IN THE FIRST DEGREE: A STUDY OF EFFECTIVE DISCOURSE IN POSTSECONDARY PRISON EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies, on both micro and macro levels, confirm that providing postsecondary education to prisoners works to reduce the rate of recidivism. Understanding that the phenomenon is works, however, does not answer the question as to why prison education is effective. Two of every three prisoners begin their incarceration without a high school diploma. Despite the majority of prisoners departing from the K-12 education system before completion through expulsion, dropping out, or failing grades, large numbers of prisoners are able to succeed in college classes. I argue that the answer lies within the communication practices occurring within prison classrooms that allow students to be discursively produced as scholars, rather than deviants. Using the method of participatory critical rhetoric, I analyzed prison classroom communication through three distinct, yet related lenses: ethnography, rhetoric, and media.

The ethnographic analysis revealed their K-12 teachers, adhering to the norms of the education system, communicated apathy and a demand for adherence to values that were not own. In prison classrooms, however, their teachers communicated that their voice and opinion had value, gave them space to communicate freely, and kept them engaged and excited. Critical rhetorical analysis to the interviews demonstrated two primary discourses circulating through prison classrooms: a discourse of individuality and a discourse of care. The fusion of these discourses allowed for a fissure into the organizational rhetoric of the prison system, allowing both students and instructors to enact a rhetoric of love. In media analysis, I explored dominant discourses about prisoners circulating through popular media and news reports. Using cultivation theory and social learning theory, I argued that the general public is taught a bias against prisoners in much the same way as they are biased against minorities. I discussed how the

bureaucratic system, by prohibiting positive portrayals of prisoners, insulates itself against public scrutiny and allows the bias and its effects to continue unabated.

DEDICATION

For Harvey. I will always aspire to be the kind of person my dog thought I was.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My friend Sarah Dignan recently told me that people write the way they are. I wholeheartedly agree with her. All our writing, at its core, is a reflection of who we are as people. A dissertation, then, as the final piece of writing that establishes that I am worthy to be called “Doctor,” is a prime reflection of who I am. Of course, I didn’t become who I am all on my own. I am the product of my experiences, but more than that, of the people that have touched my life. Acknowledging the people who helped make this dissertation possible is really a way to acknowledge those people who’ve contributed into making me who I am.

First and foremost, I want to thank the more than 1,000 incarcerated men who have given me the honor of sharing a classroom with them over the past seven years. Learning with and alongside you about the power of communication to transform lives has made a difference in mine. As I’ve said many times, this work is tiring, but every time I think I’ve had enough, I’m reminded that you cannot decide prison is too tough and go home. If you don’t get to quit, neither do I. Thank you for teaching me.

I also want to thank the great teachers I’ve had over the years. My love of the written word started with my third-grade teacher, Angie Bielefeldt, who was the first person see the potential in my writing. I wrote a story about going to my great aunt and uncle’s house in Arkansas that she held on to and would read to future classes as an example for years. Janet Brugman and Sandy Hampton, my junior high English teachers, had extremely high standards and taught me methods of research I still use to this day. Angie Richard and Mindy Faber, my high school debate coaches, taught me the power of finding my own voice and helped me to see education as a place that welcomed me. I also could not talk about great teachers without

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I’ve also been blessed with some incredible professors. From Jim Towns, who believed in everyone, to Jim Evans, who took a chance by taking me under his wing, to Jim Dimock, who never let me forget what I was capable of accomplishing. All of these professors led me on my journey that took me to Texas A&M. It was here that I met Matt May, my advisor, who pushed me so far out of my research comfort zone that I think I made it to outer space at one point. I cannot thank him enough, not just for advancing me as a scholar, but the constant support and advice he has given me over the years. At one particularly low point, he told me on no uncertain terms that I wasn’t allowed to quit because I’d never let him down before and I wasn’t going to start doing it now. As I advance in my career, I hope I never will. I am also so very grateful to the rest of my committee. Srivi Ramasubramanian, whose fiery passion for her students is infectious. Charley Conrad, who chose me to be the final student he served on a committee for in his illustrious academic career, a choice that I will carry with me for life. Holly Foster and Reuben May, who despite never having had me in class, enthusiastically supported my research. All of you have helped make me into the scholar I am.

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Of course, there are the great friends who've become like family over the years. Mandy Morton, Miles Ward, and Jill Quarles, who I look forward to celebrating New Year's with this year when we're all doctors. Lexi Whitten, my amazingly inspiring friend and former roommate, who made College Station (and El Paso) feel like home. Ashley Newman, one of my oldest friends, who took me back into her life after so many years like we'd never missed a beat, always providing the oasis I needed to keep up the good fight. River Dowdy, who has known me forever but loves me anyway. Jeremy Coffman, who the universe has decided will always be the person I coach debate with, even in prison – or worse, Nashville. Sydney Davis, Jr. Jr., who is one of the most awesome people you'll ever meet. Don't believe me? Go watch her comedy special, Wasted (Potential), on Amazon Prime. Go ahead, I'll wait. Grace and Jeremy Brannon, whose regular dinners kept me sane. Caitlin Miles, who I spent so much time over at her apartment writing together my first year that Lexi asked if I was living over there. Forrest Rule, whose long walks let me work out both academic and non-academic problems. Heidi Sisler, my "prom date" who spent so many evenings watching the world's cheesiest movies with me. Trae and Liz

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I want to end by thanking my students. Without them, there is no me. I've taught so many over the years and each one has left their mark, teaching me something about life and myself. I could write a dissertation about them, but since I'm limited to four pages, I'll mention a few who stand out. Jerusha Rodgers, one of my original students, who taught me that the world is too big a place to stay anywhere for too long. Addison Reed, who I refuse to call Douglas, showed me that one of the most important things to know is yourself. Sara Boyer, who taught me that if you work hard enough, you'll find a way to achieve your dreams. Fab Sears, who taught me that you can always look on the bright side of life. Johnathan Cereceres, who's fighting the good fight on the border. Isabell Deharo, who showed me what it meant to be bigger on the inside. Jasmin Reza, who keeps going no matter what life throws at her. Holly Gamble, who taught me not to let others views define who I am. Mike Thomas and Artrisa Fulton, who reminded me why I love coaching. Dave Mains and Craig Caudill, who showed me that it's never too late to change your life for the positive.

As I close the acknowledgments, I'm reminded of one last influence: George Feeny. I didn't start out wanting to be a teacher, so when I fell into it, I thought back to not only my great teachers as role models, but to the show *Boy Meets World*. I close every class I've taught with Feeny's final lesson, so it's only fitting that I do so here: Believe in yourself. Dream. Try. Do good. And no, I don't mean do well. Do good.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It's the first day of my Public Speaking class. As the students shuffle in and take their seats behind rows of long wooden tables that line the classroom, I'm busy arranging stacks of syllabi, paper, folders, and textbooks. My students come from many walks of life. They differ in race, age, religion, and place of origin. In truth, they only share two qualities: they are all male and they are all convicted felons. My classroom, which looks like any number of classrooms at colleges and universities across the country, is housed behind the stone walls and razor-wire lined fences of a maximum-security prison.

After the students collect their supplies, I step behind the podium to go over the syllabus and my expectations for the course. Over my years teaching behind bars, I've given this lecture dozens of times. Besides talking about the speeches they'll be giving and classroom policies, I always make a point to specify our relationship.

"As far as I'm concerned, this is a college class and I'm going to run it just like I do anywhere else. I'm a professor and you're students. The only difference is that you all seem to have the same awful fashion sense. Really? White jumpsuits after Labor Day? Tsk, tsk, fellas."

A few students lightly chuckle at my awful attempt at humor.

"All jokes aside, I have no idea why any of you are in here. I don't know and don't want to know why you're in prison. Don't tell me what crime you've been convicted of, I have absolutely zero interest in hearing about it."

The idea just made sense to me, if I didn't know what they did, I wouldn't bias myself. Despite my progressive beliefs and working-class background, I still viewed myself as somehow

dissimilar to my students. I'd grown up below the poverty line, my high school wasn't exactly the nicest, and I had my own run-ins with the law in my teens, but I'd always pictured their lives growing up as far different from mine. That belief would change today.

On the first day of Public Speaking, I have students give an impromptu introduction speech. It's a simple exercise that lets me gauge their abilities and apprehension levels to adjust my teaching style for the particular group of students. Students tell me their name, where they're from, and what they plan on doing post-release. They're free to provide as much or as little detail as they want. After so many semesters, they all begin to sound the same.

The next student walks up to the podium. He's far younger than his classmates and it shows. If not for the prison jumpsuit, you'd probably take him for an Abercrombie & Fitch model than an inmate. He clears his throat, smiles at the audience, and says "Hi, I'm Alex[1]*, and I'm from Autumn, Texas."*

I look up from my notes. Autumn is my hometown too. That's the first time I've ever heard a prisoner say they were from there. I shrug, silently reassuring myself that the town is a highly populated area of one of the largest cities in the United States. Must just be a coincidence.

"I went to Small Pine High School."

I swallow hard.

He. Went. To. My. High. School.

I try my best to not visually react. Years of grading speeches has given me something of a poker face. I begin to worry silently about security concerns. Prison policy says I have to

[1] Names and details for this anecdote have been altered to protect student privacy.

disclose if I have any current or former relationship, including friendship, with an inmate. He looks like he's about 22, though, and I'm in my 30s. There's no way he could—

"I graduated in 2003."

My face feels oddly cool. I realize the blood must've drained a bit from my face and left me looking pale. I graduated from Small Pine high school in 2002. He and I had never met, but we passed each other in the hallways for years. We likely sat in the same classrooms with the same teachers. Now, more than a decade later, we are once again in the same school. The difference now is that I'm a professor and he's a prisoner. At the end of the class period, I get to go home. At the end of the class period, he was already home.

Now, I could no longer pretend I was different than they were. This student and I started in the same place at roughly the same time. How did we begin from the same starting point and take such wildly divergent paths? Why didn't education work for him the same as it did for me then, and why was it working for him now? I still think about this experience and these questions. In this dissertation, I intend to try to find answers.

****

I have been teaching speech classes for Lee College – Huntsville Center since 2011. During that time, I have taught roughly 1,000 students working on their Associate's degrees while incarcerated. As is the case with many teachers, I have been so concerned with *what* I have been doing, I have not always focused on *how* I have been doing it. Moreover, given the isolated nature of teaching in prisons, I have not once in five years had the opportunity to observe another faculty member's class, so I find myself ignorant of how they are teaching as well.

The purpose of this research is to seek an answer to what Gehring and Rennie (2008) called the prison educator's "most frequently asked question: What works in prison education?"

(p. 23). Specifically, I am interested in what discourses are circulating through prison classrooms that allows prisoners to become successful in education, when they had not been able to do so in their previous education experiences. The infamous Martinson Report (1974) came to the conclusion that "nothing works" in the rehabilitation of criminals. More recent research (e.g. Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000) has demonstrated the opposite conclusion. The collective body of knowledge regarding rehabilitation within carceral environments shows that education works as a powerful force "to reduce recidivism by enhancing employability, increasing self-esteem and fostering personal growth" (Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, & Wilcox, 2005, p. 56). Most recently, a study by the RAND Corporation (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013) demonstrating a concrete relationship between postsecondary prison education and recidivism led the Obama administration to implement the Second Chance Pell Grant Program, partially restoring federal financial aid to prison college students. Clearly, despite Martinson's (1974) claim, something is working.

While significant literature exists documenting the results of prison education, very little analyzes the process by which the effects come to be. More to the point, no existing study examines this from a perspective analyzing discourse. A review of the literature concerning the relationship of education and criminology yielded two defining trends: the school-to-prison pipeline and, as discussed above, the function of correctional education to reduce recidivism. The school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003) is a phenomenon observed and analyzed by a number of researchers examining a myriad of factors which relate students' experiences with education to their tendency to engage in lawbreaking that results in their eventual incarceration. In short, it theorizes about the nature of school that leads students to become prisoners. When prisoners leave their incarceration with a greater degree of education, their tendency to return to

lawbreaking behaviors, termed recidivism, reduces substantially. What is missing within this academic discussion, however, is the answer as to why correctional education works. The students who receive their degrees and go on to become productive citizens instead of returning to criminality are the same students who were transported through the school-to-prison pipeline. Specifically, then, what is different about the discursive environment of prison classrooms that allows incarcerated students to be successful? In order to remedy this, I conducted a study to determine the perspective and experiences of postsecondary prison educators, students, and alumni in regards to the discursive practices within the classroom that function to make prison education successful.

Literature review

Relying on Bourdieu's contribution to game theory, Reich (2010) argued that men are largely engaged in one of two different types of games which each rely on a different conception of masculinity. When involved in a game, people tend not to question the game's rules nor its purpose, but instead focus on winning under the game's conditions. The game and its players, then, serve to reproduce the social conditions necessary for the game to be played. In Reich's estimation from his study of incarcerated youth, young men are either engaged in playing the Game of Outlaw or the Game of Law.

The Game of Outlaw operates under the conception of outsider masculinity. Reich (2010) noted the conditions of the players of the Game of Outlaw, writing:

> Young men involved in crime have little access to institutional sources of social power. They cannot distinguish themselves as men through the arenas of work, politics, or social status. They are excluded from the or, at best, offered the lowest positions in the labor

> market; they have little or no political power; and they are regarded as social pariahs at school and by many in society at large. (p. 25).

As they are systemically barred from access to the traditional markers of masculine success, boys and men playing the Game of Outlaw rely on a different kind of currency entirely to distinguish themselves as successful men. They are concerned with money, not in terms of investment or financial security, but as a means to display their high-priced goods in a form of conspicuous consumption. Power matters primarily in physical terms, specifically in the ability to physically assert yourself and harm those who would threaten your status as well as gaining access to sexual intercourse with a multitude of physically attractive women. Finally, respect is valued in relation to adherence to unwritten social codes, the rules of the Game. In short, players "establish their masculinity through buying expensive things, through having sex with many women, through not backing down from a fight" (p. 16). Reich referred to this practice as outsider masculinity because it both exists outside terms of lawful behavior and because its markers are external to the player's bodies. The result of playing the Game of Outlaw "entails reproducing one's own marginality through repeated cycles of incarceration or can even involve the loss of one's life altogether" (Reich, 2010, p. 24).

Conversely, the Game of Law is rooted in the conception of insider masculinity. Reich (2010) likewise explained the conditions of its players:

> Men who have access to institutional sources of power seem to stake their masculinity less on daily interaction. Instead, the games they play are games related to their trajectories through the workplace, political power, and social standing… these games are more firmly rooted within existing arrangements of economic, political, and social power,

> and are hegemonic, in a Gramscian sense, in that they set the parameters for the lives of those with less power. (p. 29).

Like their Game of Outlaw counterparts, money, power, and respect are valuable to these players, but are accomplished in markedly different ways. To these men, money is valuable in terms of savings accounts, mortgages, and high salaries. Power is gained through rising up the institutional, often corporate ladder, and gaining women by both impressing them with their accumulated status and maintaining gender inequalities that preserve their position. Respect, likewise, is gained from position, a reward for achieving a better result in the institution than others have. As the opposite to outsider masculinity, insider masculinity happens both within the legal realm and is viewed by its players as a largely "internal phenomenon, something that inheres in the person rather than being worn or expressed internally" (p. 29). These types of players reproduce "a kind of blind obedience to authority" (p. 24).

Understanding students, then, as players of either the Game of Law or Game of Outlaw allows for a deeper analysis of their position within the K-12 classroom. The classroom, however, is not an island into itself. Instead, it exists as a mechanism within the education system which is a small part of the larger machine of American society. As such, Conrad's (2011) work on organizational rhetoric is useful for understanding the systemic effects of public education on these students.

Conrad (2011) that the rhetoric stemming from large organizations, particularly within the United States, "influences popular attitudes and beliefs, even to the extent of molding the core taken-for-granted assumptions that guide and constrain our actions and interpretations of reality" (p. 14). Conrad argued that organizational rhetors propagate closely entwined ideologies and structures, particularly through the use of cultural myths, in order to legitimate and

perpetuate the organization. In terms of the "American system," Conrad identified three central myths: "the myth of upward mobility, the 'organizational imperative,' and 'free-market fundamentalism'" (p. 39). Of these cultural myths, upward mobility and the organizational imperative are most relevant to this discussion.

The myth of upward mobility, often referred to as the American Dream, is the belief that the United States has no fixed economic caste system. Instead, any person willing to work hard enough and long enough will be financially successful, with each generation becoming more prosperous than their parents before them. Central to this myth is the necessity of conformity in order to achieve success. "Capable individuals who work hard and 'play by the rules' will succeed beyond their wildest dreams; those who do not will not" (Conrad, 2011, p. 40). What the myth does not mention, however, is upward mobility "has varied historically with a number of factors, the most important of which is access to education, especially higher education" (p. 40).

Like upward mobility, the myth of the organizational imperative also demands conformity. At its base level, the "organizational imperative is simple: all good things come from formal organizations, and all policies, attitudes, and behaviors should be designed to strengthen them" (Conrad, 2011, p. 46). Any person whose actions or beliefs resist the organization, therefore, threaten all of our abilities to receive the good things that organizations are solely capable of providing to us. Identity itself, once developed through personal relationships, became a corporate "mechanism for motivating (which is a euphemism for controlling) employees without having to rely on expensive reward systems" (p. 48). Individuals are now encouraged to identify themselves with organizations, thereby rhetorically defining another's dissent as a personal attack rather than questioning organizational policy.

I argue that a fourth myth, which both relies on and expands upward mobility and the organizational imperative, exists within the American system: the value of education. Noted education scholar Sir Ken Robinson explained it as "a story that many people believe about education, even though it's not real and never really was" (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. xix):

> Young children go to elementary school mainly to learn the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. These skills are essential so they can do well academically in high school. If they go on to higher education and graduate with a good degree, they'll find a well-paid job and the country will prosper too.
>
> In this story, real intelligence is what you use in academic studies: children are born with different amounts of this intelligence, and so naturally some do well at school and some don't. The ones who are really intelligent go on to good universities with other academically bright students. Those who graduate with a good university degree are guaranteed a well-paid job with their own office. Students who are less intelligent naturally do less well in school. Some may fail or drop out. Some who finish high school may not go any further in education and look for a lower-income job instead. Some will go on to college but take less academic, vocational courses and get a decent service or manual job, with their own toolkit. (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. xix).

In this sense, the myth of the value of education might seem to conflict with upward mobility. If children are born with a finite amount of "real intelligence," then that would explain the differing levels of economic success. Yet, the upward mobility myth persists when adherents argue that mobility is possible among all economic classes, but the rich are those who are naturally smarter than their working-class counterparts.

The myth of the value of education works in tandem with the previously discussed myths, particularly in terms of demanding conformity. The public education system is a formal organization from which "all good things come" (Conrad, 2011, p. 46). Therefore, in order to strengthen themselves and the organization, students are demanded to "work hard and 'play by the rules'" or else face the consequences (p. 40). Playing by the rules, however, requires adherence to bourgeois ways of thinking, speaking, acting, and being.

The public school system demands bourgeois norms from students as an effect of its design and history. According to Robinson and Aronica (2016), schools "were developed in large part to meet the labor needs of the Industrial Revolution and are organized on the principles of mass production" (pp. xx-xxi). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, mass schooling was largely unnecessary and absent. Most people worked in the agrarian economy, hard physical labor jobs, or specialized in a particular craft making good by hand. As technology enabled efficient mass production of goods, demand for new and different types of workers emerged.

> Industrialism needed armies of *manual* workers for the repetitive and exhausting labor in the mines, factories, railways, and shipyards. It needed more-skilled *technical* workers in engineering and the associated trades and crafts of mining, manufacturing, and construction. It needed cohorts of *clerical and administrative* workers to manage the new bureaucracies of trade and manufacturing. It needed a smaller *professional* class of lawyers, doctors, scientists, and academics to provide expert services to those who could afford them...
>
> Industrialism needed a lot more manual workers than it did college graduates. So mass education was built like a pyramid, with a broad base of compulsory elementary

> education for all, a smaller section of secondary education, and a narrow apex of higher education. (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, pp. 33-34, emphasis original)

The higher a student moves up the pyramid of education, the tighter the demand that he or she conform to the values of the organization. American society did not, and still does not, place tremendous value on the normative conformity of manual laborers. However, technical, clerical, and professional classes require increasing levels of conformed behavior and thought.

"Industrial processes demand compliance with specific rules and standards. The principle is still applied to education" (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. 35). Paulo Freire (1970) characterized the process of education as an "efficient mechanism for social control. It is not hard to find educators whose idea of education is 'to adapt the learner to his environment,' and as a rule formal education has not been doing much more than this" (p. 116). Freire (1970) characterized this mode of control as the banking model of education, whereby students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge deposited by their teachers. By acting out of line, students were inefficient receptacles and in need of correction. hooks (1994) expanded Freire's argument by identifying issues of economic class within the education as the "bourgeois class biases shaping and informing pedagogical process (as well as social etiquette) in the classroom" (p. 178). hooks continued her analysis, writing:

> It was taught by example and reinforced by a system of rewards. As silence and obedience to authority were most rewarded, students learned that this was the appropriate demeanor for the classroom. Loudness, anger, emotional outbursts, and even something as seemingly innocent as unrestrained laughter were deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits were also associated with being a member of the lower classes. If one was not from a privileged class group, adopting a

> demeanor similar to that of the group could help one to advance. It is still necessary for students to assimilate bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable. (p. 178)

Demanded adherence to bourgeois norms is disguised in what Chang (1993) referred to as the "ideology of the communicative" (p. xviii) a philosophy that holds that the purpose of communication is the "transcendence of difference" (p. xi). In reality, the ideology of the communicative as enacted within communicative dialogue in K-12 classrooms exists to erase, rather than transcend, difference.

While, on its face, the process of communicative dialogue might appear to reasonably facilitate communication, Ellsworth (1997) established that it does something more: it preserves continuity within the education environment. Borrowing from media and film studies, Ellsworth explained that continuity preserves the appearance of a given format of communication. For example, separate shots are edited together within a film to present a continuous and unbroken story. An out of place shot breaks the illusion of the film, shattering the viewer's suspension of disbelief and reminding them that they are not observing reality but are instead subjected to a created medium espousing a particular message. Communicative dialogue as practiced within classrooms functions in much the same manner. Students are expected to maintain continuity by seeking understanding and preserving the continuity of the classroom and the school. In acting in the prescribed manner, "our differences or desires will never threaten the continuity of or conscious discourse, because we have already established our common ground of dispassionate understanding" (p. 93).

As Ellsworth (1997)[2] noted, "What is at stake in whether a dialogue is 'successful' or not is the reinscription of particular power relations that operate in and through continuity" (p. 86). It is a power relationship that demands students all become the same. By demanding that they come to understanding, they become the same. "Even if we subsequently disagree, we are already the *same* in the sense that we have shown ourselves to be rational interlocutors capable of an initial, unbiased reading" (p. 93). A discontinuity, like a nonconforming student. "calls attention to the frame around the premapped nature of the territory within which the call to dialogue is addressed. It calls attention to the illusion of dialogue's openness to *any* and *all* positions of address" (p. 89, emphasis original). The presence of nonconforming students inside the classroom disrupts the notion that students are free to think and speak independently.

What, then, happens to nonconforming students that do not "assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a nonmaterially privileged background" (hooks, 1994, p. 181), students whose presence and actions threatens the organization? hooks argued that "[s]tudents who enter the academy unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values held by privileged classes tend to be silenced, deemed troublemakers" (p. 179). Ellsworth (1997) argued that the classroom as it currently exists demands students be a willing participant or else be labeled "antidemocratic, lacking in the moral virtues and character traits required of participants (because if you *had* those traits and virtues, surely, you would be participating—those virtues and traits predispose you to participation; they virtually *compel* or *obligate* participation)" (p. 105, emphasis original). More

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[2] I reference Ellsworth here for the explanation of the effects of the ideology of the communicative's effect on students. Her arguments for a model to replace dialogue are beyond the scope of this manuscript.

than simply troublemakers, their behaviors are discursively produced by the school as a "mean-spirited, separatist, antagonistic and dangerous-to-everyone-who-loves-democracy refusal to honor another human being's attempt to 'connect' through communication" (p. 102).

When students step out of line, they become the discontinuities that Ellsworth described. The institution, of course, cannot tolerate this. Its response to those who rock the boat, then, is to ostracize and exclude them. If you challenge the status quo, you become the person "who everyone else will agree must be ostracized… Ostracized by a 'unified will.' A will that can be unified, of course, only through the exclusion of the one(s) who threaten the continuity of the dialogue" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 106). hooks (1994) described her own experience with being ostracized and excluded when she wrote "Because I did not conform—would not be an unquestioning, passive student—some [teachers] treated me with contempt" (p. 17).

Further, the historical conditions surrounding both schooling and the criminal justice system within the United States, particularly within the mid-to-late 20th century, further contributed to the demands of conformity. As Western (2006) noted, one of main causes of the prison boom was the collapse of inner-city industrial centers in the 1970s. In the beginnings of globalization and the post-industrial age, communities began to collapse as unskilled factory jobs requiring little formal education began to rapidly disappear. As factories in city centers began to close and jobs members of working class communities moved en masse to countries with cheaper labor, companies began to focus on hiring only highly skilled workers with formal education. The now unemployed workers, having no means to access legal employment, began turning to the underground economies of illegal narcotics sales.

In response to the rising drug economy, President Richard Nixon launched an initiative to crack down on both narcotics users and dealers known as the "War on Drugs." This program

experienced limited success in meeting its mandate for a decade until 1985 when President Ronald Reagan began utilizing the media to engender support for the failing War. For instance, the *Washington Post* printed more than 1,500 stories about the supposed epidemic of crack cocaine between 1988 and 1989. With the media turning the minds of the American public against those using and selling drugs, the state was now able to imprison scores of boys and men who were simply trying to make ends meet in an economy that offered them few other options.

The lasting effects of the "War on Drugs" and the companion "War on Crime" are still felt today. In his analysis of crime trends in relation to incarceration, Western (2006) noted that while crime rates among the poor, especially violent crimes, spiked in the 1980s, they had diminished by the year 2000 but incarceration rates continue to rise. "Although disadvantaged men became more law-abiding, their chances of going to prison rose to historic levels" (p. 50). Western's analysis of the data revealed three primary causes for the increased imprisonment of the poor: "a significant increase in the use of imprisonment for those who are convicted of a crime… those who go to prison are now serving longer sentences… [and] a dramatic increase in the prosecution and incarceration of drug offenders" (p. 50).

