Cover Sheet

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Stories are ubiquitous to ethnographic fieldwork, but their significance is often highly ambiguous. While undertaking fieldwork in prisons in Ecuador, Jennifer often heard that police officers received a bonus of $10,000 for arresting a drug trafficker. Inmates' claims to be involved in the international diamond trade or of being wanted by the CIA were as fanciful as Jennifer's claim to be writing a book seemed to be at that time (Fleetwood 2014). Likewise in Norway, street drug dealers bragged about winning fights and told tall tales about the huge quantities of drugs they were dealing and the vast sums of money they were making. At the same time, Sveinung boasted about his "dangerous" fieldwork (Sandberg and Pedersen 2009) to sociology colleagues who were involved with less risky projects.

It can be easy to dismiss this kind of talk as mere anecdote or hearsay. Talk can sometimes seem only remotely related to the "reality" that ethnographic research aims to reveal. Yet, these tall tales, myths, wishful thinking and exaggerations can tell us a great deal. Men's claims, both on the streets of Oslo, and in Ecuadorian prisons, also reflects masculine gender norms. Their stories about fighting and successful drug business mirror important values in the street culture they were immersed in, and are crucial for understanding the "street capital" they were trying to accumulate (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2016). Gossip, rumours, and braggadocio, may not be "fact," but they reveal a great deal about participants' understandings of their social worlds—and these understandings make things happen.

This essay argues that ethnographers of crime, control, and victimisation can find their work enriched by engaging with stories, which after all are ubiquitous to fieldwork. Stories, conversation, chat, and interviews are part and parcel of the ethnographer's toolkit. Conversation develops rapport; we give our own accounts about who we are and what we're about. As the "naïve," we ask questions to elicit participants' stories about what is going on, as well as how and why things happen. In interviews we clarify the things we have seen, and

ask about the things we haven't seen or don't wish to witness. Yet, all of this talk often comes second in comparison to observation, typically understood as *the* defining feature of ethnography. In the following essay we proposed that ethnographers of crime and control can learn much by taking talk seriously. The main arguments in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- Criminological ethnographers can draw on the work of Gubrium and Holstein, who first developed the notion of "narrative ethnography." Their work has a neat synergy with narrative criminology, a sub-field of criminology drawing on narrative theory to understand offending or harmful behaviour.
- Ethnography is well placed to observe narratives and cultures of talk. We might consider how contexts shape what can be say-able, and how it may be expressed. Appreciating talk as a form of social action prompts consideration of the impact or effects of talk and narratives on people and settings. Narrative ethnographers can also examine how social action is shaped by stories.
- We make suggestions as to how ethnographers might become attuned to narrative in their research, especially by paying close attention to cultures of talk and storytelling environments.
- We raise questions regarding the narratives we tell as ethnographers and the limitations, challenges, and future of narrative research in criminology.

We proceed as follows. We begin by giving a short presentation of narrative ethnography and the closely related and emerging research field of narrative criminology. We then explain the value of a narrative approach in ethnography by problematizing the strict distinctions between "reality" and talk—or between what people say and what they do. Next, and most importantly, we offer three ways that ethnographers might think about stories or narrative.[1] Firstly, how does the storytelling context shape what is said? What kinds of stories

are expected or even demanded? Secondly, we ask what work is *done by* stories in social interactions. Thirdly and relatedly, how do stories and narrative guide social action. Lastly, we offer some reflections on the more practical challenges of doing narrative ethnography on crime and criminal justice.

I. NARRATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE CRIMINOLOGY

The significance of narrative for social life is widely recognised, but there are a wide variety of approaches to studying narrative. Narrative criminology is fundamentally interdisciplinary, with scholars drawing on psychology, conversation analysis, linguistic structuralism, and structural analysis amongst other fields of study. Here we are especially interested in what Plummer calls the "social life of stories" (1995). Narrative ethnography focuses on observing the performance and effect of narratives and their intertwinements with story content and construction. Holstein and Gubrium, who devised narrative ethnography, explain: "It is a method of procedure and analysis aimed at close scrutiny of social situations, their actors, and actions in relation to narratives. This involves direct, intensive observation of the field of study—in this case, the multifaceted field of narrative practice" (Gubrium and Holstein 2008, p. 250, see also 1999, 2009). In other words, they call for attention to how stories are told at a particular moment, with a specific audience and purpose in mind. Gubrium and Holstein use the term "narrative practice" to "encompass the content of accounts and their internal organization, as well as the communicative conditions and resources surrounding how narratives are assembled, conveyed, and received in everyday life" (2009, p. 247). Like Plummer, who understands storytelling as a form of symbolic interaction (1995), Gubrium and Holstein understand storytelling as a form of social action. They ask: "what do stories do"? (2009).

This approach contrasts with literary approaches to the story, which tend to set aside external realities to focus on what is said/written rather than how it is performed and received. Gubrium and Holstein note that this "bracketing" of social reality, to focus on the construction of a story, plot, characterisation, grammar, metaphor and so on is driven by practical rather than ontological concerns (2009, p. 29). By contrast, narrative ethnography explicitly pays attention to storytelling—the contexts in which stories are told and their effects. In this sense, narrative not only constructs social reality but is also part of it.

