, as well as the lack of feeling a sense of belonging could be a seemingly un-survivable task.

Finally, according to Wall (2008), “stereotypes respond to social reality because ideology and social reality are mutually constitutive, and it is the cultural, racial, and ideological construction of social reality and social relationships that is being articulated through stereotypes...the consequences of stereotyping are critically related to the exercise of social, cultural, and political power” (pg. 1044). The stereotypes of prisoners, both from the greater society and from within prisons, persist for myriad reasons, but the social identities found in prisons are a direct result of what Wall discusses; they are products of exclusion and a complete lack of social, cultural, and political power.

Applying Narrative Theories

According to Godsil and Goodale (2013), “The story we tell ourselves can strongly shape how we behave. Recent work intervening at the self-concept level suggests the hopeful possibility that, through reshaping our narratives, we can change our behavior and ultimately our outcomes” (pg. 13). Additionally, narratives can be

employed in order to successfully combat stereotypes, since they are often used to reinforce them. In terms of doing narrative evaluations of, and narrative work with prisoners, Presser (2009) points out that “Criminologists tend to think of and to utilize narratives as stores of data on criminal behavior and its causes. Not incidentally, this exclusively representational conceptualization of narrative informs the notion that offenders’ narratives are inauthentic because offenders are motivated to distort what happened” (pg. 178). If the view that offenders have a “problem of authenticity” (Presser, 2009, pg. 179) is accurate, then combining Presser and Godsil and Goodale’s evaluations would mean that discovering ways to evaluate authentic narratives of offenders, and then reshape them, could ultimately lead to a change in behavior and outcomes, and thus a reduction in conflict/crime.

Presser (2010) furthers her work on the stories and narratives of offenders and points out that “our stories draw on the events, symbols, and phenomenological tensions that matter to us” (pg. 431), and perhaps more importantly, “narratives explain one’s actions—and one’s self—to one’s self” (pg. 433). If the narratives that prisoners tell are unable to be recognized as authentic, and the tensions that matter to them are seen as invalid, then the process of explaining one’s self to one’s self becomes increasingly more difficult, and perhaps even harmful. Hardy (2008) recognizes that people tell stories in an effort to make sense of the conflicts in their lives, and she also cites Gergen and Gergen’s (2006) belief that, “there is something particularly effective about listening to others’ narratives that crosses boundaries of meaning and brings people into a state of mutuality” (Hardy, 2008, pg. 248). The literal separation of prisoners from society

makes it very difficult to listen to their narratives, which makes the state of mutuality seemingly unobtainable, and the perpetuation of stereotypes and stigma likely.

In the same light, Yardley et al. (2015) discuss the purpose of narration; “to share a story with an audience—and indeed, the audience, or audiences, actual or perceived, are shapers of narrative. As Reissman (2008) argues, ‘one can’t be a ‘self’ by oneself; rather identities are constructed in ‘shows’ that persuade’” (pg. 106). In order to construct identity in a show, whether it is a narrative that positively, or negatively positions individuals in the greater picture of society, audience is a necessity. As such, the stories and those who listen to the stories are both vitally important to narrative work towards the resolution of conflict. For prisoners to overcome the stereotypes, or develop a narrative that lives beyond the confines of stereotype and stigma, opportunities for adaptation and better-formed stories must occur. Yardley et al. call such a process a crucial part of rehabilitation, and reference Ward and Marshall (2007) as complimenting the Maruna (2001) “Good Lives Model” of offender rehabilitation which, “posits that offenders and nonoffenders alike seek similar things from life (also known as primary goods); examples include knowledge, happiness, family and romantic relationships, and excellence in play and work” (Yardley et al., 2015, pg. 161). The question which must be asked, however, is when and where such commonalities may be displayed, and how nonoffenders might come to a place to accept such a narrative in the face of all of the stereotype reinforcing information presented to them so often?

Adshead (2011), in an article titled “*The Life Sentence: Using a Narrative Approach in Group Psychology with Offenders,*” references Booker’s (2004) suggestion

that “all narratives are at some level about communities and the danger posed by individuals who are disconnected from the group” (pg. 177). According to Adshad, nonattached individuals occupy a liminal space where they are both at risk, and pose a risk to other groups. If offenders, or the nonattached, cannot be recognized by others when telling their narratives, then it must increase the risk posed. “If offenders can own their identity as offenders, then this identity can be thought about and worked on remedially...only by accepting and narrating the monster within can it be transformed” (pg. 183-184). Unfortunately, as we have seen in the previously noted literature, none of this can be done without an audience to narrate to; it seems that in order for prisoners to possibly engage in narrative work, a bridge must first be built—one that extends over the prison gates and back into the communities harmed by the choices and mistakes that offenders made which resulted in their nonattachment.

Cobb (2013) believes that institutionalized violence disrupts one’s capacity to narrate pain; the process, or violence of imprisonment, undoubtedly leads to prisoners’ isolation and disenfranchisement. As such, “they live in the shadows of the public sphere, their relation to state and community broken” (pg. 27). Living in this “state of exception,” prisoners are a group that are subjected to narrative violence (pg. 29), and unable to make their pain visible, or to ever narrate the occupation of a space of victimization for the precise reason that they were once, and perhaps remain to be, perpetrators of one kind or another. According to Cobb, “narrative violence refers to both the disruption of narrative by violence and, in the context of conflict, the institutionalization of exclusion” (pg. 30).

Bringing the discussion back to the need for a bridge to be built, Cobb goes on to describe the concept of a narrative bridge as an aim of the narrative approach to conflict resolution; “A *bridging narrative* is one that is developed to ‘bridge’ different segments of a storyline—it provides context for connecting portions of the plot that seemingly are unrelated...bridging narratives provide links between otherwise disparate or mutually disqualifying narratives” (ibid). The inability of prisoners (perpetrators) to offer a narrative that also occupies the role of victim—a victim of institutionalized, or structural violence—or the role of a traumatized character, since they too are, or were, the source of some level of trauma, establishes the need for a narrative bridge. How do we collectively reconcile the possibility of such non-simplistic narratives, and allow narrative complexity to occur for a population such as prisoners, and then, more importantly, how do we bridge those narratives out into the world so that the perpetuation of violence and recidivism can be necessarily reduced? If Cobb is correct that, “the absence of recognition is a symptom of conflict, as well as being productive of conflict,” and, that “Witnessing is the process of mutual recognition and is the core to the practice of conflict resolution” (pg. 32), then it is imperative that, collectively, we find ways for prisoners to do precisely what was discussed earlier; own the narrative of offender and learn to narrate the monster, but do so for an *audience who is willing to witness*.

Frank (2010) discusses the art and obstacles of narratology. In terms of audience and the receiving of stories, Frank writes, “At the extreme, stories not readily locatable in the listener’s inner library will be off the radar of comprehension, disregarded as noise” (pg. 55). Cobb (2013) also addressed this idea of noise, and how, “Oppression, according

to critical narrative theory, occurs when people either cannot speak or cannot be heard...it is likely the case that any given conflict will contain parties who have not spoken or cannot be heard if they do—they can only make ‘noise’” (pg. 241). The major obstacle facing prisoners, “whose afflictions are regarded, or disregarded, by others as an acceptable price” (Frank, 2010, pg. 130) is that their stories not only go unheard, but, in the eyes of many, their inability to tell a story is, as Frank describes, an acceptable price to pay for the transgressions which brought them to prison. Thus, the popular stories about offenders—the only ones not reduced to noise—do precisely the thing that leaves violence as the only recourse for when words fail, they reduce complexity. Frank, perhaps describing the evolution into such violence, and the power of stereotypes in that process, writes; “stories make dangerous companions when they reduce too much complexity and are too good at concealing what they reduce” (pg. 149).

Ricouer (1992) discusses how individuals’ past, present, and future are inextricably linked in their lives through the stories they tell about those lives; “the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (pg. 147-148). Additionally, in discussing Ricouer, Rogobete (2015) writes; “Although identity is constructed through language, people understand themselves only through their engagement with others in action and agency. In these interactions, people realize that there are limits regarding their expectations from others and what they can change about themselves” (pg. 59). In this light, the limitations on expectations and changeability are extremely limited for the prisoner, who, is cut off

from nearly all interactions with the outside world and can only bear witness to expectations based on popular representations in mass media and popular culture.

Repairing the Narrative: Hilde Nelson's Work

According to Nelson (2001), a counterstory is one that “resists oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect. By ‘identity’ I mean the interaction of a person’s self-conception with how others conceive her: identities are the understandings we have of ourselves and others” (pg. 6). The literature discussed up until this point is important as a collective as it tells the story of how social identity is formed, categorizations and group dynamics often lead to stereotypes which become entrenched and turn into stigmatization of out-groups, and perpetuate in the narratives that are told, or unable to be told. These processes form what Nelson calls master narratives, or “the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of our experience (Nisbett and Ross, 1980) but also to justify what we do (MacIntyre, 1984)” (ibid). For the prisoner, these master narratives are very much rooted in negative characteristics based on the kernels of truth that are hammered into the societal consciousness through mass media. Additionally, the master narratives which categorize prisoners also justify the complete exclusion of them from the social sphere, and make the possibility of alternative narratives extremely difficult because of environmental factors within prisons, as well as the complete lack of opportunity for creating new stories and presenting them to any meaningful or attentive audience.

The process of telling a counterstory is two-fold, according to Nelson;

First is to identify the fragments of master narratives that have gone into the construction of an oppressive identity, noting how these fragments misrepresent persons...and situations. The second is to retell the story about the person or the group to which the person belongs in such a way as to make visible the morally relevant details that the master narratives suppressed. If the retelling is successful, the group members will stand revealed as respectable moral agents (pg. 7).

Ultimately, the aim of the counterstory, as Nelson describes it, is to change the ways that the oppressors see the group. But, a necessary component of creating lasting and authentic counterstories cannot go unaddressed; “counterstories aim to alter, when necessary, an oppressed person’s perception of *herself*. Oppression often infiltrates a person’s consciousness, so that she comes to operate, from her own point of view, as her oppressors want her to, rating herself as they rate her” (ibid). This process was previously discussed in the review of stereotype and stigma, and how it can cause stigmatized groups to adopt traits and characteristics assigned to them by the majority, as a defense mechanism. In the narrative view, it is less that the traits are adopted, and more that the *stories about the traits* are internalized because there are no opportunities for better, more positively associated stories. This is what can be seen with narratives available to prisoners; only overly simplistic stories about who the prisoner is are available, and a counterstory is necessary in order to “transform the monster within” (Adshead, 2011) and deliver a new, more complex and better-formed story, to a wide

audience, not based on small kernels of truth. Thus, an effective counterstory shifts the perspective of the teller and the listener, and does so by revising the collective understandings of people and the social groups they comprise. For the prisoner, the most important aspect of the counterstory that Nelson defines is the filling in of details that the master narrative has ignored or underplayed (pg. 8)—that is, shifting the view from the “kernel of truth” so that it stands further out and views the whole corn.

The counterstory is an imperative part of repairing the prisoner identity and narrative, and the concept of who plays audience to this new story cannot be underscored. Communities of choice play a significant role in establishing an understanding of identity as well as how one reflects on the purpose and practicality of their identity. Citing Friedman (1992), Nelson writes;

communities of choice...foster not so much the *constitution* of subjects, but their *reconstitution*. We seek out communities of choice as contexts in which to *relocate* and *renegotiate* the various constituents of our identities. This relocation and renegotiation is not always benign, of course. As the Ku Klux Klan reminds us, communities of choice can endorse all kinds of evil that aren't countenanced by a found community (pg. 9).

Again, the detriment of social exclusion and invisibility to the prisoner narrative is apparent. If the stereotype of offenders is extremely negative and group members begin to adopt those traits, then while in prison, and cut off from the possibility of other chosen communities, one can only formulate the basis of their identity from within the walls, where, positive construction and positioning may not be a feasible endeavor.

Identities are described by Nelson as complex narrative constructions of a person over time, viewed by one's self and others. "Because identities are constructed from both points of view, there are, broadly speaking, two ways in which they can be damaged" (pg. 20). These two types of damage are especially important to the identity of the prisoner; "first, a person's identity is damaged when powerful institutions or individuals, seeing people like her as morally sub- or abnormal, unjustly prevent her and her kind from occupying roles or entering into relationships that are identity constituting" (ibid). This kind of harm, experienced widely by individuals in prisons, is called deprivation of opportunity. The second destructive impact of oppression on a person's identity happens "when she internalizes as a self-understanding the hateful or dismissive views that other people have of her" (pg. 21); the previously discussed literature shows quite clearly how easily this may happen to prisoners. In order to meet the normative competence condition for narrative repair, which contains the "ability of others to recognize by one's actions that one is a morally responsible person" (pg. 28), an actor must be able to have control over their action's without the presence of others' placing obstacles perpetually in their path. Prison, unfortunately, is an environment full of obstacles, and as such, the work of narrative repair can seem daunting and out of one's control, resulting in the continuation of both types of narrative damage which perpetuate the harmful master narratives around prisoners.

The work is not as easy as just "sliding out" from under other people's descriptions of us. Nelson discusses how such a stance "betrays a disconcerting lack of appreciation of the very real ways in which powerful people's representations of who we

are can constrain and restrict our movement. The slave can't just *say* that her owner has no authority over her and expect to walk away" (pg. 53). Similarly, the inmate cannot just *say* that they are more than their crime, or more than what is portrayed on T.V., they cannot just walk out from the gates and find a camera to speak into, and even if they could, they cannot stream such a speech into the homes of society. No, it is much more complex than that, which is why Nelson reminds us that counterstories cannot simply counter master narratives, they must replace them.