Simultaneous to the shifts in criminal justice, the public education system itself became far more standardized and punitive. As Robinson and Aronica (2016) argued, the latter half of the 20th century saw the American school system take a number of steps that eliminated creativity within the classroom, in favor of standardized tests which examined all student achievement by the same measure. In both criminal justice and education, the hegemonic majority more closely demanded adherence to particularized norms that those falling outside the mainstream simply could not meet. In essence, the nation, in both the classroom and the courtroom, evoked a rhetoric of standardization.

Is it any wonder, then, that nonconforming students drop out, fail out, or are pushed out of schools through suspension and expulsion? “Overall, about seven thousand young people drop out of the nation’s high schools every day, close to one and a half million per year. Some of these so-called dropouts go on to other forms of education” (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. 20). Some others go to prison.

The organizational rhetoric of the school system, then, allows students to play only one game: The Game of Law. Those playing the Game of Outlaw find themselves alienated, labeled troublemakers, and ultimately pushed out of the system structured to resemble and promote systems of industrial power Outlaw players do not have access to in the first place. Playing the Game of Outlaw “lets them escape the monotony and subservience of a regulated school life in which they have little chance of success and little control” (Reich, 2010, p. 26). Lacking meaningful access to education, they have little chance of achieving upward mobility through legal channels (Conrad, 2011). Criminal activity, then, becomes the alternate means by which many choose to achieve success and often results in incarceration.

“The purpose of industrial manufacturing is to produce identical versions of the same products. Items that don’t *conform* are thrown away… not everyone makes it through the system [of mass education], some are rejected by it” (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. 35). Those students who were rejected by the education system are now succeeding in becoming college graduates. The question remains, then, as to why this phenomenon is occurring.

Research question

Why is prison education working? Specifically, what rhetorics are occurring within prison classrooms that allow prisoners previously rejected by the education system to be discursively produced as scholars rather than troublemakers?

Most of the research seeking a solution to the school-to-prison pipeline begins at the level of the school. I believe this is misguided. Any change to the school requires widespread adoption, the problems associated with this which are evident through mounting public resistance to programs like *No Child Left Behind* and *Common Core*. Further, one would have to wait decades after implementation to observe any meaningful results. Instead, I conducted research starting at the prison and working backwards. Further, unlike past research from fields like education, criminology, and sociology, I argue that the key distinction between K-12 schools that fail to educate this population and the prison classrooms that are successful lies in the communication environment within the classroom. Understanding the rhetorical differences between the discourses circulating within K-12 and prison classrooms, then, serves to demonstrate how instructional communication can be altered to discursively produce these same students as scholars instead of deviants.

By learning the reasons why education in prisons is successful, teacher training and continuing education programs could be altered to train teachers in a pedagogical model that could reach the same types of students playing the Game of Outlaw who are most likely to become incarcerated themselves. Further, this research can inform best practices for prison educators, who as I discuss later, lack the same types of guidance other educators have in terms of pedagogical and andragogical practice.

While issues surrounding economic inequality and racism certainly affect incarcerated students, understanding these systems that contribute to an unequal overrepresentation of minorities and lower economic classes in prisons relative to their percentage in the general population is not the focus of this study. Scholars including Western (2006), Fader (2013), M. Alexander (2012), and many others address these issues in detail. This study does not seek to

expand their work. Instead, I focused on the structures of education which currently reject these students in K-12 education, yet accept them within prison education.

I am a prison educator, not a prison activist or prison abolitionist. I recognize that, to some extent, my profession requires participation within an oppressive system. Likewise, should I eventually leave the prison system and teach graduate students at a free-world university, I would, as Hinchey and Kimmel (2000) demonstrated, be participating in a different oppressive system. Working as a member of any organization necessarily involves some level of participation in oppression. Rather than focus on the oppressive nature of the prison system, I hope to focus on being in the business of putting myself out of business. That is, the goal of prison education is to help incarcerated students achieve a level of education that enables them to seek meaningful employment and avoid recidivism. By informing best practices for both K-12 and prison education, I hope to make prisons obsolete by depleting the number of both first-time and repeat prisoners through inclusive education that accepts, rather than rejects, them.

Methodology

This study examines the phenomenon of effective communication in prison classrooms and, as such, is a form a phenomenological inquiry. "From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5). Minichiello and Kottler (2009) clarified that the purpose of phenomenological inquiry "is to understand the meaning that people attach to their experiences, but the focus is to investigate the internal world as it is seen, felt, intuited, and thought by the individual" (p. 25). Finally, Creswell (2009) noted that "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13). Taken together,

these explanations hold that phenomenological inquiry is an interpretive process of research that involves relying upon the descriptions of participants of their experiences within their own lifeworlds.

Phenomenological inquiry was first utilized in the study of adult education by Stanage (1987), though such use in andragogical study was first suggested by Collins (1981) six years prior. Collins argued that phenomenology was a means to access the ways in which teachers and learners existed in their everyday environments. Stanage (1987), therefore, claimed that "phenomenology is the clearest, most foundational and fullest form of investigation appropriate to adult education as a rigorous human science with the special… subject-matter of the adult educations of *person*" (p. 281, emphasis original).

Given phenomenological inquiry's emphasis on the subjects' stated perceptions of their lifeworlds, in-depth interviews are one of the most commonly utilized data collection methods (Creswell, 2009). However, as I am interested in the rhetorics employed by students and educators within prison classrooms, traditional interviewing methods are not enough. Instead, I will engage in interviews using participatory critical rhetoric as my paradigm (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015)

Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (2011) first introduced rhetorical field methods as an alternative to traditional critical methodologies "as an integration of critical-rhetorical principles with a participatory epistemology to examine the lived experiences of individuals who are embedded within rhetorical social practices, particularly attuned to issues of power, marginalization, and resistance" (Endres, Hess, Senda-Cook, & Middleton, 2016, p. 514). Following that, Hess (2011) developed critical-rhetorical ethnography as a means of using ethnographic methods alongside rhetorical concepts and theories including invention, *kairos*, and

phronesis. Middleton et al. (2015) combined rhetorical field methods and critical-rhetorical ethnography to form participatory critical rhetoric. Like McKerrow's original conception of critical rhetoric, participatory critical rhetoric is not a prescriptive method, but a "set of theoretical and methodological thematics that undergird rhetorical fieldwork, including accounting for the critic's political commitments, the scholar's critical embodiment, emplacement in the (con)text of rhetoric, and multiperspectival judgments as they are gained through interactions in the field" (Endres et al., 2016, p. 514). Participatory critical rhetoric is fundamentally concerned with rhetoric as it plays out in everyday life. By using participatory methods, critics remain in touch with the lived experience of their subjects by speaking to individuals and observing rhetoric's occurrence *in situ*, rather than after the fact. Further, participatory critical method maintains its commitment to the critic's moral role by encouraging participation in, rather than observation of, advocacy. This new method, however, requires a new conception of the definition of a text suitable for rhetorical criticism.

McKerrow (1989) pointed out that one of the key tenets of critical rhetoric involves inverting the focus of rhetorical criticism. Specifically, "the reversal of 'public address' to 'discourse which addresses publics' places the critic in the role of 'inventor'" (p. 101). McGee (1990) advanced the idea that texts are no longer finite but are instead assembled from fragments likewise theorized the role of the critic as including "inventing a text suitable for criticism" (p. 288). Conceived this way, the critical rhetorician collects and assembles fragments of discourse into a text that he or she then critiques. As critical rhetoric progressed, critics began to seek out new sources for fragments to be assembled into texts. However, while "previous moves in rhetorical theory and criticism have expanded focus to visuals, space/place, and bodies, critics continue to examine these via already documented texts" (Endres et al., 2016, p. 512). Reliance

on already documented texts, though, largely inhibits critics from accessing outlaw discourses (Sloop & Ono, 1997).

Ono and Sloop (1995) critiqued the tendency of rhetoricians to focus on documented critiques which inevitably reflect the views of the powerful. "[I]f we limit our attention to such documents (of power) … then we are missing out on, and writing 'out of history,' important texts that gird and influence local cultures" (p. 19). In order to solve this problem, they suggest critics pay attention to outlaw, also referred to as vernacular, discourses which they define as "discourse that resonates within and from historically oppressed communities" (p. 20). Accordingly, these discourses contain "loosely shared logics of justice, ideas of right and wrong that are different than, although not necessarily opposed to, a culture's dominant logics of judgment and procedures for litigation" (Sloop & Ono, 1997, p. 51).

I agree with Sloop and Ono's position regarding the importance of studying outlaw discourses. In my estimation, one cannot fulfill critical rhetoric's goal of "emancipatory potential" that opens up "possibilities for altering relations of power that currently constrain action" if the discipline ignores the rhetoric of the unemancipated (McKerrow, 2016, p. 254). In keeping with Cloud's (2006) concern that critics remain in touch with reality and especially the reality of the oppressed, the field must find a way to access and analyze outlaw discourses. The problem with traditional methods of rhetorical criticism is that outlaw discourses are not often written down, meaning that there would be no already documented text for critics to work from (Middleton et al., 2015). Participatory critics, then, are given the "opportunity to witness and record discourses that are left out of traditional written records—the cultural performances that often are altered or excluded when translated into written words" (Pezzullo, 2003, p. 350).

Furthermore, institutional and systematic barriers exist to prohibit critics from gaining access to outlaw discourses from certain oppressed communities, if they were even written in the first place. Prisoners, for instance, are subject to highly restrictive regulations about what they are able to communicate in written form to those outside prison walls (Wallace, 2016). If we were solely to rely on traditional methods, then there would be no possible opportunity to “unmask or demystify the discourse of power” that circulates around prisoners (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91).

Ono and Sloop (1995) recognized this issue, writing that the study of outlaw discourses is "not a matter of simply adapting rhetorical criticism by focusing on vernacular cultures with the same methods we have used in the past, but rather that as a result of such studies, the entire rhetorical project may be reshaped" (p. 40). In support of reshaping the process of rhetorical criticism, they noted "the rise of contemporary ethnography allows for the radical possibility of the re-presentation of alternative systems of judgment in politically performative terms" (Sloop & Ono, 1997, p. 65). Participatory critical rhetoric stands to likewise enact this radical possibility from a rhetorical perspective.

The combination of rhetoric and ethnography is not a new concept. A quarter century ago, Conquergood (1992) acknowledged a "thriving alliance between ethnography and rhetoric" (p. 80). While traditional methods of rhetorical criticism and ethnography may seem at odds, their “"long-standing interest in meaning-making cultural practices and the suasory function of symbols" is one in the same (p. 80). Further, critical rhetoricians share a similar purpose with critical ethnographers who operate “with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” and an eye toward “conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they could be for specific subjects” (Madison,

2011, p. 5). Holmes and Marcus (2005) discussed a similar notion, writing that any critical qualitative study

> worthy of the name not only tries to speak truth to power—truth as subaltern and understood within the closely observed everyday lives of ordinary subjects as the traditional milieu of fieldwork, power as conceptualized and theorized but not usually investigated by the strategies of fieldwork—but also tries to understand power and its agencies in the same ethnographically committed terms and in the same boundaries of fieldwork in which the subaltern is included. (p. 1101).

Elsewhere, they noted that ethnographers regularly concern themselves with “the economic, political, and/or environmental plights of subaltern subjects or indigenous peoples" (p. 1105). Beyond the complementary goals, ethnographers are not unfamiliar with rhetoric. In a similar manner that critical rhetoric is now moving towards ethnographic methods, ethnography took a “rhetorical turn” to attempt “to define ethnography in terms of its rhetorical features such as the topical, stylistic, documentary, evidentiary, and argumentative choices made by an author and displayed in a text” (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 5). As rhetoric takes its own participatory and ethnographic turn, it must also seek new definition, particularly in terms of what constitutes a text suitable for criticism.

Hess (2011) asked “In cases where critics engage vernacular voices, how does textual criticism function, if at all?” (p. 131). More succinctly, what form does the rhetorical text take during participatory critical rhetoric?

> “Text,” in these cases, does not only constitute the recording of speech; rather, the text has become something living, breathing, and operating within unique spaces and received

by particular audiences. In short, rhetorical scholars have turned toward in situ and everyday processes of textual production and reception. (Hess, 2011, p. 130)

This conception of a text differs greatly from those utilized by traditional methods. Blair (2001) explained that the typical method of after-the-fact analysis necessarily involves a "flattening" of the text (p. 275). By contrast, "[i]n situ rhetoric is an all-encompassing sensual experience that happens in a particular time and place and through particular bodies" (Endres et al., 2016, p. 516). Middleton et al. (2015) argued that this type of experience allows the critic to capture and conceptualize emplaced rhetoric, the interaction of not only speaker and audience, but how the location of the rhetoric itself acts to shape the conditions for persuasion.

The focus on concepts like emplaced rhetoric highlight that participatory critical rhetoric is not simply rhetoricians doing ethnography, but that the fusion between the processes produces an outcome greater than the sum of its parts. The approach, "despite its intellectual debt to qualitative communication scholarship, ethnographic practice, and performance studies, maintains a *rhetorical focus*" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. xvii, emphasis original). In its context as a rhetorical method, "it highlights elements of advocacy, identification, and persuasion, using theoretical concepts familiar to rhetoric. Simultaneously, as ethnography, it draws from a tradition of qualitative methods, including participant observation and interviewing, to assist in the research into vernacular advocacy" (Hess, 2011, p. 132).

Participatory critical rhetoric, then, will provided me with the best means to access both the outlaw rhetoric of incarcerated students as well as the vernacular rhetoric of prison educators. This process allowed a more thorough investigation into phenomena experienced by a population that rhetoricians have little access to otherwise.

Research subjects

In order to best understand the phenomenon of postsecondary prison education, I plan to interview two groups. First, I interviewed alumni who have been released from prison. Second, I interviewed instructors who teach within prisons.

Released alumni. In terms of released alumni, qualitative methods offer several benefits in gaining rich and in-depth research data. First, the nature of the American prison system itself, like quantitative methods, tends to treat inmates as a mass, rather than as individuals. "In prisons, inmates's heads are shaved and they are issued uniforms and numbers, which are used in place of their names. The goal is to strip away any remaining shred of individuality, erasing all differences among inmates" (Fader, 2013, p. 52). Stern (2014) detailed an experience relevant to this discussion from her time teaching classes in prisons. In one of her initial classes, students turned in assignments with their prison identification numbers instead of their names, having become accustomed to being referred to that way. The opportunity to be treated as an individual, as a name instead of a number, as afforded in qualitative methods like interviewing is a rare privilege for former prisoners.

In addition to the benefits native to the process, the results of qualitative studies have an opportunity to better convey the unique experiences of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, particularly in relation to their various experiences of social inequality. Pettit (2012) documented that prisoners have been poorly served in the past by quantitative methods as employed by the federal government. In her book, *Invisible Men*, she details the regular practice of prisoners being excluded from the census as well as calculations about joblessness and other factors related to the United States' population. Furthermore, given the distinct life experiences of the incarcerated and researchers (who largely have not been imprisoned themselves), survey

designs run the risk of making faulty assumptions about the nature of their lives behind bars. Question design, for instance, might miss important contributions that cannot be captured on a Likkert scale or by not including questions that the researcher could have that thought to ask but are still relevant to their subjects.

While qualitative methods offer certain benefits, the practices are not perfect. Indeed, qualitative researchers should also be aware of several disadvantages. Ethnographers often describe the problems of "getting in" to study a population, as an outside researcher is treated suspiciously by members of a community that does not yet trust him or her (Fader, 2013). This problem is compounded by the nature of prison, where automatic suspicion and lack of trust are survival strategies (Sloan & Wright, 2015). Building the type of rapport with former inmates, then, may take substantially longer than with other populations. Likewise, researchers often struggle with the problems of "getting out" (Liebling, Arnold, & Straub, 2015). Hammersley (2015) explained that qualitative researchers must constantly check themselves to ensure that they are not imposing their worldviews on their subjects, but instead letting their subjects speak for themselves through their writing. Waldram (2015) discussed a related problem about writing about prisoners, but in relation to reviewers. Given the societal discourses that circulate around prisoners and prisons which produce prisoners as villains and guards and other prison employees as noble, researchers may be accused of advocating on behalf of prisoners for merely describing their perspective on observed situations. In order for their research to be published and read, qualitative scholars ought to take care to walk the thin line between honest portrayals and acceptable rhetoric.

Prison educators. The most significant aspect of the research concerning collegiate prison educators is the distinct lack of it. Tewksbury and Vannostrand (1996) summarized the

predicament, stating “Although the literature assessing the impact of postsecondary correctional education on student-inmates is abundant, little research has focused on prison educators’ perceptions and systematic evaluations of experiential effects” (p. 276). The minimal scholarship that does exist “consists almost entirely of first-person accounts of individual educators” (p. 276). Two decades since the publication of the article, little has changed regarding knowledge over professors holding classes behind bars.

The limited scholarship concerning prison educators is not focused on the practices utilized in the classroom. Studies exist relating to job satisfaction (Tewksbury, 1994), motivations for teaching (Osberg & Fraley, 1993), and faculty perceptions of students (Edwards-Willey & Chivers, 2005). While understanding that faculty generally perceive incarcerated students as both as academically able and more motivated than their non-incarcerated students, this neither explains what is going on in the classroom or why incarcerated students who were previously unsuccessful in schooling are now earning degrees.

While educators who teach secondary education classes have received slightly more attention (e,g, Cole, 2001; Zaro, 2007), the fact remains that “little has been said regarding the more nuanced interactions of teachers working in jails and prisons” (Ritchey, 2014, p. 2). The Journal of Correctional Education has existed since 1937, the focus of most articles is student-centered. Further, relying on the experiences of secondary prison educators to inform understanding of the collegiate prison classroom is problematic. For example, secondary education classes in prison can be focused entirely on preparing incarcerated students to take the GED exam, rather than receive a diploma. This is the case with Windham School District in Texas, one of the largest secondary education systems in the country. Furthermore, while all incarcerated students have either a GED or high school diploma upon entry, the variation of

education levels within secondary prison classrooms can be more extreme. An inmate with a second-grade education would never be present in the prison college classroom, but secondary correctional educators could foreseeably teach them alongside those that dropped out during their senior year of high school. Finally, the rigor of college courses is significantly higher than those in secondary education, even for those programs not focused entirely on GED preparation. For these reasons, an understanding of prison college classrooms based on literature focused primarily on secondary education ought to be treated with skepticism.

One factor, however, that secondary and postsecondary prison educators share is a distinct lack of preparation for entering the prison classroom. “Most prison teachers did not intend to teach in prison. They started teaching in prison "casually," by accident, rather than as part of a sequenced, mediated, pre service stage in a professional development program” (Wright, 2005, p. 19). At present, only one graduate degree exists in the United States with a focus on correctional education. According to Gehring and Puffer (2005), “Almost no correctional educators were professionally prepared to work in correctional education. Neither do they have access to the literature of the field of correctional education” (p. 23).

Prison educators, on the whole, exist as “forgotten professionals” (DeGraw, 1987, p. 18). Paup (1995) explained, “There is the physical and psychological isolation from other education professionals and institutions. As a corrections teacher you may work far from any city library, resources, or college campus” (p. 6). Since prisoner students cannot visit their office, prison educators have no need for office hours and will likely have no need to spend significant time in the company of their colleagues at a central location. Professors arrive at prison units individually, often at separate times, and teach apart from each other. As such, there is little opportunity for prison faculty to learn from or even relate to each other.

In summary, outside first-person accounts and studies relating to factors like job satisfaction and student perceptions, postsecondary prison educators have received almost no attention within academic literature. The information that does exist does not answer the crucial question of why inmates, victims themselves of the school-to-prison pipeline, and likely to possess an anti-education bias because of their past experiences (Cheatwood, 1988) are now succeeding in earning degrees. This study seeks to fill this gap within the literature. As Tewksbury (1994) stated, the experiences "of prison instructors, especially those in higher education, must be examined and accounted for so as to understand and maximize the benefits available for correctional systems and inmates" (p. 63).

However, given the unique environment in which educators, especially those who teach in prison, exist, certain considerations must be taken into account. Pearson (1980) explained that educators, in general, are reticent to participate in research, particularly when it is conducted by outsiders. Rather than being seen as collaborators, researchers are perceived as intruders who treat teachers as data rather than people. Once their research is concluded, they leave the classroom "never to be heard from again until their distant papers or texts are published some years hence" (p. 41).

In addition, researchers run the risk of receiving what Connelly and Clandinin (1999) called "cover stories" rather than actual accounts of teacher's perceptions (p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin described two different types of accounts teachers give, teacher stories and sacred stories, which circulate depending on the place from which they originate. Teachers' professional "landscape is composed of two fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place" (p. 2). Within the in-classroom place, teachers are more fully themselves and exercise their "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25). In

contrast, the out-of-classroom place is one in which teachers use a different discourse to make themselves acceptable to the district and to outsiders by reiterating the "sacred story" which emphasizes theory-driven pedagogy (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 3). When addressing researchers in the out-of-classroom place, teachers often utilize cover stories to preserve their acceptability. "Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories" (p. 3). In short, teachers are less likely to reveal their teacher stories to researchers and instead opt to utilize cover stories which replicate the institutional sacred story in order to preserve their careers.

In order to discover the phenomenon of effective discourse within prison classrooms, it is imperative that the lived stories of teacher experience, rather than cover stories, be discovered through interviews. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996), "lived stories are essentially secret ones. Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers" (p. 25). Therefore, my position as a prison educator myself was useful for gaining access to these stories.

Statement of researcher positionality

I am a White cisgender male in my early 30s and have been teaching in prison classrooms for the past 6 years. In terms of class, I grew up in a house below the poverty line and, through the professoriate, have become middle class in terms of income. Given that my parents were divorced before they married, our low-income level, and the area in which I grew up outside a major city in the Southern United States, there was an extreme statistical likelihood that I would, like many of the students I attended high school with, be incarcerated or deceased myself. One at least one occasion, though I was not acquainted with him then, one of my prison students had

attended my high school at the same time I did. I credit my parents' emphasis on my education, despite my father not finishing high school and my mother dropping out of college, as a primary reason that my position within the prison system is as a professor instead of an inmate.

I am, therefore, what Diversi and Moreira (2009) called a "betweener" (p. 1). "Neither here nor there, but in-between. We are not insider-outsiders but betweeners inhabiting the blur surrounding these two identities. We are not the identities on either side of the hyphen… but we live in the hyphen, we straddle the hyphen, we are the hyphen" (p. 206, internal citations omitted). My position within the hyphen between my incarcerated students and my colleagues in the prison teaching professoriate was likely be productive for this study. It allows me access, as a fellow teacher, to my colleague's teacher stories. Further, given my shared background with my students in terms of economics and educational experience, I was able to situate their stories within the context of the probable student perceptions of their actions.

Participants

My study population consists of released alumni and currently employed instructors at the Lee College – Huntsville Center. Started in 1965, the Huntsville Center is one of the nation's oldest and longest standing collegiate prison education programs (Alston, 1981). A review of the literature revealed that its creation was preceded significantly in time only by Southern Illinois University at Carbondale who began a prison college program in 1953 (Spaulding, 2011). Its founding coincided with the passage of Title IV of the Higher Education Act which provided financial aid for low-income students in what would eventually be named Pell Grants, an action Silva (1994) referred to as the "single most important event in the development of higher education for prisoners" (p. 26). In 1994, when the Violent Crime Control Act eliminated inmate eligibility for federal financial aid, 350 prison college programs were eliminated (Lahm, 2009).

The Huntsville Center was one of only a handful of programs to survive the elimination of Pell Grants and recently celebrated its 50th anniversary of prison college education.

From the beginning of the program, Huntsville Center faculty have demonstrated exceptional commitment to prison education. While the program began in the mid-1960s, it was not until 1978 that faculty members had an office in Huntsville, TX, but instead still resided at the college's main campus in Baytown, TX outside of Houston. "Throughout those years, academic faculty members made the 190-mile round trip to the center twice a week to teach classes face-to-face" (Gos, 2015, p. 337). Today, the faculty generally live in and around Huntsville, TX.

According to Jerry Alston (1981), then Dean of Instruction at the Huntsville Center, "The Lee College-TDC association aims to return men to society in a condition to assume positions of freedom in the general community" (p. 12). While the program has historically offered technical education classes where students learn professions ranging from horticulture to computer networking, the Huntsville Center has always placed an emphasis on academic classes.

> Technical-vocational courses made their first appearance during the spring semester of 1966. But the initial emphasis on academic courses in the humanities and social sciences continues in all programs based upon the rationale that such courses give prisoners a new insight into whom they are and what they may become. The assumption underlying this emphasis is that prisoners who are later confronted with ethical, social and/or political issues will be better equipped to tolerate alternative views, issues and politics. (Alston, 1981, p. 2011).

Huntsville Center students demonstrated the same qualities as students in other prison college programs including better behavior while incarcerated and a recidivism rate as low as 5%

(Alston, 1981). Additionally, Lee College is a community college, which is the most common type of college program within prisons (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Given its history, longevity, mission, results, and status as a community college, the Huntsville Center is an ideal site to study how prison education works.

Faculty and released alumni were recruited via email. In total, I had nine faculty and four alumni participate. Faculty were interviewed at the Huntsville Center office and released alumni were interviewed at a location of their choosing, mostly their homes or workplaces. All interviews were video and audio recorded for possible inclusion in the documentary film. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for discursive and rhetorical content. I also took copious fieldnotes. I also produced autoethnographic vignettes that I incorporated into the manuscript based on both my years teaching and the interviews themselves.

Chapter outline

In approaching my research question, "Why does prison education work?," I utilized three different methods in order to find an answer. As such, the next three chapters focus on ethnographic, rhetorical, and mediated methods. By employing all three, I can better analyze and triangulate an understanding of the phenomenon of effective discourse in prison education.

Chapter II explores my research question utilizing ethnographic methods. Working through an interpretive frame, I focused not on questions of truth within the work, but a deep understanding of how the participants work through their everyday lives inside and outside of the education environment. Additionally, I took steps to ensure that I am writing with, rather than about, my participants.

Prisoner voices, by institutional design, are always already muted. Upon release, the muting continues. It does little good for my project to participate in further muting by replacing

their voices with my own. As such, I heavily utilized direct quotations from the interviews. This allowed them, as much as is possible within a manuscript, to speak for themselves, rather than have me speak for them.

