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Professor Phipps

English 1A

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Essay #2

The Single Story of Two Groups

I define "single story," as the moments when I judged an entire group based on my perceptions or interactions with a single person. Throughout my twenty-three years of incarceration, I have been guilty of judging people based on my experience rather than factual information. This revelation caused me to create a survey so that I could learn more about the discrimination between correctional officers and inmates. I learned that both groups are judged, discriminated against, and placed in a single story category. This discrimination causes health dangers, promotes a potentially dangerous prison environment, and will eventually result in a crises if a solution is not found.

One of the easiest things to do is judge another person. The media often portrays people based on what is popular instead of true. Sometimes, people are desensitized to those who commit crimes because the media is saturated with reports on crime. However, when a woman commits a crime the judgments are almost automatic. Often our perception is that she must be a bad person, horrible mother, and unworthy. Occasionally, individuals don't listen to the entire story but create their own version clouded by judgments. Coincidentally, correctional officers face these same kinds of judgments. The media portrays them as overpaid babysitters, and aggressors, who use excessive force. Sadly, they are blamed for the suicide rate within the prison where they

work. Frequently, we see the harshest judgments on correctional officers from the inmates themselves.

The ironic thing about discrimination is that it is often based on another's experience with a single member of a group. This treatment is usually based on an individual encounter or experience. Discrimination does not have to be earned or solicited but is rather freely given by placing human beings into a single story category. Unfortunately, this is common practice between correctional officers and inmates. The term "inmate" is used to identify a person who is incarcerated. The term becomes discriminatory when an officer uses it with a tone of disgust, thereby changing its meaning to represent a common message such as, *"you deserve to be here, expect nothing from me, and don't bother me."* Just as there are two sides to every coin, inmates use labels to describe correctional officers and the most common is "pig". It is used to describe an officer that is not worthy to be addressed by their name. The purpose of using this discriminatory term is to convey a message that you are not respected and will not be obeyed. Another form of blatant disrespect is to avoid eye contact with the officer who is speaking or ignore them completely and convey the message that they are utterly insignificant. Frequently, officers are simply discriminated against because they won't allow an inmate to break a rule. When an officer enforces the rules they are berated with name-calling.

Over the last three years the California Institution for Women has had an unfortunate rise in ⁴¹ suicide rates. The topic of suicide has become fuel for one of the most heartbreaking examples of "single story" that I have witnessed while incarcerated. The California Coalition for Women Prisoners recently published an article titled; "State Auditor Report Condemns Suicide rate at CIW." This article is about the Auditor's investigation that "identifies many gross failures by CDCR to comply with suicide prevention policies and practices at CIW". "The report's

recommendations focuses primarily on administrative failures such as inadequate risk evaluations and treatment plans, instead of confronting the systemic problems of staff neglect and abuse that people incarcerated at CIW, family members, and CCWP have identified as key to saving lives." The nameless author addressed a few key points that the State Auditor's report found to be true, yet decided to focus on staff neglect and abuse even going as far as to hold correctional officers "accountable for deaths that occurred due to their deliberate indifference."

It is absurd to hold correctional officers accountable for suicide simply because it took place within the prison where they are employed. The second tragedy in this story is the discrimination and blame, as it sways people from the true issue. The women who commit suicide have been struggling with long term drug addiction, mental health issues, and quite possibly a myriad of other issues that we are all unaware of. Suicide is a heartbreaking situation and the truth is that no one knows when a person will take their life. Suicide is such a tragedy that affects not only our community, but is felt by both groups within the prison. I have personally seen several suicide responses by correctional officers. Not only are they trained to respond at a moment's notice, they need to be quick and efficient. I have seen an officer cut down a woman who was hanging and revive her before the medical staff had time to arrive. It is the correctional officers and sometimes inmates who are our actual first responders. From what I have observed, many were left with a lasting trauma of the event. It is unfair to add blame to these officers for the suicides rates within the prison.