In the contemporary, mediatised world, images and texts circulate widely and meaning is never quite settled. In this context, neither traditional ethnography, nor media analysis can easily capture this reality (Ferrell 1995; Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2015). Fraser and Atkinson's twinned ethnographic research on how young people performed gang identity on their online profiles, and how analysts interpreted these performances, is illustrative (2014). Young men would "friend" local "casuals" (football hooligans) on their social media to display connection to their local area. Civilian intelligence analysts (mis)read this as evidence of gang connections. Fluid and playful "gang" narratives performed by young people became solidified into the policing story about local gangs. These stories, in turn, informed policing in the area. From a narrative perspective, young people and civilian intelligence analysts tell competing narratives, effectively captured through careful fieldwork attentive to the shifting meanings of text and performance across different contexts.

Developing cultural criminology's emphasis on text and ethnography further, with a more explicit focus on stories, *narrative criminology* has for the last decade set the tone for both narrative analysis and narrative ethnography in criminology (see e.g. Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg and Ugelvik 2016a). Narrative criminology offers a way to work appreciatively with "stories." Rather than seeking to establish "fact," narrative criminology is attentive to the construction of the social world. Stories can inspire and motivate actions,

including harmful ones (Presser 2009). Whilst interviews with "offenders" remain an important mainstay of the discipline, narrative criminologists have also analysed public political discourse (Tognato 2015), offenders' written texts, such as manifestos (Presser 2012; Sandberg 2013), online activist testimonies (Fleetwood, forthcoming), and school reports (Petintseva 2018). Narrative criminologists have also explored stories beyond texts, for example, in images and photos as narrative devices (Carrabine 2016; Copes and Ragland 2016), as well as the narrative potential of objects (Ugelvik, forthcoming). Another important development is the study of victims' narratives (Walklate et al. 2018; Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2018), and "silent" narratives (Sandberg et al. 2014, Sandberg 2016).

II. OBSERVATION VERSUS TALK

It is common for ethnographers to justify their methods by arguing that there is a large gap between behaviour and attitude, or between what people say they do and what they actually do (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). This "ethnographic rationale" underlines the importance of seeing things for yourself, privileging the author's narrative. Ethnography can even be defined as "a methodology which privileges (the cognitive mode of) observation as its primary source of information" (Gobo 2008, p. 12). In such a traditional approach to ethnography talk is considered to be secondary to observation.

That people do not always act in accordance with they say is trivially true, but narrative criminology questions such a simple approach to the distinction between talk and reality (Sandberg 2010). Ethnographers often collect and observe talk in fieldwork: stories are closely intertwined in, and are an indispensable part of, social life. Plummer notes the ceaseless and ubiquitous nature of stories: "We are, it seems, *homo narrans*: humankind the society of storytellers" (1995, p. 5). Barthes and Duisit state that there "has never been anywhere, any people without narrative" (1975, p. 237). Researchers also rely on

participants' interpretations and the meanings they give to social phenomena. Most ethnographic fieldwork is therefore a combination of observation and interviewing and/or just talking to people: the area between the two is often grey.

Epistemological distinctions between talk and observation can also be questioned. As Atkinson and Coffey put it: "An event in the social world is not something that just happens: it is made to happen. It has a beginning, a middle and an end" (2003, p. 119). What they are pointing at here is that real-time events imitate stories. When we act, we do so following the structure of well-known narratives. Take drinking alcohol for example, the acts following excessive drinking, be they intense arguments, exchanges of emotional statements, fighting, or casual sex, are closely structured by pre-existing drinking stories (Tutenges and Sandberg 2013). Despite the appearance of being spontaneous, affective, "natural," and even completely anti-social, drunken behaviour follows storylines.

Storylines not only structure actions, but how those actions are made sense of. Atkinson and Coffey (2003) emphasize that the observer's capacity to recognize an event is "essentially narrative in form" (p. 119). In this way, they highlight how cognition is narratively structured. We can only "see" that which reflects or has some kind of similarity to the narrative structures we already possess. The empirical world consists of an endless flow of signs, movements, and acts, but the human mind makes them understandable by excluding those that do not fit our the cognitive and cultural schemes. In its simplest and most problematic form this can be seen in police officers' profiling, or stop and search practices, which are arguably structured by learned narratives about who is a likely protagonist in a crime story.

In sum then, as narrative criminologists, we argue that events simulate narratives *and* are observed through pre-existing narrative structures. As such, we challenge the clear-cut distinction between stories and events—or talk and observation. Thus, any ethnography of

crime and criminal justice would do well to attend to narrative as an important form of social action and meaning making. Next, we discuss how this can best be done.

III. APPROACHING STORIES IN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON CRIME, CONTROL, AND VICTIMISATION

This section outlines three key things ethnographers of crime might usefully keep in mind. These are (a), the immediate and institutional circumstances of storytelling (b), the work done by stories for individuals and in social reproduction and (c), the role of stories in motivating social action. There is no one right way to do narrative ethnography—or narrative criminology—and as ethnographers often do, we encourage experimentation and innovation.

A. Circumstances of Storytelling

Interpersonal relations are an important part of the immediate "scene" in which stories are told. After all, stories are always "told to someone, somewhere" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, p. 10). As such: "stories are differently intelligible, useful and authoritative depending on who tells them, when, for what purpose and in what setting" (Polletta 2006, p. 3). The "situation" of storytelling however, is tremendously complex: the immediate interpersonal or interactional situation (who and what is there) sits within the local setting (the level of institution or subculture), which sits within larger national social and cultural contexts, which sit within a particular historical moment. These layers of context will shape the narrative told in diverse ways.

