

REVISITING THE PANOPTICON: EDUCATIONAL NARRATIVES
FROM INCARCERATED YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

ALLISON DANIEL ANDERS: Revisiting the Panopticon:
Educational Narratives from Incarcerated Youth
(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

Correctional education programs in prison increase life and job skills, and reduce recidivism. Although these programs are cost-effective and generate positive effects post-release, in the last few decades, opposition to correctional education has increased. Beginning in the 1970s, critics of rehabilitation programs challenged correctional education, particularly the inclusion of post-secondary education in correctional education. Citing high recidivism rates, political conservatives attacked the idea of rehabilitation and curtailed education programs and funding. Incapacitation emerged as the dominant policy position, and emphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation emerged for the first time in 100 years. In the midst of this calamity, an education program in North Carolina thrived. Although post-secondary education was rare in state prisons, in North Carolina, a small group of committed individuals established a successful program that provided post-secondary education to incarcerated youth. The N.C. Department of Corrections implemented the Workplace and Community Transition Youth Offender Program in 1999. The program included college coursework, a career counseling course, and a behavior management course. This dissertation research represents the educational narratives of participants in that program. Nine students from five different correctional facilities across the state participated in a series of in-depth interviews. Commitments to postcritical, and experimental ethnography, and feminist methodology guided the representations of these students' stories, and narrative analysis and narrative theory structured the interpretive work. Findings indicated that for these students, positive experiences with school often occurred for the first time in prison.

In memory and in honor of my father

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Graduate, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1965

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Dehumanization: My Story, Part I.....	1
	The Project.....	2
	Correctional Rehabilitation and Research.....	4
	Excerpt from “Representing Tragedy”: My Story, Part II.....	17
	Narrative, Social Justice, and Power.....	19
	Narrative Lens and Positionality.....	20
	Challenging “Dynasties of Denial”.....	23
	Complicating Claims.....	25
	Relationships without Relationships: My Story, Part, III.....	28
	Narrative to Question Power.....	31
	Narrative and Identity.....	32
	The School Game and Stigma.....	34
	Performing the Research with Narrative Methodology.....	37
	Privileged White Student from Suburbia.....	44
II.	BOYS NOW MEN.....	49
	The Glint of Terror: My Story, Part IV.....	49
	A Neophyte to Qualitative Research.....	50
	Caught in My Racism: My Story, Part V.....	67

III.	A SCRIPT FOR TRUE AND SHORAN.....	69
	Where We Sit: My Story, Part VI.....	69
	Collaboration with Students in Prison.....	69
	<i>The Life I Have to Live</i>	73
IV.	SCHOOLING TRAPS AND COUNTERPOINTS.....	102
	Educational Narratives.....	102
	Their Stories in My Story.....	102
	Starburst: My Story, Part VII.....	103
	Al Chambers.....	110
	Kevenson.....	116
	Michael Jordan.....	119
	Tyte Crewdy.....	124
	Travreso.....	129
	Shoran.....	133
	Code Yellow.....	138
V.	MAKING MEANING.....	141
	Interpretations.....	141
	A Story of Redemption.....	141
	A Story of Discovery.....	142
	A Story of Salvation.....	143
	A Story of “Keepin’ It Real” (or A Story I Cannot See).....	143

	A Story of Fidelity.....	145
	A Story of the Hustle.....	146
	A Note from Michael on Seduction.....	147
VI.	YOUNG WOMEN AND PERSERVERANCE.....	149
	Ladybug.....	152
	Latoya.....	161
	A Story of Warning.....	168
	A Story of Relational Identity.....	169
VII.	NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY.....	171
	Huts on Fire: My Story, Part VIII.....	171
	Identities and Power.....	172
	Endowing Narrative with Meaning.....	181
	Naming Significance.....	182
	Gifts of Narrative.....	182
	My Commitments.....	184
VIII.	CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS.....	186
	Following the Tracks.....	186
	The Panopticon: Visible and Unverifiable.....	188
	Symbols of Surveillance.....	189
	A Smile for Resistance.....	192
	Hunger and Canteen Lines.....	194

	Negotiating Communication Routes.....	198
	Deploying Language.....	201
IX.	PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION.....	204
	Education in the United States.....	205
	Democratic Equality, Social Efficiency, and Social Mobility.....	207
	Prison Education.....	210
X.	BEGINNINGS.....	212
	Receptions.....	213
	Reconceptualizations.....	214
	Shifting Discourse.....	214
	Implications.....	215
	Messages for Teachers.....	215
	Research.....	219
	APPENDICES.....	221
	REFERENCES.....	223

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The reader thus moves back and forth between two worlds, the storyteller's, which the reader occupies vicariously to the extent the story is well told and rings true, and his or her own, which he or she returns to and reevaluates in light of the story's message. Can my world still stand? What parts of it remain valid? What parts of the story seem true? How can I reconcile the two worlds, and will the resulting world be a better one than the one with which I began?

- Richard Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*

Dehumanization ~ My Story, Part I

Nine years ago in autumn I read Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu. I remember the season well and the questions that fell from the pages. Over time one passage in particular has stayed with me. The issue of dehumanization addressed by Old Longears resonated with me as I struggled to understand my work toward social justice. During a conversation about government between Tzukung and Old Longears, Tzukung argued that difference defined the governments of three rulers. He informed Old Longears that his description of the governments as "similar" was incorrect, that indeed the practices of three different sovereigns were different. Unaffected by Tzukung's argument, Old Longears replied:

"When Yellow Emperor governed all under heaven, he made the people of one mind ... When Shun governed all under heaven, he made the minds of the people competitive ... When Yu governed all under heaven, he made the minds of the people deviant. Men began to scheme and routinely resorted to force of arms. Claiming that they were killing robbers, not people, they considered themselves a breed apart, as did all under heaven. Hence, all under heaven were in a great panic, and Confucians and the Mohists arose. It was because of their doing that there first came to be morality, but what can you say of the way things have ended up now? I tell you, we may speak of the three august sovereigns 'governing' all under heaven, but it is governing in name only, for there is no greater disorder than that which they caused. The knowledge of the three august sovereigns rebelled against the brightness of the sun and moon, conflicted with the essence of the mountains and rivers below,

and disrupted the procession of the four seasons in between ..." Tzukung stood there disconcerted and ill at ease. (Mair, 1994, p. 141-142)

Pacing at a vigil outside a maximum security prison a year later, waiting to hear if the governor had granted a stay of execution, I found myself arguing silently in my mind with the press, pro-death penalty advocates, and family and friends who support the death penalty—for each in their respective arguments made a move to dehumanize—a move that forces the person who commits a crime to become his or her crime, and in that becoming he or she loses his or her humanity. The reasoning undid me, and as I passed back and forth amidst activists, students, and religious leaders, I thought about the men Yu governed who claimed they killed “robbers, not people.” I began to seriously question the concept of empathy. As I reflected, sometime after two a.m. the warden announced the time of death.

The days turned cold that fall and winter approached. In October Beth Hatt asked me if I would be interested in working on the evaluation team of the Youth Offender Program. She explained that the team gathered information through surveys and interviews with student-inmates who participated in an education program in prison. I said “yes” immediately and began to transcribe interviews with the students. Eventually, I interviewed students myself.

(March 2006)

The Project

The North Carolina Workplace and Community Transition Youth Offenders Program, which Educational Services in the Department of Corrections and the evaluation team called the Youth Offender Program, or YOP, was established with Federal funds in 1999. The program is operated by Educational Services and supervised by educational directors at ten different correctional institutions throughout the state: Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution, Foothills Correctional Institution, Fountain Correctional Center for Women, Lumberton Correctional Institution, Morrison Correctional

Institution, North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women, Polk Correctional Institution, Raleigh Correctional Center for Women, Sampson Correctional Institution, Wake Correctional Institution, and Western Youth Institution. The program serves approximately 300 students a year. To participate in the program, students need to be between the ages of 18 and 25, in possession of a high school diploma or GED with a standardized minimum score, and within five years of his or her release date. The program includes college coursework, a Cognitive Behavioral Intervention class that emphasizes decision making skills, and an Employabilities class that includes career planning and business communication. Students may take a maximum of three college courses a year. Although class sizes are limited to 16 students, most courses conclude with less than ten students.

I have been involved with the evaluation of the Youth Offender Program for five years, and currently I direct the interviews. Additionally, I have taught an undergraduate course on education and society through the YOP at NCCIW and Polk.

My dissertation research emerged from the broader evaluation work, and a qualitative project I completed in 2001 using ethnopoetics as a frame for the educational narratives I represented from six men I had interviewed at Polk. For my dissertation research I returned to the educational narratives of students who are incarcerated. The narrative analysis, ethnographic performance piece, and domain analysis on correctional officers explore the ways in which the nine students I interviewed make meaning from their experiences over time, inside and outside school settings.

From the twenty-nine men and women I interviewed in the spring of 2006 for the 2006 YOP evaluation, I chose eleven with whom I wanted to continue interviewing for this dissertation research. Four of the students were women and seven were men. Originally, in the spring of 2006, the four women were incarcerated at the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women (NCCIW). Four of the men were incarcerated at Polk Correctional Institution (Polk), two at Morrison Correctional Institution (Morrison), and one at Foothills Correctional Institution (Foothills). Over the course of a year, custody paroled two of the women, and transferred another, paroled two men and transferred the

remaining five. Ultimately, due to transfers and release dates, nine students, two women and seven men were represented in this research. In January 2007, they were incarcerated at five different institutions: Caledonia Correctional Institution, Lincoln Correctional Center, Maury Correctional Institution, Morrison, NCCIW, and Warren Correctional Institution.

Correctional Rehabilitation and Research

Often the factors related to delinquency are connected to the nature and quality of schooling experienced by youth (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Delinquency, 1977; Polk & Schafer, 1972), and over time schooling has become one of the most important contexts in which research is completed on delinquent behavior. Research supports the assertion that relationships exist between school achievement and prison populations. As a way to contextualize contemporary research projects on incarcerated populations and the reigning policy of incapacitation in the criminal justice system in the United States, I want to provide a sketch of correctional rehabilitation.

The history of correctional education begins in the Eighteenth Century. In the late 1700s and early 1800s religious groups and liberal politicians advocated for the humane treatment of prisoners. A century later, progressive policies and reformers influenced the expansion of education programs in prisons and training schools. Support for academic and vocational education in prisons increased throughout the early and mid-1900s. Training schools became widespread, and as schools developed some progressive schools incorporated psychotherapy into rehabilitation models (Reeves, 1929). Supporters of psychotherapeutic work critiqued the label of “delinquent” and believed that individualized attention, nurturance, and community building would alter the ways in which youth behaved (Slavson, 1961). The trend of combining academic and vocational education with therapeutic programs continued until the 1970s. Unfortunately, in the last 30 years political conservatives have curtailed education programs and funding and propagated a policy of incapacitation. Emphasis on punishment and not rehabilitation has emerged for the first time in 100 years (Davidson, 1995).

Colonial Era

Many debates that followed the Revolutionary War addressed the societal issues of civil justice and criminal justice (Jarvis, 2004). Addressing the system of criminal justice, revolutionaries decided against “the tyrannical treatment of prisoners by their former masters” and “encouraged a reconsideration of penal practice” (p. 5). During the war more revolutionaries died as prisoners in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions than as soldiers in combat. The British forces imprisoned revolutionaries “in camps and a flotilla of prison ships” (p. 5). Unwavering in their defense of the ideals put forth in the Declaration of Independence, revolutionaries criticized the inhumane treatment of prisoners by the British. Benjamin Rush, supported along with Quakers from Pennsylvania the idea of rehabilitation.

Rush, one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, advocated for a philosophy “founded on the ideal of social and spiritual rehabilitation” (Jarvis, 2004, p. 5) as well as for the abolition of the death penalty. Reformers chose Pennsylvania as the site for changes, where Quakers, constituting much of the state population, advanced the idea of rehabilitation, and helped model prisons in a monastic tradition. The Quakers argued for creating spaces for penitence and spiritual rehabilitation. Indeed, the idea of the prison cell emerged from the understanding of the monastic cell. The term “penitentiary,” created in the 1770s, referred to a space of penitence and atonement.

Refuge Houses and Training Schools

Fifty years later, the legal community began to recognize children who violated the law as a special category. Many states adopted a parentified role with children charged with juvenile offenses, the same role they assumed with children suffering from neglect. States established refuge houses and reformatories for boys and girls, separating them from an adult prison population. By the end of the 1820s the first refuge houses opened in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Both boys and girls were sent to refuge houses although always to separate quarters. Supporters of refuge houses

recognized the problem of severe poverty and advanced the idea of education and vocational training over punishment. They believed that society needed to save children from poverty in industrialized urban centers. They hoped civilized instruction in reformatory schools and work in reformatory factories would alter the behavior the children. Religious studies, vocational training, and hard labor constituted the educational programs. Advocates for these educational components presupposed the nature of a child as malleable and simply in need of direction and guidance. With the belief that modifications in the child would lead to social adjustment, reformers defended the ideas of correctional schools as a way to alter both a child's behavior and his or her environment (Reeves, 1929).

Eventually, states began to found training schools for white boys and boys of color, white girls and girls of color. In the North most training schools were integrated, and girls of color and white girls often shared the same cottage. In the South training schools only accepted white children. Southern states founded separate institutions for girls of color and boys of color much later. Most training schools provided an academic education that reflected the curriculum in public schools. Tragically, many training schools excluded boys of color from academic programs. Some schools failed to educate boys of color beyond the eighth grade. If boys of color arrived at a school with an eighth grade education, staff forced them to work rather than continue their education. Similarly, when compared with their white counterparts, girls of color received substandard academic and vocational training. Often they served school staff in domestic capacities and lived in overcrowded conditions (Reeves, 1929).

In the 1820s, arguments emerged in the New York legislature that sharply contrasted the position of reformers. The legislature criticized the lack of severity and suffering in adult prisons, and facilities like Auburn in New York became oppressive environments, codified with strict rules, and restricted mobility. In other areas of the country where support for rehabilitation waned, correctional education received little attention (Barton & Coley, 1996).

Progressive Era

The Progressive Era reforms from the late 1800s to the 1930s embodied “an underlying optimism about the possibility of curing social ills through government” (Sturr, 2004, p. 88) and facilitated the introduction of probation, parole, and intermediate sentencing into the criminal justice system. Reformers argued that, “procedures for dealing with offenders and sentencing ought to be tailored to the offender rather than to the crime ... the goal was to rehabilitate prisoners—make it possible for them to return to society as responsible citizens” (Sturr, 2004, p. 88). Additionally, reformers worked to rectify the problem of officer brutality and the abysmal conditions they found in many prisons.

In 1913 Thomas Osborne, who was a successful industrialist and politician, impersonated a prisoner to glean intimate knowledge of the conditions at Auburn, the prison in his hometown. Almost immediately he initiated a radical program for the inmates. He established a democratic, inmate-directed association called the Mutual Welfare League that organized the prison with the warden’s permission (Sturr, 2004; Gillespie, 2003). Following reform at Auburn, Osborne went to Sing Sing where he worked to introduce another league. The goals of the league were to provide “a model of society within the prison walls, to facilitate the prisoner’s rehabilitation, and to teach prisoners” (Sturr, 2004, p. 90) accountability for their actions. Organization of the leagues included executive, legislative and judicial branched, that prisoners elected. The changes effectively ended

goose stepping, the ‘rule of silence,’ and the striped suits; prisoners now wore plain gray uniforms and were allowed—even encouraged—to talk and interact socially with one another ... Recreation and entertainment were introduced into the prison. Prisoner’s ability to correspond with and receive visits from, family and friends was greatly liberalized. (Sturr, 2004, p. 90)

Unfortunately, the reforms were riddled with potential abuses of power. The privileges were used to maintain control over the behavior of inmates. “Wardens manipulated the new prison privileges to the ends of discipline. They would deprive a disobedient inmate of freedom of the yard or of attending a movie or of writing his letters or of using the commissary” (Rothman, 1980, p. 151). Often prison

officials used the threat of a transfer to a more violent prison as a way to maintain control over prisoners.

