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Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: An Action-Oriented Inquiry with Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: An Action-Oriented Inquiry with Children of Incarcerated Parents

by

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Abstract

Most people rarely think about children of incarcerated parents (COIPs) and when they do, these children are usually dismissed as not worth the effort. However, in Canada there are likely more than 400,000 children affected by parental incarceration. This became apparent to me when I was working with women recently out of prison, most of them mothers, who mentioned the hardest part of their experience was being separated from their children and the lack of support. There is a body of predominantly quantitative research that tells a bleak story of how COIPs are destined to have trouble in school, misuse substances, be gang involved, have contact with the justice system, and likely be incarcerated themselves. I was curious about a different, and less problem-saturated, life story that COIPs might tell. In this research I invited seven adult COIPs to share their experiences in a collaborative relationship that would privilege strength and resilience with the hope that we could turn toward some type of advocacy through action-oriented practices. Informed by Collaborative Therapy and Allan Wade's Response-Based Practice, and the ethical guideposts of Vikki Reynolds, I joined participants in creating safe spaces for their stories to emerge. The research design unfolded in three stages. *Stage I* included two individual interviews and a focus group: Seven participants engaged in at least one interview, five completed a second interview, and four joined together for the focus group. The four participants who agreed to join the focus group chose to engage in discussion around ways to engage in advocacy for COIPs. Consequently, *Stage II* consisted of 10 group meetings that culminated in the planning and filming for a documentary. *Stage III* became the editing processes with the eventual release of the documentary *Bonds that Hurt; Bonds that Heal* to the public. This is the story of our journey.

Acknowledgements

As the saying goes, it takes a village … and this is part of my village. My gratitude begins with the people who had the courage to share their stories with me and then allow their stories to be shared with others. Throughout this journey I have been supported, encouraged, and shouldered up by the participants who walked alongside me throughout this process.

I would also like to express heartfelt thanks for the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Tom Strong; sometimes he pushed, sometimes he pulled, and without him I would not have been equal to the task. I am grateful to my supervision committee Dr. Christine Walsh and Dr. Kathleen Sitter, for their sensitivity, encouragement, and knowing the right words at the right time.

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I am grateful to my partner Josef, for sustenance and holding me when I felt I could no longer hold on. I am grateful to my parents and siblings: Dad, I know you are here beside me, and Mom, you are incredibly generous with your prayers, and your relentless belief in me. I am grateful for my children and grandchildren who taught me to trust that no matter how messy, all is well. I am grateful for my dear and patient friends who look forward to a visit without my complaints about all the things I should be doing instead of being fully with them.

I would like to thank PolicyWise for their generosity and support; without it we would not have been able to make our documentary. On that note, without the enthusiasm, generosity, and talents of Les Bairstow (videographer), our documentary would have remained a dream.

Dedication

For Anna, who let me carry her story forward

and

For Kiara, whose story continues in this work.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Dear Ann Landers,

I am a girl who is 12 years old who is left out of all social activities because my father is an ex-convict. I try to be nice and friendly to everyone but it's no use. The girls at school have told me that their mothers don't want them to associate with me because it will be bad for their reputations. My father had some bad publicity in the papers and even though he served his time nobody will forget it. Is there anything I can do? I am very lonesome because it's no fun to be alone all the time. My mother tries to take me places with her but I want to be with people my own age please give me some advice.

Signed: An Outcast

The above letter came from the April 12th, 1961 edition of the Berkeley Daily Gazette and was included in the seminal work of Erving Goffman: "*Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity"* (1963, p. 43). The decades old plea of a young girl for advice would likely be the same today as I will indicate in the pages of this dissertation and that readers can later watch in the documentary from this collaborative inquiry. What you are about to read and witness is, at first blush, an academic exercise to be understandably scrutinized and vetted as worthy of a doctoral degree. However, it is also a story of people doing something extraordinary together. And now, by reading this and engaging with what we did, you have been invited into becoming part of the story. All narrated stories must, for practical purposes, begin and end. However, this lends to the illusion that they start and stop with the telling, so be aware that this story started long before the first words here, and will continue long after the last word at the end. And every time this story is shared in one form or another, it will change, grow, gather power, and be amplified (Frank, 2010).

The Backstory

In Canada, children of incarcerated people are a statistically unacknowledged, and largely invisible group to policy makers, governmental agencies, and social support workers (Bayes, 2008, Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). When they are acknowledged, they are most likely considered

in relation to their parents' social transgression, and ultimately stigmatized (or guilty) by association (Goffman, 1963). In order to manage the consequences of a damaged identity (Lindemann Nelson, 2001), the stories of children or adults affected by parental incarceration are largely hidden. From a research perspective, exploring the experience of parental incarceration in Canada is rare; both quantitatively and qualitatively. Consequently, stories shared by children of incarcerated parents (COIPs) could add a great deal to the developing understanding of this difficult experience. Adults who navigated the challenges of parental incarceration as children have rarely been invited to share their story in the context of research. It was my privilege to extend the invitation, work alongside them, and then pass the story along. As such, the work that is documented here was in the service of addressing the following research question:

> How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration lead to action that challenges stigma, engages mental health care professionals, and mobilizes supportive others?

This inquiry was based on the premise that adults sharing stories about their childhood experiences of parental incarceration would, in some way, benefit children who are presently experiencing parental incarceration. By informing researchers, mental health-care workers, and the general community, COIPs could be acknowledged and better served. I believe engaging with these stories was best accomplished from the standpoint of narrative, collaborative, action-oriented research (AOR) practices that acknowledge the expertise of lived experience as participants and researcher work side by side to bring this particular story of the work to light.

Positioning Me

In addition to being a mother, grandmother, sister, daughter, aunt, and partner, I am a Counselling Psychologist in training who believes that the most important element of being

human is the relationships we negotiate together. The most powerful lessons about being a good therapist (and person) are those I have learned in relationships; both personal and professional. I also connect with the idea that practicing counselling psychology, while being historically grounded in social justice practice (Ivey & Collins, 2003), is a political act that makes space for challenging meta-narratives of oppression.

The thread I bring to this story begins with my relationship with a little girl who I will call Anna. When Anna was eight years old, she came to live with my family because her mother, struggling with addiction, could not take care of herself and her child. Anna spent almost two years with my family and, just when it seemed she would stay indefinitely, her mother made a partial recovery and asked that Anna come back to live with her. That was many years ago and I lost touch with Anna, although through family connections I kept track of her life. She grew up, had a child of her own, and then herself became entangled in addiction. Anna ended up in prison on some serious charges and spent a number of years there, attempting to recover, but still losing the custody of her child. I had the opportunity to talk with Anna at her grandfather's funeral and the once confident, precocious, extremely intelligent girl I remembered was in stark contrast to the nervous, shy, methadone dependent woman I encountered who was trying to get her life back on track. Her re-entry into the community was precarious at best, non-existent at worst, as she hid in her apartment, afraid to go out into the world. Her story struck a chord in me that went deeper than momentary acknowledgement of a hard story. My response became a call to action.

I have long been an advocate for marginalized women and our conversation inspired me to dedicate my Master's research to learning and working collaboratively with women coming from prison. The journey taken alongside those women is worth savouring for a moment here. In the spirit of action-oriented research, the ratio between time spent developing the relationship

and our *research products* could be considered disproportionate; our group spent five weeks collecting and working with the data (e.g., photographs and stories) and yet I spent eighteen months attending weekly meetings and supporting the women in endeavours that had nothing to do with my research. A few of those relationships continue today and we still find opportunities to share the results of our work with the larger community. The threads of the story from that experience have been woven into my doctoral work, on which I will elaborate in the next section.

Positioning the Research

It is this notion of collaboration and common purpose that is at the heart of a family of practices broadly termed *action research* (AR; Greenwood & Levin, 2010; Tripp, 1990). Researchers who work from an AOR perspective join participants in a collaborative relationship intend to affect some measure of social change (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2010). Connecting the aspiration of change to the processes of this dissertation, by working on a research inquiry together, we can hope to mobilize change through a participatory process that includes action and reflection. AOR brings together "action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people [in community]" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1). I oriented to, invited, and joined this collaborative inquiry bringing with me the theoretical lenses of social constructionism (SC) and relational constructionism (RC) (Hosking 2011). I found the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) valuable in that I discuss the research relationship processes and stories shared as responsive and dialogical in nature. I also found the metaphor of the rhizome (discussed below), associated with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), helpful to demonstrate how these relationships unpredictably instigated both continuity and change in motion. My dissertation research, focused on dialogical processes that led to action yielding a

documentary, is meant to bring attention to and/or implement change in the ways counsellors and other service providers support children of incarcerated parents (COIPs). Particularly in Canada, scholarship on COIPs is in its infancy (Bayes, 2008); therefore, bringing together individuals with this experience was meant to further social understanding and possibly instigate much needed action.

Concepts and Terms

As a way to honour the AOR principle of transparency (Milofsky, 2000), and decrease some ambiguity, I will address some key concepts that are used throughout this document. I acknowledge that these concepts reflect my situated understandings, and they were influences as participants and I negotiated shared meaning and planned action in addressing the animating research question.

Relationship. For the purposes of this inquiry, the term relationship encompasses a dynamic process as conceptualized through the theoretical lenses of social and relational constructionism, (Gergen, 2009; Hosking, 2011; Shotter, 2016), dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1986), and collaboration (Anderson, 2012). This approach accounted for relational stability and change, acknowledgement of power structures, and was grounded in dialogical processes from which our relationships were constructed (Hosking, 2011). My attention to collaborative and feminist practices, and concerns with power, informed the way I approach all research relationships. In the spirit of AOR and a participatory ontology, I consider that relationships are locally and historically situated (Hosking, 2011); meaning that enacted relationships are particular to joint understandings and the contexts in which participants (including me) come together. I proceeded from the premise that it is essential for people involved in participatory

research to be connected through relational knowledge and seek to embody its characteristics such as caring, sharing, togetherness, and commitment (Park, 2010).

Stories: The language of relationships. When invited to talk about life experiences, it is understood by many that this sharing takes the form of stories. Gregory Bateson (1979), often considered one of the most important social scientists of the 20th century (Capra, 1989), contended that the essence of the living world, or what he called Creatura (a Jungian term), could be found in the connective tissue of relationships. Indeed, Bateson suggested, "stories are the royal road to the study of relationships," (as cited in Capra, 1989, p. 78). In this context, stories were understood as dynamic in nature, and changing with each telling. According to Frank (2010) "people have to tell stories about lives that are always in progress … [t]hose stories then become one of the bases around which collectives assemble, from couples to social movements" (p. 15). The stories shared here helped to assemble us as co-collaborators in that we engaged in a project of reflective narration and from that, the reflective collaboration led to the planning and development of our documentary where the stories of parental incarceration were bravely shared.

Stigma. How stories of stigma affect the lives of COIPs is a significant focus of this dissertation. Erving Goffman (1963) provides a lens through which stigma and resistance to stigma is explored. Those who are touched by the criminal justice system in any way, directly or by association, are *marked* (Goffman, 1963; Hannem, 2012). From this perspective, COIPs are *marked* people with hidden stigmatic attributes that need to be managed. They may include moral and/or character deficits assumed to be passed on by their parents (Goffman, 1963). Managing spoiled identities can become the life work of the child of an incarcerated parent and leave little room for developing an identity that includes strength and resilience.

Strength and resilience. When inviting participants to share stories, I drew attention to instances of strength that may not have been previously acknowledged. I understand that the questions I asked focused narrative attention in a particular direction (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Consequently, I framed questions to invite a strength-based dimension of experience. In order to be sensitive to possible histories of trauma, I drew from the recommendations for Response-Based Practice developed by Allan Wade (1997). From this perspective, people who have experienced trauma or oppression have responded in some way demonstrating active forms of responsiveness and resistance. Moreover, resilience as a correlate of strength and response, will be part of this discussion. In this doctoral research I also aligned with the resilience model developed by Stringer et al. (2018) that proposes *compassion, self-compassion,* and *competency* are components of resilience.

Introducing My Philosophical Lenses

In this section I introduce the philosophical traditions from which I chose to approach the research process, relational interactions, the data, and the resulting documentary. As I have mentioned above, in addition to social constructionism (SC) and relational constructionism (RC), I found the philosophical ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gilles Deleuze to be rich theoretical sources of support. Here I briefly describe the concepts that invoked the essence of this inquiry.

Social and Relational Constructionism. This inquiry was grounded in the understanding that co-constructing the participatory relationship is considered elemental to an AOR process and fundamental to a functioning community (Gergen, 2009). From a constructionist perspective, reality is socially created rather than discovered (Gergen, 2015a; Shotter, 2016). Where SC examines the nature of socially created reality, there is often scarce attention to the power dynamics in the relation processes. Consequently, extending SC to include

RC (Hosking, 2011) helped me to accommodate and privilege the feminist ideals that are both explicit and implicit in AOR (Maguire, 2001).

Mikhail Bakhtin and Gilles Deleuze. In addition to the terms mentioned previously, I have found the concepts of *polyphony* and *heteroglossia,* from the dialogical philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin helped me to conceptualize the stories as responses to distal (cultural) and proximal (local) narratives. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) helped me to view the stories of participants as always in motion or *becoming* and *unfinalizable*. The metaphor of the *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) alludes to the organic nature of the processes and products of this doctoral work in that they are unique, yet related to the past efforts of others. The following few paragraphs give a brief description of each of these terms and how they relate to the stories shared in this inquiry.

Dialogue. I will incorporate an understanding of dialogue proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist at the forefront of the linguistic turn of inquiry (Lock & Strong, 2010). The foundation of Bakhtin's philosophy is premised on the concept of dialogism (Holquist, 2003), which posits that the interrelational space is the site of action and creativity. His propositions provide a useful framework for the developing story that was dialogically performed. The exploration of how our group navigated and negotiated the uncharted territory of this new relationship will be informed by Bakhtin's notions of unfinalizability, polyphony and heteroglossia. The following gives a brief description of these concepts.

Polyphony and heteroglossia. Polyphony and heteroglossia are related terms that refer to the notion that all utterances arise from multiple influences (or voices) having both individual and cultural significance. From a Bakhtinian (1981) perspective, no story belongs fully to the storyteller and is influenced by, and a response to both proximal and distal influences. This is

echoed in narrative theory (McConnell, 2016), where stories are affected by others' stories as well as a contextually cultural story. What this means is that I understand that each participants' story is drawn from stories of those in their past, the listeners in the relational space, and the cultural discourses that inform the way COIPS are perceived.

Unfinalizability. Bakhtin's notion of the unfinalizable self proposes that individuals cannot be perceived as finalized, described by a label, or fully understood. From a dialogical perspective, each relational interaction activates change in all participants and meanings in the present are unstable (Morson & Emerson, 1990). In this project, all participants (myself included) will be understood as always in process dialogically such that no person will be fully known or recognized as a contained, finalized entity.

Becoming. From a Deleuzian perspective (Thiele, 2016), the process of becoming is generative and can be characterized as a continually emerging way of being. It is a way of re-conceptualizing an element differently from its original functions and bringing about new ones. This is particularly relevant when challenging the notion that COIPs are destined for (captured by) adverse life experiences, such as through involvement with the criminal justice system. Seen through the lens of the concept of becoming, there is another possible story. Becoming is neither in itself aspirational nor goal oriented; rather, it is a constant potentiality that arises from what Deleuze considers immanence, and is always in flux (Thiele, 2016).

Rhizome. In the botanical world, rhizomes are a propagation process used by plants such as ginger, irises, and potatoes: defined as a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out shoots above and roots below at intervals resulting in new plants (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the rhizome as a metaphor to develop an ontology based on a non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, non-binary, and non-linear way of thinking

and doing (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008). This metaphor embodied the way in which this inquiry came together; from many entities in relationship to each other, non-hierarchical, with ongoing growth, which becomes a new local initiative creating its own version of truth in action.

Research Practice and Process

With my ethical stance and theoretical grounding in place, I invited participants to engage with this research project through numerous recruiting strategies. Eventually, seven people responded and agreed to join me for an initial individual interview. Participants were both local and from other parts of the country therefore interviews were conducted both in person and via video conferencing technology. Following that process, five participants agreed to engage in a second interview with me and of those, four continued on to join a single focus group. At that focus group the four participants shared their individual stories and decided to continue their group relationship and find some way to engage in advocacy for COIPs.

In the context of the 10 focus groups that followed the individual interviews, participants shared their stories and we collaboratively decided that the most efficient and effective way to share their stories with a wider audience was to plan and develop a documentary film that would explore strategies and strengths of each individual and of our group. The footage for the documentary was filmed by a videographer over the course of one weekend and is still in the editing phase; although I have provided a later link to a preliminary rough cut in this dissertation. As an overview, the research design unfolded in three stages. *Stage I* included two individual interviews and a focus group: Seven participants engaged in at least one interview, five completed a second interview, and four joined together for the focus group. The four participants who agreed to join the focus group chose to engage in discussions around ways to engage in advocacy for COIPs. Consequently, *Stage II* consisted of 10 group meetings that culminated in

the planning and filming of our documentary. *Stage III* became the follow up editing processes with the eventual release of the documentary *Bonds that Hurt; Bonds that Heal* (working title). The stories that emerged within the dialogical relationships were put to work through our dialogical relationships and the processes of Dialogical Narrative Thematic Analysis.

Dialogical Narrative Thematic Analysis

Stories as narrative do more than document already happened experiences; they also project possible futures and inform people as to how to proceed (Frank, 2010). Therefore stories, in this case the narratives of adults affected by parental incarceration, provided the fertile ground for multiple levels of analysis. To further ground this inquiry as dialogically relational research, I adopted the analytical processes informed by both Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2012, 2018, 2019) and Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) as described by Arthur Frank (2010). I adopted TA to explore the contents of the stories and familiarize myself with the most salient themes that participants shared. It also helped to inform the talking points in the documentary. As a way to honour the dialogical intentions of my work, I accomplished the TA through the dialogical lens of DNA and termed it DNTA. This analysis was meant to feed into the action/reflection cycles of our focus groups and as such, did not provide the study's results. Instead, the process informed the collaborative preparation of our documentary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the foci and processes of this dissertation inquiry. I introduced the research and backstory of unacknowledged children affected by incarceration and my previous research that inspired this work. I socially located myself and shared that I aspire to socially conscious practice and research. I shared concepts and terms that will be used throughout this document in order to increase clarity. Additionally, I have introduced the

theoretical lenses of SC and RC, Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, and Bakhtin's dialogical philosophy. I also outlined the collaborative processes that culminated in the narrative development and the filming of a documentary.

In Chapter Two, I will critically review not only the literature that positions COIPs as being at risk, but also lay the groundwork for the possibility of an alternative story, one that challenges the dominant discourses of risk and will be explored through this document. I will also discuss the reasons why sharing stories is my preferred way of engaging with participants. In Chapter Three I will expand on the underpinning philosophies of social and relational constructionism, and the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin. I will also explicate the practices or *nuts and bolts* of how participants were recruited, interviewed, and how the focus groups came together to share stories and develop the narrative of our documentary. I present a rationale for the use of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and DNA (Frank, 2010) as it helped me to approach the data dialogically through DNTA. I will include a detailed explication of the data analysis process as it related to informing the documentary that we developed so our story could be shared with others. I will also discuss the ethical implications of this type of research and share some of the challenges that we navigated as individuals and as a group. Rather than the traditional *Results* section, I will present a thorough explanation of the interview, focus group, and filming processes in Chapter Four. Finally, in Chapter Five, I offer reflections on what we learned, what others could learn (e.g., scholars, service providers), and future possibilities when we share our story through the documentary: *Bonds that Hurt; Bonds that Heal*.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Nell Bernstein is a journalist who has spent much of her career documenting the experiences of, and advocating for, children of the incarcerated. Her insightful book, *All Alone in the World* (2007), offers astonishing first-hand accounts of children left behind (both literally and figuratively) by parents, communities, law enforcement officers, service providers, and policy. In one painful tale of many, Bernstein recounts nine-year-old Ricky's story of neglect starting with the police, who failed to notice he and his one-year-old brother were left in the home after their mother's arrest. Unaware his mother was not returning, Ricky did his best to feed and care for his baby brother, which included the daily walking routine established by his mother. It was two weeks before a neighbour noticed the boys walking alone several days in a row and eventually called Child Protection Services. Bernstein eloquently and passionately takes on a voice of advocacy as she expounds on arrest and sentencing policy, the effects on families and communities, and the cost to society in general of families affected by parental incarceration. In an atmosphere of retributive policies both in the United States and Canada, Bernstein is a rare voice drawing attention to the shadows where the children of the incarcerated reside.

Although children have long suffered the consequences of parental imprisonment, it is only during the last decade that the academy and (some) governmental agencies (e.g., corrections, child welfare agencies) have begun to pay attention to, and examine, the social consequences of parental incarceration. In this doctoral research I invited adults with a childhood experience of parental incarceration to share their story within the space of a collaborative, dialogical relationship. This relationship was cultivated in an attempt to not only deepen the understanding of ways in which children of the incarcerated navigate their experience into adulthood, but also with an aim to affecting some change in how service providers (e.g.,

counselling psychologists, educators, social agencies) might support children who are presently experiencing the separation of a parent due to incarceration. This literature review and the subsequent research design have been developed using the following question as both compass and lens:

> How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration lead to action that challenges stigma, engages mental health care professionals, and mobilizes supportive others?

In this critical review of the literature, I show how children of incarcerated parents (COIPs) are boxed into a narrow conceptualization that culturally and institutionally constructs them as being *at risk*, and seemingly at the mercy of social, structural, and empirical forces that have rallied against them. From the current literature view, COIPs are presented as prone to having psychological challenges, behavioural issues and/or following in a parent's footsteps in terms of their own incarceration. Although it is not my intention to minimize the challenges these children navigate, I proceed on the premise there are different stories; untold and/or underdeveloped. I propose that in order to facilitate an enhanced story that can include resistance and survivorship, a dialogical relationship founded on mutual respect, trust, and empathy must be developed. Within this context the necessary stories were invited to emerge. To that end, my research adopted the theoretical lenses of social and relational constructionism, and extended to the philosophy of dialogism as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (Holquist, 2003). In this chapter I will introduce these informing lenses and then move to a discussion of the current theories that inform the literature surrounding COIPs and the gaps in knowledge that have yet to be explored. Children respond to a parent's imprisonment differently across the developmental spectrum, hence I offer an overview of how researchers have discussed the experience from a

developmental perspective. As my research is located within a dialogical framework, collaboration is a central concept; therefore, I elaborate on how I will engage in collaborative practices that often parallel, (but are different from) those of counselling psychology. Additionally, I will elaborate on the idea that sharing stories is a preferred and appropriate way to collaborate with participants in my research, as established in the research literature. Finally, the impetus, research question, ethics, results, and potential directions are all rooted in the social justice orientation of an AOR ontology. Consequently, the spirit of AOR, understood as a participatory methodology, is always implicit throughout this document.

Informing Lenses

Most participatory approaches are informed by the philosophy of Social Constructionism (SC; Reason & Bradbury, 2010) and this project followed suit. Nuancing the SC approach with insights from relational constructionism (RC) focused the research more intentionally. Extending constructionism, I incorporated the theoretical tenets of Bakhtin's dialogism (Holquist, 2003), which supported the multi-voiced, non-finalized way in which the stories of COIPs were shared. Although I will expand on these theories in Chapter Three of this dissertation, I offer an orienting discussion of social and relational constructionism, as well as Bakhtinian dialogism (Holquist, 2003) in the following section.

From social to relational constructionism. According to the tenets of SC, the individual and society are complicit in creating social constructs (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Exploring the intersection between social construction and participatory methodologies, Ken Gergen (2003) proposed four "domains of inquiry" (p. 41) where social justice oriented research can be linked to constructionist dialogues: liberation from the 'natural' (questioning the taken-for-granted); critical reflection (questioning the *effects* of the taken-for-granted); nurturing practices

(appreciating existing traditions that are supportive); and creating integrative worlds (constructing new futures). Gergen invites researchers to appreciate the interconnectedness of these domains. In the case of COIPs this view facilitates alternative ways of looking at the consequences of parental incarceration.

SC assumes no single observable *truth* (Lock & Strong, 2010), and considers reality as continually and socially constructed. Like most social constructionists, Hosking (2011) does not view the individual as a bounded and sovereign subject "possessing a singular Self (*I* think) with a knowing mind (I *think*) that relates to the world and re-presents it [in language]" (italics in original, p. 51). Shotter (2014) contended that SC ideas can be pushed further toward a relational ontology, and Hosking (2011) offered a theoretical framework by which to accomplish this. By nuancing SC as a relational approach (Hosking, 2011), the focus of inquiry targets the relational processes that go on between individuals and other actants (e.g., non-human, inanimate) (Latour, 1987) in what is termed *inter-acts*. RC is particularly attuned to relational power differentials that reflect a feminist ontology and the performative aspects (the *doings*) of relationship.

As my research is founded on relationships that are instigated, built, and sustained through collaborative practices, RC presents as a natural extension of social constructionist thinking. A further commitment to the relational space characterized by RC can be found in the theory of dialogism, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (Holquist, 2003). In the following section I offer up a brief overview of the ideas that will position my research as dialogically oriented.

Mikhail Bakhtin and dialogism. The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, 1986) a theorist and philosopher working within the tumultuous era of the Russian Revolution and the regime of Stalin, have deeply influenced the way social scientists consider the dynamics and social significance of language, ethics, and action (Creswell & Hawn, 2012; Holquist, 2003; Jones,

2017). Although Bakhtin was writing during the political upheaval of the early 20th century, his work did not become well-known or influential until the 1960s. In social science, Bakhtin is prominently known for the concept and philosophy of dialogism (Creswell & Hawn, 2012), an idea which, at its simplest, proposes that all communicative action (speech, movement, art, conversation) is performed in dialogically responsive relationships.

Dialogism has numerous implications, not the least of which is its opposite: monologism. From a Bakhtinian perspective, monologism is a unidirectional communication, implicitly presented as an irrefutable *finalized* truth. Further, "monologism is, in the highest sense, a denial of the equal rights of consciousnesses vis-à-vis truth" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 285). However, Bakhtin (1984) submits that monologism is not absolutely possible, given the responsive nature of humans (Gonçalves & Guilfoyle, 2006) in that we cannot prevent ourselves from responding in some form or other, both recognized and unrecognized (i.e., unconscious).

> The dialogical nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human existence is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, and his whole body and deeds. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293)

Rather than absolute monologism, what is occasioned is a *leaning* toward a monological interchange (Gonçalves & Guilfoyle, 2006). In Counselling Psychology, monologic-esque examples include interventions such as psycho-education, advice giving, or directive-oriented communications. In research, monologism may play out in how the process maintains a unidirectional stance across the spectrum of practices. These include, for example, the research

interview, the narrowly focused analysis, or the finished report, which may be presented as an authoritative finalized precis on the situation of concern, privileging the perspective of the 'expert' researcher.

In this research, my intention was to privilege a dialogical stance throughout the process, which included the sharing of our stories (through the research interview), the engagement with the data (analysis), and the interpretation of the data (results). The question was posed: What do *results* mean in the context of a qualitative study of this sort? A study that claims to align with participatory, collaborative, and dialogical practices? Who has the right to choose which stories, or parts of stories, are privileged over others, and how they will be put to work? Throughout this project I have committed to sharing the processes with participants so it is understood that the observations, stories you read here, or offers of advice to the research and service community have been collaboratively constructed. I am also aware that this is an aspirational endeavour as I am bound by my limited understanding of the cultural experiences of participants, by the expectations of academe, and by the conventions of research. All I could lay claim to was my ongoing commitment to pay attention, intentionally and reflectively, so that I could be responsive to, and influenced by, my co-inquirers. It is also crucial to point out that this work is, in no way, a *finalized* understanding of what it is like to be a child with a parent in prison.

In the following section I will review the literature that demonstrates a monological description of the correlates and sequalae of parental incarceration according to the academy. As I have already proposed, I believe this is largely a narrowed and monological view of the experience. Consequently, the perspective of social and relational constructionism, bolstered by Bakhtinian dialogism, will inform the following critical review of the literature where it is

assumed that the consequences to children of the incarcerated are socially constructed while the locus of change rests in relationships.

Children of Incarcerated Parents

The term *collateral damage* has been used when describing children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent (Coulthard, 2012; Gust, 2012). In what ways are these children damaged; and more importantly is such damage considered permanent? How do people who have experienced the incarceration of a parent resist (Wade, 1997) this totalizing story that supports the stigma of a damaged identity (Lindemann Nelson, 2001)? What are the untold stories of parental incarceration and how can sharing these stories help broaden the understanding of growing up in the shadow of parental incarceration? This critical review will explore the current literature through several theories that have been used to conceptualize how COIPs appear to be affected, as well as how parental incarceration affects children at different stages of development.

Background statistics on COIPs. In Canada, no consistent records are maintained regarding COIPs. For example, prisoners are not asked if they have children, and if they do, who is looking after them, who should be contacted regarding their children or if there are special needs for these children? This understanding came to light during the processes of conducting my Master's thesis. In this research, which I have described more fully elsewhere (Pickering, 2014), I was focused on joining with previously incarcerated women to challenge the stigma that interfered with returning to their communities. The mothers of the group shared that they had not been asked about their children at any time during, or after, their institutional processing. A recent search of the Correctional Service of Canada (2015) website, which serves as information generated by the government for the public around the criminal justice system in Canada,

revealed only one related article in the May 1995 *Forum on Corrections Research*. This institutional article presented statistical (American) research evidence from 1993 that reflected similar risk factors as those in this review, and no Canadian data whatsoever. Most Canadian statistics are extrapolated from small studies conducted by service agencies such as provincial Elizabeth Fry Societies (Bayes, 2008) and The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). At the time, these somewhat dated sources estimated 180,000 children in Canada are affected by parental incarceration. However, more recent estimations suggest there are more than 350,000 children affected by parental incarceration (Elizabeth Fry Society, 2020; Hyslop, 2018). Reflecting the disproportionate incarceration rates of their parents (Government of Canada, Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013), children of Indigenous people are likely to be overrepresented in this prevalence figure.