The book *Been a Heavy Life*, for example, examined violent men's stories about their violence, told mainly in correctional institutions in the United States (Presser 2008). Presser offers an in-depth discussion of how the research interaction in criminal justice institutions, between herself and male respondents, shaped what could be/was said. She is attentive to

how interpersonal gender dynamics, and institutional power inequalities shaped the conversations that could be had and the stories told: "The deprivation of male autonomy, given cultural definitions of masculinity, may result in insistent efforts to control the other during the interview" (2005, p.2069). For some men, the interview was an opportunity to dominate the interaction and demonstrate masculine power. Thus, personal narratives are a co-construction, told by one person, attending to the presence of others (Presser 2005). This "other" may be co-present: witnesses, victims, and suspects all tell their tale to criminal justice professionals as well as researchers. Whilst interpersonal storytelling is the dominant story-medium, social media offer various opportunities for storytelling. Drawing on court files in which offenders had recorded their crimes, Sandberg and Ugelvik (2016b) found that many offenders took photographs or video-recorded their crimes, sometimes to watch later or send to friends, and often with the intention of humiliating the victim The camera, as story-recorder and device of humiliation, was an integral part of the crime.

Bodies, places, and objects are also part of the storytelling milieu: "some of the most important contingencies of narrative are the material mediations of a social setting" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, p. 33). As Smith eloquently states: "bodies are 'storied' and storytelling;" "we tell stories about, in, out of, and through our bodies" (2007, p. 395). As well as listening to *what* people say, we can consider how objects and bodies are implicated in this storytelling process. Hannah Thurston's innovative ethnography examines how narratives about the death penalty and prison are constructed in Texan museums (2017). Her analysis carefully attends to the narratives about prisoners and punishment that develop as people walk through exhibitions via interactions between objects, visitors and inmates as "missing" others. Thus, ethnographers can attend to the "scene" of storytelling.

Next, we can consider the social context in which interactions take place. Given that criminologists often undertake research in prisons, probation offices, courts, or drug

treatment centres, we might consider the impact of institutions in facilitating research interactions. Presser notes:

> Thus, when offenders tell us why they offended, they are not just voicing an internal attitude about their prerogatives. They are also responding to those circumstances that allow us to ask why (2005, p. 2070).

Presser (2005) draws attention to who is empowered to ask, and who is required to answer (see also Polletta 2006). No matter the care and attention researchers might take, the impact of the institutional context cannot be underestimated. Any outsider asking for a "story" is likely to receive an "account" (Scott and Lyman 1968), possibly one that has been carefully polished through repeated use with guards, other inmates, prison psychologists or treatment programmes (whether for drugs, anger, or "cognitive distortions"). The question, "who has narrative control?" is one that ethnographers can fruitfully explore (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, p. 109).

Scholars have examined how prison shapes offenders' self stories and identities where interventions demand inmates learn to tell different kinds of stories about individual responsibility and reformed identity (see Fox 1999; McKendy 2006; Guo 2012; Stevens 2012). Drawing on ethnographic observations and interviews, Jennifer argues that women in prison *have* to perform self-narratives in response to multiple, and sometimes competing demands (Fleetwood 2015). Although individuals ostensibly tell their own story, they do so in the context of institutional and interactional obligations. This is also the case for victims' narratives, a research field that is receiving increased attention in studies of crime and criminal justice (Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2018).

The emphasis on victims also transfers to how victim stories are treated in the criminal justice system. Saunders examined why police officers categorised rape victims accounts as a "false allegation" (2012). She found that police officers' working definitions did not follow institutional protocols for categorisation, but prospectively applied the types of judgements they expected at a trial. A "false allegation" was therefore not an account of an incident that never occurred (a common-sense understanding), but rather an account containing inaccuracies or inconsistencies (2012). Interestingly, police officers expected some narrative incongruity, but had a clear "feel" for a truthful, muddled account versus one in which the victim attempted to change or conceal facts relating to the events. By interrogating the narrative context, Saunders was able to understand why some victim accounts are persuasive and therefore inspire police action and others are not.

Storytelling interactions take place in and are shaped by social institutions such as family, neighbourhood, or "the street." Narrative environments have their own vocabulary, language, storytelling conventions, and discourses. We have described the narrative repertoire of the street field as consisting of respectively: stories of violence, crime business, drugs, and a "hard life" (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017). These stories pertain to the field but are also connected to respondents' experiences and biographies, as storytellers. Jennifer's work on the concept of narrative habitus, or embodied narrative repertoire, seeks to connect storytelling instincts to social structural inequalities and personal histories (Fleetwood 2016a). In brief, social structures shape storytelling practices via the habitus. Our lived experience inculcates dispositions for storytelling, including discourses, argot, and turns of phrase reflecting our social structural position and experience. Storytelling is always creative, but within the limits of the habitus. Thus, stories are heartfelt, profound, and durable (Fleetwood 2016a).

