

# “Nothing About Us Without Us”: Analyzing the Potential Contributions of Lived Experience to Penological Pedagogy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the necessity and considerations of integrating Lived Experience Criminology (LEC) into penological pedagogy. It critically analyses the underutilized, yet transformative, potential of lived experience of the CJS to enrich academic curricula and further inform student understanding, particularly in Australia. Drawing on initiatives such as the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, Learning Together, and Walls to Bridges, the paper highlights how such programs operationalize LEC’s dimensions—particularly Persistent Experiential Narratives (PEN) and Common Experiential Narratives (CEN)—to build criminological knowledge. However, the need for cautious and ethical expansion of these programs is emphasized, considering potential objectification of people with lived experience of the CJS. The paper advocates for greater inclusion of lived experience perspectives in criminology curricula, underscoring the value they could bring to the preparation of future practitioners, the design of robust research, and the advancement of penological epistemology. Additionally, it stresses the importance of context, locality, and specialization within LEC, and the ethical considerations inherent to these pedagogical approaches. The paper concludes by calling for a stronger commitment from academia towards inclusion and empowerment of individuals with lived experience of the CJS, echoing the maxim “Nothing About Us Without Us” from the disability rights movement. The paper posits that significant strides in the CJS and academic discipline are achievable only through meaningful and sustained involvement of these individuals.

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## Introduction

Criminological knowledge has traditionally been conceptualized as the culmination of meticulous research conducted by scholars and experts. This research is typically comprised of empirical investigations, critical analysis, and theoretical paradigms (Bon & Burke, 2022). Thus, it is presupposed that tertiary education is undertaken by students to stay up-to-date and in alignment with this established paradigm of knowledge

acquisition. Nonetheless, the scope of knowledge extends beyond the confines of empirical research and theoretical constructs. Knowledge generation is an everyday phenomenon, evolving as individuals encounter experiences and subsequently learn, reflect, adapt, and transform due to their interactions and memberships within specific societal groups. Recently, a steady but noticeable shift within social sciences has emerged, acknowledging the occurrence of knowledge creation outside the boundaries of traditional theoretical, research, and empirical contexts.

This shift is particularly notable in the domain of mental health, wherein the significance of lived experience expertise—the personal, subjective narratives of individuals who have navigated mental health challenges—is increasingly acknowledged as a valuable repository of knowledge (Byrne & Wykes, 2020; Gilbert & Stickley, 2012). This emergent knowledge conception is progressively being recognized as vital to contemporary epistemological constructs (Gilbert & Stickley, 2012). It highlights the importance of appreciating and understanding the perspectives of those with first-hand experience of mental illness, recognizing that individuals with lived mental health experiences possess expertise through their subjective experiences. They hold the potential to offer invaluable insights into the nature of mental illness and the efficacy of mental health interventions. Within the disability studies sector, Charlton (1998) also proposes the maxim of “Nothing About Us Without Us,” arguing that the formulation of knowledge about disabilities cannot be meaningful without the inclusion of those with lived experience of disabilities. Mirroring this trajectory, the criminal justice system (CJS) has also begun to subscribe to the lived experience movement prevalent in the mental health sector (Maier et al., 2022). The advent of the peer workforce and the implementation of co-production processes in criminal justice underscore the global efforts to integrate lived experience perspectives into criminology and criminal justice (e.g. Johns et al., 2022; Martinovic et al., 2022). The valuable contributions that lived experience can offer to criminological knowledge are increasingly being acknowledged (e.g. Antojado et al., 2023; Martinovic et al., 2022).

Despite the continued growth of such efforts, as manifest in the increased recruitment for “lived experience” roles in public and private sector organizations operating within the CJS (e.g. Jesuit Social Services, 2022), the inclusion of lived experience as a pivotal component of penological pedagogy is largely overlooked. Current initiatives in Australia and globally offer platforms for lived experience perspectives in education, as discussed further below. However, a distinct academic discipline underpinned by developments focusing on lived experience remains absent from criminological curricula, at least within the remit of the author’s research. In sync with the ongoing deployment of lived experience initiatives, there is a pressing requirement to include lived experience perspectives in penological pedagogy. This integration will equip future criminal justice professionals with a comprehensive skill set that allows them to effectively respond to the nuanced complexities of criminal justice interactions.