One of the unintended consequences of the advocacy and eventual implementation of the systems of probation, parole, and intermediate sentencing—house arrest, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, community service, jail-based programs, and boot camp—became increased state surveillance and control. Moreover, “judicial and prosecutorial discretion” (Sturr, 2004, p. 91) eventually generated the production of two systems of justice, one that the privileged could manipulate, and another the “poor and non-white people” tried to survive.

Radical Programs, Radical Prisoners

Resistance emerged in response to failed reforms, and prisoners and activists cited problems with intermediate sentencing and internal prison reforms, and demanded changes. The progressive ideal of rehabilitation, however, continued into the 1950s and 1960s, and educational programs expanded, including the introduction of post-secondary education (Davidson, 1995) and the creation of and increased access to prison libraries. Programs like bibliotherapy at San Quentin, “contributed centrally to the explosion of prisoner writing and publishing in the 1950s and 1960s.” Herman Spector, the librarian at San Quentin, conducted discussion groups on “Great Books” and “self-improvement” and lead creative writing classes as therapy. He kept copious notes on each participant and controlled what each inmate read. Although the administration criticized the program and forced Spector to destroy any inappropriate writing, program participation dramatically increased library use. “By 1956 there were over 33,000 books in the library and prisoners at San Quentin borrowed at a rate of 98 books per year. Some 90% of prisoners used the library” (Sturr, 2004, p. 94).¹ Access to libraries included an increase in legal research too, and prisoners began writing their own appeals.

¹ In the United States, general population use of libraries is 18 percent (Sturr, 2004).

Conflict over the System

In the 1960s and 1970s a radical prisoner's movement flourished in particular prisons and leaders like "Eldridge Cleaver, Huey P. Newton, and George Jackson," organized "groups, such as the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, and the Symbionese Liberation Army ... There were secret political study groups, underground newspapers, and prisoner unions. (Sturr, 2004, p. 92). Extensive communication existed between prisoners and activists involved in the politics of the Left. Both prisoner and activists critiqued intermediate sentencing and prison policies. Ultimately, however, the radical prisoner's movement failed as prison guards murdered leaders inside prisons, and excessive use of state force became a "legitimate" response to protests inside prisons. Outside prison, the Courts ignored meticulously written legal appeals. "There was a political and judicial backlash, and reforms were introduced to the prisons which made organizing more difficult" (Sturr, 2004, p. 94).

Prison Culture and Research

Research on prisons increased as sociologists studied the ideas of culture and sub-cultures and constructed the concept of prisonization as a way to frame experience in prison. Prisonization is "the process of socialization or enculturation into the prison subculture" (Gillespie, 2003, p. 17) and researchers in sociology utilized deprivation models and importation models to explain the process.

The deprivation model developed by Greshman Sykes (1958) documented the loss or lack of liberty, autonomy, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, and security. Sykes described these deprivations as painful, and argued that such deprivations prevented inmates from maintaining healthy relationships outside prison. For Sykes, the subculture of prison emerged from the deprivations experienced in prison.

In contrast, John Irwin and Donald Cressey argued in the early 1960s for a model of importation to explain the phenomena of prisonization. The importation model suggested that subculture in prison reflected the experiences men and women encountered prior to incarceration.

Irwin and Cressey (1962) found that prison held multiple subcultures and that the variation among subcultures was linked to demographic information, criminal history, criminal status, and the length of time served in institutions. Three areas were identified by the researchers: the thief subculture, the convict subculture, and the straight subculture. Thieves primarily identified with other thieves, and convicts honored the inmate code² and endured typically a long history of institutionalization. Often the straights were one-time offenders who identified with prison administrators and staff and participated in educational and rehabilitative programs.

The work of Sykes, and Irwin and Cressey, like most research in the 1950s and 1960s, focused on the male prison population. For the most part, researchers ignored crime perpetrated by women and girls. Male-dominated theories about male-delinquency and crime generated little understanding about the experiences of women and girls with crime (Britton, 2004; aChesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004b).

Feminist Criminology and Research

Traditionally, in the field of criminology “romance and fascination” with the outlaw and a desire to study and understand “outlaw men” directed most research. When the issue of gender and crime appeared in research, it was presented as only a variable. “Female victimization was ignored, minimized, and trivialized” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004a, p. 1). Feminist criminology challenged this tradition by specifically addressing the ways in which gender matters as a dimension of a woman’s crime and as a dimension of her treatment within the criminal justice system. Current research indicates that girls and women constitute about 25 percent of the criminal justice system.

² According to Wayne Gillespie, “The inmate code was the normative system of the inmate subculture, and its two key assumptions involved inmate solidarity and opposition to custodial authority. Prisonization was the process of assimilation into the inmate subculture whereby prisoners learned the tenets of the inmate code” (2003, p. 64). Gillespie is quick to include however, findings that revealed some inmates never adopting the code. He explained that “the extent to which prisoners take on the inmate code and behave accordingly depends upon a variety of individual traits and institutional features” (2003, p. 64).

Research on women calls for a contextualization of women and girl offenders. This advocacy for contextualization includes emphasizing the life histories of girls and women. In the majority of female delinquent cases men victimized girls before the girls committed any crime, and research findings suggest that, “sexually abused females are more likely than males to abuse drugs, sell drugs, and commit general delinquency” (Katz, 2004, p. 25). Specifically, girls experience sexual abuse at a rate three times higher than boys. “Sixty percent of women under correctional authority reported they were physically or sexually assaulted at some time in their lives” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004a, p. 5). For almost 70 percent of them the assault occurred before they were 18-years-old. Growing up, over one-third of women offenders witnessed the adults in their homes abusing drugs and alcohol.

Historically, immigrant girls and working-class girls faced family court in ways that privileged women did not. Indeed privileged women helped create the family courts. These women “carved out for themselves a role in the policing of women and girls ... ” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004b, p. 56). In Hawaii, for example, in 1929 and 1930 over 50 percent of the girls sent to court faced charges of “‘immorality’ which meant evidence of sexual intercourse” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004b, p. 57). And nationally, the courts that found girls guilty of waywardness or immorality sent them to training schools at a rate two to three times higher than that of boys. “Obsessed with precocious female sexuality, these institutions isolated the girls from all contact with men while housing them in bucolic settings. The intention was to hold the girls until marriageable age and to occupy them with domestic pursuits during their sometimes lengthy incarceration” (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004b, p. 58). Whereas the boys left reform schools often at age 16, at some schools, girls stayed until the age of 25.

Questioning the role the court took in moralizing the character and behavior of women, Paul Tappan researched hundreds of case decisions from the 1930s and 1940s. Tappan developed an argument against the trend of prosecution that sent young women to training schools for disobedience in the home or for risking moral depravity (Chesney-Lind et al, 2004b).

Typically, authorities arrested girls for status offenses. In 1950 in Los Angeles status offenses constituted 80 percent of the arrests. Courts charged girls with running away, curfew violations,

truancy, or incorrigibility. “Nearly half of the status offenders were charged directly with sexual misconduct,” (Chesney-Lind et al, 2004b, p. 60), however, rarely were girls charged with prostitution. Often the offense was with a single partner.

Research from the 1970s reflects these same arrest trends with the addition of theft, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s the types of arrests among girls and women began to change. Crime looked more like what had been traditional male crime. With the increase in demand for crack and cocaine, the courts started prosecuting cases of assault, drug trafficking, and larceny among girls and women, although at rate exponentially lower than those of boys and men (Hubner, 2005). For example, in 2004 the courts incarcerated almost 1,010,000 men for drug abuse violations and 236,000 women, and they incarcerated about 251,000 men for aggravated assault, and about 65,000 women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

Contemporary research on girls and women includes identity development, violence against women, substance abuse, gang membership, teen pregnancy, education, and lesbianism. Recently, research on teen pregnancy revealed that the sexual activity begins at an earlier age for girls who are incarcerated, and increases the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. The majority of teenage mothers leave school and earns about \$5,600 each year. The relationship between low performance in school and delinquent behavior still remains strong among girls, and over 25 percent of girls who are incarcerated reveal learning disabilities (Chesney-Lind et al, 2004b).

The introduction and inclusion of gender is important in understanding the history of incarceration and research about women and the experiences of women. However, I want to caution against using women or men as a unitary category of analysis. Feminist criminology is quick to reject essentialism and strives to contextualize issues of race, class, and gender when addressing illegal work and activity.

Recidivism and Research

According to Brian Jarvis (2004) in *Cruel and Unusual: Punishment and U.S. Culture* until the early 1970s, there were no official “prisons or prisoners ... the Department of Corrections provided its ‘inmates’ with vocational training, educational opportunities, counseling and psychiatric treatment” (p. 8). Jarvis argued that during the early 70s, regressive philosophies appeared in the rhetoric of justice. “The contemporary expansion of the penal system has witnessed a wholesale rejection of rehabilitative ideals and a return to a profoundly Puritanical insistence on punishment as retribution” (p. 8). Critical reviews of rehabilitation programs in the 1970s challenged the traditional perspectives in correctional education. The ideal of “personal transformation” was attacked and research of 200 different studies revealed that nothing worked. Recidivism rates remained unchanged (Gillespie, 2003).

Activists and supporters of prison reform disagreed with the scholarly claims of program ineffectiveness, and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) argued instead that only a small number of prisoners actually received access to prison programs. The AFSC articulated a

‘dual system of justice’ which differentially punished middle and upper class white people, on the one hand, and poor people and people of color, on the other. They objected to the fact that the criminal justice system ignored, or punished minimally, corporate crimes (even when they were called ‘crimes’), but brought ‘the full weight of repressive enforcement’ for relatively minor crimes or victimless crimes. (Sturr, 2004, p. 95)

Their recommendations included a renewed focus on serious crime, the decriminalization of victimless crime, like drug abuse violations, and the reduction of penalties for minor crimes. They proposed short, fixed sentencing for “the sorts of crimes most prisoners were in prison for; they advocated the elimination of discretion and plea bargaining, because of its contribution to the ‘dual system of justice’ between rich and poor, whites and non-whites” (Sturr, 2004, p. 95). The AFSC called for a return to punishment reflecting the crime, rather than punishment reflecting the criminal.

Eventually, fixed sentencing reforms were introduced and quickly co-opted by the political Right, an unintended consequence of the recommendations from prisoner-friendly allies. “The

political climate of the 1980s no longer favored creative writing courses in prisons or literary journals publishing prison writing and, since then, laws have been passed to make it illegal for prisoners to collect money from their writings ...” (Ek, 2005, p. 3). Bruce Franklin (1998), who edited *Prison Writing in 20th Century America*, argued that the purpose of these new laws was “identical to the purpose of the repression of prison literature in the 1930s: to keep American people in the dark about the American prison” (p. 14).

Politically, the 1980s burgeoned with tough on crime rhetoric and calls to suspend furlough and other programs, as candidates across the country found that building consensus around crime elicited voter support in ways that consensus around other social issues could not. Regrettably, advocacy by the AFSC for the decriminalization of victimless crime and for the reduction of sentences for minor crimes was ignored, and allies watched as “standard sentences lengthened” (Sturr, 2004, p. 96).

Education, Delinquency, and Research

The educational history of inmates reveals typically low grades in school, discipline problems, and school leaving (Polk & Schafer, 1972). In the United States, only 40 percent of the prison population has either a high school diploma or a GED (United States Department of Justice, 2003). In New York City 90 percent of the male prison population are former school leavers of New York City public schools (Kozol, 1991). And although over 80 percent of state prisons offer secondary education programs, only one-fourth of the prison population participates in GED and high school classes). Less than 10 percent of state prison populations participate in college courses, although almost 27 percent of the prisons offer them (United States Department of Justice, 2003).

Education research on school-leavers by Michelle Fine (1991) revealed that youth who are taught by teachers struggling with issues of power are often labeled as “dangerous kids.” Fine found

that those students who challenge curriculum and classroom discipline are labeled similarly and are both silenced and punished for their critical observations. Often these students leave school, too³.

If dissent was civilized through the mechanisms of democracy, it was exported through mechanisms of discipline. The most effective procedure for silencing was to banish the source of dissent, tallied in the school's drop out rate ... it is often the academic critic resisting the intellectual and political girdles of schooling who drops out or is pushed out of low-income schools. (p. 50)

Disproportionate rates of in school suspension, out of school suspension, and expulsion affect African-American and Latino boys (Ferguson, 2001; Fine, 1991). Fine argued also that disempowered teachers may help produce disempowered students who leave school. Consequently, understanding the ways in which men and women who are incarcerated experience education both as children, young adults, and as students in prison, may provide contextual richness and understanding of their experiences. Researching students who take college courses while incarcerated is important as questions arise regarding why particular students choose to continue with classes and education after often experiencing either previous rejection during their former educational experiences or a departure from school. Students in college classes challenge also the conservative assumption that as "inmates" they are unable to do academic work, moreover, college coursework.

Issues of recidivism⁴ still frame most of the research about correctional education programs. Consistently, research findings reveal that substance abuse programs and education programs "reduce recidivism, increase life and job skills and are very cost-effective." Unfortunately, current national and state trends reflect support for prison construction rather than prison rehabilitation programs (Barton and Coley, 1996, p. 7).⁵

³ Fine's research found that "school-leavers were significantly less depressed, more resilient, and more critical of their constrained economic opportunities. In contrast, students who stayed in school were significantly more depressed, self-blaming, and politically conservative" (Kelly and Gaskell, 1996, p. xii). However, she added, by young adulthood dropouts internalized racism and classism and shifted toward self-blame. Sardonicly, she writes, "The psychological project of late capitalism—getting the poor (and school "failures") to hold themselves accountable for their own miserable outcomes—has been a brilliant success, (Kelly and Gaskell p. xv).

⁴ The definition of recidivism varies from study to study and may include parole violations as well as an actual return to prison for a new offense.

⁵ The U.S. prison population has tripled since 1980, even though the number of arrests has remained relatively stable. If this trend continues the U.S. will soon have more people incarcerated than in four-year colleges, (Barton & Coley, 1996, p. 5).

In general education programs yield positive effects on reducing recidivism. The majority of studies⁶ analyzing basic and secondary educational programs found that participation reduced recidivism, and most studies⁷ found a positive effect on post-release employment success. Research on post-secondary education revealed a positive effect⁸ on reducing recidivism, and on post-release employment success⁹ (Barton et al., 1996).

In 2000, according to the United States Department of Justice (2003), almost 56 percent of state prisons offered vocational education programs, however, only 32 percent of the total state prison population participated in the programs; and although over 80 percent offered adult basic education and General Educational Development (GED) programs, only three percent participated in adult basic education and 23 percent in high school or GED classes. About 27 percent of state prisons offer college courses, but the participation rate is less than ten percent. State prisons are least likely to offer post-secondary education.¹⁰

A few states like Kentucky have an 86 percent participation rate in their education programs, but other states have a rate as low as seven percent. The participation in most states is between 25-50 percent of the total prison population (Barton et al, 1996). Tragically, that leaves 50-75 percent of the remaining prison population without access to educational opportunities that increase post-release employment success and decrease recidivism rates.¹

There is research also that revealed a negative effect on recidivism. One study in New York found that student-inmates with more than 60 college credits were more likely to be re-incarcerated than those with fewer than 30 credits (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995).