Whilst social environments structure what can be understood, individuals also draw on "ways of self presenting and thinking that they have learned and used elsewhere" (Sandberg 2010, p. 455). For example, when individuals narrate victimisation they typically draw on cultural notions about what a "good" victim might be like. Saunders' (2012) research found that where victims who had been drinking claimed to have been sober in order to present as blameless, police officers were less likely to see them as credible victims. Thus, victims' attempts to tell a credible story inadvertently undermined its credibility (Saunders 2012). Likewise, some victim narratives have particular resonance (Walklate, et al. 2018). Thus, we can think about where stories come from, and how they are heard.

The narrative repertoires of social fields constrain individual's narrative choices. Polletta states that our aim should be to: "flesh out the discursive and organisational mechanisms by which culture defines the bounds of strategic choices" (2006, p. 5). Through observation, ethnographers can attend to the narrative conventions and repertoires pertaining to the narrative environment, the "clichés, cultural idioms, figures of speech, subcultural argots, professional jargon, organizational territory, and institutional categories all provide locally preferred vocabularies for storytelling" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, p. 34). Tropes are part of the narrative repertoires pertaining to situations. As Sveinung has argued elsewhere, tropes hint at larger narratives: "what everyone knows" (Sandberg 2016). On the street, for example, it can be enough to state "you know what will happen" when referring to a snitch because everyone knows that story. Other dominant tropes include neoliberal master narratives of autonomy and responsibility which are taken for granted in popular media, the criminal justice system, and by offenders themselves.

Narrative repertoires contain absences and silences around what cannot be said. In her ethnography of a Brooklyn drug market, Lisa Maher noted an important "cultural silence" (1997, p. 223) around "sex-for-crack" exchanges: her respondents claimed they never would

engage in such exchanges but that "others" did so. Maher poignantly explains that "for some women, acknowledging their participation in…sex-for-crack exchanges also mean surrendering one of the few criteria on which they had both prided themselves and used to distinguish themselves from "others" – the ability or belief that they were in fact able to control their drug use" (1997, p. 224). These silences reflect individual situations as well as collective meanings.

The circumstances of storytelling are decisive for narrative criminology. Nonetheless, context is not determinative and people make meanings on their own terms too. Damsa and Ugelvik (2017) have argued that in their prison interviews the so called "interviewer effect" was limited. The prisoners told the same stories irrespective of whether a young female "insider" or a more senior male "outsider" was interviewing. Furthermore, people only have a limited repertoire of stories to tell, no matter what context they are in. Individual narrative repertoires are flexible, ambiguous, and plurivocal, but they are also restricted. In-depth qualitative interviews can identify repertoires, but only ethnography reveals how they are played out in a social context. Observation of storytelling situations is well placed to explore how storytelling is both enabled and limited by contexts, biographies, and personal histories.

B. The Work Done by Storytelling

A "standard" approach to narrative treats it as a report on things that happened, privileging other kinds of social action over talk. In contrast, we approach storytelling as a form of social action, or symbolic interaction with social causes and consequences (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, Plummer 1995). Whilst researchers may be tempted to second guess storytellers' intentions, as Frank (2010) points out, in most cases we do not know the intentions of narrators, and like social action in general, storytelling is seldom the result of strategic decisions. So, perhaps intentions can be best understood as an embodied reaction to the

expectation of a social situation; a feel for the game. Following our view on narrative agency, narratives as social action figures in two main ways: firstly, the work that storytelling does for individuals, and secondly the work that stories do in reproducing society.

An important social function of narrative is to create or manage impressions. Especially relevant to criminologists is the role of narrative in managing stigmatised or spoiled identities. Narratives communicate something about the speaker, often called "narrative identity" to emphasise that social identity is done through talk (rather than revealed through it) (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). An important way that deviant or stigmatised people construct a meaningful identity is through boundary work. As Copes succinctly explains: "symbolic boundaries, and the narratives that create them, provide numerous benefits for actors: (1) they allow for the development of social identities, (2) they help explain or account for behaviour, and (3) they provide a reference for making decisions" (2016, p. 207). In his metasynthesis of boundary work undertaken by drug users, Copes explains: "Like others who engage in stigmatized behaviours, drug users actively resist this stigma, at least as best as they can by distancing themselves from stereotypical addicts (i.e. crackheads, junkies, dope fiends, and tweakers)" (2016, p. 194). Recall Maher's respondents who claimed they were not like "others" who engaged in sex-for-crack exchanges, yet likely did so themselves (1997). Yet, their narrative identity was efficacious because of (rather than in spite of) this apparent contradiction: in the research interaction it enabled them to create a meaningful and effectual social identity.

Ethnographic research is well placed to explore the complexities of boundary work and its functions in everyday life. Drawing on ethnographic research, Thomas Ugelvik (2015) examines how inmates construct rapists as abject others, normalising other kinds of crime. Similarly, street drug dealers use "crackheads" (Copes, Hochstetler and Williams 2008), binge drinking women "sluts" (Fjær et al. 2015) and Muslim youth "jihadists" (Sandberg and

Andersen, forthcoming) to describe who they are not. An important observation is that it seems most important to draw boundaries towards those that are close in social distance, as they are the ones people are most likely to be mistaken for (Copes, Hochstetler and Williams 2008, Copes 2016). Participation and observation enable researchers to see the work done in performing narrative identities. Whilst research has generally focussed on how individuals construct themselves, ethnography can connect these stories to the environments in which these narratives are composed, but can also observe how narratives are elicited and performed, and thus their effects.