The inclusion of lived experience or “insider” perspectives in criminological and criminal justice curricula is not a novel concept. Several established university programs, including the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (Alexander et al., 2011; Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014; Pompa, 2013), Learning Together (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2020; Ludlow et al., 2019), and Walls to Bridges (Fayter, 2016; Kilty & Lehalle, 2018), foster environments where university students and currently incarcerated

individuals can learn collaboratively within a prison environment. This transformative pedagogical practice promotes mutual learning in an egalitarian framework. It amalgamates textbook learning with real-world experiences, thereby enriching educational outcomes for learners on both sides of the prison walls. However, these programs are not universally accessible to all students due to inherent barriers—the obvious being access to prisons is often tightly controlled and limited. Despite the unique learning experiences offered by these educational programs, there is a potential to adapt aspects of these initiatives to university classrooms, lectures, and tutorials.

This paper advocates for the integration of lived experience perspectives especially of incarceration, into contemporary penological pedagogy. This critical move would enable students to comprehend the practical impacts and realities of theoretical approaches in daily penological practices. Simultaneously, it could also provide opportunities for individuals with lived justice system experience to pursue careers in research, academia, practice, and a broad array of related fields, progressing academic and practice agenda seeking to centralize, amplify and value lived experience perspectives of the CJS.

### **Convict criminology and lived experience criminology**

So far, the concept of Lived Experience Criminology (LEC) has not been articulated as a distinct subfield within criminology. This subfield is fundamentally informed by the perspectives of those with current or prior involvement with the CJS. Though there have been other disciplines in criminology and related fields that have taken strides in embracing the “insider” perspectives of the CJS. Notable scholars across a spectrum of disciplines, such as sociology (Earle, 2018; Richards & Ross, 2001), and psychology and mental health (Bertrand-Godfrey & Loewenthal, 2011; Victor et al., 2022), and women’s and gender studies (Chamberlen, 2018) have employed their lived experience of the CJS in their academic pursuits. Predominantly, they have used autoethnography to provide invaluable insights from their firsthand experiences of incarceration (e.g. Brierley, 2023; Clemmer, 1940). This burgeoning field is contemporaneously known as Convict Criminology, spotlighted by luminaries such as Irwin and Cressey (1962), Irwin (1970, 1985), Austin and Irwin (2001), Micklethwaite and Earle (2021), Aresti et al. (2012), Tietjen (2019), Ross et al. (2014), Ross and Darke (2018), Ross and Richards (2003), has led to a robust body of research that uses autoethnography as a core theoretical and methodological approach (King, 2018; Newbold, 2017).

However, LEC, while inspired by Convict Criminology, represents an innovative departure, endeavouring to transition away from the term “convict” and the implications it carries. Labelling theory in criminology suggests that the use of derogatory terms like “convict” can contribute to deviance amplification, leading individuals to perpetuate cycles of criminality (Becker, 1963; Smith & Paternoster, 1990; Wiley & Esbensen, 2016). For instance, Gold (1970) discovered in a U.S. study that out of 20 teenagers, those with prior convictions were more likely to engage in further deviant acts post-apprehension. Even though other factors influence the process of desisting or persisting (Maruna et al., 2004), the societal perception of an individual’s identity, what McNeill (2015) termed as tertiary desistance, plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Applying the label “convict” to a relatively new and embryonic academic scholarship could further marginalize it and reinforce detrimental stereotypes.

In the Australian context, the term "convict" is strongly connected to the country's history of colonization and its deleterious effects on Indigenous Australians (Roscoe & Godfrey, 2022). Therefore, the term "Convict Criminology" might not fully resonate with the criminological community in Australia (Doyle et al., 2021), especially when Indigenous Australian's relationship with the CJS has been plagued with tumult and social contention (Weatherburn & Holmes, 2010). This issue could be extrapolated to different global contexts as well, including the U.S. state of Georgia (Murton, 1984). It is also important to move away from labelling people based on their penal experiences, an argument put forward by scholars like Cox (2020), Harney et al. (2022), and Tran et al. (2018). These scholars contend that the current use of terms like "prisoner" essentializes these individuals and reduces their identities to their CJS interactions. The reality is, people with lived experience of the CJS are multidimensional, and their experiences with the CJS are a part, albeit significant, of their identities. The predominant focus on the CJS aspect often overshadows the narratives of individuals' lives before and after their involvement with it. LEC stresses the uniqueness of each experience and the need for diverse experiential accounts in understanding criminal justice matters fully, and language used to frame these experiences should be one oriented towards potential and not deficit.