Although none of these numbers provide a comprehensive story of educational experiences in prison, the low participation rates invite questions about what experiences are like for those who do participate in education programs in prison.

⁶ Nine studies of eleven studies, (Barton & Coley, 1996).

⁷ Three studies of four studies, (Barton & Coley, 1996).

⁸ Ten studies of fourteen studies, (Barton & Coley, 1996).

⁹ Three studies of three studies, (Barton & Coley, 1996).

¹⁰ Almost 40 percent of the state prisons offer special education classes, however, the United States Department of Justice (2003) does not offer comparative statistics on participation on Special Education in Table 6.46.

Darren's Story in "Representing Tragedy" ~ My Story, Part II

AG (Academically Gifted)

In elementary they started doing routines on the hall where you rotate.
Mrs. Mitchell, probably her first five years of teaching, in her twenties,
she used to have it out with the other teachers.
(The class) could be in the wrong, and she would stick up for us.
We did what we could to make her proud of us.

I remember on one of my tests, I scored a 97,
and my mom got letters
asking if I might want go to school year round.
I wanted to stay with my friends,
I wanted to stay in public school.
She gave me the decision to make.
My mom didn't want to put me in a situation
where I would withdraw.

My language arts teacher, Mrs. McQueen,
helped me make it through 7th grade.
When I was having trouble at home,
she came to my home
making sure I was doing things I needed to do.
I moved with my father for a little bit,
to a different district.
I was an A B student,
in advanced classes, with some regular classes.
I didn't know if my classmates were behind me or what;
(Mrs. McQueen) visited me at the other school.

When I got to high school
it was a whole different game.
Pretty much the majority of my neighborhood went there.
They didn't want us out there.
They made me feel out of place.
I'm in AG classes;
I'm the only black guy in there –
the teacher recognized it, too –
When you get to high school
you're pretty much on your own;
(but) I was determined.

Sometimes if things are forced on you,
you can't motivate yourself –
as days rolled on I just lost my focus.
The encouragement just disappeared.
You go to sleep in class,
they're not going to wake you up.
You miss ten days a semester
and you fail all your classes,

automatically,
even if you did all your make up work.

I never hit a stride in 8th or 9th grade.
My pop moved out;
I started looking to the street.
At school I wasn't benefited.
In the street, I was doing things to make money;
the world is moving 60 times faster out there,
and I'm hoping (the principal) does suspend me,
so I have an excuse to stay home,
so I have an excuse to tell my mom.

(In prison) every teacher don't try to sugar coat nothing;
in Todd's class we started talking about
social class, social capital.

The way I look at it,
I'm glad to be tak(ing) advantage of everything here;
I'm going to make the best of it.
I finished two computer science classes,
I did invest my time in something worthwhile.

They're only two things you're going to choose:
either you go back out there
and get it right,
or you come back.
Or you can die.

Day by day,
it looks scary;
my mind's made up
I can't come back.
I'm not going to go out there and sell drugs;
I'm going to better myself,
get grants to go to school.

I think about this every night;
I have kids,
my daughter is two, my son is three;
it's another reason for me not to fail;
I'm determined.

I'm going to move once I get out.
I'm going to get married.

The world is moving 60 times faster out there;
in here, I see everyone walking.

(April 2001)

Narrative, Social Justice, and Power

To do this research on the educational experiences of men and women who are incarcerated, I chose specifically, the lens, method, and theory of narrative. I used narrative to introduce and represent the stories these students shared about their past and present educational experiences. Narrative inquiry is one way we make meaning from our experiences. More than method or theory, narrative inquiry for me is about understanding stories. The stories in which I am interested in understanding are not just any stories though; they are stories that speak to issues of social justice.¹¹ And they are stories that do something (Gourevitch, 1998; Krog, 1998; Montoya, 2002; Schulz, 2001; Tutu, 1999). I frame this research in ways similar to that of Michele Berger who approaches her work citing inspiration from the Dali Lama and Cornel West. Berger (2005) explained that one's work ought to open hearts, and intervene in crisis. I make the addition here that one's work ought to invite empathy and action as well. William Schulz, former executive director of Amnesty International USA, has argued that stories in social justice work ought to encourage an empathetic response.

I contend that narrative provides understanding of experience (MacIntyre, 1984), welcomes contradictions that emerge in the narration and representation of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), re-shapes discourse (Foucault, 1995; 1990), and allows readers and researchers to honor the particular (Noblit, 1999). I argue that honoring the particular is important if one is interested in the ways in which she might challenge grand narratives or dominant discourses. For if one does not consider the particular, either a particular story amidst grand narratives, or a particular experience by a historically and culturally situated individual, if one only names particular cases as "different" or "exceptions," she risks re-inscribing the dynamics of power present already in the status quo.

Challenging the status quo, specifically inequities between privileged and targeted individuals and groups, is also a goal in my work. I believe that advocacy and action for social justice is

¹¹ My understanding of social justice is predicated on my work as a volunteer leader for Amnesty International USA's Women's Human Rights Steering Committee. In Amnesty International's the framework of social justice includes responses to issues of civil and political disenfranchisement and economic, social, and cultural inequities as well as responses to violations of human rights.

cultivated through the production of culture, and activists as well as educators, who work for social justice, use research, curriculum, pedagogy, and actions, produce a specific kind of culture. That culture is, among other things, often community focused and perpetuated by storytelling (Guinier & Torres, 2002). Narrative gives activists and educators a way to promote this culture and a way to honor multiple and sometimes conflicting claims.

Narrative allows people to navigate their world (Taussig, 1987) and their identity (Eakin, 1999), encounter new horizons of empathy (Schulz, 2001), and explore their own consciousnesses (Bruner, 1996). Narrative interpretation of experience reveals how personal, social, and material conditions produce meaning (Aretxaga, 1997). The potential of narrative to produce educative moments or philosophical transformation is possible, but certainly not all education or all philosophical transformations are traced to narrative. Indeed, much education avoids altogether the exploration of critical reflection.¹² Narrative provides opportunities to use the imagination to reshape and rename experience so that both a different understanding and a different story emerge. This difference is not simply a critical reflection on what is already known, but a discernable alteration in the pastiche of what was already present in the story told and the alternate or new story. This difference makes new understandings about the past and the future possible.

Narrative Lens and Positionality

I have a personal, political, and moral relationship to narrative. As a teacher and researcher I believe our experiences influence how and what we learn. In *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An*

¹²According to Paulo Freire (2003) the banking concept in education is a method in which the teacher-student relationship reflects a subject-object relationship. This relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The teacher speaks from a position of unquestioned authority and describes knowledge as “motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable” (p. 71). The students receive the information passively. For Freire the banking concept occurs when students are treated as containers into which the teacher deposits information. Education thus becomes an act of depositing. “Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 73). Freire contends that attitudes and practices of the banking concept “mirror oppressive society as a whole” (p. 73). Those truly committed to liberation “must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with posing the problems of human-beings in their relations with the world” (p. 80). To establish problem-posing education, one must have dialogue, joint responsibility, a critique of authority, and a multi-directional state of teaching and learning. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.

Alternative Approach to Education, Nel Noddings (1992) emphasized this connection and the importance of identity and context. She argued: “we cannot separate education from personal experience. Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter in what we learn, what we value, and how we approach intellectual and moral life” (p. xiii). With this acknowledgement, I begin to address the importance of my politics as a dimension of my positionality. As one is always a part of the stories she represents, acknowledging positionality is always important (Merchant & Willis, 2001; Noblit, 1999).

The Personal

I need to share my affinity for narrative for it is a part of my positionality and a significant lens through which I attempt to order and interpret the world. My embeddedness in social, historical, and material conditions, whether discourses or structures, and I argue, my psychological, emotional, and intellectual responses to my situatedness and experiences, all influence the way in which I see and tell the world. This includes my relationship to a liberal arts education, interest in creative writing, compulsion toward ethnographic non-fiction, academic journeys through psychology, English, education, social and political theory, and my heart-felt affection for a number of books. All of these are dimensions of my identity that reveal an affinity for narrative.¹³

The Political

I believe that often those who are privileged consciously create cosmologies, or a nexus of mutually reinforcing ideologies,¹⁴ that sustain arguments for entitlement, for example, neo-conservatism,¹⁵ in order to redirect and deny their privilege, regardless of whether that privilege is

¹³ Of course, this dimension of my identity intersects with other dimensions, e.g., status, race, gender, and sexuality.

¹⁴ Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argued that, “race, class and gender oppression could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence” (p. 67). As a part of a dominant ideology, oppressors use markers, images, and symbols to name the “other”. This media are deployed “to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life” (p. 68). Whites may not recognize how whiteness functions as an ideology as the process of rationalization to explain privilege is reinforced by the cultural assumptions and beliefs of the privileged.

¹⁵ I am using neo-conservatism here as an example of the conservative right in U.S. politics reifying the concepts of individualism, meritocracy and equality in an attempt to re-direct issues of equity, racial and social justice post Civil Rights Movement. Neo-conservatism “attempted to frame the new post-civil rights meaning of race as a type of ethnicity, a largely cultural difference ... Many whites came to support a conservative and individualistic form of egalitarianism, thus

whiteness, patriarchy, or affluence. In my work I search for ways to dismantle neo-conservative arguments that negate the lived experiences of targeted groups.

Although I am disconcerted by the ways in which privilege and therefore, the status quo is maintained, I need to disclose that I do believe those who are privileged can interrogate and destabilize privilege. Narrative provides such an opportunity. C.A. Bowers (1986) explained that narrative unveils the intent of the storyteller and his or her taken-for-granted-beliefs.

The recounting of experience reveals the master conceptual patterns that are shared within culture to organize experience; recounting also reveals the tension between the intentionality of the subject and the taken-for-granted beliefs that reflect the unconscious process of socialization. (p. 87-88)

My hope is that these narratives may invite readers to recount their own “taken-for-granted” beliefs, and perhaps reframe their experiences and understandings, with new context and complexity.

Cosmopolitanism and the Explicitly Moral Lens

The explicitly moral lens in my positionality reflects my commitment to addressing inequities and my belief that we have a responsibility to do so with targeted groups and across borders. I adopt Kok-Chor Tan’s (2004) idea of cosmopolitanism here inasmuch as I believe that the social and economic inequalities that exist globally ought to be addressed across borders politically.

In Our Own Best Interest Schulz (2001) argued, “that caring about the fate of our ‘neighbors’ is far more than a matter of conscience. It is in truth a matter of survival—our own survival. Because our welfare is bound up in theirs, and when their dreams die, our health and security dies with them” (p. xxvi).¹⁶ Schulz presented pragmatism as the position from which one ought to address human rights violations. “The question to ask about rights is not, Are they true? The question is, Do they work? Do they work to spread empathy, combat cruelty, and protect the weak from their oppressors? The experience of the international human rights community is that (they) do” (p. 27).

upholding a supposedly ‘color-blind’ (but actually deeply race-conscious) position. The neo-conservative project eventually consolidated as a strategy to conserve white advantages through the denial of racial difference” (Winant, 2001, p. 102-103).

¹⁶ In *Facing up to the American Dream*, Jennifer Hochschild revealed that over 65 percent of “blacks believe that ‘what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life’” (1995, p. 122). She found that well educated blacks in particular expressed strong attachments and a sense of group consciousness.

Schulz (2001) characterized the human rights movement as the process of putting a face on atrocity. Quite simply, Amnesty International (AI) tells stories of human suffering. Schulz asserted that one does not have to make a moral claim in order to address the “consequences of cruelty and the signs of suffering,” that one can “ground human rights in the experience of the human community” (p. 21). He described narrative as an explicit strategy for AI—as a way to address suffering through storytelling. Amnesty International’s mission is founded on the belief that “other people’s suffering matters” (p. 16). And if suffering matters, Schulz asked, “how do we convince people to care? The answer is that we show them the pain and tell them a story” (p. 29). Sharing testimony, showing a photograph, and narrating an account of abuse are ways in which AI disseminates its research and invites empathy and support for its actions against those who violate human rights. My support for Amnesty International’s work to eradicate human rights abuses reflects this commitment, but rights discourse aside, my argument for this research is that narrative may cultivate empathy, challenge brutality, and sometimes aid in the protection of those who are suffering under oppression. One of my overarching hopes is to help contextualize the larger political drama of dehumanizing those who are incarcerated and the inequities that often emerge from their stories.

Challenging “Dynasties of Denial”

In *No Future Without Forgiveness* Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was the Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, explained that the purpose of the Commission was to change the frame of public discourse and memory. He wrote, “No one in South Africa could ever again be able to say, ‘I did not know’ and hoped to be believed” (1999, p. 120). Although the TRC was not charged with the task of changing behavior, Archbishop Tutu described during the hearings and in *No Future Without Forgiveness* the idea of *Ubuntu*. His own sense of humanity and his relationship to his idea of humanity is a way to understand both his own positionality and why the hearings were so important. *Ubuntu* is the idea that my humanity is wrapped up in your humanity that what dehumanizes you, dehumanizes me. Archbishop Tutu wrote

that *Ubuntu* was difficult to translate into a Western language and yet speaks to the essence of being human.

When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u nobuntu’; ‘Hey, so and so has ubuntu.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours’ ... We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ (1999, p. 31)

Summum bonum or social harmony, Tutu explained, is the “greatest good ... (a)nger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What de-humanizes you inexorably de-humanizes me” (p. 31).

A year after the genocidal massacres of Tutsis in 1994, Archbishop Tutu visited Rwanda. When he spoke to government leaders, mostly Tutsi exiles who had formed a new government, and diplomats, he shared with them the idea of a shared humanity, a shared community – ubuntu. “... What happens here, what happens in Nigeria, wherever—that becomes part of my experience,” (Gourevitch, 1998, p. 178).

Antjie Krog, a journalist who reported on the TRC hearings, shared what her colleague, Mondli, thought of reconciliation in *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa.*, a book she wrote about her experiences while covering the hearings.

Reconciliation will only be possible when the dignity of black people has been restored and when whites become compassionate. Reconciliation and amnesty I don’t find important. That people are able to tell their stories—that’s the important thing ... For me, justice lies in the fact that everything is being laid out on the same table. (2000, p. 60-61)

For Krog, the victim’s hearings altered the ability of people to deny apartheid and the systemic economic, political, and social disenfranchisement of Black people in South Africa. “Because of these narratives, people no can indulge in their separate dynasties of denial” (2000, p. 113). As far as reconciliation goes, she believed it was about the process itself.

I want to be careful not to suggest that storytelling is exclusively constructive, healthy, and positive—either in telling or listening. As much as I believe in the healing power of stories, I recognize as well the power they have to oppress. Perhaps because both of these conditions can be read as political, social, and personal, I am drawn to tellings—a process of reflection and action, interpreting and performing, and asking of what stories do I find myself a part (MacIntyre, 1984)?

Complicating Claims

The story and the under story

Although one may frame inquiry with a narrative approach, it is important to remember that narrative is always partial. There are spaces between the telling and the story told. There is slippage between the text and reader (Ellsworth, 1997). There is the story told and the story untold. Krog refers to this as the story and the under story—what is left out. Many things, she wrote, were left out of both the victims’ hearings and the amnesty hearings. A story is never neutral.

