

# Narrative ideas applied to restorative practices: A call for social justice

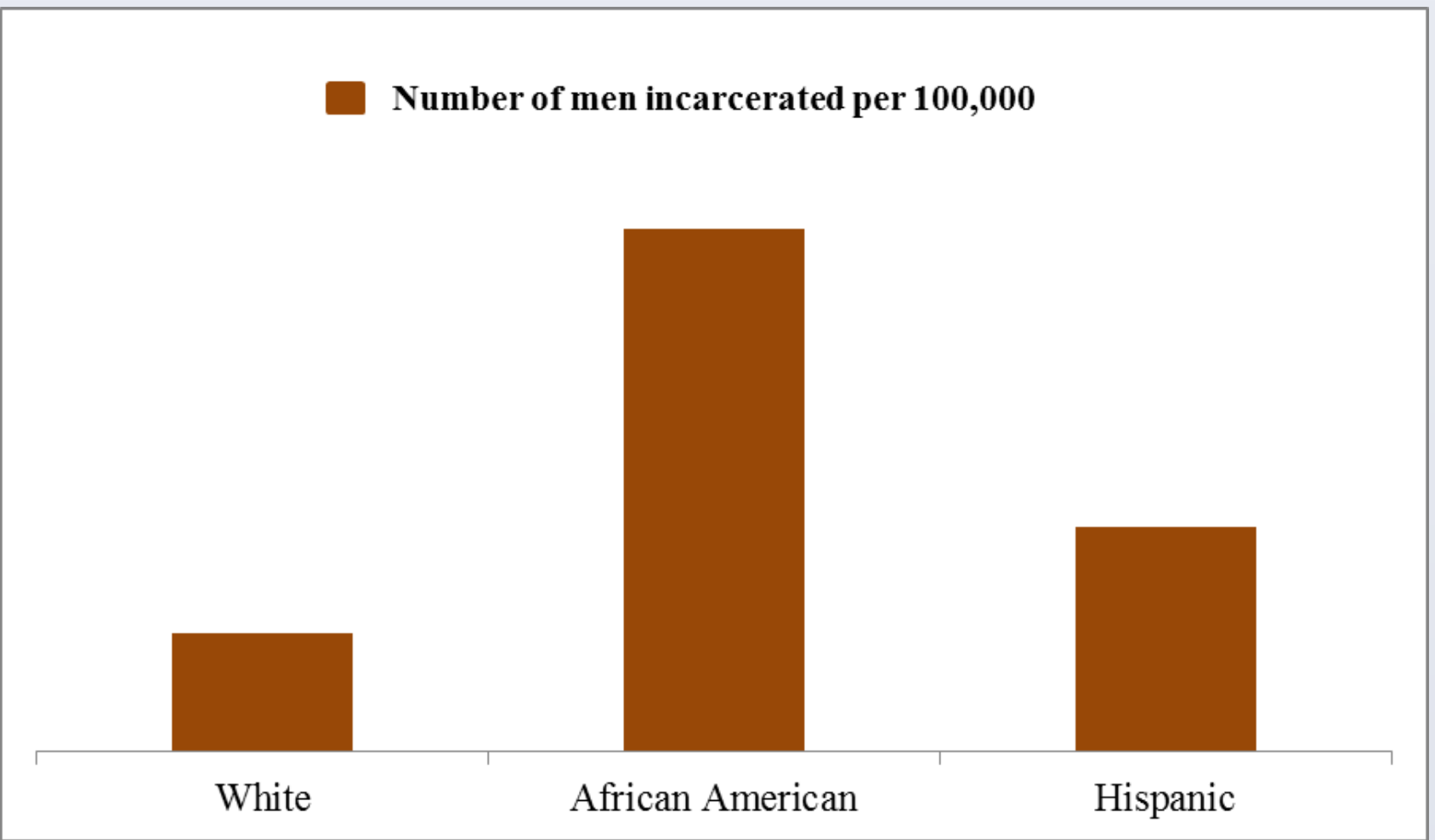
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## Background: Facts

1. Within the United States, there are more people imprisoned (over 1.5 million) than any other country within the world (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).
2. African-Americans comprise 13.2% of United States population. African-Americans (non-Hispanic) comprise 34.6% of total prison population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).
3. African-Americans are not only arrested disproportionately to general population they are imprisoned at a much higher rate than White Americans, (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014).
4. Current estimates project that for African-American males born in 1974 or later, 1 in 3 will be imprisoned at some point in their life (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2013).
5. There are more African-American males between ages 16 and 22 in prisons than in college (Deylami & Havercroft, 2014).