Although Convict Criminologists such as Ortiz et al. (2022) argue for the continued use of "convict," their perspective does not take into account the cultural context of countries like Australia, where the term has a different connotation (Pearson, 1999). This American-centric viewpoint could discourage scholars with lived experience from participating in Convict Criminology in international settings. Broadening the terminology fosters more inclusivity, enabling the field to transcend geographical and political boundaries. Even though Convict Criminology has been instrumental in recognizing the value of lived experience of the CJS, it should not be the only framework that accommodates lived experience. The emergence of LEC represents an expansion of this academic landscape. Like its predecessor, LEC leverages firsthand experiences with the CJS to contribute to criminological knowledge by allowing people directly affected by it to take part in discourses, dialogue and creation of new and emergent ways of thinking.

### **Theorizing lived experience criminology**

While the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding LEC is currently underway by the author, it is beyond the purview of this paper. Nevertheless, a succinct framework is offered herein to support the conceptualization of LEC as a form of epistemological construct within the disciplines of criminology and criminal justice. Central to this discussion is Latour's (2005) Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which posits that the social and natural world exists within perpetually fluid networks of relationships. Crucially, Latour's (2005) contention suggests that the notions of the "social" and "society" lack stability and instead are contingent upon relational dynamics. Latour (2005) reconstructs the concept of the "social" as a means to define, provide meaning, and generate knowledge for interpreting social phenomena. Essentially, the "social" is not an immutable domain or material; instead, it is subject to constant transformation and alteration. This fluidity can be extended to

our understanding of how knowledge is formed. To fully comprehend criminological scholarship, it is imperative to recognize that it is consistently evolving, context-dependent, and reliant on locale, as well as human and non-human conditions (Garland & Sparks, 2000). Relational penology, the idea that individual experiences within the CJS is a crucial element for understanding and advancing criminological thought, is not a new concept in criminology. Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) provides a theoretical and methodological approach that emphasizes the inclusion of all facets of the prison experience in shaping individual narratives (Langlais, 2006). ANT challenges the traditional hierarchical view of systems, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, which places the individual at the center surrounded by various layered systems exerting hierarchical influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Instead, ANT dissolves ontological divisions between humans and non-humans, viewing power as relational rather than inherent in the actors themselves (Berry, 2018).

### ***LEC penologies***

As previously noted, the scope of this paper precludes a comprehensive conceptualization of LEC. Considering that a notable subset of scholars leverages their lived experience, particularly incarceration, to inform their work (Antojado, 2023; Brierley, 2023), it is indeed apropos to apply LEC within the purview of penology. After all, prison is often a salient point of engagement with the CJS for those said to be on the "wrong side of the law." An array of advocates, academics, and researchers with lived experience of incarceration have added invaluable contributions to penological scholarship (e.g. Antojado, 2023; Antojado et al., 2023; Brierley, 2023; Carey, 2022; Carey et al., 2022; Earle et al., in press). These scholars have used their subjective experiences of prison to influence their academic endeavors, relying on material, psychological and social aspects inherent with their experience of incarceration. For example, Carey (2022) describes the prevalence of what he terms "mental violence" in prisons, which describes the psychological strain incarcerated people experience. In some sense, Carey's (2022) reflection of incarceration could be akin to Downes (1988) "depth," King and McDermott (1995) "weight," and what Crewe (2011) later conceived as "tightness," which describes the contemporaneous frustrations incarcerated people encounter in prison. What Crewe (2011) argued through his extension of Sykes, (1958) *Pains of Imprisonment* is a clear indication of the transient, immutable, and changing state of prison and more importantly how these shape individual experiences of imprisonment. Autoethnography, a focal point of Convict Criminology, does provide a methodological approach to illuminate these experiences, and many of the scholars above have used autoethnography to tease out nuances with the objective of informing criminology. However, there is gap in theory which conceptualizes the collective work of many scholars with lived experience of prison beyond autoethnography.