What happens? Generally speaking, "incarceration is conceptualized as a disruptive process associated with significant losses for the family" (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003, p. 194). However, scholars have suggested that consequences of parental incarceration extend beyond separation from parents, parental criminality, and adverse contexts (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Researchers are challenged by methodological barriers in terms of access, comparison groups (data is aggregated for children whose demographics and experiences vary), and rely on problematic sample characteristics (e.g., small sample sizes, paternal versus maternal incarceration). Consequently, academic understanding continues to be ambiguous in terms of the contextual and psychological conditions leading up to parental incarceration, and the short and long-term consequences for COIPs (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Hence it is difficult to determine whether it is solely parental incarceration that places children at high risk for emotional and social difficulty, or the accompanying contextual adversity that often characterizes

this experience. To explore the most recent research concerned with the experience of parental incarceration, I also review the quantitative and qualitative research pertaining to COIPs through the conceptual lenses of several theories.

Psychological perspectives. Psychological perspectives draw from individualist theories that have been developed within the literature of psychology. Unlike a relational construction position that accounts for relational processes as they create reality, this view assumes a bounded individualized ontology where the inner private world is reflected in interaction with an outer public world (Gergen, 2009; Holzman, 2011). From this perspective then, the individual is "the primary site of evaluation" (Gergen, 2009, p. 12) and little credence is given to how reciprocal relationships constitute experience.

The bio-ecological model. The bio-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) proposes that individuals live and learn in a nested set of social contexts that have interrelational effects over time. The four dimensions of this model, (a) process, (b) person, (c) place, and (d) time, encapsulate the theoretical proposal that proximal interactions between the individual, and the contexts in which the individual exists, affect development over time (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). This theory is used to understand the layered ecology in which COIPs exist and highlight both proximal (microsystems) risk factors as well as more distal (exo and macrosystems) influences. Proximal risk factors could include exposure to violence or trauma (Arditti, 2012), stressed caregivers (Arditti, 2005), or parental criminality and incarceration (Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012) whereas examples of distal influences are depleted financial resources (Arditti, 2005), social isolation due to stigma (Murray et al., 2012), or lack of policy support (Ayre, 2012). Unlike theories such as ethnomethodology

(e.g., see Heritage on Garfinkel, 1984), that contend contexts are both shaped by, and shape, a person, the bio-ecological model does not explicitly acknowledge this reciprocal relationship.

Dallaire and Wilson (2010) use the ecological theory to explore the relationship between a parent's criminal activity (micro systemic influence), child-witnessed arrest (meso- and macro-systemic in terms of policies regarding arrests made in the presence of children), and sentencing in caregiver and children's reports of maladjustment. These researchers found that children who witnessed a parent's arrest were more likely to have difficulty regulating emotions, performed worse on a receptive vocabulary test, and exhibited more anxious/depressed behaviours than children who did not witness the arrest. Although the value of approaching parental incarceration from an ecological perspective is in acknowledging the multiple contexts in which children live and develop, this model does little to account for self-agency and thereby positions children as passive recipients of experience who have minimal effect on their environment. Further, there is no attention to how children resist these experiences and develop strategies that would imply a context shaping position. In this context, I use *resistance* to refer to the conscious or unconscious ways in which people respond to aversive experience or oppression with strength (Wade, 1997). From both an SC and AOR perspective, people can counter such 'determinants' by mobilizing varied resources to challenge the status quo.

The cumulative risk perspective. The cumulative risk perspective emerges from literature that proposes combined ecological risk factors are better at predicting maladjustment than any single risk factor (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, Seifer, Baldwin, & Baldwin, 1993). From this view, when a child is subjected to numerous adverse experiences the cumulative effect is particularly consequential (Turney, 2014). This theoretical approach addresses the numerous adversities that children with incarcerated parents experience, and

emphasizes children's life ecologies before, during, and after incarceration (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). I read this as monological in that this literature presumes unidirectionality where children and families are inert things being 'done to', who have no influence on the ecologies from within which they are cumulatively 'contained'. Examples of research that use this model have looked at the ways in which a child's experience is changed, depending on the gender of the parent and the living arrangements of the child (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Dallaire, 2007a). Aaron and Dallaire (2010) employed a cumulative risk factor model (Sameroff et al., 1993) to examine several factors that may affect development. They advanced a statistically generated risk index score (Sameroff et al., 1993) to identify factors that may influence a child's delinquent behaviour beyond parental incarceration alone. As hypothesized, parental incarceration alone was not a strong predictor of behavioural maladjustment. Based on survey data, Aaron and Dallaire (2010) do not include the rich information of experience that goes beyond dichotomously confined questionnaires (e.g., yes/no responses). Consequently, the results that indicated an identified combination of factors was more predictive of a child's maladjustment than other factors, and invites researchers and policy makers into making generalized claims that may not offer a full picture of the experience. Additionally, their results neutralize the child as a passive recipient of experience. Research using statistical modelling (see Kjellstrand, Reinke, & Eddy, 2018; Muentner et al., 2018) can help practitioners understand that multiple adversities are influential; however, this offers a limited understanding and qualitative data that includes experiential understanding is sorely absent in the literature.

Attachment theory. Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (p. 194). Attachment theorists posit that children who demonstrate secure attachment have a close relationship with a caregiver who acts as a safe base

from which to explore the world, develop emotionally, and learn to regulate feelings (Murray & Murray, 2010). Poehlmann (2005) assessed the attachment representations of 54 young children (2.5 to 7.5 years) whose mothers had been incarcerated. She found that, for 63% of the children, separation resulted in insecure attachment representations, which often manifest in angry or avoidant interactions with the caregiver (Murray & Murray, 2010). Results indicated that attachment was more likely to be secure if the child lived in a stable and caring environment, reacted to the separation with sadness rather than anger, and was older. The child's caregiving situation, and not just the mother's absence, was a significant indicator of whether the child demonstrated maladaptive coping behaviour (Poehlmann, 2005; Poehlmann-Tynan, Burnson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). With this research, Poehlmann-Tynan and colleagues come closer to the view of the child as a relational participant. Additionally, there has been recent exploration in the spirit of an increasingly dialogical perspective (although it is not characterized as such). In a recent meta-analysis of the corpus of longitudinal research, Fraley and Roisman (2018) noted that childhood attachment styles may be less deterministic than most adult attachment literature implies.

Attachment, as an established theory (Roisman & Fraley, 2008), provides a practical model to discuss the consequences of incarceration as it identifies concepts with which to understand how children react to separation from a caregiver who may or may not be a parent. However, most of this research adopts a quantitative paradigm using survey data collected from the incarcerated parents, caregivers, or teachers, and offers minimal information gathered from children. This approach draws a relatively short-term picture of behavioural consequences and neglects the repercussions that reach into adulthood (Murray & Murray, 2010). Although attachment theory has a well-developed literature that explores the effects of childhood

attachment styles as it affects adult relationships (Fraley & Roisman, 2018), it has yet to be used to explore the consequences of parental incarceration in adulthood.

Ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss describes the uncertainty a person feels when a family member is physically present but psychologically absent (e.g., mental illness) or physically absent but psychologically present (e.g., divorce) (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Often the facts surrounding incarceration are unclear to the child (for example in an effort to protect the child, caregivers may not provide details of an absence), and consequently the loss experienced by COIPs could be characterized as ambiguous loss. Bocknek, Sanderson, and Britner (2009) used this theoretical framework to determine incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in children with a parent in prison. These authors suggested ambiguous loss theory is a "useful lens for the complex nature of parental incarceration" (p. 324), and research suggests that children who lose a parent to incarceration suffer differently from those who lose a parent to death, divorce, or trauma (Arditti et al., 2003; Braman, 2004; Bocknek et al., 2009; Johnson, Arditti, & McGregor, 2018). From a constructionist perspective, this difference would make sense as parental incarceration carries with it a heavy burden in terms of stigma and subsequent shame (Knapus-Soran, 2017). Previously incarcerated people cite numerous barriers when contending with socially constructed stigma (Braman, 2004; Pickering, 2012). Although ambiguous loss theory alludes to socially situated consequences of loss for COIPs, it does not acknowledge how all participants contribute to the experience of a given context. However, Bocknek et al. (2009) provided a good example of research that accesses information from the children themselves. These researchers asked the children questions about coping strategies and what advice would be helpful for others in this situation. Although it is encouraging that some researchers are asking *how* children are coping with these stresses, Bocknek et al. concluded that in keeping with

typical post-traumatic stress behaviours, the children's coping strategies were ineffective. I suggest there are elements to these stories that have been overlooked, and I believe that questions asked from a response and strengths-based perspective (Wade, 1997) can yield different results. Adults who share a retrospective story developed within the context of a dialogical relationship will, I believe, shed a more nuanced light on the experience of parental incarceration and address some of the ambiguity that is inherent in this particular theoretical lens.

Sociological perspectives. A sociological approach to the study of children with incarcerated parents typically considers the broader contexts that affect the experience and could possibly embrace an SC view. Generally, sociological theories employ a panoramic lens to try to account for the social structures that affect COIPs. It is worthwhile to mention that Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel, generally considered micro-sociologists (Williams, 2000), were concerned with relatedness and situated social phenomenon. They challenge the phenomenon of 'context' as reflecting a bucket-like metaphor, where there are boundaries outside of which influences are unaccounted for, and the bucket itself has a causal influence. Although the sociological perspective adopted in the following reviewed research broadens the scope, it can maintain a deterministic position of victimization and does little to account for children's reciprocal influence.

Strain theory. Structural strain theory suggests social structures prevent an individual from attaining perceived goals or fulfilling needs and is thus pressured into committing crime (Agnew, 2012). Revised versions of this theory include the inability to escape painful or aversive conditions, which focuses on individual responses to environmental influences compared with structural pressures alone (Slocum, 2010). This theory positions people (including children) as victims of circumstance and any individual response is negatively conceptualized. Considered a

theory of criminality, it proposes that criminally involved parents, who are themselves under strain (e.g., economic; psychological; lack of social support; trauma and abuse), increase the strain on their children (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). Those holding this view contend that consequences of separation, economic deprivation, residential instability, confusion, and lack of social support for caregivers, manifest as strain (Murray, 2005; Murray et al., 2012; Muentner et al., 2018), which contributes to problematic behaviour (Murray & Murray, 2010). Pre-carceral conditions (e.g., poverty, trauma) that burdened the family are added to the child's experiences such as unsettling visits to prison (Arditti et al., 2003; Poehlmann, 2005; Poehlmann-Tynann et al., 2017); shame that contributes to an inability to share worries with friends, neighbours, or teachers (Arditti, 2005; Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010; Knapus-Soran, 2017); and lack of information about where his or her parent has gone (Murray et al., 2012). Strain theory is oriented toward explanations of criminality and offers little in the way of a useful theory that would inform possible support strategies for COIPs (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). I acknowledge that strain theory is not strictly deterministic in the ways I understand some theories that I have reviewed here. As a theory that focuses on adaptability, actors are understood as agentive. However, strain theory is largely focused on explanations of criminality (Agnew & Brezina, 2019) and not as how one might adapt to strained environments through resistance or strength-based behaviours.

Stigma. Erving Goffman (1963), considered a seminal thinker for his writing on stigma, maintains there are three types of stigma: stigma of character traits (e.g., mental illness, prisoners); physical stigma; and stigma of group identity, which he termed tribal stigma and refers to membership in a marginalized group associated by race or religion. Children of imprisoned parents fall into both the first of these groups, and are therefore considered as

individuals with a shared moral taint (Coulthard, 2012; Murray et al., 2012; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Lindemann Nelson (2001) characterized stigma as *damaged identities* and posits that those who suffer from a damaged identity have limited access to resources and diminished moral agency (i.e., the capacity to act with reference to right and wrong). She contended, "the way in which others identify us establish what they will permit us to do; if they identify us as morally defective, they will perhaps humor us or hospitalize us, or else treat us with suspicion, contempt, or hostility" (p. xi). Braman (2004) referred to the kind of stigma associated with incarceration as "sticky" (p. 173), that is, affecting family members and persists after the incarcerated member has been released. That is the point of origin for stigma is not something the individual has done but something that someone else has done. A Bakhtinian view (1986) would characterize the influences of stigma and shame as polyphonic (e.g., peers) and heteroglossic (e.g., scholarship) voices that add to the isolation of COIPs.

Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) interviewed 34 children about their experiences of having a parent in prison. These children shared that they were painfully aware of the ways in which stigma interfered with peer relations, teacher's attitudes (see Dallaire et al., 2010; Knapus-Soran, 2017), and neighbour relations. Stigma, viewed this way, prevents children from sharing worries with concerned others (Murray et al., 2012), and thereby contributes to isolation and withdrawal; depression; and seeking solace in gang related activities (Murray et al., 2009); while also limiting access to valuable support. Under the influence of stigma, often caregivers will not share with teachers that a parent is in prison and the literature supports this protective decision as teachers have been shown to treat COIPs prejudicially (Dallaire et al., 2010). The consequences of stigma have indeed interfered with the process of my research. On several occasions prospective

participants have commented on their unwillingness to share their experiences due to both the shame of having their history exposed, and the anxiety of sharing their story with a stranger.

Developmental consequences. Children react to a parent's incarceration differently at different points in their developmental trajectory. For infants and toddlers who are separated from a parent by incarceration, this concern is often conceptualized from an attachment perspective. Dallaire (2007a, 2007b) discussed risk factors of maternal incarceration through infancy and toddlerhood, school age children, and adolescence. She argued that separation early in life disrupts the formation, development, and maintenance of the mother-child relationship, which results in insecure attachment (Poehlmann, 2005). Insecure attachment can predict behavioural concerns that manifest as either internalizing (e.g., anxiety, guilt, loneliness), or externalizing (e.g., aggression, rule breaking) problems later on in development (Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010). Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, and Mincy (2012), utilized data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (a Princeton University study following a cohort of nearly 5000 children born between 1998 and 2000 (Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study [FFCWS], 2019) to explore developmental consequences of paternal incarceration on five-year-old children. By the time these children had reached adolescence, aggressive behaviour had increased significantly and attention issues were more prevalent in children with imprisoned fathers versus children whose fathers were absent for other reasons. Comparatively, children of incarcerated mothers appear to be more at risk for these developmental consequences than those with incarcerated fathers (Dallaire, 2007a; Trice & Brewster, 2011).

As discussed previously, the research findings indicate that disruption in maternal care can interfere with a child's ability to develop secure attachment with a caregiver, which, in turn,

may affect wellbeing in a number of contexts including home, school, and community (Dallaire, 2007b; Poehlmann, 2005; Schlafer et al., 2012). Poehlmann (2005) found that younger children with an incarcerated mother were more vulnerable to developing insecure attachment patterns than older children. As children developed cognitively and socially, they had more tools to account for their mother's absence, consequently their ability to maintain healthy attachments to caregivers was improved. From a social and relational constructionist perspective, children are actively participating in their relational interactions; they don't *just happen* as a consequence of meeting developmental milestones. Quantitative research indicates that this trajectory of difficulty continues into adulthood for children of incarcerated mothers; it appears they are more likely than children of incarcerated fathers to be involved in the justice system as adults (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007).

Although they may have some ability to make cognitive sense of a parent's absence due to incarceration, school age children become acutely aware of the stigma attached to parental incarceration (Dallaire, 2007a, 2007b; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2001) and will withdraw into isolation in order to protect their secret. Children in the middle years are viewed as being particularly susceptible to stigmatization as they become aware of their social position (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Most children, by the age of 10, are conscious of cultural stereotypes and group differences; should the child belong to a stigmatized group, this awareness appears even earlier (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Socially constructed ideas of stigma may be of particular consequence at this age of dawning social awareness (Major & O'Brien, 2005).

The discourse that prevails for adolescents suggests they have more difficulty than younger children as they grow toward adulthood (Cochrane, Siennick, & Mears, 2018) and attempt to navigate the balance between individuation and connectedness (Dallaire, 2007a;

Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Shlafer, et. al, 2012). Numerous authors have discussed the negative consequences of parental incarceration as it affects adolescence (Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Johnson, 2012). For example, in addition to community and home problems, Trice and Brewster (2004) report that 36% of their adolescent research sample had dropped out of school (compared to a national average of 9%), the majority required disciplinary visits at school from caregivers, and 50% had been arrested. Lack of caregiver supervision, associations with peers who may encourage delinquent behaviour, and continual strains on the family position them as vulnerable to unhealthy external and internal behaviours (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009; Murray et al., 2012; Shlafer et al., 2012).

Developmental theories can provide insight into age related consequences of parental incarceration. However, most models do not acknowledge developmental processes as continuing into and throughout adulthood. A view that assumes development across the lifespan enhances a longitudinal perspective where early care can be improved and interventions can anticipate the challenges in later life development. Although there are a number of quantitative studies focused on the outcomes (usually deleterious) of parental incarceration on young adults (Mears & Siennick, 2016; Millar & Barnes, 2015, Muftic & Smith, 2018; Turney & Lanuza, 2017; Will, Whalen, & Roper, 2014), qualitative studies are rare (e.g., Luther, 2015). Consequently, stories from adults affected by parental incarceration is underexplored in the qualitative literature. Additionally, most developmental studies do not assume a dialogical stance and thereby do not account for children's role in affecting (or resisting) their circumstances.

Ambivalent Results and Possible Benefits

As the research accumulates about the consequences to children of an incarcerated parent, the picture may seem bleak. However, there are some researchers who, in addition to

acknowledging the difficulties these children face, also choose to identify children's strength, resilience, and resistance to an anticipated negative outcome that may include criminality and incarceration (Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). For example, Johnson and Easterling (2015) conducted interviews with 10 youth who had a parent in prison. They noted three ways in which these youth coped with this stressor. First, the majority of participants chose to distance themselves from the incarcerated parent in order to manage stigma. Second, participants tended to minimize the effects of parental incarceration, which appeared to serve as a desensitization process and increased psychological tolerance toward the experience. Third, the youth shared that they "found strength by maintaining some control over their lives" (p. 257). These stories serve as counter stories to the dominant discourse of risk that has thus far contained COIPs.

It has been established that children whose parents have been to prison differ from children who experience separation from a parent for other reasons on multiple dimensions. For example, COIPs are less likely to seek help, there is a significant degree of uncertainty as to when a parent will return, and the role stigma plays in the life of a child whose parent has been to prison cannot be understated (Johnson, et al., 2018; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Knaphus-Soran, 2017; Steinhoff & Berman, 2012). However, as most scholars note, it is difficult to discern whether it is incarceration alone that puts children at risk or other aspects of a child's ecology that have greater or similar influence (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). This literature lacks information that explores how children actively participate in and influence their environment. To complicate the issue further, there is also evidence that some children may benefit from a parent's incarceration. For example, Cho (2010) used three large administrative datasets (Illinois Department of Justice, Cook County Jail, and Chicago Public Schools) to explore child

wellbeing through the outcome measure of schooling, as the authors suggest that success in school is considered a metric for wellbeing in children. Cho's (2010) empirical findings refuted the expected result that children with a mother in prison would be more likely to be retained in school (i.e., held back). Surprisingly, there was a moderate positive effect of reduced retention. A possible explanation for this result is improved care (e.g., kinship or foster care) or decreased uncertainty, which could be present before his or her mother is incarcerated. The missing question in this research is *how* a child is able to counter and overcome this aversive experience.

In other research that runs counter to the dominant discourse, Wildeman (2010) found that under some circumstances (e.g., a violent father) paternal incarceration is associated with decreased physical aggression in boys and enhanced feelings of security in the home. It is unsurprising that a decrease in violence in the home would be beneficial, not only in terms of children's aggressive behaviour, but also in the safety of the family overall. The message gleaned from the literature is that absolute statements about the experience and consequences of parental incarceration are not possible and there remain considerable gaps for more nuanced and contextualized information.

Fighting Back: Another Story

As demonstrated in the preceding critical review, the literature positions COIPs as being *at risk* across numerous dimensions including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, aggressive behaviour, difficulties in school, truancy, and criminal justice involvement. I do not discount the difficulties to which COIPs are exposed, such as violence, trauma, financial strain, caregiver uncertainty, and stigma. Yet hidden within this bleak narrative is a counter story (Lindemann Nelson, 2001). In 2011, Knudson recommended to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child that there was a pressing need for research to determine more clearly

protective factors that help children navigate and negotiate experiences of having an incarcerated parent. Included in the call to action from the research community was insight into how personal strength and resiliency is enacted.

Although statistics (Murray et al., 2012) invite attention to the uncertainty and risk of having a parent in prison, there is a marginalized view suggesting an overlooked acknowledgement of those who do not have behavioural or emotional problems, who stay in school, who do not have contact with the law, and most importantly, do not themselves, become incarcerated. As is evidenced in the previous sections, most researchers have the desire to draw attention to the needs of COIPs, which helps to create empirically supported services that address these specific needs. However, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) agreed; that, as there have been few opportunities to share, there are stories that have yet to be articulated. In their rare direct experience research project, 34 children aged eight to 17, were interviewed to explore the children's challenges and resilience from a front-line perspective. The children shared that, along with challenges that echo what has been explored in the preceding literature review, they offered personal instances of creative support seeking, and resistance to the stigma of incarceration. Children in the study often sought out supportive organizations and found that joining organized activities through sports, theatre, and faith communities provided needed protection. In this research, I open a collaborative space where the story of having a parent in prison is invited with an attention paid to strength being shared in dialogical relationship. Children who respond differently could be seen as resisting, not only the difficulty in their day-to-day living, but also an unquestioned narrative of risk, valorized by statistics, that threaten to finalize their identity.

I propose that how society and the academy view COIPs may not align with the way participants narrate their own experience of parental incarceration. An identity story influenced

by incarceration carries a heavy social cost. Indeed, identity politics determines whether one has access to resources (e.g., health care, education, freedom from poverty, safety), whether one is included or excluded from certain social experiences (i.e., in group and out group), and who has the right to determine one's future (Madigan, 1996). What can we, as researchers, practitioners, and citizens, learn from people who have experienced parental incarceration that has hitherto been hidden from view? In the next section I will briefly explore how identity has been historically theorized in psychology, how it can be refracted through a social constructionist and dialogical lens, and how it is a significant element in this research.

Negotiating Identity

The preceding literature review demonstrates how the expert knowledges of scholars construct COIPs from a master narrative of risk and damaged identities (Lindemann Nelson, 2001). Considered through a narrative perspective, COIPs have little or no claim to a story of strength or resistance. The consequences of being captured (Willig, 2011) through a damaged identity narrative (Lindemann, 2012) diminishes the identity stories of COIPs such that there appear to be few resources from which to draw strength and contribute to how they fashion a meaningful life (Shotter, 1993). It could be said that COIPs embody 'risk' in a relational response to the way the research and support community describes them. The intention of this work is to offer alternative stories for consideration by both those who have experienced parental incarceration and by supportive others (e.g., therapists, educators). In this section I review literature that legitimizes viewing identity from a constructionist/dialogical/narrative perspective. I will show that these theoretical underpinnings supported the intentions of my work, which was to broaden the understanding of how notions of self in response to an experience of parental imprisonment can be (re)negotiated through stories in a dialogical research relationship.

Crucial questions of identity include: “Who am I?”; “What is my place in the world?”; What makes me different than other people?”; and “Am I the same person from one year to the next?” (Schwartz, 2001). The questions of identity and identity formation have occupied philosophers, artists, social science theorists/researchers, governments, and marketers for millennia (Shotter, 1993). In psychology, one of the earliest theorists concerned with identity and identity formation was Erik Erikson (Schwartz, 2001). Erikson (1993) developed a stage-wise development of identity achieved through certain turning points he called *crises* that largely culminated in adolescence (Sokol, 2009). Although Erikson believed that the interplay between culture and the individual played a role in how individuals saw themselves, he still considered the identity project as an individualized, internalized process (Erikson, 1993). Since the seminal work of Erikson, theorists have expanded and nuanced his work, yet maintain the notion that the work of how a person fits into their social world is individually bound (see Marcia 1967, 1980; Schwartz, 2001). Consequently, this approach ontologically privileges the individual’s (Gergen, 2015a) private experience that aligns with an essentialist view of identity.

Considered an Enlightenment view, the founding principle is that one’s identity is a *special essence* (Madigan, 1999), that is particularly one’s own, grounded in the Cartesian idea *Cogito, ergo sum*; I think, therefore I am (Sampson, 1989). This principle minimizes socio-historical influences and privileges individual cognition, described as memory and self-awareness (Shotter, 1993). That is to say there is a “self-contained self” (Shotter 1993, p. 16) that is not only stable and unchanging but where meaning is generated “from behind the eyes” (Gergen, 2015b, p. 6).

As I align with a social constructionist view of identity formation, the theories informing the present work arise from the post-modernist perspective that de-centres the individual as the

central source of meaning, suggesting that identity is historically, contextually, and relationally constructed (Butt, 2010: Gergen, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 2004; Shotter, 1993, 2017). The social constructionist approach to identity acknowledges the influence of relationships, group membership, social status, and access to resources (Gergen, 2015b). From this perspective, identity is malleable and entails a sense of personal (and potentially) social agency. This idea invites the notion that people have choices as to who they are in their eyes, as well as the eyes of their social group, challenging the individualized way of understanding identity as immutable. Cultural idioms provide insight into how the stability of identity is a taken-for-granted phenomenon: e.g., "*a leopard cannot change its spots"; "a square peg will never fit into a round hole".* And one that I am constantly challenging as a therapist; *"people don't change"*. Not only do "*people not change"*, their identity is passed on genetically; "*The apple doesn't fall far from the tree",* which has significant implications for COIPs. Countering this concretized view of personhood is the narrative and dialogical notion of unfinalizability.

Although both narrative and dialogic approaches to identity are theoretically grounded in a constructionist paradigm, they are generally distinguishable by the focus of analysis. From both an RC and Bakhtinian dialogic perspective (1986), the focus of analysis is the interrelational space between actors and how each actor is affected by the utterances of the other, and in some way changed by their unique interactions that are never repeated (Holquist, 2003; Hosking, 2011; McIlveen, 2012). Commenting on the theoretical premise of dialogical identity, Ellis and Stam (2010), state "the dialogical self is a dynamically unfolding entity, intimately connected to others and dependent on them for its very maintenance" (p. 421). In Dialogical Self Theory (DST), Hermans (1996, 2003) argues that the dialogical self is (a) embodied and spatially structured, (b) multi-voiced, (c) de-centralized with permeable boundaries, and (d)

contextualized historically and culturally. Shotter (1993) articulates the dialogical formation of self as "we become, and are ourselves, only in relation to others" (p. 6).

From a narrative perspective, identity is formed by articulating meaningful links over time between certain life experiences and manifested in a story that informs a sense of self (McConnell, 2016). The narrative account of identity assumes that storytelling constitutes the way we see ourselves in response to experience, rather than reflects a "true" reality (Grant, Leigh-Phippard, & Short, 2015). This account underscores the significant consequences of focusing on one narrative over another. In addition to local individualized experience, meta-narratives (generalized stories that describe aspects of human experience), are accepted as cultural 'Truths' and serve to support or constrain how we see ourselves in the fabric of our lives and culture (Frank, 2010). Frank (2010) describes these discursive sources of information as narrative resources from which ideas of self are drawn. That being said, it is understandable that master narratives concerned with crime and incarceration could inform how COIPs may see themselves and their place in society. To add to this, current research could be considered a form of *discursive capture* (Lock & Strong, 2012), understood as "being bound to the assumed implications of a particular discourse" (Strong, Ross, & Sesma-Vazquez, 2015, p. 599).

A number of authors bring the narrative and dialogic concept of identity together arguing that storytelling is implicitly relational, therefore identity is negotiated through story in a dialogical relationship (Bamberg, 2011; Grant, et al. 2015; Hermans, 2003; McIlveen, 2012). Consequently, drawing from both dialogical and narrative theories, founded on an SC paradigm make sense in light of the present study's methods and intention. In this section I have provided an overview of identity as it is characterized through an SC paradigm and how dialogic and narrative ideas further nuance constructionist thinking. I have articulated these ideas to suggest

there are ways that COIPs could conceivably develop an identity story that resists how scholars describe the consequences of parental incarceration. If COIPs are invited into a relational space that focuses on their narratives of strength and resistance, then I aim to show that it is more likely they will advocate for themselves in an action-oriented process. In the next section I will discuss the performative aspects of storytelling (Newman & Holzman, 1999) and how it is a powerful way of developing a research relationship that prepares participants for action. Additionally, I discuss ways in which narrative principles have developed into therapeutic practice and offer a brief overview of Narrative Therapy developed by Michael White and David Epston (1990).

Sharing Stories, Building Relationships

King (2003) reminds us that "[s]tories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous" (p. 9). What are the advantages of using a story-telling framework to invite participants into a research relationship? Each person who has an experience of parental incarceration has a story to tell. How will this story be heard and by whom? And once it is heard, what will become of it? As King's (2003) quote suggests, stories have power and should be respected in that when they are shared, conditions are altered. Stories do more than document experiences in the past; they also project possible futures and inform people as to how to proceed (Frank, 2010). Embedded in a storyline is the information that will influence how a person chooses particular paths and how relationships develop.