I also used this section to highlight the distinctions and differences between their experiences in free-world K-12 education and in prison classrooms. I developed themes that allow for a direct comparison between their experiences, which highlight and hint at the effective discourse occurring. This is not only useful in its own right, but provided the material for my rhetorical analysis in the following chapter.

Finally, I utilized my experiences in the interviews and the classroom to autoethnographically describe the prison classroom environment. Since readers are unlikely to have entered into prison classrooms themselves, this painted as clear a picture as I am able through the written word. Beyond that, an autoethnographic focus allowed me to constantly examine and check my own perceptions and biases. This approach produced a manuscript that is both readable and true to my and my participants' experiences.

Chapter III examined the research question from a rhetorical perspective. As with Chapter II, I included a number of direct quotations from the interviewees. In this chapter, however, the quotations were framed within an understanding of the rhetorical and discursive flows present within the interviews.

Specifically, I wrote about the minor rhetorics that occurred within the prison classroom, and outside of it, which help to discursively produce incarcerated students as scholars rather than as deviants. I read the interviewees comments through a critical lens against the outside rhetorics of deviance, criminality, and standardization I discussed in my literature review. This analysis

helps to shine light on the effective discourse occurring rhetorically and how the different discourses produce different results.

The texts I analyzed are primarily the interviews themselves, as well as my own experiences within prison classrooms. Rather than a textocentric model, I developed an emphasis on emplaced rhetoric. I localized the rhetoric as occurring simultaneously within both prison walls and within the classroom, paying particular attention to the tensions, fissures, and contradictions that allow for liberation.

Chapter IV examined the question from a perspective based on media theories. In this chapter, I had two primary goals. First, I extensively examined the mediated discourses surrounding prisoners and how those influence public perception. Second, I discussed the bureaucratic challenges and effects that prevented the creation of the related documentary film I planned as a means to challenge and resist these mediated discourses.

In terms of the first goal, I examined how social learning and cultivation theories enable neoliberal ideologies to pollute the image of prisoners in the minds of the general public. I highlighted the means by which the public becomes generally misinformed about the nature of prisons and prisoners and, through the repeated portrayal of prisoners as irredeemably violent, how the public becomes biased against prisoners. In terms of the second goal, I wrote about the frustrations of prison bureaucracy which prevented my ability to create a film which would have allowed audiences to consume a different discourse that resists the overtly negative perceptions of prisoners currently circulating.

Chapter V presented my conclusions. I summarized my research, situating it within the larger systems by which the minor rhetorics operate. I discussed the next steps for this research

along with how this method might be used to study other populations inaccessible by traditional rhetorical methods.

In relation to the next steps for the project, I plan to relate the project to my goals of educational praxis. That is, I am not simply looking to build theory and understanding. Instead I hope to take the research to a practical level that helps alleviate the problems discussed. By working to develop teacher training materials for both prison and K-12 educators, I am able to attack the problem on two fronts. First, I am able to provide a contribution to the best practices of prison education. Second, by helping to train K-12 teachers, I will assist in creating the possibility of helping students find a home in their educational environment that might lead them to college rather than to prison.

In addition, I wrote about the possibilities of extending participatory critical rhetoric as a method to reach and understand other muted groups. To my knowledge, the method, which is in a very young stage, has not yet been regularly utilized to access outlaw rhetorics from populations who have no means to produce the traditional texts rhetoricians analyze. I believe this method holds promise not just for the incarcerated, but for others like homeless populations, sex workers, and other disenfranchised groups outside the mainstream.

CHAPTER II

ETHNOGRAPHY

"Can we move the desks in here as long as we put them back?" I asked my students as class was beginning today.

"Sure, Mr. Keys, we can move them." They always add an 's' to the end of my name in the first few classes of the semester. Some of them keep this up the entire time. I joked back that while I'm a big guy, there's still only one of me. Names are important, I remind them, which is something they know all too well in here.

In prison, students don't have names. The guards refer to them as "Offender," sometimes followed by their surname, sometimes by their number. In my security clearance training, I was told that's how I had to call them too. I refuse to do that.

My students are not allowed to call me by my first name. In the eyes of the prison, that's becoming too familiar and risking "establishing a relationship with an offender," something that will get me booted out of here. Protocol forces them to call me "Mr. Key." I return the favor by doing the same. If a student's name is John Smith, I call him "Mr. Smith." It's the closest thing I can do to establish equality in these classrooms.

"Your name is a big part of who you are, your identity" I said. "So are labels. Today, we're going to learn about how some of those labels affect you."

Today is a first for me. We're going to do a version of the "Knapsack of Privilege" exercise. I tell the students to line up in the middle of the room and get ready for the instructions. Nervous as to how this will go but not wanting to let them see it, I clear my throat and read the first prompt.

"If your ancestors were forced to come to the USA, not by choice, take one step back."

About a third of my students step backwards. I continue.

"If your parents were professional, doctors, lawyers, etc., take one step forward."

"If you were raised in an area where there was prostitution or drug activity, take one step back."

"If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back."

I continue on. About halfway through, I hear a thud. As I look up from my paper, one of my students calls out, "My back is against the wall, Mr. Key. What do I do?"

I don't know how to answer, so I say the first thing that comes to mind: "Just stay there for right now. You might move forward in a bit." I continue reading, my eyes now locked on the paper. I don't want to look up.

"If one of your parents were unemployed or laid off, not by choice, take one step back."

"If you attended a private school or summer camp, take one step forward."

"If your family ever had to move because they could not afford the rent, take one step back."

"If you were told that you were beautiful, smart, and capable by your parents, take one step forward."

I keep reading until I finish the list. When I look up, I'm at a loss for words. Of the roughly 30 students, only 7 or 8 of them are spread throughout the room. The rest are lined up against the back wall of the classroom. God only knows how far they'd be back if it were a larger room.

While unique in its own right, the American criminal justice system owes a great portion of its foundation to the nation's history as part of the British empire. Our common law system itself, practiced in the federal judiciary and every state except Louisiana, is borrowed from the British justice system. Dayan (2011) provided an extensive history of the British criminal justice practice of civil and social death. A person convicted of a felony received three primary punishments: they forfeited their property to the crown, they lost access to their civil rights, and their blood itself was considered corrupt (Dayan, 2011). Despite their medieval origins and society's claim that it has advanced past the Dark Ages, all three punishments are still in effect in some form today. Instead of calling the practice forfeiture of property to the king, we now have laws that allow the state to seize property allegedly gained by illegal means. The United States also denies felons their civil rights, as even on release from prison, men are unable to exercise their Second Amendment right to bear arms nationwide and to cast a ballot for elected office in most jurisdictions. The final punishment, the doctrine of corruption of blood, is the most salient to this discussion. We no longer treat the physical blood itself as the source of criminal behavior, much in the same way we no longer continue the practices of 18th and 19th century doctors who treated diseases with bloodletting and leeches. Instead, the criminal justice has decided that another part of the criminal is corrupt: his mind.

Perhaps the most prevalent ideology in American corrections and rehabilitation is criminal personality theory. This understanding of the criminal mind as one that makes poor choices and is rehabilitated by forced acculturation to societal norms and values was the foundation for the programs observed by Fader (2013) in Philadelphia, Hubner (2008) in Texas, Reich (2010) in Rhode Island, and is currently practiced in the *CHANGES* program, a mandatory class provided to all adult inmates in Texas by Windham ISD, the state's prison-based secondary

school program. In all these and similar programs, inmates are taught they alone are responsible for their criminal behavior. They are taught to admit their faults, analyze their lives, and develop coping methods and strategies to not commit crimes upon release. Absent from this ideology and its resultant curricula is any acknowledgment of the various systems that intersect the lives of these men, like racism and inequality, that contribute to their lawbreaking. In short, practitioners of the theory repeatedly communicate and, in many ways, force the incarcerated to adopt the message that they are in prison because of something wrong with them personally. Criminal personality theory operates as an offshoot of neoliberalism, a philosophy that promotes fictive equality and punishes individuals that do not measure up to its standards. Any person who is not able to meet societal standards, in particular those related to being White, middle class, heterosexual, and able-bodied, are housed in penal facilities away from the rest of the populous.

My conversations with my interviewees revealed a decidedly different conclusion. The minds of these men are not the problem. The system is. In this chapter, I utilize ethnographic methods to examine my conversations about the communication environment within prison classrooms with both faculty and alumni of postsecondary prison classrooms. Interviews were conducted at the office of the instructors and in the homes of the alumni, video and audio recorded, and transcribed before analysis. I took fieldnotes following the interviews and again on reviewing the recordings. The autoethnographic excerpts are drawn from both fieldnotes taken after classes as well as journaling over the seven years that I have taught inside prisons. In my analysis, I give attention to the themes which developed from these conversations, especially in the overlaps between faculty and alumni experience. Further, I draw out comparisons between alumni prior experience in K-12 classrooms and the significant differences between those and their time in prison classrooms. Specifically, in K-12 classrooms, teachers repeatedly

communicated a sense of apathy to the students I interviewed to the point where they felt like they had no say in what was going on and that there was little point in them attending. In prison classrooms, however, prison educators communicated that students had valuable opinions and encouraged them to speak up, all the while maintain their engagement through various active means throughout the class period.

"I dreaded going to her class"

In addition to my degrees in Communication, I have 18 graduate hours in Criminal Justice, a remnant of a previous career path not fully taken. When my department chair realized this, he asked if I wanted to teach a section or two of Criminology, which would count for the students' social science and humanities course requirement. Halfway intrigued at the idea of teaching criminology to a group of criminals and halfway to say no to my department chair this early in my career, I agreed. When I accepted my chair's offer to teach the class, I wasn't sure what would happen. I definitely was not prepared for what did.

At one point during my opening lecture, I asked a question I often used in these classes, "How many of you would have gone to college if you hadn't gotten locked up?"

Of the class of nearly thirty students, less than five hands went up.

Each class, I would bring in some recent news stories about various crimes. We would open class by reading through them, then discuss whether the action the people in the story were arrested for should be considered a crime. Discussions were voracious, as students cited theories, some of which they weren't scheduled to read for weeks, to dissect the statutes and critique their basis. Sometimes, they concluded actions should not be crimes. Often, they decided that they should be.

Several weeks before each exam, I told students that exams were open note and provided them with a list of roughly 100 short-answer essay questions, telling them I would randomly pick 5 for the exam. If I had been given a similar assignment as an undergrad, I would have written a few keywords by each question and left it at that. On the day of the first exam, the majority of my students showed up with stacks of paper where they had written a paragraph to answer each of the hundred possible questions. By the second exam, all of them had done that. Prisoners are isolated from each other, spread across cell blocks, so they weren't getting together to split the work. Each answer I got was original and I made them turn in their notes with the exam. When I compared the notes to each other, it was clear no one was copying anyone else. To prepare for the exam, my students had individually written their answers.

Criminal personality theory, the basis for prison rehabilitation in Texas and the majority of American prisons, presupposes the experiences and intentions of prisoners are inherently different from the general population (Fader, 2013). In that sense, the theory always already produces the prisoner as the Other. In my experience interviewing alumni, I found this to be far from an accurate understanding of their lives.

Of all the alumni I interviewed, James Snow was my most recent student. He was released from prison a few months before our interview. In my class, he was one of the most talkative, constantly alternating between deep exposition into the material and barbs of dry wit. When I met him for the interview, he clearly hadn't lost a step. We met at my office because he wasn't comfortable doing the interview at his parents' house, where he was living. As I stepped out of my car, I heard his familiar voice yell from across the parking lot, "I knew you drove a Prius!" James always used to tease me in class for my perceived "hippy-ness," something he assigned to anyone he thought was liberal.

While adherents to criminal personality theory might assume James would have been a bad student, his recollection of his time in high school tells a different story.

> I was very good at school. So, a lot of times I was bored because I would get into class, I would get assignments done early, and I would just mess around. I was A/B honor roll my entire tenure in school. I have never had a low grade. I've never failed a class. So, school came very easy to me.

The same could be said for Jason Molinar. Jason was my student a few years before our interview. He had taken multiple classes from me and was always driven to learn. Shorter and smaller than most of his peers, Jason made an impact with his large voice and laid-back personality. We did his interview in his trailer, situated nearby to his mother's house due to restrictions on where he could live after release. Afterwards, he insisted I come inside because his mom had baked a cake when she heard I was coming. When talking about his experiences in school, Jason told me:

> So, growing up in elementary school and middle school, I was probably like above average, as far as -- a little bit above average, as far as grade goes. A's and B's. A's. I never really cared for school. I would have rather been at home, playing or just doing what I wanted. As I got into high school, I really started becoming a little more rebellious. And I was able to maintain A's, B's and C's. There was a while, like freshman and -- and sophomore year, where I was in pre-AP, you know, college prep courses and stuff like that because I qualified for that because of my grades.

Jason and James were not alone in describing their youthful academic prowess. I heard similar comments from the other two alumni I interviewed. While all four interviewees possessed

academic talents, they also shared another important quality: an almost universal negative experience in the classroom.

None of them espoused this disdain for their K-12 classroom experiences as succinctly as David Justice. David was a unique interviewee in a few ways. He was the only alumni I interviewed who was not my student. Additionally, where the other interviewees had recently been incarcerated, David was released in the early 1990s. He is now an established tattoo artist and owns his own tattoo shop, where we did the interview. When we met, he had just returned from one of many tattoo festivals he participates in yearly. He told me:

> I really hated it. I was bored all the time in school. I felt like there was a lot of redundancy and that -- I was always getting remarks from the teachers that I was staring out the door -- you know, out the windows or something, and not paying attention to what was going on. But I was always processing what was going on. I just -- I was bored. You know, like I felt like teachers stood at the -- at the front of the class and -- and pretty much went over what we were supposed to have already read. And -- and you know, and so it just didn't make sense to me, why my time was being wasted like that.

I heard similar things from Richard Warner. Released a year prior, Richard was one of my more memorable students. Never at a loss for words, Richard filled every room with an inescapable life, a feeling that was almost palpable. When I interviewed him at his home, he had just returned from a weekend fishing trip. The house smelled of cigarettes, a privilege denied to prisoners that Richard apparently picked up again as soon as he was out the door. When talking about his early education, he said:

> Like I remember my 4th grade social study teacher, she had certain classes, which wasn't the class that I was in, but she had certain classes that she would do fun and interesting

stuff, but in our class, she wouldn't do it. And I -- her class was boring. She did absolutely nothing to make it interesting. And I didn't flunk or anything like that, but I dreaded going to her class.

My interviewees, then, were capable of performing well academically. Simultaneously, they did not feel motivated to do more than the minimum of what was required in the classroom. As James put it, "in the classroom, it was more of I just did my assignments and existed." In order to better understand their predicament, it is important to understand their positive memories.

"I had a say in what was going on"

"Who would be here if they didn't have to be?" I ask my class.

"You mean there are people that actually want to go to prison?" a student asks, smiling. The class laughs and I join in.

"Very funny," I say. "But I mean my class. Who would take public speaking if they didn't have to?"

A couple hands go up.

"That's what I thought. Most of you aren't particularly excited to be here. And honestly, I don't blame you."

I pause for the collective gasp. My students don't disappoint.

"So, I figure this can go one of two ways. Either you can sit here and I can teach the class like I'm planning. It'll suck for both of us, you'll hate the class, and then you'll trash me on my evaluations. Or… you can tell me what you're concerned about and we can adjust the class so that you want to be here but you're still learning what you need to."

I'm pretty sure they didn't believe me. Prisoners aren't used to having choices. Every evening, they get slips of paper called 'lay-ins' which tell them where they're going to be. Not

showing up where they are assigned, not being in dress code, or any number of other behaviors where they exercise autonomy gets them a case written by an officer. Too many cases and they don't make parole. Making choices is risky here.

One brave soul raised his hand and brought up an issue. Than another. Then more students raised their hands. Slowly, the trickle of information became a flowing river. We probably spent an hour crafting the class together.

It is important to note that while my interviewees experienced significant distress attending school as children, there were some exceptions to their bleak classroom experiences. Specifically, most interviewees could recall interactions with teachers and other school employees where they felt motivated to learn and attend school.

Richard, for instance, spent a good amount of time talking about his third-grade teacher. He appreciated activities, like being read to, that introduced him to new material and were paired with opportunities to explore on his own. He noted:

> Like every day we would read -- she would read a book to us, a portion of a book, like we read -- so we read through Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and the Great Glass Elevator and the Great Brain series and all that. She was the teacher that influenced me the most into reading. And -- and she would actually read to us every single day. And encouraged us to read. Would -- we would take an hour out of class and go to the library and just check out a book.

Similarly, Jason expressed appreciation for teachers who found ways to relate to students on some form of equitable level. Specifically, he was motivated by teachers who did not adopt an authoritarian approach. He said:

> But the teachers that found the way to relate, to communicate, to control, keep control of their -- their students without seeming like they were being controlling, those teachers were the ones that were more pleasurable to be around. They could handle the heat and they could -- they could deal with it in ways. And you know, kids are perceptive to that.

Not all of my interviewees could recall positive experiences with teachers, however. Some, like James, found his motivation from athletic coaches. He recalled being motivated by his football coaches in his role as team manager, stating:

> There was never really anything that my teachers did that drove me to want to go to school. My football coaches, of course, drove me because there was incentive to -- to coming to practice and all of that. I was a football manager, so I was learning about cycle counting and inventory control. And I actually felt like I had some bearing on what happened with the football program. And as I accelerated in grades, by the time I was a senior, I was actually involved in, hey, what do we need to get rid of? What do we need to order? And I actually sat in on budget meetings with the athletic director. So, I enjoyed that kind of thing because I felt like I guess I had a -- a say in what was going on. I had some kind of authority and meaning.

Collectively, my interviewees were motivated to attend and excel in school by teachers and other school employees who, through their means of address and communication, recognized them not as inferiors, but as human beings. Those teachers and employees who allowed students the ability to autonomously communicate about themselves and their views were able to reach students in a manner that others were not. One of the best examples of this came with a story James told about being involved in the music program at his high school.

According to James, “in intermediate school, my choir teacher kicked me out of choir

because, instead of saying ‘you-all’ and ‘you,’ whenever we were singing, I'd say ‘y'all’ and ‘chu.’ And that irritated the ever-living crap out of her. So, she ended up kicking me out of choir.” If the story had ended there, he might have had a bitter experience in the arts, but another opportunity in musical theatre allowed him to discover talents he did not know he possessed. He recalled:

> I did musical drama in middle school and I really enjoyed that because I was able to sing and act and act out, and it was a constructive outlet. And in choir, it was more -- she had formal songs and operatics and stuff, and she wanted the very concise wording. Whereas, in drama, it was more of a free form style.

Likewise, Richard also found academic inspiration within the music department of his school. He appreciated the autonomy given to him to express himself and therefore found difficult pieces to be interesting and challenging. He noted:

> Band class, to me, was -- to me, it was fun, interesting and challenging. Because he would -- anytime he would give us a piece of music that was hard, I would strive harder and harder and harder and practice and practice and practice and practice and practice until I got it.

While the arts stimulated their creative urges, my interviewees also expressed that they enjoyed teachers who would go above and beyond to make classes interesting. Jason mentioned that there is “always something that is captivating about a person who is passionate about what they do. So, if you can sense that passion in an educator, obviously that class is going to be more enjoyable.”

This passion can be expressed in a number of ways. Richard, for instance, recalled a particularly meaningful experience in his third-grade classroom that he could still vividly recall decades later:

> One day she found this little baby rabbit at her home. Well, the average person would think, oh, it's a rabbit. But she picked up this rabbit and put it in a box and brought it to school. And we set up our desks in a big old huge circle and she set up cardboard around it, and we let the rabbit out there in -- and we fed it, got to play with it and all the different kind of stuff for one day. And then, of course, she took it back home and let it go. But that was the type of stuff that she -- every day you never knew what you were going to get because she was always going to have something fun and interesting for us to do. And then, of course, we still got all of our -- all of our work done, all of our math, English, everything we had to do was all done. But the whole day was interesting.

My interviewees, then, responded positively to teachers who kept their classrooms engaging and allowed space for students to communicate their views. Had this narrative been common within their educational experience, it is likely that they may have never gone to prison. However, these inspiring educators were unfortunately the exception, rather than the rule, of their experiences inside K-12 classrooms.

"I wasn't part of the equation"

It's one of my first semesters teaching in prison and I've introduced my new class to Minute to Win It. In order to complete it, students have to speak extemporaneously on a topic of their choosing for a minute without saying "uh," "um," or other verbal fillers. On the first day we do the exercise, I allot almost the entire three-hour class period to do it. With somewhere around 25 students, it typically takes that long to get them all through.

One of my students, a younger one who always has some sarcastic quip to contribute, is struggling more than others with this. At first, he's not alone. Most students have finished, but there remains about half a dozen students working on their 5th or 6th try. Slowly, the number begins to shrink.

6 becomes 5 and I notice him starting to look around to see how many other students are left to complete the activity.

4 becomes 3. The cocky swagger is gone from his demeanor and replaced with a wash of nervous anxiety. His voice shakes as he declares that this will be his last attempt before being successful. It isn't.

We're down to 2. The other person has been speaking for over half the time. I look around the room and excitement begins to build among his classmates. This exercise really serves to unify the class. They struggle together and when someone whose failed many times finally makes it, they erupt in cheers like their team just won the big game. As the seconds tick down, almost every student leans forward on the edge of their seat. All but my other student whose face cringes further with every passing moment. I wonder if he secretly is hoping the speaker will fail, if only so he won't be the last one.

My thought is interrupted by the timer beeping. The speaker has done it and the beep is drowned out in applause. I'm almost sure if there had been an orange cooler of Gatorade, they'd have dumped it on him. Faces light up and face towards the speaker, except for my student looking down at the floor like every kid whose been picked last for kickball.

As the speaker takes his seat and the applause fades, I look at my student. He's still looking at the floor and has made no effort to get up in front of the class. I call out to let him know it's his turn.

"I can't do this," he scoffs, flopping back in his seat with a sarcastic smirk to hide his shame. "Just give me a F."

His tone and demeanor tell me this isn't the first time he's said this. Most likely, it's worked every other time as a frustrated teacher gives up and moves on. But not today. Not in my class.

"No can do," I retort. "I'm fresh out of F's to hand out today. You'll just have to get up and make an A."

Before he can respond, his fellow students – many of them strangers to him – join in in a chorus of encouragement. Amidst the noise, I make out several variations of "ain't no quitting here," "give it another shot," and "we believe in you." One of the students stands up and bellows, in his best Waterboy impression, "YOU CAN DO IT! YOU CAN DO IT ALL NIGHT LONG!"

I don't remember how many more times it took him. What I do remember is writing the letter "A" in my gradebook next to his name.

While some teachers and school staff helped keep my interviewees engaged, more often they experienced classrooms that they did not feel at home in. As David put it, "what turned me off from school was more the -- just feeling that I wasn't part of the equation. I was just, you know, like a factor in it, but not really, you know, something critical or making a difference." Jason expressed similar disdain for his experience, discussing the struggles of lacking the same freedoms in school as he had "at home to pursue the things I wanted to pursue, you know. I didn't like being forced to do what they wanted me to do or -- or I guess maybe put in a box." David put it best, stating:

What I did not feel in high school was that I was an individual. I felt like that everybody

> was in the system and you -- there was a track and the track was college. It wasn't like who are you and where would you fit in and how -- how could we educate you so that you're where you belong or where you would like to be, where you would be happiest. I don't feel like the -- the high school did that for me. And I don't feel like it directed me towards -- towards a future. It -- it really pushed me towards a path that I didn't want to go towards anyways, and so -- so then that killed the motivation and all of that. And led me to -- to just not even care about education or academia at all.

In both interviewee's experiences, their teachers did not address them as individuals, but as part of an educational machine, expected to comply without standing out or expressing themselves.

In addition to experiencing a boilerplate approach to education where their individuality was neither valued nor considered, the interviewees were also frustrated with the teachers' assumptions that all students were progressing at the same level. Richard recalled classroom experiences where he was "saying, 'Hey, I don't understand that, I don't know how to do it,' and the teacher would just keep on going like I -- like I never had my hand up, never said nothing, would just keep on going." By ignoring Richard's request for help, his teacher communicated that he was not as capable as his classmates and that he would not receive the support he needed. By taking a one-size-fits-all approach, the teacher's silence produced Richard as a deficient piece of the educational machine. Further, being ignored was yet another way that Richard learned his communication was not valued in the classroom. As their regular classroom experience was not a place where they could meaningfully communicate on behalf of themselves, the interviewees sought other illegal means to do so.

Most of my interviewees turned to using illegal substances, including alcohol and marijuana, during their education experience. David, for instance, said "I started smoking weed

in high school. I was still getting good grades. That wasn't an issue. I was just bored. Yeah. I -- that's what -- what I remember high school is, I hated it." Jason also began using drugs in school. Instead of a cure to boredom like David, he used the narcotics to fill his urge to search for something deeper:

> I'm meeting more people, that's -- probably middle school was where I started meeting the -- the kids who had access to -- to drugs and were into that sort of thing. So that's where I got the exposure to -- to an I guess alternative lifestyle. I mean, I kind of -- you know, I really -- I liked the idea of that because it was something -- something kind of esoteric. You know, something beyond the norm. And I found like a fascination. I wanted to dig deeper into -- into something -- I felt like there was something bigger, man, than just that -- the -- the standard picture of -- of life and education and work, you know.

James, who described his younger self as "a big beer drinker," said that "the important thing for me was partying and having fun because I had been kind of a bookworm and more reclusive as far as socially, whenever I was younger" For all my interviewees, the use of illegal substances provided much needed respite from the monotony of the classroom. As David said, "I don't feel like marijuana was -- was a factor in -- in academia as much as it was just a release from academia, something to get away from it all."

Some of my interviewees, like James, were dissuaded from attending college after finishing high school by their negative experiences. As he stated, "at the opportunity of going to college, I was like, no. No, I don't want to learn anything else right now. Let's just go drink." According to James, he had a full scholarship offer to attend Texas A&M University as a football manager, but turned it down. He told me, "Because high school wasn't just a blast for me. I -- I didn't want to go into college, where it was more of the same thing." For those that did

attempt college after high school, "more of the same thing" was just what they found.