There is, of course, an appreciation of the importance of autoethnography in doing LEC work. The subjective experiences of people with lived experience of prison are not redundant, they form part but only part of the way in which we understand prison. There is no doubt that LEC values all aspects of an individual's environment and their interactions with human and non-human elements, which significantly shape their experiences. Factors

such as the austere physical space of a cell, the prison uniform, the isolation imposed by prison walls, the enforced labor of incarcerated individuals, and their interactions with their peers contribute to the unique "social" that is being created in prisons. An analysis of incarcerated individuals' experiences must necessarily consider these dimensions. Without such considerations, the understanding of the prison experience lacks substantive depth and the context that differentiates these lived experiences from other experiences. Interactions within prisons cannot be reduced to simplistic modes of enquiry that neglect or fail to provide sufficient consideration to these complex dimensions. For instance, an interaction between a prison officer and an incarcerated individual cannot be analyzed solely based on dialogue. The broader context, including the officer's body language, uniform, insignia, the size and lighting of the room, and the color of the walls, all contribute to creating a unique situation that shapes the incarcerated individual's experience (Latour, 2005; Matthewman & Philosophy Documentation Center, 2013; Munro, 2009).

Within prison, incarcerated individuals form what I term a "persistent experiential narrative" (PEN), arising from the myriad experiences and the emergent, frequent, and salient themes within these experiences. These PENs may include the feeling of subjugation through wearing a prison uniform, the detachment experienced after a prison visit, or the anger related to pervasive control mechanisms employed by prison staff. LEC's focus is not merely on providing a generalized approach to criminal justice situations, but also emphasizes the pursuit of criminological knowledge through individual experiences. LEC is not only individualistic in its approach but also seeks to provide a limited universalistic perspective. This is where most contemporary initiatives aimed at amplifying and embedding lived experience voices in criminal justice settings predominantly focus. For instance, Doyle et al. (2021) advocates for incorporating lived experience into efforts to reduce reincarceration rates in Australia. They propose a co-production model that involves working with individuals with lived experience to inform various facets of the criminal justice sphere, particularly policy influence. In a similar vein, Antojado and Martinovic (2022; Martinovic et al., 2022) provide people with lived experience of the CJS with platforms to influence policy initiatives through collaborative efforts such as the prison-based and community-based think tanks.

Despite the emphasis on individual experiences during the consultation process, policymaking cannot be wholly reflective of all individual experiences. Here, the application of Latour's (2005) ANT is pertinent, as it places significance on the individual and minute details of the "social." However, consultation and/or co-production processes that compile various lived experiences of the CJS also assemble a collection of PENs. At this juncture, what I term a "common experiential narrative" (CEN) emerges. In its simplest form, the CEN is the middle ground of contrasting and diverse perspectives of PEN. Much like PEN, CENs are the dominant, frequent, and salient themes formed through a collection of individuals with lived experience of prison. LEC, akin to theoretical developments in narrative criminology by notable scholars like Sandberg and Ugelvik (2016) privileges and recognizes the power of narratives in shaping individual's understanding of their own experiences and the broader social context. PEN and CEN provide a relational framework for how these subjective experiences can be capitalized within a broader criminological context. While narrative criminology focuses directly on the story to explain (or make sense of), for example, the commission of crime (Ugelvik, 2016). LEC categorizes and sorts these narratives into ways

which can be useful for broader consumption including the ways in which these stories can be incorporated into penological pedagogy, policy making, etc. The conceptualization of LEC presented herein is not an exhaustive epistemological exploration but rather a foundational overview of the principles that inform LEC. For LEC to become a mainstay of the broader scholarship, there is a need to refine its theoretical underpinnings further. A task that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Future research in this discipline could integrate other sociological, psychological, and related disciplines to enhance and enrich LEC, particularly as it relates to charting and conceptualizing people's experience with imprisonment.

### **Lived experience criminology in practice**

The implementation of a peer workforce and the incorporation of co-production methodologies provide pertinent examples of how the individualistic (PEN) and universalistic (CEN) perspectives synergistically operate in contemporary criminological praxis. The peer workforce was introduced to enable individuals with first-hand experience of the CJS to offer guidance and support to those presently navigating through the system. Buck (2020, p. 12) articulates, "peer mentoring in criminal justice has been most prevalent and rationalized within the penal voluntary sector, thus it often supplements state-managed prison and community justice." Furthermore, Buck (2020) elaborates that "peer mentors utilize their experiences of criminalization, their endeavors to disengage from crime and other shared life experiences to inspire, motivate, and aid their mentees" (p.14). Hence, peer mentors draw on their PEN to inform their practice, aiming to counsel and assist those experiencing the CJS. Although Buck (2020) depicts peer mentors as "formerly incarcerated," Australian examples also incorporate peer mentors who are currently incarcerated, assisting their peers. This is observable in the Peer Listener scheme of Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety (see Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety, State Government of Victoria, 2022). Here, Victorian correctional institutions engage currently incarcerated individuals to support their imprisoned peers by "defusing conflicts as they arise... assisting them in addressing problems and challenges constructively" (Corrections Victoria, 2022, p. 13). Nevertheless, despite the significance of these initiatives, uncertainties persist regarding the extent to which incarcerated individuals are remunerated and trained to perform this work, especially in the context of notoriously exploitative labor and wage conditions prevalent in most prison jurisdictions (Haslam, 1994).