How do we identify story from other forms of communication such as a chronicle or archive? Gergen and Gergen (2010) offered this thought as a way to identify narrative: "Narratives, as commonly held, bring events across time into a coherent and interdependent relationship" (p. 728). Cheryl Mattingly (1998) rejected the mimetic explanation of stories (stories imitate life) and suggested that stories bring forth experience. She proposes that there is

no reality without narrative and contends that we believe we are having experiences because we have stories. For Mattingly, "[e]xperience is, at best, an enactment of pre-given stories" (as cited in Frank, 2010, p. 20). This provocative idea calls into question the definition of reality and may serve to contain the boundaries of experience within a narrative framework. However, I suggest it is a limiting way of looking at narrative as it invokes a unidirectional perspective. From this view, people with a parental experience of incarceration would be destined to envision and enact an already existing narrative of negativity and risk. I agree with Frank (2010), who characterized the boundary between narrative and experience as more permeable. However, instead of being unidirectional (story happens because of experience or experience happens because of story) there is a reciprocal relationship. This idea is echoed in an SC and RC epistemology, which would view stories shared in relational space will affect, and be affected by, the context and a unique story will be created.

Cynthia Kurtz (2014) proposed that working with stories in the context of community inquiry has numerous advantages. Stories open space to share elements of experience that may be uncomfortable to share in other contexts, stories can help to resolve conflict, and invited stories can render information that would otherwise be missed if their details were solicited in other ways (e.g., asking questions, surveys). Stories have the capacity to sway opinion to the exclusion of other points of view, be ambiguous or open to interpretation, have unintended effects (recall King's contention that stories are dangerous), offer up value lessons, shift shape, and particular to this research project, stories invoke action (Frank, 2010). In the context of my research, I considered storytelling performative, relational, culturally contingent, and activating.

Storytelling, as performance, can also be characterized as a form of *practice* in the ways that Kemmis (2009) discussed the concept of practice. From this perspective, practice is

understood as an ecology of *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings* (Kemmis, Edward-Groves, Wilkinson, & Hardy, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002), which "emerge and develop in relation to each other" (Kemmis, 2009, p. 465). By viewing storytelling through a practice-oriented lens, the inquiry maintains a practical, rather than abstract, orientation. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2007), "focusing on practices in a concrete and specific way makes them accessible for reflection, discussion, and reconstruction" (p. 279). Research that targets the *practice* of storytelling broadens the horizon of analysis to include dimensions such as the context (or occasion) of the storytelling, how the teller and listener shape the story and storytelling processes, whose voice is being used in the telling (polyphony), and how story is influenced by broad cultural discourses (heteroglossia). From this perspective, telling stories invites a relational and dialogical process, thereby aligning with the tenets of RC (Hosking, 2011) and dialogism (Holquist, 2003) that privilege relational and storytelling practices as the focus of inquiry.

Reflecting a feminist perspective, Rappaport (1995, 2000) pointed out that "for many people, particularly those who lack social, political, or economic power, the community, neighborhood, or cultural narratives that are available are either negative, narrow, 'written' by others for them, or all of the above" (p. 796). The narrative *written by others* may not reflect how COIPs see themselves or tell their story. From the narrative identity literature, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, (2008) suggested that the stories we tell on a particular occasion say something about how we see ourselves in that moment. If adults with a story of parental incarceration were invited to tell their story from a position of strength and resistance, would it be different?

Healing Stories: What is Narrative Therapy?

The previous sections have focused on the scholarship concerning COIPs and how choosing a dialogical, storied way of sharing information supports this inquiry. At the core of

this inquiry is the intention to help those who work alongside, and for, COIPs to develop a richer understanding of the experience of having a parent in prison; particularly counsellors who adopt a narrative approach. Consequently, an overview of the tenets and practices of Narrative Therapy (NT) will invite the reader to connect with the insights from this inquiry, that they may come to life in the *real world* of counsellors (i.e., supportive others) and clients.

The rise of narrative ideas in the context of therapy took flight in the work of Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s (Wallis, Burns, & Capdevila, 2011). White and Epston were influenced by social constructionist/postmodern ideas and challenged the idea that the individual is wholly responsible for their well-being. They drew attention to the influence and power of oppressive dominant narratives that limit the way in which people see themselves, and their choices in the context of their lives. A key tenet of NT includes seeing the problem as located outside of the person: i.e., the problem is not the person. Furthermore, the problem is reflected in the socio-political context, which harkens back to feminist roots of resistance.

The narrative therapist remains curious and asks questions that continue to open space for new ways of knowing and seeing (Morgan, 2000). Akin to a feminist approach, the client is the expert in their lives and the process of therapy is a collaborative experience (Anderson, 2012; Sween, 1998). I recall a colleague who acknowledges all the expertise in the room by saying the client is responsible for *what* is discussed, the therapist is responsible for *how* it is discussed.

By adopting the narrative metaphor, narrative therapists presume that stories are the basic unit of experience and conduits of change (Sween, 1998). As I discussed earlier, people select certain experiences to recall and connect them together to create stories of their identity and experience. These are the stories we live by that carry with them information about who we are and what is important. Narrative therapists are curious about why some experiences are

remembered and others discounted. Through therapy, some hitherto ignored or discounted skills are brought forth, acknowledged, and appreciated. Through this process, clients are invited into seeing themselves from a more competent or heroic stance. The simple notion is that if we see ourselves as capable, then we will behave competently and make choices from a place of confidence. Clients are invited into a compassionate view of self as learners/explorers with the courage to withstand difficult experience as a means toward personal growth.

Narrative therapists also seek to engage a client's community in order to bolster the view of themselves as capable. This is often done through letter writing campaigns, initiated by the therapist, asking for those in a client's life to articulate what they appreciate about the client. Additionally, therapists may advocate for their client where possible and this may take them outside the therapy office and into the community. Not all therapists adopt this explicit advocacy stance but it is generally viewed as foundational and well within the purview of a narrative therapy approach (for examples of community narrative work see the Dulwich Centre: https://dulwichcentre.com.au/).

A foundational tenet of a narrative approach to both therapy and research is the practice of collaboration. In the next section I explicate the ways in which my work is dependent on, and powered by, collaborative practices. It was my intention to ensure that this research was a collaborative endeavour. Although I am aware there are some decisions and interpretations that were made from my individual perspective, where it was practical and additive, I committed to a collaborative position.

Theory and Practice: Collaboration

Collaboration is discussed from within varying perspectives (e.g., organizational, political) so in the interest of clarity I will explicate this broad term as understood within the

context of this project. My training has located me in a counselling psychology context and I position my ontology within a social justice paradigm, thus I have chosen to draw from both the counselling and feminist literature to conceptualize collaboration. The advantages for doing so are that both include a language and philosophical orientation that embraces feminist, social justice, relational, and transformative dimensions of an intentionally collaborative inquiry.

From the counselling literature, Harlene Anderson (2003) discussed collaboration as an integral process embedded in dialogic interaction. Collaboration through dialogue "involves a process in which participants engage with each other in shared or mutual inquiry: jointly examining, thinking, questioning and reflecting" (para. 4). Along with Harold Goolishian, Anderson developed a counselling approach known as *collaborative therapy* (Anderson, 2012; Hoffman, 2007), which subscribes to dialogic, SC philosophies and places openness, respect, and deep listening practices at the heart of therapy.

Additionally, feminist writers add crucial dimensions of collaboration to AOR (Frisby et al., (2009); Maguire, 2010; Ponic, Reid, & Frisby, 2010). From an action-oriented philosophy, participants bring the power of their own expertise to the process, and collaborative practices provide the means to harness and direct this power toward a transformative experience. Practices include common reflexivity; addressing power inequities in order to cultivate *power-with* relationships; nurturing trust; and embracing conflict as an empowering force (Ponic et al., 2010). Bodiford and Camargo-Borg (2014) remarked that by entering into an inquiry process from a collaborative and relational stance, researchers intentionally relinquish the position of *expert* and instead offer *expertise*. Collaboration, viewed from these perspectives, aligns with an RC orientation that embraces a relational ontology.

Conclusions

In this chapter I critically examined the current literature concerning COIPs, which constructs them as *at risk* and offers few instances of how children resist this dominant story. Through his *response-based* work with people exposed to violence, Allan Wade (1997) discussed resistance not necessarily as a grand gesture but rather as occurring through "small acts of living" (p. 32); therefore, I have chosen to adopt this way of describing acts of strength. I introduced the theoretical lenses of social and relational constructionism, and dialogism as described by Mikhail Bakhtin, which will inform this inquiry. I discussed historical notions of identity from an individualized perspective and contrasted it with theories of identity that are grounded in SC, dialogism, and narrative theories. Additionally, I offered a brief overview of narrative therapy in order to ground the inquiry such that it is helpful for supportive others who come in contact with COIPs.

At present, Canadian children who have a parent in prison are largely invisible and not well understood from an academic, service, or policy perspective. I suggest it is socially responsible and necessary to disrupt the prevailing story by initiating an inquiry with adults who have navigated childhood experiences of parental incarceration. In this way we can add to the literature, sensitizing scholars and service providers to nuanced stories of parental incarceration. Adopting collaborative (i.e., dialogical) practices, participants and I co-constructed a nuanced identity story; a story that resists predominant risk narratives and has the capacity to generate changes in the way counsellors and service providers support COIPs. Based on dialogical, narrative, and constructionist theories, we determined to carry these stories beyond our group and invite others into the dialogue. Consequently, we engaged in an AOR project that culminated in a documentary. In the next chapter I will discuss how this was accomplished.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Design

Although I have previously engaged in AOR, each new opportunity offers the chance to learn about the nuances of a methodology that has a wide range of theoretical, philosophical, and methodological dimensions. As both a Provisional Registered Counselling Psychologist and social scientist I remain unsatisfied with a detached perspective, recognizing that the closely engaged strategies of AOR can result in collaborative insights that otherwise may be overlooked. In my experience, the understanding that emerges from an AOR methodology is rich, surprising, and often humbling. According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), AOR is more than a way to do research; they suggest that practitioners come to AOR with a particular social justice-oriented worldview or eventually must embrace one. As my own worldview and chosen profession embraces a social justice orientation, working from an AOR frame in which I can be fully, relationally, and reflexively engaged, resonates.

For this doctoral research I relied on the willingness of my fellow participants to share their experience of parental incarceration through storytelling in both one-on-one and group contexts. Not only was this sharing necessarily developed within a respectful and trusting relationship, I also hoped the process outcomes were practical and transformative (McCormack & Dewing, 2012). Research "on" COIPs has boxed them into a finalized identity that is viewed as high risk (Bayes, 2008; Dallaire, 2007b). Consequently, establishing a dialogical research relationship with adults affected by parental incarceration demanded an approach that embraces the ethics and practices of an action-oriented methodology. How this relationship developed, how we negotiated action within the group processes, and the results of that action is the focus of this inquiry. The dialogical relationship was the first step toward challenging the socially

constructed identity of COIPs, their current state of invisibility, and the subsequent non-action that has, thus far, been the Canadian societal response to COIPs.

Animating Question

The convention in quantitative research is to pose research questions framed as hypotheses; "testable predictions about the relationship between variables" (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004, p. 39). Although testing variables is not the case for qualitative research, there continues to be a tendency toward research questions in general that invite answers. I find this convention disorienting as I labour under no illusions that I will have a claim to an absolute truth about the stories of COIPs, AOR relationships, or how these two "variables" can be tested. Indeed, the questions asked here are not seeking truth, but rather opening space for further questions to be considered. The stories that were gathered and shared here are particular to this research situation and the learning that has been absorbed from this process is not meant to predict what others in similar situations might or should do. Rather, this work is an invitation for the reader to engage in a dialogical learning process that may inform future research, clinical practice, or invite enhanced everyday compassion. As Frank (2010) suggests, "any analysis ought to contribute something to humans' understanding of how to live—not just how living is done" (p. 19). Consequently, instead of research questions I prefer to characterize this inquiry as being taken up by the following animating question, which invites the notion of action:

> How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration lead to action that challenges stigma, engages mental health care professionals, and mobilizes supportive others?

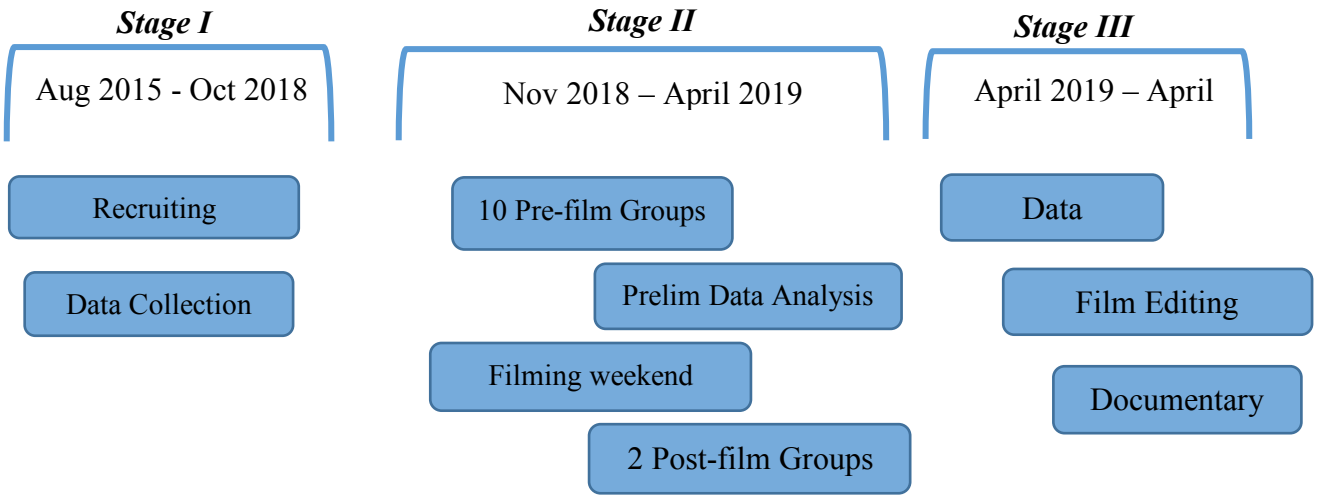
Frank (2012) discussed the very real danger of becoming distracted by the *how* of the process and losing site of the *why*. By returning to this animating question frequently, I strived to

stay connected to my commitments to the research and my participants as we performed the *how* of the research question. In other words, both the *why* and *how* are consequential. This is important as it draws attention to the deed of responding (Shotter, 2009) to a situation, rather than formulating an idea narrowly based on past research to stand as a research question. From Shotter's (2016) perspective, it is not the theorizing that instigates action, it is action that propagates action, which reflects the Deleuzian (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987) ontology of the rhizome, where action (and growth) has been propagated by ideas, but is always on-going in non-hierarchical relationships.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss in more detail the philosophical foundations that informed this research as a community based, action-oriented inquiry grounded in social and relational constructionist theory. I will also elaborate on how the challenges of recruitment and community connections shaped the process. I will discuss the decision for characterizing data as a storied phenomenon and the tensions inherent in applying a narrative epistemology to data. Additionally, I will detail the methods of the individual interviews and focus group strategies. I will introduce the extraordinary experience of sharing stories with each other and the wider community through a documentary based on their individual stories and our group experience. Following the explanation of what constitutes data, I will elaborate on how I engaged with the data from a Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) approach through a Narrative Dialogical Analysis (DNT) lens (Frank, 2012; Sullivan, 2012) that I characterize as Dialogical Narrative Thematic Analysis (DNTA). The intention of this analytic strategy was to sensitize myself, and dialogue with, the common experiences of COIPs to gain an appreciation for the stories that were the most salient and impactful to them, and not to provide a conventional narrative analysis of their stories. In this way I believed DNTA was the appropriate

choice to inform developing the narrative of the documentary we ultimately produced. Additionally, the adoption of a narrative dialogic lens helped me attend to how we dialogically negotiated counter stories that challenged the damaged identity stories typically told about COIPs. It was these counter stories that we chose to focus on in the documentary and for which this project was meant to support. In the remainder of this chapter I will expand on these processes and have included an abbreviated project map below (Figure 3.1) and an expanded map (Figure 3.2, p. 21) that provides a chronological overview of the stages of this work.

Figure 3.1. Abbreviated Project Map



Philosophical Foundations

What invigorates all AOR practices is participant advocacy, participatory agency, and activism. AOR has the potential to circumvent the traditional paradigm based on a constructed separation between researchers and researched (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). An AOR framework provides a scaffold for participants and researchers to work toward a negotiated goal. Greenwood and Levin (2007) proposed that a balance of action, research, and participation links all forms of AOR. Researchers who embrace an AOR approach aim to join with participants to collaboratively alter the situation of the group, organization, or community involved in the

research and move toward a more sustainable, liberating, and self-managing state. Considering the lack of recognition, much less support for COIPs, an AOR approach offered us a powerful way to generate new knowledge meant to, in some way, affect the lives of participants, and the lives of people in similar situations. Adopting an AOR ontology acknowledges a strong commitment to "democratizing the knowledge generation process" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 7), such that all participants share responsibility in the collaborative research process.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) proposed several key features that characterize AOR as: (a) a social process; (b) participatory; (c) practical and collaborative; (d) emancipatory; (e) critical for change; and (f) recursive. According to these authors, all forms of AOR will include these elements in varying degrees. In the following section I will discuss how these aspects of AOR served as an orienting structure from which all research processes were enacted. I will extend the discussion into the philosophical groundings of constructionism, participatory/relational interaction, and dialogical negotiation; the theoretical frameworks that informed my research.

Constructionism as Social Process

Researchers who adopt an AOR approach will often locate it within a social constructionist (SC) paradigm (Gergen, 2014; Gergen & Gergen, 2015; Huzzard, Ahlberg, & Ekman, 2010) where social worlds are seen as created rather than discovered (Strauss, 1978). Like most AOR, my research involved a social process that recognized people exist within contexts where individuals and society co-create social reality (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). In other words, individuals' actions affect the views and responses of society, and vice versa. Accordingly, COIPs have been storied as *at risk* and have little say in how society constructs their identity. It is for this reason that my research adopted SC, and extended it to RC.

Social constructionism. According to Lock and Strong (2010), social constructionism is better understood as a "broad church" (p. 6) rather than one school of thought. However, these authors offer four expansive tenets that converge to underpin SC as a pooled concept. First, SC is concerned with how humans derive meaning out of experience. Second, meaning and understanding is constructed relationally in shared interactions that come about through using language. Third, meaning-making is contextually sensitive and depends on time and place. And fourth, SC theory resists the idea of essentialism; the notion there are essential human characteristics that can be discovered through psychological inquiry. These tenets helped me to hone in on the processes that are key to taking negotiated action with participants to challenge the socially constructed stories of COIPs and offer up a counter story. Butt (2010) noted "the process of construction silently interweaves with any investigation we carry out, so that reality is always made as well as found" (p. 364). From this position, the process of understanding follows not from the detached observation of what is "out there" but as the result of cooperative and active people in relationship (Gergen, 1985).

Shotter (2016) was critical of how researchers adopt an after-the-fact objectivity, which he asserts is a *thin* description of what has happened in another time and context with different actors. According to Shotter, theories, models, and principles are taken out of the moment, do not account for the interacting of embodied beings, and are assumed to be objective "Truth". He proposes a revised understanding of objectivity where there is a "a rich [thick] sense of the *before-the-fact*, already instituted, intra-woven form of objectivity, a holistic common-sense that provides to all the participants within it, a shared *sense of the circumstance* they are currently occupying" (p. 72, italics in original).

Shotter (1995) nuances SC by focusing his attention on the embodied, negotiated, and dialogical nature of joint action, a concept that resonates with the intention of this inquiry and data analysis. As Shotter points out "[t]he process involved is always of a collaborative, distributed nature, spread out amongst all the participants within the communicative process" (p. 17). As such, my intention was to bring my experience as an SC researcher and collaborative counsellor to negotiate these processes. From this perspective, I acknowledge that rather than make objective claims about the experience of parental incarceration, we are negotiating a different kind of relationship with the thin story of risk, which is typically told by others. This reflects the notion of heteroglossia, where storylines are borrowed from multiple voices and perspectives (Robinson, 2011). Rather than a finalized story of struggles, the stories shared in this inquiry privileged competency, courage, and compassion. I want to point out that stories of struggle were invited and not minimized within the responsive (see Wade, 1997), trusting, relational space where they were negotiated; these stories were transformed. As dialogically facilitated, relational processes animated this inquiry, I extended social constructionism (SC) to include relational constructionism (RC).

Relational constructionism. RC aligns with SC in the ways referred to above and adopts a relational discourse as it refers to the social as relational (Hosking & Shamir, 2012). Along the same lines as SC, RC does not assume the individual as a centred and self-determining subject. In addition to critical and relational discourses, RC draws on feminist theory (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008) to discuss the interspaces of relationship. It considers relational processes the media through which relational reality hinges on constructions of a relational self with particular others. Relational constructionists suggest that just as there are multiple others with whom one relates; one is not contained by a single identity. Gergen (2015)

has referred to this lack of identity containment as multiplicity wherein identities arise within particular relational contexts, which means instead of a monological and singular view of self, RC maintains a dialogical view (Sampson, 1993) that accounts for the multiplicity of identity (Harré, 2004; Hosking, 2011). By embracing relational processes that give rise to multiple relational identities, RC assumes multiple local and regional ontologies that reflect an emergent quality. In other words, a particular way of seeing the world is locally real and each local and/or regional context relationally creates that reality. For example, RC considers many sciences as local ontologies within a particular "language game" that extends to other, related "forms of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 226). For RC, the lines of distinction between the dualisms of objective-subjective and real-relativist are seen as local-cultural and local-historical (Hosking, 2011). In other words, these dualisms are unfixed and context specific, where negotiated realities are influenced by local and emergent history. Circling back to the metaphor of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) this relational approach provides emergent processes that flourish between participants toward joint action (Shotter, 2016).

Proponents of RC offer an abstract formulation of relational processes, and avoid a methodological prescription. In addition to the previously mentioned distinctions, adherents to RC propose that (a) relational processes are centered, whereas constructs of individual mind, knowledge, and operations are decentered; (b) processes are considered to go on in inter-acts, theorized as relational performances that can take forms such as speaking, hearing/listening, gestures, symbols, seeing, or any creative expression; (c) processes close down or open up possibilities; (d) relating has the potential to construct hard or soft (minimal) self-other differentiation; and (e) power is ever ongoing as a quality of relational processes including "power over", "power to", and "power with" others (Hosking, 2011; Starhawk, 1989).

The above features of the RC framework focus on the *how* (process) of constructing rather than on the *what* (content) from interaction. In addition to occasioning stories of what it was like to have a parent in prison, I was also interested in how research relationships were negotiated and developed such that RC offered beneficial scaffolds to explore the interspace of our relationships. From an RC perspective, performing research with others is an opportunity to (re)construct relations and realities where the processes themselves are the objects of inquiry. This is also congruent with an analytic frame that draws from Bakhtinian dialogism (Holquist, 2003) as it informs thematic analysis. Additionally, proponents of RC accept a feminist view where power dynamics are acknowledged and managed in a way that sustains relationships based on dignity and respect (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008). From an RC perspective, the formation of an AOR relationship has the potential to open up or close down possibilities; one possibility is challenging the prevailing story of people (children or adults) exposed to parental incarceration. Since a central tenet of AOR involves joining with others to address a community concern, RC offers me a way to view, and discuss, the relational processes as they unfolded in the service of our project and culminating in the documentary we filmed: *Bonds that Hurt, Bonds that Heal* (working title).

Constructionism: process and content. As I mentioned in the previous sections, a constructionist ontology, will influence the ways in which both the content (*what*) and the process (*how*) of the research are characterized. A traditional view of content refers to the historical/temporal and consequential particulars of stories: what happened, where, and when. From this perspective, content is seen as separate from process, however the content of these stories helped participants orient toward a shared understanding that was agreed upon by the story teller(s) and story receiver(s). The content of the story guided the process as participants

chose to focus on some particulars and leave out others, which speaks to process, and Strong and Knight (2012) have discussed as co-editing. From a constructionist and dialogic perspective, the binary of content and process is challenged. In this project, *content* was performed as we negotiated it into an emerging narrative where the story-developers (study participants) had a say in how they want their story to move forward. We performed the content such that a previously unacknowledged story of how COIPs navigate parental incarceration could be heard. In other words, the performing of interaction shapes the content so that the response and responsiveness (Bakhtin, 1986) of the utterances creates meaning between actants that livens the thin, after-the-fact analysis. Bakhtin (1986) proposes that all utterances are, in fact, a response to others or othernesses (Shotter, 2016) with the understanding that a further response is forthcoming.

> An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value … What is given is completely transformed in what is created. (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 119-120).

Shotter (2016) puts it thus, "the meaning of our speakings is '*in*' our speaking, not in the '*content*' of what is said (p. 95, italics in original). It is misleading to consider these aspects of communication as distinct side-by-side entities as they form the whole of discourse and are crucial to a dialogical understanding of the stories shared in this research. Communication is a multi-elemental, performed phenomenon where the content of the story might be considered what is perceived first and most obviously, and the processes, which include embodied responding with elements of action, emotion, and sensing, make up the whole, which in itself is not a complete phenomenon. The way that our communications talked into being the resulting

film of our story aligns with the Deleuzian (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) notion of rhizomatic emergence; an apt metaphor for the way in which the stories and relational processes created something beyond the sum of the parts.

What is AOR?

Reason (1999) referred to AOR as a "radically participative form of inquiry" (p. 207) that engages people in examining their own knowledge (understandings, skills, and values), and how they interpret themselves and their actions in the world (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Although proponents of different AOR approaches call for different levels of participation, they all share a participatory worldview (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Coming together as a group and participating in the development and production of a documentary could not have been achieved without the negotiated participation of all of us.

AOR as participatory, collaborative, and practical. Taking up a participatory paradigm involves relating in ways based on reciprocity, challenging the traditional empiricism of positivist science that claims to place the researcher in a value-neutral position of observation (Shotter, 2003). From an AOR perspective, the typical researcher/participant dichotomy with inherent power differentials and differing values or goals is mitigated. Shotter (2016) invites us to "examine the radical nature of participative or withness thinking, and its role in our [thicker], already instituted before the fact forms of everyday objectivity" (p. 40). Consequently, the research processes described in this dissertation intentionally proceeded from a participative, collaborative perspective in order to stay congruent with the animating research question that states one way to bring forth stories of COIPs is by engaging dialogically and acting.

Collaboration is not just about working together, but about reconciling perspectives, multiple expertises, and resources, as well as sharing accountability and responsibility.

Collaboration is a process through which we can go well beyond our own vision of what is possible, and from which we can jointly act (Shotter, 2016). There is a distinction between collaboration and cooperation as it is portrayed in educational literature. Kozar (2010) describes cooperative endeavours as tasks that have been divided among participants and in which each individual brings their own learning back to the group where it is amalgamated. Alternatively, collaboration is a process by which the common goal is a negotiated process and is not recognized as a single individual's accomplishment (Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2012; McInnerney & Robert, 2004; Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). As I alluded to earlier, drawing from a Gestalt (Jacobs, 1989; Smith, 1988, 2014) sensibility, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Additionally, collaborative practices oriented toward action are inherently practical (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The pragmatic philosophy of Richard Rorty (Rorty, 1980; Reason, 2003), as applied to AOR, positions AOR researchers as concerned with what works in a particular context, and with solutions to the problems of such a context. Creswell (2007) discussed a pragmatic worldview as one that focuses on the "outcomes of research – the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry – rather than antecedent conditions (as in post positivism)" (p. 22). Researchers who embrace a practical ideology privilege *what* and *how* questions rather than the traditional *why* questions of modernist research (Creswell, 2007). However, it is worth mentioning that in revisiting my animating research question, I use the *why* as a compass rather than as a question to be answered in an abstract way. Results are intended to make a difference in what Reason (2003) describes as the real world. From a SC/RC perspective, the real world is a socially negotiated, contextually relevant, and constructed form emerging from relational interactions (Hosking, 2011). As will be demonstrated in the following analyses, the practical consequences of this inquiry had both a personal effect (participants shared

numerous benefits of participating) and (hoped for) broader social effects where support service and interested stakeholders will be invited to engage with the stories shared through this inquiry.

Collaborating in the context of SC and AOR requires relational practices of safety and communication, while recognizing participants as dialogic co-creators. It is necessary to address how power is acknowledged and managed by collaborative participants. In AOR-informed projects researchers, managers, organizations, and other members of privileged groups are typically invited to create power relations *with*, rather than *over*, people when engaging in research practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). For this research, collaborative practices, informed by both feminist (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Ponic, Reid, & Frisby, 2010) and counselling psychology scholarship (Anderson, 2012; Hoffman, 2007), were fundamental as we (participants and I) strove to mitigate the damage of the power structures that have contributed to the COIP stories of risk told by others. Essential to the practice of AOR, participating in the research process goes beyond the dichotomous activities of collecting/analyzing data or simply providing data; it entails entering into the relational space of democratizing knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Democratizing knowledge means that knowledge holders not only participate in the creating process, but also share a say in what counts as knowledge: in this research participants had a say in what counted as knowledge.

AOR as emancipatory and critical for change. AOR has been described as emancipatory (Hacker, 2013; Heron & Reason, 1997; Maguire, 2001) in that people explore how their everyday practices are constrained by social structures with the intention to better understand and address these constraints. In this project, the social structures examples that are most constraining include public policy, the criminal justice system, educational institutions, and housing options. The emancipatory dimension of AOR invites ideas of feminism in terms of both

theory and practice. I identify as a feminist practitioner, researcher, and person in my daily life, yet this research is not explicitly gender focused. As feminist theory has developed over the last several decades (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009), many writers have expanded feminist inquiry to include anyone living under oppressive circumstances, usually on the margins of society (Corbett, Francis, & Chapman, 2007). Indeed, bell hooks (2015) reminds us "feminism is for everybody" (p. 1). Those who have discussed these tensions have termed this fusion feminist-informed action research (FIAR) (Corbett et al., 2007; Maguire, 2001), which embraces inter-related oppressions such as race, social status, sexual orientation or preference, spiritual affiliation, and physical ability in addition to gender. Maguire (2001) asserted "feminist-grounded action research is not limited to a struggle against gender oppression alone" (p. 63). From this perspective, lifting gender out of the multiple contexts of marginalization results in a narrow understanding of inter-related oppressive structures. Consequently, acknowledging that this inquiry is grounded in a feminist sensibility supports my commitment to broadly incorporate the ethics, practices, and centrality of power issues associated with feminist inquiry.

