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Stories Matter: Reaffirming the Value of Qualitative Research

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Abstract

While the social sciences are experiencing narrative and emotional turns that are largely based on exploratory and theoretical qualitative research, the problematic dismissal of qualitative research approaches continues to loom large outside academia. Frequently described as a collection of “anecdotal stories,” qualitative research is dismissed as unscientific and unreliable— comments that limit the perceived usefulness of qualitative findings, especially in terms of policy reform. This article problematizes evaluating qualitative research according to quantitative measures of rigour and explores the richness and value of documenting experiential stories and the process of storying in social science research. Notably, we take up the issues of criminal record suspension (pardons) and the abolition of carceral segregation as two case studies to demonstrate how the qualitative value of experiential research and personal stories are simultaneously mobilized and rejected by key actors such as politicians, government researchers, and judges. Our analysis highlights the power that stories have when it comes to influencing change within the criminal justice system, depending on who takes up/rejects these stories. We conclude with a discussion of why stories matter and how, when “layered,” they can contribute to the production of meaningful interventions to the ongoing criminalization and punishment of vulnerable people.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Narrative Research, Case Study, Criminology, Criminal Justice Reform

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Stories Matter: Reaffirming the Value of Qualitative Research

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While the social sciences are experiencing narrative and emotional turns that are largely based on exploratory and theoretical qualitative research, the problematic dismissal of qualitative research approaches continues to loom large outside academia. Frequently described as a collection of "anecdotal stories," qualitative research is dismissed as unscientific and unreliable—comments that limit the perceived usefulness of qualitative findings, especially in terms of policy reform. This article problematizes evaluating qualitative research according to quantitative measures of rigour and explores the richness and value of documenting experiential stories and the process of storying in social science research. Notably, we take up the issues of criminal record suspension (pardons) and the abolition of carceral segregation as two case studies to demonstrate how the qualitative value of experiential research and personal stories are simultaneously mobilized and rejected by key actors such as politicians, government researchers, and judges. Our analysis highlights the power that stories have when it comes to influencing change within the criminal justice system, depending on who takes up/rejects these stories. We conclude with a discussion of why stories matter and how, when "layered," they can contribute to the production of meaningful interventions to the ongoing criminalization and punishment of vulnerable people. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Narrative Research, Case Study, Criminology, Criminal Justice Reform

Discussion and debate about methodological preferences is nothing new in the social sciences and there is growing support within the field for critical qualitative work that allows both researchers and participants to be more engaged in and with the research process (see Kilty, Felices-Luna, & Fabian, 2014). There is an understanding that "[q]ualitative research is no longer just simply 'not quantitative research'" (Flick 2007, p. ix), and greater recognition of the valuable contributions that narrative and ethnographic research bring to the field and to society as a whole (Presser, 2016; Shearing & Marks, 2011). Qualitative methods allow us to draw out the complexities of social problems (Siltanen, Pich, Klodawsky, & Andrew, 2017; Tilley, 2016) and the emphasis on storytelling in qualitative research is more conducive to findings that can be used to support transformative social, political, and economic change (Chatteron, Fuller, & Routledge, 2007; Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016). While the social sciences are experiencing narrative and emotional turns that are largely based on exploratory and theoretical qualitative research, the problematic dismissal of qualitative research approaches continues to loom large outside of academia. Frequently described as a collection of "anecdotal stories," qualitative research is dismissed as unscientific and unreliable, comments that limit the perceived usefulness of qualitative findings—especially in terms of policy reform.

The motivation to write this paper stems not only from a desire to highlight the importance of narrative and other qualitative research methods, but also from a recurring feeling of frustration that many qualitative researchers (ourselves included) experience when they hear the phrase "it's just anecdotal" after someone shares a story as evidence of a social or criminal justice problem. This phrase is a quick and easy way to dismiss qualitative research, to diminish the labour of qualitative researchers, and to downplay the lived realities of those who participate in qualitative projects. This dismissal contributes to an environment—both inside and outside of academia—where qualitative research is thought of as less-than-scientific. Referring to narratives as *just anecdotes* implies that they are unreliable or non-factual, and while people tend to express great interest in listening to stories, they are often reluctant to accept storytelling as a rigorous scientific approach to social research.

This paper will be of great benefit to scholars working particularly in the field of criminology, penal sociology, and law—especially those mobilizing case study and/or narrative analysis approaches. This discussion on the value of qualitative research also benefits social actors who are in a position to take up stories as evidence in areas such as law or policymaking.

Stories in the Social Sciences

At its heart, research is storytelling (Christensen, 2012, p. 232).

Perhaps two of the most interesting and qualitatively rich avenues for contemporary critical social and criminological research involve the use of narrative methodologies and emotional and affective theoretical frameworks. Narrative analysts endeavour to interpret the stories people tell and why a story was told in a particular way (Riessman, 1993). For some, this analytic process involves breaking the narrative text down into its structural component parts by way of sociolinguistics or semiotics, while others examine the narrative as a "whole" text. While some scholars use the terms narrative and story interchangeably because "they have many of the same characteristics, such as chronological order (Labov & Waletsky, 1967) and thematic ordering of events (Czarniawska, 1998)" (Feldman, Sko¨ldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004, p. 149), following Feldman et al. (2004) we situate the two as related but distinct. Specifically, we suggest that stories are used to reveal a particular experience (or combination thereof) that when taken together constitute an overarching narrative message.

The narrative analysis process typically involves analysing the form, structure, and content (both in terms of what is included and what is excluded) of the stories that are used to make up the larger, overarching or "through" narrative (Crépault & Kilty, 2017), which Feldman et al. (2004, p. 149) describe as "the grand conception that entertains several themes over a period of time. Stories are instantiations, particular exemplars, of the grand conception. They respond to the questions of "And then what happened?" or "What do you mean?"" As Ricoeur (1983, p. 150) explains:

> A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion.