In a parallel context, Larissa Strong (2022), Commissioner of Corrections Victoria, recently addressed the 10th International Criminal Justice Conference in Melbourne, Australia. She commended the contributions of the Think Tanks, established by Antojado and Martinovic (2022)<sup>1</sup>; Martinovic et al., (2022), which played an instrumental role in introducing contractual provisions in the re-tendering process of the Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway (CVRP) (2022). The redefined tender

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<sup>1</sup>The author was part of the leadership/executive team that established the current iteration of the community-based think tank Beyond the Stone Walls Advisory Collective.

stipulated the imperative for contractors to employ individuals with lived experience. In her address, she expressed an ongoing commitment to further incorporate lived experience into the operational processes of Corrections Victoria. Strong (2022) championed the significance of co-production processes with individuals with lived experience as being pivotal in directing the future course of Corrections Victoria as an organization. She acknowledged the value that people with lived experience confer in optimizing outcomes for the organization, particularly its potential to mitigate rates of re-incarceration. In essence, Strong (2022) alludes to the capacity of the CEN to inform policy, operational processes, and institutional procedures to meet organizational objectives and goals. Her remarks are indicative of an emergent trend, discernible even within public agencies, which are often perceived as being "sluggish" and "inefficient" in integrating lived experience.

The field of criminology, particularly in Australia, has swiftly incorporated lived experience as part of its "core business." This is evident in the upcoming Australia and New Zealand Society of Criminology Conference in Melbourne, Australia in December 2023, which will feature a lived experience panel with Rosie Batty AO, Conor Pall, and Dwayne Antojado. Additionally, there are numerous publications that reference or incorporate "lived experience" within an Australian context, such as works by Doyle et al. (2021) and Antojado (2023). Furthermore, a governmental agency in Victoria, Australia emphasizes the importance of lived experience in its public and organizational strategies, as evidence by Strong's (2022) speech. All of this, points to an undeniable and unwavering effort to include lived experience as part and parcel of the criminological quest, at least in Australia. While the term "lived experience" is increasingly resonating within criminology, its integration into pedagogy remains nascent. Currently, the sole tertiary education program in Australia that centers lived experience voices is the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program by Martinovic et al. (2018).

### **Lived experience in penological pedagogy**

In the face of the proliferation of initiatives that incorporate (and hopefully empower) perspectives of individuals with lived experience, it is pertinent to acknowledge their experiences as a form of knowledge reservoir. The inclusion of these perspectives in the methodology of criminology as an academic discipline in educational delivery seems an inherent transition. Powell and Snellman (2004) characterize the knowledge economy as "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence" (p. 199). A hallmark of the knowledge economy is its dependency on intellectual prowess as opposed to natural resources and physical outputs (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Concomitant with this steady evolution towards this economic paradigm, heavily dependent on knowledge creation and dissemination, is the trend towards credentialism (Zajda, 2007). Davis (1981, as cited in Buon & Compton, 1990) conceptualizes credentialism as "a pressure to upgrade formal educational prerequisites for entry and promotion through labor markets" (p. 126). The realm of criminal justice practice has not remained insulated from the influence of credentialism, as evidenced in the proliferation of tertiary and vocational qualifications in criminology and allied courses. There has been a notable surge in universities offering concise courses on



distinct and specialized branches of criminology, such as RMIT University's (2019) Graduate Certificate in Domestic and Family Violence, Central Queensland University's (n.d.) Graduate Certificate in Correctional Nursing, and Swinburne University of Technology's (n.d.) Graduate Certificate in Forensic Behavioural Science.