In addition to the theoretical underpinnings that orient the intentions of this project, AOR is a critical resource for change, in that researchers join with participants to contest and replace unjust or unsatisfying ways of interpreting, describing, and interacting with their world. AOR can provide a vehicle by which academics and community members work alongside each other to instigate change through action (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). My intention was to work alongside participants in exploring their stories and develop an AOR project that has the potential to bring about change in how COIPs are supported and understood, thereby making the challenges of parental incarceration more visible.

AOR as recursive. Action research is recursive (i.e., reflexive, dialectical), which helps participants and researchers investigate culturally unquestioned reality in hopes of altering it or at least introducing dialogue. The recursive elements of AOR are reminiscent of Lewin's (1946) cycles of reflection that call for iterative processes of action and examining the effects of the action. This series of reflections/actions can be visually depicted as a spiral that involves planning, acting, reflecting, and adjusting plans of action (Heron & Reason, 2002). Reflective action, in the context of this AOR project, was based on open communication, trust, and respect for knowledge holders' contributions. Our group meetings were essential to enact the recursive and reflective processes necessary to negotiate our common action. In other words, after the first meeting, each subsequent meeting was an opportunity to reflect on previous plans and adjust further action to incorporate what we had learned. In this way we agreed that the film was the best way to use our resources and would have the most community reach. I will expand further on this process in later sections.

Research Design

In this research I worked alongside seven adults who had a childhood experience of parental incarceration (recruitment details presented later). I sought participants who: 1) were 16 years of age or older; 2) had grown up in Canada; 3) had a parent in prison when they were between the ages of six and 18; and 4) whose parent(s) had been imprisoned for 90 days or more. I chose these criteria for a number of reasons. First, a retrospective view of a childhood experience has both advantages and disadvantages. Although there is substantial evidence that memory does not yield an infallible account of past experience (Loftus, 2017; Loftus & Teitcher, 2019), the intention of this research is not to verify 'Truth' in order to validate or invalidate experience. Rather, this research is meant to explore participants' relationship with salient and

meaningful memories that inform their stories, and to explore the relational processes that lead to action-oriented group processes where we engaged in advocacy for people (children and adults) affected by parental incarceration. Table 3.1 presents the demographic information of the seven participants.

Table 3.1. Participant Demographics

Initials (age)	Gender	Parent incarcerated	Age at PI	Caregiver at time of incarceration	Present Parent location/relation	Participation number of individual interviews: number of focus group interviews
CK (50)	Female	Mother/father	3 - 16	Foster, Remaining Parent	Parents deceased, Living Independently	2: 10
NVS (19)	Male	Mother	8 - 11	Foster, Kinship	Father deceased. Resides with mother	2: 9
SV (18)	Female	Mother/father	6 - 12	Kinship	Father in prison. Resides with mother	2: 8
KA (33)	Female	Mother	15 - 19	Kinship	Father deceased, mother in care, LI	2: 8
MCP (20)	Male	Mother	4 - 14	Father	Relationship with mother. LI	2
MM (21)	Male	Father	6 - 18	Mother	Relationship with father/ mother.	1
LV (20)	Female	Mother/father	5 - 18	Kinship	Participant deceased	1

As discussed earlier, using a narrative theory perspective privileges the idea that the memories we choose to focus on will inform our self-concept and have an influence on our actions. Therefore, a retrospective view can create reflective space that is necessary for examining the experience of parental incarceration. Second, as this research took place within a Canadian context, and is specifically meant to challenge the lack of services and acknowledgement that exist in Canada, it was expected that participants would have a Canadian

perspective. Third, the early childhood amnesia phenomenon is an accepted concept in studies of memory (Tustin & Hayne, 2019) and has demonstrated that adults are more likely to remember events that occur after the ages between two and eight (Eacott, 1999). Consequently, choosing to place the lower age range at six, for inquiry-relevant reflections, acknowledges that participants are more likely to recall salient experiences. Finally, the decision to include a set duration of time the parent was imprisoned came from the notion that as time goes by, it becomes more difficult to explain a parental absence as, for example, a work or travel related absence.

This research proceeded in three Stages. *Stage I* included two individual interviews and the initial focus group. *Stage II* was informed by decisions made in the focus group of *Stage I*. In *Stage II*, we continued to meet for a total of 10 times where we made the collaborative decision to engage in advocacy through the creation of a documentary that explored aspects of individual stories and how we came together as a group. After the filming (about which I will elaborate on in section name of section) we entered *Stage III* of the project where the footage was viewed and approved by participants, and then edited to produce the final version.

A Word on Recruiting: Methodological Challenges

As I have mentioned previously, the idea to explore the consequences of parental incarceration was first discussed during my Master's degree work alongside women who had recently been released from prison. At their behest, I embarked on a journey that was meant to honour their experience concerning their children, and be congruent with my commitment to challenge social stigma affecting those involved with the criminal justice system. The women in that initial collaboration assured me that finding participants would not be difficult as they knew of several possible candidates. Additionally, when I first proposed this research to colleagues who worked with marginalized populations, there was a great deal of enthusiasm and

encouragement. Consequently, I was not fully prepared for the difficult journey ahead. As is customary, I began recruiting shortly after my candidacy exam: I contacted participants from my Master's research, posted recruitment posters in both likely and unlikely places, talked to numerous community organizations, took every opportunity to share with colleagues at gatherings (e.g., social, conferences, professional meetings etc.), built a Facebook page, talked to community organizations again, put up posters again, was interviewed on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio network, and an article appeared in the university newsfeed (Appendix A). In over three years of exploring every avenue I could think of, I was able to recruit only seven participants. As I was to discover again and again: The story of parental incarceration is very deeply hidden. Needless to say, I was beyond discouraged and there were many times I wanted to give up. Even as I battled the demons of demoralization and despondency, I knew this yet to-be-told story of parental incarceration was important and concerned colleagues encouraged me to keep going. Ultimately, my supervisory committee and I decided that, although participant numbers were small, it was time to bring these important stories to light. Upon reflection, the difficulty of recruitment for this inquiry reflected the influence of stigma and shame as a hallmark of the parental incarceration experience (Knaphus-Soran, 2017; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Turney & Lanuza, 2017). The next sections include a commitment to the ethical intentions I believe are vital in social research, particularly when working alongside those affected by social injustices. I also elaborate on the details of who shared their stories, the context of the sharing, the performative dimensions of the stories, and how they were analyzed.

Ethical Stance

"Intentions do not guarantee effect" (Jeff Chang quoting Karl Tomm, personal communication). As this quote by Karl Tomm suggests, it is important to continue to evaluate the effects of actions, regardless of the honourable intent. Additionally, AOR is inspired by social advocacy (Greenwood & Levin, 2007), and sharing stories is profoundly grounded in relationship (Clandinin, 2013), I believe it is important to state and address ethical concerns that go beyond confidentiality and a fundamental ethic of care (Schulz, Schroeder, & Brody, 1997). By inviting self-selecting participants to join me in this exploration, my ethical considerations included, but were not limited to: (a) addressing power relations; (b) ensuring that decisions regarding direction and implementation of the group processes were collective; (c) facilitating respectful and appropriate communication; (d) obtaining ongoing informed consent as befitted this type of fluid methodology; and (e) clarifying ownership of research products.

I also aligned with the ethical framework developed by Vikki Reynolds, who self-identifies as an activist/anarchist and therapist (Reynolds, 2012; Reynolds & Hammond-Becket, 2012). I believe her guiding ethical intentions helped me to embrace and extend the previous considerations. Reynolds (2012) describes her work as "profoundly collaborative and informed by decades of solidarity with direct action activists" (p. 18). She states that the intentions embrace imperfect solidarity and that even though the work comers from a decolonizing and anti-oppression stance, it does not guarantee that it is safe or correct. From a stance of (imperfect) solidarity, Reynolds reminds counsellors/researchers that our work is not harmless or innocent and mistakes are at the expense of clients/participants (Reynolds, 2010). I believe this is an important reminder as I work alongside research participants. Although I am well intentioned,

the understanding that my actions and responses are not neutral lines up with a dialogical, social constructionist ontology (Shotter, 2010) and adds an additional layer of self-reflection.

Reynolds (2012) proposed ethical intentions or guideposts that help to sustain justice doing across all domains of practice (e.g., therapy, activism, research). I recognize these are distinct domains with differing intentions/goals, however, I believe this ethical stance is appropriate across all domains of practice that come into contact with social injustices, including research.

Reynolds (2012) begins with centering ethics, where she invites practitioners to emphasize and enact their ethics, for it is "in the doing that ethics are revealed" (p. 22). She places shared accountability, humility, and continual self-questioning in relationship at the core of practice. I found that maintaining a research journal was fertile ground to practice self-questioning and reflection. Additionally, I consulted on a regular basis with colleagues who had worked in the area as well as community members familiar with the consequences of incarceration. Consulting and reaching out for support resonate with Reynolds' second guiding principle: doing solidarity. This involves joining with others (e.g., therapists, clients, participants) in justice work, acting collectively (i.e., joint action), and supporting each other without judgment (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). I acknowledge the work we are doing as a group was inspired and informed by community members, advocates, activists, and researchers who challenge the stigmatizing experience of incarceration.

In the third guiding intention, addressing power, Reynolds (2012) proposed that practitioners address how power influences their work. From this perspective, I attempted to identify injustices and challenged the myth of neutrality. My intention was to explicitly discuss the power imbalances and continue to check-in with participants in order to create a relational

mechanism for feedback. I also was aware that regardless of my attempts to flatten the hierarchies by adopting a RC/SC stance, these structures remain and must be acknowledged. Reynolds notes that practices that spring from this intention will include, but are not limited to, witnessing peoples' resistance to oppression, confronting the influence of privilege, and promoting accountability.

Reynolds' (2012) fourth guiding intention, fostering collective sustainability, confronts the threat of professional burnout and promotes collective caring. In the domain of research with people oppressed by social injustice, I connect to the personal difficulties this work entails. From this view, it is not clients or cases that harm us; rather, damage is done through structures of injustice and working in isolation. Caring for each other, having freedom to enact our ethics, and sharing in our work buffers practitioners against burnout. I returned to this guiding principle many times over the course of this work as I experienced the feelings of dejection and helplessness I mentioned in the section on recruitment and methodological challenges. Without the support and encouragement of my family, colleagues, supervisory committee, and participants (past and present) I might have given up. Instead of succumbing to discouragement, these key relationship connections energized and re-inspired my work.

It is the fifth guiding intention, critically engaging in language use, that connects Reynolds' framework to constructionist theory. From a constructionist perspective, meaning making is grounded in shared language, and attention to language use helps practitioners sustain ethical practice. She aligns her work with that of Canadians Linda Coates and Allan Wade (2004; 2007), who examined court documents in cases of rape. These researchers, interested in the nature of violence and resistance to violence, demonstrated how language use can maintain power structures, obscure perpetrator responsibility, and blame or pathologize victims.

Throughout the literature review of this document, I demonstrated how COIPs are described as being at risk, which obscures stories that resist the concretized version of their experience as written by others.

Reynolds' (2012) final guiding intention is structuring safety. She admits, "there are no perfectly safe helping relationships" (p. 27), as all relationships across differences are inherently risky. However, the binary of safe/unsafe is challenged when we co-create with participants, environments that are safer or *safe enough*. Safe enough practices are fostered when the parameters of safety and risk are negotiated with participants, we accept imperfection in our work, and resist replicating structures of dominance. Reynolds is clear that "structuring safety is not something practitioners do to get ready for the real work; it *is* the real work" (p. 28, italics in original).

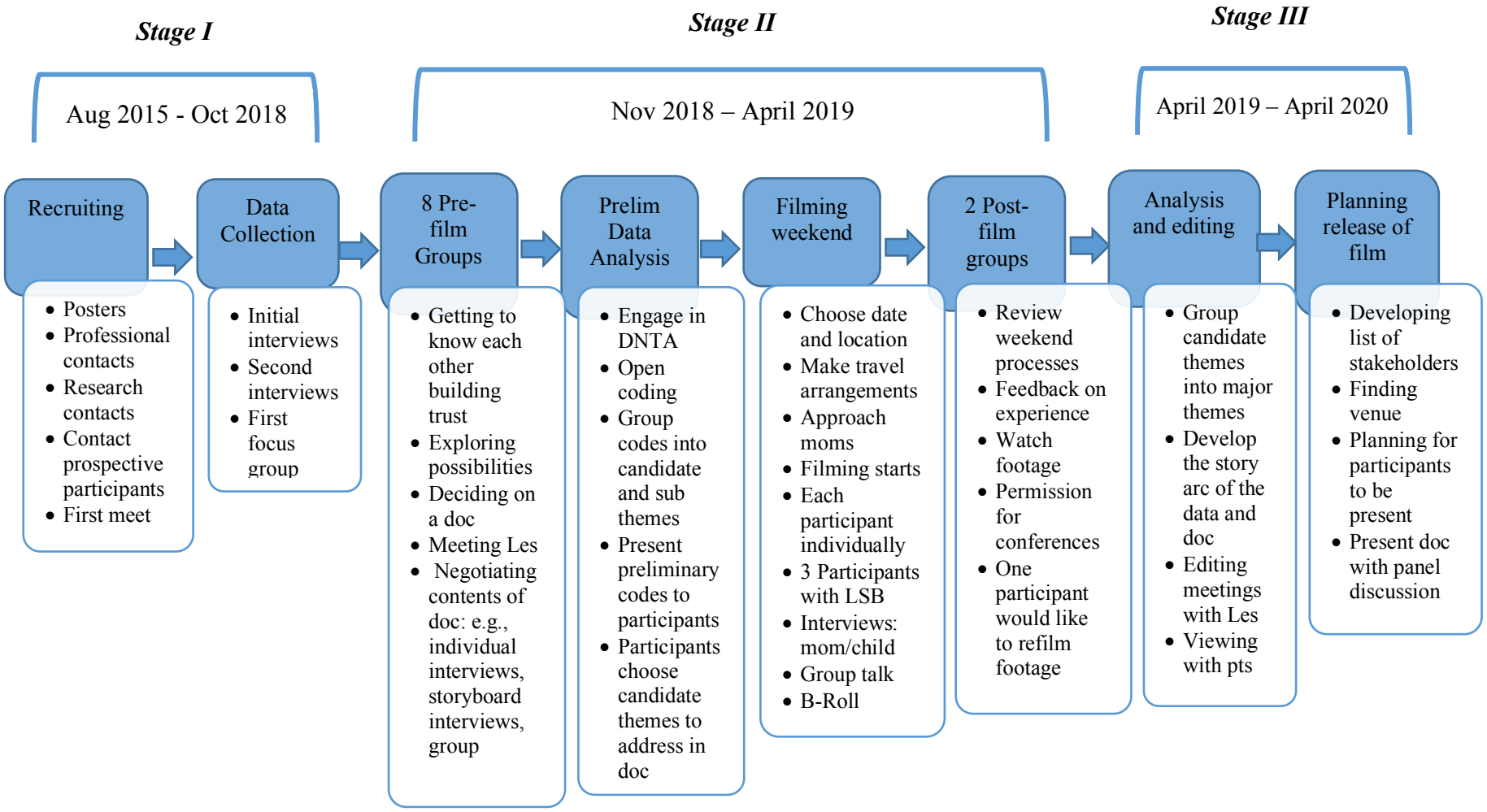
The desire to *structure safety* inspired me to include two interviews (rather than one) before the group processes to develop the relationship, ensure that all aspects of the consent and limits to confidentiality were understood, and demonstrate that the research/relationship space was safe enough. At the first group meeting power dynamics were addressed, I made it explicit that all decisions would be negotiated and that I was committed to acknowledging the different expertise around the table. My collaborative, narrative, and feminist theoretical orientation as a counsellor provided me with the skills to create a 'safe enough' space and ensure that all participants were heard. In the first meeting, we established that there was a desire to continue on with some effort at advocacy or at least exploration into the present situation in Canada regarding COIPs. This decision was made as a group through negotiation and collaboration, which I will demonstrate through the analysis. I tried to ensure that all decisions were negotiated and checked in often on how participants understood certain processes, their comfort level with

the processes, and assurances that this was a joint project. As will be discussed in later sections, we negotiated how the products that came out of the group effort were to be disseminated and shared with the community. In addition to my theoretical orientation as a practitioner I adopted a response-based approach (Wade, 1997) to relational interactions, which honours how participants respond with strength to their experience that is often unrecognized. Consequently, throughout the process, participants were treated with sensitivity and care, which align with both my professional codes of ethics and the guiding principles offered by Reynolds (2012). This project was approved and monitored by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) of the University of Calgary.

Engagement

The process of engaging in an AOR project takes many twists, turns, and tangents. Consequently, the journey can be confusing. I have included a map that helps to organize the process in a linear fashion. Although, as any researcher engaged in this type of methodology knows, this is far from an ideal representation. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is illustrative.

Figure 3.2. Expanded Project Map



Developing AOR Relationships

I began to engage with participants in different ways. One responded to a poster displayed on a university cork board and the remaining six were reached through research, professional, or social relationships. To facilitate referrals and snowball sampling, I prepared a third-party recruitment statement (Appendix B) where I briefly summarized the study and provided contact information. Through social and professional relationships supplied with the abbreviated explanation, participants were given my contact information and invited to email me stating their interest in the study. I offered to have a phone conversation, or meet before the participant agreed to join the study. To ensure that participants were fully informed as to the processes of the study I sent them a copy of the recruitment poster (Appendix C), a copy of the consent form (Appendix D), and a list of open questions meant to stimulate conversations and stories (Appendix E). All participants opted for having the study overview, consent form, and questions emailed to them and did not request an informational meeting. It can be said that the dialogical relationships were instigated by these initial contacts as all potential participants who connected with me chose to engage in the research.

Interviewing: Particulars and Strategies.

As there were numerous participant interactions, I have provided Table 3.2 that indicates which participants engaged in the individual interviews, focus groups, and filming weekend.

Table 3.2. Interviews and Focus Group Attendance by Participants.

	II1	II2	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6	FG7	FG8	FW	FG9	FG10
CK	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
NVS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+
SV	+	+	+		+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+
KA	+	+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
MCP	+	+											
MM	+												

LV	+												
LB									+	+	+		

Note: II=individual interview; FG=focus groups; FW=filming weekend; and LB=Les Bairstow.

Individual interviews. In *Stage I* of my research, participants were asked to engage in two individual interviews and one focus group interview. These interviews helped to start building the research relationships, create a safe enough space to share stories, and invite participants to join the focus group. When a participant agreed to meet with me, we negotiated a meeting place and time that was comfortable for the participant. Three of the seven participants lived outside of the city and therefore meetings took place via video calls on the platform Google Hangouts™. The remaining interviews were conducted at the university, in the participants' home, or in one case, my car. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist who signed the CFREB-approved confidentiality form (Appendix F). The full transcriptions were given to participants for their approval. After one participant discontinued communication and one passed away, five participants granted a follow-up interview. As mentioned earlier, the second interview was a way to build relationship, develop trust, and build on the ethics of a safe enough space. At this meeting, data from the first interview were summarized and participants were invited to check accuracy and change, redact, or add information. Following the second interview, four participants chose to form an ongoing 'advocacy group', which led to *Stage II* of the research.

Group process. *Stage II* (included the focus group meeting from *Stage I*) consisted of 10 meetings (eight prior to filming and two after the filming weekend) to explore ways to raise awareness and consequently, to engage in advocacy with the hope of invoking change in the way the community, service providers, and policy makers support COIPs. We met bi-weekly starting in November, 2018 and continuing through to April 2019. Two participants reside in Calgary,

one participant in Fort Langley, British Columbia, and one participant in Moncton, New Brunswick. The two local participants attended the meetings in person and the others joined online via the video conferencing platform. The locations of the meetings in Calgary varied depending on the availability of time and space, privacy, and the mobility of participants; e.g., a room at the local library, the University of Calgary, or my home. I always ensured that the two local participants had transportation and would pick them up if necessary. The first meeting consisted of reviewing confidentiality and consent, negotiating the group values, getting to know each other, sharing stories about experiences of parental incarceration, and making the decision to continue meeting. At this point I applied, and received approval for an ethics amendment from the CFREB, which meant an additional consent form for participants (Appendix G). Participants shared that they felt some initial anxiety before the first meeting but quickly opened up to each other as they established trust and understanding. At each of the next three meetings we engaged in discussion around how best to use our resources and energy to raise awareness for COIPs. These group processes reflected the recursive cyclical nature of an action-oriented methodology (Minkler, 2004) where efforts were made by participants to find information about an agreed upon area of concern, act by making inquiries and exploring options, bringing the information back to the next meeting for reflection, and then again act based on what we learned. For example, we discussed exploring the foster care system, the way law enforcement deals with children during and after arrest, available resources for children, and counselling/social work practices. We each volunteered to explore some source of information in these areas of interest and later brought these sources back to the group for further discussion.

At the fourth meeting the group decided that the best way to reach out to the public and those in a position to support COIPs, was to develop a short documentary. We worked together

to make decisions about the target audience and the narrative arc of the film, which was to reflect both participant experience and our development as a group. We explored the technical details of making a documentary and we each spent time researching how to accomplish our goal with our limited expertise, time, and resources. We quickly realized we were out of our depth. However, through academic connections and grant funding, we had the opportunity to engage a videographer (Les Bairstow) connected to the University of Calgary and experienced in making documentaries based on academic work.

It was important to the group that the person who would be filming intimate details of our experience was a fit. In other words, it would be someone who presented with openness and compassion. Before introducing Les to the group, I had two meetings with him to provide an overview of the project and get a sense of how he might resonate with participants and the intent of the documentary. Les was very interested in the subject matter and admitted that until our meetings, he too had not given any thought to COIPs. He agreed that it was an important message to share with the public. Consequently, Les was introduced to the group after he signed a confidentiality agreement approved by the CFREB (Appendix H). At this meeting participants asked him questions to get a feel for whether he was a trustworthy witness to and documentarian of their stories. At the next meeting we discussed how people felt about Les and they all agreed that he appeared to contribute to a safe enough space to share and film their stories. After this initial meeting, Les joined the group for one more subsequent meeting where we shared ideas about filming possibilities and he informed us about what we could expect from the technical aspects of the process. After the filming weekend, we engaged in two additional group meetings to review some of the footage and get feedback from participants. We were also preparing for me to present clips representing themes at three different conferences (Appendix I: National

Children of Incarcerated Parents Conference, Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Annual Conference, American Family Therapy Academy Conference), with the permission of the participants.

Filming process. We chose a weekend for filming and the two out-of-town participants were able to fly to Calgary with the support of the grant funds. We discussed the importance of a filming location and I offered my home. We agreed that a comfortable environment where participants shared nourishing food, had privacy when needed, and had the intimate support of each other would help ease what might be a trying experience. Over the course of two days we engaged in filming individual interviews with each participant based on their chosen topics of discussion, two mother and child interviews, and discussions arising from a visual interview tool called Life Story Board™ (LSB) (Chongo, Chase, Lavoie, Harder, & Mignone, 2018) that combines art-based therapy, narrative storytelling, and genograms (http://vidaview.ca/). I will discuss these elements in the next section. We also filmed what is called B-roll footage, which contextualizes the visual experience. This took place around my neighborhood, in the home of the participants who live in Calgary, and in my home. B-roll footage helps to support the stories in a creative way and helped us avoid the boredom of what film makers call "nothing but talking heads". B-roll film adds interest to the quality of a film and invites viewers to remain engaged through different levels of audio-visual experience. Additionally, we used music with permission from different artists.

Elements of the film. Prior to filming I had been engaging in the early stages of data analysis (described in the next sections) and I discussed the accumulating commonalities and themes with participants. With the help of a Google Docs™ participatory document, I invited participants to view and comment on the initial threads I had identified through the preliminary

data analysis. Participants added comments and made some adjustments to more accurately reflect their negotiated understanding. From this provisional analysis, each person chose a number of particular themes they felt were important to discuss for the documentary. From this information I developed questions (Appendix J) for each participant that reflected the themes they had chosen and encouraged further reflection about the particular theme.

The use of the LSB was instigated by participants, as one had some experience with a life story approach to therapy. We researched the source and arranged a meeting with Dr. Robert Chase, the developer of LSB and a physician who has worked with war exposed children in developing countries. Chase, Medina and Mignone (2012) proposed that a visual approach to interviewing transcended language barriers as well as provided a vehicle through which stories that included traumatic experiences could be shared more comfortably. The participant who had suggested researching LSB joined the meeting with Dr. Chase. We brought this information back to the group and all agreed to try it. I ordered the kit, had a training session with Dr. Chase, and familiarized myself with the tool before our filming weekend. As a group we accepted that our use of the LSB was somewhat experimental and would assess the value of using it as a way to share stories and as viable footage after the filming. My training as a counselling psychologist had prepared me to work with strong emotions and/or difficult memories that might come up. Chongo et al. (2018) used the LSB for research purposes and found that a greater depth of sharing was achieved than with interviewing alone; particularly with stories that are emotionally charged. The participant feedback afterwards was positive and they all reflected that they felt more comfortable sharing the difficult stories via the LSB process than in a face to face interview. In terms of the documentary as the final product, the LSB added visual interest and served as a jumping off point for the more salient stories shared by participants. It also provided

the anchor for possible animated sequences that will be included as a way to depict the more dramatic stories and tap into an emotional connection to the audience.

In addition to the individual interviews and the LSB footage, we filmed two mothers, whose children were participants in the research. This was the result of a discussion with Les in the group meeting he attended. He had asked if it would be interesting or possible to interview a parent and child together. This idea gained traction in the group and two participants (SV and NVS) volunteered to ask their parent if they would be willing to be interviewed. It came back to the group that this was possible so I applied for, and received approval for an addendum to my ethics certificate. I had initial meetings with the two mothers in order to clarify the process, invite queries, and share the questions I had developed ahead of time (see Appendix J). My intention was to assure the mothers that this particular experience was meant to explore how incarceration affected the relationships between parent and child, and to explore some of the challenges when reunited. I explicitly shared that it was not meant to be a commentary on past experiences that might invoke shame and ensure that the conversations were strength focused. With participants' help we developed a filming schedule (Appendix K).

In the next section I will describe how the data and analysis helped to inform the subject matter and narrative arc of the film. I will discuss what constituted data, the DNA lens through which the themes for the film were negotiated and the processes of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012), which I came to characterized as DNTA, and how this approach helped to focus and contain the data.

Data and Analysis

As mentioned above, the recordings from the two pre-film individual interviews, the first two focus groups, and the footage from the video were transcribed by a professional

transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality agreement approved by CFREB (see Appendix F). Additionally, I recorded the subsequent group meetings, kept field notes, and generated a detailed summary report for each meeting, which I shared with participants for approval and/or feedback. The transcribed interviews, group meetings, and transcripts from the video footage were considered potential data. In addition to these sources of data, I kept a reflective journal to process the interactions and challenges, and maintain a reflexive stance. Data were managed with the assistance of a qualitative analysis program (MAXQDA™) that helps to organize textual data as well as generate visual representations if required. Each of the individual interview transcripts and summary notes were shared with respective participants to ensure they were comfortable with the content and they had the opportunity to redact or adjust shared information (Harvey, 2015; Thomas, 2017). We later reviewed the film footage together and participants decided what was, or was not, to be included. In the next section I expand on these processes and describe my reasoning behind choosing a narrative view of data and how I developed the subsequent themes.

Narrative, Stories, and Data. As the inquiry's animating question included an aspect of narrative in the form of sharing stories, it was important to explore the dimensions of narrative that were relevant to this project. Narrative, understood from a research and clinical practice standpoint, has become so endemic in social science research that in many ways, it is a cumbersome concept rendered nearly meaningless as a catch-all term. As the focus of this inquiry is on the stories of people affected by parental incarceration, I will not attempt to resolve this state of affairs. However, in the next section I will review the early conceptualizations of narrative, some tensions that are of concern to this project, critiques of narrative data, and my preferred ways of working with stories. From a narrative perspective, each person affected by parental incarceration has a story to tell. How will this story be heard and by whom? And, once it

is heard, what will become of it? These are significant questions to be considered when aligning with a narrative orientation toward data and analysis, and the elements of a documentary. As King (2003) suggests, stories have power and should be respected in that when they are shared, conditions are altered in a number of ways. Stories as narrative do more than document already happened experiences; they also project possible futures and inform people as to how to proceed (Frank, 2010). Echoing my theoretical orientation in counselling practice, I believe that embedded in a storyline is the information that will influence how a person chooses particular paths. Therefore, sharing stories, in this case the narratives of adults affected by parental incarceration, merits investigation and provides multiple growth and analytic opportunities. Additionally, childhoods that may include difficult or adverse experiences may be more easily conveyed if communicated through a narrative perspective (Kurtz, 2014).

As an element of analysis, narrative has a rich and varied history in the social sciences and humanities (Gergen & Gergen, 2010). In the social sciences, the early writing of cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1991) challenged rationalist explanations of psychological behaviour as being inadequate and lacking depth. While the positivistic approaches he critiqued claimed purchase on objective truth, Bruner was unconvinced such explanations of reality reflected the fullness of human experience. He pointed out that little attention was paid to how humans create the social world and what takes place within that domain. Bruner (1991) posits we construct "the rich and messy domain of human interaction" (p. 4) mediated and moderated through narrative. He focused not on narrative as text, but on how narrative is instrumental in the construction of mind (Bruner, 2004). He proposed that memory and human experience are organized through narrative forms such as stories, myths, gossip, and literature. By tapping into this rich source of information, via attention to narrative, understanding human experience could

be fleshed out and deepened. Consequently, analysis of stories is concerned with how stories influence people's lives, how they are defined by the stories that resonate within them, extending to the stories that are not told or have little effect (Frank, 2010). Narrative inquiry is concerned with how a particular narrative is recognized, received, enervated, and perpetuated.