Richard, for instance, went to community college. When describing the experience, he said "I was going to El Centro, you -- you knew you were going to college and everything, but there was no -- if you didn't turn in your homework, oh, well. You know, if you were struggling, oh, well." David, who also went to college before incarceration, stated "I didn't feel like the teachers really even cared about us. Some of the classes were way too big. So, it's not like they knew you anyways. And it was like, you know, if -- sink or swim." In both K-12 and postsecondary education, my interviewees experienced classrooms that they did not feel addressed them as individuals. It would only be in prison, ironically, that they would find teachers that recognized them for who they were.

"We want to hear your voice"

"What are we doing this speech on?" a student asks me, a puzzled look strung across his face as he looks across the desk at me.

"Whatever you want to," I tell him. "It's the final speech, your last chance to speak, so you have free reign on what you're going to say."

He looks at me like I've just told him I'm from Mars.

"Yeah, you said that. But really, what are we supposed to talk about?"

"Anything you want."

"Yeah, but we can't criticize the prison or the officers, right?"

"You can totally do that."

Now he's sure I'm joking.

"Yeah, right. Like you're actually going to let me do that."

"I'm not going to let you do anything," I say, emphasizing 'let.' "This is your speech, not

mine. I'm not going to tell you what to say."

"So, I can really say whatever I want?" he asks with a somewhat assured tone.

"It's up to you. Really," I say. "Talk about whatever you feel is important."

The student nods like he understands. He turns from the desk, then turns back and speaks once more. "How do I know what's important to me?"

As previously noted, the prison system is not known for treating prisoners as individuals. Much like the education system interviewees described, but to a more extreme degree, prison treats inmates not as subjects, but as objects. Further, as Jason expressed, prisoners are treated as if they are always already inferior:

> You expect in prison, because the way you're treated by the staff and the officers and -- and generally, you know, anybody other than the other prisoners -- well, even by other prisoners -- you're -- you're -- you're treated a certain way, a sub human, I guess, sometimes is -- is -- you know, that might be -- I can't say you're treated sub human all the time, but definitely some of the time. And all the time inferior. So, you come to expect that.

In prison classrooms, however, students found a markedly different experience from both the prison environment and their previous time in education. All interviewees expressed that instructors at Lee College – Huntsville Center communicated an interest in getting to know them as people, rather than as students. David, for example, stated "I always felt like my teachers -- they knew me, they -- they knew what I was about and what I was capable of and they pushed me beyond that." Similarly, Jason told me that "they were interested in you as a student, as an individual, not -- not just -- you know, not just -- they -- they weren't there to get a paycheck. They were genuinely concerned with you." Perhaps the biggest compliment came from Richard,

who compared his instructors in prison to his beloved third-grade teacher, saying that the "teaching environment at Lee College was different than what we got in school, where the teachers actually did care about you. Like instead of having one Mrs. Huster, we had six of them."

For their part, the instructors I interviewed shared the sentiment that instructors cared about the students as people. One of the first instructors I interviewed was Amanda Devore. One of the youngest instructors at the Huntsville Center, Amanda previously taught in inner city schools before teaching English in prison classrooms. She told me that her first assignment for every class is a literacy narrative, which she explained is "a personal story about a reading or writing experience. And I learn so much about my students from those literacy narratives. And some really heartbreaking stuff. And similarly, some really encouraging things as well." Katie Wright, one of the newest additions to the Huntsville Center faculty, also creates opportunities to get to know the students in her English classes. She said that "in most of my classes there are chances for them to write parts about their lives, you know, like about their experience." Colby Oldham, a former assistant warden who retired from the prison system to become a Business instructor, noted in his interview that the students "have their thoughts and ideas and opinions like we all do. And when they're given that opportunity to share that, they -- they enjoy doing that." Kathy Smith, a retired school teacher who adjuncts for the Huntsville Center, summarized the overall teaching approach of her colleagues, saying that it's about "treating them like my neighbor because they are going to be." Collectively, the Huntsville Center faculty incorporate opportunities within both assignments and classroom discussions that not only permit, but encourage, meaningful communication by students.

New students, however, do not expect this individual treatment upon entering the college

and are often nervous about being acknowledged. As Jason stated, “going in, you know, you're not sure what to expect from these educators.” Amanda relayed an experience which effectively encapsulated this experience:

> It took three weeks my first time in Lee College to get them to start talking to me and to start speaking to one another. It -- it's a -- yeah. And I realized why, eventually, just because they're not used to being able to ask questions of an instructor or of anyone of authority. But if you don't have that kind of autonomy, if you don't realize that you have a voice as a reader and as a writer, you think you don't have anything worth saying. So, you're just going to -- when -- yeah. If you think you don't have anything worth saying, you're not going to say anything, right? And so that's also been a big challenge, is helping these students to realize they do have a voice… You have some value. You have something worth saying. But they're not told that very often, right, that you have value. You have a voice. We want to hear your voice. No one wants to hear me.

Her last sentence truly struck a chord in terms of how prisoners often view themselves in terms of their ability to communicate. In prison, their communication is often devalued and ignored. Therefore, on entering the classroom for the first time, they are wary of opening up as they are conditioned into silence and complacence by the prison environment.

Amanda was not alone in her understanding of prisoners’ conditioning. Multiple instructors I interviewed emphasized that a large part of their job is encouraging students to see their own value, something the prison system readily denies them. Judy Baker, a former drill sergeant and prison guard, expressed that she tries to instill in her students “that they can do it. You know, they say, this is too hard, I can't do it. Or whatever. You know, to continue to encourage them and just -- you know, help them where they can.” Kathy emphasized that

“Instead of living down to the expectations of others, they're finally realizing they have their own they can meet, if they just try with a little encouragement.” Cynthia Lewis, a retired school teacher who spent the bulk of her career teaching for Windham ISD inside Texas prisons, stated that students likely had “someone who said, you'll never amount to anything or -- or you can't do this or you can't do that. And -- and now, we're here, telling them you can do this and you can do that.”

Jason best summarized his experience with Lee College – Huntsville Center instructors when he said, “It really helped me feel -- even in there, where sometimes you -- you know, you question your value as a person, it helped me feel that value.” Recognizing the value of the student as an individual translated into the classroom by multiple means of communication, as discussed below.

“The worst thing I have ever tried is direct lecture”

I've always hated long speeches, both as a member of the audience and as the person giving them. The only thing worse, in my opinion, is morning classes. When I found out classes here would be three hours long, I definitely knew I wasn't going to be able to keep their attention for that long if I just got up there and talked at them.

A few semesters ago, I decided to try something new. I've always said that I'm never the smartest guy in the room, no one is. Everyone has something to teach everyone else. In that spirit, modeled after my graduate school classes, I had each student pick a section of the chapter to teach the class. They're given 15-20 minutes and the one thing I told them not to do is get up there and lecture.

Of course, a lot of them, having suffered through years of lecturing, do the only thing they know to do in the classroom: stand up in front of the class and read from the book. Some of

them, however, take the project and run with it. I've heard spoken word and poetry performances, seen innovative group exercises, and even a guy that did magic tricks. Those are the lessons that stick out in my mind. When it's my turn to be in front of the room, I try to keep them engaged with my own "magic."

One of the primary issues the alumni I interviewed addressed in their previous classroom experience was that they felt their teachers were talking at, rather than, to them. James spoke of his frustration with teachers who focused almost exclusively on lecturing, rather than engaging in conversation with the students, saying:

> If a teacher is just going to come in and say, here's what you need to know, go home and be ready for the test, why not just give me your curriculum, tell me when you need the test turned in, and I don't need to show up for class because I can read a book, write down an answer and give you a test. I don't need to come listen to you lecture for three hours to -- to get the information. If you're not going to engage me and I actually be able to answer questions and have a conversation to teach me, it kind of defeats the purpose of the class, in my opinion.

The instructors I interviewed were cognizant of the ineffectiveness of lecture in prison classrooms. Speaking about her students, Cynthia told me that "they felt like some of them were lectured to as they were growing up, always lectured, never allowed to give a response or -- or -- or to give their opinions." To her, along with the other instructors, lecturing was the cardinal sin of teaching in prison. In fact, when I asked what teaching methods were ineffective in prison, every instructor mentioned lecturing as the first issue. Baker stated, "Well, what really doesn't work is -- is just a straight lecture kind of thing, where you just show PowerPoints or just up there and read the book." Robert Matthews, a former prison guard and Windham ISD employee,

said “The worst thing I -- I have ever tried is direct lecture. I can stand and talk to them for two hours and you lose them in the first 5 minutes.” Amanda told me “I can't speak at them for three hours and expect them to retain anything that I'm going to say. It's -- it's not going to happen.” Huntsville Center instructors, on the whole, have abandoned lecturing in favor of methods that allow for more engagement.

A consistent theme among instructors when talking about effective teaching methods was creating spaces where students could express their own thoughts and opinions. Colby, for instance, advised that instructors should “keep the lecturing of the material to a minimum, and -- and -- and concentrate more on opportunities for them to have discussions amongst themselves to come up with conclusions.” Similarly, Judy described her teaching approach as trying “to get more participation from them and let them talk to me more than I talk to them.” Robert described his classroom philosophy as “more of a facilitator's approach than an instructor's approach. I never try to push lecture as much as I try to engage conversations.” Doing this, he said, lets “them start to expand on what they've researched, what they've read, what the data says, and their own experiences, you see a whole lot bigger exchange of ideas than just trying to impart knowledge.”

Students in prison classrooms are taught that their voice and ability to communicate is not just valuable in discussions, but that it can also be used to question the instructors themselves. Whereas the alumni I interviewed complained that teachers in their previous experience were unresponsive to questions and critiques from students, they found the opposite experience in prison. Jason explained this, stating:

> If there was an issue on a question or if something was unclear, if one or two people were unclear, well, y'all just need to work a little harder. If half the classroom says, hey, man,

> I didn't understand this, then they would either -- I've had professors or instructors throw the question out, and I've had them say, well, let's -- well, let's look at this and see if we can figure out what the best answer is.

The instructors I interviewed emphasized that they encouraged students to ask questions of both them and the material. This was, of course, not always easy with incarcerated students. Amanda described the students' predicament as being "in an environment where you're -- they're told constantly, don't question, just do. And in a classroom, you have to question." In order to combat this conditioning, Cynthia starts her classes "by telling them it's a virtually risk-free environment, except for all of the things that they knew are a part of the prison system that we cannot engage in." Kathy, likewise, tells her students that "if there's something that you don't understand or you don't agree with, you have the right -- and I impress on you to ask me, and we can see. Because we're adults." Kathy actually encourages students to challenge her, noting that "if you don't ever challenge, not in a negative or confrontational way, but ask, I said, how are you ever going to know?" Rather than demanding compliance, prison instructors encourage students to learn through critical thought and inquiry, even and especially of the instructors.

Throughout the process of teaching, these instructors' communicative practices helped to revalue the voices of their students, helping in some sense to re-humanize them in a system dedicated to treating them as a collective irredeemable mass. As Jason put it, "it was always refreshing to deal with somebody who you could interact with on a -- on a -- on a person-to-person level of equality, rather than, you know, trying to petition the powers that be." Treating students as people, however, was not all that was necessary for prison education to work. Instructors also actively worked to engage students in the material.

“They are not really happy with just sitting and listening”

The most awkward part of any class is the first day. In free world classes, professors traditionally go over the syllabus, describe the class, answer any questions, and then dismiss early. In prison, there’s no early dismissal. Classes meet once a week and they’re three hours long. As a result, your first day awkwardness tends to go on for what feels like an eternity.

This semester is going to be different. At least, I hope it will be. The old prison policy was that all videos, no matter the length or topic, had to be reviewed by the warden well before the class began. To avoid eating up endless hours of the warden’s time, you were restricted to only four videos a year. Most instructors, including me, avoided this entirely by just not showing videos. A couple weeks before the start of the semester, we got a bit of good news – definitely a rarity when teaching in here. The prison system had eased its policy on videos, allowing us to show short clips without prior approval. For a prison educator, it was like winning the lottery.

Instead of discussing my teaching philosophy, I’m going to show them two videos. They’re both spoken word poems about education by Suli Breaks, a British artist. I’m not sure how my students are going to react to these non-traditional videos, but I figure anything is better than an hour-long lecture. As I play them, you could hear a pin drop as my students’ eyes are glued to the screen. Afterwards, one of them asks me what the names of the videos are.

A couple weeks later, another student asks me if I have any more Suli Breaks videos. I tell him I don’t. He tells me his wife really liked them.

“Your wife?” I ask, perplexed.

“Yeah,” he replies. “I told her how to look them up when we were on the phone. She put me on speaker and played them. She really dug them.”

Prisoners in Texas are extremely limited in their ability to use the phone. Their families

pay a high rate per minute for calls and there's typically only one phone per cell block, with stiff competition to be able to use it during the few hours they have access. If he's spending his time telling his wife about my class, I must be doing something right.

Boredom was a consistent theme among my alumni interviewees when describing their experience in K-12 classrooms. In many ways, students felt they were simply going through the motions when attending classes. David, for instance, told me:

> I think it was just more of just having to sit there and -- you know, like all day long and -- and try to absorb a bunch of redundant information. I feel like high school is about -- they're going to feed you and then they want you to feed it back to them.

In this sense, the only communication that was deemed valuable by their K-12 teachers was memorization and repetition. For more active students, like my interviewees, this devalued other forms of communication they found more exciting and important. This experience directly contrasted with their memories of their time in prison classrooms. Rather than dull and boring, they often found their classes and professors both refreshing and exciting. James described it this way:

> I know that the instructors and professors and faculty inside made college very enjoyable. It was a fun and inviting and -- and educational experience. It wasn't just drolling on about this subject, and then turn in a paper or turn in this assignment. It was -- it was engaging and it was fun.

According to the alumni, faculty engaged them in the classroom in a variety of ways. For Jason, practical application was a key element in keeping him excited to attend classes. He said, "You know, you're teaching me this equation, but show me how is this equation going to improve my quality of my life, how is this equation going to help improve someone else's quality of life?"

James, on the other hand, appreciated humor. He described his experience in my class, stating that "you made it engaging… your buzzers and table banging and your jokes and -- it was just -- it was very different. There -- there's not a lot of people who can teach you something while making you laugh." Students also appreciated when faculty would show videos or engage in other creative lessons. By changing the way they communicated, faculty were able to keep students excited about attending class and encourage better academic performance.

Faculty, for their part, understood the value of communicating in a manner that kept students engaged. In large part, this stemmed from a recognition of the students' condition, particularly in relation to fatigue from other activities during their day. Prisoners in Texas start their days extremely early and, in some circumstances, have been awake for more than twelve hours when our three-hour classes begin. Katie described this, saying "if you get them in the evening, they've been up since 2:00 a.m., as most of us know. And so, they're really tired. So, it's hard for them to make themselves pay attention." Dr. William Green, a veteran instructor, explained that beyond being tired, students often "have just come from work. They have not eaten. And they have not taken showers. So, the last thing they want is to sit in class that's kind of maybe warm and listen to me talk." In order to keep students engaged, or at least awake, faculty offered a number of strategies they utilize in the classroom.

In order to fight off sleepiness, faculty often worked to give students a means to be up and moving in the classroom. Colby told me that he works to find ways for students to "be active some way in the class. They seem to be more tactile, more -- they want to be more hands-on in what they're doing." Cynthia, likewise, explained that her "students like hands-on, they like to be able to manipulate whatever it is you are working with. They are not really happy with just sitting and listening." By getting students up and out of their seats, faculty are able to keep them

interested in the material.

Similarly, as Jason said, the faculty also work to provide real world and practical applications for their materials. William told me he constantly tries to find ways to "bring in real life applications that has something to do with the research or the literature that you're teaching, it kind of like broadens their interests." Judy shared the same philosophy, telling me that she's "trying to incorporate as much realism as far as how they would do some things on the outside." Other faculty, like Vann, bring in copies of news stories for students to read. One particularly popular assignment has students pick stocks and then follow them throughout the semester to see how their mock investments played out.

Faculty also make extensive use of visual and auditory media. Media access is extremely restricted in prison, as students often only have access to a television in crowded day rooms where the program watched is decided by vote. As such, they often see far more movies than anything. For those that have more control over the media they watch, their options are still limited. At one unit where prisoners have televisions in their cells, due to a lack of day rooms, the only national news channel available is FOX News. William explained that "the prisoners really like more -- more video, podcasts, YouTube type instruction in contrast of sitting and they being lectured for three hours." Amanda described showing "videos about vague like language from MAD TV that are hilarious and, you know, letting them -- trying to translate that into something more concrete." Students are also typically enthralled by watching TED and TEDx talks. When TED was added to the content in our computer labs, study hall monitors reported many students would watch TED Talks for the entirety of the three-hour study hall. While the excitement over TED and TEDx Talks might seem counter-intuitive to their disdain for lecturing, the choice to view seems to stem more from their ability to choose to watch a video rather than

be forced to endure a lecture from a live person.

By working to keep students active, classrooms became spaces of engagement rather than spaces of boredom. When students were excited to be in class, they were more motivated to participate and put more effort into their classwork, both inside the classroom and outside of it. For all of its effects, however, engagement was not the most powerful force motivating academic achievement in incarcerated students. Rather, it was the realization that instructors legitimately cared about them.

"They didn't have to be there"

A couple years ago, I started a debate team on one of the units. It's a project I'd wanted to do for a while, but kept getting told no. I recruited an initial group of students and started practices. From week to week, students were progressing at an exponential rate. I had coached national champions before, but I had still never seen any group improve so much so quickly. As it turns out, they were using every spare moment to practice. From down time to signing up for meetings and programs to get practice space to even using a corner of the recreation yard while everyone else was playing basketball.

The day of the debate came and I was confident, but also seriously nervous. I knew my students would do well, but would it be enough to win? We collected the ballots from the judges. My assistant coach counted them first, telling me we'd lost by a single vote. As I was sitting there, feeling a mixture of pride and disappointment, something told me to check the ballots again. We were debating Texas A&M on the Affirmative side. Two ballots said "Lee," two ballots said "A&M," but the last one… said "Aff." I think my assistant coach must have seen the A and counted the vote for the other team.

I announced that they'd won the round. The team jumped up and erupted into cheers. My

assistant coach told me later that he was worried when the students were excited, because prisons can often overreact. Then he looked back and saw the warden jumping up and down and figured it was okay. I choked back tears when I told them how proud I was of them. As it turns out, I wasn't the only one feeling those kinds of emotions. Weeks after the debate, I received a letter from one of my students. In part of it, he wrote:

> *I want to formally say "Thank You!" Thank you from the bottom of my heart. My family and society has written me off. As a drug addict who turned to robbery to suicidal binge, I have worked hard for many years to retrain my brain, my thinking, my coping mechanism.*
>
> *It took everything I had to maintain composure on that stage when we won. I almost lost total control emotionally we had accomplished something so difficult, something that seemed impossible to most. But you not only believed, but knew we could win. The feelings of worth, value, confidence are immeasurable. You gave that to me. I felt like a human, a person that actually mattered, after not mattering at all, to anyone.*

Perhaps the most telling thing about the interviews I did with alumni was that they believed, with rare exceptions, that their K-12 teachers did not care about them. To them, as Jason put it, instructors were "just there to collect a paycheck." Classes in prison offered them something distinct, instructors that they knew they mattered to, that valued them. Amanda powerfully described this from the faculty perspective, saying:

> I love every single faculty member that I work with here because you're here -- you want to be here. You're not here because this is the only job you could get, right? You don't get pat-searched before you go to class just because it's fun. You're here because you bought into the program. You believe in these students. And you want to -- to make a

difference. And the students know that. Like they can feel it.

Amanda was right. The students could definitely feel it. James said, “I would say that the Lee College teachers that I had experience with cared more about us.”

A primary way that instructors communicated their care for their students was holding them to high standards while simultaneously telling them they were capable of meeting those standards. Describing an experience in my class, Richard stated:

> there was a person that was in our speech class that I thought was going to flunk. And he was from the trustee camp. And he actually got a B. And that's because you encouraged him and that's because you -- I don't know how you made him into a better student, but you did.

I was not the only instructor who had this kind of impact on Richard. He told me about another class, where he hadn’t lived up to his usual standard of academic performance:

> I got a B on the test. I never got Bs. I always got As. Everybody was wanting to sit next to me because they always wanted to cheat off me. And he called me up there to give me my test, and -- and he looked at it, and he says, I really expect more from you. Guess what? Next test was back to an A. I studied a little bit harder.

It was his teacher’s communicating a belief in him that motivated Richard to work harder. As he put it, “the teachers care about us. And they get disappointed and hurt if we flunk. Where if you grew up in the free world, they -- well, we'll see you next semester. Big difference.” In K-12 and even college education, students found professors that were unbothered if their performance slipped. In prison, they found the opposite. As Jason said, “in Lee College, in prison, it was -- it was like, no man left behind.”

Beyond the belief in the students, my interviewees also expressed that their presence in

prison classrooms was, itself, significant in demonstrating they cared for the students. Amanda was correct when she told me, "They know that you want to help." For Jason, teachers choosing to work in prison eliminated all excuses he had for not working as hard as he could. He told me:

> It's hard work. It's hot. It's dirty. You don't have proper attire, you know. You're in your prison clothes. And these guys, they could easily go sit -- the instructors could go sit in the office, but they're in there, man. They're in there with you. They're sweating it out. They're bearing the heat. They're putting in the work… And so, then you have no excuse. You know? You can't say it's -- it's too hot or it's too hard. Because this man who doesn't even have to do it is right there in you -- right there in it with you, you know.

Richard also acknowledged similar motivation from the presence of professors inside prison. He said he was moved because "we have people like you -- you could be a professor at any university in the United States, and you know that, and where are you a professor at? Eastham, Gatesville."

One of the most moving moments of all my interviews came from Jason. We had finished the interview, but he asked me to turn the camera back on because there was something else he wanted to say. Normally a stoic person, I was stunned when he began crying during this final statement. To honor his powerful statement, I will take the unusual step of presenting his words in their entirety:

> It's not comfortable. It's not a desirable place to be or work. And yet, in spite of all the nonsense that -- that these teachers have to deal with having to do with security and the -- just the whole -- the whole discomfort of the whole environment of the whole thing, in spite of all of that -- I mean, they can go get a job somewhere else that's much more comfortable and much more accommodating, but they don't. They choose to go into

> these places, these dark, hard, crappy places and teach this material.
>
> And to me, that -- that really showed -- that really showed a passion and a concern for the student. They didn't have to be here. You didn't have to be in there. You don't have to go there. And it would be easy for a person, or for an educator to say, hey, you know what, I don't like this place. It's uncomfortable. I'm going to teach somewhere else. Or I'm going to go do something else. But in spite of all of that, they put -- they put aside the -- the discomfort and the -- and the nonsense that goes on with having to come in and out of prisons, they put all that to the side, to still -- to go and to minister, to teach, to educate these students. And that -- that in itself is a powerful thing that sets these educators apart from other educators. And the -- the students, they see that, they perceive that. These guys are coming in here, they're giving their time to be in this place with us.

As Jason put it, prison education is effective when students are actively aware that their instructors care about them. Therefore, the act of showing up is itself a means by which instructors communicate care to students. This is accomplished both by holding them to high standards, but also by the instructor's presence itself.

"We are not following the standards"

Teaching in prison was actually my first teaching job. The only other time I'd been in charge of a classroom was one semester where I taught as a graduate assistant while working on my Master's. While I received several hours of training for the job, none of it had to do with teaching. My training consisted of security briefings, telling me to never make physical contact with students in the classroom and what to do in a hostage situation (which, incidentally, has not happened in Texas prisons since the 70s).

I was never given a syllabus. I was issued copies of the textbooks we would be using and

a copy of policies to include, but told that it was my responsibility to write the syllabus myself. There were no other Speech faculty, so I had no one to ask how to write one.

As the semester progressed, no one checked on my progress. We had precisely one meeting every semester and it was right at the beginning. My department chair never observed me. Even student evaluations were mostly just administered by me, though I did step outside the classroom to let them fill them out. Ironically, I was less surveilled in prison than I was anywhere else I've taught.

To summarize, my conversations with both alumni and faculty yielded significant insight into why prison education is effective. When students were in K-12, they felt as if they were inconsequential to both their teachers and the education process in general. Rather than having their autonomy and individuality respected, they were faced with a one-size-fits-all approach that demanded behaviors that were foreign to them. Cynthia, a former K-12 teacher, described her own frustration with the education system which closely aligned with my interviewees' experiences:

> And it's all about how we are born with so many gifts and so many talents. And our brains are fed and nurtured until we get to kindergarten. And then, from then on it's norm, norm, norm, norm, norm. We -- we don't want you to be a flower in the garden, while everyone else is a cucumber. We want you all to be -- and so, education goes through -- through that -- those stages and -- and people are not -- they're not respected for their talents or for their abilities. It's you learn what I tell you to learn. We are going through this. Year by year by year by year. And -- and you just have to do it that way.

Prison education, conversely, did not focus at all on the enforcement of normative behavior. Instead, instructors worked to provide spaces for students to express themselves, both in their

assignments and in voicing critiques and questions to the instructors themselves. Further, they worked to make classrooms engaging places to be. Most of all, students were constantly aware that their instructors cared deeply about them.

One reason that the instructors expressed that this was possible was the relative autonomy of teachers within prison classrooms. As Kathy said, “. We are not -- we are not following the standards. And I taught public schools and -- and I know that -- well.” Cynthia expressed disdain for the ever-changing requirements given to public school teachers, telling me, “Every year we had changes, changes, changes. We were going after what other states were doing. We were not sticking with things that I thought were working.” What makes prison education different, according to Kathy, is that “we can concentrate on education. We don't have to teach to the tests. We don't have all the political things that go on involved with classroom environment and public schools.”

The most remarkable insight I gained is that prison instructors are, seemingly unknowingly, recreating Freirean critical pedagogy. Freire’s primary complaint about the banking model of education was that it suffered from “narration sickness” (Freire, 1972, p. 21). These instructors, who advocate abandoning lecturing, have successfully immunized themselves. Further, as Jason’s comments about being treated as a semi-equal indicate, instructors assume the role of co-investigators, as Freire demanded.