If we seek to understand both the value and impact of stories, it is important to examine how stories are mobilized and for what ends. Following Ricoeur (1983), we maintain that stories,

especially those articulated by politicians, are often told to reveal some type of quandary or dilemma that requires official state attention and action, which typically positions legislators and policymakers as the primary stakeholders involved in responding to the threat or problem. Commonly acting as moral entrepreneurs and thus as the (moral) authorities on issue at hand (Cohen, 2002), politicians narrate stories in ways that serve their political agenda. While that much is obvious, narrative analysts have demonstrated that stories are interpretive events that can be read differently (Holley & Colyar, 2012; Presser, 2016; Sandberg, 2016). Therefore, not only is it important to consider how stories are marshalled in different ways, but also what is left out of a story in order to bring the audience to the broader narrative conclusion as it is designed by the narrator (Crépault & Kilty, 2017). In this sense, context shapes stories and thus the grand narrative that the story or stories are summoned to both reveal and shore up.

Starting from the premise that our social world and the individual stories that people tell may be subject to varied interpretations and that stories may actually be crafted by way of multiple and potentially conflicting logics, we suggest that bridging emotions and affect theory with narrative analysis methodological techniques is a fruitful avenue for critical social research. Examining the types of emotions that stories conjure helps to showcase the "narrative angle" of the storyteller. For example, criminological and socio-legal scholarship demonstrates the ways that emotions structure punitive criminal justice mentalities (Johnson, 2009; Manaugh, 2005) and law and legal development (see Bandes, 2000), interpretations of the victim's role in the criminal justice process (Sarat, 1997), and sensational mediated criminal justice news reporting and content (Kilty & Bogosavljevic, 2018).

Like journalists, political actors are particularly adept storytellers and they notably recount stories about crime and justice in ways that elicit the emotions of anger, fear, and disgust (Johnson, 2009; Manaugh, 2005). We suggest that asking how and why a narrator tells a story in the way they do necessitates considering the specific emotions and affective reactions that the story evokes. In this way, a narrative can be understood simultaneously as an organizing, assembling, and summoning force. Specifically, narratives contribute to the organization of our beliefs and views about particular issues and experiences; they help to assemble our reasoning (by way of both pragmatic and emotional forms of thinking and deliberation); and they do so, at least in part, by way of summoning, rousing, or rallying emotional and affective responses that shape how we *feel* about things as they are presented to us in a story or a collection of stories extolling a particular message. For example, and as we demonstrate below, stories recounted by political figures often involve "change" and/or "progress" narratives that suggest either the need for a call to action or a new (implying better) pathway forward to address a social problem or to change the actions of a distinct group of people in a specific time and place. Politicians also frequently use stories to tout their own achievements, showcasing feelings of pride and invoking feelings of trust that they can "get the job done." When politicians then rouse anger and fear in the public as audience, citizens are more likely to vote for and support a candidate or political platform that vows to "get tough" on convicted lawbreakers (Johnson, 2009; Sarat, 1997). Such is the power of an emotional crime and justice story and narrative.

Humans are natural storytellers; while narratives and stories are our primary mechanism of communication and the social sciences are experiencing narrative and emotional turns that embrace exploratory and theoretical qualitative research, the problematic dismissal of qualitative research approaches continues to loom large outside of academia—especially within criminal justice institutions (Travers, 2013). Rather than outright rejection, this dismissal occurs through subtler discursive techniques that qualitative researchers experience by way of remarks that effectively situate their work as less valued than the dominant or "received view" that continues to be held up as positivist and quantitative (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Additionally, "standard methods of research communication such as journal articles and

policy reports" (Christensen, 2012, p. 233) do not always accommodate the creative space required to share stories in a way that will allow for the greatest impact. Frequently described as a collection of "anecdotal stories," qualitative research is often dismissed as unscientific and unreliable, comments that limit the perceived usefulness of qualitative findings—especially in terms of policy reform (Lewis, 2009; Maruna, 2015).

This article problematizes the evaluation of qualitative research according to quantitative measures of rigour and explores the richness and value of documenting experiential stories and the process of storying in social science research. Notably, we take up the issues of criminal record suspension (pardons) and the abolition of carceral segregation as two case studies in order to demonstrate how the qualitative value of experiential research and personal stories are simultaneously mobilized and rejected by political actors, government research experts, and the courts who take up, reject, and accept stories as evidence to inform criminal justice policy reform in different ways. Specifically, we outline how politicians mobilize sensational stories about outlier criminal cases to serve political ends (in this case, amendments to Canada's pardon process), which problematically involved generalizing from two discrepant cases to the entire population of criminalized people. Not only does this fail to meet social scientific research standards pertaining to generalizability, it also runs counter to the very premises of how and why it is important to create evidence-based policy.

In contrast, we utilize the second case study to show how the Ministry of the Attorney General selected certain expert researchers to represent the government in court who openly reject the value of qualitative research methodologies, especially the use of personal stories, for drafting evidence-based policy. Although the fact that the courts accept personal stories in the form of testimony as a valid form of evidence to use in juridical decision-making lends support to our larger argument that stories matter, we also maintain that consideration must be given to the way that stories are collected and analysed and the types of stories that are assembled. We conclude with a discussion of why stories matter and how considering the ways in which stories are "layered" over time and potentially across diverse groups increases the credibility, believability, and trustworthiness of a given narrative. We suggest that this approach can contribute to the production of more meaningful criminal and social justice reforms that respond to the ongoing and complex criminalization and punishment experiences of vulnerable people in more compassionate ways.

"It's just anecdotal…": Stories, Double Standards, and the Dismissal of Qualitative Research

We are certainly not the first to address the frustration experienced by those who employ qualitative research methods in their academic work. For example, Labuschagne (2003) wrote a brief submission for *The Qualitative Report* after her experience working on a medical research council ethics committee, stating that "[t]he article was written in response to frustrations expressed by members of the Ethics Committee of the time, to give a general overview of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research" (p. 103). Labuschagne highlights that qualitative research is "becoming a prominent tool in medical research" (p. 100) and that suggestions that qualitative methods are "airy fairy" must be put to rest. The article emphasizes that qualitative research involves the "careful description of situations, events, interactions, and observed behaviours" (ibid) and that scientists should treat qualitative and quantitative methods as "complementary rather than competitive" (ibid).

The main concern with conducting qualitative research is often an ethical one, especially considering "embedded in the new ethics regime is the dominant approach to science that privileges traditional, positivist, scientific outlooks and methods" (van den Hoonaard, 2014, p. 175). This bias towards quantitative methods within ethics protocols inevitably leads

some academics to adopt less engaged methods (conceived by Research Ethics Boards (REBs) as posing less risk of harm to participants) in order to receive ethics approval, which not only alters the research question and design, but can also leave qualitative researchers feeling restrained and frustrated (Felices-Luna, 2014; Haggerty, 2004). In response to this, qualitative researchers stress that at its core, "[e]thical research is about relationships founded on trust and reciprocity" (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008), and as long as researchers can ensure these two things as they engage with individuals and groups in the community, then REBs should be open to some "methodological innovation" (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007, p. 13).