There is much to consider when choosing to adopt a narrative approach to characterizing, collecting, and analyzing data. Narrative is more than the reporting of events or the recitation of experiences presented in a temporally coherent manner (Josselson, 1995; Labov & Waletsky, 1997). Among other things, narrative interaction offers insight into how people make sense of life experience (Clandinin, 2007), conduct identity work (Grant et al., 2015; McAdams, 1993; Shotter, 1993), culturally connect with others (Gergen & Gergen, 2010), and challenge social injustice (Kurtz, 2014; Kurtz & Shimshock, 2011). Strawson (2004) critiqued the privileged position that narrative holds in much of social science research by suggesting that there are alternative ways to convey identity, personal history, morality, and future endeavours. His case in point is that blind affiliation with narrativity obscures the possibility that there are other ways of making sense of experience. He cautions that researchers and practitioners should not be unconsciously attached to the idea that the best and only way of demonstrating experience across time is accomplished via coherent, storied, expressions of self. I believe this is important to consider as each participant had different ways of expressing their historical experience. Although I am attuned to the stories in all their forms, I knew I would not serve participants if I discounted or ignored a non-storied way of conveying meaningful information.

In a review of how narrative theory in the social sciences developed (and continues to develop), Smith and Sparkes (2008) identified eight sources of tension under three broad themes that I believe should be considered as I adopted a narrative approach to this research. In order to

condense their ideas into an accessible overview, I have constructed the following table (Table 3.3). I found this helpful to organize the numerous positions narrative-oriented scholarship has explored in such a way as to make explicit the choices that I needed to consider as they organize both my analysis and results.

Table 3.3. Tensions in Narrative Theory/Inquiry (adapted from Smith & Sparkes, 2008)

Narrative and the Self	Ontology/Nature of Narrative	Analysis
Narrative and identity: - Some see as inseparable and performed simultaneously - Self or identity is a narrative (McAdams, 1993, conceptualizes it as a life story) - Some disagree; e.g., Eakin (1999) suggests that it is unlikely and extravagant to claim that narrative is us. "how can a story be presumed to stand for all we believe we are? (p. 102). Proposes narrative as a structuring role in the performance of a sense of identity. - Problematized in that stories may be used to hide as much as they reveal (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000) - Craib (2000) proposes there is danger in reducing the self to an effect of language. The danger is more real in a narrow definition of language.	Unconscious versus Conscious - (Neo) realist: life narrative already exists to be discovered (McAdams 1993; Crossley, 2003). A self out there that can be known in principle. We are subconsciously gathering "data" for the self-defining story we will someday discover and compose. - Relativist: no theory-free knowledge and/or observation. One can never know if depiction is "Truth" or how things "really" are (Smith & Deemer, 2000). As humans we have finite knowledge of self and world and identity is something we "create, do, and perform in relation to a particular audience" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008)	What and/or How - What questions emphasize content, plot, characters. E.g., "What does the story tell us about X" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 184) - How focused analysis is concerned with the performed experience, hone in on everyday methods. E.g., "How X is constructed in the telling (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 184). The production of meaning is the emphasis.
Non-Unity versus unity - Non-unity: multiplicity of identities, fragmented, emerging, contradictory, contextual, distributed over time and place. (Hermans, 2002; Wetherall, 1998; Gergen, 1991, multiphrenia). Saturated self no longer possible to have one identity that suffices for all contexts. - Unity: Challenges the notion of multiple selves and claims a constancy or unity to identity (e.g., McAdams admits to many elements but claims that narrative identity integration is a developmental task). Crossley	Interiority and externality: - Interiority characterized as "inner feelings, private internal world", individualism, a mind" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 180) - Is the analytic lens focused "thickly" on inner experience and "thinly" on sociality or vice versa? - Externality views privilege the social/relational way in which meaning and identity are constituted. Gergen (2015a) contends that relationship precedes interiority and individual experience. Numerous scholars see identity as inter-subjectively produced (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Hermans,	Analysis of story and storytelling - Story analysts focus on content, or what makes up/counts as story. Takes a "social facts" approach where stories are considered data for systematic analysis that ends in abstractions (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thinking about stories. - Storytellers consider how stories are

(2003) states "we orient ourselves towards the world with an implicit sense of temporal coherence, order and experiential unity (p. 292).	2003; Shotter, 2017). Storied selves are conceptualized as by-products of embedded socio-historical relational performances.	shared and produced. The product is the dialogically enacted story (Frank, 2010). Thinking with stories.
Coherence: Defined by some as a unified, integrated self-narrative, some scholars argue that coherence is not inherent but performed in the dialogic relationship between the listener and storyteller (Gergen, 1991, 2009). Gubrium and Holstien (1998) argue not simple internal consistency. How the story hangs together depends on context and may have multiple coherences.	Construction: - What is the social construction of the self? Implies an active, creating metaphor that challenges the 'natural, true, or individual self' that is discovered (Gergen, 2009) - Some scholars suggest the term construction is misleading and neglects that much of identity formation is not intentional or conscious (Frank,1998; Polkinghorne, 1996)	

Smith and Sparkes (2008) caution that their review, summarized above, is meant to "be illuminative rather than definitive" (p. 172). In other words, by articulating the historical tensions, researchers who adopt a narrative approach to data collection and analysis will appreciate the philosophical, ontological, and epistemological decisions that must be addressed. Gergen and Gergen (2010) reiterate a number of these tensions and suggest that adopting an RC approach can mitigate some of the tensions that pervade narrative inquiry. For example, the tension between story (structure) and storytelling (process) can be relieved through relationship. What these authors are suggesting is that both the content of the story and the performance of the story are mediated and moderated through relationship. In other words, the relationship addresses the dichotomous conceptualization of either/or and allows investigators to acknowledge the influence of both story and performance as it unfolds in the negotiated relational space. How this relates to my research becomes clearer in how the relationship was initially organized around the content of the stories shared in the first two research interviews, how the content served as a touchstone for participants as we joined with each other, and how the relationship with the stories was changed through sharing with people who recognized familiar experiences shared by

others. What changed were not the contents of the stories themselves, but the relationships participants had with those stories as they were shared with me and the other participants.

I believe this inclusive approach suggested by Smith and Sparkes (2008) calls for a dialogical (Bakhtin, 1986) stance that accepts the ongoing responsiveness of the scholarly conversation without becoming stuck in a finalized idea of the "Truth" of narrative theory or practice. In other words, as scholars put forth certain ideas (or stances), they invite continuing responses that deepen and influence the understanding of how narrative is discussed and operationalized. As it relates to this research in particular, adopting a dialogical stance acknowledges that I attended to the unfinalized consequences of stories activated through relationship. Smith and Sparkes (2008) suggest that it can be ambitious to adopt a both/and position in light of the historical polarization between positions across the narrative landscape. However, "[w]hile not always easy or straightforward, it is possible that the tensions and contrasting horizons of understanding that frame how narrative research is shaped and dealt with can coexist with each other" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 187). They point out that researchers need to be aware of the process as ongoing, and make conscious choices grounded in values that are coherent with the focus of the inquiry.

Throughout the overview of my theoretical grounding and the intentions of this research I have alluded to choices about where this work is situated in the narrative theoretical universe. Explicitly, I acknowledge that I have adopted a SC/RC view of how the stories of people affected by parental incarceration are negotiated in the context of this research and how this oriented us toward joint action (Shotter, 2016). This means that rather than viewing stories as already out there only to be discovered, I joined with participants to develop previously un-storied experience into a shared story. In other words, although these experiences were

understood to have happened, sharing them in a storied, strength-focused way helped participants to put words to what may have previously been inadequately articulated. I also acknowledge that the content of the stories of parental incarceration served as the orienting experience that perpetuated the cohesiveness of the story we created together. Through the dialogical thematic analysis of the individual and group processes I will demonstrate how our narrative identity through the process embraced both unity (McAdams, 1993), and non-unity (Hosking, 2011; Gergen, 1991). While this analysis was not central to our collaborative inquiry, I will attend to ways in which participants positioned themselves initially and if/how identity narratives changed over the course of the process, which speaks to the negotiation of self as seen through the research relationships. The dialogical processes that occasioned the stories, and how they developed from individualized actions to collaborative joint action (Shotter, 2016), is another focus throughout the analysis. In the next sections I will describe the analysis processes and how dialogical narrative analysis provided the philosophically congruent lens through which to apply a TA process that initially informed the film.

The DNA Lens

With my research aim and theoretical underpinnings in mind I initially engaged with my data through the sensibilities and ethics of dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) (Frank, 2010) and the mechanics of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). I attended to elements of the stories that were most salient to the way participants navigated the experience of parental incarceration as children and the dialogical way the stories were negotiated. In the next sections I will describe how the ontological stance of DNA informed the epistemological offerings achieved through TA, and how these results helped our group to develop the narrative arc/processes for the

documentary. I will also offer some visual examples of my process that will include excerpts from the transcripts and a process map.

Although the TA process generated the themes that inspired discussions, which ultimately informed our narrative for the film, I was ontologically committed to a stance that would afford me philosophical congruence. To that end, I adopted the approach developed by Arthur Frank (2010, 2012) to orient the processes of the TA. Frank's DNA is guided by questions such as the narrative resources available for participants to draw from, while acknowledging the social, cultural, temporal, and contextual influences on narratives. There is significance in what participants chose to share and/or leave out, which was influenced by a number of factors including researcher/participant power dynamics. I followed up on stories that indicated resistance to the heteroglossic narrative of risk, while highlighting instances of resilience or growth. I also attended to strategies that helped participants cope with the experience of parental incarceration, how childhood struggles followed them into adulthood, and comments on what the group meant to them. In this way I acknowledge that I was part of the developing research story and that there were lines in participant narratives I chose not to pursue.

Arthur Frank's five commitments and Bakhtin. Before beginning analysis, I reviewed and aligned my focus with the five commitments that Arthur Frank (2012) asserts are foundational to a dialogical analysis. First, it is imperative to recognize that every individual voice is seen as being in dialogue with other voices. This idea reflects the Bakhtinian notions of heteroglossia and polyphony (Robinson, 2011). Frank (2010) describes these two concepts as different social levels of influential narratives, some proximal (polyphony), others are more distal (heteroglossia). The second commitment is to attend to and "remain suspicious" (Frank, 2012, p. 35) of the opposite of dialogue: monologue. Frank (2012) suggests that most social

science is monological and attempts to define or capture people with researcher accounts of who they are. Conversely, the dialogical researcher adopts a witness stance as stories are gathered and in which multiple storytellers join together so that the stories can be heard collectively. Third, the stories shared are not seen as endings in themselves but continue on in emerging storylines with an unpredictable force of their own. The fourth commitment addresses the unfinalized nature of storytellers – they are changed by the sharing as are those engaged by the stories shared. This commitment underscores the tension between stories in motion and the necessary closure required for a doctoral research project. Finally, the intention of a DNA is not to summarize findings, but to invite and open "continuing possibilities of listening and of responding to what is heard" (Frank, 2012, p. 37). This commitment supports the intention of this research by activating social and supportive responses to the consequences of parental incarceration and adding to the research that may influence policy further down the road.

Defining and choosing stories. I used these five commitments to guide me through the steps in this phase of the analysis, which was to identify the segments of text that constituted a story. Additionally, I followed Frank's (2012) suggestion that stories unfold in three dimensions: horizontal, vertical, and from the perspective of a child. The horizontal dimension reflects the elements of a story described by the sociolinguist William Labov (1997, 2010) as how it unfolds in real time. Accordingly, the initial element of a story is an abstract, which announces that a story is about to be told, followed by the orientation, which sets the time, place, and central characters of the story. The core of the story is a complicating action, wherein the characters are required to respond to an extraordinary circumstance. This eventually leads to an ending to the story and some sort of resolution to the complicating action. The resolution is followed by an evaluation of what has happened and a coda, which returns the story to the present day and in

conversation, turn taking returns to other speakers. Within the context of the research interview, this structure may not be linear or clear but some elements need to be present to satisfy the horizontal criterion suggested by Frank (2012).

The vertical dimension of a recognizable story includes characters, point of view, suspense, genre, and importantly, imagination. Frank (2012) claims that even though the Labovian (2010) elements of a fully formed story may be present, if it does not animate the imagination, it is not a noteworthy story. The third dimension of story relates to imagination and its being recognized across multiple tellings. Frank calls this the "bedtime test" and suggests that young children respond to stories that activate the imagination and are impactful enough to be told multiple times while maintaining a certain integrity.

Within the stories I identified what Bakhtin (1986) deemed as an utterance. An utterance is a component of dialogue that invites a response: it can be as minimal as one word or as lengthy as a novel.

> Any utterance—from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise—has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others (or, although it may be silent, others' active responsive understanding, or, finally, a responsive action based on understanding). (p. 71)

Referring back to the animating research question, I was interested in how sharing stories of parental incarceration invited a response, and ultimately how these dialogical moments oriented me and the other participants to engage in some form of advocacy. These moments signaled a dialogical interaction that helped to shape the process and develop the story of our group action; the development of the documentary. Additionally, I noted utterances that

indicated relational processes and negotiated identity development via the process of thickening the stories of strength, resilience, and resistance to the dominant discourses of risk.

Emotional-volitional tone. As a dialogical thematic analyst, I was also interested in what Sullivan (2012) refers to as intonation, or the emotional-volitional tone (Bakhtin, 1981; Shotter, 2012) of an utterance or exchange. A core dimension in dialogically grounded analysis involves embodied responses (Shotter, 2016; Sullivan, 2012) that are imbued with meaning or indicate value to the speaker.

In order to include this dimension in my analysis, I prepared the written transcriptions using a modified version of the Jefferson Transcription System (Jefferson, 2004; Sullivan, 2012) to notate paralinguistic features of the conversation. This helped me tune in to performative relational processes and a sense of the emotional-volitional tone of the dialogue. Using the legend provided (Table 3.4), I include a short transcript excerpt demonstrating the results of this notation process (Table 3.5). This notated transcription helped me to sensitize myself to the emotional-volitional performance dialogues. It served as a scaffolding step in the process.

In this story from CK's first interview, she shares some experiences she had with teachers. Her story includes an abstract, a complicating action, a resolution, and an evaluation. I have included an example of the annotations I used for each story I identified in the interviews. Across the interviews, and the group and film processes, some of these stories were told more than once. Although some small details changed, the stories maintained essential elements.

Table 3.4. Legend for Transcription Notations

Symbol	Indicates
[ ]	Marks the start and end of overlapping speech
((laughing))	Comments about features, context, or delivery
CAPITALS	Emphatic speech
(inaudible)	Speech hard to transcribe for various reasons, may offer a guess

{challenge}	With permission changed word used by participant; What they meant to say.
"I felt abandoned"	Underlined words signify stress in tone: not as strong as capitals
:::	Semi-Colon marks pauses by the second.
^	A slight raise of tone that is less than a question but marks a questioning stance.

As mentioned above, I offer an example of how I drew on the Jefferson Transcription System (2004) to make more explicit the emotional-volitional tone of the interview.

Table 3.5. Transcription Example of First Interview with CK

Barbara	How teachers] treated you and how. Umm :::
CK	Oh yeah, I have one particular name, I even remember her name. ((chuckles))
Barbara	That's a big impression, hey? ((laughing, matching tone of CK))
CK	She was NASTY. But you know what? :: even though there were some nasty teachers, there's some teachers that made such a humungous difference in my life ^ that I'll always remember and some that just, out of their :: compassion for me, were amazing. ^ That didn't happen till later. In elementary school the teachers were generally :: pretty shaming, :: not supportive. I would be :: um, :: what do you call it? partnered, like [pointed out
Barbara	Yup yup ::: Publicly] shamed basically?
CK	Yes, YES, ABSOLUTELY. Um, the one that I remember was that was Small Town I think I was going to, was Local Elementary School, and the police came to the school to pick us up ^ and take us away cuz our mom had just been picked up and taken to, I don't know where, who knows where because we don't get told. But Remand or, whatever :: she was being charged. So, we couldn't go home. So they came, I think I was in grade 3 and um, they came and picked us up from the classroom ^ aaand uh ::: yeah, it was extremely embarrassing ((flat tone)) and I remember the teacher saying "I figured it would be her". Like when I heard it at the front, when I heard them say "CK"^. It was ::: "of COURSE it's her". [yeah
Barbara	Right (less emphasis but matching tone)

Note: In the service of participant anonymity, locations have been replaced with location type. E.g., Toronto = Big City; Scarborough = Neighbourhood.

Polyphony and Heteroglossia. As I was using a dialogical approach to analyzing my data, it was important for me to keep in mind the two concepts that Bakhtin (1986) proposes are significant influences within any speaker's story: polyphony and heteroglossia, which I addressed in Chapter One. I agree with Frank (2012, p. 35) who acknowledged that:

> [t]he distinction is subtle. I understand polyphony as emphasizing how one speaker's voice is always resonant with the voices of specific others—people whom the speaker listens to and whose response she or he anticipates. Heteroglossia emphasizes how every story is assembled from multiple codes of language usage and genre. The others who are present in the heteroglossic dialogue are the generalized others of a speech community, not specific individuals. In any one person's speech, multiple communities intersect

In order to understand my data from a dialogical perspective, these two concepts helped re-orient me toward a multi layered, contextual, temporal, and socially located dialogue, particularly if I reflectively recognized a tendency toward monologue and the implicit idea of a finalized story. In the next section I discuss how I combined DNA (Frank 2010) with TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) to develop the dialogical narrative thematic analysis (DNTA) approach to the data and how it informed the narrative of the documentary.

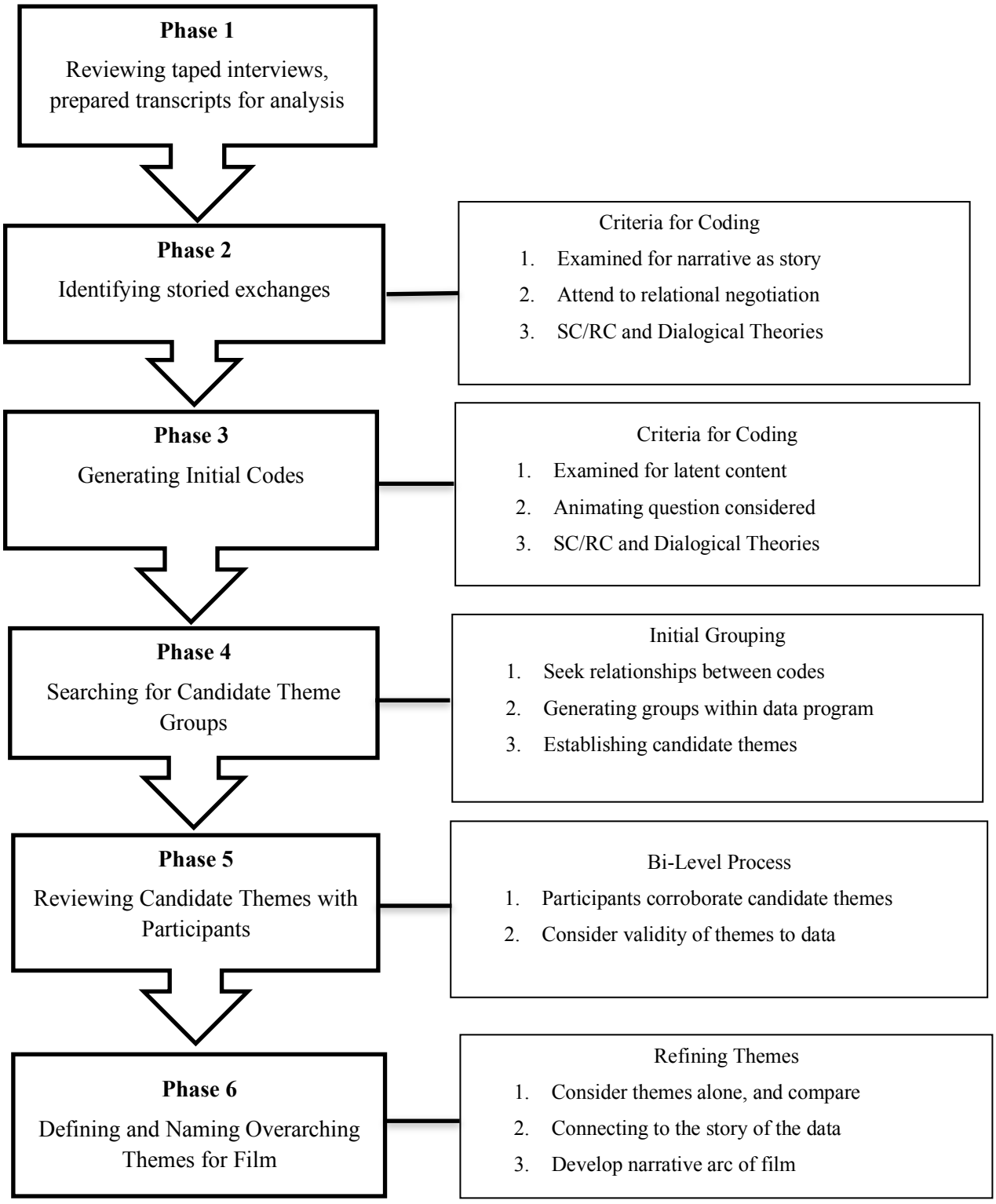
Dialogical Narrative Thematic Analysis

TA is widely used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data, however, Braun and Clarke (2006, 2018) contend that the decision to use TA must be supported by a theoretical position that is clearly stated at the outset of the project. In this case, my theoretical framework is based on social/relational constructionist and dialogical epistemologies. From this understanding I initially engaged in an open coding process to determine common topics of conversation across the data. I used the transcripts from the first two individual interviews, the first focus group, as well as memos and meeting synopses from our group discussions to prepare for the filming (session numbers). I then identified stories, as described above, to be annotated and analyzed using a TA approach, sensitized by the dialogical premises described, and activated by the research question. I describe this approach as DNTA. As such, I considered my interaction

with the data to be a dialogic process in that I was revisiting stories shared in another context and bringing them into circumstances where I was engaging with them from yet another perspective.

Throughout my dialogue with each story, individually and then subsequently as a whole, I reflected on aspects of the data that I responded to emotionally, cognitively, and from a values perspective. I followed intuitive threads of thinking, and kept an analysis logbook where I could memo and play with ideas. I also continued to make entries in my research journal to dialogue with struggles, ethical dilemmas, and generative insights. The provisional subthemes were derived from the open coding process and presented to participants. In the next section I will detail the process by which I arrived at the themes that we discussed in the group and which subsequently not only informed the talking points that were the foci of the film, but the way in which we are making editing decisions for the final product. In the following section I will explain the details of my analysis accomplished in a series of phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). Figure 3.3 outlines this process.

Figure 3.3. Six Phases of DNTA (Braun and Clarke, 2006).



Phase 1: Listening to recordings while rereading the transcripts. I began my analysis by listening to the individual and group recordings while reviewing the associated transcripts. In this way I familiarized myself with subtle qualities that a written transcript alone is unable to afford, and helped me to access some of the emotive-volitional aspects of the interactions. As Creswell (2007) pointed out, qualitative research involves understanding the environment where participants share their experiences. I extended this interpretation beyond the physical environment to include the emotional and relational environment. Hence, I was attending to cues that are socially understood to indicate an emotion and noted that on the transcript (Table 3.5). For example, laughter or slow, quiet speech. By immersing myself in this contextual setting I was more able to enter the *space* of the exchange and thereby engage in a more sensitive and in-depth relationship with the data. I attended to my own emotional experience as I reconnected with the data and the relationships.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. This phase of the process involved attending to aspects of the data that were common across most or all participants. If the topic had been discussed by at least four of the participants I considered it a candidate for a theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) make a distinction between semantic content or latent content: the former is concerned with the explicit or surface meaning of the data and the latter goes beyond the semantic content and examines the underlying ideas or meaning within the data. For this project I initially attended to semantic content, which helped to orient me to common experiences that participants shared. For example, all participants shared instances of *being in the dark* as to what was happening with their parent(s), sleepless nights, and ongoing anxiety, which likely meant they struggled, and/or continue to struggle, with mental health concerns. In addition to stories related to traumatic difficulties such as bullying or frightening arrest experiences, I noticed

instances of coping, resilience, relationships with families, and systemic influences in terms of stigma, barriers, and supports. Using the analysis program MAXQDA (2018), I coded fragments of text from the individual interview transcripts and grouped them into categories, or "patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57) that seemed significant to the experience of parental incarceration and the animating research question.

Phase 3: Examining the data for storied exchanges. Aligning with my narrative position as discussed previously, I reviewed the data for stories that fit the criteria as set out by Labov and Waletzky (1997). These exchanges were rich with information about what was important for participants to share, how they shared it, and how it evolved over the tellings. In addition to the structure of a story, adopting a narrative approach meant that I attended to how participants positioned themselves in their stories, who had the story telling rights, how others appeared in their stories, as well as understanding that there were many aspects of the stories that were left out. Additionally, there were instances that did not strictly adhere to the conventions of a Labovian structure (Strawson, 2004) and I wanted to acknowledge them as dialogically negotiated exchanges about aspects of having a parent in prison. As I was interested in the meanings implied by these exchanges (storied and non-storied) I chose to perceive some of the non-storied utterances as important to include in the analysis.

Phase 4: Searching for candidate themes. This part of the process helped me to connect with the meanings that spoke to common experiences within the data and possibly inform *Stage II* of the project; engaging in advocacy in the form of a documentary. As there were over 100 initial codes, I combined overlapping codes that were essentially similar and started to explore the relationships between codes to ensure that they were discreet. As mentioned above, I used the data management program MAXQDA (2018) to start putting the merged codes into groups that

seemed to be related to each other and were common to most of the participants' stories. The results from this process are presented in a table as candidate themes with related elements in next chapter (Table 4.1).

Phase 5: Reviewing candidate themes with participants. I shared the candidate theme table with participants via the document sharing platform Google Docs™. These candidate themes were intended as provisional and offered as talking points for the group where we negotiated meaningful elements that would be included in the documentary. Participants were invited to comment, adjust categories, and consider unaccounted-for aspects of their experience they might like to share. This analytic feed-forward phase of our work will not be fleshed out in a full summary of our narrative analysis, as this was not our collective aim. I will discuss these processes we undertook in more detail in the next chapter.

Although the results of this phase of analysis were negotiated with participants, I acknowledge that unlike some AOR projects in which participants help to develop a research question, engage in data collection, and conduct analysis, this was not the case in my study. As this project was conducted as doctoral research, it was not practical or institutionally accepted that participants had a central role in these processes. However, I endeavoured to create a safe enough space through the group meetings where decisions about what we chose to do in terms of advocacy, how we chose to enact it, what parts people would play, and all the subsequent decisions regarding the documentary were thoroughly negotiated. I checked in constantly to support my intention to collaborate and mitigate power dynamics. I was aware that participants were limited by their own life commitments and adjusted my expectations accordingly. These candidate themes informed phase six of the analysis, which became the narrative structure of the documentary.

Phase 6: Defining and naming overarching themes for the film. The prevailing motivation for analyzing the data to coalesce into overarching themes was meant to inform the narrative arc of the documentary. I again reviewed the transcripts of the individual interviews as well as the transcripts from the film footage and the first few groups mainly focusing on the stories. I began to consider the provisional candidate themes in terms of relationships to each other and the data set as a whole. I attended to ways in which participants challenged master narratives considered from a heteroglossic perspective, how they developed ways to cope with their circumstances, and how counter-stories began to develop. I also noted how the emotional tone shifted over the tellings, which addressed a polyphonic sensibility in that the group context influenced how they were negotiated. I used memos to highlight aspects of the data that connected to my theoretical orientation as well as the animating research question. In this way the data became the scaffold that served as a placeholder for the story as set out in the documentary. In order to present the data in an organized fashion, I applied a temporal aspect that could support overarching themes and consider the story of the data from a *before*, *during*, and *after* incarceration structure. The following table (3.6) is the same excerpt presented previously, however with added memos.

Table 3.6. Transcript Excerpt of Interview with Memos.

Barbara	How teachers] treated you and how. Umm :::	Memos
CK	Oh yeah, I have one particular name, I even remember her name. ((chuckles))	Signals the start of story.
Barbara	That's a big impression, hey? ((laughing, matching tone of CK))	Relational processes, developing connection
CK	She was NASTY. But you know what? :: even though there were some nasty teachers, there's some teachers that made such a humungous difference in my life ^ that I'll always remember and some that just, out of their :: compassion for me, were <u>amazing</u>. ^ That	Begins developing counter story. First relates damaged identity story.

	didn't happen till later. In elementary school the teachers were generally :: pretty shaming, :: not supportive. I would be :: um, :: what do you call it? partnered, like [pointed out	
Barbara	Yup yup ::: Publicly] shamed basically?	Paraphrasing
CK	Yes, YES, ABSOLUTELY. Um, the one that I remember was that was *Small Town* I think I was going to, was Local Elementary School, and the police came to the school to pick us up ^ and take us away cuz our mom had just been picked up and taken to, I don't know where, who knows where because we don't get told. But Remand or, whatever :: she was being charged. So, we couldn't go home. So they came, I think I was in grade 3 and um, they came and picked us up from the classroom ^ aaand uh ::: yeah, it was extremely embarrassing ((flat tone)) and I remember the teacher saying "I figured it would be her". Like when I heard it at the front, when I heard them say "CK"^. It was ::: "of COURSE it's her". [yeah	Elements of story: Abstract, orientation, complicating action. Recalls emotional response in unemotional way. Protecting today's self?
Barbara	Right (less emphasis but matching tone)	Practicing empathy. Witnessing emotional pain. Responding to C's flat tone.