Narratives also seek to excuse unusual or deviant behaviours. "Accounts" verbally bridge "the gap between action and expectation" (Scott and Lyman 1968, p. 46). These "accounts," may be "excuses" (the "wrong" act is admitted but responsibility is mitigated) and "justifications" (where a person admits their actions but denies their wrongfulness) (1968). Both types of account draw on "socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question" (1968, p. 51). Whilst the ways that people compose excuses is itself of interest, Scott and Lyman draw attention to their effects: "Accounts may be honored or not honored. If an account is honored, we may say that it was efficacious and equilibrium is thereby restored in a relationship" (1968, p. 52).

For an account or narrative to be believed and so make something happen, it needs to reflect local storytelling conventions. While interviews can enable the researcher to hear accounts, only ethnographic research can offer insight into the performance of narratives, their reception, and social effects. Hammersvik's narrative ethnography of cannabis growers, for example, follows his key respondent, "Bill," in conversation with other cannabis growers, exploring the diverse motivational vocabularies in play (2018). Bill's narrative repertoire draws on both ideological and commercial discourses for cannabis cultivation to compose an

authentic account for the audience at hand. His narrative is thus made credible for different audiences.

A further question is how talk and narratives shape social settings. As forms of social action, they reproduce social fields and social structures. In their analysis of violent narratives, Brookman, Copes and Hochstetler argue that speaking the 'code of the street' reproduces it; in this way narratives reproduce the field (2011), drawing attention to the importance of stories (and not just actions) in maintaining street culture. Likewise, Miller, Carbone-Lopez, and Gunderman argue that talk is the "narrative scaffolding of social structure" (2015, p. 71). As women draw on cultural notions about female gender to render themselves intelligible, they reproduce and reinforce these notions (ibid). Street talk also shapes and transmits street culture within and across populations, creating a script establishing "when to engage in violence, the intensity of violence to be used during conflicts, and the consequences for inaction" (Lauger 2014, p. 182). Thus, talk comprises and diffuses social structure, rather than merely reflecting it.

Narratives are not just "practical and symbolic actions: they are part of the political process" (Plummer 1995, p. 26). Stories can open up political space for other stories to follow. Feminist narratives about sexual violence can change how women understand victimisation; reframing the personal in terms of long-standing gendered inequalities, empowering women by mitigating blame and stigma. As a consequence, "a new set of understandings about rape have started shifting a little of the patriarchal hierarchies, the dominant stories of sexuality which have silently terrorised many women's lives in the past" (Plummer 1995, p. 27). These need not be whole narratives to have an effect: #metoo is a highly effective trope that enables women to testify to the widespread nature of sexual violence, without requiring them to go into details and potentially relive trauma. But we can understand #metoo as a current trope made possible by previous stories (Plummer 1995).

One of narrative criminology's main concerns is to investigate the work stories do, for storytellers, but also for groups, political agencies, and societies. This work is ongoing and iterative (Frank 2010). Being able to observe storytelling, and follow stories as they move through different social contexts is of great advantage. Only time and finance limit the possibilities for following a particular story. Some stories are not grounded in practical experience, but are still widespread and effective. Loseke (2001, 2012) describe them as "formula stories," and emphasize that their plots, characters, and morals are recognizable and predictable. Such formula stories often refer to social problems, and come with a set of implicit expectations for how they should be responded to emotionally and practically. The emergence of such stories has been widely discussed, for example in the moral panic literature (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010). It is rarer, but would be equally interesting, to see studies of the decline and disappearance of such formula stories.

C. How Stories Guide Social Action

It has long been recognised that stories and actions have a close connection, even as far as Aristotle, Polkinghorne claims. The duration of storied actions ranges from "a short adventure to the time between our own birth and death, or even to the length of all the generations of humankind" (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 145). Narrative criminology draws richly from the proposition that narratives do not merely describe actions, but guide them too. A central concern is how stories instigate, maintain, or sustain desistance from harmful action (Presser and Sandberg 2015). Narrative motivations can hinge on identity, or follow formula stories about how things are done. In short, we seek to *enact* stories through action.

Jackson Jacobs' ethnography of brawlers makes this point elegantly. Drawing on ethnographic observation and participation in drunken brawling, he demonstrates that the value of fighting lies not solely in the excitement, corporeal pleasures and pains, but in telling

about if afterwards: “narrative consequences are the *raison d’etre* of risk” (Jackson-Jacobs 2004, p. 231). In short, brawlers do it to tell the tale. Similarly, drinking stories can be seen as emerging from and reflecting a narrative environment fascinated by heavy drinking and various forms of transgressions. Tutenges and Sandberg (2013, p. 543) therefore conclude that in “many drinking situations, individuals can be seen as acting out drinking stories that they are familiar with from the media, movies, music, literature, the Internet and their friends.” School shootings are a tragic example of how crimes enact stories. The Columbine school shooting, for example, set up a narrative script that has been mimicked throughout the world, even inspiring other kinds of mass murder (Sandberg et al., 2014).