I call their recreation of Freire’s work unknowing because the instructors I interviewed had never read or even heard of Paulo Freire. Yet, their practices and even language aligned closely with his concepts. Cynthia, for instance, told me “It's not like I'm the authority and -- and they're just the people who are there waiting for me to pour something into their heads. Because that's not my intent.” This almost directly mirrors Freire’s critique of the banking model, where

he said “Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated account. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teachers” (Freire, 1970, p. 91)

It is, in retrospect, not surprising that prison instructors would develop similar practices as Freire. Freire did not set out to develop his critical pedagogy. Instead, it was a natural consequence of his teaching environment. Working to teach literacy to extremely impoverished children in Brazil, Freire had few if any traditional teaching resources to work with. All he had were his students, ones who received little good from traditional Western models of education. In much the same way, prison instructors work with few resources with a student population that was rejected by Western education systems. Like Freire, they built their model of teaching by relying on the only resource they had: the students.

Understanding prison education ethnographically, while important, is only the first step. In order to provide a more in-depth analysis, I must also understand the discourses circulating in both K-12 and prison classrooms. In the next chapter, I use critical rhetorical methods to investigate said discourses.

CHAPTER III

RHETORIC

I always thought the idea of education was to learn to think for yourself.

Haft, Weir, Thomas, & Witt, 2004

This quote from the late Robin Williams, playing teacher John Keating in the classic motion picture Dead Poets Society, is summative of both the character's and the film's philosophy of education. Keating's struggle throughout the film is best characterized as a conflict between two competing ideologies. As an independent thinker, Keating encourages his students to critically and creatively engage with the subject matter of their studies in an effort to form their own opinions and become actualized as human beings. As a critical pedagogue, his presence becomes increasingly disruptive to the hegemonic norms practiced within the educational establishment of Welton Academy. The referenced quote comes at the conclusion of a conversation where the school's headmaster, Mr. Nolan, questioned the wisdom of one of Keating's exercises which explored the dangers of conformity, an unspoken yet pervasive value within the school. Nolan remarked, "Well, John, the curriculum here is set. It's proven. It works. If you question it, what's to prevent them from doing the same?" (Haft et al., 2004).

In the end, Welton Academy prevailed in the ideological struggle. At the film's conclusion, Nolan coerced Keating's pupils into falsely implicating him in the tragic suicide of one of their classmates and used their statements as a means of terminating his employment. Despite the same students standing on their desk to salute Keating on his exit in the now iconic final scene, Nolan ultimately took over his course and immediately restored the previous anti-

critical curriculum and Keating was left unemployed. In short, Keating did not belong within the discursive structures of Welton Academy.

While Welton Academy is fictitious, it provides a metaphor for the rhetorical landscape of the American education system. A belief in the way students ought to conduct themselves and be taught is so pervasive within American schooling as to silence and expunge those voices that would threaten its pristine rhetorical landscape. Here, I work to expose the machinery of this function of the education system, while showing how the inner workings of prison education challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of the system to produce a different result. In this chapter, I utilize participatory critical rhetoric as a means to enter into and criticalize K-12 and prison classrooms. In doing so, I deconstruct "ideologies of domination and technologies of justification" that welcome some and exclude others into the education system (Moreira & Diversi, 2011, p. 232). Utilizing my ethnographic interviews and fieldnotes as text, I unmask the discourses which produced my students as deviants within the K-12 system and those which produce them as scholars inside the postsecondary prison education system.

The past is present

Moreira and Diversi (2011) asked "where are the missing bodies in American education?" (p. 235). I contend that many of these bodies are confined to prison. My students, however, were not born missing. They had lives, histories, existence that existed prior to their incarceration. To understand the students they are now, I must first understand the students they were before they entered my classroom. Therefore, any understanding of the rhetorical conditions that enable them to be produced as scholars must begin with their past conditions in the K-12 education system.

Schools are not the neutral temples to learning they claim to be. In addition to teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, schools exist as a primary means for society to inculcate students into adopting its norms. Foucault (1977) discussed how schools are sites of ideological perpetuation through the method of education. B. Alexander (2007) explained that the educational process "is a quintessential site for cultural proliferation and acculturation" (p. 307). Cooks and Warren (2011) took a more direct approach to describing the nature of education as training "bodies to behave in socially sanctioned ways" (p. 211). In this way, students are not only learning the content of their classes, but are being quietly indoctrinated to accept the educational system's ideology. Ladson-Billings (2000) stated that educational institutions produce "individuals who internalize the dominant worldview" and that, as educational institutions are societally trusted sources whose role is to explain the allegedly objective nature of reality, "the hegemony of the dominant paradigm makes it more than just another way to view the world—it claims to be the only legitimate way to view the world" (p. 258).

Those who resist socialization become a threat to the hegemonic order and are subject to rhetorical containment through exclusion. Poirot (2009) explained that "containment rhetorics attempt to tame the threat of alternative views through discipline and confinement, clearly articulating the other as outside of the dominant values and structures of U.S. culture" (p. 266). In the case of the American school system, the containment rhetoric utilized is best explained by New Censorship Theory. "New Censorship Theory sees censorship as a diffuse, ubiquitous phenomenon in which a host of actors (including impersonal, structural conditions) function as effective censors" (Bunn, 2015, p. 27). Butler (1997), for instance, conceptualized censorship as any means "the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable" (p. 137).

New Censorship Theory traces its roots to the works of Karl Marx, who was the first to challenge the traditional notion of censorship. Also known as the liberal model, the traditional conception of censorship is "as *external*, *coercive*, and *repressive*. Censors are authoritative social actors, extrinsic to the communicative process, who deploy coercive force to intervene in the free exchange of ideas to repressive effect" (Bunn, 2015, p. 29). Traditional censorship, then, exists as the diametrical opposition to and perceived threat against free expression. Marx's problem with such an understanding was that it both presupposes that free expression truly exists for citizens of any nation and assumes that it will exist unrestrained in the absence of direct state censorship. Instead, Marx decentered the state as the primary producer of censorship. Instead of relying on official means including actual or potential violence, those in the dominant group are able to activate other channels to covertly censor speech and ideas that runs counter to their hegemonic power structure. For Marx, this was done through the means of ideology, a purposeful work of distortion meant to obscure the means by which power operates and control the means of knowledge production. The end of both of these goals is that members of a society will not only behave in specific ways, but internalize "specific socially sanctioned beliefs and structures" (Bunn, 2015, p. 34). This concept was expanded by Gramsci's (2000) explanation of hegemony as "a consensus of thought that naturalizes historically contingent social relation" (Bunn, 2015, p. 35).

This form of hegemonic power cements together nicely with what Althusser (1972) referred to as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). ISAs are distinct in form, though not in purpose, from Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA). RSA's involve the use or threat of force by the state to maintain control, where ISA's are a form of social conditioning which reproduce power through interpellation, or the creation of subjects. That is, ISAs do not just censor

messages themselves, they instead produce individuals incapable of speaking the objectionable messages. Traditional censorship is a form of RSA, while New Censorship is an ISA.

Continuing the metaphorical conversation, Foucault (1990)[3] provided a more thorough explanation for New Censorship, writing:

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. (p. 27)

This determination of authorized discourses is illuminated through Bourdieu's (1991) discussion on the production of language. Bourdieu examined language as a result of the tension between linguistic habitus, "a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive interest) and a certain capacity to speak," and "structures of the linguistic market, which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorships" (p. 37). Speaking of sanctions, Foucault (1990) explained that, "There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (p. 27). Theses silences are the effect of silencing, the subtler form of New Censorship as a means to control discourse. Foucault recognized that the distribution of power was not from the top down, but functioned from a multitude of angles. "Instead of ideology proceeding from a unitary source, we have discourse proliferating from multiple, diffuse sites of power, organized around authoritative bodies of knowledge and the institutions formed to cultivate and disseminate them" (Bunn, 2015, p. 37).

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[3] I cite Foucault here in reference to this section alone. While I understand he did not believe ideology could be unmasked, as I do later in this chapter, his work is crucial for understanding the silencing of students.

Butler (1997) took this concept to its ultimate end, arguing that censorship was not only productive, but necessary for communication. She stated that "for a text to become readable, it must be produced through a process of selection that rules out certain possibilities and realises others" (p. 129). That is, a speaker chooses his or her words "only in the context of an already circumscribed field of linguistic possibilities" (p. 129). For Butler, New Censorship, which she referred to as foreclosure, is always-already operating in a manner that is not only "tied to the circumscribed production of the domain of the speakable" (p. 139) but "whose operation makes possible the formation of the subject" (p. 138).

Collectively, New Censorship Theory demonstrates a different form of regulation of discourse which allows the state to control speech without resorting to traditional censorship. Instead of outright repressive and aggressive action, New Censorship works by utilizing a variety of sources to not only prohibit certain forms of speech, but subjects that are only capable of particularized discourses.

While some prisoners were subject to the RSA of expulsion, many others are rhetorically contained through the ISA of New Censorship. Some of those respond to this containment by dropping out of school, while others like my interviewees become disconnected from the school system and fail to continue their education after completing high school.

One means by which schools rhetorically contain deviants is by the policing of the language students use. James, for instance, recalled being removed from choir for his pronunciation of words. As he told me, "instead of saying 'you-all' and 'you,' whenever we were singing, I'd say 'y'all' and 'chu.' And that irritated the ever-living crap out of her. So, she ended up kicking me out of choir." In the already circumscribed view of the education system, James' choice of language was unsuitable, and therefore unspeakable. By forcing him to adopt their

language, teachers sought to either produce James as a student who communicated according to their values, or not a student at all. Therefore, not only was James contained through the RSA of removal from choir, but he and his fellow classmates received the lesson, via the ISA of New Censorship, that their language was unacceptable in school.

Moreira and Diversi (2010) expressed their angst against the regulation of scholarly language and its accompanying ability to silence the voices of the oppressed, stating "I am told I can't write about my experiences until I can use language like the privileged!" (p. 459). (Freire, 1970) addressed the oppressive qualities of language policing by the academy, writing:

> It is necessary to respect students' language, its syntax and its semantics. It is this respect that is not present when we disregard or minimally regard the discourse of children from subordinate classes. Particularly when we more than insinuate and make our dislike obvious for the way those children speak, the way they write, the way they think, by labeling their speech inferior, and incorrect. It is precisely this that takes place in the so-called multicultural societies where language and hegemonic cultures smash and belittle the language and culture of so-called minorities. (pp. 134-135)

It was within this same spirit that Moreira and Diversi (2011) claimed that "only those with the 'right' language, identities, resources, and theoretical libraries can advance through the educational system without justifying their right to be there" (p. 234).

As Nance (1989) noted, these hegemonic practices of conformity tend to punish culturally different students the most. Rather than a degree being evidence of "their intelligence, desire to learn or will to succeed," it instead is a marker of "their ability to successfully master the [school's] 'way' of being" (p. 14). Bartholomae (1985) explained that in order to be academically successful, "students must learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on

the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (p. 403). Rhetorically, this punishes a student for his or her cultural diversity, while insisting the hegemonic standard is normal or professional. "When teachers condescendingly explain to students that a particular ethnic style of communication is inherently ok but can only be used outside of the classroom, then the real lesson for the day is intolerance" (Nance, 1989, p. 23). As students from culturally different backgrounds often have patterns of speech and thought that diverge from the academic hegemony, they simultaneously have their own culture devalued and struggle more to complete their courses.

Entering prison

On this day, like many others, I've just left shakedown. Much like getting on an airplane, you take off your shoes and belt and put all your belongings through a scanner. You walk through a metal detector, then get a thorough pat search from one of the gray-suited guards. At first, it's invasive having a stranger's hands probe all over you. In time, it just becomes part of the job.

Today, I'm not even thinking of the uncomfortable contact as I head past a line of offices. The warden, the chaplain, and numerous secretaries stay here. Despite the flat concrete floor, the rest of it might as well be a hallway in any business building in the country. The walls are lined with framed awards and certificates and interspersed with photos of employees and announcements about bake sales. I turn the corner and see the main picket in the distance.

Main picket is the central entrance to the prison. It's painted metal bars are where the office borders the prison. On my side, everything is wooden, painted, and polished. On the other, it's a labyrinth of red brick and gray metal.

On this day, I happen to look above me as I'm headed towards the gate. Something catches my eye. I don't know if these signs have always been here and I never noticed or if they're new. Hung with transparent fishing wire, these words seem to hover above all who pass through the gates: Competence, Commitment, Compliance, Complacency.

Somehow, I don't think the last two espoused values are for the employees.

The system doesn't care if the prisoners are competent and they certainly give no regard to whether they achieve competence. What they do expect – what they demand at the end of a baton and a can of mace is that prisoners comply without complaint. These qualities, of course, are the opposite of what makes a good student.

Prisons are, in some sense, a more extreme version of the inculcation of the American school system. In both places, people are not treated as individuals, but as members of a mass of bodies in need of societal training and correction. Schedules dictate, without regard to the individual's choice, the spaces each body will occupy and the activities it will complete at as assigned time. Teachers taking roll is replaced by guards counting inmates. In both situations, an absence from the place the authority has designated is met with consequences that result in a reduction of freedom. Where teachers write students up and send them to the principal's office and detention, guards write prisoners "cases" and send them to the warden and to segregated cells, better known as "the hole." Even physical education is replicated by the rec yards, which in many ways resemble high school athletic complexes complete with basketball courts, running tracks, and weight machines. The primary difference is that while both K-12 students and prisoners are rhetorically contained, prisoners are also physically contained within the walls of the prison/

Perhaps the only place within the walls of prison that is fundamentally different from K-12 schools is, ironically, within the classroom. In the previous section as well as the literature review, I analyzed the discourses in the American education system that produced my students as deviants. I explained that the pressure to confirm communicated to students that they were deficient for their failure to abide by the cultural standards of the education system, thereby removing them through either a RSA in the case of expulsion or through an ISA in the case of disengagement and dropping out. Here, I will examine the counter discourses that circulate throughout prison classrooms which produce them as scholars. The two primary discourses I identified are a rhetoric of individuality and a rhetoric of care. Combined, I argue in this chapter that prison education works because instructors enact a rhetoric of love.

Discourse of individuality

In both their status as prisoners and their previous experiences inside K-12 classrooms, my alumni interviewees were treated as the Other. Originating in Said's (1978) work, *Orientalism*, Othering is a term adopted in the literature to explain the process by which hegemonic groups dehumanize those who fall outside the mainstream. According to Said, members of the dominant cultural group associate themselves with Normality, while classifying the Other as part of Abnormality. To be the Other, then, is to be perceived as "backward, degenerate, and inferior to the mainstream Western standard" (Winslow, 2010, p. 259). The process of Othering, which Bach (2005) referred to as organizational irrationality, is "a form of disenfranchising, discounting, or marginalizing" that reduces individuals whose culture falls outside the hegemonic majority to "a cipher, or non-person" (p. 259). Jason, for instance, expressed his experience in how guards and other prisoners would treat him as "a sub human, I

guess, sometimes is -- is -- you know, that might be -- I can't say you're treated sub human all the time, but definitely some of the time. And all the time inferior."

Whether in prison or in the classroom, the Other experiences a fundamental exclusion from the rest of society. "Individuals or groups are socially 'excluded' when they lack effective participation in key activities or benefits of the society in which they live" (Razer, Friedman, & Warshofsky, 2013, p. 1152). This exclusion, according to Young (1990), occurs through the process of domination of the Other by the majority group. Rather than view domination as a top-down process, Young took a post-structural approach to reveal how domination occurs through a multitude of processes stemming from all directions. Irving (2010) expounded on Young's dimensions of oppression, defining them as:

> • exploitation: the inequitable transfer of labour benefits from one group to another
>
> • marginalisation: the exclusion of particular groups of people from useful participation in social life
>
> • powerlessness: a lack of authority status, autonomy, sense of worth and voice
>
> • cultural imperialism: the imposition of dominant values through stereotyping of behaviours, which not only devalues the cultural expressions and experiences of oppressed groups but also imposes a dominant view of how the world, and cultural life, should be seen
>
> • violence: the fear of real or implied violence that is prompted by a desire to inflict harm on group members. (p. 16).

In particular, my interviewees statements expressed experiences of cultural imperialism, marginalization, and powerlessness.

As discussed previously, students experienced cultural imperialism through methods like language policing. Marginalization and powerless, however, were experienced in much more nuanced ways. Consider, for instance, James' statement that "in the classroom, it was more of I just did my assignments and existed." James, like the other interviewees, did not feel as though they had any meaningful contribution to the classrooms they were housed in. David, likewise, told me about "just feeling that I wasn't part of the equation. I was just, you know, like a factor in it, but not really, you know, something critical or making a difference in the equation." Collectively, my interviewees felt as though they had no choice, no autonomy, and no voice as students in K-12 classrooms. In their experience, a teacher was not there to help them, but instead as an authority figure who "presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence" (Freire, 1992, p. 72). These experiences are the hallmarks of being marginalized and powerless. To them, their education was not something that they did, it was something that was done to them.

In prison classrooms, however, they experienced a different discourse. Instead of being dominated by a discourse that regarded them as the Other, they entered a space "where the student can transform themselves as well as the world they encounter in positive ways. The teacher regards the student as a whole person and engages him or her from that perspective" (Miller, Irwin, & Nigh, 2014, p. 3). Mayes and Williams (2012) explained this type of education as "an attitude *toward* the student, not a program *for* him" (p. 111, emphasis original). The discourse in prison classrooms, then, was that the student was a whole person with knowledge and experience capable of meaningfully contributing to and participating the classroom environment. This discourse of individuality was recognized through moderation of authority by instructors, promotion of equality, and the recognition of student autonomy.

Moderating authority

Freire (1998) argued that “I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with ever greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand” (p. 99). The instructors I interviewed were aware of their position of power within the classroom as well as students’ past experiences with negative authority figures. As such, they took steps to moderate their authority. One anecdote recounted by Amanda illustrated this point:

> So, I'm asking questions and fielding questions and they're not responding. So, I tried to do the interactive stuff that I would do at Lone Star, right? Because I always want it to be interactive. But they weren't ready to interact with me. And I even had a student, two weeks ago, at Walls Unit, again, tell me -- they were in group work, and I was going around to see, you know, who needed help and what it was. And he said, "If you would leave, they would start talking again." And it was a 302 student. So, he had already been through one semester of developmental, and so he was -- he's about ready to exit out of the program. So, I come around and, you know, we're only in our second week in class, and he looks at me, he says, "If you would leave, they would start talking again," of which, I thought was great. Because he felt like he could say that to me, for one thing, that he felt like we were okay. Like he -- you can do that. And secondly, he was right because I left and they started. Okay. And they were going over their work. They just -- my presence there, that authority, I guess, and maybe because I'm a woman, they weren't going to start speaking in front of me.

This narrative illustrates two methods the prison instructors utilized in order to approach students as whole people. First, instructors recognize that past experience with authority figures has the effect of inhibiting student expression. As such, instructors like Amanda have learned that they

can often encourage students to use their voices by stepping away, as not to intimidate them.

More important, however, is the creation of an environment where students feel free to critique instructors and remind them of student needs. In her anecdote, Amanda noted the benefit from her student feeling free to advise her to back away, something they would not be free to do to a prison guard nor were they able to say to a K-12 teacher. By learning from her student where to stand, Amanda was better able to encourage students to enter the class as individuals.

Equality

Knowing one's place as an instructor is meaningless if that understanding still places students in a subordinate role Freire (1970) asked

> How can I dialogue if I project ignorance on others and never perceive my own… [or] consider myself a3 member of the in-group of pure 'men,' the owners of truth and knowledge… [or] I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of the elite… [or] if I am afraid of being displaced? (p. 90).

It is clear, then, that from a Freirean perspective, education is impossible between unequal members of society. Rather than being a place of defined hierarchy, Freire (1970) argued that the classroom is instead "the point of encounter" where "there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know" (90). The comments from both the faculty and alumni interviewees highlight this same discourse of equality within the confines of prison classrooms.

Kathy, who emphasized that she treated her students like her neighbors, tells her students that "if there's something that you don't understand or you don't agree with, you have the right -- and I impress on you to ask me, and we can see. Because we're adults." Likewise, Amanda, as with the rest of the instructors I interviewed, encourages students to express their opinions,

telling them, “You have some value. You have something worth saying. But they're not told that very often, right, that you have value. You have a voice. We want to hear your voice.”

This type of discourse “allows students to bring their own lived experiences into discussions, offering them opportunities for participation, engagement in higher levels of reading and discussion, and to understand the power of language” (Bell Soares & Wood, 2010, p. 487). Subhumans are not allowed to question the direction of the majority, nor are their experiences viewed as something to be valued. In prison classrooms, students are produced as scholars through their ability to express those things that are important to them without fear of repercussion.

Autonomy

Freire (1970) explained that when students “apprehend the challenge as interrelated to the other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated” (p. 81). The recognition of these contexts is crucial to the recognition of students’ condition and ability to meaningfully make choices. As Held stated, avoiding domination “requires us to pay attention to, rather than ignore, the material, psychological, and social prerequisites for autonomy. Persons without adequate resources cannot adequately exercise autonomous choices” (p. 37). Instructors in prison classrooms recognize these conditions and utilize them to create spaces for students to exercise their autonomy.

Cynthia, for instance, explained that her “students like hands-on, they like to be able to manipulate whatever it is you are working with. They are not really happy with just sitting and listening.” William works to “bring in real life applications that has something to do with the research or the literature that you're teaching, it kind of like broadens their interests.” According

to Robert, he works as a facilitator to allow students to express their own choices, saying that allows ""them [to] start to expand on what they've researched, what they've read, what the data says, and their own experiences, you see a whole lot bigger exchange of ideas than just trying to impart knowledge."

These methods, while allowing for autonomy generally, also take into account students' conditions in order to be effective. My interviewees were aware that students entering class were often tired and hungry, due to the time classes were scheduled. As such, more activity was emphasized over direct lecturing, the latter being universally panned by the instructors I interviewed. By recognizing the realities of their students' lives, instructors were able to better create opportunities for them to make choices.

Discourse of care

Circulating a discourse of individuality is not enough in and of itself to produce incarcerated students as scholars. Returning to Reich's (2010) work, the Game of Outlaw, which results in a rejection of the K-12 education system, provides ample opportunity for the expression of individual autonomy. My interviews revealed a second discourse that was equally crucial to their performance as scholars in prison classrooms: a rhetoric of care. That is, it is not enough that instructors recognized them as individuals, they must also realize that instructors cared about them as individuals.

Caring is more than words

Not all care, however, is created equal. Toshalis (2012) critiqued the deficiencies of care evident in some teaching practices. It is important to note that Toshalis, who is a scholar of education and not a rhetorician, mislabeled the phenomenon "the rhetoric of care" (p. 2). In his essay, he used the terms "aesthetic care" and "rhetorical care" interchangeably with "rhetoric of

care," utilizing the common understanding of rhetoric as mere words without accompanying actions. To illustrate, he charged that scholars should "be suspicious when assessing teachers' capacities to care by engaging only their rhetoric" (p. 30). As will be elaborated on later, there is a fundamental difference between the rhetoric of care and "rhetorical care" which consists of platitudes without sufficient action. Toshalis' critiques, notwithstanding the misuse of terms, still bear consideration.

In examining the whole of his argument, Toshalis' primary critique of rhetorical care can be summarized as follows:

> rhetorical care is a regulative pedagogical discourse that depends on a paternalistic and infantilizing ethic, appeals to the archetype of teacher-as-savior, employs deficit scripts as a way of framing the students' need for care, and ultimately produces symbolic violence through the deflection of accountability, the foreclosure of opportunity, and the disregard of sociopolitical inequities. (pp. 27-28, internal citations omitted for clarity).

In short, however well-intentioned, Toshalis argues that many teachers engage in practices "comprised of gestures or phrases that appear or sound caring but fail to function as care-giving actions" (p. 4). Instead of actually caring for students, teachers who enact rhetorical caring view students as inherently deficient, circulating what he called "deficit discourses." This is similar to Freire's (1970) concept of "false charity." According to Freire, "True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the 'rejects of life,' to extend their trembling hands" (Freire, 1972, p. 45). Toshalis' rhetorical care and Freire's false charity, then, both operate when a dominant figure, like a teacher, presumes that their students are deficient and in need of their saving.

These well-meaning instructors, thinking they know the needs of their students better than their students do, enact behaviors which serve only to reinforce dominant discourses and perpetuate the helplessness of their students. Van Galen (1993), for instance, described ‘‘examples of teachers who may have presumed that they were working in the best interests of their students but who misread situationally and culturally grounded behaviors of students of color, poor children, and female students’’ (p. 8). As a result, students are forced "youth to participate in a power-evasive, culturally chauvinistic framework that individualizes students' difficulties with schooling while larger structural issues like the school's subtractive curriculum go unnoticed" (Valenzuela, 2010, p. 263). Even absent these harms, rhetorical care still enforces the practice ‘‘that decisions are being made by one group for another’’ (p. 263).

Authentic care

Toshalis (2012), despite his critiques, does not believe all care is simply another form of domination. He distinguished "authentic care" from rhetorical care (p. 3). Where rhetorical care involves "adoption of deficit discourses as a way of framing who needs care and how that care should manifest" (p. 19), authentic care reverses the direction by giving the decision of what care is needed to the recipient of care rather than the caregiver. He cited Nodding's (1992) work, which provided two fundamental elements required to determine whether care is authentic:

> (1) "an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for" or "what characterizes our consciousness when we ask another (either explicitly or implicitly) 'What are you going through?'"; and (2) a sense that the carer's "motive energy is flowing toward others and their project" such that the carer "seized by the needs of another,". (p. 3).

Freire (1972) asked similar questions regarding caring for students, writing:

> How would the cared-for want me to act?' … who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? (p. 84).

For all the authors referenced, authentic care begins with the real needs of the cared for, not the imagined ones that authority figures presume exist. In order to understand these needs, Toshalis (2012) and similar scholars argue for the need of educators to form meaningful relationships with their students. Shaunessy and McHatton (2009), for instance, discussed the "need for teachers who are engaged in meaningful, supportive relationships with students" (p. 498). Likewise, Nieto (2009) argued that "Relationships among teachers and their students are the most important ingredient in successful schools" (p. 32). Recognizing the importance of supportive teachers, the question then becomes how a supportive teacher ought to act.