These modifications in the industry are welcomed, as they equip practitioners with foundational knowledge and skills pertaining to criminal justice prior to embarking on their careers. However, these offerings frequently fail to incorporate lived experience perspectives unlike other domains within the broader academic sphere. For instance, a medical student at a university is mandated to undertake "field practice" by observing practicing medical professionals, thereby garnering lived experience knowledge from both patients and professional mentors (Coakley et al., 2019; Klingensmith & Brunt, 2010). In contrast, in the process of acquiring a criminal justice or criminology degree, the opportunity to compile and listen to these lived experiences are often either optional or absent. Even when such opportunities are offered, learning outcomes are frequently oriented towards the attainment of practical skills for practice, rather than towards harnessing alternative methodologies of knowledge acquisition. When a criminal justice practitioner graduates and transitions into the field, effective practice is often dependent on their ability to build rapport, connect with, and empathize with the individuals they work with, rather than consuming and assimilating textbook chapters to formulate efficient interventions or strategies. Moreover, the Victorian Government's (2023) recent "Safer Prisons, Safer People, Safer Communities" report underscored that when individuals commence their careers in the CJS, they often do so in adverse environments, where "discrimination [is]...a common experience for LGBTQI+ correction staff – 45 per cent of respondents in this group reported experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity" (p. 323). Members of the investigative panel which conducted the report were also "disappointed to witness open racist and discriminatory behavior by corrections staff across at many locations" (Victorian Government, 2023, p. 323). Within this challenging milieu, it is perplexing how practitioners can be expected to be effective if they are not equipped with all possible tools—including the perspectives of individuals with lived experience of the CJS. There is a place for abstract criminological thinking which urges students to think critically and be informed. However, these skills in isolation do not empower students to support individuals entangled in the CJS. Empirical studies alone do not shed light on the comprehensive picture of criminal justice interaction; there simply are not enough researchers in the field of criminology and related fields to realistically study every nuance that transpires in criminal justice settings. Consequently, academia must turn to LEC, engage with those in direct contact with the justice system, as well as professionals that work directly in the CJS. These minute details are pivotal in criminal justice practice, and future criminal justice practitioners should be equipped with the skills and capabilities to develop them for effective practice. It should be noted, however, that LEC does not offer a panacea for all of the CJS problems, but rather it forms part of the solution to render the system more efficacious, humane, and informed.

Intriguingly, lived experience perspectives have become an increasingly integral component of criminal justice practice (see Martinovic et al., 2022; Vacro, 2021). However, as previously articulated, the transition of this perspective into academia,

specifically within the domain of penological pedagogy, has often been at a glacial pace. Nonetheless, appreciation for the value of LEC is discernible in several established university programs, such as the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (IOPEP) (see Martinovic et al., 2018), Walls to Bridges (see Fayter, 2016), and Learning Together (see Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016). These tertiary education initiatives unite university students and incarcerated individuals within a shared learning environment, fostering collaborative academic experience. The crux of these programs, however, is not the content per se, which imparts diversity and innovation to the pedagogical process. Instead, the crux lies in the notion of mutual learning and shared knowledge production, whereby university students and incarcerated individuals learn from and with each other, cultivating an "egalitarian learning experience" (Martinovic et al., 2018, p. 438). However, the reach of these co-learning environments is limited by the students that successfully engage in these programs inside prison walls. There is clearly recognition that the lived experience of incarcerated students in these programs enriches student learning, as highlighted by Martinovic et al. (2018), Ludlow et al. (2019) and Fayter (2016). The object is therefore to embed lived experience perspectives in everyday penological pedagogy delivered in university classrooms. It is argued here that LEC is then a theoretical framework by which these perspectives can be constructed, analyzed and produced. Moreover, the pedagogical emphasis is placed on student-centered learning, which positions students' insights at the forefront of their academic experience (Martinovic et al., 2018, p.438). It is crucial to acknowledge that LEC does not merely supplement traditional sources of knowledge, but rather complements criminological education, contributing practical dimensions to theoretical constructs and abstract ideas discussed in classrooms, lecture halls, and tutorial spaces. In certain respects, LEC augments the graduate "toolbox," equipping future practitioners with the versatility required to navigate the criminal justice field effectively. Consequently, it becomes essential to critically examine university programs that underscore the lived experience of incarcerated individuals in order to explicate and expand on the utility of lived experience within penological pedagogy.