Accurate stories about identity must be proportionally correct, according to Nelson, and in light of the kernel of truth argument, stereotypes are based completely outside proportion, as the part is substituted for the whole. Thus, it is imperative that any counterstory aimed at replacing the master narratives about prisoners first address proportion and complexity. Credibility is the key to counterstories; "In the fact that oppression can damage my identity lies a threat to my freedom of agency. In the fact that more credible stories of who I am can be constructed lies the possibility that the damage might be repaired" (pg. 105).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Deciding what type of study to conduct was not an easy task. Research about prisons and offenders is vast; studies conducted by prisoners, about prisoners, on the contrary, is quite rare. This study was completed utilizing a flexible design approach where semi-structured interviews were the means of data-collection, and a thematic analysis was used to interpret the data gathered. The limitations section will include discussion around other, possibly better situated, methodologies for conducting similar research, but a flexible design approach was necessary, for this study, for a multitude of reasons.

Flexible Design Approach

Robson and McCartan, 2016, cite that a good flexible design draws from multiple methods; this tradition need not be ‘pure,’ and procedures from several can be brought together. “Ideas for changing your approach may arise from your involvement and early data collection” (pg. 147). In this sense, although the study’s main focus was on narrative theories; how prisoners tell their own stories and the themes that arise from multiple accounts across a diverse spectrum, the authors dual status as a prisoner and researcher meant that there would additionally, and naturally, be ethnographic, grounded theory, and complete participant observation elements to the collection and interpretation of the data as well. Musson (2004), cited by Robson and McCartan (2016), for example,

used multiple methods including participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, documentary analysis, and group discussion.

Although the data collection for this specific study was done almost exclusively through semi-structured interviews, there needed to be a flexible design in that the researcher was also interacting with participants on a daily basis, both before and after the recruitment and interview phases. Field notes were not taken for this study other than during and immediately after the interviews, so traditional participant observation was not a method used. In the analysis of the data, however, the researchers experience of incarceration and his interactions with both participants and non-participants within the prison clearly influenced the meaning-making process of establishing themes. The researcher is, unequivocally, a complete participant; although the study was not based on his participation except as an interviewer, it would be naïve to say that the data analysis could be done with complete objectivity, drawing nothing from more than a decade of intimate experience with incarceration; such an approach to analysis would diminish the study, in the researchers opinion.

This view is not unique, and Jackson (2010), although not speaking about prison research, makes a valuable point; “The kinds of people we claim or are perceived to be can influence interpretations of what we say and do, perceptions of our character, and how we are evaluated; who speaks affects what is said and who listens influences who speaks, what is spoken about, and how a speaker and her or his discourse is perceived” (pg. 743). In this description, Jackson focuses on the relationship between speaker and listener, or in this case, participant and researcher, and how that relationship will

undoubtedly affect the answers to questions, as well as the depth and authenticity that participants are willing to give to the study. This process can be achieved via many different methods, researchers often spend months or years immersing themselves into the culture or group they are studying; the strength of this research is that the immersion had already happened before the study was conducted. Wolcott (1990) describes the term ethnography as indicative of both process and product— “the presentation itself” (pg. 47)—and according to Drake et al. (2015);

We define ethnography as a form of in-depth study that includes the systematic and impressionistic recording of human cultural and social life in situ. It includes observing and/or interacting with people as they go about their everyday lives, routines and practices. We contrast an ethnographic approach with purely interview-based research methodologies that tend to be episodic, short-lived and often take place outside of spaces the informant routinely occupies. In addition, we also recognize an ethnographic approach in commitments to the generation of ‘thick’ descriptive accounts of the research, though these may vary considerably in ‘thickness’, depth and texture (3).

As described by Drake et al., the ethnographic qualities of a study can generate thickness, and although the data gathered for this specific thesis was primarily interview-based, the data itself was not short-lived nor episodic in the researchers view, as the stories of the participants described an extended period of incarceration, a period that he has been witness to in his own daily experiences and interactions. All parts of this study

were conducted inside of the spaces that participants occupy—which is, in this researcher’s view, a major advantage of this study.

According to Robson and McCartan’s (2016) definition, “An ethnography provides a description and interpretation of the culture and social structure of a social group. It has its roots in anthropology, involving an immersion in the particular culture of the society being studied so that life in the community could be described in detail. The ethnographer’s task was to become an accepted member of the group including participating in its cultural life and practices” (pg. 156). In this way, conducting a *true* ethnography of prisoners, from the outside, is not a possibility. There is no way to completely immerse oneself in the daily life of prisoners, unless one becomes a prisoner. Even if an outside researcher was able to infiltrate the prison under disguise as a prisoner, full immersion would still not be possible because they couldn’t possibly understand the psychological aspects of imprisonment that come with being found guilty of a crime, experiencing the stigma that accompanies that conviction, and being wholly unable to leave when you want to, as a researcher would be able to do, if they so chose. For these reasons, authentic and adequate ethnographies of prison must come from prisoners; unfortunately, this study, too, was unable to be a true in depth ethnography, mostly due to time limitations.

“Participant observation is very closely associated with the process of an ethnographic study” (Robson and McCartan, 2016, pg. 158), and the feature most important to the role of a participant observer is full immersion in day-to-day lives of those being studied. Although a complete ethnography was unable to be completed, and

participant observation was not part of data collection, it most certainly applied to the study in the researcher's role and the frames used for analysis.

Also due to time constraints, this research could neither be a complete grounded theory study. "A grounded theory study seeks to generate a theory which relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study. The theory is 'grounded' in data obtained during the study, particularly in the actions, interactions, and processes of the people involved" (Robson and McCartan, 2016, 161). Where interviews are the most common tool used for collecting data in a grounded theory approach, in order to support emerging theory, it is imperative that studies be iterative (Smith, 2015, pg. 54), so they may support the new theory as concrete. For that reason, this study was more a thematic analysis, but it resembled grounded theory in that there was no intention to support any existing theory through the data collection and analysis. Instead, the data would speak for itself, and theme's and theories would emerge from the data as opposed to the researcher seeking to support or defeat the presence of preestablished theories. According to Smith (2015), "TA coding allows for research questions to evolve throughout the course of the research" (pg. 228), and, "is not a question of universal absolutes, but is reliant on the subjectivity of the researcher and their rigour and scholarship" (pg. 246).

The last major component which contributed to the flexible design approach utilized in this study is that of narrative research. Put succinctly, Robson and McCartan (2016) refer to narrative research as being "Based on 'stories'. Can refer to an entire life story, long sections of talk leading to extended accounts of lives, or even an answer to a

single question” (pg. 165). This study did not focus on participants life stories nor on single questions, but instead focused on how individual’s stories about themselves changed or evolved, according to themselves, based on questions meant to elicit responses about the effects of incarceration on narrative specifically.

This Study Compared to Other Prison Studies

According to Drake et al. (2015), “Writing about what has been encountered in prison and making sense of it is one of the most demanding and elusive tasks of the ethnographic researcher” (pg. 5). This is true for all researchers conducting studies about prisoners and prisons, but especially difficult and demanding for researchers from the outside academic world. “Research is after all, an act of human engagement. To achieve criminological *Verstehen*—subjective understanding of situated meanings and emotions—researchers have to be *affectively* present *as well as* physically present in a social situation” (pg. 76). It can be extremely difficult for researchers to be affectively present for participants whose experiences are so far removed from their own, especially in an environment such as prison, where participants could potentially be coerced, extremely guarded, deceptive, expecting relief or other gains from participation, etc. For a prisoner/researcher, many obstacles are minimized, while some disappear altogether as a result of familiarity with the surroundings. Also, not only does the prisoner/researcher not have any power or authority to offer anything for participation, he/she also is accustomed to the ways of prisoners and may more easily identify deception or exaggeration, as well as assure participants of the nature of confidentiality and voluntary participation, without the threat or belief of consequence for refusal. Methodology

established by a prisoner/researcher can be, as such, less complex as an authentic understanding of the environment allows him/her to design the study around obstacles that are likely to be met at various stages of the research.

In Drake et al. (2015), Davies (2015) discusses conducting research as a former offender entering back into the environment where he was incarcerated, and the many advantages of such an approach. “Building trust between interviewer and respondent is seen as being crucial in the research process (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984), this is never so important than in the relationship between prisoners and non-prisoners where the levels of mistrust might be naturally higher due to the them ‘versus’ us mentality” (pg. 467). This is a major barrier to outside researchers trying to conduct a study, whether it be ethnographic, grounded theory, or even flexible in design. Where surveys, interviews, or observation are called for, the role of the researcher, as discussed earlier in this chapter, can either be advantageous or detrimental to the data collected. When no personal connection exists, a participant may be hesitant to discuss personal information, and rapport will be difficult to establish unless done over an extended period of time. The reason for interview as the data-collection tool in this thesis was precisely because of what connects the researcher to the participants, and the ability to establish rapport through that connection, almost immediately.

According to Bosworth et al. (2005), “It is difficult, without serving a sentence oneself, to learn what prison is like, because neither the government nor the academy produce many studies of daily prison life. Outside of official and academic sources, there are some firsthand accounts of life inside by prisoners and staff” (pg. 260). Many such

publications or studies about imprisonment are autoethnographic in nature, meaning they offer singular interpretations, based on one individual's experience of imprisonment. Observations are made and conversations may be recalled, but the story is very much only the authors. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it is not the researchers recollection being discussed; the only interpretations being made are about themes which emerged through data-collection and analysis; the stories being discussed were told directly by the people living them, in their own words, and containing their individual thoughts and emotions about them. This is not to say that autoethnographic approaches to discussing issues around incarceration are without value and merit, but instead, that to understand the experience of prisoners, we cannot study the narratives or recollections of singular authors, but must gather many stories from diverse participants. There is a "false assumption that all prisoners experience incarceration the same way. Nothing could be further from the truth" (Newbold and Ross, 2012, pg. 6-7), and the purpose of this study is to uncover themes in how prisoners experience incarceration, and, more importantly, their narratives about those experiences and the effects of them.

Collecting the Data

Once the study was approved by both the Department of Corrections and Mason's Institutional Review Board, recruitment began. The researcher generated a random list of potential participants by drawing cell numbers out of a bowl for every pod (living area) in the two main housing units within the prison. Once the completed list was generated (ten cells were chosen in each pod), the corresponding names to each cell were gathered by consulting with unit staff in order to obtain access to the master list for housing

assignments. After a complete list of names and cell numbers was generated, four identical lists were made; the only difference in each list being the color scheme.

Recruitment was done by calling individual inmates out to an office, in the unit where their pod was located, in order to meet with the researcher. Once the potential participant was with the researcher, a quick explanation of why he was called to the office was given, and a few additional minutes to describe the study was requested. For those willing to hear more, the purpose and process of the study were explained (with an emphasis on confidentiality measures) and participants were asked if they would be willing to participate. If the answer was affirmative, informed consent was obtained by reading the consent form with the potential participant and explaining, in detail, each component. Due to the nature of imprisonment and the constant surveillance, signatures were not gathered and copies of the consent form were not provided to participants, as it would reveal their involvement if the form was found in their possession, or if the signed copies were found in the researcher's possession.

Depending on the level of participation agreed to, random codes were generated by the researcher to signify whether recruitment ended with an individual offering informed consent to participate in either a real, or a mock interview; choosing to not participate at all; not showing up to the recruitment conversation after being called for; or not wishing to hear more once the initial introduction was complete. On the total of five code sheets, codes were then jumbled so that every participant had a different code on each sheet, and someone else had the same code on every other sheet. The purpose of this measure was to ensure that if the code sheets were discovered by staff, that they

would not know who participated or in what manner, and only the researcher knew which color scheme represented that actual code sheet.

Once recruitment was completed and the target number of fifty participants was obtained, the researcher began scheduling interviews to be completed in the education department of the prison. This space offered a place for interviews that did not look out of the ordinary, as tutors, students, and peer-facilitators often meet with one another in private offices. Mock interviews and real interviews were conducted so that the researcher would be the only one with knowledge of who participated in the actual study and would be represented in the findings after analysis was completed. Interviews were based on nineteen questions that were pre-approved by both the Institutional Review Board and the Department of Corrections. Due to time constraints in the first few interviews, only the first sixteen questions were asked, and the rest of the interviews were stopped after the sixteenth question to keep uniformity. Interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours, and a total of twenty-seven real interviews were conducted. The target number of actual interviews was thirty-five, but for various reasons eight individuals were unable to keep their scheduled appointment with the researcher.

During the interview field notes were taken, as recording participants was not a possibility both for confidentiality purposes and because inmates are not allowed to possess recording devices within the prison. As such, the field notes of the researcher acted as the data-collection tool and it was imperative that they be as detailed and specific as possible. In order to capture the emotional content of respondent's answers, as well as recollect responses in more detail, the researcher conducted additional field notes within

twelve hours of completing each interview, referring to the original notes taken during the actual interview and then expanding upon them while recalling the conversation in as much detail as possible. Participants were only referred to by their established code-number, and immediately after the interview, the researcher's field notes were reviewed in order to ensure no personal or possibly identifying information was recorded; such information was redacted if present.