Freire and bell hooks called upon educators to make themselves open and vulnerable to students to demonstrate care. Freire (1972) wrote that "the oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow within them" (p. 64). Likewise, hooks (1994) argued "when professors bring narratives of their experiences to classroom discussion it eliminates the possibility that we function as all-knowing, silent interrogators" (p. 21). By getting to know students and letting students get to know them, teachers form the type of supportive relationships necessary for providing authentic care. Those that do, as Gregory and Ripski (2008) found, have students who place more trust in them. According to the authors, "teachers who described the importance of relationship building for eliciting student cooperation were more likely to have students who reported trust in their use of

authority" (Gregory & Ripski, 2008, p. 346). Other studies have found that teacher support leads to increased GPA, attendance, graduation rates, and student resiliency (Phillippo, 2012).

From a rhetorical perspective, these acts of support accomplish several tasks. First, they produce the educator as an actualized person, rather than an impersonal authority figure. By making themselves vulnerable and sharing personal narratives, teachers communicate from their own life experience, permitting themselves to be seen as human in the eyes of their students. Likewise, by getting to know their students as people, rather than as inert subjects ready to absorb the next lecture, teachers also discursively produce their students as people. A discourse of care, then, can only circulate between individual people who recognize and address the humanity within one another. By taking these steps, then, teachers discursively humanize both their students and themselves, allowing for an authentic caring relationship to emerge.

"Relationship with an offender"

While the importance of relationship building is well-established, implementing these methods is not as easy inside prison as it is outside. Despite their many similarities, prison classroom environments are still inherently not the same as K-12 classroom environments. This is particularly true in terms of the types of relationships instructors are permitted to build with students. In Texas, for instance, K-12 teachers are prohibited by the penal code from having improper relationships with students, which is explicitly and exclusively defined as engaging "in sexual contact, sexual intercourse, or deviate sexual intercourse" with a student enrolled in the school where he or she is employed. Prison teachers in Texas, like my interviewees, are subject to a far more rigorous prohibition on forming relationships with students. According to PD-22, the standards for behavior for all TDCJ employees and contracted professionals like instructors, instructors are "prohibited from continuing or establishing an unreported or unapproved

relationship with an offender." Rather than an explicit prohibition as with K-12 teachers, instructors are subject to an excessively vague prohibition of any relationship which, in the exclusive determination of prison officials, "jeopardizes or has the potential to jeopardize the security of the TDCJ or compromises the effectiveness of the employee." The mandatory training for postsecondary educators in TDCJ, publicly available via their website, goes even further in its prohibition.

In a substantially large section of the training, instructors are warned that all of their students are potential manipulators. For instance, the manual reads:

> Offenders live in a deprived environment and engage in manipulation for a number of reasons, including:
>
> - To make themselves more comfortable
> - People are objects to be used to obtain what they want
> - They gain power and respect in the eyes of other offenders
> - It's what they did before coming to prison
> - It's a game or means of entertainment

Further comments from the manual include statements like "Offenders thrive on trying to manipulate staff and your wardens and security personnel are aware of this ongoing behavior" and "Once you have been targeted as a 'mark', the offender will continue to try to manipulate you or a situation until they have achieved their goal." Instructors are, by the language of the manual, always-already set in competition with their students when they are told instructions including "You can easily defend yourself against attempts at manipulation by acting with caution" and "Say something at the onset and do not let the offender have the upper hand."

Terms like "defend," "caution," and "the upper hand," produce instructors as potential victims of their students, not their teachers.

Per the manual, the only way to protect yourself from your students is that "You should always strive to maintain a professional relationship with your students and never allow yourself or the offender to cross the line." In practice, instructors are told that maintaining a "professional relationship" means refraining from any conversations about their personal lives or anything not directly pertaining to the subject matter, for risk of being perceived as forming a "relationship with an offender." In short, prison instructors are prohibited by prison policy from performing any of the behaviors the literature identified as necessary for establishing supportive relationships and providing authentic care.

However, despite these prohibitions, my alumni interviewees still told me about the support and care they received from their instructors. In spite of rules prohibiting meaningful relationships, I heard comments like when James said, "I would say that the Lee College teachers that I had experience with cared more about us." Richard, likewise, emphasized that that the "teaching environment at Lee College was different than what we got in school, where the teachers actually did care about you." How then, under these repressive conditions, is a rhetoric of care still made by possible by prison instructors?

Discourse of care in prison

One comment Richard made sheds light into one of the means instructors found to enact a rhetoric of care. He told me "the teachers care about us. And they get disappointed and hurt if we flunk." A discourse of care, here, is enacted by the belief in the student as well the emotional investment evident in the disappointment of teachers when students fail to live up to the academic standards to which their teachers know they're capable. In contrast to previous

experiences with uncaring instructors who were not moved by a student's poor performance, incarcerated students experienced the communication of care because instructors noticed their actions, and more importantly when those actions were lacking. The act of being noticed and acknowledged, then, enacted the discourse of care in prison classrooms.

Faculty also noticed and acknowledged students in other ways. David told me that "I always felt like my teachers -- they knew me, they -- they knew what I was about." Similarly, Jason said that instructors "were interested in you as a student, as an individual, not -- not just -- you know, not just -- they -- they weren't there to get a paycheck. They were genuinely concerned with you." In addition to making spaces for personal expression, faculty found a multitude of ways to engage and encourage their students as individuals. Cynthia emphasized the importance of providing encouragement, telling me her students had instructors in the past who "said, you'll never amount to anything or -- or you can't do this or you can't do that. And -- and now, we're here, telling them you can do this and you can do that." Judy constantly encourages her students by telling them "that they can do it. You know, they say, this is too hard, I can't do it. Or whatever. You know, to continue to encourage them and just -- you know, help them where they can." In Jason's words, this type of behavior from instructors "really helped me feel -- even in there, where sometimes you -- you know, you question your value as a person, it helped me feel that value."

Acknowledgement of students as human beings is a critical component to providing support and authentic care. del Carmen Salazar (2013) called education a process of "mutual humanization" (p. 131). Bartolome (1994), who originated the concept of humanizing pedagogy, argued that humanization in the classroom is only possible when students are treated as "active

and capable subjects in their own learning" (p. 181). By recognizing their potential and capability, prison instructors discursively produced their students as humans, and as scholars.

Finally, my analysis of the discourse of care could not be complete without returning to Jason's comments about the meaningful nature of instructor's mere presence in the prison classroom. His words ring over and over in my head: "They didn't have to be here. You didn't have to be in there." As he fought back tears, he told me:

> I mean, they can go get a job somewhere else that's much more comfortable and much more accommodating, but they don't. They choose to go into these places, these dark, hard, crappy places and teach this material. And to me, that -- that really showed -- that really showed a passion and a concern for the student.

Whether or not Jason's statement that instructors could find work elsewhere is accurate is immaterial to the point. Even if this was the only job they could attain, Jason perceived their presence was an act of choice. Rose, Daiches, and Potier (2012) emphasized the importance that instructors "just be there" (p. 261). By choosing to teach in the prison environment, instructors demonstrated care simply by showing up. Given their options of other more comfortable places to teach, prison instructors in their mere presence become the advocate Rosenfeld and Sykes (1998) wrote about: "beside those who manage to escape the cycle of defeat and exclusion, there is always someone who stands beside them, without conditioning their presence on reciprocity, personal gain, or gaining control over the other'' (p. 362). Care, then, can be rhetorically demonstrated by presence alone and in conjunction with the other factors discussed.

Rhetoric of love

In summary, I identified two primary discourses circulating within prison classrooms that allowed students to be produced not scholars, rather than deviants. First, the discourse of

individuality was enacted when instructors moderated their own authority, established equality between instructors and students, and created spaces to allow students to express their authority. Second, the discourse of care was enacted when instructors, despite prohibitions on forming meaningful relationships with their incarcerated students, acknowledged students as fellow human beings, encouraged them to pursue their capabilities, and chose to enter the oppressive environment of prison.

The combination of these two discourses allows for the creation of a fissure, a small crack within the walls of the oppressive communicative environment of prison. Prisoners are regularly dehumanized by the carceral system, as it strips them both of a sense of autonomy as well as the knowledge that others care about them. The synergy created in the classroom by caring for the individual, then, opens up a discursive space for a new possibility summarized in Noddings' (1992) statement that "we learn from those we love" (p. 107). As Freire (1970) wrote, "no matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause" (89). By enacting discourses of individuality and care, prison instructors demonstrate their commitment, and thus their love, for their students. In turn, students love them back and are able to learn, grow, and develop into the scholars that their previous experience in K-12 schools would not permit them to become.

In my students' experiences in K-12 classrooms, they found that "many educators still respond to students who are different in predictable ways–they isolate them, ignore them, retain them, suspend them, expel them, and in far too many instances, they fail to love them or teach them" (Kuykendall, 2009, p. 14). Loving students, however, should not be confused with desiring to be liked by them. Duncan-Andrade (2009) parsed the difference in terms of teaching:

> . . . being liked comes from avoiding unpleasant situations, whereas being loved is often painful: Many of these teachers are so afraid that students won't like them if they discipline them that they end up letting students do things that they would never permit from their own children. They lower their standards and will take any old excuse from students for why they did not do their homework, or why they cannot sit still in class or do their work. Not me. You gotta work in my class. I can be unrelenting at times, probably even overbearing. Oh, I might give a student slack here or there, but most of the time I'm like, "go tell it to someone else because I'm not trying to hear that from you right now. We've got work to do." (p. 188)

Love does not and cannot happen when teachers view their students in the "status of subhumans who need to be rescued from their 'salvage' selves" (Bartolome, 1994, p. 176). Instead, love is only possible when both parties are acknowledged as fully human, with the choice to love or not. Loving classrooms are "*enabling spaces* where students can form respectful relationships and derive a sense of *meaning*, *connection* and *control* over their lives" (O'Donovan, Berman, & Wierenga, 2015, p. 645, emphasis original). Accordingly, this "enabling space is a creative field from which to acknowledge a whole landscape of relationships" (p. 64).

My students' descriptions of their previous experiences in K-12 classrooms were stories of rejection. Whether for their language or their perceived inattentiveness, students felt like their schools did not value them. In a sense, feeling rejection is almost always in relation to a lack of love. From romantic relationships to parents, when a person says they were rejected, they tend to mean that they did not receive love from those they desired. The only exception to this might concern professional relationships, as when a person is applying for a position within the company. However, in those cases, it is generally termed that the application, rather than the

person, was rejected. When rejection becomes personal, it is almost always an expression of a lack of desired love.

Unloved students do not push themselves, nor do they try any more than necessary if they try at all. Without the foundation of love, they see no value in education, but turn to other avenues where they can find it. The secret as to why prison education works, then, is remarkably simple, yet crucially hidden from most discourses on education. Loved students are produced as scholars, while unloved are produced as deviants.

Returning to *Dead Poets Society*, Keating's students were willing to push themselves because they knew he loved them. The film's final scene, where the students stand atop their desks to proclaim "Oh Captain, my Captain" is good evidence they loved him as well. Therefore, when addressing the issue of the effectiveness of education, in the plethora of education scholars and philosophers, it appears the most relevant group of scholars are *The Beatles*, who told the world "All you need is love."

CHAPTER IV

MEDIA

When I tell people that I teach prisoners for a living, I typically get one of two reactions. In the former, people sneer in disgust and ask how I can feel safe teaching behind bars. In the latter, people tend to scoff and say something to the effect that prisoners do well because they have nothing else to do all day. Neither perception, both negative in its own way, bears any resemblance to my teaching environment nor to my students. What is true of both perceptions, however, is that they invariably tend to come from people who have never themselves stepped inside a prison. With no actual contact with the penal system, one is left to wonder from where these ideas stem. In short, they come from the public's exposure to mediated images of prisons through both news and fictional programming.

In terms of prison education, the public's opinion, via mediated images, is incredibly relevant. Determining the most effective manner of prison education is meaningless if it is impossible to implement. As I will argue in this chapter, the public's perception of prisoners is directly linked to their support of policies, both positive and negative. In order to achieve public support for prison education funding, the public must be able to view prisoners in a more positive light. That is, if they think prisoners are not worth saving, then they will actively object to their tax dollars being used to fund their education.

In this chapter, I will examine a selection of the mediated forces that shape public perception of prisoners. Specifically, I will explore the dominant discourses and representations of both prisoners and their pre-incarcerated criminal counterparts, as well as prison and crime in general, that circulate in mainstream U.S. media discourse and popular culture. Second, I will

utilize both Cultivation and Social Learning theories in order to explain how said mediated discourses shape public perceptions. Finally, I will discuss my attempt at an alternative media initiative to respond, negotiate, and resist the dominant mainstream narratives about prisoners and prisons.

Dominant mediated discourses on prisoners and prisons

Prisons purposefully exist, in both location and design, in a manner designed to hide them and their occupants from the public eye. From being placed in unpopulated areas to the stone walls and razor-wire fences to heavy restrictions as to who can enter, prisons are in every way what Goffman (1961) termed a total institution. As a result of these factors, “the prison is a closed milieu known to relatively few people, but about which there is much fascination and supposition within the wider population” (Ridley, 2014, p. 17). Despite this fascination, the public often has no means nor desire to enter a prison. Instead, they form their ideas and impressions of prison life through their media consumption. Wilson (2003) argued that “ultimately when we present an image of prison we shape the public’s expectation about what prison is like, and what happens inside, of who prisoners are and what they have done” (p.28). While reliance on media to form opinions and receive knowledge about unknown topics is not, in itself, an unusual practice, it is further complicated because the public does not often receive images of prisoners and prisons from journalists. According to Surette (2007), it is a rare occurrence for news media to include images of prisoners. Lipschultz and Hilt (2014) wrote that when media does rarely cover prisoners, it consists of almost entirely extremely negative events including riots and escapes. Lacking any substantive coverage of the penal system by journalists, media consumers fill this void through popular media.

Viewers of television and films “use knowledge they obtain from the media to construct a picture of the world, an image of reality on which they base their actions” (Surrette, 2007, p. 1). In terms of prison, Gillespie, McLaughlin, Adams, and Symmonds (2003) explained that the primary source of this knowledge comes from fictional representations including films and television programs. Despite the plethora of entertainment options and topics available to the modern consumer, Surette (2015) explained that crime and violence remains the most popular subject matter in media. While this is a current trend, it is by no means a new one. Surrette (1998) explained that the American fascination with criminal and penal depictions on media began in the early twentieth century with films including *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903, *The Big House* in 1930, and *Scar Face* in 1932. Bailey and Hale (1998) wrote that a high demand in criminal and prison themed films began in the 1940s and continued throughout the century. Crime and prison-centered television programs became popular a decade later in the 1950s and they continue to be consumed at high levels today (Snauffer, 2006). Surette (2007) estimated that a quarter of primetime television from the 1960s through the 1990s had crime as a primary subject matter. Prisoners and prisons became a popular subject for television programs in the 1990s (Cecil, 2015). According to figures calculated by Rotten Tomatoes, a website that calculates critic’s and the public’s ratings of media, some of the highest rated shows of the past few years include *Better Call Saul, The Americans, Mr. Robot, Marvel’s Daredevil. Hannibal, Sherlock, and Orange Is The New Black*, all of which focus on crime and/or prisons.

There is an admitted gap in the literature concerning the media effects of the portrayals of prisons and prisoner (O'Sullivan, 2001). However, the limited scholarship which has addressed this issue has found the portrayals to be resoundingly negative. Cheliotis (2010) noted, “Prisons are most usually typecast either as dark institutions of perpetual horror and virulent vandalism or

idyllic holiday camps offering in-cell television and gourmet cuisine on the back of taxpayers," while prisoners "are portrayed as degenerate beasts beyond redemption or undeserving layabouts" (p. 175). In an analysis of the prison-themed television program, *Oz*, Rapping (2003) argued that the program "presents a vision of hell on earth in which inmates are so depraved and vicious that no sane person could possibly think they should ever again be let loose upon society" (p. 81). Even science fiction programs are not immune to this trend, as prisons in the future resemble exponentially worse conditions. In a study of prison images in such media, Nellis (2013) concluded their vision of the future demonstrated "prisons of the future will be hellish places, and… there will surely be villains bad enough to justify their existence" (p. 223).

That is not to say, however, that prison media does not have protagonists. According to Rafter's (2006) analysis of prison films, the protagonist inevitably fits the definition of a stock character within prison media, the "young hero, who is either absolutely innocent or at most guilty of a minor offense that does not warrant prison" (p. 164). The rest of the prisoners, according to Wilson (2003) are "not normally viewed in anything other than disparaging terms" (p. 79). O'Sullivan (2001) extended Wilson's argument, commenting that redemption "is reserved for the 'exceptional individual', prisoners in general are seen as collectively incapable and undeserving of rehabilitation" (p. 321). Complicating this further is the continual use of the White Savior as a prisoner-hero. From Andy Dufrense in *The Shawshank Redemption* (portrayed by Tim Robbins) to Paul Crewe in *The Longest Yard* (portrayed by Burt Reynolds in the original 1974 version and Adam Sandler in the 2005 remake) to Piper Chapman in *Orange Is The New Black* (portrayed by Taylor Schilling), the exceptional individual is almost always a White man or woman who shows their fellow inmates of color a better way to live. Therefore, the only individuals who are discursively produced as potential heroes are the – inevitably White – ones

who do not belong in prison in the first place. The implication of this, then, is that the overwhelming majority of prisoners are evil and the prison system exists to justly punish them for their depraved ways.

Given the continual representation of all but a few prisoners as irredeemable deviants that perpetuates the existing divide between what Sarat (2002) called the “civilised and the savage” (p. 82), the media literate scholar is forced to question why this portrayal exists within the status quo. To answer this query, the works of Michel Foucault are useful. In Foucault’s (1977) work, *Discipline and Punish*, he explained that at the dawn of the nineteenth century, public displays of punishment for criminals were quietly replaced by more secretive forms of discipline with the formation of prisons. “It is ugly to be punishable, but there is no glory in punishing, hence the double system of protection that justice has set up between itself and the punishment it imposes” (p. 10). While the state wished to enact the so-called justice of punishment on lawbreakers that the public demanded, it feared, and rightfully so, that its traditions of brutal public punishments would make the government seem less civil and more like the criminals it was punishing. By moving punishment outside of the public eye, the state was able to perpetuate the image of the prisoner as scoundrel in need of punishment, while “justice is relieved of responsibility for it by a bureaucratic concealment of the penalty itself” (p. 10).” This shift to supposedly more ‘humane’ forms of institutional correction was generally thought to remove flagrant barbarism and randomness, and to assert a credo of a ‘civilised’ modernity based on the rationalised rule of law” (Llinares, 2015, p. 210). This removal, however, did not quell the public’s need to see the offender punished. Mason (2005) explained that “despite Foucault’s genealogical account of the disappearance of the *ancien regime's* spectacle of punishment, of gallows and guillotine, visual spectacle persists in cinematic representations” (p. 195).

In addition to being portrayed as morally unredeemable, the mediated image of prisoners and criminals also produces them as being hyper-violent. Surette (2007) analyzed representations of crime in film and found that post World War II, those films became increasingly violent as production companies shifted away from self-censorship and towards marketability. Similarly, Mason (2003) found violence and resistance to authority to be recurring themes in prison films. The effect of this focus on violence is a play on the public's "fears by overstating the danger of criminal victimization, targeting weak and marginalized swathes of the population, criticizing the authorities for laxity, calling for more and harsher punitive measures, and blocking or neutralizing the imagery of human suffering thereby caused" (Cheliotis, 2010, p. 178). In short, fear sells. The media discursively produces criminals and prisoners as villains to be feared in order to attract viewers.

Media, then, portrays prisoners en masse as justly punished villains because doing so "satisfies an almost primordial desire to view punishment as fundamental to the exercising of power" (Llinares, 2015, p. 211). Given the nature of media corporations responsible for producing the majority of fictional media as profit-minded businesses, Herman and Chomsky (1990) explained that they reproduce the dominant ideological views of their audience in order to sell their product to consumers. Cheatwood (1998), in an analysis of 56 prison films released between 1929 and 1995, found that the films reproduced the dominant views of each time period. That is, the production companies framed prisoners in a way that they believe consumers want. In terms of media, frames "are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed" (Altheide, 1997, p. 651). Given Tuchman's (1978) argument that existing

frames are built upon prior frames, the nineteenth century need to see prisoners punished is still evident within modern media.

How media shapes the public's view of prisoners and prisons

If prison media were simply a voyeuristic production that allowed viewers to live out their fantasies of justice, then it might be relatively harmless. Unfortunately, the effects of prisoner and criminal centered media serve to shape the public's perception of prisoners, prisons, criminals, and crime. The existing public perception of prisoners, "that they are the detritus of society and unworthy of civic concern" (Ridley, 2014, p. 39), can be explained through social learning theory and cultivation theory. Social learning theory, created by Bandura (1969), stipulates that individuals acquire knowledge and belief through the process of observational learning. Accordingly, humans observe behaviors performed by others, internalize them as acceptable, and begin to model them (Bandura & Walters, 1963). In terms of media, Bandura (1969) referred to "models presented mainly through television and films" (p. 215). In my own previous work (Key, 2015), I provided examples of this type of modeling in relation to homophobia produced by a lack of LGBTQIA+ characters on children's television programming. Children viewing such media engaged in homophobia because they modeled the presented media's concepts that heterosexuality was the only normal state of existence.

Cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002) stems from the idea that long-term exposure to media works to cultivate certain attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within viewers. These include first-order beliefs about facts and second-order beliefs which encompass the ways in which we perceive particular issues. Cultivation functions through three different processes: mainstreaming, resonance, and substitution.

Mainstreaming occurs when viewers across various demographics adopt the same values promoted in media programming. A prime example of this in relation to criminality appeared in a study by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1980) on perceptions of crime. Gerbner and colleagues found mixed results between affluent and impoverished viewers who were light consumers of media. Those from higher economic classes who lived and worked in areas where they had little contact with crime did not view it as a serious issue, while those from lower economic classes who regularly encountered crime thought it to be much more problematic. This difference vanished among heavy viewers of media, as both affluent and impoverished viewers felt crime was a serious issue. Exposure to media, heavy-laden with messages about criminality, produced the same mainstreamed effect regardless of the viewer's circumstances.

Resonance and substitution have similar effects, but work differently depending on the viewing population. Resonance occurs when media reflects and exaggerates the experiences a viewer has based on his or her personal experience. For instance, those respondents in Gerbner and colleagues' (1980) study who lived in high crime areas experienced resonance when they saw their lived reality reflected in media portrayals of crime. The respondents living in low crime areas, however, had no experience to compare to the mediated version. Instead of resonance, they experienced substitution. Substitution is a phenomenon where a viewer lacks access to events or topics portrayed on media and uses their media consumption as a substituted basis of knowledge for them. Whether by resonating with experience or providing a substitute experience, media provides individuals with a source of knowledge on which to base their actions.

Cultivation theory works in conjunction with Social Learning theory in that through repeated experiences of social learning, viewers are thereby cultivated into the resultant

performance of the modeled actions. However, both Cultivation and Social Learning rely on the viewer's perception that what they are seeing has some basis in reality. That is, if viewers perceive the content as unreal, it will likely neither produce ideas or learned behaviors.

The problem of fictionalized prison media, then, is that viewers often, consciously or unconsciously, perceive it as real. Rafter (2006) noted that roughly half of prisons films make the spurious claim to be representing reality or to be based on a true story. Given viewer's lack of personal knowledge of prisons and prisoners, they are therefore more likely to believe these claims of truth. Even prisoners themselves are not immune from these effects. Van den Bulck and Vandebosch (2003) reported that the prisoners they interviewed developed their initial views of carceral life from media, writing:

> the expectations of most of the inmates on entering the system were mainly based on television and movie images of prisons in the United States. They realized where they got their information from. They made explicit references to American audiovisual fiction. From it, they seemed to have been led to expect that the majority of inmates would be convicted of very serious crimes, that the experienced inmates would subject newcomers to an initiation ritual and that rape and violence were part of the daily fare of prison life. (p. 108).

This problem is exacerbated by the existence of so-called reality television programs depicting prisons. According to Cecil and Leitner (2009), the viewing public is largely unaware of the production processes of such media and are largely unable to determine which elements are fictitious and which are based in reality. In their review of reality television programs that feature crime and prisons, Fishman and Cavender (1998) determined that such programs "blur the line between news and entertainment; some even blur the line between fact and fiction" (p. 3).

Wilson and O'Sullivan (2005) described the reasons for the dubious authenticity of prison media as stemming from "the artificiality of the medium, the constraints of the genre, processes of formal and informal censorship and regulation, commercial pressures and popular tastes and demand" (p. 478). Cecil (2007) noted an additional category, the need of production companies to please the prison administrators in order to permit continued access. Turnbo (1992) provided evidence of a recurrent trend that prison officials are already reticent to allow media access. Therefore, should the message produced by the media conflict with the needs and desires, officials can and will prohibit further filming within their institutions. Further, in relation to the commercial pressures, production companies face a public unwilling to allow a counter-narrative of prisoners as anything other than reprobate. Attempting to use media to humanize prisoners is "taken as a sign of indifference to the suffering of those who have been harmed by others and of lack of common sense in the face of obvious social dangers'' (Rhodes, 2004, p. 6). Under the pressures noted above, "the editing process results in countless hours of film on the cutting-room floor, thus creating a highly edited version of prison life" (Cecil, 2007, p. 308).

Made-for-TV and Made-for-film prisons, however, are far different from their real counterparts. Yousman (2009), in his book *Prime Time Prisons on U.S. TV*, critiqued television programs for portraying prison as far more violent than reality and for failing to address salient issues to carceral life. As part of his research, Yousman interviewed former prisoners about their impressions of fictional prison media. Overall, they rejected the fictional portrayals' accuracy:

> Interviewees also spontaneously brought up many issues that were rarely or never dealt with in either dramatic or news programming. Issues such as poor nutritional and health care services; limited opportunities to participate in educational, vocational, or other rehabilitation programs; frequent verbal or physical abuse by corrections staff; complicity

> of corrections staff with the prison drug trade; the difficulties released prisoners have in finding employment; and high turnover rates and inadequate training programs for COs, came up in every interview and yet were almost entirely absent from the television discourse about incarceration. (Yousman, 2009, p. 43).

Despite these inaccuracies, prison media continues to shape the public's perceptions of life behind bars, leading viewers to believe about prisoners the same things the show's creators want them to believe about fictional characters.