In addition to ethical concerns, those who criticize qualitative research often speak to issues of measurement or a lack of categorization and standardization in qualitative work (Shearing & Marks, 2011). Quantitative researchers, as well as those whose job it is to determine what is "good" research, strongly value standardized categories as they strengthen both the reliability and validity of the findings. Golafshani (2003) writes that qualitative research does *not* lack reliability or validity, but rather "the concepts of reliability and validity are [simply] viewed differently by qualitative researchers who strongly consider these concepts [as] defined in quantitative terms [to be] inadequate" (pp. 599-600). She adds, "[t]o ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial" (p. 601)—noting that trustworthiness is best achieved via triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 2003).

A good example of using triangulation to ensure trustworthiness (validity and reliability) in qualitative research can be found in political activist ethnography (PAE)—a method that stems from Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005). Political activist ethnographers combine "various methods, such as interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis" (Hussey, 2012, p. 5) to "map out the social relations" in which activists (including academic-activists) are engaged so that they "can be effective in transforming the ruling relationships" within various institutions (Kinsman, 2006, p. 139). By using multiple qualitative research methods (in addition to engaging with activists in the community) researchers develop a complex understanding of the institutions around them, are able to understand the categories and standards present within those institutions, and can therefore better intervene in the spaces where "policies are planned, implemented and evaluated" (Campbell, 2006, p. 91). This ability to promote narratives and stories as valid and reliable evidence is especially important for social scientists who wish to mobilize qualitative research for social justice reform efforts.

Even when ethical concerns and issues around validity and reliability are addressed by qualitative researchers, the issue of whether the stories shared through qualitative research methods are accepted as "truth" remains. Within criminology, the stories of criminalized people are highly sought by researchers who wish to develop more complex understandings of criminalization, punishment, reintegration, and desistance. The good news here, according to Sandberg (2016), is that "[p]eople are motivated to tell their stories about suffering and success so that 'others can learn'" (p. 154). The bad news, according to Presser (2016), is that "[o]ffenders' stories are taken as devices meant for manipulation" (p. 146) and therefore these stories are not often accepted as "truth." This assumption that criminalized people lie or manipulate the truth (Presser & Sandberg, 2015b), not only impacts how the qualitative research projects that include their stories and testimonials are taken up by others, but it may also impact how this research is used (or not used) in the evaluation and development of criminal justice policies, practices, and interventions.

The dismissal of stories and storytellers is problematic in program and policy evaluation, especially when researchers and practitioners want to highlight the impact of certain policies on marginalized, vulnerable, and oppressed communities (MacKinnon & Indigenous Learning Circle, 2017). Traditional evaluation methods value statistics over stories and therefore "[a]nalysis is limited to examining a narrow range of specific effects" (Neysmith,

Bezanson, & O'Connell, 2005, p. 45) rather than attempting to capture the complexity of social problems. We see this very clearly in the Canadian context with how "Indigenous knowledge is often defined as… non-scientific, practical knowledge" (Altamirano-Jiménez & Kermoal, 2016, p. 5). In their edited collection, *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place,* Nathalie Kermoal and Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez present works from Indigenous scholars who highlight the erasure of their research methods and stories (particularly those of women) within Western epistemological frameworks. They share that "Indigenous knowledge draws on different sources such as stories, dreams, visions, practices, and experiences" (p. 8) and remind us of the destruction of this knowledge through "colonial policies in Canada" (Jobin, 2016, p. 39). Similar to what Presser and Sandberg (2015b) contend about offenders' stories being interpreted as manipulations, Kermoal (2016) writes that "while Indigenous peoples may be given the opportunity to speak, this does not mean that what they say will be valued, or even that it will be necessarily understood" (p. 113). By dismissing Indigenous storytelling, we dismiss experiences of abuse, hardship, and injustice and therefore contribute to the ongoing oppression (which includes mass incarceration) of Indigenous people across Canada through policies and programs that fail to address their *actual* needs and concerns.

Of course, stories are not *always* dismissed as anecdotal. As mentioned previously, politicians rely on stories to highlight (perceived) flaws in specific government policies and they frequently repeat these stories while on the campaign trail, at community town hall forums, in House of Commons debates, and in their conversations with media representatives to demonstrate the need for immediate change. Certain stories are taken up because they support specific political ideologies and platform agendas (e.g. about punishment), yet, in these moments, expectations of positivist norms of validity, reliability, and generalizability are routinely ignored. In the following section, we use two case studies to highlight and problematize this double standard.

Method

Case Study

> *Stories are good at making simple what is complicated. At the same time, some of the complexity is retained because stories by their very nature are ambiguous and open-ended.* (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016, p. 129)

In what follows, we discuss two recent socio-legal political debates, namely the federal government's efforts to make legislative changes to Canada's pardon system and its dogged refusal to inhibit or prohibit the use of carceral segregation, despite ongoing calls for its abolition from prison scholars, advocates, and prisoners. We take up these two issues as case studies to demonstrate how personal stories are simultaneously mobilized and rejected by political, governmental, and judicial actors as acceptable forms of knowledge upon which to base legislation and draft policy. These case studies also showcase how the law, as one of our preeminent and fundamental social institutions, accepts personal testimony as a significant and accepted form of evidence to be considered in juridical decision-making, which we suggest establishes the value of stories and case studies in creating evidence-based policy. As criminologists and sociology of punishment scholars, the law is an important site of investigation and as law and narrative scholars maintain, it is a site where "personal narratives at once provide evidence of a storyteller's viewpoint and experiences as well as the social and cultural milieu in which they live" (Bano & Pierce, 2013, p. 226). Accepting that stories can compel social action, we selected these two case studies because they show how stories can become the rallying point for both progressive and reactionary social change and that looking

at which stories reflect "dominant cultural trope[s]" can tell us something about the larger socio-political context and how institutions solicit, enable, and constrain different narratives (Bano & Pierce, 2013, pp. 230-231; Sandberg, 2016).