I believe Elizabeth Ellsworth’s analysis of dialogue in *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address* (1997) is useful in trying to understand Krog’s observations about storytelling. Ellsworth argued that there are never disinterested mediators in dialogue, that people bring their own partial, multiple, and contradictory subjectivities to a dialogue. Inviting dialogue, for her, is a political act with its own sets of rules and expectations. Dialogue is simply not neutral. Dynamics of dialogue are asymmetrical, particularly in settings, which are already embedded in social structures. There is “slippage, and unpredictable transformations” (p. 42) between the text and reader. Ellsworth asserted that as a part of the condition of employing any form of address the speaker is always projecting a particular idea of what she desires from the social relations around her. She situates others through her discourse.

Coercion and Narrative

Phillip Gourevitch, a journalist from the United States, who wrote *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*, warned his readers that, “Rwandan history is dangerous. Like all history, it is a record of successive struggles for power, and to a very large extent power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality—even, as is often the case, when that story is written in their blood” (1998, p. 48). In a similar way, critical race theorist, Richard Delgado (1995) cautioned his readers about the ways in which stories coerce and construct reality. Delgado offered an ethnographic account of the ways in which law school students and administrators responded to the decision not to hire a Black candidate for a teaching position. He described administrators dodging critical feedback repeatedly from the students and admonishing those responses that fell outside what they deemed as constructive dialogue. The students struggled to find their own story when saturated with the rhetoric of the administrators. Eventually, they held a rally and published an anonymous critique of the white, privileged hiring system. Delgado explained that, “there is a war between stories. They contend for, tug at, our minds” (p. 62). The administrators’ story revealed “how forceful and repeated storytelling can perpetuate a particular view of reality” and Delgado cautioned, like Gourevitch warned, that stories may be “deeply coercive” (p. 64).

Honoring stories of victims

Unless people have the chance to tell the stories of their pain and suffering, they are diminished and, yes, victimized. Yet telling one’s story as a victim story risks reducing oneself to stereotypes of suffering. Describing yourself as a victim has a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating feature; and yet, failing to acknowledge or assert one’s victimization leaves the harm unaddressed and the perpetrators unchallenged. (Minnow, 1993, p. 40).

Alexandra Juhasz (2004) addressed the issue of sharing stories of victims while working on her documentary *RELEASED: 5 Short Videos about Women and Prison*. Although Juhasz represented women who were incarcerated as victims, framing the experiences of women prisoners as victims remains problematic. Juhasz claimed that “female inmates of American prisons are victims of state, social, and ideological systems (such as prison, welfare, racism, sexism, and physical, emotional or

drug abuse) that punish them for their usually victimless crimes” (2004, p. 248). In her research she queried whether or not representation was a possibility without the reification of the status of woman prisoner as victim and the reduction of her experiences “to stereotypes of suffering”? Is objectification, she asked, a “structural precondition” of documentary work?

In her project Juhasz decided to introduce collaboration as a way to challenge the production of stereotypical stories of victims. She enlisted colleagues and activists to help her document the stories, and although the project was ultimately about women prisoners, there were no images of prison in the film. Juhasz claimed that the dialectic among the five videos, the individual responsibility each filmmaker owned over his or her video, and the conscious decision to avoid traditional images of prison helped her counter the stereotypical stories of victims.

What do the decisions to engage in research with targeted or oppressed look like? For what I want the world to know (Glesne, 2006) is that the men and women who are incarcerated are important and a part of our community. They are human, indeed, and our attention ought to be theirs. But what I had to ask, and did not ask before in any of my initial interviews I completed, was “Do you think your story is important to tell? Do you want to share your story? and with whom?” I could not presume that the students would agree with me. And to move forward with this research I needed an affirmative response. I received affirmative responses in the interviews represented here, and ultimately, the students’ interest in their own stories generated new understandings for me.

Lastly, although this project is about what some stories do, I must acknowledge that stories may also be about not doing, or rather not doing particular things, like the law school student responses that fell outside of what was acceptable feedback to administrators. They were simply not to do those sorts of things.

Narrative and Seduction

I argue here that narratives may seduce the “parlor liberals” (Douthat, 2005, p. 200) with the idea that they participate in the politics of eradicating social and economic inequities through the act

of consuming stories about disenfranchisement and abuse. In his auto-ethnography about the structures of privilege at Harvard, alumni, Ross Douthat, described “parlor liberals” as

forming the mainstream at elite colleges. They sit comfortably on the left of the American political spectrum, believing in gun control and gay rights, in affirmative action and abortion, in a multilateral foreign policy and a significant social safety net and they will likely vote Democrat until they die. Yet there is something conservative about them. They are creatures of their class, not would-be traitors to it, and they are deeply uncomfortable with radicalism in any form. This discomfort ... extends easily to anyone who displays too much self-righteousness and zeal, too much anger at institutions and leaders and structures of powers ... Parlor liberals are ultimately well disposed to the world and to their privileged place in it, believing that what injustices there are can be righted without too much upheaval and unrest, and perhaps even without raising taxes. (2005, p. 203-204)

In reading Douthat’s description for many of his peers from Harvard, and thinking about the trend and commitments to book clubs, I began asking the following questions. Do letter-writing campaigns to leaders who violate human rights, for example, sate the parlor liberals need to respond to structured inequality? Do particular narratives serve the same purpose? If a book club in an affluent community reads *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*, is their commitment to social justice met? Does the satiation of particular narratives keep us from radical activism? For all the potential that I believe narrative has, I need to remember that narrative is not action. There are things that narrative may not do; there are things we cannot see; and there are unintended consequences.

Relationships without Relationships ~ My Story, Part III

I did not think of sounds before I went into the prison for the first time. I thought of hiding my body in bulky clothes, of my demeanor, of my fear. I wondered if the students would see my fear. And later, after I began my interviews, I thought about their fear. Should an 11-year-old child, be hustling on the street until 2 or 3 a.m. for his lunch money, his school clothes? That child is in many of these men.

I am changed by the stories I have heard. The first one that stayed with me long into the night and the weeks that followed was one I had transcribed for another interviewer. It was a story of

violence. And cocaine. An estranged ex-partner attacked a young boy's mother, pulled her off her neighbor's porch, and assaulted her. The woman's brother, the boys' uncle, tried to pull him away from her. Unable to, the brother began stabbing the man, eventually halting the assailant's abuse. The boy watched as his mother's ex finally fell away from her, bleeding, and exhausted from the vanishing effects of cocaine. His uncle saved his mother, and then endured the courts sending him to prison for assault. The man's voice on the tape, no longer a boy's, struggles to make sense of justice. I found myself struggling, too. There are other stories, too, the ones I hear with memories of the men I interviewed in 2001—Ben, Darren, Hitch, Malcolm, T.J. and True. And when I think of them what I want the world to know is that they are important. In sharing this with my advisor he made a move to position “them” as culturally situated in an institution—prison— but in my mind, in my story of their stories, I still see them as boys in school. I see them as boys within men. For me, they are important first, there, in those classrooms, and on the streets, before they cross into the discourse of dehumanization: “bad boys,” “class clowns,” “trouble-makers,” “dropouts,” “inmates,” “felons.”

George said to me, “you do not have a relationship with them.” He is right, and it is hard to hear. I do not, but they are a part of my community and a part of who I think I am and what I think I do or at least ought to try to do in this world. And my fate is linked to theirs.

During an interview with Marcus Cove which I completed under the gaze of an intern who refused to let me interview students alone, I told Marcus that one of the reasons I do the work that I do is because I believe that each student I meet is more than whatever moment sent them to prison. He looked surprised by what I shared, but did not speak. After the interview it was the intern who responded. She was paying for college herself and had made it clear to me before my interviews that she resented the education the inmates received for free. After Marcus left she shared quietly that she had not thought about the things I said. Our difference made me think of empathy or what I think of as empathy. What I offer in the name of empathy may be paternalistic behavior, privileged white behavior or simply a commitment to listening. I think empathy is what one does for people for whom we care. We say that we hear, that we are listening. We say: “Your story is important.” “Your

experiences matter,” when so often we are silenced, particularly in schools, and told that they do not. The teacher does not want to know what happened at home. It’s a no excuses-atmosphere in school. Yet perhaps we need the story from home and empathy to accompany it.

At Helms High School, there was one teacher from whom I felt care: Ms. Grace. Through the stories we read together, care emerged. It was not a one-to-one connection, but rather our relationship was mediated by the stories we read together, that we discovered together. I cherished Anna Karenina even though there were chapters I skipped and quiz questions I missed, because I loved learning, listening, and engaging the story with Ms. Grace. I felt as if I had a relationship to Ms. Grace even though my relationship was to the text and experiences we shared. So, what are these relationships without relationships?

I have had only limited interaction with the men I interviewed, but their stories sustain me. Moreover, I see them not as they were in the interviews but as they were in their stories, as boys now men. There is a child’s story I want to tell.

In class, Ms. Grace made the characters we read exist for me, and they became a part of my imagined community. Kitty and Levin. Mr. Oblonsky. Anna. It is my hope and hubris to think that I might share these stories so that they may become a part of a reader’s imagined community, stories the reader shall not be able to put down, stories he will carry with him.

In the first iteration of this research, I left Hitch, metaphorically and literally, at the fence. He stood on the other side of a double fence at the edge of the yard and called to Todd and me when we arrived at the gate house at Morrison. He remembered Todd’s class which he took at Polk a year earlier and the interview I had completed with him. Bright with energy he asked us to find him when he got out. That day Todd and I had new interviews to complete, so we did not linger at the fence, but I wish we had. I regret that we did not. In un-nameable ways this research is a part of my journey to find Hitch. Somehow, I know he will reappear in the stories left to tell.

(January, 2006)

Narrative to Question Power

Stories alone, however, cannot heal us. They also cannot bridge the ruptures between and among Outsider communities or address the economic, educational, and environmental crises of segregated communities—the barrios, ghettos, reservations, and borderlands—wherever they are located. Stories must move us to action and inform our praxis.

- Margaret Montoya, *Celebrating Racialized Legal Narratives*

Citing work by French philosopher, Michel Foucault, Guinier and Torres (2002) coupled the idea of discourse to his theory of knowledge and power. They framed the element of narrative with these ideas. Agency exists in narration, in the production of discourse, they argued, and therefore, in the production of knowledge and power. Narrating is “an active process of creating a story that is both explanatory and motivational, as opposed to merely descriptive. This concept of power is explicitly relational ... and emphasizes an element of power that is potentially generative, that can be exercised by those who create it within groups” (p. 18). Narrative harnesses the potential to generate political and social action. The spaces in which this “reconceptualization of post-postmodern power” emerges provides “the opportunity for individuals to share stories and construct relationships that reinforce a more systemic and critical social understanding” (p. 18).

Foucault believed (1995; 1990), and Guinier and Torres adopted this point, that power in discourse could alter grand narratives, that often appear invisible to the privileged, and could produce counter-narratives. According to Guinier and Torres, Foucault’s theoretical move re-positions traditional ideas of agency in the sense that, now, if and when one tells a story (constructs a discourse) he deploys power. Understanding the deployment of power in the narratives I represent is important as I am interested in fundamental ways about relationships of power.

In *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Begoña Aretxaga (1997) represented stories from women and girls living in conflict in Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s. One of her aims was to “conceptualize experience as an ongoing construction always placed within the arena of existing discursive fields and social practices” (p. 17). For Aretxaga, the narration of experience was important, because the process of interpretation “shows

how personal and social realities are endowed with meaning and power. Narratives of experience provide a critical point of entry into the history that confirms those realities” (p. 18). She argued that without narratives people are unable to interrogate power within social relations—particularly forms of oppression. Narratives embody and project their power relationally, creating new relationships of power. Consequently, narrative teaches people about their roles in their own stories and in their performances of storytelling (Ek, 2005) and provides the opportunity to extrapolate meaning in social relations.

Narrative and Identity

Kimberlé Crenshaw is generally recognized as the person who first used the term “intersectionality.” Coming from a background in legal theory and critical race theory, she introduced her concept of intersectionality to address the inadequacies of framing discrimination along a “single-category axis.” In *DeMarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, Crenshaw (1991) used the term when she applied the intersections of race and gender to her analysis of anti-discrimination cases in legal theory. Crenshaw analyzed cases that required plaintiffs to make their arguments regarding discrimination along a single categorical axis of identity. Specifically, she criticized the courts for forcing Black women to present their cases on the basis of either race discrimination or gender discrimination. The courts refused to allow women to allege discrimination based on both race and gender. In doing so, they denied the multiple intersections of discrimination. Crenshaw asserted that forcing a one-dimensional lens upon the discrimination Black women plaintiffs suffered oversimplified issues of discrimination. “Because, the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 58).

Crenshaw’s (1994) emphasis on intersectionality “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 94). Because intersectionality “shapes experiences” (p. 95) her analysis demanded that any interrogation of

oppression include a framework that acknowledges the interrelationships among multiple dimensions of identity.

In her later work *Mapping the Margins* (1994), Crenshaw identified two kinds of intersectionality: structural intersectionality and political intersectionality. Crenshaw explained that she was not creating a totalizing theory with her idea of intersectionality but a way to mediate claims to multiple identities and the organization of group politics. Studying domestic violence and women of color, she introduced structural and political intersectionality as frameworks to interpret the social and material consequences of embodying intersecting dimensions of identity.

In investigating structural intersectionality, Crenshaw linked the issue of unemployment, lack of available, affordable, and accessible housing, and the need, of women of color in particular, for court advocates, to the navigation of domestic violence situations by women of color. She explained that issues of employment and housing were typically different for women of color when compared to other groups, and that court advocates are absolutely necessary for non-English speakers filing ex-parte, domestic violence protective orders, and criminal charges.

Political intersectionality involves the navigation of different political agendas. Crenshaw used the ideas from her previous critique about dominant discourses on race failing to address the particular experience of Black women and her critique of the dominant discourse on feminism failing to address the particular experiences of Black women to address the construction of political agendas. Crenshaw believed that acknowledging intersectionality may be one way to recognize difference in experience and still organize politically to influence change. And, indeed, there are some organizations already working for racial and social justice with the concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw's concept is found in legal, critical race, and feminist theory as well as in international, and human rights discourse (Raj, 2002).

Qualitative research (Berger, 2004; Merchant & Willis, 2001), communication studies (Crenshaw, 1997), sociology and feminist theory (Bettie, 2003), and feminist criminology (Chesney-Lind et al., 2004b) all use the idea behind intersectionality as well. The application of the idea of

intersectionality consistently appears in qualitative research. Inasmuch as designs in qualitative research are capable of accounting for contradiction, and ambiguity, intersectionality is useful in understanding how one tells one's story and how one experiences and represents identity.

In *Women without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*, Julie Bettie (2003) described the experiences of young women in high school and their negotiation of class, race and ethnicity, and gender as identity, performance, and location. Her ethnography depicted "class categories" and the ways in which they are "infused with and intersect with gender and racial/ethnic meanings" (p. 7). Bettie explained that her analysis frames the intersections of class, race, and gender.

Because middle- or working-class performances were experienced differently across race/ethnicity, and further, because those performances were read differently by others, dependent on the race/ethnicity of the performer, and because it is impossible to uncouple these meanings, I used the hyphenated "race-class performances of femininity" as a way to indicate that class performances have race and gender specific meanings. But I could just as well speak of "gender-class performances of race" or "race-gender performances of class." That race, class, gender, and sexual meanings and identities intersect is not simply an abstract theoretical insight. (p. 55-56)

Bettie's insistence on coupling meaning with an understanding of intersections in identity echoed Crenshaw's position on the lived experience of Black women as both a raced and sexed experience. Crenshaw invited the dimension of class as well in her work with women of color who are survivors of domestic violence.