A primary reason for the limited scope and unified message about prisoners stems from the limitations imposed by the carceral system on inmate communication. While the past decades have seen a rise in access to electronic and print media inside prison walls, the modes of communication available to prisoners are almost invariably one-way, from the outside in. Vickery and Watkins (2017) wrote about the digital divide that results from economic inequality. According to her study, numerous individuals lack meaningful access to communication technology like cellular phones and home computers due to the economic constraints of their impoverished financial class. Prisoners, however, are not prohibited from possessing telecommunication devices because they cannot afford them, but by policy. Texas, like many other states, prohibits and heavily punishes prisoners for possession of cellphones. Further, in most states, prisoners are either prohibited entirely from accessing the internet or are limited only to secure servers displaying only approved material for educational and job seeking purposes.

In her analysis of media restrictions imposed on youth, Vickery (2017) argued that prohibition of access to content stems a risk-aversion model where adults see technology as a threat to youth. The prison system, on the other hand, sees prisoners, rather than technology, as the threat to be contained. Jewkes and Reisdorf (2016), in one of only a handful of articles

examining prisoner media access, confirmed through their study that fear and risk-aversion are the foundation for media-prohibitive policies in prison, writing:

> The biggest fears surrounded online media, but even technologies that are not internet-enabled, but could potentially be converted, were vetoed by security officers because, as one of them put it, 'you'll always find some bright spark who can take an iPod or games console and convert it to watch pornography or contact people outside that they shouldn't'. This is a deeply entrenched and oft-repeated view, which underlines current rationales for punishment and belies an overt risk-aversion. (p. 548).

Prison officials worry that "the introduction and spread of digital infrastructures on the grounds that they carry risks of inappropriate networking, prisoner organization, resistance, mobilization and access to 'risky' content" (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016, p. 549). While Vickery (2017) argued that we ought to abandon risk-aversion models of media access in favor of policies that are opportunity-driven, the adoption of this mindset is unlikely within a prison environment. So long as prisons view inmates as threats in need of correction, access to the internet and other means of outside communication conflict "with commonplace ideas about incarceration being a time of isolation, solitude and penitence, as well as retribution, material hardship and suffering" (Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016, p. 537). As such, there remains primarily only one narrative circulating about prisoners.

Within these conditions, the public accepts the fictional and quasi-fictional representations of prison through this media as accurate and uses these beliefs to shape their actions and reactions. Wilson and O'Sullivan (2004) established media consumption as the primary means by which public opinion on prisoners is formed. "The portrayal of crime and justice in the media has been forwarded as also influencing the public agenda for justice by

sensitizing the public to particular issues" (Surette, 1984, p. 5). Munro-Bjorklund (1991) expanded on this argument, stating that "public attitudes toward criminals in general, the types of people who are or should be incarcerated, and prison conditions that should be tolerated become evident through the treatment of criminal characters in film" (pp. 56-57). Finally, Mathiesen (1995) claimed that "in the whole range of media, the prison is simply not recognised as a fiasco, but as a necessary if not always fully successful method of reaching its purported goals" (p. 144). This type of media exposure "can leave the recipient of such information feeling that they are appropriately informed about the reality of the prison, and with little or no desire to challenge such evidence" (Ridley, 2014, p. 18).

Ridley (2014) explained that the problems of public perceptions do not stop simply by shaping the views of media consumers. In a representative democracy like the United States, mass opinions bleed into public policies. "As a consequence, such distorted media discourses profoundly influence not only public attitudes, but also political rhetoric and subsequently criminal justice policies" (Ridley, 2014, p. 20). Austin and Irwin (2012) pointed to the War on Drugs as an example of these effects. Instituted in the 1980s, the War on Drugs was a reaction to public perceptions of a rising crime rate in relation to illicit drug use, despite no empirical evidence backing this assertion. According to Lynch (2007), the War on Drugs led to a significant increase in incarceration rates, particularly among minorities. Rapping (2003) discussed American support for the similarly situated War on Crime, noting that media consumers are "determined to keep themselves safe in what they perceived as a social landscape filled with mass murderers run amok, with teenage 'superpredators,' and with murder and mayhem around every corner. In reality, statistics show a dramatically declining crime rate" (p. 73). This fear, an effect of media consumption, "is used to support public policies, or more

conservatively, this fear is needed to maintain an active public indifference or ignorance around the establishment of regressive and punitive policies and laws" (Meiners, 2007, p. 36).

Neoliberalism

The previous section overviewed the process of the development of the American public's negative attitudes towards prisoners and criminals. Understanding how the process happens, however, does not answer why it happens. That is, what is it about the media that makes the viewing public so ready to accept its claims of prisoners' moral lacking as reality? The answer to that question lies within the discourses of neoliberalism hidden with prison media.

In their book, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Entman and Rojecki (2001) disputed the binary dichotomy between racist and non-racist individuals. Instead, they proposed a "Spectrum of White Racial Sentiment" (p. 18) that better encompassed the nuances of the American public. The scale included Comity, Ambivalence, Animosity, and Racism. Those in the Comity, likely commonly referred to as non-racist or anti-racist, category have positive or neutral feelings towards Blacks and believe that groups vary widely in traits, that discrimination is prevalent and harmful, that Whites and Blacks do not have conflicting group interests. On the other end of the spectrum is the Racism category whose members have intense negative emotions towards Blacks and believe Blacks are fundamentally different and lower than Whites, that Blacks cannot achieve equality and discrimination against them is a necessity, and that the interests of Black groups are a threat to Whites. Ambivalence is the midpoint between Comity and Racism where members oscillate between positive and negative emotions towards Blacks and believe that Blacks tend to have more negative qualities than Whites, that discrimination occurs in rare and isolated incidents, and that Black interests sometimes but not always cause problems for White interests. Finally, Animosity exists between Ambivalence and Racism and its

members have mostly moderative negative emotions towards Blacks and believe that Blacks mostly have negative traits, that Blacks no longer experience discrimination, and that Black political movements are asking for special treatment at the expense of Whites. The authors do not offer a category between Comity and Ambivalence.

Given the relationship between Blacks and criminality that Entman and Rojecki (2000) and others observed, I argue that their scale is equally applicable to public sentiment towards prisoners and criminals. In order to understand the public's attitudes toward the incarcerated, one could simply substitute the word "prisoner" or "criminal" for "Black" and "non-prisoner" or "non-criminal" for "White" in their scale. This is helpful to map attitudes which vary from those who recognize a wide variety of traits in both groups, to those who believe in some measure of difference between criminals/prisoners and themselves, to those who believe there is a distinct and unchangeable difference between themselves and criminals/prisoners.

The bulky language ("non-prisoner" and "non-criminal") in the second substitution for the scale is not without relevance. The English language currently lacks a broad umbrella term to encompass both prisoners/criminals and non-prisoners/criminals in the way that terms like Race, Religion, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation include members of various groups within them. The terms "prisoner" and "criminal" meet the definition of "what rhetorical scholar Michael McGee describes as an "ideograph": a shorthand word or phrase that captures and organizes community around prevailing ideological commitments" (Cloud, 2015, p. 13). To society at large, a person labeled as a 'criminal' or 'prisoner' is a savage worthy of mistreatment. At the so-called "Mother of All Rallies," a sparsely attended rally in favor of Donald Trump held in Washington, D.C. in September 2017, the organizers took the unusual step of allowing the leader of the Black Lives Matter protest of their rally to give a short speech on stage, When the Black

Lives Matter speaker referenced Eric Garner by complaining that there was no justice for a Black man that was choked to death by police officers on video, the crowd booed and one attendee could be heard loudly remarking, "He was a criminal! No! He was a criminal!" In the eyes of that attendee, being a criminal justified being killed without trial. Those labeled with the ideograph "criminal," then are seen as worthy of mistreatment, beatings, and even death by members of the American public.

Merriam-Webster's Thesaurus has a small list of antonyms for "prisoner" as well as the noun usage of "criminal" which all describe various positions related to being a prison guard or warden. When searching the term "criminal" as an adjective, the antonyms are mostly moral claims including ethical, good, just, principled, right, righteous, and virtuous. Embedded within our language, then, is both a clear us vs. them distinction as well as claims towards the immorality of prisoners and criminals. Further, there is no term to describe a person who has a bias against criminals and prisoners. That is, there is no equivalent to racism, sexism, or homophobia to describe a system of bias against criminals and prisoners.

I argue the reason that the public so easily accepts the immoral caricatures of criminals and prisoners in media along with discrimination against them – what other group would they tolerate denying the right to vote or earn gainful employment – in public policy is the nation's believe in neoliberalism. Melamed (2006) explained that neoliberalism arose as a new form of justification for discriminatory action following World War II, a type of cultural racism that replaced its biological predecessor. Instead of blatantly discriminating against people on the basis of a categorical difference, like race, neoliberalism offers a cultural fiction that systemic discrimination does not exist and that those who fail to live up to societal standards "based on their adherence to normative cultural criteria, that is, the heterosexual family unit, middle-class

status, and patriotism" do so because of their personal failures (Belcher, 2016, p. 493). The adoption of neoliberalism proffered a uniform "U.S. national culture as the key to achieving America's manifest destiny and proof of American exceptionalism" (Melamed, 2006, p. 7).

Under the neoliberal paradigm, the so-called free market is the solution to ending inequality. By ignoring existing system barriers as if they no longer exist, neoliberalism promotes a fictional nation where everyone is on an equal playing field and has the same chance at success or failure based on individual choices. Those who believe in neoliberalism, then, fall into the Animosity category. By denying systemic inequality, the public remains comfortable in its "beliefs that laziness and weak will are the chief impediments to [criminals' and prisoners'] social mobility" (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 19). After all, they experienced hardships in their own lives and never turned to committing crimes, so why couldn't criminals and prisoners have simply worked harder instead of breaking the law?

Orange Is The New Black offers powerful evidence for neoliberalism's presence within prison media, ironically in the beginning of the pilot episode. Piper, the main character, is in a conversation with her mother who insists that she does not belong in prison with the rest of the inmates. Piper immediately rebuffs her mother "by reminding viewers that being incarcerated is 'nobody's fault but [her] own'" (Belcher, 2016, p. 494). This emphasis on personal choices as being the sole determinant for consequences is a foundational tenet of neoliberalism. In a statement that is meant to rebuff her mother's claims of privilege and establish solidarity with her fellow inmates, largely people of color, Piper's statement enforces neoliberal ideas in a "complicitous critique" which is inherently "bound up… with its own complicity with power and domination" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 4).

Neoliberalism, therefore, exists as a hidden discourse permeating prison media. Belief in the neoliberal ideology, embedded in American culture, means that narratives of prisoners are more easily accepted. Returning to Cultivation theory, the American public mostly experiences substitution in regards to information about prisons, but the neoliberal messages cause resonance with their taken-for-granted beliefs about choice. Challenging the mediated discourses about prisoners and criminals, then, will require challenging neoliberalism itself.

Challenging the mediated narrative

A recognition of the current mediated discourses surrounding prisoners, criminals, prisons, and crime along with the methods by which the public adopts these views is critical to the creation of a mediated counter narrative. Returning to the modified version of Entman and Rojecki's (2000) spectrum, I argue that the general media consumer falls into the Animosity category, rather than the equivalent to Racism (Convictism, perhaps?). Neoliberalism itself, despite its damaging attributions, arguably places the viewer squarely in Animosity. To believe that there is a fundamental difference between criminals/prisoners and the general public is antithetical to the neoliberal fiction of free choice and equal playing field. For example, one could not simultaneously believe that criminals/prisoners are sentenced because of the choices they freely made and that criminals/prisoners are a distinct and lower group from the viewers. Therefore, the neoliberal masse of viewers is likely to hold animosity, rather than pure prejudice, against criminals and prisoners.

According to Entman and Rojecki (2000), "animosity boils down to stereotyping, denial, political rejection and demonization, and fearful, angry emotions" (p. 19). Stereotyping involves classifying all members of a group based on limited observation. Denial, in the manner Entman and Rojecki employ it, consists of rejecting the existence of "discrimination and structural

impediments" (p. 19) that may contribute to criminal behavior and instead attributing deviance to personal failure. Political rejection and demonization occur when individuals view the goals of another group as competitive, as opposed to cooperative, with their own. "Politics to them is generally a zero-sum game pitting [Criminal/Prisoner] interests against [Non-criminal/non-prisoner]" (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 19). A key example of this came with bills to stop both the state of New York and President Obama from providing financial aid to prisoners taking college classes behind bars. Both bills, each titled "Kids Before Cons," justified their action by claiming that financial aid should not be denied to non-criminal students to fund prisoners' classes. In reality, even at its highest point, prisoners collectively utilized less than 1% of all Pell Grants in a given year (Zoukis, 2014). Viewing politics as a zero-sum game, however, meant that any financial aid given to prisoners was being wrongfully taken away from college students. Finally, the fourth category of fearful and angry emotions happens when viewers experience anxiety over the potential harm criminals and prisoners might inflict upon them.

The source of the feelings and behaviors experienced by those in the Anxiety category is not prejudice or bigotry, but "rooted in sheer ignorance" (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 19). Given the limited contact most viewers have with the penal system, they remain largely unaware of the differing life circumstances that lead some to crime and others to college. The good news here is that because their beliefs are rooted in ignorance, rather than hatred, "they do not hold consistently to all their antagonistic sentiments. That is to say, *they are susceptible to change*" (pp. 20-21, emphasis original).

Ignorance is solved primarily through education. However, to be effective, media that challenges this ignorance must consider the conditions of the audience. While neoliberal ideology is foundational in creating an audience that is receptive to the current negative

discourses about criminals and prisoners, it is not so much the cause of the problem but a tool that can be coopted for alternative purposes. Since neoliberalism has been the dominant ideology since World War II, most current viewers cannot remember a time when it was not the dominant cultural force. The myth of the American Dream (Bormann, 1985) itself relies on neoliberal ideas about personal choices leading to life consequences. Any attempt to detach viewers from such deeply held taken-for-granted beliefs is likely to fail as viewers will wholly reject the argument and cling more tightly to their beliefs. Ava DuVernay's documentary, *The 13th*, is one such failure. The film, which largely mirrored arguments from Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow* about racist policies which lead to an overrepresentation of Black men and women in prison, was critically well-received… but only among viewers that were already inclined to believe its arguments. The general public, who elected racist Donald Trump as President of the United States a month after the film's release, were not ready to accept DuVernay's narrative.

Instead of trying to dismantle neoliberalism, I propose utilizing it to counter the current mediated discourses. As an example of this, I turn to what might be an unlikely source: professional wrestling. World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) regularly produces the most-watched show on cable television, *Monday Night Raw*, which is trailed closely by its companion program *Smackdown!* (WWE, 2016). In June 2011, Phil Brooks, better known as wrestler CM Punk, launched himself into the national spotlight when he made what appeared to be a real, out-of-character, speech on *Monday Night Raw* where he critiqued the WWE for holding him back despite his work ethic. His speech received attention from major mainstream media programs including *The Jimmy Kimmel Show, Sports Illustrated,* and *The Jim Rome Show*, where ESPN personality Jim Rome spent an entire episode of his radio show discussing the speech. Brooks

was rewarded by the viewing audience and the WWE, becoming the longest reigning WWE champion in the past several decades with a title reign lasting over a year. The speech was effective for two primary reasons: it was perceived to be real, rather than fictional, and it promoted neoliberal ideas while critiquing systems for not rewarding an individual's hard work (Key, 2012).

They key point to gain from understanding the impact of Brooks' speech is that he did not attempt to undermine the audience's belief in neoliberalism. Instead, he used that belief to his own benefit. If a neoliberal believes that a person's station in life is a result of their actions, then a system that ignores a person's hard work and punishes them due to circumstances outside their control must be offensive. Further, audiences were able to identify with Brooks because they believed they were listening to a speech from a person dissatisfied with their employer, not a fictional character trying to further a storyline. Indeed, perception of reality is crucial to Cultivation theory.

Based on Brooks' model, I began work on a documentary film examining the experiences of prisoners enrolled in college courses. A documentary is ideal for maintaining the audience's belief that they are seeing reality, as opposed to fiction. This film would feature interviews with prisoner-students, instructors, and released alumni who are now employed functioning members of society. Considerable time would be given to allowing prisoners to discuss overcoming hardships, both in their lives prior to incarceration as well as in prison and in the classroom. Prisoners might describe, for instance, waking up at 2am for breakfast, working 8 or more hours at a hard labor job, and starting a three-hour class at 6pm, a full 14 hours after they'd woken up. They might also describe the difficulties studying and writing papers in crowded and noisy dayrooms and cramped cells. Instructors could describe the rigor of their assignments and how

students rise to the challenge. Released alumnus would be able to show how they are working and using their degrees to be more productive in legal, rather than illegal economies.

In terms of choice of media venue, Netflix is the ideal platform to place this documentary. While Netflix does not release viewership numbers for individual programs, their chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, called prison-based *Orange Is The New Black* their "most-watched show" (Birnbaum, 2016). Clearly, there is already strong interest among Netflix viewers in prison media. Further, while the average consumer might not be inclined to purchase a documentary film, their availability as part of *Netflix*'s package could encourage viewership. DuVernay's *The 13th*, for instance, was released exclusively on Netflix. Futhermore, *Evolution of a Criminal*, a film produced by a former student at the prison program I teach, is also available, demonstrating the company's willingness to broadcast independent documentaries on prisons.

Roadblocks on the path to liberation

This was the second academic documentary I would produce, having previously shot one on the evolution of debate formats for my Master of Fine Arts from Minnesota State University. I received approval for the first two parts of the project, interviewing faculty and released alumni, quickly and easily. While the overworked, and largely adjunct faculty, at the prison had numerous schedule conflicts, I was able to interview nine of them and reach saturation fairly efficiently. With my other two populations, the problems were more significant.

In terms of released alumni, the biggest issue was locating subjects that were willing to participate. The first hurdle came from locating potential subjects. The Huntsville Center does an admittedly poor job keeping track of alumni. This is largely due to bureaucratic issues. For instance, most students graduate before being released from prison. As such, the college loses contact with them and most do not contact them upon release, meaning that for the vast majority

of former prisoners, the Huntsville Center has no means to contact or locate them. Further, the TDCJ policies I discussed in the previous chapter which prohibit forming a "relationship with an offender" include those who are on parole when released. As a result, the college has limited ability to communicate with these alumni. In total, I received a list of approximately 50 names out of more than half a century of teaching prisoners. When I sent my initial emails, several came back as invalid addresses, limiting my contact pool further. The response rate was equally problematic, with only five responding including one declining to participate.

I discussed this issue with Jason when he came to our annual conference on Texas correctional education. In his view, many released prisoners are unwilling to participate because they are trying to put their incarceration behind them. Further, many who have been released years ago have built new lives since that time and have coworkers, and perhaps romantic partners, who are unaware of their time behind bars. Appearing on film, then, would risk outing them to those who they have kept their incarceration a secret. As Western (2006) discussed, released prisoners often endure painful stigma about their incarceration. This stigma, then, proved to be self-fulfilling as their fear of it prevented them from participating in a project that might help to alleviate the stigma through producing positive images.

I saw a similar reaction earlier this year on Facebook where someone had shared a new story about a former prisoner who gave up a job interview to render aid to a victim of a car accident. The news story was titled "Ex-Con Skips Job Interview to Rescue Crash Victim." The Facebook post shared a screen cap from the story with a reply similar to "Imagine saving someone's life and being called an ex-con." I replied that the person should consider why they thought the term "ex-con" was insulting. Given the media's almost universal portrayal of prisoners, even a person arguing for the humanity and heroism of the subject of the story still

held negative associations about a reference to his incarceration. Positive media like my documentary will help to reframe ex-con as a possible positive descriptor. However, that reframing is impossible without former prisoners willing to risk the stigma possibly brought on by appearing in the film.

When mentioning the scope of my documentary to my current students, many of them expressed that they approved of the idea and hoped to be able to participate. As previous research has found, current prisoners, unlike their released counterparts, are eager to have their stories heard (Stern, 2014). After receiving approval from Texas A&M's IRB, I submitted the proposal for review to TDCJ, as required by their policy. Texas A&M's IRB found my study to only cause minimal risk, that which is experienced within everyday life, and was only brought to full board review because my subjects were incarcerated. They approved an identical study interviewing released alumni within days by expedited review.

According to TDCJ's External Research page, "The review process usually takes between 60 and 90 days, depending on the specific project." 90 days after submission, I called and was told that the project was only in its first of roughly four phases of review. Ten days later, I received the first email from their research coordinator. In it, I was told that the research had been reviewed and that that "At this time, the following modifications are *requested*: -The exclusion of all audio/video recording collection. Handwritten notes only" (emphasis mine). I emphasized the term "requested" because, as TDCJ is the sole arbiter allowing or disallowing research, refusing their "request" could lead to the denial of my project and no possibility of access to incarcerated students. It is important to note that TDCJ Administrative Directive 02.28, which established policies for research in Texas prisons, does not prohibit audio or video recording. Further, TDCJ Executive Directive 02.40, which governs media coverage, allows for

the audio and video recording of prisoners by news media as well as "editorial researchers, filmmakers, production companies, book authors, magazine writers, freelance journalists, and other non-news media representatives."

The policy itself places numerous limits on media access. For instance, wardens may "impose limitations on or set conditions for media access to the unit when, in the warden's judgment, such media access would disrupt the safety and security of the unit or cause serious operational problems." Wardens may also prohibit media "when the interview, in the warden's judgment, would impair the rehabilitation of the offender, detract from the deterrence of crime, negatively affect a victim or victim's family, disrupt the safety and security of the unit, or cause serious operational problems." The policy also prohibits the presence of others, including family members, attorneys, and spiritual advisors, during the interview, nor may visitation with those groups be filmed. Further, no person with a relationship to a prisoner who has currently or previously been on their visitation list can conduct a media interview. The policy also prioritizes access by new media, allowing that other forms of media "*may* be permitted on the same basis and under the same conditions as access by media." Further, especially with regards to witnessing executions, the policy further defines who TDCJ considers to be media. For executions, TDCJ does not recognize college or university newspapers as media, nor do they permit any reporter who is not a full-time regular staff member of the media outlet.

While these restrictions are numerous, the policy on its face seems to permit media access to prisoners. However, my other experience with TDCJ in regards to media revealed that this policy is not as permissive as it may seem. In both debates, as well as the TEDx event, the Huntsville Center was prohibited from advertising or inviting media into the events, except for a staff member of *The Huntsville Item*, the local paper with readership limited almost exclusively

to residents of the town. In the case of the TEDx, no reporter was available, so the event received no media coverage whatsoever. Recently, VICE Media contacted me about filming a speaking event in the prison featuring Hassan Assad, the former prisoner turned WWE professional wrestler who had spoken at the first debate. When I spoke to TDCJ Public Information Director Jason Clark, he told me he was opposed to allowing VICE into the prison to film the event because the programs they produced were often "controversial." When we offered to have them film it on the college's behalf and only use footage approved by TDCJ, Clark responded by email, stating "I believe an acceptable avenue is to have Lee College film the event rather than have the documentary enter the facility." For some reason, TDCJ would permit us to film it ourselves and license the footage, but would not let the "controversial" media company inside. Recognizing the need to film such a significant section of their documentary program themselves, VICE declined to participate further in our event.

As of this writing, it is more than 180 days since my original submission. The only response I have received from TDCJ since is a "request" that I destroy all notes from a proposed thirty hours of interviews at the completion of the project. Texas is not alone in its draconian policies prohibiting media access to prisoners. In neighboring Louisiana, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is suing the state prison system for a policy banning media interviews with prisoners that discuss the nature of the prisoner's alleged crime, alleging violations of the 1st Amendment rights of both prisoners and media. Per the ACLU, the types of restrictions in Louisiana, practically identical to those in Texas, are content-based restrictions on speech which are inherently unconstitutional. Much as I want to challenge these in a similar fashion, I am concerned that it might threaten my status as a prison educator in Texas if I were to sue TDCJ, as

my position requires TDCJ to enter units and the language is written so broadly as to allow virtually any reason for prohibition under the guise of security.

While Cecil (2007) found that prison media producers were subject to the whims of prison officials, my experience bears a different and more disturbing conclusion. Tight control of access to prisoners by prison officials effectively forecloses on positive media portrayals of inmates, thus leaving the overwhelmingly negative mediated image unchallenged. In short, the public will continue to believe negatively about prisoners, as prisons will not permit media to show them anything to contradict this. This compounds the problems of stigma faced by prisoners, as negative media portrayals allow the public to sanction and even endorse maltreatment, while giving them no reason to support funding of positive programs like postsecondary education.

Challenging the mediated discourses and changing the public's perceptions of prisoners and criminals is no easy task, but it is possible given the right choice of media for the audience. The current media climate portrays the criminal and the prisoner as individuals who are rightfully locked away because of their poor choices, ignoring the systems that contributed to their deviance and incarceration. Within the neoliberal American climate, it is no wonder then that these mediated images both resonate and substitute for the public's understanding of carcerality. By utilizing the neoliberal mindset, these ideas could be challenged by discursively producing prisoners as hard working and thus deserving of reward, rather than punishment, for their work. With an effective platform like Netflix, consumers could be reached and exposed to this alternate narrative.

While this documentary alone will not change the public's minds enough to affect public policy, it represents an important first step in changing the minds of viewers away from

Animosity and further towards Comity. These real images stand the best chance of cultivating a different second-order perception of American viewers about the incarcerated. Through this alternative media narrative, viewers would be able to see prisoners not as irredeemable villains, but as fellow humans working hard towards their own futures.

However, this important step remains impossible when prisoners themselves are barred from appearing in such a film by TDCJ. Combined with the small number of alumni participants, due to stigma of being identified as an ex-con, the film would likely lack the ability to draw in viewers and change their perspectives. While showing the opinions of prison educators might have some positive effect, it would do nothing to challenge the negative media image of prisoners already entrenched in the public mind. With no video of prisoners themselves, there is nothing to challenge the existing image.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

It's the first week of the Spring semester of my freshman year of high school. Despite having been here a semester, this place still feels huge to me. From kindergarten through eighth grade, I went to a private Lutheran school. Back then, there was no tuition for the school if you were members of the church, so my Catholic father and Baptist mother became Lutherans to give my brothers and I a chance at a better education. Classes were small. Give or take a few students who would leave or come in every year, I spent most of my childhood in a classroom with the same thirty students. We went to school together, to church, and to youth group trips. With a group that small, you never really need to learn social norms. Everyone is basically friends by default.