Data Selection and Collection

The first case study on criminal record suspension (pardons) shows how stories about individual criminal offenders are mobilized by political actors to pass more punitive criminal justice legislation that has no basis in research and is instead rooted in the political appeal to the emotional reactions of a fearful public (Johnson, 2009; Pratt, 2000; Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003). Politicians are deft storytellers and it is common for them to recount those they hear from individual citizens in emotional ways to advance and secure support for different aspects of their political agenda or platform. This can have troubling effects when the emotions that are stirred lead to support for reactionary "get tough" criminal justice reforms—described as penal populism—whose effectiveness in terms of providing greater public safety and preventing re-offence are unsupported by social scientific research; such was the case for the creation of mandatory minimum sentences and other policies that have led to mass incarceration (Johnson, 2009; Pratt, 2000; Roberts et al., 2003). Notably, the changes to Canada's pardon system were made after federal politicians repeatedly recounted the emotional stories of two high profile and sensational *outlier* criminal cases. Ultimately, the federal government passed legislation that will affect everyone in Canada with a criminal record, not just those convicted of similarly atypical crimes, by way of political argumentation that was based on faulty social scientific method, specifically the principle of generalizability[1] which requires data to be gleaned from a representative sample of the population in order to extrapolate findings to the whole group.

Stories, however, can also be mobilized toward more progressive ends, which the second case study on carceral segregation demonstrates. In this discussion, we show how stories are taken up in the context of juridical decision-making regarding the appeal to limit the use of isolation as a carceral practice due to the physical, social, and psychological harms it has been found to cause. Contrary to the way that the Government of Canada problematically mobilized two discrepant crime stories to change legislation in the first case study discussion, here we illustrate how the government's expert witnesses not only reject qualitative research that details the harms of carceral segregation for lacking social scientific rigour, notably validity, but also how they presuppose that qualitative research is inherently "simple," "common sense," subjective, and thus a substandard foundation upon which to base criminal justice policy. Citing the Honourable Mr. Justice Leask's Reasons for Judgment in *British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) v. Canada* (2018), we discuss the importance of law's acceptance of personal testimony as a credible form of evidence as support for our position that *stories matter*, especially when those individual stories have been told repeatedly, over time, and by a diverse selection of people—essentially creating a *layered* effect that increases the credibility, believability, and trustworthiness of the narrative produced by way of those personal stories.

Case One: Criminal Record Suspensions

Between 2010 and 2012, Canada's pardon system was eliminated and replaced with a new record suspension regime that has been described by many as unnecessarily punitive

[1] Qualitative researchers strive for *saturation* in their data to indicate that their sample is sufficient or representative (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

(McAleese, 2017a; McMurtry & Doob, 2015; Sullivan, 2014). We suggest that these changes to the *Criminal Records Act*[2] (CRA) were largely propelled by the then Conservative federal government by way of mobilizing two high profile and sensational criminal justice "event-stories," or "concrete stories about particular events" that were situated as causal and temporally related to particular narratives or narrative turning points (Sandberg, 2016, p. 155).

The first story was that of Graham James, a hockey coach who was convicted of several sexual offences involving junior hockey players and who was granted a pardon in 2007 (Cheadle & Bronskill, 2010). While James was never accused of committing any new offences after receiving his pardon, there were further allegations brought against him in 2010 in relation to sexual offences committed from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s. The news of these additional charges combined with the fact that James had been granted a pardon was described as "a slap in the face" by his victims (CTV.ca News Staff, 2010) and "set off an immediate political controversy" (Cosh, 2010, para. 8) about Canada's pardon system—with the Conservatives leading the charge for a complete overhaul of the process. The second story was that of Karla Homolka, a unique figure in Canadian law as she was convicted of two counts of manslaughter in 1992 for the role she played in a series of sexually motivated murders with her former husband Paul Bernardo. At the time, Homolka had not yet been granted a pardon but was quickly reaching her eligibility date to apply for one (Bryden, 2010). The possibility of Homolka receiving a pardon created a similar reaction to that of the James case, once again propelling the Conservative government to push for hasty reforms to the CRA.

These complex event-stories were intentionally diluted to the point of becoming tropes, which Sandberg (2016, p. 154) describes as the "modal manifestations of stories, their ambiguity a social resource and their taken-for-grantedness pivotal for understanding hegemonic discourse." These two stories were used to demonstrate the so-called "inherent faults" in Canada's pardon system[3] and were threaded into a wider fear-based narrative that drove the Conservative government's relentless punishment and get-tough-on-crime political agenda.

The changes to Canada's pardon system occurred in several stages over the course of two years, during which time the Conservative party held a majority federal government. After Public Safety Minister Vic Toews caught wind of James' pardon and the new allegations against the former hockey coach he took it upon himself to disparage the work of the National Parole Board[4] and to dismantle the pardon system. Toews wanted it known that "it's not the state's business to be in the forgiveness business" (as quoted in Ibbitson, 2010, para. 4) and used James' case to fear monger about the dangerousness of pardoned sex offenders living unsupervised in communities across Canada. When that was not enough to push changes through quickly, Toews began to reference Homolka, who would have been eligible to apply for a pardon before the end of the summer in 2010. While being eligible for a pardon does not mean that Homolka would have ever received one, an unlikely event given the nature of her crimes and the sensationalism surrounding her case (Kilty & Frigon, 2016), politicians did not acknowledge this point as it would have threatened the credibility of their narrative that the pardon process needed to change. The Homolka case garnered more media attention than any case in Canadian history and was an emotional lightning rod that was easily mobilized to secure both public and political support for more punitive criminal justice initiatives (Kilty & Frigon, 2016). The urgent cross-partisan desire to prevent Homolka from being granted a pardon

[2] The *Criminal Records Act* outlines the process and requirements for applying for a record suspension in Canada.
[3] Prior to the sensationalization of the James and Homolka cases, Canada's pardon system was widely recognized as an important element of an effective reintegration program (Ruddell & Winfree, 2006; Wallace-Capretta, 2000).
[4] Now the Parole Board of Canada.

allowed for Bill C23A, the *Limiting Pardons for Serious Crimes Act*, to receive Royal Assent on June 29, 2010.