### 2011 US Incarceration Rates by Race and Ethnicity



### A qualitative depiction of the quantitative data



## Purpose of Presentation

This presentation will speak to inviting responsibility rather than imposing consequences on the offender. It is obvious that the criminal justice system has not made communities safer; ex-offenders less offensive; or victims have a sense of being less victimized. Currently, the entire rehabilitative process, in fact, is concerned with individual punishment rather than community health. Guided by restorative practices and social justice, this approach addresses harm done to relationships; attempts to restore relationships; contributes to stories of possibilities rather than tales of helplessness; and finally, invites the offender to take responsibility for his behavior and for the larger community to participate in addressing harm done to all involved.

## Theory

### Narrative Practices

The use of the narrative/text metaphor has gained increasing influence in the field of counseling. Narrative Therapy, as explicated by White and Epston (1990) attends to the stories of our lived experiences and the discourses within the dominant culture, which constrain those lived experiences. These discourses can affect an individual's identity, generate feelings of hopelessness and self-blame, and reinforce problem-saturated stories. Most importantly, these problem-saturated stories are seen to be part of one's essential self; i.e., the person is the problem. Narrative therapy conceptualizes etiology in such a way that the problem – not the person – is the problem.

Other attentions such as the benefits of externalizing the problem; a greater emphasis on the influence of language and discourse in the production of knowledge; and finally, the political nature and inseparability of power and knowledge, are aspects of narrative practices relevant to restorative justice and counseling both the incarcerated and the victims.

### Restorative, Social Justice Practices

Restorative justice holds offenders accountable to victims and the community at large; ultimately promotes healing and strengthening community bonds by addressing the harm done to all parties. Restorative justices address the relationships that is altered between the offending behaviors and victim(s). The idea is to repair the relationships through: (1) understanding different ways of thinking about offending behaviors, (2) focusing on the harm caused by offending behaviors, (3) focusing on the harm done to the community as a whole, (4) inviting offenders to take responsibility for their behaviors, and (5) providing an atmosphere and format that allows for amends to be made to individuals and the community (Winslade & Monk, 2007, 2001). Restorative justice is not about deepening societal wounds and conflicts but rather healing and peace. Combining the idea of restorative justice with narrative approaches offers a unique opportunity to repair the harm done to individuals and the communities which nurtures the individuals.

### Principles of Restorative Justice Practices

1. Restoration not retribution or rehabilitation
2. Relationships not individuals
3. Accountability to victims not authorities
4. Privileging more voices rather than isolating the individual
5. Allows the offending individual to set right the wrong
6. Victim is able to witness the offender accepting responsibility
7. The community develops more holistic conflict resolution skills

Ultimately, we can begin to envision a polity that encompasses all elements of the community regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, occupation or lack thereof, and/or any of the other labels (addict, felon, thug) that have formally been excluded from the conversation.