When I finished eighth grade, I wanted desperately to go to the local Lutheran high school. That's where almost everyone I knew was going. But my parents were putting my older brother through college and the high school didn't have a tuition waiver, so they couldn't afford to send me there. Instead, I would go to public school for the first time as a high school freshman. I went from a group of 30 students to an entering class of over 1,000. There were literally more people in my first period class than my entire eighth grade cohort. Going through puberty at the same time certainly didn't help my chances navigating this giant ocean of students as the proverbial small fish.

While my private school hadn't taught me social skills, it had definitely prepared me well academically. My junior high curriculum, in many ways, was more advanced than the classes I was taking and I sailed through most of them with ease. As I walked into my science class, we were assigned new lab partners and, to my horror, I was sat next to Becky. Becky was your

classic girl next door kind of pretty and I'd had a crush on her early in the Fall. She was also a pretty awful student. One day early the previous semester, she'd forgotten to do the homework for that class and begged me to copy mine. Having only experienced these types of situations via movies and TV shows, I told her I'd give her the answers if she'd go to the homecoming dance with me. She agreed and quickly wrote down the answers right before the bell rang.

After class, I asked her about when I should pick her up, or rather when my parents should since I definitely wasn't driving then. She laughed at me, saying she had a boyfriend and couldn't believe I thought she was serious, then walked off. As a naïve kid coming from a small school, I'd never been taken advantage of before. Even still, I wrote it off and avoided her the rest of the semester. And now, fate had made her impossible to avoid.

I wasn't about to be taken advantage of again and let her know outright that I wasn't happy about being partnered with her and she'd be doing her own work. Appalled, she pushed back, saying she had no idea why I'd act like that. I mentioned our previous interaction about homecoming and she laughed again, mocking my preteen heartbreak that, at the time, felt far more serious than it was. Keep in mind, I'd never had to stand up for myself before, and the only examples I knew of came from media. I knew I had to say something, so I quoted my favorite wrestler, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, telling her "when you mess with me, there's hell to pay." She asked if that was a threat and I said no, but wanting to look cool, I repeated a phrase from a movie I'd seen somewhere: "It's a promise."

Class started right after that, and I felt proud that I'd stood up for myself. I could not have imagined what was coming next. Our interaction happened on a Friday, so the next time I came to school was the following Monday. She wasn't in class that day, but I thought nothing of it, until I got a slip telling me to go to my assistant principal's office. The only time I'd ever been

called to the office in junior high was to help out with a project or receive an award, so I walked in and sat down, proudly wearing my wrestling team jacket I'd just been given. The stern look on the assistant principal's face told me this wasn't going to be another award.

She asked me about my interaction with Becky and I began to quietly panic, thinking she knew I'd helped her cheat the previous semester and now I'd be in trouble for it. My parents raised me to be honest, so I told her what happened that past Friday. She then started in a line of questions like "did you tell her you had a blueprint of her house and knew where her bedroom was?" and "did you tell her you knew when she'd be home alone?" Shocked, I denied all of these, but she kept coming.

"We take threats here very seriously," she said, snidely, having already made up her mind about the type of person I was.

"I didn't threaten anyone," I protested.

"You already confessed to that."

"What? No, I didn't. I've never threatened anyone in my life."

At this point, she called in Becky's assistant principal. I looked up and was relieved to see a familiar face. He went to my church, I went to the private school with his daughter, he knew me. He knew I couldn't have done what I was being accused of doing.

"Adam here is on the wrestling team," my assistant principal said, her voice dripping with disdain. At that point, I realized she was implying I was violent.

Shortly thereafter, I was told I was going to be suspended, based purely on what Becky had said. Apparently, she went home that Friday and told her dad I'd threatened to kill her. That didn't happen, but that didn't matter to my assistant principal. I was guilty because she said so.

What happened next is a blur. I'd never been in trouble before. I started hyperventilating, I may have had a panic attack. They took me to the nurse to lie down. The nurse called my parents and handed me the phone. I grabbed the handset and loudly told my dad that "I never threatened that girl!" Apparently, the nurse hadn't told him anything about that. He sped up to the school. Loud yelling was exchanged between him and my assistant principal, and he took me home. Surely, I thought, my parents will be able to settle this. I was wrong.

Initially, I received a few days of in-school suspension and one day out-of-school. When I came back to school afterward, I was once again called into the office. This time, there was a police officer there. As I'd later found out, Becky's father was outraged when he found out I wasn't expelled. He pulled Becky out of school and threatened to sue them. Ironically, he sent her to the same Lutheran high school I wanted to go to, surrounded by all of my friends I'd known most of my life. The police officer took my statement, then wrote me a ticket for disorderly conduct for making a "terroristic threat." This was before 9/11, so they through that term around a lot easier back then. Just like with the assistant principal, it didn't matter what I said. To them, I was already guilty.

I still remember sitting in my room later that day, hearing my mom loudly wail and cry in a closed-door conversation with my dad in their bedroom down the hall. I felt like the worst person imaginable, because I knew I was the cause. Later that semester, I would appear in court to plead no contest, because we didn't have the money to fight the charge.

Toward the end of that year, I was called in again. I was in band my freshman year, and Becky had been as well. I was outside the band hall, when I saw a guy chasing and grabbing at a girl. He had her by the wrist and she was pulling away, telling him to leave her alone. I stepped in between them, forcing his hand off her wrist, and told him to leave her alone. The next day, I

was called into the office again. I was told that the girl, whose name I didn't even know, had told them that I'd had an unrequited crush on her and assaulted her male friend. They also claimed I shoved him down some nearby stairs. None of this was true. As near as I can tell, they were friends with Becky and this was retaliation because they viewed me as the reason she left the school. This time, my dad demanded they look at the security videos, which showed that my accusers were lying. Even still, I was suspended again, for making physical contact with the guy who looked to me like he was assaulting the girl. Once again, even with video proving the accusations were wrong, they'd already decided I was guilty.

Looking back at that memory now, I see how close I was to ending up in the same spot as the student I mentioned at the start of this. He and I both went to the same high school, both got in trouble with the administration, both got charged by the police. Years later, however, our paths had diverged significantly. The school failed both of us. My salvation came the next year when I found the debate team. It became a place to belong, where I was valued for who I was and what I could do, the opposite of my experience in the assistant principal's office. My debate coach, Angie Richard, didn't see me as a problem, she saw me as a person.

It was in debate that I first felt loved as a student. That feeling of love made the difference for me, so that now instead of completing my sentence, I'm completing my doctorate. In much the same way as I am now reflecting on my own life events, I will reflect now upon this research In this chapter, I will summarize my findings, examine limitations, and provide guidance for future research.

What I found

This project had three primary parts. First, I ethnographically examined my interviews to determine themes within Chapter II. Second, I used critical rhetorical methods to examine the

interviews as texts in Chapter III. Finally, I examined the mediated discourses surrounding prisoners and discussed the bureaucratic frustrations in producing a mediated counter-narrative in Chapter IV. These distinct parts, collectively, paint a clearer picture of the effective communication practices necessary, inside and outside of prison walls, to educate both current and potential prisoners and provide a better means for re/integration.

The ethnographic analysis revealed a stark difference between student experiences in K-12 and prison classrooms. Their K-12 teachers, adhering to the norms of the education system, communicated apathy and a demand for adherence to values that were not own. There was no space for them to meaningfully communicate their ideas and values within the classroom and their behavior, and even their language, was produced as deviant. In prison classrooms, however, their teachers communicated that their voice and opinion had value, gave them space to communicate freely, and kept them engaged and excited.

Applying a critical rhetorical analysis to the interviews demonstrated two primary discourses circulating through prison classrooms that were absent from the students' experiences in their K-12 schooling. First, a discourse of individuality was circulated through instructors moderating their own authority, communicating with students on an equal level, and recognizing and celebrating the autonomy of their students. Second, a discourse of care was circulated by instructors becoming vulnerable by both sharing about themselves and listening to students share their experiences and needs, as well as by their perceived choice of presence within the classroom. This discourse of care acted against the mandatory teacher training that produces students as threats, instead choosing to produce them as humans worthy of a caring relationship. The fusion of these discourses allowed for a fissure into the organizational rhetoric of the prison system, allowing both students and instructors to enact a rhetoric of love.

In order to examine the best means to effectively promote re/integration, I conducted an analysis of dominant discourses about prisoners circulating through popular media and news reports. Using cultivation theory and social learning theory, I argued that the general public is taught a bias against prisoners in much the same way as they are biased against minorities. These biases, spurred by almost universally negative coverage that portrays prisoners and savage and violent, leads to public support for punitive justice. Initially, I had planned to construct a documentary to counter this narrative, but my attempts were thwarted by the prison system which prohibited me from filming interviews with prisoners. Instead, I discussed how the bureaucratic system, by prohibiting positive portrayals of prisoners, insulates itself against public scrutiny and allows the bias and its effects to continue unabated.

Having examined this issue through three distinct lenses, I now collectively interpret my findings. As previously discussed, the conservative backlash against the societal upheaval related to the demand for civil rights and equality led to a rhetoric of standardization. From education to the criminal justice system, expectations of human behavior became standardized and all actions falling outside adherence to these norms became discursively produced as deviance. Even criminological theories, which seek to attempt to understand the mindset of those who commit crimes, participate in the rhetoric of standardization.

Life course theories of deviance hold that individuals tend to commit more deviant acts, especially crime, during their youth and gradually age out as they proceed through various social rituals (Western, 2006). “Adolescents are drawn into the society of adults by passing through a sequence of life course stages – completing school, finding a job, getting married, and starting a family. The integrative power of the life course offers a way out of crime for adult offenders” (Western, 2006, pp. 4-5). Once men achieve gainful employment and marriage, they “become

embedded in a web of social supports and obligations" often called "social bonds" (p. 5). Using Reich's (2010) terminology, then, life course theory states that men eventually mature and integrate into the Game of Law. According to Reich, however, players in the Game of Outlaw have a distinct "*lack* of investment in masculinity games played by the powerful" and are generally uninterested in the rewards of or even playing the Game of Law (p. 28). Life course theories of deviance, then, serve to discursively infantilize and to some extent pathologize members of the Game of Outlaw.

The embedded assumptions of the theories discursively relate playing the Game of Law with maturity and produce its players as socially good, while simultaneously producing Game of Outlaw players as immature and their Game as a pathological phase they eventually outgrow like pubescent acne. Integration and re-integration, then, assume the moral superiority of the Game of Law. While life course theories do acknowledge the systemic forces that intersect with the lives of Game of Outlaw players, they nonetheless serve to normalize the Game of Law. Integration and reintegration are not inherently problematic if performed willingly, but at the point where boys and men are forced into the Game of Law, society and the state have enacted violence upon them. It is of little wonder, then, that rehabilitation and correctional programs have such poor success rates and why so many inmate-students outright resist them.

The rhetoric of standardization does not stop affecting students once they leave prison. In her book, *Falling Back*, Jamie Fader (2013) documented the struggles of reintegration. Fader noted that former prisoners "returned to the city to find the same problems they had faced at the tie of their arrest: neighborhoods plagued by violence and open-air drug markets, conflict with the police, and a lack of legitimate employment opportunities" (p. 3). Further, those returning also "suddenly realized the difficulty of renegotiating their place within families, households,

peer networks, and neighborhoods" (p. 3). Her respondents experienced mixed success in attempting to reintegrate. Some, for instance, sought to better their economic chances through education, but faced the barrier of an inability to pay for or attend school due to the long hours work at low-paying work. Those who were most successful at reintegration were those who had access to institutional resources that enabled their upward mobility. Therein lies the problem of conceiving a program for successful reintegration. To be reintegrated implies one was previously integrated into society, but most of these boys and men never integrated nor wanted to integrate in the first place.

One area in which Fader (2013) differs significantly from Reich (2010) is in her conception of the values of her incarcerated respondents. Fader (2013) concluded that "even youth who are most embedded in street culture are well aware of and in fact aspire to mainstream values of work, family, and above all dignity" (p. 33). In short, Fader believed that even players of the Game of Outlaw desire to play the Game of Law. As noted previously, Reich's (2010) work directly contradicts this. Money, power, and respect are important to players of both Games, but the signifiers float substantially depending on which Game a person is playing. What Fader (2013) did correctly identify, however, is that rehabilitation and correctional programs that operate under the neoliberal criminal personality theory are ineffective at preparing incarcerated boys and men for facing the structural barriers they will return to upon release from incarceration.

No reintegration program can solve for systemic barriers like systemic racism and society's stigmatized treatment of the incarcerated. A former prisoner can follow every step in a program, but that will do little to lessen societal bias against him. An important step to undoing these stigmas includes a concentrated program to challenge the mediated image of the criminal

and the prisoner. Successful reentry, a more apt term than reintegration, however, requires both systemic and personal solutions.

Reich (2010) explained, using Bourdieu's game theory framework, explained that "[p]articipation in a game systematically shuts down the possibility of questioning how the game emerged or reflecting on the goals around which the game is organized" (p. 23). Bourdieu explained the reason for this phenomenon, writing that "investment in a game and the recognition that can come from cooperative competition with others, the social world offers humans that which they most totally lack: a justification for existing" (quoted in Reich). Both the Games of Law and Outlaw offer boys and men the security of knowing their place in the world. As such, the appeal of the Games is seductive, though players of both are unaware of the negative consequences of play.

Reich (2010) offered a third possibility by expanding on Bourdieu's work to conceive a realm outside both Games which he termed "critical practice" (p. 176). By recognizing that both types of masculinity are games, a person is able to essentially step outside and stop thinking and acting as a player. "Critical practice is a second-order understanding of both games, an ability to see each game as a 'hustle' while not letting either dictate one's activity unconsciously" (p. 178). Those boys and men who embrace critical practice avail themselves of a new set of values and abilities: "a capacity to come together as a group, to recognize one another as fully human (rather than as instruments), to discuss what values are most important to them, and to pursue those values together" (p. 35). Like players of both Games, critical practitioners still value money, power, and respect, but conceive of those in radically different ways:

> Young men involved in critical practice reframe money as important only in terms of meeting their natural needs and are no longer concerned with displaying or saving their

> money to distinguish themselves. They reimagine power as the capacity to address their problems collectively through political praxis. And respect, formerly something "won" through competition with other young men, becomes something akin to mutual recognition, or love. (pp. 35-36).

These men, then, reframe life from a competitive game to a cooperative endeavor. Recognizing the gaming nature of both types of masculinity also enables critical practitioners to code switch, utilizing the tools of both Games in the appropriate situation. Adept code switching permits them to more successfully navigate systemic barriers.

While I appreciate Reich's (2010) contributions, I believe his attempts to escape both Games are impractical. Per Bourdieu (1991), all humans are essentially game-playing creatures. The solution, as my study reveals, is not the abandonment of games altogether. Instead, critical practice can be achieved by playing a new game. Rather than the Game of Law and Game of Outlaw, critical education invites players to play a Game of Love. When students realize they are loved, they can find a sense of home within the educational environment, which is the foundation of which any critical practice can be learned.

Love requires mutual recognition among parties. To love and be loved, we must recognize that the recipient of our love is an individual person. As a result, love resists standardization. It is impossible to love a person without knowing them. As such, all love is both personal and personalized. That is, one cannot standardize love. To treat a person as a nameless faceless part of a mass is incompatible with love, as is an attempt to "love" by treating all students the same or holding all to the same standards. A Game of Love, then, begins with an educator recognizing the individual and then teaching the individual to do the same with others. Only when this occurs is a critical practice possible.

Teaching players in the Game of Outlaw to become critical practitioners by playing the Game of Love requires an equally critical and loving pedagogy, one that should be employed in prison classrooms. Freire (1970), for instance, introduced the idea of "problem-posing education," which he posited as a resistance to problem-solving education (p. 65). In the latter, there is an inherent presumption that all problems have or even need a solution. In the former, problems are discussed from various angles in order to better understand their nature. Rather than prisoners being told they have a criminal personality and make "criminal thinking errors" (Fader, 2013, p. 46) that are solved through the adoption of Game of Law standards, students and faculty alike co-investigate problems in the liberated classroom. Freire argued that this process was essentially liberation. The oppressed, a group in which prisoners are a prime example, are denied agency through state-sponsored structures which devalue their intellectual resources. In contrast, critical pedagogy views student contributions as valuable, rather than pathological. In essence, they feel loved because their ideas are recognized as valuable and they are likewise recognized as people capable of producing worthy thoughts.

According to Freire (1970) the typical student/teacher relationship "involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified" (p. 71). Love is not and cannot be lifeless. Extending upon Freire's argument, bell hooks (1994) discussed the classroom as a place of possibility and freedom rather than oppression and deprivation:

> the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heard that allows us to face

> reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

By stepping outside the Game of Law norms pervasive within education, instructors and students are able to critically analyze the various factors affecting their lives. This is accomplished not by narrating to students, but by listening to them. By listening to their students, teachers play the Game of Love.

So, the question remains, now that I understand the process, how might I implement it? Systemic change in education must come from teachers, who are the individuals most often interacting with students. Changing the paradigm requires changing teacher education protocols. As such, one of the next steps I plan for this research is to develop it into a practical guide by which educators might play the Game of Love in their own classrooms.

Limitations

While this study yielded valuable finding, it was not without its limitations. In discussing the limits inherent to my study, I identified two distinct themes. The first came from the methodology itself. The second came from the limitations of gathering data for this particular population. I begin with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative methods in a prison environment and close with a discussion of the study implementation.

Qualitative methods in prison

In terms of prisoners themselves, qualitative methods like participatory critical rhetoric offer several benefits in gaining rich and in-depth research data. First, the nature of the American prison system itself, like quantitative methods, tends to treat inmates as a mass, rather than as individuals. "In prisons, inmates' heads are shaved and they are issued uniforms and numbers, which are used in place of their names. The goal is to strip away any remaining shred of

individuality, erasing all differences among inmates" (Fader, 2013, p. 52). Stern (2014) detailed an experience relevant to this discussion from her time teaching classes in prisons. In one of her initial classes, students turned in assignments with their prison identification numbers instead of their names, having become accustomed to being referred to that way. The opportunity to be treated as an individual, as a name instead of a number, as afforded in qualitative methods like interviewing is a rare privilege in prison. In addition, prisoner communication tends to be highly regulated by penal institutions. This includes both their interpersonal communication within the walls and their ability to communicate with others who are outside prison. For instance, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice recently adopted a policy prohibiting prisoners from maintaining social media pages on sites like Facebook through their correspondence with family and friends (Wallace, 2016). Fader (2013) noted that her respondents were "eager to share their stories" and particularly enjoyed that "behind the closed door of the interview room, [they] had complete freedom to speak their minds" (p. 7).

In addition to the benefits native to the process, the results of qualitative studies have an opportunity to better convey the unique experiences of the incarcerated, particularly in relation to their various experiences of social inequality. Pettit (2012) documented that prisoners have been poorly served in the past by quantitative methods as employed by the federal government. In her book, *Invisible Men*, she details the regular practice of prisoners being excluded from the census as well as calculations about joblessness and other factors related to the United States' population. Furthermore, given the distinct life experiences of the incarcerated and researchers (who largely have not been imprisoned themselves), survey designs run the risk of making faulty assumptions about the nature of their lives behind bars. Question design, for instance, might miss

important contributions that cannot be captured on a Likkert scale or by not including questions that the researcher could have that thought to ask but are still relevant to their subjects.

While qualitative methods offer certain benefits, the practices are not perfect. Indeed, qualitative researchers should also be aware of several disadvantages. Ethnographers often describe the problems of "getting in" to study a population, as an outside researcher is treated suspiciously by members of a community that does not yet trust him or her (Fader, 2013). This problem is compounded by the nature of prison, where automatic suspicion and lack of trust are survival strategies (Sloan & Wright, 2015). Building the type of rapport with former inmates, then, may take substantially longer than with other populations. Likewise, researchers in prisons often struggle with the problems of "getting out" (Liebling et al., 2015). While observing oppression becomes normalized for those within prison, the process can be emotionally trying and even traumatic to researchers who are new to being inside prisons. Crewe and Ievins (2015) also discussed the struggle to maintain appropriate social boundaries, given the rules and regulations of the penal institution. Finally, in terms of writing up the research, two primary issues emerged from scholarship on prison ethnography. Hammersley (2015) explained that qualitative researchers must constantly check themselves to ensure that they are not imposing their worldviews on their subjects, but instead letting their subjects speak for themselves through their writing. Waldram (2015) discussed a related problem about writing about prisoners, but in relation to reviewers. Given the societal discourses that circulate around prisoners and prisons which produce prisoners as villains and guards and other prison employees as noble, researchers may be accused of advocating on behalf of prisoners for merely describing their perspective on observed situations. In order for their research to be published and read, qualitative scholars ought to take care to walk the thin line between honest portrayals and acceptable rhetoric.

The present study

Perhaps my largest hurdle in this study was finding a sufficient population with which to interview. As I discussed in the previous chapter, I had difficulty recruiting participants. While some faculty were willing to participate, the overall number interviewed was somewhat small. This was due in large part to scheduling. As an under-funded program, the majority of academic faculty at the Huntsville Center are adjunct and are either retired or teaching at multiple colleges and universities. As such, while they may have been willing to participate, their crowded schedules made it difficult and in many cases impossible to schedule interviews. In terms of alumni, I believe that stigma was a primary contributor to my lack of response when soliciting interview participation.

With the exception of one, all interviewees were my former students. Their previous experience allowed a level of trust that I believe contributed to their willingness to participate and speak to me. I do not believe a researcher fully outside their social circle could have recruited them. Even with the social capital I had built, I was still only able to recruit four former prisoners to participate. Finally, while I believe that prisoners themselves would have been willing participants, bureaucratic hurdles from TDCJ have prevented me from being able to interview them in a manner that could be used for research.

In terms of the limitations mentioned in the previous section, I believe the stigma-based reticence to participate from the alumni constitutes problems getting in. As a prison educator, getting out has a different definition for me entirely. So long as I continue to teach inside prison walls, I do not have to tackle the issue of "getting out" because I am constantly still in. While I recognize that this might bias my results, it also gives me unique insight into the conditions of prison education. However, this also means that, as Hammersley (2015) argued, that I must

constantly check my own biases and assumptions. For that reason, I have chosen to include substantial portions of the interviews in text as well as the whole transcriptions in appendixes. As I have yet to attempt to publish this particular work, I have not yet experienced the problems stemming from writing about prisoners and former prisoners.

Directions for future research

As demonstrated in this study, participatory critical rhetoric holds promise for discovering, analyzing, and bringing light to outlaw discourses. Like the goings-on of prisons themselves, outlaw discourses do not regularly circulate through mainstream channels. While the current age of technology allows a different means of circulation through venues like YouTube and Facebook, the fact remains that there are still groups, like prisoners, who cannot utilize these means and many other groups who choose not to use them.

Participatory critical rhetoric, then, allows access to texts that are both important and currently invisible through traditional means of rhetorical analysis. That is not to say, however, that these discourses are readily accessible. My experience attempting to access prisoner discourses being hampered by TDCJ's bureaucratic processes is a prime example of the difficulties future researchers might experience in attempting to utilize this process.

In terms of future research, the first step will be to, if possible, interview currently incarcerated students themselves. Whether this is possible remains to be seen. Even accessing that population, however, is not an end, but a beginning to my research in this field. I would like to expand out to analyze the outlaw discourses circulating throughout other oppressed student populations. These include incarcerated students enrolled in GED programs, those outside Texas, and those incarcerated in prisons in other countries. To begin this process, I am currently

working with the African Prisons Project with hopes of a series of studies of their college programs in Kenya and Uganda.

In terms of studying oppressed students, I also do not plan to stop with prisoners, nor should others. In addition to the under-researched group of former prisoners seeking to further their college education, there are a plethora of other similarly situated students. For instance, I hope to conduct future studies with expelled students, dropouts, and those placed in alternative education programs. In addition, there are students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs who are experiencing the same type of exclusion, and participatory critical rhetoric can allow similar study of their discourses.

Conclusion

In closing, when reflecting on this study, I cannot help but think back to one of my favorite students. A naturally talented speaker, Derrick was enrolled in one of the first classes I taught in prison. He took a liking to me and enrolled in every class I taught at his unit thereafter. He was the first student I recruited onto the debate team and delivered one of the most memorable lines I've ever heard when teaching. Three or four practices in, he came to me and said "I can't believe I'm saying this, but unfortunately I made parole." Derrick was released a few months before our first debate.

Several weeks ago, I heard from one of the other debate team members that Derrick had unfortunately violated his parole and would be returning to prison. This news brought on a mix of emotions. At first, I was surprised and disappointed that he had not made it. I wondered if I had somehow failed him. While feeling this, I realized that I was perpetuating the same philosophy that I oppose: that the reduction of recidivism is the goal of prison education. That's not the case, nor has it ever been.

I've regrettably had more than one student pass away before completing their degree. Their deaths did not make them failures, nor did Derrick's return to incarceration. There are innumerable systemic factors that contribute to the likelihood of incarceration. While education can provide some pushback, it cannot solve them, nor can it be expected to do so. Derrick's story is a stark reminder that my students are not suffering from criminal personalities that I hope to reform, nor are they victims in need of me saving them from themselves or outside forces. A student has not failed when they do not become gainfully employed, or even when they return to prison. Nor have I failed them. The reason for this is that the goal of education is not employment or to produce law-abiding citizens, it is to produce scholars capable of making their own choices. This includes choices that I do not agree with or would not make.

Derrick's story reminded me of something that happened while I was teaching high school. Toward the end of the year, I had accepted a position coaching at a university with a substantial scholarship fund. As part of my hiring, I received the ability to offer a scholarship to one of my graduating seniors. I had an incredibly intelligent and talented student who suffered from testing anxiety, and thus her SAT scores did not reflect her actual ability. I offered her a scholarship to this school, thousands of miles away from home, and she turned me down to stay and go to the local community college. I felt physically sick when she told me. When I mentioned this to a veteran teacher, he reminded me that I was applying my own definition of success to her.

When scholars, educators, politicians, and policy makers value prison education as a means to reduce recidivism, they do the same thing: they apply their own definition of success to incarcerated students. In doing so, they dehumanize them, treating them as the same mindless

automatons that Freire wrote about when discussing the banking model. Even charitable dehumanization is still equally problematic.

If my study shows one thing, it's that education works when students are recognized as individuals capable of exercising autonomy. Our goals as educators must never be to decide for our students their best course of action. Instead, we must love our students enough to empower them to make their own choices, and then respect those choices. It may sound funny that I learned about love in prison, but that's exactly what happened.

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