After this victory, Toews continued to push for more changes to the CRA including increasing the pardon application fee. He emphasized repeatedly that "people aren't entitled to pardons" (as quoted in LeBlanc, 2011) and continued to use the stigmatizing term "criminal" to refer to people with criminal records who have lived crime-free in the community for years. In February 2012, the pardon application fee jumped from $150 to $631[5] and in March of the same year the pardon system was eliminated under Bill C-10 —the *Safe Streets and Communities Act*. The word *pardon* was replaced with the term *record suspension*, the wait times before eligibility were extended to upwards of ten years,[6] and certain individuals[7] (including people convicted of sexual offences) were excluded from the process altogether.

These changes to the CRA were a "needless reaction to the unique and sensationalized cases of Graham James and Karla Homolka by politicians and policy-makers" (McAleese, 2017a, p. 88). As opposed to the old pardon system which served to support long-term community integration, the new record suspension regime interferes with successful desistance by limiting the social and economic opportunities available to people with criminal records (Greenspan & Doob, 2012; Sullivan, 2014). We know this not only because of the abundance of academic literature on the collateral consequences of punishment and the stigmatizing effects of a criminal record (Hannem & Bruckert, 2012; Jacobs, 2014; Jones, 2015; Maruna, 2014; Pager, 2003; Ricciardelli & Peters, 2017; Thacher, 2008), but also because of the stories that began to surface almost immediately after the elimination of Canada's pardon program in March 2012.

In April of 2013, the *Criminalization and Punishment Education Project*[8] (CPEP) hosted a public forum at the University of Ottawa that brought together academics, practitioners, and people with criminal records to demonstrate the negative impact of the new record suspension regime. Dozens of stories were collected by CPEP members from people all over the country who wanted to share the hardship they were experiencing because of the more exclusive and punitive rules within the CRA. These stories[9] were presented at the forum so that those in attendance would have a better understanding of the collateral consequences of punishment experienced by people with criminal records across Canada. Difficulty finding employment was the predominant theme in these stories, but people also spoke to issues related to education, volunteering, finding safe housing, and mental health—notably in terms of experiencing depression and isolation because of the inability to move on from mistakes made in the past. These stories very clearly demonstrated the ongoing punishment endured by people with criminal records living in the community long after they served their formal sentences.

In addition to this public forum, stories have circulated in the media since the changes to the CRA came into effect. Not only do many individuals continue to speak publicly about

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[5] It is important to note that this change to the application fee went forward despite a public consultation report that revealed that only 12 out of 1,086 respondents were in favour of the increase (Parole Board of Canada, 2011).

[6] Under the pardon program, wait times before eligibility were three years for those convicted of summary offences and five years for those convicted of indictable offences. Now, under the record suspension system, the wait times before eligibility are five years for those convicted of summary offences and ten years for those convicted of indictable offences.

[7] Individuals with four or more indictable offences on their criminal record are also prohibited from applying for a record suspension.

[8] The Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP) brings students and professors from the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, along with community members together to identify key issues to be the focus of criminological inquiry, develop collaborative research projects, as well as plan and carry-out related public education initiatives.

[9] Ten stories were presented at the public forum on April 5, 2013 with permission from those who submitted them via e-mail.

their inability to find work (Cheadle, 2013), but their stories also highlight other reintegration issues that have emerged as a result of the new CRA, such as difficulty finding housing, traveling, and volunteering in their community (Ireland, 2016). Stories about criminal record suspension as they are presented in the media also demonstrate the injustice inherent in the new regime and speak to the barrier that the $631 application fee poses to potential applicants who are living in poverty and therefore cannot afford to have their criminal record sealed (Bronskill, 2017; Crawford, 2016b). Finally, several opinion editorials have circulated over the past six years essentially pleading with politicians and policymakers to reverse the changes made to the CRA and to recognize the value of the previous pardon program which should never have been altered in reaction to the two sensationalized stories of Graham James and Karla Homolka (Israel & Mainville, 2018; McAleese, 2017b, 2018; "Ottawa should fix perversely punitive pardon policy," 2017).

Stories about the punitive and exclusionary record suspension regime have appeared in other spaces including two constitutional challenges. Courts in Ontario and British Columbia have ruled that the changes made to the *Criminal Records Act* are unconstitutional[10] based on stories, reports, and testimonials from criminologists, practitioners, and people with criminal records. In her decision on the matter, B.C. Supreme Court Justice Heather McNaughton stated that a criminal record is itself a form of punishment in that "[it] encompasses all of the traditional attributes of punishment: deprivation of liberty; penalty or unpleasant consequence; and stigmatization or public condemnation" (as quoted in Crawford, 2017). Ontario Superior Court Justice Robyn Ryan Bell agreed with these reflections and also struck down the changes to the CRA as unconstitutional based on stories of hardship from people with criminal records (Seymour, 2017). While Justice McNaughton cites expert reports submitted by several criminologists in her decision (*Chu v. Canada*, 2017), she also highlights an affidavit that was categorized as anecdotal evidence:

> Mr. Chu also filed an affidavit from Samantha McAleese… For six years, Ms. McAleese worked with ex-offenders in the community… In Ms. McAleese's work with ex-offenders, she has observed that people with criminal records face significant obstacles and hardships in the community. Many do not have gainful employment and are trapped on income assistance programs or in low-wage, insecure, and irregular employment. Generally, her clients were limited to part-time contract jobs, often in construction. Record suspensions can alleviate some of these hardships. (p. 57)

The inclusion of stories as evidence in a legal decision of this magnitude provides hope about the value of stories that provide a counter-narrative to the "tough-on-crime" rhetoric present in political discussions about punishment and criminalization; unfortunately, this acceptance of stories has not translated into policy changes under Canada's current Liberal federal government.

In January 2016, Liberal Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale made a promise to reform the CRA and, at the very least, reverse the changes made to it by the previous Conservative government (Crawford, 2016a). The government followed up on this statement by engaging in an extensive public consultation process and publishing two reports (Parole Board of Canada, 2016; Public Safety Canada, 2017) that demonstrate a lack of support for the

[10] Due to these successful constitutional challenges, people with criminal records in Ontario and British Columbia who were convicted prior to the changes in both 2010 and 2012 are eligible to apply under the previous pardon system. More information about this can be retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/parole-board/services/record-suspensions/information-for-bc-and-ontario-residents-applying-for-a-record-suspension.html

current record suspension regime and plenty of evidence of hardship in the form of stories from people with criminal records and practitioners who work to support them in the community. Despite this collection of stories, the Liberal government has yet to act on their promise to reform the CRA and claim that they are taking their time to ensure that all decisions are "evidence-based" (Public Safety Canada, 2018). The dismissal of stories as evidence is frustrating for those whose lives are on hold because of the record suspension regime, especially when you combine these stories with government research that demonstrates the success of the previous pardon program (Wallace-Capretta, 2000) and even more so when you consider that it only took two sensational outlier or discrepant stories to eliminate the pardon system in the first place. This case study demonstrates how stories are taken up and/or rejected for different and potentially conflicting purposes; the next case study builds on this point, demonstrating that the government recruited positivist scholars to dismiss the value of qualitative research, especially that which is expressly critical of existing criminal justice practices, on the grounds that it is qualitative rather than statistically significant.