Mock interviews looked objectively the same as the real interviews. The researcher and mock-participants would meet in one of the two rooms that were used for all interviews, the researcher would lay out all the same materials used during actual interviews, and the mock informed consent form was revisited before commencing the mock interview. The conversation which proceeded was general small talk by the researcher and the participant, and during the discussion the researcher appeared to be taking notes, although nothing pertaining to the study was being recorded at all. Conversations ranged from discussion about sports, everyday prison frustrations, current programming and work opportunities within the prison, and a wide spectrum of other topics. The nature of the research itself was discussed in vague terms during a few of the mock interviews, but conversations were always led by the participant and then proceeded organically. For any outside observer looking in, the mock interviews would have been indistinguishable from the actual interviews, thus protecting the confidentiality of individuals who answered the approved interview questions.

Semi-structured interviews were a necessity for this study and it was important for the researcher to be able to ask for more in-depth answers, or to follow threads within the

answers of participants as they may have pertained to emerging themes in the research. Additionally, some interview questions were purposefully vague, and as such, required elaboration for some respondents. The value of vague questions was to leave answers open to interpretation and minimize the possibility of indirectly guiding responses towards certain possible themes. According to Smith (2015), semi-structured interviews provide opportunity for the interviewer to establish rapport with the respondent, feel free to probe interesting areas that arise, and follow the respondent's interests or concerns (pg. 31). This process proved invaluable as many of the themes that will be discussed arose more out of the flow of respondents than it did the direction of the researcher. The most powerful and poignant themes which emerged, resulted from the flexibility within the semi-structured design of the interviews, and thus the structure of the interview proved to be a valuable tool within the research design.

For another view on semi-structured interviewing, Robson and McCartan (2016) describe such a process as; "The interviewer has an interview *guide* that serves as a checklist of topics to be covered and a default wording and order for the questions, but the wording and order are often substantially modified based on the flow of the interview, and additional unplanned questions are asked to follow up on what the interviewee says" (pg. 285). Semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for flexible design approaches and the description given by Robson and McCartan was nearly precisely reflected in the process used in this study, with the only difference being that the order of questions was adhered to in order to make recording field notes easier and more cohesive.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The issue of language and meaning is very important to analyzing data obtained from any research population, but for research in prisons it is of significant importance. An added value of being a prisoner, and a researcher, gives the researcher an intimate understanding of language and context, in real time. Many things that affect prisoners, and the way that such things are described, may not be as mysterious to someone who is privy to the semantics as well as the experiences of the environment.

Data Analysis Methodology

As discussed in the previous section, the flexible design approach allows a researcher to pull from various methodologies in both the collection and the analysis of data. This study draws heavily from the ethnographic and grounded theory approaches to analyzing interview data, but it is, because of numerous constraints, a thematic analysis. By utilizing latent coding, the analysis moves “beyond what is explicitly stated to consider the frameworks the participant uses to explain her (his) world” (Smith, 2015, pg. 235). Conducting a quality thematic analysis is less about finding universal absolutes, and is, according to Smith, more about the subjectivity of the researcher and their rigour and scholarship (as quoted earlier). A “Big Q” approach to thematic analysis emphasizes the active role of the researcher in the research process, and the importance of embracing

researcher subjectivity, rather than viewing it as a ‘problem to be managed’ (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Similar to a grounded theory study and analysis, inductive thematic analysis is aimed at developing theory from the data itself, in this case, by venturing “beyond description, to decipher the (deeper) meanings in the data and interpret their importance” (Smith, 2015, pg. 226). Blumer (1969) discussed the belief that people act towards things on the basis of meanings that they have for them, and that such meanings are derived from, or arise out of, the social interactions that one experiences with others. Such meanings for objects and events are handled in, and modified through, interpretive processes used by individuals in dealing with the things that they encounter. The interview questions were specifically designed with the intention of eliciting themes regarding how inmates construct their sense of self, how certain phenomena effect the social world of prisons and the social identity of prisoners, and how expectations from outside, and within prison, play a role in the development of inmate narratives.

Discussion of Major Themes

A total of twenty-seven interviews were conducted with men inside of the maximum-security prison where the study occurred. Each participant was asked sixteen questions, and many of those questions were followed up by additional inquiries meant to elicit more in-depth responses to uncover the “why’s” as opposed to the “what’s” of how incarceration effects the participant’s senses of self, social identity, expectations, and behaviors. Due to the amount of data collected many themes emerged from the participants responses, and due to the nature of the study as allowing theory to be

established as a result of the data collected, the themes which emerged have wide-ranging implications even beyond the purpose of this study. However, for the purposes of this thesis and the analysis of the data, only the major themes that emerged regarding the participant's sense of self, social identity, and the effects of stereotype and stigma, as well as expectations, will be discussed.

Two Sides of the Prison Coin

In order to discover themes in the ways that the experience of imprisonment may have effected prisoners' sense of self, the following question was asked;

Do you feel as if prison has changed you? If yes, how so?

This question was almost always followed up with more specific questions in order to elicit descriptive accounts of why participants felt as if they had changed, if they in fact felt that way. The process of changing while incarcerated was almost unanimous, with only two respondents initially saying that they hadn't changed and that they were precisely the same person today as they were before coming to prison. However, through follow-up questions, every respondent was able to acknowledge, at the very least, a process of change that occurred through events specific to being incarcerated, even as a more natural process of maturation that comes in one's lifespan, regardless of time, place, and/or environment.

Positive change and maturation. Of the twenty-seven participants, nineteen were able to identify positive changes that they experienced as a result of incarceration. Out of the nineteen who had stories regarding positive growth, four *began their description* with the positive view; two as a result of educational growth, and two more described gaining

sobriety as a positive change that being imprisoned brought about. Five participants discussed the positive changes they experienced as being more “natural” and just a “part of growing up,” and when asked if they thought prison specifically had something to do with it, they said that it did not, and then re-focused their answers on the negative effects of incarceration.

A common theme that emerged within these responses was that individuals who have either a.) been incarcerated for a lengthy period of time, i.e. more than five years, or b.) have been incarcerated numerous times, were able to compare their younger, wilder, and more reckless selves to the men they felt they were at the time of the interview. Many participants discussed being young and misguided early on in their experiences and feeling that they had to earn a reputation, or if they were doing a large amount of time, prove themselves to other prisoners as a protective measure. As they matured through their current sentence, or returned later in life for successive sentences, they began to realize that their younger selves were misguided and tainted by false expectations of what prison would be like and what one should do to establish a reputation as a self-protective measure.

One individual stated;

“My first couple of years I spent doing the same things I was doing on the street, chasing drugs and getting into trouble. But I fall into the population that it has actually bettered me...I feel like I’m on track now to where I’m supposed to be”

This was a sentiment shared by a few respondents, that the beginning of their incarceration, or their earlier bids were spent not changing or growing up, just maintaining the same types of behaviors, habits, and beliefs that they were used to in the free world, but eventually something clicked and they realized they would need to change, or that what they thought prison would be like ended up proving to be inaccurate.

Another individual who has been in for an extended period of time described it in the following way;

I've been through a lot of changes; I'm still changing even today. But I've settled into this lifestyle...thirty years ago I wasn't that guy—focused, non-frivolous, principled—now I am, and people know that about me.

This same individual discussed his evolution into becoming a community activist; one who, in the beginning of his incarceration would battle staff and administration in order to benefit from it personally, but now, he does all he can to fight for better conditions and “creature comforts” for the population at large, especially men who won't be going home soon, or at all. He didn't necessarily view the beginning of his incarceration as negatively as others did, but was very aware and adamant of the positive changes that he experienced and identified.

Another long-term prisoner who captured this subtheme in his response kept it quite simple in his description;

I've got a bigger outlook on life; I've grown up a lot...the beginning of this (incarceration) was really dark. I got in a lot of trouble feeling like I had to prove myself in here.

This response really captures the theme in this question. Many of the respondents who identified a positive change through their incarceration did so by first admitting that they were misguided at one point, and that they learned through failure—often from long stays in segregation/solitary confinement—that they got to a point where they looked more objectively at their surroundings as opposed to viewing it from the stereotypical stances of all they had heard and seen about prison before actually arriving in it.

Frustration, anger, and resentment. With the exception of two interviewees, every participant identified negative changes that have occurred within them as a direct result of being in prison, whether that was through this specific prison sentence, or from previous sentences and carrying into this one. The three major changes that were identified were that prison made participants generally more angry—including more violent—that they experienced extreme levels of frustration as a result of the deprivations they were subject to, or that resentment brewed inside of them due to the treatment they received from staff, and their sometimes negative interactions with other inmates. Another subtheme that emerged in four participants was the idea of a “who cares attitude” about coming back to prison once they had been in. These four individuals described a feeling of hopelessness that stemmed mostly from addiction and the belief that after they came in for the first time, nobody would give them a chance to prove their worth as a human being again. One of those participants described it as follows;

Prison gave me a “who-cares?” attitude about coming back, it fueled my addiction and feeling of hopelessness and made me selfish; I only pursue my own needs every time I get out.

Another gave a similar description;

I became incredibly frustrated when I realized that I was institutionalized after my first bid...my 'give-a-shit-meter' is on empty, for everything out there.

A third participant described a numb feeling when he thinks about the outside.

Having experiences with the system early on through juvenile detention made coming to prison normal for him;

I think it's made me numb, like numb to reality, out there doesn't even seem real to me...prison definitely destroyed me.

There were far too many responses to capture, in quotations, the effect of imprisonment on making individuals angry, frustrated, and resentful. Many participants that described the connection between anger and violence also described a process of “embracing” the expectation to solve problems through violence. Others described violence (whether through thoughts and fantasy, or actual physical violence) as the only means of release from the constant abuse endured at the hands of staff; this feeling was often described in terms of a building resentment that they described as a negative change that accompanied incarceration. A couple individuals said that “fighting became normal,” whereas others simply described the compounding of negative experiences as eventually boiling over. One individual captured, very succinctly, the major theme which will be discussed in the following section, and is reflected in this thesis’ title;

Many of the negative experiences in here force you to go to the extreme in order to just be heard...taking my voice away makes me feel violent because violence will always get results.

The violence of silence will be described in detail in the discussion section, but it is worth noting that this respondent acknowledged openly how when staff were unwilling to recognize his voice, or his words, that if he resorted to violence, they would always pay attention. He discussed how the DOC was currently keeping him from visiting with or talking to his children because of an interpretation regarding a specific policy; but he believed that if he were to resort to extreme violence, it would be enough to get him shipped out of state where violations such as keeping someone from seeing/talking to their children do not occur—in his opinion. In this way and others, this particular participant alluded to the loss of voice one experiences as a prisoner, and how a sure-fire way to be “heard” is through violent acts, or threats of them.

Overall, the themes regarding negative perceptions of how the individuals changed resulted from sustained negative experiences at multiple levels.

Three Dimensions of Negative Expectations

There were three specific questions regarding what participants felt was expected of them while in prison:

- 1.) *What do you think your peers or fellow inmates expect from you?*
- 2.) *What do you think the staff within the prison expect from you, and what do you believe they think of you, generally speaking?*
- 3.) *Do you think that society has expectations regarding inmates? What are they, and do those expectations influence how you behave or how you view yourself?*

The purpose of these questions was to establish how the process of social identity formation was affected by the prison environment, how behavior may be affected by perceived expectations from others, and how feelings of stereotype, stigma, etc. possibly affected prisoner's views of themselves vs. society's views of them. The themes which emerged were both surprising and incredibly valuable.

What I expect of myself versus what I see. Something interesting happened when participants were asked about what inmates expected from one another. Twenty-two participants began answering this question by describing a set of positive expectations including being respectful, clean, not too loud, etc. As the conversation continued in the first handful of interviews, it would turn suddenly when participants were asked whether or not they felt most people met the expectations they were describing. The response was, unequivocally, that they did not feel as though most inmates embodied the expectations which they described, and, in fact, were quite the opposite.

This question brought on a dialogue about the difference between expectations and hopes for many respondents. "What I expect" from others, or "what others expect from one another" was defined during interviews as; the behaviors, beliefs, or actions that you see as common from others, and in turn, that you think people anticipate you will embody as well. "Hopes," then, were described as the behaviors, actions, and beliefs that individuals would *like to see* from others, or that they feel others would want them to display and embody. This conversation and distinction are quite important; often times participants would describe what they hope others will do and how they will act, but

when asked if those hopes or expectations lined up with what they saw, answers were typically a strong negative.

The idea of the “convict code” was discussed by many respondents. This was one of the things that many participants *hoped* people would adhere to; keeping to one’s self, doing one’s own time, not associating with the C.O.’s unless necessary, never snitching on someone, being respectful in areas like hygiene, noise, and cleanliness, and being a man of your word were all associated with the convict code. But, those were typically what people hoped for—when asked if it existed in the specific facility where the study was being conducted, the answers often described a belief that prisoners talked a lot about “the code,” but that such speech was hypocritical;

People talk about it, but there isn’t any convict code in here really. The expectation is the addict mentality, I expect that everyone here is full of shit.

Another respondent agreed;

I’ll tell you what I expect. Respect. Boundaries. Routine. Paying attention and being courteous, just respecting other inmates. To a certain extent, a few people match my expectations, but it’s only a few. I have come to expect the complete opposite.

Eight respondents actually spoke to the hypocrisy that they see when it comes to what inmates expect from one another. This experience of hypocrisy was often directly related to the convict code that people speak about but do not display, and when not directly tied to the “convict code,” the hypocrisy of inmates and their expectations was discussed.

Additionally, nine more individuals discussed the presence of negative expectations. Some of the more common answers were along the lines of; *“I expect to be lied to, stolen from, fucked over, and taken advantage of.”* Several iterations of this response were given, and the majority of respondents who had similar things to say also attributed the presence of hypocrisy or negative expectations to the evolving attributes of drug addicts within the prison, specifically the growing number of opiate addicts. Things like uncleanliness, lack of trustworthiness, and a lack of general respect were viewed as attributes of prisoners whose sole concern each day was the pursuit of substances, at any cost, and by any means necessary.