The most dangerous aspect of discriminating against a group of people or placing them in a single story category is the harm that it causes to ^{the person discriminating} a person's health. "Research suggests that discrimination is internalized over a lifetime, and linked to a variety of poor health markers and outcomes; more inflammation and worse sleep; smaller babies and higher infant death rates; a

greater risk of cancer, depression and substance use. The cumulative burden of discrimination is linked to higher rates of hypertension and more severe narrowing of important arteries in the heart and neck. Even the telomeres at the end of our chromosomes, which act as a sort of timer for aging cells, can shorten." (Khullar, Dhruv)

Correctional officers and inmates deal with a lot of discrimination throughout the day. The damage is causing the deterioration of health and well-being for both groups. The dangers of labeling groups of people into a single story category is like telling a lie that has the ability to destroy. Often, people's bias perspective ^{and} has defined stereotypes ~~that~~ have long lasting negative effects. One person's actions does not and never has defined the identity of an entire group.

Our community is composed of many diverse groups and beliefs if we don't come together and treat each other as individuals we are ripping apart a system that was created for our protection. Correctional officers are the authority in prison. Inmates count on them to be the protectors and peacemakers and without them, there would be no order. I have seen firsthand what happens when inmates have "the run of a prison." This usually happens when officers become weary, depressed, or unsupported. Chaos abounds, people get hurt, and everyone is on edge. I have also witnessed officers who are tired of being reprimanded for having to exert their authority in a dangerous environment; therefore, they do very little until a situation has become explosive.

In the survey "Discrimination, Who are the Culprits?" the first survey question was "Have you personally encountered discrimination while you have been incarcerated or employed here and by whom?" The choices were correctional officer, staff member or inmate. Not surprisingly, the highest ranking groups were correctional officer and inmate. The responses to this question were overwhelming. Many told stories of daily discrimination from fellow inmates.

Surprisingly, correctional officers receive discrimination from their peers as well. The amount of discrimination directed at both groups is shocking. The final question was, "During your incarceration, what group has motivated you to become a better person, through direction, guidance or kindness?" Expectedly, many chose "inmates" however, correctional officers were second, followed by staff. Sometimes, it is hard to go against the flow, to think for oneself in an environment that breeds a single view point. The conclusion reached is that all everyone wants is to be treated like a human being regardless of the stories they have been told.

If we don't stop treating each other with disrespect, disdain, and judgments we will never know the truth of the remarkable people among us and neither will society. It is through our words, and by our actions, that we ultimately show people beyond these prison walls who we are. We give people the ammunition to write one sided stories that are prejudicial each time we remain silent and refuse to tell our story. Ultimately, both sides are working hard to serve each other in a kind, nonjudgmental way. Many inmates and staff within our community work diligently towards suicide prevention. There are intelligent people training others on how to cope and handle tough situations. Some are teaching self-help groups while others tutor inmates working towards a college education. There are amazing people working towards rehabilitation within this community.

Work Cited

Khullar, Dhruv. "How Prejudice Can Harm Your Health." *The New York Times*, 8 June 2017

"State Auditor Report Condemns Suicide Rate at CIW." "*The Fire Inside Newsletter of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners*," issue 56, Fall 2017, p10.


Leland, Rhonda. "Discrimination, Who are the Culprits?" Questionnaire, 8 February 2018