### ***The inside-out prison exchange program in Australia***

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (IOPEP), conceived by Lori Pompa in the United States (Pompa, 2002), was adapted for an Australian context by Martinovic et al. (2018) in 2016 within two prisons located in the state of Victoria. The assessment of the Australian IOPEP conducted by Martinovic et al. (2018) reveals that both incarcerated and non-incarcerated graduates exhibited an enhanced capacity to comprehend and critically analyze the CJS. By learning in tandem with and from those who have had direct experience with the CJS, non-incarcerated students gained insights into the practical functioning of the system, thereby transcending the theoretical purview typically provided in textbooks. This interaction bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and the real-life experiences offered by incarcerated students within the prison classroom. The preconceptions of non-incarcerated students, often influenced by conventional media portrayals of incarcerated populations as monolithic entities (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Castro & Brawn, 2017), were deconstructed, encouraging them to view incarcerated individuals beyond the confines of stereotypes

(Martinovic et al., 2018). Within this framework, the lived experience of incarcerated students serve as a pedagogical tool, illuminating the various applications of theoretical criminological perspectives. Such knowledge holds significant value for students pursuing studies in criminology, criminal justice, and related disciplines, preparing them for the realities they may encounter as professionals in the criminal justice sector.

### ***Learning together***

Learning Together (LT) is an educational endeavor designed to cultivate transformative learning communities by uniting students from higher education and criminal justice organizations in a shared learning environment within a prison (Ludlow et al., 2019, p. 25). Currently, approximately 40 higher education and criminal justice institutions in England and Wales participate in this initiative. Guided by Freire's (2003) philosophy of education as a conduit for societal good, the program endeavors to foster locally informed learning communities encompassing both incarcerated and non-incarcerated students. Like the Australian IOPEP, LT brings together students from universities, criminal justice institutions, and incarcerated individuals within a learning environment inside and outside prison walls. Although there have been previous attempts to introduce LT in Australia, the program is not currently offered in the country (Ludlow et al., 2019).

### ***Walls to bridges***

Walls to Bridges (WTB) aligns with the ethos of LT and IOPEP by promoting an egalitarian learning environment that integrates incarcerated and non-incarcerated students within a shared learning community (Fayter, 2016). Distinguishing itself from IOPEP in Australia, WTB offers multiple units or subjects, providing incarcerated students with opportunities for continued engagement. Consequently, students gain exposure to a diverse array of subjects alongside a variety of incarcerated and non-incarcerated students. The pedagogical approach of WTB is underpinned by Freire's (2003) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which informs course outcomes and aligns with the philosophy of LT (Fayter, 2016). Initially introduced to Canada as Inside Out Canada by Simone Davis, WTB is a localized adaptation of IOPEP. Pollack (2016) asserts that the relational dynamics and educational approach of WTB facilitate interactions between two distinct student groups, dispelling stereotypes, particularly those associated with incarcerated students. While WTB is exclusive to Canada, it allows for the customization and localization of the curricula. Although IOPEP permits individual university providers to tailor their course content based on student demographics, subjects offered within WTB tend to align more closely with criminological themes, whereas IOPEP provides a more diverse range of courses (e.g. Allred, 2009; Heider, 2018), particularly outside the Australian context.

Innovative practices such as IOPEP, LT, and WTB exemplify the practical application of LEC within penological pedagogy. While not explicitly framed as such, these programs draw heavily upon the PEN and CEN of individuals within the CJS, centralizing these accounts in the construction of criminological knowledge. The prison environment, its austere furnishings, the presence of prison officer and staff, the procedure

of entering and exiting a prison, the uniform of those incarcerated, as well as the very experiences of incarcerated people shared in prison classrooms, are all equal players in the transformative educational process of university students. These programs embody the power of Latour's (2005) ANT by granting non-incarcerated students first-hand insights into the realities of prison through the shared experiences and PENs of incarcerated students. As evidenced by the outcomes of these educational initiatives, these narratives have proven to be both transformative and impactful.

Nevertheless, the expansion of these programs without careful and culturally informed local integration may inadvertently contribute to the objectification of incarcerated individuals, generating ethical challenges. These programs implement strict entry requirements as safeguarding measures to prevent potential harm to incarcerated individuals (Martinovic et al., 2018). However, there exist alternative means to integrate lived experience perspectives into mainstream criminological curricula without necessitating student visits to prisons. By employing academics with lived experience of the CJS, existing criminology and criminal justice courses could leverage their PENs to provide practical insights into the experiences of police interaction, correctional involvement, and court proceedings, thereby equipping students with practical insights into their future professional practice. Moreover, integrating LEC into criminological curricula could guide future criminological researchers in designing robust research projects that yield more comprehensive and holistic results, rather than siloed and piecemeal outcomes. The "insider" perspectives offered by individuals with lived experience could steer research design towards innovative and previously unexplored directions within criminological epistemology. Independent courses co-designed with individuals having lived experiences of the CJS could create a pedagogical nexus, synthesizing textbook and theoretical knowledge with real-life experiences, and offering contextually grounded and specialized knowledge in criminology and criminal justice. This approach not only empowers people with lived experience of the CJS by placing their experiences at the center of the learning process, but also enhances the learning experience of future criminologists, forensic psychologists, criminal lawyers, and other criminal justice practitioners.