We might also consider how victim narratives create fear of victimization, and examine how our actions are motivated by a will to avoid such outcomes. Elizabeth Stanko's research on women’s “safety work” found that women’s daily lives involved a variety of victim-avoidance strategies drawing on stories heard from friends and familiars (1990). Stanko recalls one respondent who avoided taking a shower when she was home alone, recalling the famous shower scene in the film *Psycho* (1990). Stanko draws richly on her own experience to inform her research and analysis. Jennifer’s current research examines how the online activist group, Hollaback, offers storylines of resistance for women experiencing street harassment (forthcoming). Ethnographic research is well placed to examine this interplay between media, storytelling, and social practices.

We may be motivated by a sense of narrative identity, either held or wished for, or by a narrative storyline we feel compelled to follow or avoid. Fundamental to this conceptualisation is that stories are not post-hoc constructions serving to neutralise stigma or harm, but that the story precedes and motivates the event. Still, it is notoriously difficult to encounter narratives in advance of offending, but ethnographic research is well placed to observe story-motives in action, albeit within practical and ethical limits. The drinking stories

mentioned above emerged in ethnographic observation and interviews with Danish youth in a holiday resort in Bulgaria (see also Tutenges and Rod 2009). Sébastien Tutenges listened to stories about drinking told on nights out, capturing the interplay between telling and enacting drinking stories (Tutenges and Rod 2009). Similarly, Ditte Andersen joined treatment sessions for violent offenders, gaining insight into how and which stories guided the interaction. Clients were treated based on a fixed narrative of how violent men should be; sometimes young men tried to live up to these expectations (Andersen and Sandberg 2019). Such ethnographic studies of talk in situ are good for getting insights into the complex relationship between action and narrative.

When Lois Presser (2009) coined narrative criminology, it was in a paper emphasizing how narratives constitute crime and harm. She has followed this up in subsequent work. In what she describes as the "power paradox," Presser (2013) has described the relationship between capability and compulsion—or the combination of the license to do harm and the logic of powerlessness that characterizes a broad range of harm-doing. She argues that harms as diverse as genocide, intimate partner violence, penal harm, and meat eating are characterized by perpetrators having a mixed sense of entitlement and having no choice but to do it. Both the capability and compulsion narratives can also be seen in the street field, where hard life stories (compulsion) often coincide with crime success stories (capability) (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017). Presser (2013, p. 118) speculates that the power paradox may motivate action, either by resolving the paradox or stirring up emotions where the final outcome is harm. What is certain, however, is that any kind of harm—both those of crimes and the criminal justice system—are deeply embedded in stories.

Narratives produce, uphold, and reproduce harmful action, on the street, in families, penal systems, and form not only the way we understand crime and criminal justice, but also how we shape these practices and institutions. Ethnographies in this field should try to get a

sense of how this is done. Searching for the underlying narrative or discursive fundament for human action is crucial to understand such action. Although ethnography as a methodology cannot present causal explanation in a strict sense, that should not stop us from exploring, suggesting, and even speculating about the relationship between narratives and action.

IV. SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this final section we offer some critical reflections on the role of ethnographer as listener and as storyteller. This is not a new theme in research methodology, but thinking narratively brings these issues into sharp focus.

A. Listening to Stories

As Back astutely notes: "our culture is one that speaks rather than listens" (2007, p. 1). In this context, Polsky's "first rule," "keep your eyes and ears open, but keep your mouth shut" is a good one (1969, p. 121). Before asking any questions of our research participants, he instructs that we understand "what pleases them and what bugs them, some sense of their frame of reference, and some sense of *their* sense of language" (1969, p. 121). Although it can be tempting to record interviews early in fieldwork, it is useful to first get a feel for the narrative environment and ordinary language use in a field. This might mean suspending judgement regarding the credibility of particular stories and careful observations about which stories are well received or not.

Researchers can also open up space to tell different kinds of stories: we can collaboratively reflect on the stories told, or that might be told. Art-based participatory methods might enable respondents to tell their own stories through creative writing, plays, or other artistic mediums. Participants' stories can also be disseminated in novel ways, for example via social media, giving them more ownership to the final result (a recent example

from a University of Oslo research team can be seen under the tag "MuslimVoices" on Facebook). Making space for new kinds of narratives is likely to be especially salient where research is undertaken with deeply institutionalised or marginalised groups. Particularly relevant here is Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic violence," which he uses to characterize how the language of powerful groups is imposed on subordinate groups, naturalising inequalities (Bourdieu 1991). Popular representations of "illegal" migrants, people who use drugs, or people who sell sex, can all be understood as symbolic violence. As ethnographic researchers, we have an opportunity to counter such public narratives.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that we "are part of the social events and processes we observe *and* help to narrate" (Atkinson and Coffey 2003, p. 120, italics in original). In talking "at," we risk imposing our own frameworks for "making sense" rather than asking how sense is made in our research contexts. We can further ask how our biographies and histories, sedimented in researchers' habitus, inform our sense of what constitutes a "good story" (Fleetwood 2016a). We can ask how our particular taste for stories might overlap or differ from our respondents, or how storytelling may be a way to construct communities as part of ethnographic research (Fleetwood 2016b). We can reflect on how our habitus, reflecting our academic training, disposes us toward recognising some stories as "truer" than others.