Even amongst the self-identified addicts, and interviewee’s who admitted to being “involved” in that aspect of prison life, another interesting thing that was present was that those respondents always said they were “different”; not hypocritical, not disrespectful, usually clean and not too loud, etc. One-hundred percent of respondents did not identify themselves in a negative light in terms of how they abide by expectations that are, or should be, common in this environment. The vast majority of respondents did say that they expected people to fall short of how they hoped other prisoners would act, and many respondents alluded to the fact that they make attempts to not worry about anyone but themselves, specifically because they expect negativity from others. Most participants also expressed a belief that prisoners were always looking for an opportunity to use and/or manipulate others, and as a result they said that they didn’t tend to care what others expected from them.

Defining the prototype; defying the prototype. There was a total of six questions aimed at uncovering themes around the social identity of inmates. The narratives discussed above regarding expectations offer insight into what participants felt about the state of social cohesion and expectation, but other questions were intended to, 1.) gather a picture of how participants defined the inmate prototype, and reveal what respondents felt about how they compared to that vision, and 2.) establish what types of connections brought offenders together and whether salience was agreed upon by diverse respondents, while also searching for themes in the ways participants position themselves within the narratives of what is “common” inside of prison and why.

The eighth question during the interview was; *Describe the “typical” inmate. Do you differ from that image, or are you similar to it?* This question was very revealing of many of the same themes located within the question discussed above regarding expectations. The prototypical inmate was viewed by the majority of respondents in a negative manner; as a drug addict on the chase to get high, and willing to resort to any dishonest, manipulative, and untrustworthy behaviors necessary in order to obtain a variety of substances. Additionally, when participants were asked about social groups that they noticed within the prison, the overarching theme was that drugs formed groups, and that where there used to be social groupings around common interests, sports, hobbies, etc., now it seems that people are either very much keeping to themselves or they are coming together only when they need one another in the pursuit of intoxication.

The view of the inmate prototype was very negative, and not surprisingly, all but one respondent refused to acknowledge any resemblance to that prototype, and even that

single individual disregarded all similarities other than coming together with other, less desirable people, in the pursuit of getting high. Despite the commonly held negative beliefs and views regarding how inmates feel about the prototype, it is not surprising that they sought out positive self-representations in order to boost self-esteem. This is not a rare sensation, in fact, “Social identity theory assumes that people are motivated to evaluate themselves positively” (Oakes et al., 1994, pg. 82). Often times individuals in stereotyped and stigmatized groups will have higher self-esteem than their majority in-group counter-parts. However, Oakes et al. also say that “insofar as a group membership becomes significant to their self-definition they will be motivated to evaluate that group positively” (ibid); which must mean, based on the data gathered in this study, that the overwhelming negative views of the prisoner as a possible ingroup member show that the concept of inmate group identity is not important or even present for participants of this research. Perhaps the negative views of the inmate prototype could also be attributed to the flood of stereotypes that prisoners are fed through mass media and television—T.V. is one of the methods of passing time most used inside of this specific prison, and many others these days. It is possible that the consciousness of inmates as a collective have been infiltrated through constant negative representations, and the sense of positive self-esteem is being held onto as tightly as possible because of the negativity one faces every time they turn on their T.V. This belief about media setting expectations and stereotypes will be discussed later in this section.

You will be silent. The second question about expectations dealt with what participants believed the staff within the prison expected from them. This, out of all

sixteen interview questions, experienced the most uniformity and consistency of responses. The answers to the question; *What do you think the staff within the prison expect from you?* Were, at times, so similar that it felt to the researcher that participants had preplanned their responses. This, of course, would not have been possible, but the consistency in the answers speaks to the effect that this particular set of expectations has on the inmate experience and narrative. The use of dehumanizing language, literally subhuman labels such as dog, sheep, etc., are indicative of the “us vs. them” mentality that is so prevalent in prisons and in conflict, but what is unique to this research is the discovery that a significant part of this attitude seems to be either created or intensified by the belief from inmates that they are expected to be voiceless.

The following quotes are indicative of the general belief that respondents had regarding the perceived opinions from staff that inmates are subhuman, and that they are not allowed to have a voice or an opinion; that there is to be silence:

- *How do I put this shit? They expect you to be fuckin sheep; do what I say, when I say, and how I say. You're not even allowed to have a fuckin opinion or a voice at all.*
- *Lay down in the corner and lick your nuts. They expect nothing from me. They expect you to cower down and basically be a little bitch...Do what you're told, shut up, and don't ask questions because they do what they want.*
- *I just think they all think we're a bunch of pieces of shit who don't even deserve air. They think we're all little bitches and they expect us to act*

that way because there's never any consequences for them. They expect you to just cower up and 'take it'.

- *Some of them expect you to bow down to their every whim, and some of them could care less about what you do altogether.*
- *The attitude is, don't make a wave, don't have an opinion or a voice.*
- *It's not that all of them are disrespectful, but the majority just don't want you to have a voice.*
- *With some staff, no matter how polite, correct, or right you are, they don't want to hear you. They don't want to converse with you at all, at least not respectfully.*
- *100% cooperation, tell them what they want to hear, not the truth.*
- *Most of them look at us like pieces of shit, and they are unwilling to change—they don't realize that us being here is the punishment...they try to punish us themselves.*
- *Sit, sleep, and bark when they say so. That's what they expect...many feel like they are here specifically to punish and make us miserable.*
- *Do what the fuck they say, be their bitches.*
- *They don't care, they just want you to be "a prisoner," you're just a number.*
- *They expect people to be "complete prisoners." Do what you're told, no matter what, with no questions.*

- *A lot of them want us to slug through our day and just never make a peep...they want us to just do our time quietly and not say anything, they'd prefer us to just sit in our room and rot.*
- *They are only interested in you shutting up and not causing any aggravation.*
- *They expect that I've lost my humanity just because I've come here. They expect that I'll be their puppet while I am here.*
- *They will always be right, no matter what they say or what they'll write (in a disciplinary report). They don't ever get held accountable. They expect you to have no voice; shut up and take it, and 75% of them abuse that power.*

Aside from the consensus that inmates are to be voiceless, perhaps what was more interesting is that many respondents weren't speaking of the kind of silence and non-confrontational attitude that is required in order to maintain security and order within the walls. A lot of respondents recognized the need for the "power" that officers have and the purpose of directives that they often give. These responses were not simplistic in terms of the participants being frustrated by the deprivation and lack of self-efficacy that they experience in their roles as inmates, they were very specific to a general expectation of voicelessness *in all situations*. Additionally, it was not a complete submersion into the waters of the "us vs. them" mentality that one would expect to find in this environment. The majority of participants noted, of their own volition and with no specific question to lead them there, that not all staff were of the opinion that inmates

were subhuman and should be without voice. Most respondents made it a point to recognize that there were officers who were different and actually spoke to inmates, treated people with respect, or at least were not harsh in their giving of directives, that there was an opportunity to be heard even when disagreed with.

No expectation for rehabilitation. As part of a follow up question, the researcher often asked participants about what they believed staff expected from them in terms of how they use their time; do they expect one to participate in programs and try to rehabilitate? Or, do they expect that prisoners will stay stagnant and/or get in trouble? This was another topic that experienced some significant uniformity, in three different categories: 1.) Some respondents believed that there was an expectation from staff that you do not try and better yourself, in fact, ten or more respondents described that if you did try and better yourself, that you would be targeted for maltreatment from staff. 2.) Other respondents described that staff didn't care what you did with your time, as long as it, in no way, disrupted or created work for them. 3.) A smaller group of interviewees believed that staff would actively seek opportunities to prevent prisoners from engaging in positive change; that was described as job security and just "part of the game."

The following are a few quotes to capture the first theme;

- *They expect you to fail. They want you to fail. They don't want to see you more educated or have more opportunities than them.*
- *They want us to fail, the majority of them look at us as scum.*
- *They genuinely don't want us to change or become better people.*

- *90% don't care if we do good or bad, but a lot of cops hate big time on people who are bettering themselves. They make their lives miserable.*

The second theme can be seen in the following thoughts from respondents;

- *They mostly don't think about expecting anything from you.*
- *There is no expectation to engage or better yourself...Run-of-the-mill officers are suspicious of inmates in general, they just have no expectations because of it.*
- *I don't think they really care about how we do our time or what we do, they just always blow you off in the moment.*
- *Most just don't care what inmates do, they don't even think about it, or us.*
- *Nothin. They don't care what we do. They don't care if we do good or bad, they could care less.*
- *Some of them could care less about what you do altogether.*
- *I don't think they even think about what we're supposed to do or should be doing—they either don't think about it or they don't care.*

Interviewees described the third theme with responses such as;

- *They don't care what you do, don't care about your personal growth, they just want to bother you...why would they care? Job security.*
- *Staff expectations are non-existent; they're not interested in anybody getting better...They expect you to come back—they even say as much—recidivism keeps the place pumping, it's their bread and butter.*

- *If people don't come back, they're out of a job. They don't want to see you do good.*
- *They only expect that we do programs to keep their flow of money coming in. But they need us to recidivate to keep the flow coming, so they expect us to fail.*

With the majority of respondents in various levels of agreement that there is no expectation for inmates to actively pursue rehabilitation, it seems there is a belief that engaging in positive growth, or activity towards growth, is discouraged to the point that it causes some, if not many inmates, to consciously not engage in rehabilitative measures, as doing such would set them up for failure with many staff.

Invisibility and silence. The final question regarding the effect of expectations on inmates was in regards to how participants viewed society's expectations, and their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about them and the prison experience. This was the question meant to elicit responses about the effects of stereotype, stigma, shame, and outside expectations, and it was important that the question not specifically ask anything about stereotype, as doing such could potentially cause respondents to simply recite popular stereotypes that other's believe society holds. This question asked, "*Do you think that society has expectations regarding inmates? What are they, and do those expectations influence how you behave or how you view yourself?*" As with the question about inmate expectations, this question often required the researcher to ask follow up questions such as; *what do you think society expects you are doing while in prison? What do you think they believe this place is like? Do you think that they expect you are*

bettering yourself? These follow ups were necessary when respondents would ask what the researcher meant about expectations from the outside, or when respondents seemed stuck with the question initially.

Two major themes emerged as the interviews continued, and they experienced a significant amount of consensus, almost unanimous in fact. The two themes, as the section title implies, were that participants felt that society didn't have any expectations for them, and more specifically, that people outside of the walls of prisons simply didn't think about inmates at all, unless they were confronted with a media representation about prisons/prisoners. This invisibility was only exacerbated, according to the majority of respondents, by the fact that the overwhelming majority of representations that the outside world sees of inmates is very negative. This is where the silence theme comes to light; respondents felt that there were no opportunities for positive representations in popular culture or mass media, and that the collective inmate voice and reality was effectively silenced by not accurately portraying inmate identity, daily life, desires, hopes, fears, etc. Participants had many opinions about why positive representations of prisoners did not reach the public, and within those responses there was much less consensus, but the effective silencing of prisoner voices—authentic voices—was viewed by many participants to have a significantly damaging effect.

Within the narratives that participants told about the invisibility and silence of prisoners from society's view, the issue of damaging stereotypes and stigmatization lurked, and this was a sensation that twenty respondents spoke openly about. This could be considered a subtheme, but ultimately stereotypes were viewed as a product of

invisibility and silence, and there was extensive discussion around the ways that it affected respondent's narratives and sense of self.

Instead of breaking respondents' words into parts in order to summarize the narratives regarding invisibility, silence, and stereotype effect, it will be more effectively communicated by including some lengthier responses that capture the consensus of all three, and the way that participants were affected by the combination in more complete responses. Hopefully this conveys the full content of the distress that interviewees felt when answering this question more vividly.

- *I think they are probably scared of all of us because they don't know any better. People think we will all steal from them or hurt them because of all the shows that are in the world now, they only depict the worst of the worst. Society thinks we are all the same, but for the most part people don't think about prisons or prisoners other than when they see the shows or unless they personally know someone in the system...I don't really let it influence me, I don't ever think about it...but I find it hard to hang out with "normal" people out there because of how much separates us.*
- *I believe society actually thinks this place is helping people because it's what they put out there—lies and bullshit about what's happening here. A lot of people do believe the "lock-up" stereotype, especially if they don't know someone in prison...a lot of expectations are set based on tiny pieces of info they are provided with from courts, T.V., the prison, and the whole system is really tainted with disgust, honestly...but people don't think*

about this often at all, unless they see or read about this place, and then that fades pretty fast...It absolutely affects and influences me, I feel like, "fuck it," especially so close to going home I feel like fuck these people. I will go back home, because if I stayed in this state, I'd feel like there was absolutely no chance to do anything but crime because nobody would give me a chance...I'd feel like, "what else am I gunna do?"