Case Two: Abolition of Carceral Segregation

The practice of isolating prisoners in solitary confinement, known in Canada as segregation, has long been both practiced and critiqued. Segregation is used as a policy response and practice by correctional staff to those actions and behaviours that they interpret as threatening the security of the institution and the safety of staff and prisoners. While the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), the government agency responsible for overseeing federal corrections,[11] claims to use two different types of segregation there is no qualitative difference between the two. Disciplinary segregation isolates individuals as a form of punishment, typically for committing or threatening acts of violence against staff or other prisoners and for more serious forms of institutional rule breaking and destruction of property. Administrative segregation isolates the prisoner "for their own protection"—either because they requested a time-out from the general population or to facilitate direct monitoring of those who are thought to be suicidal or who are in emotional or psychological distress. Despite the difference in status, the conditions of confinement are the same in the two forms of segregation: the cells are equipped with closed circuit television camera surveillance 24 hours a day; prisoners are confined to their cells for 23 hours a day, with only one hour to shower and walk alone inside a small caged yard; there is no access to programming, no contact with other prisoners and limited contact with staff, which only occurs when guards slide meals through the thin meal slot in the cell door or when a nurse or the warden checks on them once a day by way of a conversation that is carried out through the meal slot. These conversations "are not likely to be lengthy and could be as brief as a minute or two" (*BCCLA v. Canada*, 2018, p. 38). Despite these exceptionally restrictive conditions, the CSC maintains that administrative segregation is non-punitive, although it is well documented that prisoners interpret admission to administration segregation as a form of punishment (*BCCLA v. Canada*, 2018; Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013, 2015).

In fact, despite decades of academic research (Guenther, 2013; Haney, 2003, 2008; Kilty, 2014; Liebling, Durie, Stiles, & Tait, 2005; Martel, 2000, 2006; Shalev, 2009) and government reports (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013, 2015; Sapers, 2008) detailing the inhumane conditions of confinement that those housed in segregation are subject to, the federal government refused to revise its position on segregation. Nor did they respond favourably to making changes following the ground-breaking coroner's inquest into Ashley

[11] Individuals sentenced to a federal term of incarceration serve two years or more, while those serving sentences for less serious offences are held in provincially run institutions for up to two years less a day.

Smith's preventable 2007 carceral death[12], which made 104 recommendations[13] for correctional policy and practice reform including the abolition of indefinite segregation and prohibiting the use of segregation for self-injuring and mentally and/or emotionally distressed prisoners. It is noteworthy that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture[14] and Amnesty International made similar recommendations to end the use of solitary confinement in 2011. The federal government's failure to abandon a practice that is known to create exceptional levels of mental and emotional distress led the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association and the John Howard Society of Canada to file a joint lawsuit[15] against the Attorney General of Canada to challenge the use of administrative segregation in Canadian prisons in January 2015. One week later, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies[16] filed a similar petition in Ontario Superior Court.

In December 2017, Associate Chief Justice Frank Marrocco of the Ontario Superior Court struck down Canada's laws on segregation as unconstitutional, citing the lack of independent review and the known psychological harms that are caused by isolation. While the CCLA applauded the decision as a step in the right direction, they have since launched an appeal demanding that the government create a hard-cap on the use of segregation for periods of time beyond 15 days and to outright prohibit its use for certain vulnerable groups (e.g. those who are mentally distressed, young people, and those seeking safety). In January 2018, just one month after the Ontario decision, the British Columbia Supreme Court found that segregation laws violate sections 7 and 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in that they permit prolonged indefinite isolation, fail to provide an independent review of segregation placements, deprive prisoners of the right to counsel at segregation review hearings, authorize administrative segregation for the mentally distressed, and because this carceral regime fundamentally discriminates against Indigenous prisoners who are vastly over-represented in this extreme form of holding[17].

In his Reasons for Judgment in *British Columbia Civil Liberties Association v. Canada* (2018), the Honourable Mr. Justice Leask outlines a series of key points that speak not only to the damaging impact of carceral segregation on those who are subject to such isolation, but also to the importance and value of personal stories in coming to understand that impact as it is lived and experienced by incarcerated men and women. As in any court case, Justice Leask positioned witness testimonies (whether from academic experts, correctional staff or prisoners) as "evidence" that he used in his reasoning to make a decision in the case. Noting that the expert witnesses for the plaintiffs and the government not only held fundamentally opposed

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[12] Ashley Smith was sentenced to a one-month custodial sentence as a juvenile for the index offence of throwing crab apples at a postal worker. She incurred so many institutional charges, many for self-injurious behaviour, that she served three years in juvenile custody before being transferred to the adult federal system following her 18th birthday. Eleven and a half months later, she died in a segregation cell from asphyxiation from a self-tied ligature while correctional staff watched from the hall, having been illegally instructed by correctional administrators not to intervene until she fell unconscious.

[13] These recommendations can be retrieved from: http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/publications/005007-9009-eng.shtml

[14] Juan Méndez, *Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. United Nations General Assembly, 66th Session, UN Doc A/66/268, 2011.

[15] The Statement of Claim for this lawsuit can be retrieved from: https://bccla.org/our_work/bccla-and-jhsc-v-ag-of-canada-challenging-solitary-confinement/

[16] The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies later withdrew their involvement from this petition.