Sometimes the stories we listen to are our own. One notable example is Winkler's powerful, cathartic ethnographic account of being raped in her own home by a stranger (1995). Carl Root also offers a fascinating autoethnographic analysis of being attacked with a taser for refusing to follow police orders, orders he was not legally obliged to follow (Root, Ferrell and Palacios 2003). The journal article is the outcome of being encouraged to write about this encounter by his doctor after suffering from PTSD as a consequence of the attack. As such, it stands as an example of how victims can "seek to regain control not just over their

lives, but over their narratives—the stories of their lives" (Root, Ferrell and Palacios 2013, p. 144). These examples demonstrate the value of storytelling for recuperating victims' agency, and the importance of researcher reflexivity.

B. Recording Stories

Recording devices are essential stock-in-trade for those undertaking narrative research. Accurate recordings are essential for the close analysis of respondents' use of vocabulary, metaphor, plot, and even dramatic pauses (Riessman 1993). Ethnographers often use tape recordings, and transcriptions can offer insight into how respondents speak, as well as giving space for their stories, rather than snippets of them. Bourgois' *In Search of Respect* (2003) makes effective use of transcribed recordings and descriptions that bring to life late night, intoxicated conversations held in hallways and street corners. But recordings and transcripts can only capture part of the picture:

> …the transcript may not reveal a setting's discursive conventions, as what is usually talked about, avoided, or frowned on when it is mentioned. It does not disclose the consequences of telling stories in particular ways. Although there is no strict line of demarcation between, in this case, stories and storytelling, we need to know the details and working conditions of narrative occasions if we are to understand narrative practice. (Gubrium and Holstein 2008, p. 247).

How then are we to observe and record the background and foreground of stories: the cultural contexts that shape them, and their performance? We offer two simple answers. The first is that we can listen to, and observe, when and why stories are told, and record this in our fieldnotes (for example, see Hammersvik 2018). The trick here is not simply thinking

about what people say, but also paying attention to when and how some stories come around, and noting when they don't. Mistakes are especially useful: when does a joke fall flat? Which stories are repeated, and how do performances change for different audiences? The second thing we can do is to check our understandings with respondents. Each storytelling setting has its own argot and storytelling conventions that people are more or less aware of. Ethnographic hanging out offers the opportunity to ask our respondents about local slang words or turns of phrase as well as reflections on silences and taboo.

C. Re(telling) Stories

Writing up narrative research is often the most difficult part of a research project. Conveying the vivacity, ingenuity, openness, and ambiguity of storytelling is difficult. Examining drug dealers' stories, Sandberg, Tutenges and Copes argue that: "It is relatively rare that researchers point out the complex and often contradictory stories violent actors tell. Instead, most of us highlight one aspect of the story and leave the others hidden. Those interested in street codes 'hear' tales of respect and retaliation just like those interested in accounts 'hear' excuses and justifications" (2015, p. 1182). Narrative research is well placed to reveal the multiple discourses in play. Narrative criminology can also open up space for narratives as sometimes incoherent and complex. At the same time, writing demands cohesion in a way that life does not, so the inherent complexities and ambiguities of storytelling and storytelling environments must be balanced with the need to create a comprehensible story for the reader/listener.

The most difficult parts of storytelling to retell, are tropes, and silences, although they might be most important ones given that what we take for granted speaks volumes (Presser 2013, p. 119). Arguably, silences, tropes and partial stories are the most salient forms of storytelling contexts and can be indicative of the hegemonic discourse that defines a social

field (Sandberg 2016). The dilemma when writing about that which is absent is that it demands a whole different level of hermeneutics than other forms of narrative analysis. Instead of retelling, the task becomes reconstructing the stories at hand. This will always be subjective and dependent upon the researchers; a thorough understanding of the narrative environment gained through ethnographic fieldwork or previous knowledge of narrative environment is crucial.

The term "narrative ethnography" is sometimes also used to draw attention to the *narrativity* of ethnographies-as-texts, with distinct narrative conventions and genres (see Adler and Adler 2008; Van Maanen 2011). This literature usefully calls ethnographers to reflect upon our stylistic conventions. We wish to draw attention to something more fundamental, which is that our writing constructs worlds: "the methods we use to describe the world are, to some degree, constitutive of it" (Atkinson and Coffey 2003, p. 115). This is especially important for ethnographers of crime, control, and victimisation. Writing (and we use this term to encompass contemporary use of photographs, documentary film making, and maps) constitutes "offenders," "punishment," "crime," and "justice," just as surely as do the discourses researchers seek to deconstruct.

The tropes employed in academic writing reflect hegemonies. Bear in mind Orwell's warning: "As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into abstract" (1968, p. 130). Orwell argues that ready-made phrases allow the reader to avoid deep thought about the subject of their prose. He cautions especially against passive constructions, dead metaphors, and meaningless words. Good description goes a long way toward avoiding Orwell's traps. But, with narrative in mind, we might explore the potential of different genres in our work. Why are criminologists criticised for writing "romantic" portrayals of offenders, but not tragedies? What might these different genres make visible or rule out?