This process helped me to develop these overarching themes that expanded the story of our group and the story of the data: *Surviving Chaos, Turning Toward Resilience, Group Cohesion,* and *Ongoing Impact.* The analysis also served to inform the group's recommendations on how to best join with COIPs to support them not only during the time of incarceration, but also as they emerge into, and navigate adulthood with the formative experience of parental incarceration as part of their life story. Where the preliminary data analysis described informed our choices of specifically *what* to film, further developing the overarching themes was instrumental in how the footage was edited and put together in the service of answering the research question.

Conclusion

This research was a response to my Master's work where formerly incarcerated women and I challenged community stigma. During the course of that research project it was revealed that when the women were incarcerated, there was no acknowledgement of, or dedicated services for, their children. Consequently, I developed the animating research question: *How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration challenge stigma, engage mental health care professionals, and mobilize supportive others?* In this chapter, I discussed how the processes for this research were positioned within an action-oriented framework, which is grounded in a participatory ontology that embraces collaboration, acknowledgement of power dynamics, and a social justice intention. I expanded on the philosophical foundations of social and relational constructionism as theoretical underpinnings and how these philosophical ideas are congruent with an action-oriented, participatory project.

I explored the tensions inherent in a narrative analytic approach and clarified my position in terms of the self, the ontological nature of narrative, and how narrative can be approached from an analytic perspective. For this research I characterized stories as ongoing and unfinalized, which is congruent with the Bakhtinian (1986) notion of relationship responsiveness and narrative. By adopting the analysis processes of thematic analysis grounded in dialogic philosophy as described by Bakhtin (1886) and Shotter (2016), I was able to attend to both the content of participants' stories of parental incarceration and the process of how these stories unfolded in a dialogical relationship with myself and each other. I explained how the Bakhtinian concept of dialogical relational processes informed the way data were collected and analyzed. I also described the details of how I reached out to participants, the interview and analytic processes that followed. I recounted my challenges of an action-oriented approach conducted

within the constraints of graduate research. I detailed how TA was accomplished from a dialogic, relational lens and how I came to refer to the analysis process as DNTA. I described how I arrived at the candidate themes that informed the filming of the documentary and the overarching themes that informed the editing process and the story arc of the film. In short, I used dialogical practices to invite and co-construct stories shared by COIPs as they were shaped within our collaborative relationship. The stories (data) were analyzed through DNTA and results were used as the narrative for our documentary, *Bonds that Hurt; Bonds that Heal*. In the following chapter I will present the analytic results in more detail and expand on the processes that were involved in the development and filming of our documentary.

Chapter Four: Research and Filming Processes

Rather than a traditional *Results* section, this chapter will be descriptive and focus on the research processes, data choices, and participant experiences that culminated in the documentary. The intention of the prior analysis was not to provide a "final word" on the stories that I heard, but to feed my analysis forward as candidate themes back into the storying process from which we took further steps in developing our documentary. To reorient these processes as enacted in the service of addressing the animating research question, it may be helpful to recall it here:

> How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration lead to action that challenges stigma, engages mental health care professionals, and mobilizes supportive others?

From an AOR perspective, data is considered instrumental (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) in the service of answering the research question and subsequent further actions. In other words, data analysis is not an end in itself and is primarily meant to inform action. As such, my intention for this chapter is to demonstrate how we dialogically and collaboratively talked participants' stories ("data") into an accessible narrative that has power, engages listeners, and speaks to human conditions such as; betrayal and trust; rejection and acceptance; despair and hope; isolation and belonging. I saw my role throughout this project as a co-facilitator who provided a safe enough space for participants' stories to be explored and shared, bearing witness to these stories, and using my privilege and resources to help channel them into our shared narrative that we aim to see experienced beyond the structures of academia.

In these next sections I will expand on how the three stages of this project were accomplished in a way that aligns with the action/reflection cycles described by Heron and Reason (1997, 2002). Again, it is important to remember these processes were not strictly linear

but, for clarity, I will describe them in such a manner. For *Stage I*, I will expand on the relational processes that helped to form our group and talk about why some participants chose to continue, while others did not. In the section dedicated to *Stage II*, I drew from recordings of our meetings and my synopses to revisit the collaborative, dialogical interactions that I believe are important to highlight throughout this chapter. I will refer to the procedures by which I arrived at candidate themes and themes that informed the narrative of the documentary. To help with this description I will include the tables and some relational interactions that helped to shape the emergent story of our work together. I will include more details of our filming weekend and discuss the aftermath and how we navigated some post filming decisions as a group, while other decisions were made by Les and me. There is much to be said about the editing processes that Les and I worked through and how these became *Stage III* of the project.

Stage I: Building Relationships

As discussed in Chapter Three, *Stage I* included recruitment, two individual interviews, and the first focus group. The core element of this stage was developing the relationships that eventually led to multiple focus groups and the making of the documentary. My ethical commitment included continually reflecting on my actions through a research journal and consulting with experienced others. Experienced others included participants from my Master's degree study, colleagues who had previously engaged in AOR, and colleagues familiar with working alongside vulnerable populations. My commitment also ensured that I checked in with participants for comfort levels and ongoing consent. This exchange at the end of KA's (I'm BP) first interview is an example of how participants and I negotiated our relational processes and how I wanted to ensure participants that I understood these stories as theirs and they had storytelling rights:

BP: I'll go through the transcript and I'll sort of put it together in a condensed form. ... And then I'll touch base with you, we can set up a follow-up interview. It won't be as long or as comprehensive [as the first interview], I just want to give you the opportunity to say, 'No, I don't want that in there,' or, 'You've messed that up, that's not at all how it went,' or, 'There's something else I want you to know.'.
KA: Yeah.
BP: So that just gives you some control over your information. I want you to know that that's really important to me.
KA: Yeah.
BP: You have control over what your story is.
KA: Yeah. Yeah. I think, so, too, one more thing, too, is preparing kids for the future because ...

A version of this exchange was practiced with all of my participants and I made it a habit to continually invite feedback and acknowledge that I did not have the experience or expertise that my participants had. I did share with them what academic literature generally says about COIPs and this information resonated with participants who were well aware that they are seen as social outcasts and at risk, by not only the academic community, but the professional community and the community at large.

At the first individual interview all seven participants agreed to grant me a second interview and stated their intent to join at least one focus group. However, there were two participants with whom I was unable to connect for the second interview. One participant (MM) was willing to connect at first but as there was a significant amount of time between the first interview and the time when I was able to conduct the second, the window of opportunity closed. There was a point when MM no longer responded to my attempts to connect, and after three emails went unanswered, I stated I would not bother him again. The other participant with whom I did not have a second interview, tragically passed away before we had a chance to arrange it. This was a significant emotional blow to me as I knew her voice was powerful and so much of what she would have contributed would now be lost, not only to this project, but more

importantly, to the world. I chose to keep these participants' first interview transcripts as part of the preliminary data analysis as I believed they added to the gathering narrative to which all participants had contributed. A third participant (MCP) granted me two interviews, but did not attend the focus group, indicating that he was too busy to be part of the group. There were many gaps in the time between first contact and follow-up interviews due to unforeseen life circumstances on my part and tolerance for these gaps on the part of the participants. However, there came a time where it was necessary to move forward, so with the support of my committee, I discontinued recruiting and focused on bringing participants together. The first focus group was a test of how we would achieve our collaboration. As an entry from my post-group reflections indicated, there were numerous setbacks and obstacles, including my own self-doubt.

> ***November 19, 2018: Research Journal Entry:*** *Today was our first meeting, which has been a very long time coming down a path fraught with so many dragons. The few days leading up to this moment were an exercise of letting go, having faith, and walking in with no expectations. Of course, there were technical difficulties, transportation headaches, getting into the room at the university. There were so many attempts by the dark forces to thwart us. Yet we prevailed, we finally sat down and looked at each other and then … some magic happened. They "knew" each other in a way they had never been "known" before. Although there were only three of them, it felt like many more.*
>
> *My fears are beginning to nibble at my soul, saying "helpful" things like: you won't be able to keep this energy going. There's way too much to do. What right have you got to speak for these people? But there was enough energy there to continue with the few dedicated souls that felt a connection.*

The participants who became part of the ongoing groups and co-developers of the documentary were extraordinary in their commitment to the collaboration. I continue to admire, appreciate, and be humbled by their dedication to seeing this project through. In the next section I will describe what took place after the first focus group as I demonstrate how we collaborated, negotiated, and developed the content that was to become the documentary.

Stage II: Data Analysis, Group Processes, and Filming Weekend

To refamiliarize myself with the group processes I referred to the recordings of the groups, my meeting synopses, and my research journal entries. After the first focus group, the four participants and I decided that we wanted to continue on meeting, and to explore ways to advocate for COIPs. To that end, we scheduled another meeting approximately two weeks after the first. At that meeting, participants shared more stories of their experiences as children and continued to develop strong bonds with each other, and with me. We also discussed a number of possibilities in terms of advocacy for COIPs including looking into foster care and child support services through organizations such as The Elizabeth Fry Society. After each group meeting I created a summary document and sent it to participants to view and edit if they felt there was something missing, or something they wanted to delete. At first, I was careful to keep the statements general enough so they could not necessarily be attributed to a single speaker. I did this so that participants might feel less individual pressure to contribute but, as we got to know each other, and as the group settled into a rhythm, everyone felt more comfortable being referred to by name throughout the summaries. After the first two meetings we happened onto what would become our purpose and goal: The development and making of a documentary.

Preparing for the Documentary. It was at Focus Group #3, that we first toyed with the possibility of doing a documentary. The associated summary note (Appendix K) suggests that the idea generated a lot of excitement. I listened to the recording and could hear the energy in our voices as they became more animated. This is an excerpt from the summary referring to the time just after we had discussed the abstract of an upcoming conference, for which I had applied to present the work we had accomplished so far:

December 19, 2018, Focus Group #3:

- *The discussion about the abstract led to the idea that making a documentary or short film about the experience might be a good way to get the word out to support workers and others about how it feels to have a parent in prison. Everyone agreed that it could be a good use of our time and resources.*
- *We also discussed booking some time to come together physically to do the film/documentary and how that would be "awesome!" ☺ It was acknowledged that it would depend on funds and time. Barbara shared that the funds from the grant that is funding the group meetings will run out in April.*

The idea to make a documentary had taken hold and the rest of the group meetings were dedicated to the effort. It was evident that the developing bonds within the group were creating the energy that would carry us toward our collective goal to engage in advocacy. In other words, a documentary based on their stories and how the group came together resonated with participants' desire to make a difference. This goal was to affect how people understood the experience of parental incarceration, challenge their damaged identity stories laden with *risk* narratives, and invite reflection on best practices for those who support families affected by incarceration. All of which was in the service of addressing our animating research question. And so, our work together came into focus and it began in earnest.

Aligning with the action/reflection cycles of Heron and Reason (1997, 2002), in each meeting the group discussed what we had learned from our action plans laid out at the previous meeting. By the seventh meeting I had made enough progress with data analysis (the audio-recorded and transcribed interviews and first focus group) that I wanted to share the preliminary results of the DNTA with the group for feedback. As mentioned in Chapter Three, these candidate themes (Table 4.1) were part of *Phase 4,* where I sought relationships between the codes resulting from the open coding process and generated code groups with the help of the MAXQDA (2018) data management program. We discussed each item in turn and agreed that these candidate themes were salient aspects of the experience participants had shared and should (or could) be addressed in the documentary. After we explored these overall candidate themes

each participant chose which elements they wanted speak to in the film. It was from these discussions that we developed the questions I would use for the documentary interviews (see Appendix J). Each participant had different questions for the interview depending on the topic on which they had chosen to focus. The questions were meant to open enough space to provide flexibility for participants to respond with as much or as little as they felt comfortable. I made sure to review the questions with each participant individually before the filming weekend so there would be no surprises and they had control over the content and direction of the interview. As a way to keep track of the choices, I posted a version of the table below on the document sharing platform Google Docs ™ and participants were invited to go onto the Google Docs website and indicate which topics they would like to explore and, if they felt they wanted to, add or subtract that which they deemed appropriate. The table below is a copy of this online document with the initials of participants next to the candidate themes they chose to discuss in the documentary.

Table 4.1. Candidate Themes and Speakers for Documentary

Theme	Elements and Subthemes	Who will talk
Lost memories	Difficult to recall at beginning of conversations, recover some memories through discussion with other participants, believe lost memories can be protective, some find the phenomenon frustrating	NVS CK
Moving Around	Instability, no friends, no roots, no sense of community	CK, NVS
School	Feeling out of place, teachers both helpful and harmful, only place that was predictable even if it wasn't pleasant	CK, KA, NVS
Arrest	Negative experiences, scared, embarrassed because of community awareness, questioned by law enforcement	KA
Law Enforcement	Believe the intersect could be more sensitive. Do not harbor overly negative views of police.	NVS

Found supports	Teachers, not social workers or counsellors,	CK,
Adults	Did not trust many adults, parents of friends were harmful, did find one or two that were trustworthy	KA
Family Relationships	Siblings both positive and negative, parent relationships variable; some positive, others not existent, always have to organize some type of understanding with or without the parent,	NVS
Growing up too fast	Burdensome sense of responsibility, compensate for parent's absence or lack of ability to parent, don't understand immaturity of peers	NVS
Moral learning	No guidance from adults, had to make own code of morals, some very black and white, conversely, developed a sense of forgiveness	No participant chose this category
Cautionary tales	At some point always have to decide what to stand up for in life. Saw parents/siblings making choices that participants did not see as wise. Witnessed siblings making different choice.	SV
Consequences into adulthood	Mental health concerns carried over from childhood, anxiety is pervasive, depression, some eating concerns, affects relationships as adults, loneliness, don't feel like they belong anywhere until now.	KA, NVS
Coping	Stayed busy, took control of life in other ways (e.g., food), connected to dance, music	CK, NVS
Resisting damaged identity stories	Choose to fight back, adopt a "fuck you" attitude to prove others wrong, anger used as a survival tool, choosing a different life than parent, adopt a well-developed moral code, reflect on past experience to have compassion for self and others.	CK, NVS
Advice to supporters (Counsellors, teachers, social workers etc.)	Mentoring, peer groups can be negative as kids join together and get into trouble, support feelings of "being normal", prepare kids that troubles follow you into adulthood, teach basic social skills.	NVS CK
Advice to kids	Finding a sympathetic adult, staying busy, find a mentor if you can. Mostly stay busy, try to separate yourself from the behaviour of parents. It's not your fault.	KA, NVS
Advocacy	Joined research through word of mouth, seeing poster, sense of advocacy, bonus that it has been healing, promotes a sense of belonging somewhere, feels like story is important to share, help kids going through this now.	All

Participants shared that the themes they chose to focus on for the film reflected what was important to them and that they would feel comfortable being filmed talking about the topics. I noticed they chose the themes that, over the course of the groups, they revisited often in our conversations. For example, CK and NVS mentioned a number of times that moving around was representative of the chaos that characterized their childhood and KA often referred to the disappointment associated with not being able to trust adults during that time.

Before the weekend filming I also contacted the mothers of the participants who had agreed to participate in the documentary. I was intent on informing them about what to expect and sharing the open questions (see Appendix J) that would guide the interview process. Additionally, it was important to verbally receive informed consent before I would proceed and for which they would sign before the filming took place.

The Filming Weekend. The date we chose for our filming weekend was March 8th to March 10th, 2019. The two out-of-town participants arranged to fly to Calgary. There was some difficulty with getting time off work for one of the participants so she had to come a day later (March 11th) but joined the group via Google Hangouts™ during the filming of the group conversation. Both of these participants stayed in hotels close to my home. Before the weekend we negotiated a schedule of individual interviews, LSB interviews, the mother/child interviews, and the group meeting we had near the end of the weekend. We had discussed a filming schedule with Les and the participants and I shared the schedule with all participants and included suggestions to make the weekend run smoothly and comfortably (Appendix L). I prepared all the food for the weekend and ensured there were plenty of snacks and drinks for the times when interviews were happening and people had to wait.

As Les and participants arrived, I asked them to read over and sign the necessary consent form (Appendix M) that complied with CFREB requirements and ensured they understood the limitations of confidentiality in the group setting and going forward. For example, I made it clear that participants would have the final word on their contribution to the documentary up to a point, after which they would not be able to withdraw their footage. They all shared that this was acceptable and the filming proceeded. All of these processes were meant to create an atmosphere of sharing and collaboration. My intention was to make all activities and decisions transparent with input from participants at all possible junctures. I received explicit permission to include the following images (Figure 4.1 and 4.2) in this document.

Figure 4.1. KA Being Filmed for Documentary.

I realized that the filming weekend would likely be an emotional experience and tried to provide a *safe enough* space where participants could feel comfortable. When all participants had signed the consent form, and we had set up the filming space, participants engaged in scheduled individual interviews, two mother/child interviews, the LSB interview, and a group discussion.

Details of the LSB experience. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the LSB was included in the filming process at the behest of participants. The discussions were sparked by CK's curiosity

around a process she had heard of as a way to talk about difficult experiences more comfortably. CK and I had a meeting with the developer of the LSB, Dr. Robert Chase. I was given permission to record that meeting. CK shared that we were hoping to use the process as part of our documentary with the understanding that it may or may not be included in the final product. In support of using the LSB, CK wondered if the LSB might help participants remember details of experience that seemed to be missing from memory. She stated, "We all have things we can't remember … maybe this will help." The three participants who engaged with me for the filmed LSB interview all reflected that they felt the experience was an effective way to recall events around the arrest of their parents. I have included an image of one of the story boards below. How the footage for the LSB helped us to focus the narrative will be further discussed in the section dedicated to *Stage III*. Due to illness during the filming weekend, SV did not engage in the LSB process, nor the group meeting at the end of the weekend.

Figure 4.2. Example of KA's completed LSB

After the filming weekend we had two more group meetings in order to reflect on the weekend experience, discuss next steps in terms of the documentary, and talk about the

conferences where I was accepted to present on our work. As before, the meetings took place online with participants from out of town and in person for the two who were in town. I had approached the group earlier before I submitted the conference abstracts (Appendix I) and they had helped me with the titles to reflect the fact that they didn't feel heard. I asked them if it would be acceptable to use clips from our footage that reflected the overarching themes into which I had ultimately collapsed the candidate themes. I let them know that they would have the opportunity to view the clips before they were presented. Les edited some of the footage to reflect the overarching themes (discussed in the next section) and as promised, at our next meeting we watched the clips together. Understandably, participants were somewhat uncomfortable watching themselves but agreed that the clips were acceptable and at the time I was given permission to use them. Later on, one participant asked if she could refilm parts of her interview and I agreed that this could be done. However, the complications of setting up another filming process and time constraints did not allow for this to happen. As such, I understood that her footage was in question and I did not use it for my presentations (I will address this further in the next section). One participant resided in the province where one of the conferences was taking place and she chose to attend the presentation. After the conference she noted that it had been a powerful experience and reiterated she was grateful that parts of her story were being shared. In the next section I will discuss how the overarching themes (Table 4.2 below) helped with the story arc of the documentary and how Les and I worked together, and in a limited way with participants, on decisions that informed the final product.

Stage III: Analysis and Editing

The collaborative connections with participants were stretched in *Stage III* of the project. Understandably, participants did not feel compelled, nor was it practical, for them to be

intimately engaged in the advanced analysis or the editing processes. They understood that when a decision was necessary, and before the release of the documentary for my defense or to the public, they would be consulted and they continued to have storytelling rights. The following sections describe the relationship between the data and the documentary as well as how Les became a dialogical partner in the development of the stories in the context of the documentary.

Advanced Analysis of Overarching Themes. *Stage III* of our work was accomplished primarily through advanced data analysis that ultimately informed the editing process, and was largely my and Les' responsibility. Participants were kept informed about the progress of the editing and were included at crucial decision points. *Phase 6* of the DNTA that culminated in the overarching themes (Table 4.2 below) was an opportunity to see the data holistically. As I engaged with my participants once again through analysis, I became aware of more nuanced ways in which our relationships, the stories, and the group were dialogically negotiated. I acknowledge that I shaped the relationally negotiated stories as strength and response narratives in order to be congruent with the animating research question and my theoretical underpinnings. For example, the overarching theme *Surviving Chaos* explored the challenges of growing up in uncertainty, the pain of being stigmatized at school, and how participants managed to navigate these experiences with a number of coping strategies. The name of this theme was inspired by accounts of participants' home life and parental arrest stories. Most participants used the word "chaos" in their recollections. Through the process of the research I did not intend to focus on the arrest or the circumstances surrounding the incarceration of their parent. Our open interview questions were focused largely on how incarceration was navigated. Parental arrest stories were offered unbidden as I had chosen early on not to explicitly ask questions that invited specifics about the nature of the offences or details of the arrest. However, participants would often use

the arrest story as an anchor, and perhaps as a way to legitimize their response stories, lending weight to the enormity of their struggles, and conversely, the courage it took to prevail. Both NV and CK related upsetting accounts of at least one of the arrests they witnessed. In NV's case the arrest included an assault on their home. He describes it as follows:

> The first time my mother was arrested, she was, we were flash-banged by the emergency response teams for [local municipalities]. There was three response teams. It was chaotic. I was watching "Bob the Builder." We had a flash-bang through the back door. I was eating beans and wieners with some peas on the side with my brother on the couch right beside me. Flash-bang comes in. I open my eyes. There's two guns in both our faces. I hear commotion in the front of the kitchen. Then I see my mom push, just bulldoze three or four SWAT members, and then gets tackled in front of me, face hitting the ground in front of the TV, and telling me, "It's okay." That's traumatizing. I walked outside the back door. There's dogs barking. There's helicopters. The neighbors are staring at me. The entire street's blocked. That's traumatizing. No one talked to me about it.

NV's account is offered at the beginning of his hard-won story of survival. Over the course of this research this kind of story surfaced more than once and became one of the central narratives of the documentary as he told it through the LSB process. Through the analysis, I noticed the first time he shared the story it was delivered tentatively, in a flat tone of voice, curiously devoid of emotion. As I pondered this narrating style I termed *arms-length reporting,* I retrospectively wondered if he was waiting for my reaction to check that his assessment of trauma was reasonable. In the recording I responded to the account with relational process comments such as "oh my gosh", "that sounds really scary, I'm sorry", and "It makes sense that the events right after the arrest are unclear". I believe, dialogically, these responses invited NV to

follow up with more details in subsequent tellings. I noticed over the different recordings and the multiple times the story had been recounted that it had changed not in detail, but in emotional register. NV was more emotionally connected as could be seen by the tears he allowed to appear and in his tone of voice. Together we bore witness to the fear and confusion that was experienced by a small boy and his twin brother and relationally constructed a giving-receiving narrative process that was appropriately sensitive, compassionate, and caring.

Each overarching theme reflected similar processes as I attended to dialogical exchanges that included instances of strength and resilience, resisting stigma, and coping strategies as evidenced by several of the subthemes. When participants looked back on their childhoods they did so with self-compassion and compassion: significant factors of resilience. I understood that my participants and I were sharing stories of pain that were not meant as pleas for pity but as verification that they had survived the complicated consequences of parental incarceration. I intentionally adopted both a withness (Hoffman, 2007; Shotter, 2016) and witness stance (Reynolds, 2012). Hoffman (2007) observed that a "'withness' conversation creates conditions where voices emerge that have often been stifled" (p. 66). In the context of this research *withness* practice meant engaging participants responsively and dialogically, understanding that the utterances between us were unique and collaborative. Through being both witness and inviting *withness,* I intended to create a safe-enough space (Reynolds, 2012) that honoured participants' hard-won (Frank, 2010) expertise on surviving parental incarceration. Table 4.2 below offers a detailed overview of the subthemes that were developed into overarching themes. The subthemes listed here were derived from the open coding process and candidate themes described in the previous *Stage II* section. I then grouped candidate themes into discreet categories that appeared to reflect salient aspects shared by participants about the experience of parental incarceration.

The overarching themes were further developed after the filming by using the transcripts of the LSB interviews and filmed group session as additional data. As such, the overarching themes were instrumental in developing the narrative arc of the documentary (through editing), which in turn, contributed to addressing the animating research question.

Table 4.2. Overarching Themes.

Surviving Chaos	Turning Toward Resilience	Group Cohesion	Ongoing Impact
•***Instability***: •home/schools •***Traumatic arrest*** •Grief and loss •In the dark •***Stigma and isolation*** •Peers, adults •Growing up quickly •***Coping*** •Distraction: pos/neg •Thoughts of suicide	•***Resisting stigma*** •Managing internalized stigma •Counter stories •***Self-compassion*** •***Compassion for others*** •Forgiveness •***Developing competencies*** •Determination •***Transformative relationships*** •Teachers •Mental health care workers	•***Sense of normal*** •Accepted •***Belonging*** •Trust •Feeling heard •***Sharing counterstories*** •Making peace with the past •***Engaging in advocacy*** •Collaboration	•***Relational distance*** •Difficulty trusting •Fierce independence •Residual shame •***Mental health*** •Anxiety •Disordered eating •PTSD

To ensure that participants agreed with these themes, and how the editing was being accomplished I shared this document with the group via email. CK emailed me back with this comment:

> "Omg wow!!!! .... You are amazing at describing one's felt experience as they have described it. You are gifted at this work Barbara. I hope you are proud of yourself. What you have been able to do despite your life circumstances. You are amazing. I hope people tell you that. I really admire your tenacity, love, understanding, patience, kindness, and encouragement. You are a super human.

I hesitated to include this quote as I am humbled by this effusive description of my part in this work. I continue to deeply value CK's and all other participants' ongoing support, and do not underestimate their own commitment and courage.

Editing the Documentary. At this point participants stepped back and were satisfied to be kept informed as to the development of the documentary and leave the editing and technical aspects of the work to me and Les. Over the next several months, Les and I met when we could and had several meetings where we discussed structure and tone, the target audience, how the stories would best be heard while maintaining emotional engagement. Les was interested in the background narrative and I shared a great deal of information about how COIPs are seen in the literature, the struggles they face in terms of stigma and trauma, and how the narrative of risk is a thin description of their experience as put forth by others. As a protective father of two young children, Les connected to their stories and found himself emotionally moved. At the beginning of our relationship he had admitted that this experience was rarely something he had considered and when he did, there was some judgment. I assured him that his response was typical of most people with whom I had shared our work in that they admitted they had rarely thought about children affected by incarceration and COIPs were unconsciously dismissed.

After meeting participants and hearing/filming their stories, Les became more than the technical expert; he became passionate about advocacy for COIPs as vulnerable children. The conversations between Les and I were dialogically important as we navigated the boundaries of insider knowledge versus outsider knowledge (Goffman, 1963) versus shared knowledge (Heron & Reason, 2002). In many ways, Les became the group's placeholder for the public viewpoint and thus we dialogically negotiated how to present the story so it would be received as intended. Additionally, at the beginning of the editing process we had not received permission to include

the footage from the participant who had suggested her interview be re-shot so we initially proceeded as if it would not be included in the documentary. Eventually we received permission to use the footage for the rough cut (Appendix N) but have not explicitly for the final product.

Over the 10 months between the filming weekend and focused editing process we entertained a variety of approaches. We explored questions and considerations that helped us bring the vision of the narrative into focus and used the overarching themes as anchor, compass, and guide. Beginning in January, 2020, Les and I began to meet on a weekly basis. Our meetings took place via Skype™ as he was in Japan for six months due to his partner's sabbatical. While there, Les applied to the Sundance Film Festival to take part in a workshop they offered on documentary making. Out of a competitive field, and based on the subject matter, he was one of 16 successful applicants. It was necessary to inform participants about this opportunity and ensure that they were comfortable with Les using footage in the context of the class. He assured me that the footage was protected from public access and would only be seen by the instructor and other members of the class. I reached out to all of the participants, including the two mothers, and at the time of this writing all participants have agreed to have our documentary developed with the help of master film makers. Further editing is needed to prepare the documentary for public release. A link to the product can thus be found in Appendix N.

Conclusion

In this chapter I detailed the collaboration that began with the two initial interviews and one focus group in *Stage I* of the research. I described how *Stage II* of the research included the group meetings and filming weekend. I also shared how the preliminary data analysis accomplished through the processes of DNTA informed the content of the documentary and how each participant chose which topic they wanted to discuss. I shared how I engaged in the

advanced analysis of the preliminary data to develop the overarching themes and how they provided the structure by which the editing processes were to proceed thus becoming the underpinnings of *Stage III.* I also described how Les, our videographer, came to be an integral part of the group as he entered into a dialogical relationship with participants, the data, and myself throughout the development of the documentary. In the final chapter I will reflect on the experience and how all processes were enacted in the service of answering the animating research question. I will discuss how the generated knowledge fits into the extant literature and informs the academic and practical community as to how to best support COIPs. I will include the limitations of this research and future directions.

Chapter 5: Reflections

> People are cast into stories, but storytellers invent themselves in the stories they tell.
> (Frank, 2012, p. 12)

> There's something different about us and you carry it. It's a tough one because I've never truly felt the kind of belonging that I felt in this group. And it's special. … Absolutely a sense of safety. I think it was just nice to be in a group with people and talk about things I've never spoken before, and people get you. The deep understanding, the level with which you're understood, has been amazing. … Maybe this is part of what I'm meant to do, is to give this message. I don't know, but any good I can do in helping children who live this challenging life. (CK)

As CK alluded to in the above quote, this research project was more than an academic exercise for participants. The connections they shared with each other, and with me, fueled their desire to keep going, bravely sharing their most hidden vulnerabilities in a context of safety and trust. Together we created a safe enough space. They all had their reasons to engage and initially it was because they had an idea they wanted to help, that their story could somehow make it better for children experiencing parental incarceration. Not one of us really understood how sharing their stories with me and each other could, in itself, help themselves and other COIPs. Consequently, the research question presented below that was initially mine, became ours:

> How can sharing stories of a childhood experience of parental incarceration lead to action that challenges stigma, engages mental health care professionals, and mobilizes supportive others?