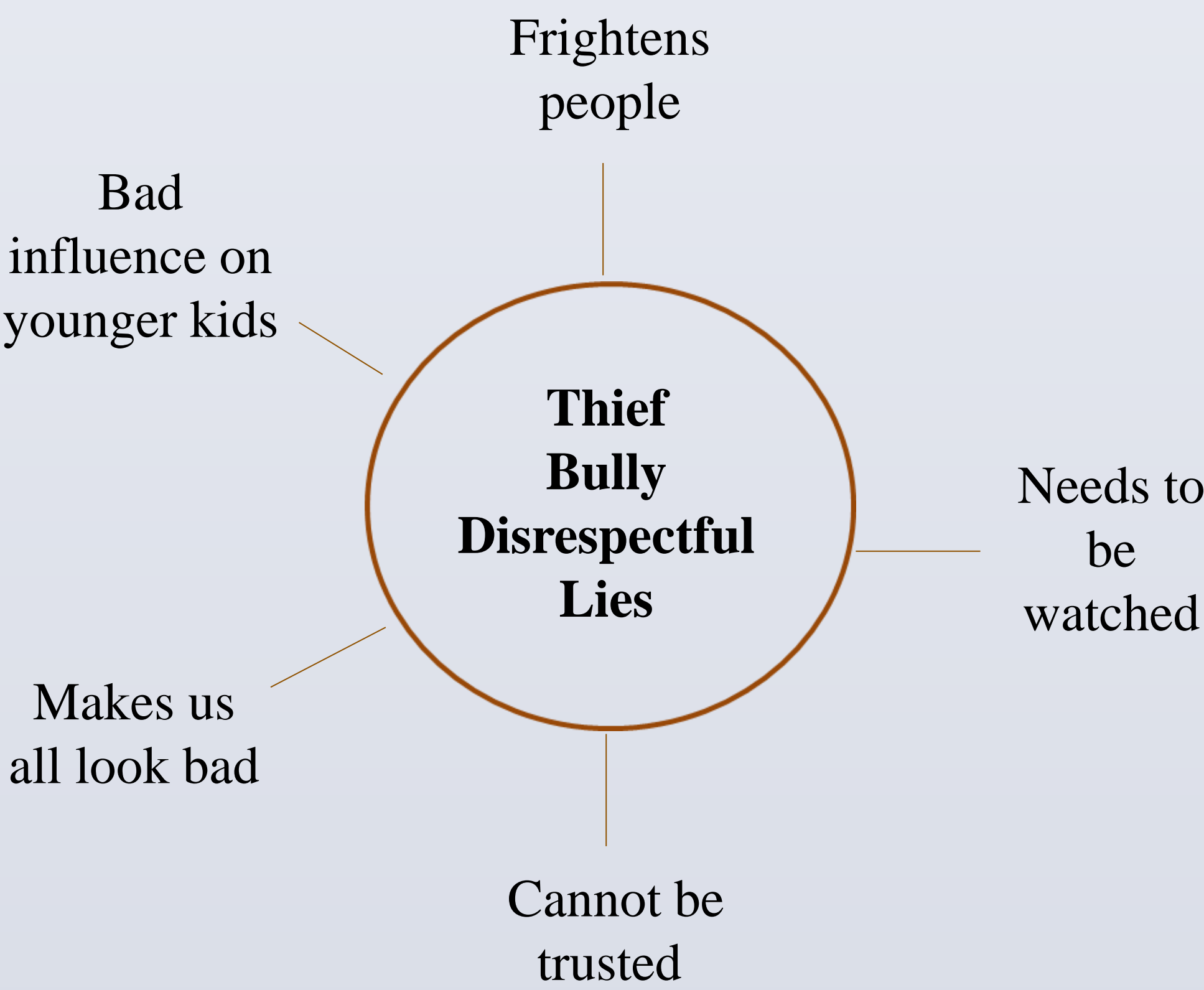
## Model\*

### Questions to Ask:

1. Who has a stake in addressing this issue?
2. Is there a victim?
3. What cultural background needs to be included?
4. Is the offending person willing to make amends?

### The Problem Story

- The victims speaks first.
- The problem cannot be a person (So, what is it that the offender did that is a problem?)
- Write description of problem in circle
- Ask each person about the effects of the problem on them. Begin with the victim.
- Draw spokes out from the circle and map effects of the problem



### The Alternative Story

- “Does anyone in the room know anything about the offender that does not fit the problem?”
- The middle of the circle explains what these examples show about this person.
- The outside are examples of the middle circle characteristics.



## Implications



### The Individual:

1) We do not have to change the whole system to change people's lives; 2) People can be invited to care for themselves, i.e., govern their own behavior; 3) A more democratic vision of the government of behavior; 4) Conversations are always political and the results of these conversations are self-evident in the distribution of wealth and power (Winslade, et. al, 2007, 2001).

### The Community:

If we are able to conceptualize the idea of an individual narrative, why not the idea of a community narrative? Applying the same principles and techniques used to deconstruct the problem story of the individual, we should be able to deconstruct the problem story of a community and solicit voices and exceptions which speak to a preferred community identity. Within this preferred identity there might exist the kind of community involvement with public servants (police, politicians, local businesses) that refuses to support a “them” versus “us” dichotomy; seeks to embrace all elements; and eliminates the need for adversarial policing practices.

## Conclusion

From a systemic point of view, the offending behaviors of individuals need to be contextualized within a social justice framework. Doing so acknowledges that we cannot continue to address at a micro level what are in fact macro level realities.

We invite relevant stakeholders, including: representatives from various police forces, local courts, social service agencies, faith-based partners, professional counselors, other helping professions, and of course, the community itself - which must include not only those that have traditionally assumed the role of the victim but also **ALL** those marginalized elements of our communities - especially those elements which have habitually been characterized as offenders, to begin a healing conversation. Our communities have alternate stories and preferred outcomes which deserve to be heard and lived.

### Notes & Suggested Reading

Deylami, S., & Havercroft, J. (Eds.). (2014). *The politics of HBO's the wire: Everything is connected*. New York: Routledge.

Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Vera, E. M., & Speight, S. L. (2003). Multicultural competence, social justice, and counseling psychology: Expanding our roles. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*, 253-272.

White, M., & Epston D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (2001). *Narrative mediation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (2007). *Narrative mediation: Re-authoring conflict stories*. *AC Resolution, 6*(2), 12-13.

\* Based on Winslade's model of restorative justice with school-aged children.