[17] Between 2010-2015 women's admission to segregation increased by 15.8%, uses of force increased by 53.5%, and self-injurious incidents increased by 4.6%. These figures are even more dire for Indigenous women, who now make up 35.5% of women in federal custody, are more likely to be classified as maximum security, and who made up almost half of all admissions to segregation in 2014-15. Over the last ten years, use of force incidents against Indigenous women more than tripled and their rates of self-injury are 17 times higher than for non-Indigenous women (OCI, 2015).

views on whether segregation is harmful to prisoners, Justice Leask also noted "they disagree about the proper scientific method for determining the answer to that question" (*BCCLA v. Canada*, 2018, p. 67). In response to this disagreement, Justice Leask cites at length one of the expert witnesses for the government, Dr. Paul Gendreau, who in his testimony clearly articulated his disdain for the value of qualitative research:

> For the greater part of the 20th century sources of knowledge in psychological research took two forms…. First, there was evidence based on qualitative sources which was rooted in testimonials, anecdotes, intuition and case histories. The integration of evidence was 'simple,' typified by 'what everybody knows' declarations, exceptions prove the rule, and 'what experience has taught me' and "a single case tells me all I need to know about a phenomenon." Kimble (1994) refers to this form of reasoning as common sense…. Meta-analysis was a true paradigm shift in how psychology and related disciplines (i.e., medicine) took stock of scientific findings…. It achieved the goal of the replication of findings which is a hallmark of the 'hard' sciences such as chemistry and physics. Meta-analysis achieves replication by statistically summarizing and averaging the results from a group of single quantitative studies. It provides a precise numerical estimate of the effectiveness of a treatment effect and identifies moderators statistically that can either enhance or diminish those effects. Understandably, it took time to implement these changes as new training and mindset was required in moving forward; meta-analysis is now the gold standard for reviewing literature in criminology, psychology and medicine. (*BCCLA v. Canada*, 2018, pp. 67-68)

Mr. Justice Leask ultimately found that the meta-analytic method as it was carried out in the two studies mobilized by the two expert witnesses for the government, Dr. Gendreau and Dr. Mills, was, as Dr. Craig Haney, one of the expert witnesses for the plaintiffs, stated, a "methodological disaster" (2008, p. 73) that failed to include 93% of the identified publications on solitary confinement and "all of the articles written by the leading voices for reform" (p. 69). Despite Dr. Gendreau's claims that meta-analysis is the gold-standard for reviewing literature, this positivist and quantitative method can just as easily lead to "simple" results when a single or a few studies are used to say everything you "need to know about a phenomenon." In this example, qualitative peer reviewed research was excluded from the two meta-analyses submitted as evidence by the government *because* it was qualitative. This outright dismissal of the value of qualitative findings illustrates the government's position that only positivist work can be used to create evidence-based policy. That the Superior courts in two different provinces accepted the "testimonials, anecdotes, and case histories" provided by expert witnesses and individual prisoners not only illustrates the importance of personal experiential stories and what they contribute to our knowledge about and interpretation of the material conditions of confinement, but also the fact that law, one of our foremost social institutions, appreciates and accepts the significance of this method of collecting and conveying information.

Stories Matter

> *The use of people's experiences for understanding social phenomena and for developing alternative explanations of why and how practices take the form they do has a long history. There has been a resurgence in the use of qualitative methods in the social sciences as the limitations of positivist research paradigms and existent forms of quantitative data analysis for understanding social phenomena became increasingly evident.* (Neysmith et al., 2005, p. 15)

The two case studies outlined above demonstrate the power that stories have when it comes to reforming the criminal justice system. Whether these reforms cause more harm to individuals within the criminal justice system depends on which stories are taken up by politicians, government researchers, policymakers, and other key decision makers—like judges—and which stories are dismissed as *just anecdotal*. The mobilization of some stories and the rejection of others is an effective strategy to gain political support by intensifying emotions that increase the demand for immediate change. What we problematize in this paper is not the *use* of stories, cases, or narratives (qualitative research) in evaluation and decision-making processes, but rather the *types* of stories, cases, or narratives (random and discrepant) that are prioritized and dismissed by key figures and the types of research methods that are valued and rejected by positivist research experts working for the government. For example, in the case of the reforms made to the *Criminal Records Act* the government pushed through the changes based on two high-profile, sensational cases of violence and sexual harm and then proceeded to ignore the scientific evidence and personal testimony (narrative) about the benefit of pardons to people with criminal records and to society as a whole. The policy reforms that stemmed from these two outlier cases affected *all* Canadians who have a criminal record, when much more reasonable changes could have been made to address *only* specific high-risk scenarios. Not all stories are evidence of a widespread problem, but, as was clearly shown in this case, all stories can have an impact if they are mobilized in the right way by the right people.

In both cases, we see the role the judiciary plays in acknowledging stories as more than *just anecdotal* evidence, especially in the second case on carceral segregation. The judge in this instance did not dismiss individual testimony because it was anecdotal, instead considering it key to understanding how segregation comes to impact the minds and bodies of incarcerated people—something the flawed meta-analytic studies cannot do with aggregated datasets and statistical analyses. Reaffirming the value of qualitative research does not mean dismissing quantitative research, but rather highlighting that stories are an important, valid, and reliable method for recording personal experiences and contextualizing, grounding and making sense of findings generated from quantitative research. More than an important research tool, criminal justice stories in particular help identify the value of and bolster support for restorative and transformative justice efforts as they remind us to be empathetic. Even the stories of Graham James and Karla Homolka do this, as they highlight that our current criminal justice system does not do enough to repair the harm done to individuals, families, and communities through violent acts; the irony here is that the punitive legislative reforms that were made in reaction to these outlier cases not only fail to foster empathy or work to repair harm, but they actually perpetuate further harm by making it more difficult for all criminalized people to secure a record suspension.

The key here is the importance of story *complexity*—namely, to avoid reducing stories to tropes and taking up stories without a better understanding of the broader context within which they are situated. The criminal justice system is a complex one that demands the use of rigorous research methods to study it (Dandurand, 2018). While we maintain that qualitative research is necessary to draw out these complexities in such a way that they provide both

credible and relatable information, it is also important to problematize the inappropriate ways in which stories are used. We suggest that when sensational and atypical stories are used to shore up a penal populist agenda (Roberts et al., 2004), it discursively conflates partisan politics with the rigorous collection and analysis of stories and thus harms the reputation and perceived value of qualitative research.