The students I interviewed provided layered understandings of identity and wrestled constantly with their stigmatized identity while in prison and their imagined identity upon release.

The School Game and Stigma

In the winter of 2001 I began working on the evaluation team of the Youth Offender Program. Later that year I started interviewing men from different institutions who participated in the program. I interviewed students twice a year until the summer of 2003 when the contract with UNC-Chapel Hill ended. In that first spring of 2001, I spent time specifically with one class and

interviewed most of the students. Excerpts from the classroom observations and interviews became a part of the evaluation, but also part of a qualitative project I completed for Dr. Noblit and Dr. Hatt in their advanced qualitative research course. I chose to represent the interviews I completed with the students and the instructor who taught the class, in poetic transcriptions (Glesne, 2006). I produced an ethnopoetic project. “AG” in My Story, Part II is a poem from Darren’s interview transcript. From my analysis in the ethnopoetic project I found the following themes. I want to acknowledge some of the themes that emerged in past interviews as a way to invite readers to think about some of the ideas that I took with me into the dissertation research.

The view of school as a game was prevalent in the interviews I had completed. This perspective reflected other stories from marginalized or targeted students in qualitative research. Many of the stories in Angela Valenzuela’s *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* and Ann Arnett Ferguson’s *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* capture the tenor of the stories I represented in the poems. Valenzuela’s and Ferguson’s work addressed the stigmatization of students, too.

In *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela applied and expanded Nel Nodding’s concept of caring in school. Authentic caring is described as sustained reciprocal relationships between the teachers and students and is essential as such caring becomes the foundation for learning. Consequently, when teachers do not initiate relationships with students the absence of caring affects some students. Valenzuela framed the “uncaring student prototype” in her research and asserted that school structure and teachers control “the mainstream values of the high school and its school-sponsored organizations” by assuring that “high achievers and students involved in school activities will be underrepresented in the ranks of the ‘uncaring-student’ prototype,” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 76).

In *Bad Boys*, Ferguson interrogated the way an elementary school regulates children’s bodies through the process of discipline and the way the school stigmatizes the children, mostly African American boys, in that process. She observed that a child’s perceived academic potential became linked to his or her reputation which was often a construction created by teachers and administrators.

This reputation was circulated among adults in the school and marked the child for others. Ferguson noted as an example that an African American man on the school staff labeled sweatshirt-hooded Lamar with “that one has a jail-cell with his name on it” (2001, p. 1). Lamar’s reputation reached Ferguson before the ten-year-old even walked by her.

In “Third Street,” another poetic transcription from the project, Malcolm suffered from the discrimination perpetuated by his teachers. He was stigmatized because of his father’s behavior and felt targeted for extreme disciplinary actions for the same reason. Malcolm shared that when he was in sixth grade the teachers insulted him.

Back then my dad was a criminal. While I was at school I kind of paid attention.
In the 6th grade the PE teacher told me, “You aren’t ever going to amount to anything; you’re going to be just like your daddy, and go to prison.” They discriminate(d) against me, I’ve heard teachers, “He’s from third street, he’s from the projects.” I’ve heard teachers, out of their mouths. If I got in trouble for fighting or something they’d make it a legal matter.

This stigma was one over which Malcolm had no control. Adults in the school labeled him in this particular way because of his father. In high school after Malcolm had been in a fight, he and his mother went to school to try to gain his re-admittance. The administration denied him access. In his account Malcolm provided contrast in the two scenes of returning to school. He was welcomed by his friends, but the administration was verbally abusive to him upon his return: “When my mama and I walked into the high school people ran up to meet me, hug me, and then we went into the principal’s office. And they told me I was a ‘menace to society.’ They basically denied me my education.”

In my dissertation research I wanted to avoid using simply the school game and stigmatization as the framework onto which I build future stories. These are patterns that past interviews generated, and patterns that appeared again, but I worked to include new and different patterns that complicated and layered the ones already present.

Performing the Research with Narrative Methodology

Narrative inquiry is the process of organizing, interpreting, and producing stories that generate reflexivity. People who work with narrative are in turn the interpreters, evaluators, and producers of stories. They use narrative to frame understandings of people, culture, and change, and to address social and cultural phenomena without reducing the phenomena to isolated variables. Narrative inquiry allows for complexities, contradictions, and ambiguity in ways that other “meaning making” approaches do not. “Ambiguity is the warp of life, not something to be eliminated” (Bateson, 1994, p. 9). In narrative inquiry certainty is not the goal rather an in-depth understanding and a gathering of meaning is.

Those who employ narrative inquiry in their professional research claim that narrative enriches discourse (Geertz, 1988), creates alternative musings and action (Bruner, 1996), and promotes understandings of development, through multiple understandings, discourse and possibilities for re-tellings (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Narrative is a creative way to understand development, and complexity and a way to understand change in a social historical context (Phinney, 2000). Some researchers claim that narrative provides a more truthful account of what happened (Freeman, 2004). Although I do not agree that narrative provides a more truthful account of experience, I do believe it addresses contradiction, conflict, ambiguity, and the negotiability of experience in ways that other methods do not.

Orientations in the Methodological Framework

Following Auli Ek’s conception of narratives in *Race and Masculinity in Contemporary American Prison Narratives*, I analyzed narrative not only as “representations of life in prison, but also as a window through which aspects of the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality ... can be understood” (2005, p. 11) in a social, and historical context.

Additionally, in my approach both to interviewing and analyzing I adopted Donna Haraway’s (1991) feminist epistemological perspective that frames all knowledge as situated knowledge.

Knowledge for Haraway is positioned always in a socio-historical context, as is the knower. All knowledge is, therefore, partial and embedded. In translating this idea into my research I found the moral and investigative positions of critical feminist ethnographers helpful (Lamphere, Ragoné, & Zavella, 1997). “In analyzing women’s and men’s lives, (critical feminist ethnographers) view our subjects as positioned actors who forge ‘situated knowledges’ in order to act within their material conditions” (p. 5).

The recognition of partial knowledge led Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné and Patricia Zavella, who identified as critical feminist ethnographers, to question the way power and knowledge worked in their relationships with their research participants. “How can we alter the power relations between ethnographers and their subjects when we frame the topic for study and the questions asked and receive professional benefits from the publications of our results? And how can we write about our subjects without objectifying them?” (1997, p. 6).

For these anthropologists, capturing rich detail, contextualizing and honoring difference in experience and identity, and situating experience historically, are ways in which they work to overcome traditional anthropological relationships between researcher and participant. I followed this perspective in my work with the narratives I represent here and tried to create spaces for storytelling that were not constrained by social, philosophical, or political theories for which these stories could become merely cases of. My primary goal methodologically was to allow the narratives to drive the pace and development of this project. Where I introduced theory, I situated the narratives from the students in relation to the theories I discussed, not as anecdotal support for the legitimization of particular theory. Chapter 8: Correctional Officers is an example of this. The stories the students shared about their experiences with correctional officers and the domain analysis anchor the chapter in a way that the theory does not. As Chandra Mohanty (2003) argued, “the best theory makes personal experience and individual stories communicable” (p. 191). I had a tentative interview protocol that asked about school and teachers while growing up and in prison, and have the stories

from those questions, but in this work I represented also in complex ways the men and women who told their stories. Their relationships to school experiences was as important as their descriptions of them. In other words the ways they told their story and the meaning they made in the tellings were significant.

Interviewing

I interviewed seven men and two women participating in the Youth Offender Program and who were incarcerated at five different correctional institutions. Many of these students experienced either previous rejection during their former educational experiences or a departure from school. During my interviews I used consent forms and remained diligent about acknowledging my positionality: identifying my white privilege, my class privilege, the audacity of my role as researcher, and my role as student. Additionally, I shared my commitments to understanding what happens to disaffected children in school. Often I failed to develop the rapport I would have liked. However, through member checking and the process of collaboration over my narrative analyses, I believe what I have re-represented in the following chapters reflects some of moments of storytelling I shared with the students. Audio-taping was used with permission and when working. Appendix B contains the interview protocol.

Coding: In Vivo, Sociologically Constructed, and Open

Codes are not isolated variables, but contextual signals of thematic content. “Codes and their segments can be nested or embedded within one another, can overlap, and can intersect” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 36). I used codes to organize my work and to represent patterns and themes as well as build my structured narrative analysis that framed each educational narrative. My analysis would not exist without coding. Coding shaped my interpretations. In vivo codes were those codes derived from the language and terms the students used. I found coding in vivo to be one way I could work inductively through their frames of analysis. In contrast, the sociologically constructed codes I used reflect my own interests and metaphors. The language of the students was not connected always to

these codes. The analysis for Chapter 5: Making Meaning was based on both in vivo and sociologically constructed coding.

Over the course of the project I created categories using a taxonomic approach, with illustrations, and in vivo language from the participants. Students prompted through their disclosure the domain analysis for Chapter 8: Correctional Officers. Experiences with correctional officers emerged as a prominent theme across the interviews with men and women, second only to educational experiences, and I was asking questions about educational experiences. From the structured narrative analysis that framed the narrative representations in Chapter 4: Schooling Traps and Counterpoints, and Chapter 6: Young Women and Perseverance, I used the in vivo references about correctional officers to anchor the chapter on correctional officers. My interests in identity and the ways in which the students framed education in the United States, and in prison, produced the sociologically constructed codes of identity and narrative in Chapter 7 and philosophies of education in Chapter 9.

Characterizing open coding as hermeneutic, I believe that both my perceptions as I interviewed and my representations of the narratives reflect my positionality and experiences of interpretation. “Hermeneutics contends, perception itself is an act of interpretation. Thus the quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, as encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense” (Kincheloe & McLaren, p. 285-286). In my work, I am in agreement with Delgado, who explained, “we participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it” (1995, p. 61).

Structured Narrative Analysis

In narrative inquiry one may structure a story from a general model. Borrowing from William Labov’s sociolinguistic approach to narrative, I employed the narrative elements he constructed to code, frame, represent, analyze, and interpret each student’s story. Labov used the chronology of events to construct a narrative from data. He interpreted changes across time and experience through thematic, evaluative, and narrative categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Although I used Labov’s

method, the analysis and interpretations are my own, and I take responsibility for any and all misrepresentations.

Frames for Analysis and Interpretation

During the summer of 2006 I visited Maury, Morrison, and Polk, and completed interviews with True, Michael Jordan, Tyte Crewdy, Kevenson, Al Chambers, Travreso, and Shoran.¹⁷ Having found myself with first and second round interviews completed with seven of the ten participants, I began coding in vivo—a process that quickly became both overwhelming and exhilarating. I decided that if I were to continue coding so closely to the data that I would never emerge from the richness of the language, and the particular statements each student made. As a way to grasp the breadth of time and place and multiple relationships each student shared, I decided to stop coding in vivo until I had coded each story with Labov's structured narrative analysis and a matrix. I culled the data for the chronological story of schooling experiences and coded each story. I coded themes and patterns that fell outside stories of schooling in vivo and with sociologically constructed codes. To move from the work of structured narrative analysis to interpretations within and across stories I used a matrix (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) as a way to code at the level of story. Doing so allowed me to consider three-dimensional narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Three-dimensional narrative helped me explore the ways in which the students were telling their stories and making meaning from their stories. Clandinin's and Connelly's (2000) idea of three-dimensional narrative is that it elucidates experience. Borrowing from John Dewey's conception of experience, they apply the ideas of continuity and interaction in situations to investigate what they called three-dimensional narrative. This approach allows the researcher to look inward, outward, backward, and forward when interpreting experience, and focusing specifically on context. They argued that there are no context-free experiences and that past experiences influence present experiences on a personal and social level affecting the individual and his environment. They

¹⁷ I went to Maury to follow up with a student who had been transferred there just before his release date in July 2006. I had interviewed him over the years on three other occasions and observed him in class in the spring of 2001. I finished transcribing my interview at Maury within 48 hours.

believed that the stories one tells about the past and may lead to possible re-tellings for understandings in the future. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Noblit (1999) support an emic approach in qualitative work and extend an invitation to readers and audiences to interpret what has been told, and to share other possibilities of telling. With this orientation in mind, I embraced the contradictions and tensions I knew to be present in the student narratives and this work, and I welcome critical and alternative readings (Clifford, 1986) of what is represented here.

As I continued to work with the interviews, I began to visualize the ways in which each student told his or her story. Some students spoke with, to and against each other. I began to hear them speaking to each other through their stories. Ultimately, I heard their stories as texts, challenging, buttressing, and nesting in one another's ideas. Although the students were in different facilities across the state, I heard them as if they were in the same room, working the ideas I tossed in front of us. I concluded that I heard a script.

From the matrix I moved to the construction of a script, which has kept me buoyed in their stories and inspired me to frame what they shared creatively. In September 2006 I began the draft of the script and worked through four iterations until I held the first reading in December 2006. Creating the script allowed me to anchor the stories of these men and women relationally and to begin to write my chapters of narrative analysis. At a regional conference in February 2007, colleagues helped me perform the script. Presenting the performance as a work-in-progress I videotaped the feedback and questions I received from the audience. My goal was to rework the script into two potential performances, one for those educators who work in schools and the larger field of education, and one in honor of Al, Travreso, Shoran, and Ladybug, who want children and adolescents to hear their stories. In my last set of interviews, I shared with students, Act II, Scene 1: C.O.s, and their spoken-word-monologues. I asked explicitly for feedback and received positive comments about the fidelity of the script and the structure of the monologues.

Domain Analysis

During my interviews the most common unsolicited “tangential” storytelling referenced correctional officers, or “c.o.s,” to the students. Following the pattern the students used in their communication with me, I chose to represent “correctional officers” in this research as “c.o.s” instead of “cos” or co’s, because I wanted to reader to read the way the students speak “c” “o”s as “see” “ohs,” not “kohs.” I chose to keep “c.o.” lower case as a way to politicize and favor the students’ language. Coupled to the most common “tangential” storytelling—referencing c.o.s—were the two most common questions I received about my dissertation research in the last year, which were: “What did they do?” and “What is prison like?”

Prevented by the IRB from asking any questions about criminal activity and annoyed by the move in the first question to make these students what they did, or did not do, I decided to complete a chapter on experiences in prison with correctional officers. The domain analysis represents the patterns I witnessed in students’ stories and responds the patterns in the questions I received about my dissertation work.

In a domain analysis there is the actual symbol, the referent, and the relationship between the symbol and the referent. A domain analysis is used to understand common assumptions and performances of those assumptions. The use of both the symbol and the referents is based on common social and cultural assumptions about the domain. The analysis may reveal tacit knowledge and to a degree the position and location of the user to the domain and her assumptions. There are two limitations in using a domain analysis. One, the researcher needs to be careful not to impose her own categories on the research, and two, there is never fully a match between the domain as analyzed and the cultural knowledge to which it refers (Coffey & Atkinson , 1996).

Spew Journal

Spewing is jotting down an idea, issue, or reflection about the project. As I did this work, spewing provided me with moments of reflection and new questions for analysis. The process also

constantly returned me to my own positionality. Fragments of my spew journal, which has become a project diary of sorts are found throughout the dissertation, for example, Dehumanization ~ My Story, Part I.