- *I think that society has got it all wrong. They hear the word "inmate" and they think the worst possible things. People generally don't know what prisons are like or what happens, they see all the media and it gives them false expectations, ideas, and understandings. They think we're all mean and violent; they don't understand that their next door neighbor could be here tomorrow, that shit happens to good people.*
- *Society doesn't take the time to try and understand who we are and how we got here. The public needs more education on what leads people to jail and how it can be corrected...they think it is like the T.V. because they don't know any better, it is all they see.*
- *While we're here we're all the same to them. They probably hope we are getting help but they probably only believe what they see on T.V. They don't see us trying to improve, learn, change, grow, and stuff like that...When I get out, I think a lot of people will look down on me and not give me a chance to prove that I'm a good person. Very few people will probably give me a chance.*

- *In a lot of cases I don't think they really think about us. Even my family wants to and tries, but they even find it difficult. Expectations are very driven by the media and T.V. People glorify police shows that categorize criminals or offenders, not to mention the "lock-up" type of shows, those set bad expectations...it absolutely, absolutely, absolutely weighs on me. On one hand it motivates me to enlighten people on a broader scale, but on the other it is destructive and crushes hope—the belief that no one cares, no one values you as a human, no one thinks you are human. My sentence made me a ghost, essentially purposeless.*
- *I think a lot of society doesn't even think about us. Maybe more so now because of prison reform efforts, now more people want to see us succeed, but most people still don't have expectations and don't even think about us after the news story ends...There's also the "lock-up" expectation of violence—like stabbings and rape—people assume that what they see is the reality; gangs, violence, stuff like that, that is what they see on movies and T.V. I have to explain to people often that this is nothing like that.*
- *I don't really think there are expectations. People would rather see us locked up and throw away the key, like "if they never come out we don't have to think about them." They believe what they see on T.V., they just don't have a clue...just believe we get what we deserve. Why would they have any other expectations? They don't see any positive; not guys getting educated, not men reading books, or truly committing to change.*

- *The way prison is portrayed causes negativity and fear, nothing positive gets out to the public. Everyone is categorized the same, society just doesn't know what to think because of what they are fed in the media. People don't know what to think.*
- *I think society thinks we're just a bunch of hoodlums in here—just turning up and going crazy. People don't tell society the good things that are going on in here, they don't ever see positive representations, they only get to see the bad...it affects me because I'm afraid I will be stereotyped as a violent criminal for the rest of my life. I'm afraid that when I walk out of these doors, God-willing, of how people will look at me.*
- *Outta sight outta mind is the M.O. Just stay in there and shut the fuck up; people don't want to hear about you, especially the good you might be doing. People affected by crime just want to see it as just deserts, and as long as they aren't hearing about this place they are cool with it...the T.V. is believed, the stereotypes are widely held.*
- *There is just no community interaction, all that people ever see is the bad. It weighs on and influences me a lot. This place only puts out the bad; bad news travels fast and good news travels nowhere here. I'm not lookin for a pat on the back, but sometimes it feels useless to even try because no matter if I do good or bad, I'll be in the same exact spot in their eyes.*
- *They think we are all monsters because of what they see on T.V., we look all scary and bad and then these people (staff) tell them that we are all*

scary and bad. They expect this place is scary and dangerous too, like what's depicted on T.V. Until they see something different, they'll think we're all bad people.

- *They expect us to not change and even if we do, they don't believe it. They think we're all animals even though we're clearly not...People probably don't have thoughts or expectations, I don't think they really think about it at all, honestly, or they just think we're wild animals.*

In addition to these responses, it is worth noting that seven respondents, more than twenty-five percent, also discussed the fact that before coming to prison they also didn't ever think about inmates or prisons. A few of them spoke about feeling disgusted by that reality, and wishing that they had known better before it was too late. They appeared more understanding that their status had been reduced to invisibility, but they also appeared more affected by that reality, as if they felt that previously believing the stereotypes that media portrayed made it even harder to accept that fact that most people now felt that way about them.

Feeling Like More than a Number, and Dreaming of Simplicity.

Two other questions during the interviews elicited significant and discussion-worthy themes for this thesis. The two questions were; #9.) *Are there situations when you feel that you are treated as an individual as opposed to just one of the inmates?* And, #16.) *What are your hopes for the future?*

Chipping away at the overly negative narrative. Many participants required elaborative statements about question number nine, to which the researcher explained that

he wondered if there were instances, whether when one was alone, with friends, or with staff, where they experienced a feeling that they were an individual again; as if they escaped the prisoner status or label for a moment. The consensus was enlightening as more than one-third of respondents (10) described instances of having positive interactions with staff members where the feeling of power-over and the expectation of silence or voicelessness was suspended. Some stories recalled staff simply having a genuine conversation with respondents, others told of times where a staff person offered them something so simple as a reward for hard work, or simply recognizing someone's value, a noticeable change in them, or their efforts towards certain positive ends.

Perhaps most interesting, participants who could describe positive interactions with staff that made them feel more human were also more likely, throughout the interview, to point out that all staff were not negative or bad people. Inmates with stories about feeling like more than a prisoner while engaged in a group activity with their social circle were more likely to describe social groups in the prison beyond the overly-simplistic view of only drugs bringing people together, and individuals who could not recollect any instance where someone else made them feel like more than a prisoner, or a number, were most likely to have a generally negative view of staff, the inmate prototype, and social identity within the prison. It is important to offer some quotes about the effect of feeling like more than a prisoner, specifically through positive interactions with staff.

One individual who is an artist spoke passionately about feeling valued when an officer, who was also an artist, asked him for drawing tips;

I feel human anytime staff relates to me through artistry. One officer even asked me for drawing tips one time, and he was being very genuine and treated me like an artist instead of an inmate.

Another participant spoke about the way he feels human again when staff recognize the changes he has made and the work he has put in towards those changes;

When staff interact with me and take notice of the changes I have made—when they talk to me from a more equal standpoint it makes me feel like something more than an inmate. It makes me feel like the change is worth it, I guess.

Many inmates have jobs within the facility that put them in situations to interact with more staff than “normal,” and with some staff on a very consistent basis. One respondent described the feeling of working with, as opposed to for, staff;

With certain C.O.'s when it comes to work, yes I have had experiences of feeling like more than an inmate. The staff I work with consistently don't talk down to or disrespect me. They treat me more like a co-worker or a friend—not like an inmate, and it is consistent. Being given that respect when we are outside and working side-by-side really takes me out of this place and makes me feel normal again.

Another individual described the power of a simple gesture and how it made him feel, to be treated with respect;

There was one time where I was working as a cleaner, and I got called down to SMU at like two in the morning to clean up a bunch of feces. One of the

officers that was working down there pulled me aside after and told me that he couldn't believe how long I've been doing this job for, and that he was always impressed that I never complained and always showed up with a good attitude even for something like this. It was in the middle of the night, and when I finally finished, he offered me some girl scout cookies and said that I could have them but I had to eat them there, before I was escorted back to my cell. Just that little thing made me feel like I wasn't in prison for a few minutes, like I had value. This guy gave me cookies and he could have been fired for it, but he appreciated me enough to do it anyway. That really meant a lot to me, it felt good to be treated like a person.

These types of stories held a power to them that transcended just the words being spoken. When respondents told such stories, something happened physically to them. A weight became visibly lifted from the body, as if taken off their shoulders and allowing them to sit up straight again, excited to tell the story of moments where they experienced a sense of humanity. Participants who had these stories to tell became more relaxed for the remainder of the interview after sharing them; their voices softened, as did their posture throughout the rest of our time together. It was as clear as could be that recollecting these moments had an incredibly positive effect on them, and that these were moments that maybe they hadn't brought to their consciousness in a while, but they were thankful they did again. It was a powerful experience, as a researcher, seeing the possible healing effect that such interactions can have on the prisoner psyche and narrative.

A simple life...whatever that is. The very last question asked during interviews was quite simple; the researcher just wanted to know what prisoners hoped for in the future. There was one overarching theme in respondents' answers, and it was the idea of living a simple, normal, or easy life beyond these walls. Almost every single participant kept their answers to this question very short and simple, and one-hundred percent of respondents took a moment to breathe and gather their thoughts before answering. Hopes were not elaborate or unrealistic; even men who were doing life sentences, but described the hope of being released somehow, also recognized the improbability of such a reality, and then shared their hopes for changes in the prison, or a role they wanted to play in improving the lives of men here.

Overwhelmingly, hopes for the future revolved around being back with family, working, and living an "average" life. Grandiosity was not present in a single response to this question, and only one participant referenced the expectation of returning to prison; *"I just hope I stay out, this time, for a couple of months at least."* Many individuals said something to the effect of, *"I just want to do it right this time,"* and *"doing it right"* referred to their status as a husband, father, son, and/or employee. Four responses referenced a "normal" life, two individuals said the "American Dream" was something they still hoped to obtain, and fifteen explicitly stated that they hoped to never come back to prison. There was a surprising number of interviewees who referenced wanting to hold down a job and be a good role model for their kids, and five even said they wanted to be "productive members" of their communities. This theme of simplicity in respondents hopes for their futures was transcendent of all categories—race, age,

religion, time spent in prison and length of sentence, types of conviction, etc. Despite all of the negativity that brewed in the answers to many of the questions asked during the interview, somehow participants found a way to put much of that aside and envision a future where they were able to put prison behind them, rise above the stereotypes and lack of expectations, and find gratitude and peace in the world, beyond the chaos of incarceration.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The twenty-seven interviews conducted for this study offer a new set of insights and understanding into the narratives of incarcerated men, and how the weight of dehumanization, expectation, stereotype, shame, and voicelessness affect those narratives. By gathering authentic views from such a vulnerable and difficult population to reach, this research contains implications for conducting narrative repair work, but also for beginning to alter the very nature of incarceration towards the creation of healthier and more positive experiences for inmates and staff alike; experiences that decrease conflict and physical violence through the reduction of narrative violence, and the easing of tensions that can result from more positive interactions in an environment deeply entrenched in an “us vs. them” state of affairs.

The Role of Prisoner as Researcher

In the book, *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography*, thirty-four researchers contribute to the knowledge and understanding of conducting research in prisons. Of those authors, only one is referenced as having experienced the “pains of imprisonment” that Sykes (1958) discussed in his renowned study, *The Society of Captives*. The reality that a handbook on prison ethnography could be written by a group of individuals who have, except for one, never been in prison is bothersome. In fact, it makes a silent statement that inmates are incapable of being researchers, or even

academics for that matter. Without explicitly saying so, such a text, and the majority of research about prisons and prisoners in general, imply that while incarcerated, a prisoner is not capable or worthy of rising to the status of researcher—that they are not trustworthy to conduct research objectively enough to be considered credible; that they cannot make sense of their own experiences, and those of the men or women around them; that they can only be studied and observed—watched and “made sense of”. This is not something new for the prisoner, who has been told that they are defective in all too many ways and for far too long, but it is something that needs to change.

Without realizing it, even some authors who advocate for better research about incarceration and crime further imprison their subjects into the role of “Other.” In the “General Introduction” to the Palgrave Handbook, Drake et al. (2015) write, “The majority of prison ethnographies which focus on prisoner cultures or ‘societies’ – including the majority within this Handbook – are done by people unlikely ever to be imprisoned, and who have never been sent to a prison themselves, other than as a visiting researcher” (pg. 2). This statement, seemingly harmless and innocent, makes some truly unfortunate inferences. When the author says, “people unlikely ever to be imprisoned,” what he/she is doing is making a categorical statement about *who* prisoners are, *where* they come from, *what* types of individuals they are, and *how* they found themselves in this predicament of incarceration. What is it that makes an academic or a researcher so unlikely to be imprisoned? Are they infallible, more human, less likely to make a mistake? Are they better, smarter, harder working? What is the purpose of the distinction?

Of course, this statement meant no harm, and the author goes on to recognize that the outsider role of a researcher makes it difficult to obtain an authentic view of a prisoners reality, but what is not ever recognized as a possibility is that, perhaps, prisoners could be the key to unlocking the riddle of prison as a society or culture. This omission is harmful, and it is the author of this thesis' hope that such a reality will begin to change through the contribution that this study hopes to make to the understanding of prisoner identity and prison culture. Experiencing more than a decade of incarceration, and still remaining imprisoned in the very place that the study was conducted gives the researcher many advantages. This discussion section should show the ability to make sense of prisoner narratives, in context to the environment where those narratives were formed, as a strength of the study, and leading to valuable implications for the improvement of conditions in prison which lead to various levels of conflict.

Stereotypes and the Destructive “Kernel of Truth.”

In 1954, Gordon Allport discussed that stereotypes “may or may not originate in a kernel of truth; they aid people in simplifying their categories; they justify hostility; sometimes they serve as projection screens for our personal conflict” (pg. 200). Some authors have written extensively about whether or not stereotypes are rooted in these kernels of truth (see Oakes et al., 1994, especially), and that if not for such kernels, then stereotypes would be wholly inapplicable and would not exist, as they could hold no foundation for the possibility of factual representation. What the literature sometimes seems to be missing, however, is the notion that kernels which form the basis for stereotypes of certain groups are true for *some* members of *all* groups. For instance, the

stereotypes discussed by Allport (1954) of Blacks as being lazy and boisterous, or Jews as being sly and grasping, are not rooted in kernels of truth about Blacks and Jews specifically, because clearly there are plenty of whites and Catholics who are also extremely lazy and grasping. Are there not members of every group that likely display such “kernels of truth?” Are these kernels, then, less indicative of personality traits and/or characteristics of the groups they are meant to harm, and more indicative of the power structure of those intending to do the harm? In this way, it is imperative that the “kernel of truth” argument is discussed when it comes to stereotyping inmates/prisoners/offenders.