Writing academic research *as narrative* may be demanding but necessary work. As Jock Young argued, some "orthodox" criminological research seems to be able to turn gold – or "the stuff of video games, the staple diet of media and the central theme of a multitude of genres within popular literature" – into gravel (2011: 83-84). Cultural criminology has been criticised for the preponderance of adventure stories, as narrators *of* ethnography, so researchers might consider the value of genres and styles for their subject. In particular, we may wish to consider how our re-tellings may remain faithful to, or depart from, those used by our respondents. Whilst drawing on narrative and literary devices might make for engaging reading, this has to be balanced with analysis in order to do more than retell stories. The demand for narrative ethnographers of all kinds is then to combine story-ability with theory and analysis. As critical narrative criminologists we believe this may be best accomplished by linking narrative analysis with concerns about social inequality, power and harm (Presser and Sandberg, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

Talk is ubiquitous and often taken for granted in ethnographic research. In this essay we draw attention to its significance, specifically arguing for the value of narrative analysis as part of ethnographic fieldwork. We described the close links between narrative ethnography and narrative criminology, and emphasized that the seemingly obvious difference between seeing and hearing can be problematized. We also discussed different aspects of storytelling that narrative ethnographers should be oriented towards; including storytelling environment, the work stories do, and how they are an inseparable part of "reality," or what people do. In sum, our main argument is that listening to stories should be a pivotal part of any ethnographic fieldwork.

Narrative ethnography does have its limitations and challenges. Stories always come with bias and a particular perspective, and if researchers wants to know the "truth" about behaviour they will have to balance storytelling with other sources of data. It is also a continuous challenge to link stories emerging in a particular storytelling environment with larger structures in society, such as class, gender and ethnicity. While most would agree that stories emerge from such societal structures, and contribute to reproduce them, it can be difficult to show to the exact links between a story and the larger societal structures it is produced within. Stating that language is power is a cliché, and although accurate, it is an ocean from such general insights to pointing out the exact way that stories uphold and produce power structures in society. Nonetheless, this challenge is perhaps not unique to narrative ethnography.

Observing storytelling in situ does much to advance our understanding of what they really mean and how they are part of power complexes. Understanding the conditions in which stories are demanded or invited helps us appreciate where stories come from, what the speaker aims to do in telling them, and their connection to social action. In short, it allows us to avoid reading out of context by recognizing the complex work that underpins the apparently simple act of telling a story. So, while only interviews can do much in terms of revealing narrative repertoires, they can only take us so far when it comes to understanding storytelling contexts and the work stories do. In the same way that "offenders" are compelled to act by particular self-stories, narrative criminology is well placed to examine how victims are compelled to act, and compel others to act on their behalf, by narratives. Unfortunately, because of practical and ethical issues, ethnographic research on offenders is rare; ethnographic studies of victimisation are even more rare and largely a matter of "brutal serendipity" (Root, Ferrell and Palacios 2013; Winkler with Hanke 1995).

We started out by noting the dubious nature of talk. Some ethnographers use this to decry the importance of stories as opposed to observations of what people actually do. We would instead argue with Carr (1991, p. 162) that: "narration, far from being a distortion of, denial of or escape from 'reality,' is in fact an extension and enrichment, a confirmation, not a falsification, of its primary features." Any story, true or false, tells us something important. The most important task for narrative ethnographers is therefore not to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic stories, but to explore how *all* stories reflect, reproduce, and change social identities, communities and cultures.

1. Policy Implications

Narrative ethnography is well-placed to contribute to policy-making. Like all ethnography, it offers in depth understanding into participants' lives, however attention to narrative is especially significant for research into criminal justice settings where legal and administrative language is especially significant. We direct the interested reader to narrative ethnographies of men's imprisonment (McKendy 2006; Ugelvik 2015), prosecutor's narratives (Offit 2017), narratives of immigration detention workers (Ugelvik 2016), narratives in the Youth Justice system (Petintseva 2018) and victims' narratives (Root, Ferrell and Palacios 2013; Walklate et al. 2018). All are exemplary of the importance of studying narrative in settings shaped by policy. Furthermore, Walklate and colleagues' research demonstrates the importance of narratives *for* policy making (2018).

2. Directions for Future Research.

A significant development (at the time of writing) is the development of narrative victimology (Walklate et al., 2018; Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2018). Whilst ethnographic research on crime victims is rare, narrative ethnography is especially well

placed to observe the diverse work done by the victims' narratives (Hourigan, forthcoming). Narrative criminologists are also turning toward biography and personal experiences as a rich source of data about the importance of narrative and stories. Drawing on personal experience of imprisonment, and interviews with other "convict criminologists," Rod Earle (forthcoming) considers the problems and possibilities of telling criminological narratives as former disciplinary subjects. Narrative auto-ethnography enables investigation of how material objects may be storied, and prompt storied action, as argued by Thomas Ugelvik in his chapter on his wife's Nazi Rifle (Ugelvik, forthcoming). Whilst narrative research may be criticised for a lack of attention to embodiment and the phenomenology of crime, Jennifer's current research (forthcoming) draws out the relationship between narrative and bodies, also drawing on narrative auto-ethnography.

Good ethnographic research has always been inventive, drawing on diverse forms of data and modes of analysis attentive to the phenomenon at hand. In our own work, we draw on narrative, symbolic interactionist, Bourdieusian and feminist approaches to ethnography, and we can imagine many other productive synergies. Whilst we hope the reader finds this chapter a convincing case for greater attention to narrative, we encourage ethnographers to use both narrative criminology and narrative ethnography critically and playfully, rather than dogmatically, in their own research.

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[1] We use story and narrative interchangeably throughout.