Feminist Methodology and Negotiated Interpretation

One way to stay close to a participant's story is to ask the participant to read the researcher's work on his or her story during the project. Member checking is "sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately" (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). I consider this process essential in my research and spent time in my third interviews with students working from member checking to collaboration (Lamphere, Ragoné, & Zavella, 1997). Acknowledging and establishing reciprocity, where possible, in the relationship between researcher and participant generates understanding about the relationality of social actors. Honoring context and situatedness of identity, time, and place signals the moral and technical elements of feminist methodology (Haraway, 1991; Gilligan, 1982). In my work, I asked for the students' interpretations of my interpretations and explicitly solicited descriptions from students of their own stories. These layers of interpretation became central to my understanding of reciprocal work, collaborative moments, and what can be the beauty of negotiated interpretation. All of the students with whom I met in these interviews found themselves in the stories and in the script I had represented. Al and Shoran in particular expressed joy and satisfaction in response to reading their narratives. Any misinterpretations or misrepresentations they addressed have been incorporated into the narrative analysis presented here.

Privileged White Student from Suburbia

In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, Kozol (1991) interviewed privileged children from a predominantly white school outside New York City. They discussed and then most of

the children dismissed the idea of busing. Kozol described their analysis as well articulated but without much feeling.

There is a sense that they are dealing with an issue that does not feel very vivid, and that nothing that we say about it really matters since it's "just a theoretical discussion." To a certain degree the skillfulness and cleverness that they display seem to derive precisely from the sense of unreality. Questions of unfairness feel more like a geometric problem than a matter of humanity or conscience. (p. 127)

Although I used a constructivist approach in my interviews, my motivation reflects a post-critical position. And although of course I am always situated, I am also a graduate student who seeks out information about power and who deliberates and dallies in the play of metaphor. I would be deluding myself if I ignored my hope that what has been produced might augment the ways educators understand relationships of power in educational experiences.

There are days that I wish I had distance from Kozol's privileged white students from suburbia, but I don't; I am always also a privileged white student from suburbia. I am also a privileged kind of activist, one with the time and resources to work on human rights issues. I send dozens of letters a week on myriad issues to politicians and corporate CEOs, but I do so from my computer. I attend rallies and vigils throughout the South, but I get to them in the car I own. I study how to be a better community educator and grassroots organizer, but I do so by attending seminars and annual conferences, often hundreds of miles away. And if I have an academic or professional conflict I pause to consider my participation in events. I spend most days immersed in a university community, and though I am committed to understanding relationships of power I cannot relate to the shell-shock reality in which those who are truly struggling live.

My positionality often separates me from that which I am trying to understand, and there are things that I cannot see, like perhaps the way in which Tyte Crewdy made meaning from his story. However, my commitment to social justice and my hope for change engage me, and I do my research anyway. I have the privilege of not working three jobs and raising a family alone. I am an upper-

middle class white woman with a graduate degree. I have resources and support and “freedom” to reflect on my engagement with this work. I am one of the “elite” by definition.

Although the students challenged the way I live, and think, and who I think I am, and my cultural and historical experiences limit my understandings, I cannot imagine doing a different dissertation. I leaned heavily on the application of critical reflection in my work to aid me in my engagement with my own interpretations. I am cognizant of projecting, or altering my lens to validate my own philosophical and moral framework and so looked hard to find complexity and tension in the students’ stories. I asked students explicitly about the space I shared with them, and I named the moments when I felt caught between interpretations or incapable of interpreting at all.

I want to interrogate power, but that does not mean that I do not deploy power myself. I must own the mantle of authority as researcher. In *Postcritical Ethnography: Reinscribing Critique*, George Noblit warned the postcritical researcher about merely shifting power to the authority of critique. “... Critical ethnography wishes to reveal domination and ideology, but in doing so replaces the hegemony of power in social life with the hegemony of critic. The critic/author poses superior knowledge and insight” (2004, p. 316). Keeping my role as critic and development as a researcher visible in the research is one way I tried to complicate the hegemonic force of the critic. The layered presentation of the research was the other way I try to complicate the authoritative critique. The chapters I developed although linked and connected by the narratives from the students are not mutually reinforcing blocks of data that build a unified meta-narrative. And although I ordered the chapters chronologically based on my experiences with the research, neither the students’ stories, nor my story are linear. Different representations of the students occur in different chapters, and I have splintered the narratives purposefully, in the way that I argue in Chapter 7: Narrative and Identity that discourse and structure splinter identity. I used multiple representations of their stories through the script in Chapter 3, through the representation of the students’ stories through structured narrative analysis in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6, and in the coupling of their narratives with theory in

Chapter 8. This splintering and the multiple representations of the students' stories influence interpretation, both interpretation by me and interpretation by the reader.

I use interpretation in this particular way by charting the dissertation with elements of experimental ethnography (Bruner, 1993; Clifford, 1986). The bearings of this framework include a challenge to the idea that interpretation captures the truthfulness of an interview. In experimental ethnography interviews are culturally and historically embedded accounts that exist among several possible accounts. A representation of a story is not "the story, but a story among other stories" (Clifford, 1986, p. 109). The students' stories represent not only my interpretation of their account, but the interpretive moment of telling itself. As a student tells me his or her story, she works both to interpret his own experience in the account he shares, and performs the account for me—his audience—in particular ways. While I am interpreting the students, they are interpreting me (Bruner, 1993; Warren, 2001). As such the interpretive process is complicated between the participant and researcher. The interpretation and performance of interpretation is bi-directional. Not only were the students interpreting their experiences with school at my request—since my questions structure the overall interview—but they were interpreting me, too. The performances of their respective stories were interpreted in the moment of telling by them as well as by me. They may have been the map-readers of their own paths in the telling, but they knew as well as I did that I was standing on the trail right next to them. My following influenced directly their navigation as the map-readers. In other words, my presence influenced the interpretations they made and the performance they embodied as they shared their stories. The experience of following their paths and representing their own meaning-making occurs concurrently.

In this presentation of research, because I cannot write my following directly beside the words of the students' meaning-making—and expect a reader to navigate text written over itself—I created *My Story's*. Framing interpretation in experimental ethnography requires reflexivity and participation in the text by the researcher. *My Story's* reflected my own interpretive moments, the development of my understanding over time across this project, and the challenges I had as a

researcher to follow. For although I was committed to following the students' stories wherever they lead, the paths upon which we tread were never the same. We changed them as we traveled.

CHAPTER 2

BOYS NOW MEN

The Glint of Terror ~ My Story, Part IV

*A teacher taking the sidewalk is called back into the compound
Spring trees just blooming
rise against storm clouds from the east
and two flags to the south
one U.S., one North Carolina
they sound like kites in the wind.*

*Security passes in a white pickup
Sixteenth time in the last twenty minutes.
The compound must be small to the south
On the soot-washed gray walls of the entrance
A bright yellow and green sign warns me
of rules I must follow as a visitor*

*Thirty-four landscaped bushes,
an uncovered trashcan,
and six cement benches
wait outside the youth institution*

*There are airplanes overhead and a bird,
and the glint of terror under 14 double-headed spotlights
and a fading afternoon sky.
Four rows, three feet high
Five rows across the gates
300 yards the razor wire runs
Repetitive, deadly, and crawling up the double fence,
resting, perched along its edge.*

*An inmate transfer van returns, but only an officer exits.
A red SUV parks beside me,
An Explorer with tinted windows and a combination door lock*

1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8
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*Four rows, three feet high
Five rows across the gates
The razor wire runs*

(April 2001)

Neophyte to Qualitative Research

I called my first paper on the narratives I had collected from the men I observed in Todd Weaver's class during the spring semester of 2001 "Documenting Tragedy." I had completed classroom observations and interviews for the Youth Offender Program evaluation and chose to represent some of my data in a project for my advanced qualitative research class. I remember that as I interviewed I felt overwhelmed by story after story of children abandoned by the school system and left to illegal prospects on the streets.

George Noblit and Beth Hatt had encouraged the class to be creative with their data, and early in the semester I had stumbled onto Karen Norum's (2000) article about ethnopoetics. Norum wrote "School Patterns: A Sextet" and introduced the divergent perspectives of a teacher, a parent, a student, and a teenager who was homeless and a "high school drop out" in four poems. She claimed representing narrative in this type of arts-based research promoted empathy in ways traditional methodologies did not. She asserted that the poetry generated "different pictures" that in turn engendered "new understandings." The words she re-represented in poems were from the interviews she conducted with each participant. The poems themselves were about a teacher who blamed her students for the inefficiency of her own lessons; a parent who lamented the patterns of foreclosure that cut through public schools; a student who associated school lectures with church sermons; and an adolescent who was homeless and compared discipline in school with prison. This last poem about the comparison of discipline in school to prison accompanied me as I began my observations and interviews with students in the Youth Offender Program. Ultimately, for my course project I decided to use ethnopoetics or narrative poems as a way to confront the deluge of suffering I had recorded from the students.

I constructed the poems to represent the tenor and the content of the stories Ben, Darren, Hitch, Malcolm, T.J. and True had shared with me. To craft the poems I extracted language from each student's interview transcript. With the exception of making all names and places pseudonyms, and changing a verb tense or an ambiguous reference for clarification, the following poetic transcriptions

are “linguistically faithful”(Glesne, 2006, p. 201). I have not made any additions or alterations from the interview transcripts to the poetic transcriptions. Once I constructed the poems, I chose their titles. What I worked to represent was the emotion, rhythm, and meaning in each story (Glesne, 2006). “AG” (Academically Gifted) ~ My Story, Part II was one of the poems I constructed from the interviews I completed. The following four poems are from the course project as well, and they are constructed in the same way from each respective transcript. I re-represent here along with “AG” the story I heard from Malcolm in “Third Street,” from T.J. in “Crazy Class,” from Hitch in “The Only Boy in the House,” and from True in “A Little Star.”

Third Street

I came from the roughest neighborhood in my county.

I took school seriously,
from elementary school to middle school.
I liked school, (paid) attention,
wore (a) DARE patch on my pants;
I didn't like drugs.

I was passed out of middle school.
I know from 6th grade, 6 to 8
They just passed me to pass me.
I know I didn't pass any test;
I've seen a kid held back, who's grades were better than me.
They might have seen a better future for him;
they just passed me to pass me.

My middle school principal, Mrs. Foster,
she used to try to keep me out of trouble.
Back then my dad was a criminal.
While I was at school I kind of paid attention;
In the 6th grade the PE teacher told me,
“You aren't ever going to amount to anything;
you're going to be just like your daddy,
and go to prison”
They discriminate(d) against me,
I've heard teachers,
“He's from third street,
he's from the projects.”
I've heard teachers,
out of their mouths.

If I got in trouble
for fighting or something

they'd make it a legal matter.
They had me on probation two or three years.

(I was) a rock in a hard place,
coming home every day to no father.
I had to buy my own school clothes,
school shoes, paid my own lunch.

Since I was 12,
gambling, hustling, selling dope,
came home at 2 or 3,
take a shower, go to school.

After middle school I strayed away;
I started hanging out on the streets,
smoking dope, making fast money,
still kind of paid attention in class.
I only stayed 19 days in 9th grade.

I admit I was selling dope.
My second day in high school
I had a hundred dollar bill on me.
As soon as I got to school
I go to the principal's office,
"We had a parent call saying you were selling drugs in school."
They found the \$100 bill –
they gave it to my mom,
kicked me out of school for ten days.

The only thing I was thinking about,
(was) that's ten days on the street,
chillin', hanging out with my boys.
Two days, ten days off and another seven or eight –
then a Hispanic pulled a razor on me.
He had it in the strap of his knapsack.
Officers grabbed me, pulled me up.
I pushed (them);
(One) went up against the door,
and they arrested me.
I knew the officer, he went to school with my mama;
everyone called him "Uncle Tom."

I was bound over and tried as an adult,
I was 15 when I got out.
I tried to go back to high school.
When my mama and I walked into the high school
people ran up to meet me, hug me,
and then we went into the principal's office.
And they told me I was a "menace to society."
They basically denied me my education.

They told us we had to talk to someone on the school board.
We did.
He told us about the Family Resource Center,
Where you get your GED
on your own type thing,
get a booklet, do it step by step
just like classes here.

In Todd's class
I learned about how the school system operates
I learned how if you're from an urban community
Where there's more likely more poverty and violence
how teachers
how the government
isn't going to focus on your education as much.

I'd like to start a program,
non-for-profit,
to talk to kids, kids in detention, help them,
tell them what prison is really like.

It takes a lot of self-esteem, self-confidence
to walk straight.
I try to conduct myself as a grown man
as much as possible.

I would have liked to graduate high school
with my fellow class students
The Millennium class, the class of 2000.

That's the one thing I would change about school;
I would have liked to graduate high school
with my fellow class students
The Millennium class, you know, the class of 2000.

Crazy Class

Mount Pleasant, my people, my family
they don't really have a lot of money.

Ever since I was little
School for me was hard
I was labeled BEH,
really just means I was hyperactive.
They put me on "Ritlin"

Coming up through middle school
I was in a special class,
"the crazy class."
Other kids got suspended for fighting
or using profanity towards a school administrator,

we would get community service
and sent back to the crazy class.

All of us had behavioral problems.
Things were really loud;
normally it would be off the chain,
couple people over here talking,
someone over here pumping a cd player.
They weren't really able to control us.

There were only a couple of us who were able to go out
into mainstream classes.
The teachers didn't want to deal with us
(they) look at you like they expect trouble.
They looked at us as being unsuccessful
because of discipline problems
we got sent to the principal.
They said, "you're nothing,"
"you're not going to amount to anything."
We were on our own.

You know what Unks (Gerald Unks) says
I think on page 135,
discipline problems can come from teachers.

Couple of people
my mom,
a teacher in a mainstream class
let me know I could do what I want to do,
"You can do anything if you put your mind to it."

School for me was an experience.
Where they were trapped
we were free.
Where they bought into the system,
conformed to the way hierarchists expect them to,
they were labeled as successful.
We were labeled as failures, (but)
we were able to express ourselves freely.

The teacher in our crazy class,
she had respect for us;
they knew.
They didn't just give up on us,
no matter what we did,
how we acted.
Crazy class teachers give me hope for doing better;
they came to work with us
you always saw a smile on their face.

I wouldn't do homework
but I would read.
To Kill A Mockingbird, I read it
before we even had to read it in school –

Schoolwork was easy for me;
I'd be done, and I'd just be sitting there;
I'd do something to keep me occupied
that lead to me getting into trouble.

I took myself off (Ritlin),
I was probably 14 or 15.
I started doing a lot of drugs,
skipped school,
dropped out.

Education was something you obtained to be successful in life.
I found another way.

We grew up poor,
and I sold drugs to make a living,
and I made a really good living.

Basically, it was social capital,
you know people,
you move places in society.
I found that I didn't need an education
to obtain the things I *did* desire,
the joy in life

From 16 to 19, my life was a constant party;
I was messed up every other day in my life;
I'd eat some ecstasy just to relax.

I lived in Charlotte
by myself, I mean,
with my boys
and my girl for awhile.

Life's been a constant struggle for me –
me being hyperactive,
knowing that I'm confined to an environment;
I considered taking myself out.
That's how bad it was.
There's no other way except by the grace of God,
that I'm here.

The hardest thing for me
is learning to accept things that I can't change,
to live life on its terms.
Where I'm at, I've just got to accept.

This is one of the obstacles in life

Foolishness is in the heart of a child,
and I've been a child.