The seemingly insurmountable obstacle that prisoners face when it comes to the widely held views about them; the ones that they, themselves, see on T.V. everyday, and that they feel society holds as the stereotypic view regarding their character and morality, is that the kernel of truth is, for most, indisputable. Participants in this study were clearly affected by the advertising of harmful kernels which trap the prisoner into a stereotype of evil, violent, and general “Other.” During the interviews it wasn’t that participants were hoping to ignore the fact that they were in prison for doing something wrong, and it wasn’t that they wanted to shift or deny the responsibility for that reality either. What came out was, quite clearly, that respondents felt very harmed, shamed, and discouraged that the only representations of them which reach society are those based in the simplistic kernels of truth—the fact that they did in fact do wrong, and that *some people* in prison are genuinely bad individuals.

People in prison did something wrong. They committed an infraction and violated a law which equates to a violation of the social contract. Perhaps they stole, lied, lashed out in a moment of purposeful or accidental violence, sold illicit substances, or committed any possibility of a vast array of other infractions against society; the point is, that they made a mistake, were judged to be guilty of that mistake, and as a result are being punished for said mistake. And so, in the eyes of society, because every person (except for the truly innocent) who is behind the walls of a prison has faltered, it seems justified to categorize them as bad, or somehow defective...as “Other.” The shame and humiliation that the offender experienced as a result of the arrest, subsequent trial, and process of incarceration don’t seem to be enough; mass media must perpetuate ill feelings through the dramatization of crime and punishment, and the advertising of kernels of truth which continue to simplify a narrative in need of complexity.

The twenty-seven interviews done during this study show that the weight of such stereotype and stigma has significant effect on incarcerated individuals, and that even when not explicitly stated, those effects seem to be detrimental when prisoners narrate what they believe society thinks or expects of them. If the participants to this study are right, and the overwhelming majority of what society is shown about prisoners is negative, then aren’t the kernels slowly turning into the corn?

The existing literature around stereotype and stigma fails to propose any remedy for when the kernel of truth that is presented is actually supported, such as in the instance of crime, punishment, and incarceration. From a narrative perspective, we know that just because a kernel is there, that it should not place the individual easily into a one-

dimensional role that categorizes them as a simplified actor. Substituting the kernel for the whole ear of corn is an act of narrative violence, which, as discussed by Cobb (2013) only serves to create protracted conflict by making narratives structurally, increasingly simple (pg. 51).

The trouble that participants claimed to face is, due to the widespread advertising of their “rotten kernels,” and the lack of advertising about the possibility that good kernels remain, society seems to assume that the rest of the corn has gone bad. Even if this is not the case in reality, it is evident through the respondent’s answers in this study that their sense of reality is that people typically assume the corn has gone bad. The question that must be asked, however, is when the kernel of truth exists, and is indisputable, how does the individual, or group, stop the kernel from being the only thing in the picture? If we recognize that a crime is possibly just a moment of time in a person’s full life and existence, or maybe their crimes are even comprised of numerous moments, then why does society at large seek the need to categorize the person based on such limited information? Allport (1954) concurs with the participants of this study that mass media plays an undeniable and significant role in such a process; “They (stereotypes) are socially supported, continually revived and hammered in, by our media of mass communication—by novels, short stories, newspaper items, movies, stage, radio, and television” (pg. 201).

At this point, the Kernel metaphor seems to need expanding. If you found a bad kernel (a moment in a person’s life) in the corn field (the persons whole life, and future potential), would you then burn the field down? What if you found a handful of bad

kernels? Is it not the farmers responsibility to discover if the kernel is bad because of an external problem, like a lack of sun or water? Does the farmer not conduct an investigation into why the kernel, or the corn, is going bad, and don't we believe it is incumbent on the farmer to try and remedy the issue before giving up on his crop? Perhaps the question we need to ask ourselves is, who are the farmers when it comes to society, crime, and the purpose and nature of punishment?

Prisoners in this study have spoken to the damage of stereotypes and the belief that media and society have a magnifying glass on their kernels of truth, but as a matter of perspective, doesn't it seem that removing the glass and looking at the whole corn, and possibly even the field, could give us a better picture of the crops we are producing? What is the purpose of our prison system? Does a farmer grow a kernel or a single ear of corn, or do we entrust her to grow a field, and then tend to that field so that others may eat? Perhaps it is time to rethink how we portray individuals who have violated the social contract and been brought before the mechanisms of law and punishment that we have in our society. It seems, from the perspective of the participants in this study, if society had the opportunity to view them as something more than the mistake they made, or their kernel of truth, than it is possible that people would believe there is an opportunity for that individual to become more and/or achieve more; to change, and aspire towards something better. If society continues to only see the bad kernels, then by all measures they will continue to believe that the whole stock is bad—if prisons are fields of corn, then currently there is nothing to do but burn the fields based on what people can see. Here, we must remember a parable from Allport's (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*;

A child who finds himself rejected and attacked on all sides is not likely to develop dignity and poise as his outstanding traits. On the contrary, he develops defenses. Like a dwarf in a world of menacing giants, he cannot fight on equal terms. He is forced to listen to their derision and laughter and submit to their abuse.

There are a great many things such a dwarf-child may do, all of them serving as his ego defenses. He may withdraw into himself, speaking little to the giants and never honestly. He may band together with other dwarfs, sticking close to them for comfort and for self-respect. He may try to cheat the giants when he can and thus have a taste of sweet revenge. He may in desperation occasionally push some giant off the sidewalk or throw a rock at him when it is safe to do so. Or he may out of despair find himself acting the part that the giant expects, and gradually grow to share his master's own uncomplimentary view of dwarfs. His natural self-love may, under the persistent blows of contempt, turn his spirit to cringing and self-hate (pg. 142-143).

Allport describes traits that form in individuals and groups due to victimization, but even the semantics of his theory are troublesome for the offender, who is unallowed to make any type of claim regarding his victimization. However, in the presence of a flood of media portrayals about who the prisoner is, Allport's words ring extremely relevant; "one's reputation, whether false or true, cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered, into one's head without doing something to one's character." (pg. 142). It is obvious that the hammering of mainstream representations of prisoners is doing

something to their narrative, and likely their identity or character. Now that we know such simplistic views affect the ways that offenders consider their opportunities and prospects to change, it seems imperative that a counterstory be offered up—lest the prisoners become the dwarf-child, and have only detrimental options to pick from. Maybe it is time to show the corn, as opposed to only focusing the narrative lens on the kernel.

The Violence of Silence

In the foreword to Sara Cobb’s 2013 book, *Speaking of Violence*, Mark Freeman discusses the fact that in conflict, “Others” have their stories to tell as well; “Each side fuels the other, and the cycle continues, even intensifies. Whatever else might be needed to end the cycle of violence—and Cobb is surely attentive to the myriad factors involved—new, more complete, and indeed truthful stories are required. Without these, there can only be repetition” (pg. x). Freeman then talks about finding the difference between “better” and “worse” stories as being the work of critical narrative practice. That was the purpose of this study, to engage with the narratives of the “Other” in an effort to uncover better stories that may bring to light just how we can stop the repetitions of violent conflict that both lead to crime and imprisonment, but more importantly in terms of this research, prevent further violence within the prison system and thus reduce recidivism, which reduces crime and conflict outside of prison walls.

According to Cobb (2013),

In order to ‘get on,’ people must be able to tell a story in which they are positioned as agents, able to describe and account for their own victimization,

able to respond humanely to the stories of others. However, conflicts are precisely the context in which the capacity for action, for narrative action, is carefully circumscribed by institutional practices (Smith, 2008), by master narratives (Johnson, 2008), by structural and physical violence (Burton, 1996; Galtung, 1990).

The “violence of silence” is born when the “Other” is unable to tell the story that Cobb describes, and even worse, is unable to tell a story at all. For the prisoner, as seen through the narratives told in this study, there is a belief of extreme silence, both from the outside, and the inability to be heard while on the inside. There are rarely opportunities to tell a story that offers narrative complexity to society, and opposes the widely distributed view that prisoners are only violent, manipulative, malicious, etc. There is no opportunity to tell a story of the harm of dehumanization to the staff who oversee the prisoner, in fact, the threat of violence, both structural and physical, looms over the prisoner who wants to tell a story of any kind, whether better-formed or not. There is a belief amongst inmates that there is an expectation of silence from the staff with whom they interact with every single day, and that expectation leads to the deprivation of voice, which leads to the lack of recognition of natality and humanness (Cobb, 2013, pg. 92-93), which ultimately only leads to more violence.

Cobb (2013) cites Polkinghorne (1988) as saying that “the human condition is the condition of narrative,” and Gergen (1988), “we are the narratives we tell” (pg. 22). So, when we suppress the ability to speak, or narrate, we effectively deny the humanity of those lacking a story. If we are the narratives we tell, and we are unable to tell a narrative

because our voices have been effectively silenced, then we, quite simply, *are not*. That is the violence of silence.

If Cobb is correct in her belief that, “the consequence of narrative violence is the perpetuation of violence itself” (pg. 28), and, “violence is the only recourse when words no longer work” (pg. 59), then it seems clear that at least part of the violent counter-culture of prisons is attributed to what the respondents described as their lack of voice, or the expectation that they are not permitted to have voice. In Cobb’s evaluation of the five narrative patterns which constitute conflict escalation, it becomes increasingly obvious that prisoner narratives follow the listed pattern and result in a variety of conflicts: 1.) the popular narrative of prisoner’s gains dominance by reducing complexity and the diversity of perspectives through only offering the singular kernel of truth about their crimes; 2.) prisoners are delegitimized through step one, and rendered voiceless by a lack of access to society—through physical separation—and the expectations of silence from prison staff; 3.) on all sides responsibility is externalized and blame is directed at the “Other”, for prisoners the blame lies in the system for reducing their voice and calling into question their humanity while not addressing root causes of crime, and for society and prison staff, the blame couldn’t possibly be anywhere but with the offender, since it was they who broke the law; 4.) because prisoners cannot shift the narrative of society, and society is unable to hear a narrative from prisoners, both sides invert each other’s meanings in an effort to legitimize their own views and cancel the “Other’s” narrative out altogether. Finally, 5.) “when all else fails, people stop talking altogether and speech itself ceases to be functional. Violence is the final ‘solution’” (pg. 98). From society,

this violence takes the form of continuing the narrative suppression and denial of voice from prisoners, and from prisoners, left with seemingly no outlets other than physical violence, the counter-culture of prisons rages on while frustration is relieved through various forms of violence—all of the stereotypical behaviors and norms that are displayed for the entertainment of society, the very food that nourishes the appetite for society's justification of narrative violence towards prisoners. The vicious cycle rages on, and the violence of silence only grows, and feeds itself.

Bigliani et al. (2013) believe that “our virtues (and sometimes our defects) need to be recognized by key witnesses” (pg. 67), but for the participants of this study, there was a belief that nobody witnesses anything other than the stereotypical defects and the stories about what led them to imprisonment. When virtues are unable to be witnessed, the literature shows that acting virtuously ceases to be a worthy endeavor, and so the violence of silence creates a denigration of virtues and morals, the things needed most in an offenders rehabilitation as he/she readies themselves for a return to society. The systemic humiliation that prison offers, coupled with the inability for prisoners to express voice that equates to more than noise, seem to exacerbate cycles of recidivism and continued harm in society.

Nelson (2001) discussed the concept that an identity is twice damaged when it experiences deprivation of opportunity and an infiltrated consciousness. In line with Steele's (1997) conception of stereotype threat, which states; “through long exposure of negative stereotypes about their group, members of prejudiced-against groups often internalize the stereotypes, and the resulting sense of inadequacy becomes a part of their

personality” (pg. 617), many participants spoke about the process of giving up on any prospect for change because society refuses to accept them. The process of infiltrated consciousness became apparent through participant’s responses, and the deprivation of opportunity is an integral part of incarceration. The result of the twice damaged identity, coupled with the complete lack of voice on the part of offenders, is an ever growing conflict which prisoners are fully submerged.

The fact that prisoners committed acts of harm or wrong-doing creates a system-justifying form of stereotype and prejudice, as discussed by Dovidio et al. (2005). Because of their transgressions, prisoners face an uphill battle not only against the kernel of truth, but also against the formation of categories based on rational vs. irrational evidence. The violence of silence prevents prisoners from creating a necessarily complex narrative about their whole selves, and the result is that society is force-fed simplistic representations of offenders which equate to adequate evidence for the formation of misconceptions. Those misconceptions hold the prisoner captive, and the physical and social barriers that separate them from society exacerbate their status as a loathed outgroup, while effectively reducing their voices to nothing more than noise, when they are “heard.”

Sykes (1958) came up with what he called the five pains of imprisonment; “the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security” (Drake et al., 2015, pg. 7). “By identifying the deprivation of what are, fundamentally, essential human needs, Sykes made clear the inherent, intentional and profound inhumanity of the prison experience” (ibid). This research, done by gathering

the narratives of prisoners in a maximum-security prison, revealed a sixth pain of imprisonment; the deprivation of voice, story, and narrative complexity. As discussed earlier, the need for acceptance and recognition are essential, and the suppression of such a basic need through the effective silencing of prisoner narratives is another violent aspect of incarceration. Human's have a need to be heard, but as long as there is a supported belief that certain narratives will not be heard, and as such, the humanness of the "Other" will not be recognized, engaging in narrative repair is a daunting task. Like Sisyphus pushing his boulder up the hill, participants in this study felt that trying to convince society, or believing that society could be convinced that they were more than the stereotype, was a never ending, unobtainable task. The recognition that to society they were voiceless, coupled with the extreme sense of frustration by the expectation of voicelessness with prison staff, seems to significantly damage the prisoner identity due to an extreme deprivation of opportunity.