Tracing this dissertation's story line back to its origin we find that the initiating story started with a little girl who grew up and went to prison. Her story struck me with enough force that I then embarked on a journey that would take me and participants to many places. The rhizomatic metaphor of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) is one way to see how these connections became entities of their own. My connection to that little girl, as she suffered the consequences of trauma, became a story of incarceration that connected to my own stories of advocacy for

vulnerable women, which then became a story of women out of prison challenging stigma. This eventually became a story of people working together to share their hard-won stories of parental incarceration. Their stories included challenging narratives of risk, mobilizing courage to counter shame, and drawing on resilience to face the messiness of life with grace. When the documentary from our collaborative efforts is eventually presented to the world, our stories will continue to move and grow well beyond this document.

In this chapter I will reflect on what we learned, what we want to share with society and how this learning can go forward to impact the way COIPs are supported in Canada through our work and the work of others. I will connect our learning to the extant literature and discuss how participants demonstrated resilience through compassion, self-compassion, and competence. I will also take some time to reflect on how returning to my ethical structure supported me and my participants through difficult times.

As this is an AOR project, grounded in narrative, collaborative, and feminist philosophies, it is important to acknowledge (briefly, I promise) how I too have been transformed through this work, and how it has changed me as a person, practitioner, and scholar. I will discuss reasons this dissertation document is important, in addition to our documentary, as a vehicle by which knowledge translation can travel the usual tracks of academia. Although this work was meant to jump those tracks, only time will tell the degree to which it has. To that end, I will share what participants have shared with me about how practitioners could have supported them, listened to them, and helped guide them when they were in the throes of surviving chaos. Also, as all research is imperfect, so too was this project, and so I will share my learnings in the form of limitations and as well as note what I believe are strengths. Finally, I will reflect on

where our story may go from here and how those who support COIPs can learn from this complicated story of struggle and triumph as it changes and grows with each telling.

Connecting to the Literature

Much of what we learned through this work supported findings from the literature in terms of risk factors for COIPs. Also, we found ways in which COIPs have challenged the stories of risk; stories that have historically been glossed over or unacknowledged. In this section I explore the salient areas that extend the literature with both risk and strength-based stories.

Supporting and adding to the literature. Supporting extant literature, participants shared stories of instability, trauma, suffering through stigma, isolation and shame, mental health concerns, school troubles, and loss (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Arditti, 2012; Cho, 2010; Correctional Service Canada, 2014; Bocknek et al., 2009; Cunningham & Baker, 2003; Dallaire, 2007b; Corrections Service Canada, 2014). However, they also shared stories of triumph, refuting the dominant narrative of *risk* told by others (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Bocknek et al., 2009; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Participants identified numerous instances where they resisted the damaged identity story of risk and *beat the odds,* so to speak, with counter stories (Lindemann Nelson, 2001) of coping, courage, persistence, and competence. For example, all participants shared feelings of shame and at the same time pushed back against stigma, which revealed elements of resiliency consistent with *compassion for self* and *competency* (Stringer et al., 2018). Resistance took many forms and was experienced in both subtle and overt ways. Although not typically found in a Reflection (i.e., Discussion) chapter, I wanted to include insights that LV offered as a poignant example, as it reflects much of the literature around sharing the truth of what happened to her parents. She admitted that:

> [I hid it] for as long as I could because I was ashamed of it. I didn't want people to look at my parents and then look at me and be like "'You're just gonna' be just like them'. Because I was constantly told that in school by um, bullies that bullied me. I didn't like hearing that. I didn't like hearing that I was maybe just like them. Honestly, I think what's made me not [be] like them is just because knowing that everybody expects you to be exactly like them and you not becoming like them, kinda' just proves that you were a lot stronger than they all thought.

Scholarship around COIPs is clear that most children choose to hide their situation if they can, which can interfere with help seeking or connecting to social supports (Arditti, 2005; Dallaire et al., 2010; Knapus-Soran, 2017). Hiding the truth also protects them from the consequences of stigma (Coulthard, 2010; Goffman, 1963). In addition to feeling shame, a well-established experience that resonates with present scholarship (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Knapus-Soran, 2017), this passage included a challenge to assumed "guilt by association", or *sticky stigma* (Braman, 2004, p. 173; Hannem, 2008). This is a rarely heard or sought out counter story from which practitioners, scholars, and policy makers have a great deal to learn about how to support COIPs as they replace damaged identity stories with stories of strength and resilience.

Damaged identity and counter stories. A common thread across all participants' narrative was navigating the perpetuation of damaged identity stories that were most dominant at school. Dallaire and colleagues (see Dallaire 2007a; Dallaire et al., 2010; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010) have observed that instances of bias toward COIPs is not insubstantial. However, in addition to shaming experiences, participants also discussed teachers who made a difference and helped to support a counter story. In many cases it only took one adult, (e.g., teacher, social worker, or neighbour) to germinate a new story. CK spoke of a teacher who saw past her

circumstances and scolded her for wearing too much make-up and hiding her beauty. According to CK, she said: "you're such a beautiful girl, why do you have all this shit on your face?" In this case, a teacher helped a vulnerable young girl challenge her story of shame by considering the possibility that she was beautiful. How a sensitive adult influenced CK's self-concept, with generous acts of kindness allowing her to look past the behaviour and see the child, is not a particularly novel insight for those who work with vulnerable children. However, these observations need to be restated in order for the stories to gather enough power to change how COIPs are seen by the general community, care workers, and policy makers.

All participants shared that school was a complicated place for numerous reasons that included both pain and security. Although recognized as a significant source of shame, CK reflected that "at least at school you could predict what was going to happen." As evidenced in her quote, CK recognized school as a place where stories of worth could take root. Much of the literature largely discusses negative experiences at school (Dallaire et al., 2010; Kjellstrand et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2012; Muenter et al., 2018) yet most participants had at least one positive story that supported the notion school could be a significant site of intervention.

Coping and post traumatic growth (PTG). By drawing attention to how participants managed the difficult experience of parental incarceration, I was afforded the opportunity to highlight resistance, strength, and counter stories. The literature that supports a counter story of strength is limited (see Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008 for a notable exception). Johnson and Easterling (2015) noted that COIPs utilized three primary strategies to cope with parental incarceration: distancing from the incarcerated parent; minimizing the effects of incarceration; and attempting to maintain some control over their own lives. Perhaps because the present study was retrospective, participants were not prone to minimizing the effects of incarceration but

instead showed self-compassion as they realized what they had survived. This study supported the finding that participants valued control over their lives as they adopted strategies that were both supportive and damaging.

Coping strategies engaged by participants included positive and negative consequences. Participants admitted that some of the short-term consequences were both costly and protective. NV shared that "I'm a fast learner so my coping strategies would have been developed fast and they would have been, from what I can tell they … I just became a hard shell," which meant that connecting with peers or teachers was unlikely. MM shared that in order to manage persecution he used physical force that resulted in suspension from school but also afforded him a measure of respect and, ultimately, peers left him alone. He reflected that "I don't know it's like, I can't make them shut up through words I'll make them shut up through like being physical." However, he also shared an instance where he stepped in to protect his younger brother, a demonstration of compassion for others that supports a story of resilience (Stringer et al., 2018).

External coping strategies included listening to music, choosing friends wisely, being close to animal friends, dance, art, prayer, finding a job, and joining a faith community. MM shared that he adopted a habit of going out into the forest with one of his few friends, taking an axe with them and randomly chopping wood. "Yeah … it's kinda' weird but somehow it felt good to just go out there and whack away at trees. We weren't trying to be destructive or nothing, it just felt good." Reflecting past findings (Johnson, et al., 2018; Knaphus-Soran, 2017) participants' stories included few instances of reaching out to peers, teachers, counsellors, social workers, or any other adults. From most perspectives, isolation and anger were the preferred adaptations to facing judgement and shame.

Anger as protective and motivating. For the participants in this study, the internal coping strategies that appeared to be a protection against shame were dominated by anger. CK admitted that one of her key emotional fallback positions "was my anger, for sure, which pushed me through and gave me the motivation and the desire to want something different in my life". All participants referenced anger as a motivating force. In counselling literature, anger has been acknowledged as an energizing force that indicates action is required to address a perceived threat in the environment (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014: Lowenstein, 2004). As Lowenstein (2004) points out "properly directed, anger can lead to positive action and produce feelings of being in control of situations perceived to be threatening" (p. 21). In Response-Based Practice, Wade (1997) characterizes anger as an appropriate response to violence and threat. According to all participants, anger was a key component of their resistance to damaged identity stories. The participants who were involved with the documentary also admitted that, although anger was useful at the time, it often interfered as they navigated adult relationships. Rather than viewing anger as something to be dampened and/or rejected, it could be more generative to support COIPs as they learn to direct the energy in beneficial ways both in the moment and throughout their lives. Mastery of anger appears to be a significant element of a useful counter story.

Turning points to growth. At what point does coping transform into growth? The construct of PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) has been an area of interest for researchers and psychologists for the last two decades (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Researchers have described PTG as "an experience of positive adjustment resulting from how a person responds and rebuilds following a life altering event" (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014, p. 312). However, children impacted by parental incarceration are typically exposed to chronic, rather than acute, trauma experiences and demonstrate incremental shifts over time. A model that I believe closely

reflects the carceral experience was proposed by Stringer et al. (2018) where the concept of *turning points* is congruent with managing the effects of parental incarceration with resilience. Central to how turning points spark resilience is the concept of self-stigmatization. Stringer and colleagues propose three perceptual components of internalized stigma that mediate the shift toward resilience: concordant/discordant views of self; social distance; and balance of power in relationship. These mediating factors are central to the development of three concepts considered fundamental for resilience: competence, compassion for others, and self-compassion. In this research the data reflected numerous stories or *turning points* where participants demonstrated competence, compassion for others, and self-compassion. However, there were also many reflections on how participants saw themselves in the eyes of critical others, maintaining social distance through isolation, and felt powerless in the face of structural and relational oppression. Goffman (1963) would recognize the transferrable stigma, an unwanted legacy, at play here and note the way participants managed their *spoiled identities* through numerous strategies.

For the four participants who took part in the development of the documentary, I noticed that reflections around feeling powerless and wounded decreased over time and comments about connection, competency, and healing became more numerous. For example, participants spoke of protecting siblings, showing understanding around how parents of peers might be concerned, compassion for their parents and siblings, and competence as they shared victories like being accepted to university, having a satisfying job, graduating from university, and becoming a professional. As participants increasingly connected to their strength and resilience they gained more appreciation for these aspects of their identity, which in turn perpetuated resilience.

As I reflect on these counter stories of strength, I realized that my attention shifted of its own accord, as I too resonated with participants' accounts of empowerment. At the beginning of

our relationships, stories of trauma and hardship occupied most of the conversational space. They were, what I have termed, *Loud Stories* as they were shared with significant emotional volume and loomed large in our interactions. It was necessary for these stories to be brought into the light so we could use them as fertile ground and together, decide which seeds to plant, reflecting on the turning points that helped change the stories. Accordingly, the seeds of strength took root and we nurtured them into a documentary that was fueled by compassion, self-compassion, and competence. The damaged identity stories of shame that had been most dominant in their lives were transformed into stories of survival, turning points, and thriving. The process of this research and the relationships in the group helped perpetuate this change.

Reflecting on Ethics

I was grateful for the support of the ethical structures provided by my personal, academic, and professional codes of ethics. Additionally, the necessity for my research to be approved by the CFREB helped me to articulate, and firmly locate, my work in an ethical framework. Any AOR project must be grounded and supported by a robust understanding of relational ethics and as such, this project was enacted from this perspective. Over the course of this research, reflecting on my actions, words, and relationship was always an important aspect of the work. As I had set out in the last chapter, I found the work of Vikki Reynolds (2012) to be particularly supportive. Her concept of *imperfect allies* (Reynolds, 2013) soothed me when I stumbled and helped me to continue reflecting on my processes with self-compassion when shame was such an easy default position. At times, I was terrified that I might not be able to live up to expectations I had set out for ourselves. The last thing I wanted was to nurture false hope. As fate would have it, due to my own life circumstances and my own emotional struggles, there were gaps in time over the research process where I felt participants had every right to withdraw from the work. It

is a testament to their commitment that they stuck with it. I understood that it was my ethical responsibility to be transparent with participants and attempt to mitigate the unavoidable power dynamic by being honest and forthcoming. I believe this supported the collaborative intentions of the project and participants saw me as a fellow struggling human and reflected that they felt we were in it together; supporting me with encouragement to keep going.

One of Reynold's concepts for ethical practice is the idea of "shouldering each other up" (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012, p. 4) where people in community work to support each other, thereby challenging burnout. I believe that participants and I shouldered each other up throughout this work. I also acknowledge that there were ethical dilemmas for which I needed to consult. I found that colleagues in the field, as well as community connections, were very willing to help. In these instances, I also found it helpful to work through the ethical decision-making tree provided by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's code of ethics (2007). I believe it was my responsibility as a researcher working in the community to access and act through these ethical structures of support.

I also found support in the dialogical narrative analysis ethics of Arthur Frank (2010), who cautions against monological approaches to stories. I attended to the dialogical aspects of sharing stories and gained an appreciation for the power of responsivity as it emerged in a safe enough space. His ideas of "hard-won" stories helped me appreciate the significant costs of surviving difficult circumstances. The framework I adopted and referenced in Chapter Three helped me to understand my part in the storied exchanges, which invited me to engage in ongoing reflection about how I influenced the telling.

Transformations and Change

According to some scholars, an outcome of AOR is transformation for participants, communities, and researchers (McCormack & Dewing, 2012; Reason & Torbert, 2001). *Transform* is a weighty word that implies a major change in form, nature, or function (Merriam-Webster, 2020). It would be presumptuous of me to make assertions as to whether there have been transformations of story or self on behalf of my participants. However, from a dialogical approach, all interactions are transforming in that whatever is created has never existed before in that particular form and is "absolutely new and unrepeatable" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 119). Certainly, sharing stories contributed to how participants saw themselves in their narratives as evidenced by many comments; particularly throughout the filming process. When invited to validate the contents of Chapter Four, CK shared that our group work, and the co-development of the documentary, had "changed my life," which indicates a level of transformation. Of the four participants involved with the documentary, there were two who had similar reflections. However, SV did not share these views with such fervency, which was evident when asked if she had noticed anything different about herself as a result of being in the research project, she shared "no … not really." At that moment, if any transformation could be said to have happened, SV was not aware of it or did not feel compelled to share her insight with me in that moment.

In addition to the transformation of participants, researchers should also reflect on their own experiences of transformation. As such, I can say that the learning I encountered throughout this process was transformative. I was humbled to encounter my own implicit biases and admit to being surprised by the depth of wisdom and insight that participants have shared. This was a very difficult journey for me, yet I realize the challenges were nowhere near as perilous as those experienced by participants. I can unequivocally say that I have been changed as a person,

practitioner, and researcher by this process and my valued interactions with the brave souls who shared their stories. I have learned to be more patient with my questions, I have learned to be more patient with myself, I have gained a new appreciation for curiosity and collaboration, and I have become even more flexible than I was when I started. I have learned to accept uncertainty and minimize my attachment to (i.e., expectations) how others will act. I have learned the limits of my strength and perseverance and I have learned to ask for help. I have grown in many more ways than I can say here and I will continue to be part of this unfinalized story for a long time.

In terms of transformation for COIPs in general it is hard to say at this time whether there has been or will be a change in the social structures meant to support children affected by incarceration. Although, with the future release of the documentary, continued attention by the dedicated organizations, scholars, and concerned individuals across Canada, at the very least, it could be said there is hope. There is recent evidence that participatory video was able to decrease stigma associated with severe mental illness (Whitley, Sitter, Adamson, & Carmichael, 2020) after people watched the videos. Perhaps this work will be able to do the same for COIPs and their families as they are experienced by the general and service community.

Limitations

As with all research, there were limitations in this project. Those limitations could include small sample size, the qualitative challenge of generalizability, and the duration across time as limited by human capacity for sustaining focus. The difficulties of recruitment resulted in a small group of people and it could be argued that a small, purposive sample such as this, where some participants claim to be transformed by the process of the research, is of limited use to the scholarship and policy around COIPs. It is a valid argument if one thinks of global change writ large. However, qualitative research, as such, is meant to “provide rich thorough descriptions

about the phenomenon under study" (Sousa, 2014, p. 211). Because of the small sample, it could be questioned whether this work provided a rich enough description of parental incarceration that would inform significant change.

The consequences of a small sample also include a lack of diversity. Only one participant was male, and five of the seven identified as Caucasian; one identified as having South American heritage and the other identified as Indigenous, although she shared that she did not feel close to her heritage culture. Considering Indigenous people represent a disproportionally large segment of the incarcerated population, this is an area that needs attention (Government of Canada, 2013). In light of this imbalance, AOR alongside and/or conducted by Indigenous people would be a crucial area to explore. As some of my Indigenous friends have pointed out, their experience differs both quantitatively and qualitatively from the settler experience and should be considered in light of colonizing practices.

Additionally, because my focus was on resisting stories of risk, there might have been important aspects of the stories that I glossed over or missed altogether. It is possible that I did not give full attention to non-collaborative interactions and arguably there is as much learning from these disconnections as there are from collaborative ones.

Some limitations were technical with participants spread across the country and unable to meet face to face there could have been relational interactions that were less than ideal. However, when participants did meet, they connected with enthusiasm as if they had known each other for years. Additionally, there was a group in which CK commented that at first, she preferred to meet via video conferencing as she felt safer. Perhaps with another population the video meetings might have been more limiting. Additionally, we were only afforded one

weekend of filming, which was taxing on us all. If we had the leisure of multiple filming opportunities we might have found richer sources of footage.

Strengths

Bergold and Thomas (2012) cite fundamental principles of participatory research beginning with ensuring a democratic process, creating a *safe space*, defining the community, and acknowledging different levels of participation. In this research I hope to have demonstrated that these principles were met as much as possible, and that I was transparent concerning points at which collaboration was impractical. There could be questions about defining community in that these few voices may not be representative of numerous stories across the spectrum of COIPs' experience leaving out significant voices yet unheard. However, in the context of this research, all voices in our small community were honoured and respected reflecting the collaborative intentions throughout the process.

The most recent issue of *Action Research Journal* (Bradbury, Waddell, O'Brien, Apgar, Teehankee, & Fazey, 2020) includes an introductory article dedicated to the implementation of AOR by offering a series of "quality choicepoints" (p. 3). These *quality choicepoints* are guideposts for AOR that invited me to reflect on how this work aligned with these particular criteria for transformative AOR. They include the following: a) clarity and significance of purpose; b) quality of partnership; c) contribution to AOR theory/practice; d) participative methods; e) actionability; f) researcher/author reflexivity; and g) practitioner relevance and accessibility. As I considered these choicepoints, I believe that each one was acknowledged and practiced at least to some degree. The relational framework characterized by collaboration was also a strength that provided the necessary conditions toward creating a safe enough space for counter stories to emerge dialogically. The challenges that threatened to throw us off the path

were navigated within the safety of our relationships and we were able to draw strength from each other. Without the theoretical structures that guided us, this would have been very difficult. Moreover, the tenacity it took for our group to meet and accomplish the filming of the documentary demonstrated considerable commitment. I believe the strength of our relationships, and the trust built through our relationships, was key to their commitment.

Contributions

This research has contributed to the research literature in a number of ways. First, participants shared their stories in an effort to add to the gathering knowledge concerning parental incarceration. The Canadian literature in this area is sparse (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015) and my hope is that we have inspired much-needed attention from scholars, community workers, mental health care practitioners, and policy makers. The insights offered here have challenged the single story of risk prevalent in scholarship around COIPs and families affected by incarceration, resisting with counter stories of strength, courage, determination, and competence. By choosing to tell the stories through the medium of video, our intention is that the stories will not molder on the (digital) shelves of academic institutions, but will be heard by people positioned to reflect on their own implicit biases and make practice or policy decisions that would affect the lives of those caught up in the justice system.

Second, participants have shared a number of insights that invite clinicians and health-care workers who come in contact with COIPs to attend to best practices while cultivating attitudes of curiosity and patience. A recent document commissioned by the Quaker United Nations Office (Halton & Townhead, 2020) offers international standards and guidelines for COIPs. One section notes that, “in order to implement these recommendations, [it is necessary to] collect data and undertake research to better understand the domestic situation” (p. 12). In an

effort to add to the accumulating knowledge, both internationally and nationally, this research will be disseminated through journal articles, conference presentations, and the documentary screenings. In Canada, the work done by dedicated organizations (e.g., Canadian Families in Corrections Network [CFCN]; Fostering, Empowering, Advocating, Together [FEAT]; and E-Fry of Greater Vancouver) offer guidelines and resources on how to best support COIPs. Perhaps through exposure to the stories in this research, and through the documentary, those concerned with the welfare of COIPs will seek out these rich sources for guidance.

Educators can also benefit from these stories of parental incarceration by more deeply understanding the impact they have on children who depend on them for a sense of continuity, acceptance, and safety that might be unavailable at home. Again, inviting educators to reflect on their implicit biases, the lack of acknowledgment or support in the educational systems, and be reminded of the power they have to harm or to help. Additionally, the learning from this project could be shared at the university level with counsellors, social workers, nurses, or others who are training in the helping professions. As it is very possible that aspiring professionals will encounter families affected by incarceration, there are a number of possible interventions that could be developed from this research including mentoring or peer support groups, not to mention specific advice such as how to work with anger.

Additionally, there were many stories of foster care environments that were traumatic and damaging. Recognizing the heavy load on the system, this research further supports the need to direct resources and education for those positioned as foster supporters for children in care. This includes those in kinship care relationships. Three participants who were cared for in a kinship care situation, noted that there was little support for these relatives. They commented that it would have eased considerable stress if there were resources in place for relatives caring for

children with an incarcerated parent. This research may add to the sparse literature addressing kinship care needs and support (see Hawthorne, 2019; Phillips & Bloom, 1998).

From a methodological perspective, this project, which has been termed an AOR approach might also be characterized as participatory action research (PAR). My understanding of PAR (Livingston & Wilkins, 2018) suggests that this project does not adhere to an orthodox PAR approach where participants are consulted through research question development, data collection and analysis, and presenting results. I am more comfortable admitting to this project developing with PAR sensibilities where the last two phases adopted a participatory ethic and practice. Having said that, I propose that this project is an example of an AOR/PAR project that may be informative for others who are considering a social justice focus or using visual media to amplify the voices of marginalized people. This research adds weight to the notion that researchers must be supported by an ethical framework, engage in reflective practice, and be aware of the commitment that is inherent in participatory research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; McCormack & Dewing, 2012). Moreover, the majority of research concerning COIPs is quantitative (Easterling & Johnson, 2015; Dallaire, Zeman, & Thrash, 2014) and this work will bolster the missing qualitative piece that puts flesh and blood humans at the center of knowledge generation. In addition to adding to the literature concerning COIPs, the challenges inherent in this type of work may be daunting. However, drawing from the experience of others supports efforts to generate new shared knowledge and disseminate it in creative and effective ways. It is my hope that other researchers interested in the way COIPs (or other vulnerable youth) are supported might learn from our experience and draw from the wisdom offered by participants.

Another area crucial to this type of project is how institutional research boards (IRBs) can support, facilitate, and monitor the adoption of AOR and PAR methodologies. There is a risk

versus benefits balance that should be considered throughout projects. Asking researchers to reflect and account for how and when participants might feel burdened may mitigate some power issues that could be otherwise hidden. Also, I believe it would be helpful to ensure that researchers have had some experience in this area or, in the case of graduate students, their supervisors are familiar with AOR. Additionally, asking researchers to indicate their sources of social support and how consultants will be accessed helps to acknowledge the relational aspects of the work with the understanding that these projects are not accomplished alone.

Additionally, adopting a social constructionist, dialogic, participatory framework in the service of addressing the research question supports this philosophical approach as one that makes space for previously untold and unheard stories as a means to act by, and for, people on the margins of society. In other words, the work we accomplished together was best served by this particular philosophical lens and other researchers engaged in AOR and participatory methods may find it informative.

Reflections on Method

Those who undertake such AOR efforts are quickly awakened to the extraordinary commitment and reflection necessary for ethically sound, responsible AOR work. Participants may not have the capacity to dedicate valuable time and resources and unfunded projects are almost impossible to accomplish. I agree with the notion that participants' time and efforts are valuable and should be acknowledged as such with some form of compensation if possible: at the very least it should not cost participants more than time. I am grateful that PolicyWise (2020), an Alberta organization dedicated to promoting "effective social policy and practice to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities" supported this research with a doctoral student grant that in addition to compensating participants for their time, enabled me to hire a

professional videographer to do the filming and assist with the editing of the documentary. Institutionally, academics may not be positioned, willing, or able to take on such efforts due to time and resource restraints and as doctoral research it is rare, although not unheard of (see Ness, 2011). Additionally, academic institutions or supervisors may not be familiar with the filming processes and find that the relational demands necessary for this type of work may challenge familiar or traditional guidelines. Consequently, there are many important and worthwhile research projects that could be a vehicle for unheard stories that may never come to academic attention. Thankfully, this research is an indication that projects of this type can be undertaken by graduate students. I am aware that some university training programs are implementing strategies that would facilitate more research that reflects a social justice or action-oriented approach (e.g., University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education).

Recommendations for Supporting COIPs

At the request of the participants in my Master's research, I undertook this project to help draw attention to how COIPs are acknowledged and protected in Canada. Consequently, it is appropriate to draw attention to the broader questions about Canadian support for COIPs. By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2011) Canada made a commitment to prioritize the well-being of children. In many ways, Canada has attended to improving circumstances and policy for children (see UNICEF report *Where We Stand*, 2020). However, in terms of acknowledging and providing services for COIPs the federal and provincial governments have fallen short (Hannem, 2008; Hannem & Leonardi, 2015; McCormick, Millar, & Paddock, 2014). Prompted by the crisis of mass incarceration, agencies in the United States have implemented dozens of programs and services for COIPs; many of them from the community service sector and some from governmental agencies. This was clearly evident at the

second annual Arizona State University National Children of Incarcerated Parents Conference where preliminary results from this study were presented (Pickering, 2019). Researchers, service providers, policy makers, and law enforcement agencies in Canada will benefit from the work that has been accomplished in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. However, is it imperative that COIPs be acknowledged and supported through various means in Canada (Bayes, 2008). As has been advised by numerous scholars and agency advocates, a statistical representation would be an important place to start. With this information, children affected by incarceration may come to the attention of numerous agencies and systems that could provide avenues of support, or at least mitigate harm. The following areas would benefit from information geared toward best practices when supporting or interacting with COIPs.

Policy development. A first step in developing policy around COIPs would be to gather population statistics that would accurately reflect the number of children impacted by incarceration. This is not a novel idea and is reflected in calls to action from community organizations and the few researchers working in the Canadian landscape (e.g., Bayes, 2008; CFSC [Quakers], 2019; Hannem, 2012; McCormick et al., 2015). There are approximations gathered by numerous support agencies (e.g., E-Fry, CFCN) that would put the number of children affected by incarceration at ~ 400,000, which is significant and likely under-represents the actual number. Even this conservative estimation suggests a considerable human and economic cost. This research supports the growing evidence regarding the difficulties for COIPs and alludes to possible points of intervention meriting further study, that could in turn, inform policy development.

Children and family services. It is important to remember that losing a parent to incarceration is qualitatively different from losing contact with a parent in other ways (e.g.,

divorce or death) (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Mears & Siennick, 2016). Also, the relationship between children and parents is a critical focus of intervention for the incarcerated and their families. It has been shown that incarcerated parents who are more connected to their families and communities are less likely to recidivate (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015; McKiernan, Shamblen, Collings, Strader, & Kokoski, 2013). If it is in the child's best interest, the child/parent relationship should be nurtured and supported throughout the duration of the incarceration. Participants in this research all shared that the relationship with their parent was important. The mothers and participants who were interviewed in the documentary share some insight into how crucial the parent child connection is, with mothers underscoring the idea that it was their children that helped them stay on track. I would recommend enhancing re-entry strategies that support the family reunification process. Therapists who recognize the unique conditions that surround families affected by incarceration would benefit from the information shared here by participants. For example, understanding the role of anger as a powerful force that can be both helpful and harmful.

Educators: The school setting has the potential to be both protective and/or harmful. Participants shared a great deal about their educational experience and how it could be more supportive. Research from other jurisdictions has implicated teachers in terms of bias and differential treatment toward COIPs (Dallaire et al., 2010). As I have been advocating for COIPs and sharing my experience over the last several years, I have found a profound lack of awareness among educators, counsellors, clergy, social workers, and corrections personnel. Information is needed by schools to address this lack of awareness cited by the participants in this study, which adds to the gathering evidence (Knaphus-Soran, 2017; Miller & Barnes, 2015).

Mental health care providers. All participants had engaged in therapy at some point and shared both helpful and harmful practices. Reflecting the findings of other scholars, all participants suffered from varying degrees of anxiety; including diagnosed PTSD (Schlafer et al., 2012). Participants also shared stories of self-harm, disordered eating, depression, substance use (Davis & Schlafer, 2017), and relational difficulties (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015; Murray et al., 2009). It is also relevant that participants cited parents' mental health concerns that were associated with incarceration. Conversation regarding the specific needs of COIPs should be implemented for workers in contact with children and families affected by incarceration. As a counselling psychologist, I learned a number of ways in which practitioners could adapt their practice to fit more appropriately with children or adults who have been affected by incarceration; parental or otherwise. CV mentioned that demonstrating over-exuberance in terms of noting strengths can backfire. She called it "short-stopping" and said that this approach only served to shut her down, afraid to show her "true self" and feeling pressure to live up to what seemed like unreasonable expectations. Also, as noted previously, being aware of anger as a motivating factor that demonstrates resistance could help clinicians work with it, rather than try to suppress or detract from it. Participants were clear that the mental health concerns, fueled by shame kindled in childhood, have endured into adulthood. Clinicians working with adult COIPs would benefit from hearing the stories told in this research to help clients challenge the shame and stigma they may carry, and gradually (recall "short-stopping") replace these with narratives of resilience that include self-compassion, compassion, and competence.