In a college course
you're basically responsible for what you do.
You don't have to ask for taking a bathroom break;
it gives me a whole new outlook.
It's like everybody's doing their part.

It's really not the education
that I'm obtaining that's going to
keep me on my toes,
keep me out of prison;
it's about motivat(ion).
I'm constantly doing to become the person I want to be in my life,
with hopes and dreams becoming a part of my life.

I want to help people go through this.

I'd like to go to UNC
if I got something to keep me mentally challenged
I can learn and grow –

I mostly seek out of the spiritual side of things.
You can look at the same situation with
two totally different aspects.
Until you can view things from both sides,
carnal and spiritual,
you're blind to many things
Most of things I know don't come from school,
(they) come from life
and wisdom of spirituality.

Where they were trapped we were free.
Where they bought into the system,
conformed to the way hierarchists expect them to,
they were labeled as successful.
We were labeled as failures, (but)
we were able to express ourselves freely,
because we really didn't believe
in the curriculum being taught.

You're blind to many things.

The Only Boy in the House

In first grade the teacher had a pile of books
she let us read,
and prizes for each book.

I got to the last book.
I got to the last two words
in the last book
and she said,
“You can do it!”
She was encouraging,
(and) I did it.

Once I asked the teacher in home ec class, what to do.
We were making lasagna,
and she said, “Doesn’t your mother cook?”
She made me feel like I was doing something wrong, Asking.
I stopped going to class.
It was like she was telling me to give up;

A lot of it came from home, too;
My grandmother looked on me as the man.
My mother went away,
wasn’t too steady a parent.
With my grandmother,
she wanted me to take responsibility,
she didn’t want me to turn
out the way my mother did.
I’m the only boy in the house;
I’ve got three sisters,
when they got scared they came to me.
Me and my sisters are really tight.

I stopped paying attention in school in 7th grade;
(school) was like the hang out,
I wasn’t going to learn,.
I failed 7th grade.
When I came back
my 7th grade teacher, Mrs. Jones,
told me, “This year I would get out of there.”

I can’t recall going to class five times in two years in high school.
Teachers would tell me to be quiet,
I would say something smart to get kicked out,
to walk the halls;
they would call home,
but nobody’s home.
I’d get home and erase the answering machine.

I used to like school,
I don’t know what changed.
I went to a nice high school;
we had a swimming pool.

When you get in trouble in school you go to time-out,
when you get in trouble (here),

you go to the hole,
go to segregation,
no phone calls, no air
30 days
minimum.

In school you get a chance to explain
what's going on.
Once a statement's made here,
it's a no win situation.
I can have as many witnesses as I want,
they show you that they're in control.
You can appeal from seg.

Not everything's bad about this place.
I'm trying to be patient, to listen to people,
Reason I'm in here,
I couldn't be patient.
I went out and did what I did to get money for my child.

Now I see I had options.
In Todd's class, he explained how society categorized us,
put expectations, limits on what you do;
Social Darwinism.
If your upbringing's not so good,
people expect you to stay in that position.

The way he handles class is a lot different;
not only can I learn from Todd,
he'll do his best to explain things to me.

My grandmother supports me, because I'm in school now.
Things are a lot different for us.

Things are a lot different for us.
I see I had options.

A Little Star

I was a jokester.
I was a class clown.
I would say something
and get everybody laughing;
they'd send me out;
I'd go into strategy mode,
say I'm sorry more than I really am,
regardless of whether I'm right or wrong.

I made it difficult,
talking, not paying attention.
I had a lot on my mind.

I've always been talkative.
my dad's talkative,
We'll be somewhere or in the car
And I think, Lord, I wish he would stop.

When I did focus,
I didn't ever really have bad grades.

I transferred schools.
It wasn't quality,
wasn't as up to par as my other school –
When I started a new school
I was the only one who dressed like I did;
I got most of my clothes in New York
We went on trips in the summer.
They liked my attire and my cell phone.
I liked the attention;
it was like being a little star.

You really can't say it's safe
anytime someone could walk in and shoot someone;
it never happened,
so I guess it was safe enough.
I guess it was safe enough,
it depends on what reputation you have for yourself.
The principal, they build things up,
I do this one day and this another day,
I got used to it – it was like a game,
sometimes they say they got more information
than they have
I didn't even go to school one time,
I had left my wallet in a friend's car;
I go to get the wallet,
people see me come,
people see me leave.

Somebody broke into the locker room and stole some stuff;
they said, "We got a camera, you looking in lockers,"
but I know who did it.
They suspended me until they could "figure it out."
Three days.
I was mad
for getting suspended
for something I didn't do.
I was trying so hard,
I was trying to graduate that year,
I went at nighttime at community college
to make sure I passed,
I was trying real hard.
I was in CP, college prep classes.
I was smart enough to be above general.

I had respect for teachers; that's what it's all about respecting people.
It didn't seem like they cared.

You really can't say it's safe.
It depends on what reputation you have for yourself.

It ain't that much different (here).
People telling them they can't go here or there.
This prison in particular
they treat you like little children;
they try to treat you like adults in a childish way.

Hopefully, classes will help me
take education to another dimension;
A lot of prison programs teach about self-employment.
My dad's got his own business.
I'll work for him or he'll help me.

I have a son.
The good thing is that I'll be out
before he starts school.
I'll start teaching him,
help him learn more,
what schools to put him in,
(if) the school isn't benefiting him.

I'll share how the school system's set up
to target certain groups of individuals,
That it depends on the school
and where you stay;
determine(s) whether you're successful
in life or not.

The good thing is that I'll be out
before he starts school.
I'll start teaching him.

Most prevalent and perhaps most insidious in the patterns of the poetry was the overt degradation of the students by teachers and administrators. In "The Only Boy in the House," "AG," "Third Street," "Crazy Class," and "A Little Star," Hitch, Darren, Malcolm, and T.J. were told they were worth nothing and taught to doubt their ability. Even though the narrative content from poem to poem differed, each offered an account of a child's burden to survive the violence of institutionalized racism or institutionalized stigmatization.

During the qualitative methods course that I was taking that semester, we studied “representation,” and slowly, I realized that all I had “documented” depended on language, and my interpretation of language and meaning. I had brought with me from my master’s in Journalism to my doctoral work in Culture, Curriculum and Change, an appreciation for the craft of storytelling, but I was learning how to recognize my own positionality in the stories I was sharing. I learned that my language, the texts I read, the discourses I signaled, and the symbolic references I navigated became frames of reference or lenses that I projected onto experience to make meaning. I learned that I positioned the experiences the men I interviewed as particular representations.

In a move to capture this new understanding I changed the title of my project to “Representing Tragedy” late in the revisions, but I was reluctant, alright, downright unwilling to re-frame the stigma of tragedy which I imposed on the narratives of the men I had interviewed. The terror and disbelief in listening to some of their stories still haunted me, and I wanted to represent the catastrophic conditions and share with others the influence the stories had on me.

In the assigned critique of the project that we were asked to write, I spoke of my trouble with naming “tragedy” and the difficulty of describing each story as tragedy when the origins of each story, the contexts of each story were so different. I did not want to universalize each man’s experience, but tragic chords reverberated through all of them. I wrote: “Not only have I represented stories that are not my own, but I have done so in hopes of eliciting a response, maybe not one of outrage, but hopefully, one of at least more critical thought.” I explained that the potential audience for the project would hear the poems I had constructed, that “the men themselves (would) not be present.” I struggled to understand what my reading of their stories might mean as my cultural and historical background would be inscribed on their words, and I grappled with how I represented their tragedy. In the project critique, I asked, “How does one decide what defines and represents tragedy?” and then presented excerpts from the poems themselves that I thought might capture the complexity of claiming tragedy through description.

When I got to high school
it was a whole different game
Pretty much the majority of my neighborhood went there
they didn't want us out there
They made me feel out of place,
I'm in AG classes
I'm the only Black guy in there;
the teacher recognized it too –
when you get to high school
you're pretty much on your own,
but I was determined

Sometimes if things are forced on you,
you can't motivate yourself –

as days rolled on I just lost my focus,
the encouragement just disappeared;

- Darren from "AG"

I was in the 6th grade (when) the PE teacher told me
"you aren't ever going to amount to anything;
you're going to be just like your daddy,
and go to prison."
They discriminate(d) against me;
I've heard teachers,
"he's from third street,
he's from the projects."
I've heard teachers,
out of their mouths.

(I was) a rock in a hard place,
coming home every day to no father.
I had to buy my own school clothes,
school shoes, paid my own lunch.

Since I was 12
gambling, hustling, selling dope,
came home at two or three,
take a shower, go to school

- Malcolm from "Third Street"

there were only a couple of us who were able to go out
into mainstream classes
the teachers didn't want to deal with us
(they) look at you like they expect trouble

they looked at us as being unsuccessful,
because of discipline problems.
We got sent to the principal,
they said, “you’re nothing,”
“you’re not going to amount to anything.”
We were on our own.”

- J.T. from “Crazy Class”

Once I asked the teacher in home ec class,
what to do. We were making lasagna
and she said, “doesn’t your mother cook?”
She made me feel like I was doing something wrong, Asking.
I stopped going to class.
It was like she was telling me to give up

- Hitch from “The Only Boy in the House”

I was mad
for getting suspended
for something I didn’t do.
I was trying so hard,
I was trying to graduate that year,
I went at nighttime at community college
to make sure I passed,
I was trying real hard.
I was in CP, college prep classes.
I was smart enough to be above general.
I had respect for teachers; that’s what it’s all about respecting people.
It didn’t seem like they cared.”

- True from “A Little Star”

As I worked, I gravitated towards the story of Darren in “AG.” I wanted desperately for the teacher to walk over to his desk and kick it lightly from underneath to awaken him as I had seen my own 11th grade English teacher do with so much success. I wanted Darren to wake up, rub his warm brown eyes, and focus on the class I imagined in front of him, pick up his pen and before writing a letter snap the idea chalked on the board into his own mind, making it his own in understanding. I lamented that he slept, and I blamed his teachers for not caring enough to wake him.

I knew that in my heart I had betrayed the others. I had heard, I had envisioned, Darren's story as tragic first. There was no foreshadowing in his telling, there were no insurmountable environmental influences. He had changed schools in middle school, *but* I felt myself thinking he was labeled a gifted student. Darren had status, yet upon arrival in high school, he disappeared in front of his teachers. No one cared, no one sought him out. I hurt over his not "making it." Instead of owning my feelings and sharing my pain for him in my work, I wrote with emotional distance. I was afraid to admit that I had felt his loss deeply. I kept my tone analytical and my position of privilege intact.

(Darren) had almost succeeded in a white, capitalist system as an African American boy coming-of-age. To me the hustling on the street appeared normalized – even though I had just as many notes from "AG" to "Third Street."

I explained that through the process of writing and representing the narrative poems that I experienced a transition of psychological loyalty. Every boy represented deserved my loyalty and empathy. I wrote as if I alone was the one who held the authority and privilege to offer "loyalty" and measure deservedness. I did not see this. I thought that by honoring—another move that reflects a position of privilege—each story that I would shelter the storyteller from further discrimination in the imagination of future readers. I explained:

The manifestations of their oppression may be different, and therefore, I may gravitate toward those experiences to which I can intertwine my own life's threads, but the institutionalized oppression they "survived" is a common reality – and one over which I should be outraged consistently.

I wanted to control the reader's interpretation, and I wanted to beg the readers not to do dismiss these men who were also the boys whom teachers, administrators, fathers and mothers had dismissed already. I was aware on some level that if these poems, these narratives, were shared only as *cases* of injustice that the depth and complexity of each boy's lived experience would become secondary. At the time I could not articulate that point, but I feared that spectacle might flatten the moments and fears and losses that these men had shared with me. I chose to shame those who might not feel empathy for each boy, now men. I argued: "To champion one tragedy over another is to create a spectacle. It helps one avoid criticizing a larger community, critiquing a complex problem and

instigating change. For one story, one tragedy, we can offer tears, for countless we must demand change.” I called on a privileged U.S. public, desensitized to suffering, to avoid tragic tokenism and empty spectacles. I argued that change and not only tears must be the response to these stories. This political move took me even further away from my own emotional and psychic connection to Darren and the others. I failed to acknowledge my emotional connection to Darren’s story.

Months later, I came across a paragraph within the story of Elvia in Valenzuela’s *Subtractive Schooling* that uncovered my assumptions about the purpose of schooling, perhaps my dominating philosophy of education. Valenzuela introduced Nel Noddling’s concept of caring in school as a way to frame the stories from mostly Mexican-American students that she represents in her ethnographic research about a Texas high school. She argued that sustained reciprocal relationships between teachers and students were essential to the process of learning. She explained that when teachers failed to initiate relationships with students, that the absence of caring negatively affected their schooling.

Valenzuela asserted that school structure and teachers controlled “the mainstream values of the high school and its school-sponsored organizations” by assuring that “high achievers and students involved in school activities will be underrepresented in the ranks of the ‘uncaring-student’ prototype,” (1999, p. 76). Many of the stories she shared illuminated the dynamics between teachers and their students, and traced the discrimination the students feel in the absence of their teacher’s care. For one student, Elvia, the uncaring she witnessed became a reason she decided to leave school.

Valenzuela described the painful exchange between Elvia and her mother as Elvia withdrew from school and the following conversation she herself had with Elvia. “It’s like all of our teachers have given up and they don’t want to teach us no more ...” Elvia explained. “If the school doesn’t care about my learning, why should I care? Answer me that ... a friend of mine dropped out of high school, took her GED, and went on to college. I tell my Mom that’s what I want to do, but it’s like she don’t get it” (1999, p. 88).

Valenzuela represented Elvia's unhappiness in school, her critique of teachers as uncaring individuals, and wish to leave school to earn her GED and go to college, however, she described her "relief" a year later when she saw Elvia's name on the school roster. She reported her "relief and pleasure that (Elvia's) name was included on the school roster in the attendance office" (p. 89). Valenzuela's relief revealed something of her own ideas about appropriate avenues for success, particularly when Elvia had stated clearly in her interview the year before that she was interested in getting her GED and going to community college. I wondered if Valenzuela would have felt relief if the path that Elvia had named for herself had materialized. Elvia had articulated an interest in choosing a different course for her education, not an abandonment of her education, but Valenzuela took comfort in knowing that she had returned to a place that Elvia herself had described as "uncaring"—the issue at the very core of Valenzuela's critique of Seguin High School.

It was Valenzuela's normalization of the "appropriate" educational path toward success—a high school experience that culminated in a high school graduation—that I pounced on and critiqued in a conference paper I had prepared for the American Educational Studies Association. I argued Valenzuela did not honor Elvia's wishes for her own educational path, and I suggested that academics interrogate their notions of successful schooling and reflect critically on assumptions about what school is and for whom school works. I argued that we must "queer" our notions of success as experiences embedded in traditional high schools in the U.S. are riddled with uncaring teachers and administrators, and institutionalized racism and stigmatization. I introduced some of the narrative poems from my own work with students in prison to contextualize these issues. I placed the emphasis on Valenzuela's own lack of self-critique as a way to suggest that I had interrogated mine. It was in a last moment of preparation, the evening before my panel presentation that I realized I had not critiqued my own assumptions and contradictions at all. As I read I heard my own racism and elitism speaking back to me.