Without the ability to de-familiarize the culturally recognizable narrative of who offenders are, the only option to begin narrative repair is by making a sincere attempt at de-infiltrating prisoner consciousness through the construction of a counterstory which, at least, establishes an inner voice for the prisoner. Currently, the prisoner seems trapped in the realm of noise. Silence has become the battlefield of the soul; participants sense of worth and humanness are torn and shredded by the narrative violence which denies their natality, they have been left with a feeling of hopelessness, their stories bleeding out on the battlegrounds, feeling unable, *unallowed* to scream for help. There needs to be a way to establish in the prisoner, a belief that narrating the nature of their individual

complexity, even if only for themselves to start with, is a valuable task. Encouraging the prisoner to first learn to farm his or her own corn into a healthy field of kernels may just create the landscape for them to present the whole crop, or more than the single damaged kernel, when the world is ready to receive it.

It seems that, as a start, the world of academia may be able to play a seemingly small part. By rethinking how prisoners and other disenfranchised individuals are represented in the research landscape; not as subjects, and not necessarily as collaborators—although there is much value in that as well—but as autonomous and trustworthy researchers, one's capable of gathering legitimate data, analyzing it objectively, and ultimately presenting it to the world, academia can begin to shift the realm of possibilities for how voices are heard and not just reduced to noise. By offering an escape from the deprivation of opportunity, while simultaneously encouraging the collection of authentic narratives, prisoners' (and other) infiltrated consciousness' may begin to subside, and narrative repair of damaged identities may occur.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

“It often is said in prison that basketball courts may be built at will, but tennis courts are not allowed. This comment typifies general societal views of who enters prisons, what they are capable of doing, and what they deserve” (Lanier, Philliber and Philliber, 1994, pg. 16). Additionally, according to Allport (1954), “it is easier, someone has said, to smash an atom than a prejudice” (pg. xvii). Combined, these quotes speak to the deeply entrenched views of who it is that prisons hold within their walls, and how difficult it is to expand that view towards recognizing the narrative complexity of the more than two million prisoners in our country. According to Piche et al. (2013), “The emergence and dominance of the penitentiary in the 19th century and early 20th century produced a carceral form that isolated and silenced the voices of dissent and resistance of the imprisoned” (pg. 450). Ultimately, the loss of identity, self-worth, and authentic relationships which aid in the sense-making process of such a humiliating experience as coming to prison, contribute to the forces of silence that perpetuate cycles of violence for offenders both within the walls, and once outside of them.

The Researcher and The Prisoner as One—My Story

In this section I will temporarily put aside the formal language appropriate for thesis writing. I will do away with the label of “researcher,” or “author,” that one must utilize when doing academic or professional writing, and I will write from the perspective

of a prisoner in a maximum-security institution; one who discovered his identity as a student while imprisoned, and who is budding into the more formal or professional role of a researcher, while recognizing that much of the world has made those three attributes a near impossibility for similarly situated persons to simultaneously achieve.

Through my two undergraduate degrees I became very interested in research and writing around issues that were affecting myself and the more than two million people in American jails and prisons. I began reading books and scholarly articles about myriad topics around incarceration and the counter-culture of prisons. I read about recidivism and reentry, the history of prison, the establishment of the prison industrial complex, the evolution of institutionalized racism which evolved from slavery into Jim Crow, and then went underground through the civil rights movements of the 1960's only to resurface in the 70's as "The War on Drugs," which targeted minority neighborhoods and populations for disproportionate policing, enforcement, and sentencing, reestablished a system of legal disenfranchisement and becoming the building blocks of mass incarceration.

Through both my independent research, and the formal research I was receiving for my schoolwork during undergrad, I began to notice a trend. Whenever I would read about prisons and jails, and anytime I would read about crime, addiction, reentry, etc. the articles and books would be written by academics and scholars who had never seemed to encounter the very things they were writing about. I began to become acutely aware of stereotypes that were being perpetuated through literature, which led me to pay more attention to what was being discussed on the television and in newspapers, which then led to conversations with my family, friends, and fellow prisoners regarding what they

thought, felt, believed, and understood about crime, punishment, and imprisonment. The more I researched the more I realized that there really was no literature coming from prisons that didn't seem to reduce the role of inmates to nothing more than subjects to be studied—there were few instances of prisoners contributing to literature or the academic understandings of imprisonment.

Eventually, as my educational journey continued, I also began to understand that outsiders who come into these environments to do research are largely incapable of leaving with authentic data. As years passed and my discussions continued, I began to realize that even in those of us who try, with all of our might, to resist the “us vs. them” mentality that prison produces, and the lack of trust for outsiders who had not experienced the levels of deprivation and humiliation that I was becoming so accustomed to, there was a sense of secrecy that existed when I spoke about prison and the inner workings of incarceration. I spoke to interns, and people doing various kinds of research within the walls, and I was always hesitant about their intentions and how much I should give away. I discussed the mistrust of *all* outsiders with my fellow prisoners, and I began to believe whole-heartedly that there was only one way to understand what happens in prison—we, inmates, would need to conduct research in order to make sense of all of this.

Unfortunately, the world of academia, with all of its positive intentions, and its many wholesome and kind-hearted researchers who genuinely hope to change the processes of incarceration through their work, has, perhaps without realizing it, perpetuated the belief that inmates are not, and cannot be researchers. After reading

hundreds upon hundreds of articles about prison research, I rarely noticed inmates reflected with narrative complexity, and instead, simply as subjects to be interviewed, studied, categorized, etc. Even the terms used to describe prisoners in these seemingly positive studies only served to perpetuate negative views about us. The label “convict”—an extremely loaded word, that, for individuals both within and outside of prison, is used to describe typical criminalistic behaviors and the entrenched mentality of us “vs.” them, as well as a sense of aggression, machismo, etc.—was constantly used to describe subjects (see Ross et al., 2014); narrative themes and scripts were titled in ways that seemed to hold prisoner’s hostage to their mistakes and their emotions as a result of punishment and dehumanization; the research felt more damaging to me, more often than not.

And so, eventually, I decided to take steps towards changing the research landscape, and I decided that I would somehow endeavor to conduct legitimate research in prison, while still confined. After more than ten years of imprisonment the opportunity began to present itself; an opportunity to use my mistakes and misfortune to attempt contributing something to the academic world, and the world at large. When I received approval to do this research, I began to really understand just how important of an opportunity this is, and how it could, potentially, change the landscape of understanding offender narratives and identity through collecting authentic and honest narratives from the very people I have shared such a difficult experience with.

The Counterstory

If Nelson (2001) is correct, and “moral respect is necessary for the free exercise of moral agency,” then prisoners have a very long way to go in order to begin constructing and activating the necessary counter stories that can aid them in engaging in narrative repair. Nelson believes that, “a counterstory frees up a person’s agency because personal identity and agency are intimately connected. Not only do my actions have the potential to disclose who I am, but how I and others understand who I am profoundly affects the range of actions that are open to me” (pg. 69). With this, the prisoner is in a precarious position; on the one hand, their actions—their kernel of truth—have, for much of society, disclosed who they “are” and now categorized them into a very feared and loathed “Other.” The moral respect that they lost has now put them in a position which severely restricts their moral agency, and more importantly, their ability to offer a narrative, apart from their lapse in moral judgment. As a result of their crime and the subsequent loss of agency, others now understand them in a way that severely restricts the possible range of actions, and specifically suppresses their ability to vocalize alternative and better formed stories. The counterstory thus becomes a daunting task.

The major obstacle that prisoners face is that the violence of silence currently denies any opportunity for expressing a better formed story about their identity.

When individual others or social forces bring it about that a person can no longer act on a particular identity, then no matter how fundamental her commitment to the value around which that identity centers, and no matter how centrally the story of that commitment figures into her self-constituting

autobiography, the identity is not hers. She cannot claim an identity that has no outlet for its expression (pg. 101).

It appears clear that a necessary step to engaging in the narrative repair of the widely damaged identities of prisoners is to seek out and/or create new outlets for expression. The first step then, is to create the counterstory which replaces part of the master narrative. This research seems to give two opportunities for counterstory that can be controlled from the inside, ones that have less to do with lack of moral agency, and more to do with the creation of community within the walls, and the repair of how inmates view each other, as opposed to only positively positioning their individual selves.

Through twenty-seven interviews across a widely diverse group of men in a maximum-security prison, there was far too much consistency to hold on to the overly negative views that were presented. Perhaps through identifying the aspects of culture that have become negative and a source of frustration, prisoners have created a road map to engaging in the first steps of narrative repair. By shifting the expectations that inmates have of one another, and by telling a new story about the prototype, it is possible that more positive views about one another will form. This study revealed that almost everyone who participated had very similar hopes for the future, and that they experienced much of the same oppression, and narrated it in the same ways as their very diverse fellow inmates. That is, in itself, a well-formed story, in that it has consistency and a sense of authenticity because telling it to *this* researcher offers no real promise of reward aside from re-establishing voice.

Society views prisons as widely homogeneous places, subscribing to the stereotypes that are force-fed to them through mass media. Prisoners know that the opposite of this is very true, and in fact, at times, the differences that we share are a source of conflict. By uncovering the things that connect prisoners to one another, especially in such a heterogeneous place as a maximum-security prison, is to do the very thing that society is currently widely incapable of; it is to recognize the true depth of complexity within the walls AND the linkages that we all share, which are capable of formulating a counterstory to the master narratives which say we are irredeemable, violent, evil, and vicious. In reality, what this research proved, is that much of the violence we face in prison is the result of weighty stereotypes and the suppression of voice. The narrative violence that the prisoner must endure can easily manifest in physical violence, because as Cobb (2013) says, “the consequence of narrative violence is the perpetuation of violence itself.” But, how we approach storytelling with one another, how we define the prototype from the inside, and how we decide to strive to have our voices heard, even in the face of oppression, can set the tone for a new story...one that counters the master narratives which hold us back.

Additionally, a couple of very important themes emerged from the research, which are valuable to both prisoners themselves, and to society at large. The small portion of participants who were involved in educational programming within the prison established a theme; all of them were more positive about their experience of incarceration, as well as being more capable of recognizing the positive ways that coming to prison had changed them. It appears that by taking the opportunity to further one's

education, at any level (respondents ranged from Adult Basic Education, to High School Equivalency, College Readiness, and current college students), prisoners' sense of self and their ability to make sense and meaning of their incarceration and surroundings, experienced a significant positive boost.

Perhaps most importantly, aside from the recognition of the detrimental effects of the violence of silence, this study revealed that the commonly believed mentality of an absolute "us vs. them" dynamic within the prison system, when it comes to how staff and prisoners interact, is not only untrue, but when it is minimized there are greatly positive effects. The open admission and recognition by nearly all participants that there were staff within the prison whom were not abusive, vindictive, or denied their ability to have a voice, showed that positive relationships, or non-confrontational ones at minimum, can exist within this environment. Even more significant, many inmates were able to describe an instance where a staff member treated them with respect and dignity in a way that had a genuine and lasting positive affect on them. Many of those participants referenced that moment in time as having altered the nature of their relationship with that staff member permanently, and changing their perception of the belief that "all" staff were bad. Even more powerful, these were not rehearsed or prepared stories, they were emotional retellings of a prisoner regaining a sense of humanness through a simple interaction with a once solidified "Other."

This finding should provide hope that improving the nature of staff-inmate relations on a wide scale has opportunities, not only for far-reaching positive implications towards changing the culture and environment of prisons; including physical safety and

reduced conflict of various kinds, but also for imagining what is possible if mechanisms for positive interaction are imbedded into the system at multiple levels. In concert with Allport's (1954) contact theory, if intergroup contact can reach below the surface it has the potential to be effective in the reduction of prejudice (pg. 276). But contact first needs to address the power of expectancy; what made the stories told by respondents powerful was that they defied expectations, they caught prisoners by surprise in a moment where there were neither expectations for good or bad; at times they were moments of vulnerability, and other times were basic everyday interactions that evolved into something more. Ultimately, the lack of expectation laid the ground work for a newly formed positive interaction to occur; "In all human relations...the engendering power of expectancy is enormous. If we foresee evil in our fellow man, we tend to provoke it; if good, we elicit it" (pg. 160), and I hypothesize that when we are caught in moments where expectations are suspended completely, the road to authentic displays of character, even for normally conflicting parties, is paved. If positive contact between staff and inmates can have the powerful and positive affect that this researcher saw on participants, then there is no doubt that positive contact with society could do the same. Currently the belief from participants that both staff and society had no general expectations from them, coupled with a generally negative view of the inmate prototype and the social groupings of prisoners, show that there is very little sense of community at any level for the common prisoner. Establishing some positive semblance or sense of community would be a necessary step into building the bridging narratives for counterstories to cross.

Creating opportunities, whether coordinated by DOC's, advocacy groups, media, or others, to allow new narratives to form and be told, and to allow potentially positive contact to happen, could build the chances for counterstories to take hold both in society and within prisoner self-images and narratives. Such contact could have far reaching positive affect including the reduction of recidivism through a feeling of inclusion and community for prisoners with people beyond the gates, producing a new set of beliefs around expectations from society, and the perceived violence of silence.

Strengths of the Study

As discussed in the methodology section, conducting a quality thematic analysis means embracing researcher subjectivity as opposed to viewing it as a problem in need of management. The major strength of this study is derived from the dual position of the researcher/prisoner. The inaccessible nature of prisons, and prisoners as a population, means that gathering quality and authentic data from within prisons is extremely difficult. The difficulties sit beyond IRB processes for approval, coordinating efforts between researchers, organizations, and departments of correction, and the stressful and sometimes intimidating nature of entering spaces of confinement; they also exist because interpreting data gathered from the inside is largely a game of "best guesses" when done by outsiders.