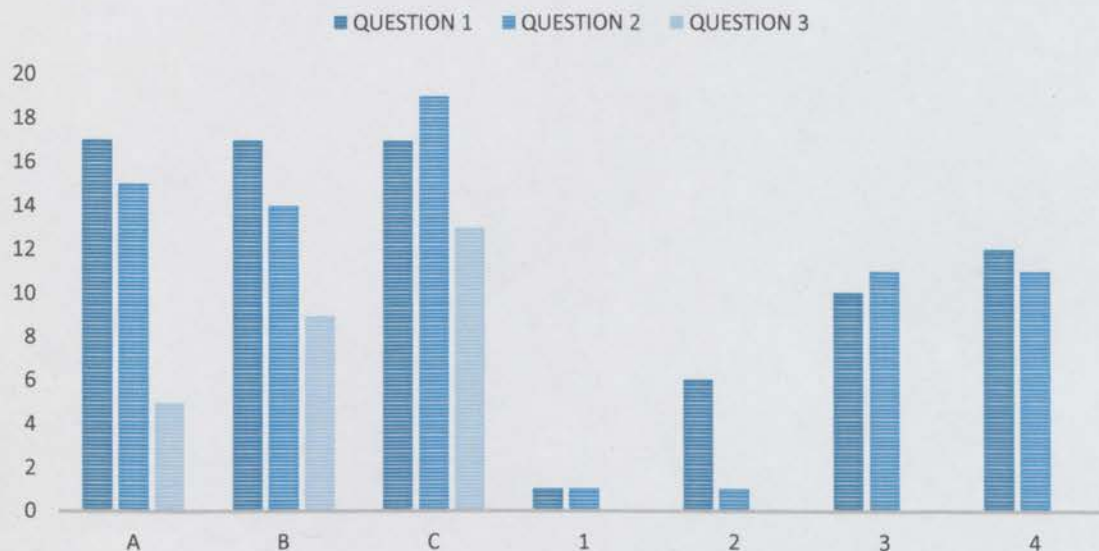
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Discrimination, who are the Culprits?

Questionnaire, 8 February 2018



QUESTIONNAIRE, 8 FEBRUARY 2018



I conducted my survey based on discrimination. It's a wide topic but, I wondered if Incarcerated women felt that they were discriminated against as much as the activist papers claim, an example of an activist paper is The Fire Inside. In a recent article they are talking about the recent and back to back suicides at CIW they go on to talk about the abusive conditions for women at CIW. Claiming this abuse is perpetrated by correctional officers.

I was prompted to conduct this survey because of a recent suicide of an officer. For weeks after it happened I heard inmates saying horrible things about the man. In my mind it has become a "single story" because of the harsh judgments from some of the women incarcerated here. Never, did I hear correctional officers blame inmates but, I have read articles where activists blame correctional officers when one of us commit suicide. I know that the job they have to do here is hard. I see the way they are treated by inmates and other staff members yet, no one blamed an inmate. I think it is because they know what it is like to be discriminated against therefore, it would be ridiculous to do it to another. Not to mention untrue.

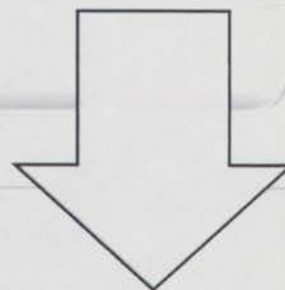
My first question. Have you personally encountered discrimination while you have been incarcerated? I was not surprised that 17 people picked all 3 and even the correctional officers choose all three. This survey covers women incarcerated from 2 to 27 years. What did surprise me is that most felt the discrimination was often and that is across the board staff, inmate and correctional officer.

The next question I asked was have you witnessed discrimination against correctional officer, staff or inmate. Once again 19 said they witnessed discrimination towards inmates with 15 towards correctional officers and 14 towards staff and this question was often tied at 11.

My last question was during your incarnation what group has motivated you to become a better person through direction, guidance and kindness? Thirteen said fellow inmates however, 5 and 9 stated correctional officers and staff. This leads me to conclude that correctional officers may not be the "single story tyrants" they have been portrayed to be in the media.

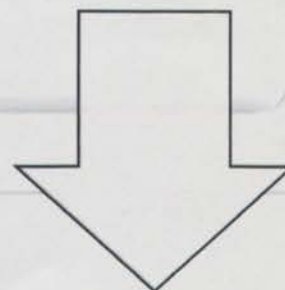
Have you personally encountered discrimination while you have been incarcerated, or employed here? By Whom

- a. Correctional officer
 - b. Staff member
 - c. Inmate
1. Never
 2. Rarely
 3. Sometimes
 4. Often



Have you witnessed discrimination against?

- a. Correctional officer
 - b. Staff member
 - c. Inmate
1. Never
 2. Rarely
 3. Sometimes
 4. Often



During your incarceration what group has motivated you to become a better person, through direction, guidance or kindness?

- a. Correctional officer
 - b. Staff member
 - c. Inmate
1. Never
 2. Rarely
 3. Sometimes
 4. Often