Law enforcement. Participant stories included being present during the arrest and the consequences of this particular trauma. It would be important to ensure that law enforcement agencies have protocols in place and awareness training for officers that find children present at

the time of arrest. If these policies are not already in place then it would be a priority to draw from research such as this and other scholarly work for recommendations (e.g., Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). From the stories shared in this research it is clear that engagement with law enforcement should be managed with children in mind to mitigate the traumatic sequalae that might be significant to COIPs.

Prison visitation: The experience of visiting a parent in prison is significant in a child's life. Four participants in this research mentioned visiting their parent and each one said it was very difficult. In other jurisdictions this is an area of interest (see Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010) and some progress has been made where child friendly programs have been implemented. For example, in Canada the women's prisons and some of the men's prisons offer areas that include toys, books, and art supplies provided by the Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) (2020). However, these programs are not in all institutions and the security protocols remain jarring for children and family members (Hannem, 2008). As Poehlmann and colleagues have indicated (2010), there are numerous points of intervention that could help to decrease the uncertainty, fear, and at times, traumatic consequences of seeing a parent in prison. For example, having less institutional settings that are more inviting and facilitate connection between the parent and child (Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). Additionally, participants mentioned being frightened before visiting incarcerated parents. The CFCN sponsors a Family Liaison Worker program that supports women as they transition into the community and reunite with their children. However, at the time of this writing, this is available at only one institution for women and none in institutions for men in Canada (CFCN, 2020). There is clearly much room for improvement in both women's and men's prisons.

Future Research

As indicated by the sections above, the field is expansive in terms of future research and development of programs in the area of families impacted by incarceration in Canada. For example, it could be helpful to conduct impact research with those who have seen the documentary by exploring explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) bias. The possibility of developing workshops based on the documentary could also be an impetus to conduct impact studies that would investigate reduction in stigma. For example, giving a workshop to educators and developing a before/after questionnaire to determine efficacy of content or delivery.

The participants in this project found the group experience to be very helpful with insights into what would constitute a support group or mentoring program. The information garnered from these stories could help to develop interventions that could be investigated through outcome studies similar to the workshop studies mentioned above. Implementing studies with young COIPs who are presently navigating parental incarceration about what would be most helpful could pave the way for effective support strategies based on recommendations from those with lived experience.

The Slowly Changing Canadian Landscape

At the beginning of this project I understood the Canadian context of support for COIPs to be sorely lacking. Although there is much work to be done (e.g., there are still no statistics collected on COIPs), there have been a few notable shifts. For example, across the country, relevant organizations and academics are beginning to connect with each other and share our work. It is important to recognize the work done by existing community organizations in Canada such as CFCN (2020), who has developed numerous programs and resources, as well as The Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver with a dedicated program for children and mothers

affected by incarceration (2020). These are pockets of support that have been gathered together in the Canadian Coalition for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCCIP). On January 24, 2019 the organization Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers) CFSC, the peace and social justice organization of The Quakers worldwide, as can be seen by information on their website (CFSC, 2020), organized a meeting of people across the country who had an interest in supporting families and children affected by incarceration. Attesting to, in part, the siloed nature of this work, I was not aware of this meeting until I heard a CBC radio interview conducted by David Enright with Verena Tan of the CFSC; she was talking about sentencing practices when children are involved. I contacted Verena who invited me to join the CCCIP. The CCCIP is comprised of representatives across the country and includes organizations, academics, and people who work within the criminal justice system. Their most notable contribution is a document that reflected the formative meeting of the group that happened just before my involvement (CFSC, 2019).

I was scheduled to co-present on this document at the Alberta College of Social Workers annual conference in Edmonton with a fellow Coalition member, Dennis Whitford, who writes Gladue reports (Justice Education Society, 2019) (sentencing recommendations for Indigenous people) for a First Nation community in Northern Alberta. We were looking forward to sharing some of the learnings from my dissertation project. Dennis had planned to lead a group discussion using a case study about a briefly incarcerated mother who lost her children, and we both had planned on sharing information regarding the mandate of the CCCIP. Due to the present situation regarding Covid-19 and the global pandemic, this conference (along with others where I was scheduled to present) was cancelled. Thankfully the learning from the present work is digital and will be shared with the CCCIP when the documentary is ready. Members will be invited to use it to support the mandate.

Unfinalized Conclusion

> I went through life thinking what I went through was normal. Nobody ever looks at it as normal. … I just really hope that what I felt from this group can somehow get out to the world somewhere. Even if it touches one or two kids, or one or two adults, that can help other people, that'd mean the world to me because I would love for somebody in my situation to feel how I feel now. That relief, and that comfort, I hope I can bring that to them through this group. That's what I would want. (NVS)

The stories bravely shared in this research echo those I have heard from past participants (Pickering, 2012) and colleagues. They will add to the developing understanding about the impact of parental incarceration on individual, family, community, and societal levels in Canada. The relationships nurtured through this research were in the service of addressing the lack of support for COIPs in this country. In addition to the work that we accomplished, we also found lasting connections that enhanced all of us in more ways than can be fully appreciated. In this chapter I endeavoured to share my reflections on our collaborative experience and what could be applied to the broader context. I attended to what this work has contributed to the academic literature in terms of knowledge and method. I also suggested how COIPs could be better supported in ways that are informed by this work and the work of other scholars and community organizations working in the Canadian context. I discussed the learning and limitations of this research and touched on the challenges and what other researchers in AOR might learn from our experience. Theoretically, I suggested that adopting a social constructionist, dialogical, participatory paradigm is a serviceable framework for this type of research as it inspired us to act by co-developing and sharing the documentary. Scholarship in the area of parental incarceration is increasing in international contexts, and from which many programs and interventions have been developed. It is time for Canada to take steps to first acknowledge these invisible children, and then enact both research and service development. My hope is that the published results of

this research and documentary will perpetuate conversation around supporting a sector of vulnerable children who have historically been imprisoned by shame, stigma, and invisibility.

Participants and I have discussed a number of possibilities in which our documentary would have the most far-reaching impact. We are fortunate to have potential exposure through the Sundance Film Festival and the documentary workshop that has guided Les' editing work. Reflecting the future research possibilities in the last section we have considered developing workshops around the film that could be presented to educators, law enforcement, and/or students in counselling, social work, or psychology programs. I have had many invitations from post-secondary programs to present our work and will explore these opportunities further. There are also possible opportunities to approach law enforcement or prison programs that may find our work beneficial or at least informative. For now, we have agreed that the eventual public release (Fall of 2020) will be an event where stakeholders will be invited to view the documentary and engage in a panel discussion afterward. Participants have indicated that they are motivated to attend and be part of the panel. Before the public release we will have a number of conversations around how this will be accomplished and ensure that participants do not feel pressured to join in with the panel and if they do, feel they are safe enough. After the release of the documentary, it is important to note that participant stories will continue to grow and change both within themselves and hopefully for those who have listened. Revisiting the metaphor of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and the dialogical philosophy of Bakhtin (1986), the stories shared in this work are unfinalized, will continue to develop and change, creating and perpetuating new stories of resistance, resilience, and strength.

The story of the young girl who set me on this path also continues to change and grow in an unfinalized way. Now, as an adult, she still suffers. Yet, she is aware of, and touched by, how

I responded to her story with a commitment to work toward change in the lives of families affected by incarceration. She assures me that it is comforting to know that some good has come of sharing her life story fraught with challenges. She continues to resist the stigma and risk stories that have been part of her experience in much the same way participants have done in this research. As I feel for the participants in this story, I continue to be humbled by their ongoing story of pure determination, courage, and commitment to never give up. For that, I am grateful.

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Appendix A: Media Coverage

University of Calgary News article: Guilt by Association

https://ucalgary.ca/news/guilt-association-what-happens-when-mom-or-dad-goes-jail

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio program: The Homestretch with Doug Dirks

https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/programs/homestretch/study-how-children-of-convicts-are-stigmatized-in-society-1.3534672

Appendix B: Third Party Script

Hi _____. Thank you for letting me tell you about a study that is concerned with how you came through the experience of having a parent in prison. The researcher for this project is Barbara Pickering, a doctoral student at the University of Calgary. In her previous research she worked with women who have come out of prison and an important part of the stories they told had to do with the fact that there is no acknowledgment by government or in many cases, social services for kids affected by incarceration. She is looking for people who are 16 years or older, had a parent in prison for more than 3 months, and grew up in Canada. She will invite you to share your story with her in one or two private interviews for which you will receive a $25 honorarium each time and then if you are interested, you can join a focus group to develop a collective story about parental incarceration and discuss plans about how the group could take action. Both the interview and the focus group will be audio recorded. If this sounds like something you would be interested in, you can contact Barbara through email at bjpicker@ucalgary.ca or by phone at 403-681-0605. Barbara will explain the details of the study in depth so you can decide if you would like to be part of it. Additionally, the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study.

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

Did You Know?

- In Canada, no one really knows how many kids are affected by incarceration
- Some agencies estimate that 180,000 kids have a parent in prison
- Likely more kids affected by incarceration than by ADHD or Autism combined
- There are no dedicated programs for kids of incarcerated parents
- Most stories of having a parent in prison have gone unheard
- Children affected by incarceration are mostly invisible

I believe it is time to start paying attention to children affected by incarceration. I am looking for participants to share the experience of having a parent in prison in two one-on-one interviews, as well as a focus group, that will be audio recorded. Participants will receive a $25 honorarium for each interview and $50 for the focus group. If you, or someone you know, had an incarcerated mother or father between the ages of 6 and 17, and would be willing to share the story, please contact me, Barbara Pickering at 403-681-0605 or email bjpicker@ucalgary.ca. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study.

In order to be eligible for this study:

- Must be over 16
- A parent was incarcerated when you were between 6 and 17 years old
- A parent must have been incarcerated for over 90 consecutive days
- Must have grown up in Canada

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & E-mail:

Barbara Pickering, Faculty of Education, Applied Psychology. Telephone: 403-681-0605. Email: bjpicker@ucalgary.ca

Name of Study Supervisor:
Dr. Tom Strong, Werklund School of Education, Applied Psychology. Telephone: 403-220-3586. Email: strongt@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project: Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: Exploring stories of parental incarceration. Can we make a difference together?

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose
This doctoral dissertation is a study to explore the stories of adults who have had a childhood experience of parental incarceration. This study will also target the factors around how participants come together in a group in order to work toward changing the way children who are affected by incarceration are acknowledged and served.

What will I be asked to do?

There are two stages in this study. In *Stage I,* you will be asked to engage in two, one-on-one interviews that will last approximately 60 minutes each. During the individual interviews, you will be invited to share the story of your experience of what it was like to have an incarcerated parent. Interviews will take place at a mutually agreed on time and place. You have been provided with a list of sample questions that may be asked during the individual interview in order that you may

prepare for the interview and not be surprised by unexpected questions.

Once the interviews are completed, you will be given the opportunity to join *Stage II* of the study, which is a focus group with other participants to discuss the possibility of engaging in further research that could make a change in the way service providers support children affected by incarceration. The meeting will take place at the University of Calgary, or another mutually agreed on location, and will last for 1.5 – 2 hours. In this meeting you will be invited to share your story with other adults who have experienced parental incarceration as a child. We will develop the collective story of what it was like to be a child with an incarcerated parent. Additionally, we will determine if there is interest enough to launch an *action research* initiative, which will focus on ways in which the group can share the story with the service community in order to draw attention to the experience of having a parent in prison.

Action research is research that is done with members of a community who have a common purpose, in order to affect some type of social change; in this case, the acknowledgment and/or service of children affected by incarceration. The group will discuss ideas about how this information should be shared (e.g., presentations, workshop, book, photographs) and with whom (e.g., counsellors, teachers, law enforcement). You have been provided with a sample of the types of questions that will stimulate conversation during the focus group so you can prepare and not be surprised by unexpected questions.

Both the individual interviews and focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to check the transcription to ensure you are still comfortable with sharing the information. Should there be a concern with the information shared, you will have the right to remove it from the data. The recordings will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed.

There is a $25.00 cash honorarium for the individual interviews. Additionally, for your participation in the focus group, you will be given a $50 cash honorarium to help cover the costs of child-care and/or transportation. This honorarium is to recognize your contributions of time and information to the study and ensure that any costs that occur as a result of joining the study are covered. Should you decide to withdraw from the study before its completion, you will be given a $25 gift certificate from Walmart as a token of the researcher's appreciation.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation without penalty at any time. You are free to decline to answer any and/or all of the questions asked by the researcher. Please note that if you withdraw after participating in any part of the study, the data you have provided via the individual interview may be withdrawn. However, focus group data will remain intact as it is impractical to remove an individual's contribution to the group process.

What type of personal information will be collected?
No personal identifying information will be collected. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality for the one-on-one interviews, you may choose a pseudonym or you will have one assigned.

In terms of the focus group, absolute anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the group setting. The focus group discussion will remain confidential, and the researcher will ask participants to refrain from sharing individual's contributions outside the group; however, the researchers cannot control this or guarantee confidentiality. At the first group meeting we will review the consent form and terms of confidentiality; asking participants to honour the agreement that all information shared will remain in the group.

Are There Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
The researcher does not see any foreseeable risk to your participation in the research. If for any reasons, the topics of discussion in the research interviews are upsetting for you, and you are in need of support, please contact one of the following services:

1. The Distress Centre: 403.266.4357 (24-hour crisis line and free counselling). Address: Suite 300, 1010 - 8th Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1J2
2. Eastside Family Therapy Centre: 403-299-9696 (a walk-in, no-fee counselling service). Address: Northgate, 495 36 St NE #255, Calgary, AB T2A 6K3

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear the interview tape. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results.

The results may also be presented via academic journal articles and/or presentations at conferences or community forums. Individual names will not be used at any time. Electronic and paper-based information relating to the study will be stripped of all identifying information and will be retained indefinitely in a password-protected laptop belonging to the researcher to accommodate possible future projects and analyses.

Signatures (written consent)
Your signature on this form indicates that you: 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research participant.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. Please indicate below that you understand there are two stages to this research. You are under no obligation to participate in both stages and can withdraw at any time.

☐ I am willing to participate in the individual interview

☐ I am willing to participate in the focus group

Participant's Name: (please print)
_____

Participant's Signature _____Date:
_____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

_____

Researcher's Signature: _____Date:

_____

Questions/Concerns:
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Barbara Pickering, PhD Candidate, Applied Psychology, 403-681-0605, bjpicker@ucalgary.ca or Dr. Tom Strong, Faculty of Education, Applied Psychology. 403-220-3586, strongt@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of this consent form.

Appendix E: Open Interview Questions

1. Tell me your story about the time your mother/father went to prison.
2. In your story were there any champions or someone who was particularly helpful to you that stand out?
3. Tell me about a time when you felt like you were your own champion.
4. When you were going through this, was there anyone in particular that you could talk with?
5. What were some of the biggest changes that you remember for you as a child?
6. How did your relationship with your mother/father/siblings change?
7. What advice would you give a child or adolescent who is going through that experience today?
8. I know there were lots of feelings that were present at that time but what is the one that stands out the most for you as you look back on that experience?
9. Did your teachers know what was going on for you and your family? What was that like for you?
10. Did your friends know what was going on for you and your family? What was that like for you?
11. Do you recall a worker such as a social worker or counsellor that was involved with your family?
    a. What kind of experience was that?
    b. What was positive?
    c. What was negative?

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Barbara Pickering related to her research study titled ***Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: Exploring stories of parental incarceration. Can we make a difference together?***

Furthermore, I agree to:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. Not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Barbara Pickering.
3. Store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. Return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Barbara Pickering in a complete and timely manner.
5. Delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio-tapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix G: Stage II Consent Form

Consent Form: Stage II-Focus Group

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & E-mail:

Barbara Pickering, Faculty of Education, Applied Psychology. Telephone: 403-681-0605 Email: bjpicker@ucalgary.ca

Name of Study Supervisor:
Dr. Tom Strong, Werklund School of Education, Applied Psychology. Telephone: 403-220-3586. Email: strongt@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project: Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: Exploring stories of parental incarceration. Can we make a difference together?

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose
This doctoral dissertation is a study to explore the stories of adults who have had a childhood experience of parental incarceration. This study will also investigate the factors around how participants come together in a group in order to work toward changing the way children who are affected by incarceration are acknowledged and served.

What will I be asked to do?

In *Stage I* of this study you completed two, one-on-one interviews. In *Stage II* you have been invited to join a focus group meeting. The meeting will take place at the University of Calgary, or another mutually agreed on location, and will last for 1.5 – 2 hours.

In this meeting you will be invited to share your story with other adults who have experienced

parental incarceration as a child. We will develop the collective story of what it was like to be a child with an incarcerated parent. Additionally, we will determine if there is interest enough to launch an *action research* initiative, which will focus on ways in which the group can share the story with the service community in order to draw attention to the experience of having a parent in prison.

Action research is research that is done with members of a community who have a common purpose, in order to affect some type of social change; in this case, the acknowledgment and/or service of children affected by incarceration. The group will discuss ideas about how this information should be shared (e.g., presentations, workshop, book, photographs) and with whom (e.g., counsellors, teachers, law enforcement).

The focus group will be recorded and transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to check the transcription to ensure you are still comfortable with sharing the information. Should there be a concern with the information shared, you will have the right to remove it from the data.

For your participation in the focus group, you will be given a $50 cash honorarium to help cover the costs of child-care and/or transportation. This honorarium is to recognize your contributions of time and information to the study and ensure that any costs that occur as a result of joining the focus group are covered. Should you decide to withdraw from the study before its completion, you will be given a $25 gift certificate from Walmart as a token of the researcher's appreciation.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation without penalty at any time. Please note that if you withdraw after participating in any part of the study, data collected up to the point of withdrawal may still be used in the study.

What type of personal information will be collected?
No personal identifying information will be collected. Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researcher would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Are There Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
The researcher does not see any foreseeable risk to your participation in the research. If for any reasons, the topics of discussion in the research interviews are upsetting for you, and you are in need of support, please contact one of the following services:

1. The Distress Centre: 403.266.4357 (24-hour crisis line and free counselling). Address: Suite 300, 1010 - 8th Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1J2
2. Eastside Family Therapy Centre: 403-299-9696 (a walk-in, no-fee counselling service). Address: Northgate, 495 36 St NE #255, Calgary, AB T2A 6K3

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
Only the researcher will have access to the information that you share about your experiences of having a parent in prison. The information you share will be confidential and be summarized for presentations or publications that result from the research project. The information you provide will be incorporated into a final report prepared by the researcher to fulfill the requirements of a

Doctoral dissertation at the University of Calgary. Individual quotes will be referenced by a pseudonym.

The results may also be presented via academic journal articles and/or presentations at conferences or community forums. Individual names will not be used at any time. Electronic and paper-based information relating to the study will be stripped of all identifying information will be retained indefinitely in a password-protected laptop belonging to the researcher to accommodate possible future projects and analyses.

Signatures (written consent)
Your signature on this form indicates that you: 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research participant.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print)

_____

Participant's Signature _____Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

_____

Researcher's Signature: _____Date: _____

Questions/Concerns:
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Barbara Pickering, PhD Candidate, Applied Psychology, 403-681-0605, bjpicker@ucalgary.ca or Dr. Tom Strong, Faculty of Education, Applied Psychology. 403-220-3586, strongt@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of this consent form.

Appendix H: Confidentiality Form for Videographer and Animators

Videographer/Animator Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____ videographer/animator, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all video or audiotapes and documentations generated by myself, or received from Barbara Pickering related to her research study titled ***Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: Exploring stories of parental incarceration. Can we make a difference together?***

Furthermore, I agree to:

6. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be revealed during the filming or audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
7. Not make copies of any video/audiotapes or computerized titles of the interviews, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Barbara Pickering.
8. Store all study-related video/audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
9. Return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Barbara Pickering in a complete and timely manner.
10. Delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio-tapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Videographer/Animator's name (printed)_____

Videographer/Animator's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix I: Sample Conference Abstract

Submission Abstract: Counselling psychologists are often in a position to work with people who are on the borderlands of society. In this presentation, I share insights from participants who were part of a research project that explored the lived experience of people who experienced parental incarceration. In Canada, children of incarcerated parents are rarely acknowledged, yet it may surprise clinicians that there are likely more children who have parents in prison than children with Autism and ADHD together. The stories shared in this research included ways in which counsellors failed them. Through video and audio tapes, participants will explain the details of their experience of counselling, how counsellors can be more supportive, and how they ended up often having to seek help from other sources. The wisdom shared can be generalized to others who are living on the margins and subjected to stigma, bias, and misunderstanding. There is much to learn if we, as professionals, hone our listening skills in collaborative ways. Attendees will have the opportunity to share their own experiences of working with children affected by incarceration and/or other marginalized populations who are often restrained by a reified conception of who they are and how they should be helped.

Appendix J: Documentary Interview Questions

CK: Moving, school, coping, resisting damaged identity stories

1. Tell me about how it was moving around so much?
2. What was school like and what was the most difficult things about it?
3. How did you "show them they were wrong?
4. Would you have advice for people who support COIPs?
5. What about kids themselves?

NVS: lost memories, moving, school, law enforcement, family relationships, growing up too fast, coping, resisting damaged identity, advice to supporters, advice to kids

1. What is it like to know you have forgotten some things? How have you begun to recover some of those memories?
2. Tell me the story of the arrest?
3. What are some memorable experiences around how you and your brother survived foster care?
4. Would you have advice for people who support COIPs?
5. What about kids themselves?

SV: cautionary tales, school, arrest, consequences into adulthood

1. What would you like to tell me about the arrest?
2. What kinds of things are you dealing with today?
3. Would you have advice for people who support COIPs?
4. What about kids themselves?

KA: school, arrest, consequences into adulthood, advice to kids

1. What would you like to tell me about the arrest?
2. What kinds of things are you dealing with today?
3. Would you have advice for people who support COIPs?
4. What about kids themselves?

B and SV:

1. How old was Syd when you were incarcerated?
2. What were some of the things that went through your mind about Sydney after your incarceration?
3. What did you miss the most?
4. What was the most difficult part of being away from your daughter?
5. What has it been like since you and she re-united?
    a. What were/are some of the challenges?
    b. What was most memorable and/or positive?
6. Looking back, what kinds of things could happen that would have made it easier for your child?
7. Would you have any advice for therapists, teachers, government people?
8. What are some ongoing struggles that you would be willing to share?

J & NVS:

1. How old was Nathan (the boys) when you were incarcerated?
2. What were some of the things that went through your mind about them after your incarceration?
3. What did you miss the most?
4. What was the most difficult part of being away from your sons?
5. What has it been like since you and the boys have re-united?
    a. What were/are some of the challenges?
    b. What was most memorable and/or positive?
6. Looking back, what kinds of things could happen that would have made it easier for your kids?
7. What are some ongoing struggles that you would be willing to share?
8. Would you have any advice for therapists, teachers, policy making folks?

Appendix K: Group Meeting Summary and Journal Reflection for Focus Group #3

December 20, 2018; Reflection post group

We completed focus group #3 yesterday and the group is coming together. K joined us for the first time and shared that she has been struggling. I think she found the connection with the group to be quite helpful in feeling better. I noticed her energy was much different from the beginning of the group to the end. S had a bit of a struggle joining in and I when I asked her a few questions she froze up a bit. It didn't help that she was doing the meeting in the car next to her Mom. Hopefully that doesn't happen again or I'll likely have to have a chat with her in terms of group confidentiality as I felt the group was a little reserved.

I think everyone is still finding this very helpful overall, which is not the intention of the group but an expected outcome. Belonging to something when one has spent so much time being on the outs of the outs is soothing. We will talk more about this as the weeks progress.

For now, watching the group cohere is soothing to me and feels like such a long time coming. The feelings of that long road of darkness I have travelled to get to this point still linger and I hesitate to be too optimistic. Much of it has to do with the belief in myself and whether I can handle the upcoming pressures and possibilities. I don't want to let the group down and I think that there is always a place to ask for help. These guys are so warm and welcoming that I know I'm safe. I find it interesting that we are all benefitting from these feelings of safety and trust. I think these guys have my back and they will be with me every step of the way as I will be with them. We will "shoulder each other up" as VR keeps reminding me.

There is an idea floating around that the group wants to do a documentary. Lots of energy and excitement was generated. I think it's an awesome idea but I also think we don't know how big it would be or if it's at all feasible. I think we have to be able to match our resources with our dreams. I have invited everyone to reach out to their own resources and see what we can find. As my friend A would do, try to maximize our efforts!! Not in terms of taking advantage (as she does sometimes) but in asking for help.

This is the summary note from the meeting.

December 19, 2018: Focus Group Summary

Attendees: C, N, K, S, and Barbara

Processes:

- Check-in and talk about how the last few weeks have been.
- Follow-up on action plans:
    - N shared that he had done some research on kids in foster care in the AB system and could find nothing that indicated there was any support for the kids. He did find some documents talking about compensation for foster parents.

    - C shared she had talked to a friend she thought might be interested in the group. She also was waiting for indication that it was okay to talk to officials that could inform her about what kind of supports are in place for foster kids in BC. She didn't get the go ahead soon enough for this meeting but will talk to her friend who works with child and youth mental health
    - Barbara did some research on opportunities to connect with the schools here in Calgary and shared that it's an application process. She said we would need to have something concrete to offer.
- K introduced herself and shared some of her story about having her mom go to prison. The group welcomed her to the meeting.
- Barbara wondered about the notion of forgiveness as a significant part of the process of accepting the situation. We talked about the process of forgiveness and how it comes about in small increments. Everyone shared that it is complicated and has a lot to do with their own healing.
- Barbara shared her acceptance to a counselling conference in Moncton in the Spring and read the abstract. The group gave her feedback about the wording but agreed that it was an acceptable abstract and encouraged her to go ahead with the presentation. We agreed that changing the title of the presentation to "Can you hear me?" was a better reflection of their experience.
    - There was some discussion about how everyone had negative experiences with counselling in the past. The most significant feeling was how counsellors kept doing "cheerleading" and talking about how great participants are. Everyone agreed that this was actually pretty annoying and would rather have had someone who just took the time to listen and be "with them" in their pain.
    - One of the most important messages was for counsellors to be "real" by sharing some of their experiences. Also, showing sincere caring was very significant.
    - We also talked about how it would have been helpful for counsellors to be aware of the lack of social skills due to not having a supportive parent or family. This was in response to being bullied a lot and ostracized due to the situation.
    - Participants shared that interpersonal guidance really was needed and that counsellors might have been instrumental in helping with this.
    - We also talked about the lack of consistency among counsellors and that having to develop numerous relationships was not helpful at all. It was mentioned that the more genuine the counsellor is the more effective the support is.
    - We also talked about trust as a really significant factor in developing relationships not only with counsellors but with other people.
- We talked about the complicated process of forgiveness and how it comes about in small increments.
- The discussion about the abstract lead to the idea that making a documentary or short film about the experience might be a good way to get the word out to support workers and others about how it feels to have a parent in prison. Everyone agreed that it was a good use of our time and resources.
- We also discussed booking some time to come together physically to do the film/documentary and how that would be "awesome" ☺ It was acknowledged that it would depend on funds and time. Barbara shared that the funds from the grant that is funding the group meetings will run out in April.

Action plan:

- Everyone will do some research on what it takes to do a documentary.
- Barbara will contact her committee member who has some experience with film making and ask for guidance
- C will talk to E-Fry and her contact who works for Child and Youth Services.
- We are all going to explore the availability of funds for our film.

Next meeting: January 9, 2018, 11:00 AM Calgary time

- Follow up on what everyone found out regarding a short film or documentary (e.g., where to start, who is our audience, what media and how to access this media, cost etc.)
- Discuss funding
- Develop a working plan for the stages of the documentary

Appendix L: Filming Weekend Schedule

Details of the weekend

- The transportation and timing discussed. Carmen will come on Saturday. K will come on Monday.
- We established what to wear, and the placement of the microphone
- The schedule was established as follows:
    - Saturday: Individual interviews and Life Story Board processes
        - 11:00 – Les arrives to set up
        - 1:00 – C (will arrive earlier to meet with Barbara and talk about the LSB process)
        - 3:00 – S and B
        - 5:00 – N and J
        - 7:00 – Pizza
    - Sunday: Group interviews, walk, and dinner
        - 2:00 – 4:00 – Group meeting (K will attend via video chat, which will be recorded
        - 4:30 – 5:30 – Walk in Fish Creek Park or around neighbourhood
        - 5:30 – 7:30 – Dinner
    - What to bring
        - Warm clothes for walk
        - Photographs, memorabilia, meaningful objects
        - Different outfits for both filming days: should be not too patterned, that a microphone can be attached to
        - Slippers or inside footwear (Barbara's house can be chilly ☺)

Appendix M: Consent to be Filmed

Re: Collateral Damage: Living with Stories of Parental Incarceration video

I _____

Hereby give my consent to be included in photographs or video by the Children of Incarcerated Parents Group for the Research Study *Sharing Stories, Building Bridges, Moving Mountains: The footage is to be used in the making of:*

Collateral Damage: Living with Stories of Parental Incarceration (working title)

I also agree that the Children of Incarcerated Parents group may use the aforesaid film in whole or part in the final version of any motion picture film/video, promotional reel, internet video, or television program either as a sequence on its own, or preceded, interlaced or followed by such other material as the Children of Incarcerated Parents Group may wish.

_____ _____

Name (please print) Signature

Name and Address (please print)

Appendix N: Link to Trailer of Bonds that Hurt; Bonds that Heal

https://vimeo.com/410821440/d4889d8c3c