This is, in no way, meant to insult any researcher, or the wider realm of academia and the myriad people conducting quality research relating to criminology and incarceration. What is meant by "a game of best guesses" is that until one experiences the pains of imprisonment, the violence of silence, and the trauma that leads one to these

kinds of experiences, it is incredibly difficult to make sense of the stories that come out of places like prisons. There is also a serious lack of trust when it comes to speaking with incarcerated people. The nature of separation, isolation, and power has made the inmate a very cautious individual—out of necessity. Part of the violence of silence alluded to in this thesis is the fact that the inmate narrative is filled with damage at an overly simplified version of the prototype displayed in media of all kinds. As such, how could anyone expect prisoners to be trusting of someone arriving from the “outside,” to tell their collective story?

The major strength of this study is that by recruiting participants from the very prison where the researcher has resided for over a decade, a level of trust is pre-established, and the conversations that preclude the interview are rooted in shared spaces and common understandings and experiences. The trust that is so necessary when conducting quality interviews is improbable for the outside researcher; but, for this researcher, it is almost pre-established before the description of the research even occurs. Additionally, a higher dimension of trust exists; the researchers aim is obviously not to use the narratives towards a self-motivated, or sponsor-motivated end—to use the participants words only to support existing stereotypes or views as opposed to evaluating them authentically would be self-defeating in many ways. Essentially, the relationship between participant and researcher that requires time and context in normal ethnographic research in order to obtain quality data, is the strongest part of this research because of the dual role that the researcher occupies.

Despite the role of the researcher/prisoner being one of powerlessness in terms of the way communication occurs and certain permissions are obtained, the strength that lies in the role is that many obstacles that would be otherwise unexpected or difficult to understand for the outside researcher are easily overcome and adapted to by the prisoner/researcher. The uncertainty and inconsistency of prison life, including scheduling, availability, emergency lock-downs, low-staffing obstacles, etc., coupled with navigating staff and inmate personalities, deciphering authenticity vs. exaggeration, and many more issues specific to these environments leave the outside researcher at a disadvantage because of a lack of experience and context. Even a researcher who has conducted numerous prison studies will only have a general knowledge of such things, but will likely not have the necessary detailed picture to navigate such issues in different prisons, or even different units within a prison.

The researcher of this study, a long-term inmate in the very prison where the study was conducted, had access to a level of knowledge and authenticity that can only come with intimate knowledge of the spaces and people within these fences. Over ten years of living behind the walls of this specific prison gave this study a richness both in the recruitment and interview process as well as the analysis of the data that would be incredibly difficult to come by for an outside academic. Participation in this project became a source of pride for many interviewees (who said as much during the interview), specifically because of the role of the prisoner/researcher conducting the study. With subjectivity constantly in mind, and practicing extreme caution regarding researcher and confirmation bias, this study was an exercise in gathering incredibly honest and authentic

narratives from a highly inaccessible and difficult population, and then evaluating those narratives with an intimate knowledge of time and context. The goal was to produce a piece of work that may change the landscape of how prison research is done, how people understand the process of imprisonment and the ways it effects prisoners, and create a possible map for exploring the possibility of narrative repair processes as a necessity in institutions like prison. The unique dual role of prisoner/researcher made these goals a possibility, and did so in a way that is both trustworthy and necessary in terms of measuring the quality and authenticity of the specific research conducted.

Limitations

The research experienced numerous obstacles and limitations, as does any research conducted in a prison setting. A lack of control over the research environment poses obstacles that must be managed to the best of a researcher's ability, and for this project, because of the researcher's dual role also as a prisoner, there was even less control than there would be normally. There was no ability to communicate problems in real time with prison leadership, the space for interviewing was not consistent and sometimes had to be changed or moved at the last minute, and, additionally, the relationship with prison staff had to be navigated delicately to ensure that the corrections officers which the researcher interacted with each day did not think that he was trying to cross the boundary from inmate to researcher/student/academic/etc.

The most obvious limitation to this study, however, was time. Due to the research being conducted in the form of a Masters thesis, and the researchers desire to graduate after the semester that the data was collected, the study was limited in some ways because

of a lack of time. If more time had been available, than many more interviews could have been conducted and a possibly more in-depth analysis could have occurred. The selection process for participants yielded many more willing parties than originally anticipated, and additional time to conduct the study would have provided the researcher with the opportunity to strengthen the themes which emerged from the data as well as finding possible other themes and/or subthemes. Even if the number of interviews had stayed the same, more time could have allowed the researcher to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the data collected, doing numerous rounds of thematic analysis and then circling back to enrich the themes and subthemes alike.

Although the number of interviews conducted was sufficient for a masters thesis, the sample size of twenty-seven interviews was a limitation as it only represents approximately three percent of the total population within the prison where the study took place. Conducting interviews with a larger percent of the population would have further solidified the themes which emerged in participant narratives and given more context across a diverse spectrum of individuals with which to make sense of those themes. Additionally, although the researcher did his best to represent as much diversity as possible through the selection process, access to actual statistics regarding the diversity of the prison would have helped capture a more accurate picture of who should be represented. As an inmate, there was much information that the researcher could not, by policy or by law, have access to—a researcher from the outside world would have more access to such information. Thus, in some ways the researcher's dual role as a prisoner

was a strength of the study, but also limited him from obtaining information that could strengthen the study as a whole.

Future studies should consider the time that it will take to receive IRB approval as well as approval from the Department of Corrections where the study is occurring. This process was the lengthiest part of the research, and as such, the collection and analysis of the data did not have an abundance of time because of the schedule that the researcher needed to adhere to. Also, the study should be replicated in other prisons to see if the themes which emerged were unique to the environment where the study occurred, or if they are more indicative of the prison experience generally, across time and space. If future studies could support the themes discovered here, then the implications for considering narrative processes as a tool of conflict resolution in prisons, designing narrative-based programming to lower recidivism, and creating processes for the identity repair of prisoners to occur, would be very strong.

There is a genuine need for studies like this to become more common so that innovative solutions to the problem of mass incarceration in the U.S. can begin to evolve out of the narratives of offenders. Due to the unpredictable nature of conducting research in prisons, the lengthy IRB approval process, the lack of control that a researcher has within this environment (both as a prisoner researcher and one from the outside), and the need for quality narrative studies from within prisons to emerge, time should be the number one consideration that researchers take into account when designing and executing studies inside of a prison. Without a strict time table for completion, many limitations that this study faced would be irrelevant; the number of participants would not

be limited and recruitment and participation could continue until researchers felt that themes were concrete and representative of the majority of the population; the prisons demographic makeup would be accurately/statistically represented; obstacles faced because of the uncertainty of the prison schedule would be negated as missed days or periods could be made up at later dates; and, analysis of the data obtained would be able to experience successive rounds and rigorous evaluation not restricted by due dates or completion deadlines. Being restricted by time has the possibility of handcuffing the researcher to events that are both unpredictable and unavoidable. Such events could become more manageable, and the data collection and analysis would likely not suffer as a result of them if the time table for the study was open until completion.

Implications for Future Research

Through the narratives collected during the research, and the subsequent analysis of those narratives, many implications for further research arose. Not only could the study be replicated in other prison environments in order to discover how the themes which emerged may, or may not, transcend time and place (as discussed in limitations section), but it would also be worth more deeply exploring a few other aspects of the themes discussed.

The concept of pre-existing damaged identity is one that should be considered and explored by future researchers. Because prisons disproportionately house individuals of color, the impoverished, and other marginalized people, the idea that many prisoners have experienced damaged identity previous to coming to prison would mean that they became even more damaged through the process of imprisonment. Questions should be

designed to uncover the possibility of layered damage to the prisoner's identity; the layers existing before incarceration, and then the ones that are piled on because of incarceration. Such research would help create an understanding of how narratives may be affected by different levels of marginalization, stigmatization, prejudice and stereotype, and could even speak to the need for narrative repair processes to be engaging with at-risk communities. Such approaches could also implicate the relevance of pre-existing damaged identities as a risk-factor for increasing the chances that someone experiences incarceration in their life.

Subthemes discovered in this research also contain implications for further consideration of some specific topics. Due to the generally more positive narratives of participants who were involved in educational programming, conducting research with that specific group of individuals and comparing it with narrative research of individuals not involved in education may shed light on why this sensation occurs and if it is consistent. Additionally, there could be implications about educational programming in prison as a process of narrative or identity repair itself.

In terms of social identity theory, a couple of more specific processes should be considered. The effects of collective generality and low axiological balance, as discussed by Rothbart and Korostelina (2006), seem to play a significant role in the narratives of prisoners and the ways that conflict with prison staff is described/explained. Because of the presence of extreme collective generality and low axiological balance between the groups and the stories they tell, the topic of acquired identity becomes a very necessary one to explore. Future research could also be designed within a research team approach;

one where an inmate/researcher is conducting interviews with prisoners, and a staff/researcher is doing the same with correctional staff in order to compare the themes regarding these social identity processes and how each group experiences possible acquired identities, as well as how collective generality and low axiological balance effect the stories they tell and whether there are extreme similarities or differences. Such an approach could do a lot to uncover the possibility of designing trainings and programs based on contact theory, problem solving workshops, etc.

Future research should also seriously consider the effects that community and a sense of belonging have on narratives, since those are two things that seemed to be looming in the narratives offered by participants to this study. The negative image of the inmate prototype coupled with the lack of stories about group dynamics and a feeling of belongingness to the group seem to say that a sense of community and belonging are seriously missing from the prison environment. Would creating community and healthy belonging to positive groups spark processes of identity repair? Is the lack of such a presence, in itself, damaging to identity and narrative? These are questions that further research could attempt to answer.

Finally, resilience is a topic that is vast in the research literature, especially around trauma. One question posed by this research is, “what narratives are prisoners ‘allowed’ to tell,” meaning, which narratives do the existing research and literature on prisons and prisoners categorize as acceptable to the wider audience of society and academia? Are prisoners “allowed” to discuss the process of incarceration as traumatic, and are they allowed to be *victims* of such an experience? If so, or if, at the very least, it

is recognized that this process is traumatizing, then future research could discover aspects of resilience, who experiences it, and how. Resilience literature could then be drawn upon in order to compare how resilience forms in other traumatic settings and how it may be encouraged, or teased out, in this setting as well. Uncovering the connection between the trauma of incarceration (through dehumanization, separation, degradation, etc.) and the experience of resilience could be a major step towards creating better formed stories for prisoners, better formed prisons, and lowering the recidivism rates which perpetuate cycles of harm and trauma for prisoners, victims, and communities.

This study shows the power and importance of uncovering the authentic narratives of offenders, as told by them, and also alludes to the need for such narratives to emerge in order for CAR, as a field, to begin addressing processes of reconciliation and lasting positive peace in communities crippled by high incarceration rates, violent crime, and many other related issues. Although the study was limited by the researcher's dual role as a prisoner, it was also strengthened by that same role; without the ability to access environments like prisons and gather honest accounts of the individuals within them, designing interventions and programs becomes a guessing game at best. Without studies like this, implications for further research suffer as they are not based on the stories of the individuals who such research will affect. The notion of exploring pre-existing damaged identities, trauma and resilience, and how the process of incarceration effects social identity and group dynamics arose specifically out of the stories of twenty-seven offenders in a maximum-security prison in the Northeastern United States, where this study was conducted. The importance of such studies cannot be downplayed or

underestimated. Understanding how inmates make sense of their experiences before, during, and after incarceration is pivotal for America, the world's leader (by a mile) in incarceration and recidivism. Peace in many communities depends on lowering incarceration and recidivism rates; redefining justice requires addressing structural violence and the stories told about how such violence leads to imprisonment and is exacerbated by prisons; healing for victims, offenders, and communities alike depends on the ability to tell honest and vulnerable stories to people with the skills and know-how to evaluate and analyze those narratives in order to consider opportunities for repair, and the construction of peace processes which recognize the need for all voices to be included.

If this study was the plastic wrapping around a brand-new puzzle, it has now been carefully peeled off to reveal these implications for further research, which are the pieces of an important and necessary picture to which this exploration hopes to contribute.

Additionally, a milestone has been reached with the completion of this project; now the world of academia hopefully knows that it is possible to support a study conducted by a prisoner, in their environment, in order to contribute to the knowledge base around who prisoners are and what imprisonment does and can possibly do in the future.

Empowering prisoner voice is a necessity to combat the violence of silence and the detrimental effects it has to identity and narrative, and, empowering prisoners to aspire to contribute and subscribe to a counterstory is a goal that this project aimed to accomplish.

With this study, there is now less mystery about the possibility of prisoner as researcher and there is a contribution to the wider understanding of prisons and prisoners, from the voice of the confined themselves.

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BIOGRAPHY

Brandon Brown received both his Associate and Bachelor of Arts degrees from the University of Maine at Augusta while confined in a maximum-security prison. He will be the first person in Maine to complete a graduate degree while incarcerated, and upon completion of his M.S. degree from George Mason's S-CAR, he will enroll in the doctoral program, also with GMU, in the newly named "Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution."

Brown aims to explore the narratives of stakeholders within the criminal justice system towards creating avenues where healing for all is a foundation of justice. He also hopes to explore utilizing narrative theories of conflict resolution across a wide spectrum of conflict scenarios and contexts, and conducting narrative work towards social justice advocacy and activism around issues of mass incarceration and structural violence.

Also a lover of music, dogs, yoga, and food, Brown plans to dedicate his life beyond prison to living every day with meaning and purpose, and spreading light, joy, and peace to as many people (and animals) as possible.