Layering Stories and Reaffirming the Value of Qualitative Research

While qualitative research is often described as lacking rigour due to the small number of cases reviewed or interviews conducted, we propose that the concept of *layering* can be used to counter these claims. If we *layer* various stories over a significant amount of time, and perhaps across diverse groups of people, and we are able to see the same themes repeated time and again, we suggest that this illustrates the continuity, strength, and authenticity (Fabian, 2014) of the overall narrative. We see this in the case of carceral segregation through decades of qualitative research (across Canada and internationally) that details the harmful impacts of isolation on the mental and physical health of incarcerated people (*BCCLA v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2018; Guenther, 2013; Haney, 2003, 2008; Kilty, 2014; Liebling et al., 2005; Martel, 2000, 2006; OCI, 2013, 2015; Sapers, 2008; Shalev, 2009). We also see this in the case of criminal record suspension through extensive qualitative research on the collateral consequences of punishment that details the hardships experienced by people with criminal records as they are trying to integrate and meaningfully participate in their community (Hannem & Bruckert, 2012; Jacobs, 2014; Jones, 2015; Maruna, 2014; Pager, 2003; Ricciardelli & Peters, 2017; Thacher, 2008). Although each individual research project might contain a small number of cases, taken together the stories generated through these projects repeatedly highlight the same key points and "through" narrative (Crépault & Kilty, 2017) about the harmful impacts of isolation in prison or stigma in the community and therefore contribute to a more complex and credible understanding of the problem.

We use the term layering, inspired by and which we adapted from Butler's (1988) use of the term "sedimentation[18]," to consider what statements or stories survive and which disappear over time. Layering is similar to the *replication* that quantitative researchers aim for in their work, only instead of validating the research tool qualitative researchers are looking to validate the narrative. By layering stories from different people in different contexts over time, qualitative researchers can solidify a particular narrative, which may then be considered a more valid and reliable one. Layering does not necessarily take into account the differences between groups, but instead enables the qualitative researcher to showcase the similarities across narratives pertaining to the same issue or problem. The potential erasure of difference is an important point to acknowledge, given the dominance of Eurocentric worldviews that have historically and continue to marginalize Indigenous and other discounted ways of knowing (Altamirano-Jiménez & Kermoal, 2016; Kermoal, 2016) and the longstanding Black feminist critique that mainstream feminism is modelled after a white middle class experience that fails to consider how race intersects with gender, class and other factors to produce difference (Kilty et al., 2014).

We maintain that qualitative researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that historically marginalized voices are not erased or sidelined when layering stories and thus they

[18] Butler, drawing on Foucault, uses the term sedimentation to problematize the received view of male/female sex/gender binaries. Rather than locating gender as an inherent essence tied to biological sex, Butler proposes that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence, or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic" (1988, p. 523).

must actively work to both highlight similarities across stories emerging from different groups over time, while also recognizing difference and the unique perspectives brought forward by different groups through their individual stories. For example, while research demonstrates that women disproportionately engage in self-injurious behaviour while isolated, which may therefore be interpreted as a gendered finding, research with both men and women reveal similar (layered) stories about the forms of emotional pain and suffering that develop and emerge from time spent in solitary confinement (*BCCLA v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2018; Guenther, 2013; Haney, 2003, 2008; Kilty, 2014; Liebling et al., 2005; Martel, 2000, 2006; OCI, 2013, 2015; Sapers, 2008; Shalev, 2009). Once again, we are not suggesting that qualitative research findings derived from a small sample size are not credible, believable, or trustworthy in their own right, but rather that layering presents an additional tool in the qualitative method arsenal with which to disabuse critics of the notion that those findings are *just anecdotal*.

In her research that explores women's work experiences across five Canadian east coast communities, Kosny (2003) used focus groups as a way to *layer* the experiences and narratives of her research participants. Rather than conducting a series of one-on-one interviews, which she argues can contribute to feelings of isolation amongst participants, Kosny facilitated focus groups "to collect information from participants without displacing them from their social context" (p.540). Although "there seems to be a dark cloud hanging over focus groups" (ibid) due to a perceived lack of objectivity and standards (again, typical criticisms received by qualitative researchers), Kosny asserts that focus groups actually allow participants to "collectivize their experiences" (2003, p. 539) and therefore validate the narratives produced through this collaborative and interactive research method.

Specific to the discipline of criminology, an excellent example of the power of layering stories as evidence of the strength of the overall narrative is *The Journal for Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)* —a "peer reviewed, non-profit journal, based on the tradition of the penal press" (JPP, n.d.). This journal[19] is a repository of stories (dating back to 1988) from prisoners, former prisoners, and critical criminologists who, through their narratives, highlight the harms of incarceration and aim to contribute to public education and criminal and social justice reform efforts. When the individual entries and issues of the JPP are taken together you begin to see similar narratives about different aspects of prison life (i.e., prison education, segregation, and specifically gendered and racialized experiences) appear repeatedly over time and across different penal jurisdictions, demonstrating that each submission is not *just anecdotal* but rather an indication of a much larger and significant trend in the carceral experience.

Qualitative researchers often ask us to follow our intuition and leave room for flexibility and spontaneity in our work (Flick, 2007; Manzo & Brightbill, 2007). This "multi-faceted, messy, and non-linear" approach to research might cause some uneasiness for those accustomed to traditional positivist methods (DeSantis, 2014, p. 55), but taking such methodological risks "evokes in us the notion of the capacity to think critically, reflexively and innovatively about the social world" (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p. 2), which encourages qualitative researchers to ask more complex questions about social problems (Maruna, 2015; Presser & Sandberg, 2015a). Qualitative methods such as autoethnography (Jewkes, 2011), memoir (Cvetkovich, 2012), and other critical, feminist and participatory methods (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006; Klodawsky, Siltanen, & Andrew, 2017; Tilley, 2016) allow for people with lived experiences of criminalization and punishment, and their allies, to share stories and "give voice" to those who are often marginalized (Kilty et al., 2014; Sandberg, 2016). By considering the strength, credibility, believability, and trustworthiness of a layered story (Lincoln & Guba, 2003) and the "through" narratives (Crépault & Kilty, 2017) or "grand

[19] More information about *The Journal for Prisoners on Prisons* can be retrieved from www.jpp.org

conceptions" (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 149) that they develop, and paying attention to the trends and themes that emerge from qualitative research over time, we not only demonstrate the need for qualitative methods, we are able to reaffirm the value of stories. It is our hope that this approach will help us to avoid any future "methodological disasters" that might inflict more harm against criminalized persons and others affected by punitive criminal justice policies and practices.

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