Furthermore, it may be safely assumed that the CEN would be of greater utility in designing criminological curriculum in which LEC is not only included but mainstreamed. However, the CEN is not representative of all experiences in the CJS. It cannot always achieve universality, for it is situational much like the foundational framework of LEC. In the context of pedagogy, the utilization of the CEN as a heuristic device which informs the formulation of criminological curricula should be contextualized, localized and specialized. Lived experience perspectives in Australian prisons would be utilized in Australian universities. Similarly, lived experience of women in female prisons should be utilized to inform criminological scholarship concerning women, queer people concerning queer people, minority groups concerning minority groups, and so on. Particular attention to geography, temporality, race, gender, and a myriad of other aspects would need to be made to ensure that considerations are reckoned in relation to context, locality and specialty. Academics co-designing university courses with people with lived experience must be cognizant of these factors in order for LEC to be successfully and properly implemented in penological pedagogy.

Context, locality, and specialization play a pivotal role within LEC, and their significance must be explicitly outlined. Despite LEC's universalistic outlook on individuals' lived experience, this universality is inherently constrained, producing conclusions drawn only from the PENs that constitute the larger CENs. This constraint emanates from the inherent heterogeneity in justice system operations across the globe, a feature encapsulated by the concept of "locality" within the LEC theory. The unique experiences individuals encounter within the justice system are shaped by an interplay of local legislations, specific situational contexts—characterized in LEC as "context" (e.g. was the experience within a prison setting)—and their individual, distinct experiences, a component referred to as "specialization" within the LEC theory. For example, it would be irrelevant to involve people with lived experience of the CJS in China, if the subject at hand was concerned with the Australian CJS. To genuinely enrich student experiences through the application of LEC, these experiences must align with the societal, cultural, and institutional context within which these justice systems operate. In fact, Ludlow et al. (2019) argues that although there is a need for the retainment of international structures in constructing theory, there is also in some ways a parallel need to reflect on the socio-political and cultural identities, particularly in the way in which these shape local knowledge and partnerships.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it would be an oversight not to address the requisite ethical considerations intrinsic to the pedagogical approaches articulated herein when advocating for the incorporation of lived experience perspectives in penological pedagogy. The steady influx of individuals with firsthand experiences of incarceration, who continue their education during and post-incarceration, has been observable. Within the Australian landscape, notable examples encompass individuals such as Carey (2022), McPhee (2021), and Antojado (2023). Yet, these scholars frequently cite the dearth of opportunities in academia for those endowed with lived experience of the CJS, specifically of incarceration. As McPhee (2021) contends, criminology has largely eschewed amplifying the voices of criminalized storytellers, favoring instead the cultivation of the "other" narratives for academic gain, thereby provoking compelling questions for the broader discipline of criminology.

Drawing a parallel to medical education, medical schools globally not only employ scholars dedicated to medical research but also offer opportunities to medical practitioners to contribute to the domain of teaching and research. Arguably, these practitioners offer invaluable insights drawn from their lived experience in the medical field. They equip medical students with practical skills that enable them to serve effectively as doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. In light of the scarcity of published work on this subject, McPhee's (2021) unpublished work, where she issues a "call to action" (p.1) advocating for the establishment of pathways for individuals with lived experience of the CJS to participate in knowledge production and influence prison policy and practice, merits attention, not only in Australia but also globally.

Lastly, the dearth of articles and publications addressing the role, or lack thereof, of individuals with lived experience in penological pedagogy and research is a matter of considerable concern. It reflects academia's apparent reluctance to embrace the

inclusion of those with such lived experience. Echoing McPhee's (2021) sentiments, this paper issues a call to action for academic institutions to endeavor to include and empower individuals with lived experience of the CJS. It is anticipated that through fostering novel engagements and interactions between LEC and academia, innovative criminological futures will materialize wherein institutions across the CJS will demonstrate heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to the individuals they serve. It is high time the maxim "Nothing About Us Without Us," well-established within the disability rights movement (Charlton, 1998), finds resonance within the CJS and criminology as an academic discipline. This paper posits that significant change within the CJS and the academic discipline will be achievable only through the meaningful and sustained involvement of individuals with lived experience.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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