Caught in My Racism ~ My Story, Part V

Color rises quickly to my cheeks and I look up and around the hotel room to see if anyone has caught me in my racism, my ignorance. The room is empty and cold, and I sit at the desk in the corner wondering how I will name my racism out loud in the morning. I chastise myself as I realize that in the conference paper before me that I have normalized the street experiences of Hitch, Malcolm, and True, and held Darren in contrast as the exception. I flip quickly to my section on the narrative poems and read “to me the hustling on the street appeared normalized.” I am full of regret. I find that I have framed across the poems the normalcy of “life on the street” as something that simply “appeared” and not as something I normalized. Although I tried to acknowledge my privilege and my positionality in the project, I failed to acknowledge the way I raced the experiences of Hitch, Malcolm, and True. My racism normalized their experiences. And my elitism normalized a high school education as the path for success. I had critiqued Valenzuela for doing the latter in the paper I was about to present. As I worked into the night to make changes, I wondered about the seemingly infinite process of reflexivity in my research.

(August 2006)

I realized that I genuinely believed in the liberal arts education that was available in the private and public schools I attended. I believed such an education ought to be available to every adolescent. As such I could not address the educational narratives of the men I had interviewed until I returned to my own positionality. And so that night I returned myself to context, claiming reflexivity as fundamental to qualitative research, and owning my emotional responses in my work—not merely intellectualizing them. The next morning I acknowledged my failures and cautioned audience members against normalizing the experiences of Hitch, Malcolm, and True as I had. More than anything I did not want the listeners to dismiss the particularities of each story.

Crossing Sheryl Kleinman’s (1991) work on qualitative research later I found representations of experiences that were similar in emotional intensity. Kleinman’s argument in favor of the inclusion of “emotions in fieldwork” provided me with a language to negotiate my own struggles

methodologically. Her work legitimated for me the journey I was navigating with my own research. Kleinman positioned the emotional responses of researchers as frames for reference and reflection, for what we feel and fear and who we are affects how we construct the world. Although I had taken copious notes, reflected, coded, revised, and coded again, in retrospect I realized that in the interviews I had not listened as carefully as I ought to have nor had I reflected on my own experiences with school thoughtfully enough. I projected my interpretation of school onto the narratives of these men. I wanted to return to what they had said and work harder to hear. Although I had the opportunity to work on the evaluation project one more year, in 2003 the project moved to another university and my return to the students, their stories, and the prisons took four years. I pledged in my return that I would lead with questions less and follow their stories more.

CHAPTER 3

A SCRIPT FOR TRUE AND SHORAN

Where We Sit ~ My Story Part, VI

In a room 14 by 12 feet there are four rows of three small desks and a teacher's desk under the window. On a bulletin board in red letters are the words, "Stay Cool with Math" and a poster of a brown monkey with his paws on top of his head. Above his blank, childlike expression there is the question, "Have you used your brain today?" In the corner there is another poster mounted on the side of a file cabinet that says, "Celebrate Freedom." A white woman with blond hair, a brown man with dark hair, a white man in a wheelchair, and a white pipe-player in a three-corner hat are pledging allegiance together in a group. Uncle Sam and the Statue of Liberty smile along with them in cartoon-like patriotism. A white dog with red spots, and blue stars for eyes completes this family portrait of "Freedom."

(NCCIW, March 2006)

On a wide white bulletin board with a blue border, there is a striped lighthouse perched above four sailboats. The boats are yellow, pink, blue, and green, and the lighthouse is smiling. The roof of the lighthouse is a triangle and looks like a hat sitting on a smiling marshmallow. The smiling face is the light of the lighthouse. Above the lighthouse is the phrase "GOOD CHARACTER SHINES THROUGH" — ten rays shine from the beaming face of the lighthouse, five rays from each side—each ray illuminates a word. The five rays on the left say "Responsibility" "Compassion" "Honesty" "Self-discipline" and "Fairness." The five rays on the right say "Trustworthiness" "Citizenship" "Integrity" "Perseverance" and "Respect"; I decide that the birds, the smiling lighthouse, and the silly little sailboats are perfect decorations for a child's room or a first grade classroom, but not a college classroom.

(Polk, January 2007)

Collaboration with Students in Prison

Collaboration with research participants is an essential part of feminist methodology (Lamphere, Ragoné, & Zavella, 1997). I found that finding ways in which I might collaborate with the women and men I interviewed difficult. Since I interviewed these participants for only an hour

or two every few months, time limited the exchange of transcripts and eventually, analysis. Scheduling visits took anywhere from three months at NCCIW to two to four weeks at different facilities for men. These delays prevented any form of immediate follow up or consistent, timely contact for the clarification of a point made in an interview. Additionally, over the course of six months five of the men and one of the women were transferred. Often I did not know participants were transferred until the day before my scheduled visit or in some cases, not until after I arrived. As my dissertation research was linked to the evaluation project of the Youth Offender Program, I needed to complete all interviews on site regardless of whether or not the students I had scheduled for interviews were the ones that were available. When a student I was interviewing was transferred, and I arrived to complete an interview, an administrator in the school would simply ask another program participant to step into his or her place.

In spite of these limitations I wanted to commit to the concepts of collaboration and participant-directed ideas. The idea of collaboration is more than just member checking—a sharing of data with research participants for the accuracy of representation. Finding ways in which I could collaborate took time. A possibility arose on the return from Maury from my interview with True. I started to see his hope about the future cradled in a trough of cynicism. His ability to believe in a better future for himself, and his young son existed in a complex understanding of social reproduction theory and hegemony of the elites. I heard his hope contrast sharply against the projected future that Shoran shared. Both True and Shoran articulated the power white capitalists wield. Thinking of their interviews as texts I began playing their discourses against one another on my drive home. A script emerged in my mind, and on my return I started to craft it as both a performance and a chapter.

Framing the idea with evocative ethnographies in mind (Ellis, 2004), I developed a script that included the representation of educational narratives as spoken word, a scene from my ethnographic observations of a college class in prison, and a constructed scene that addressed the dynamics between students and correctional officers. True and Shoran anchored the messages I wanted to share. As I worked I returned to the transcripts of all the participants and realized that the women and most

of the men really wanted their story shared, and a few wanted their story shared with children in particular. Their responses came from my questions at the end of usually the second interview. “What do you think about your story?” and “Who do you want to hear your story?” True responded to these questions in this way:

I realize that my story’s important ... you know because I mean maybe you never know who it could help and that’s why I’m here. That’s why I’m here maybe that whatever it is you write, whatever it is I say could maybe help somebody else. That’s why I talk to you you know, so when you come and talk. Hopefully, it’s gonna benefit somebody if that’s one person, somebody, you know what I’m saying, hopefully, they won’t come this way. Or you know they’re here for a small amount of time and they don’t want to come back, and they can see that you know that education is needed, education is needed.

Al’s reasoning for sharing his story with me echoed what True shared. Al was interested in helping children avoid the path he had taken. He explained that when he is able to make enough money he wants to start programs that work with young kids.

Most people just want to interact with (kids) after they been in gangs. I’m trying to start something like where people talk like in middle schools, that’s really where everything starts at. They look at guys in like high school, “Oh man, I want to do that. I want to be like them.” ... I feel like it would have made a difference in my life and a lot of people’s lives if they came to school in like middle school or even elementary school, fourth, fifth grade, like, “Hey, this is what your future might look like; If you do this different, (it) might help you out now.”

Travreso talked about the importance of reaching young children, too. “Like especially elementary and middle school you know what I’m saying, because in high school you’re already grown. Little kids you know what I’m saying, so they can realize, I’m not saying so they can get scared, no, so they can think about it.” Travreso shared a list of simple privileges that are denied in prison, for example, watching TV at any time, or eating whenever you’re hungry.

When True started to think about his story helping someone else, he began talking about his son, and his son’s education. True argued that curriculum needed to “grasp the attention” of children.

It’s like if I’m rappin’ something, and I feel as if it’s not grabbing their attention then I get something that will. You know? So, it’s the same thing with children. If you’re not grabbing their attention then you need to get something that do. And they do do that though, you know, like they got like a little cartoons with the alphabet and all that. They’re doing different things that they weren’t doing when I was younger so you know they try to find different ways to grab people’s attention.

True returned many of the ideas he shared in his interviews to thoughts about his son and his steadfast belief in a better future for his son. His care and love for his son and his longing to spend time with him again became the reason, along with interest in other interviews like Al's and Ladybug's, that I chose to move toward a script, as a frame to generate multiple meanings, and as a performance to create moments to rupture what we as educators think we know about children, and about men and women who are incarcerated.¹⁸ My hope is that eventually the script will be performed for current and future teachers—the teachers that might teach True's son or Ladybug's son. The script in this chapter stands as a version that teachers (and teachers of teachers) might find useful. I hope that educators will see it performed eventually. Developing and sharing the script was a move I made to work on collaboration as well.

This script is a work in progress, and it is also an artifact of my research at a particular place in time. I wrote these scenes between the second and third interviews. As such my interpretations and subsequent representations reflect an intermediate moment in my analysis. During my third set of interviews along with the narrative analysis I gave to the participants, I shared the parts of the script that represented segments of their stories. I asked them for their own interpretations and feedback. This process took place in the fall of 2006 and the winter of 2007. The script was performed as a reader's workshop by colleagues and me in February 2007 at a regional conference on education. I videotaped the performance and audience responses and feedback, so that I may return to the development of the script as performance.

¹⁸ Originally, in the spring of 2006 I planned to conduct a focus group with administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers. My move toward a script was a way to engender hope amidst these narratives, rather than to assess blame. The focus group is a way to (return or introduce) the stories the men and women shared to the education community. I realized though that an element of the focus groups was punitive. I wanted administrators and teachers in particular to know what other administrators and teachers had done to these men and women as children. I wanted to evoke their empathy for these students taking college courses in prison and ask them what they heard in their respective stories. I hoped that sharing the stories might open understanding and generate possible discourse around how one responds to students who are disaffected in school, but I also wanted to represent students whom school failed to those who work in schools, who discipline class clowns and who equate behavior problems with a lack of intelligence. Although I think focus groups still harness potential to generate constructive dialogue about those whom school fails, the idea itself was not participant-directed but researcher-directed. I do not think any of the men and women I interviewed would mind the move, but it was not one any of them named. And in the light of what they did name, I have chosen a script.

The Life I Have to Live

The Cast

Kevenson is a student at a medium security prison, who is an African-American male. He has a broad smile and wears glasses that are small on his face. He is thoughtful, reflective, and has an easy laugh that sometimes he directs at some of his own self-described mistakes in the past.

Shoran identifies as an Indian, Puerto Rican, Black male. He speaks in murmurs at times as if below water. Honest, insightful, and unapologetic about his view of the way the world works, his life on the streets, and his likely return, he hides only his eyes which are under the dreads that fall across his round face.

True is an African American male quick to perform and quick to conspiracy theories. An intellectual, a cynic, and a performer as a rapper, story teller and a philosopher, True served five years in a medium security prison. Self-described as an “attention hog” he offers systemic critiques of education, capitalism, and criminal justice, and almost in spite of himself, believes that his future and certainly the future of his five-year-old son will be better than the world he sees today.

Ladybug is a white woman and proud mother of a six-year-old son. Her quiet and direct comments invite close listening. She wears her enthusiasm about her acceptance into Shaw University in her smile and embraces her identity as a college student.

Latoya is an African American woman with a light that shines from her eyes and her face. A mother of four, two girls and two boys and a fast talker whose words run together in excitement, she shares openly the vast differences in her schooling experiences in New Jersey and North Carolina. She is eager and nervous about her release, longing to be home with her children and in time for Christmas.

Ladybug and Latoya are incarcerated in the largest state facility that houses all custody levels, including death row, maximum, close, medium, minimum and safekeepers.

Crewdy is a spry 21-year-old African-American male with attentive eyes and a thin goatee. He grew up in a large mid-western city and attended nine different elementary schools. He breaks into nervous laughter when he talks about his rap or old neighborhood. He works road crew during the day at the minimum security prison where he is incarcerated.

Michael is a white male who is incarcerated in a medium security prison. He establishes his presence with his bright green eyes, broad shoulders, and the names he drops of authors and titles in the Western canon. An avid reader and scrabble player, he prides himself on clearing the Day Room by turning the channel to UNC-TV. Having found salvation while incarcerated, he delivers well received sermons at the prison chapel a few times a year.

Travreso who identifies as Mexican is incarcerated at a minimum security prison. He is quick to share his views on race, politics, and education. An amiable storyteller, he becomes impatient with questions about issues he considers quite clear. With confidence he moves smoothly and efficiently across topics of race, discipline in prison, and U.S. imperialism..

Al identifies as Chicano and is passionate about his Aztec heritage. Speaking behind his glasses and a dark beard, he seems constantly surprised by his own intellect and ability to help other students study in prison. He is incarcerated in a medium security facility and is eager to take more college courses.

The Life I Have to Live

Prologue:

(True crosses the stage from stage left to stand in on the edge of the stage. Shoran crosses from stage right to stand on the opposite side. Both True and Shoran wear putty-grey jumpsuit, with white t-shirts underneath. Both wear identical white sneakers. Looking only at the audience and not at each other True begins.)

True: The streets teach people things. In order to survive, you don't need nothing else; you don't need no education; you know, you can live day to day, and survive and be good. You'll be happy, so called happy. Some people find themselves happy with a limited situation, not realizing they're not truly happy. The streets has a way of giving people temporary, small amount of happiness, and they get satisfied. So when I look at you like, "You can be happier than that," and they be satisfied: "No, I'm happy now. I'm good where I am."

Shoran: I can't see going to flip no burgers, getting paid five dollars an hour, getting paid \$200 a week or whatever, that ain't even enough money to pay my rent. Feel me. But then when I want to go interview for a \$20 an hour job or something like that, my past is going to hold me back. Feel me, they say, you gotta bury the past, and move on, but how can you when society won't let you.

True: Somebody's got to work at McDonald's, somebody's got to work at the Shell station, somebody's got to cut grass. If they wanted everybody to be educated then who would do those jobs? Everybody is not meant to succeed; they don't want everybody to succeed. They knew what they're doing as far as education. This is just a program that's been going on for years, centuries.

Shoran: It's always good to gain more knowledge in anything you know, but that don't necessarily mean it's going to help. Education alright, it might be good to obtain while I'm locked up. I mean, like I said, I see people try that. Pshh, give 'em a couple months, they're back doing the same thing. A few that I saw try to better themselves, they didn't have another choice. Society won't give 'em no chance to try and better themselves regardless of education in here. There ain't too much I can do out there in the world than what I've been doing. I'm just trying to better myself.

True: So I'm going to try to enroll (in the) community college. I was talking to an officer, and he was telling me about (a) guy I could ask for when I get there (who) could help me enroll. You know I'm just ready to further my education really, you know get something else. Get in a better place, a better situation in life with education, hopefully, technology.

(For the first time, Shoran looks across the stage at True when True finishes speaking. He looks back at the audience and speaks. True looks at Shoran as he is turning his head to speak to the audience. True watched him as he speaks.)

Shoran: I can get out of here, put on a pair of glasses, pair of slacks, and tie, cut my dreads off, and everything, and try and take it a whole different way, when I go into an interview. They don't care about none of the credentials. I can be the best man for the job, but (prison's) all they see.

(True looks from Shoran to the audience and speaks. Gesturing to Shoran with his body language True asks.)

True: What you going to do when this person is stressed out? When he's stressed out and he can't find work or don't know how to establish his business, whatchu going to do to get him to still be who he is and not want to go out here and get involved in drugs?

(Shoran does not respond to True. He addresses the audience.)

Shoran: Society sees me as a Black male with felonies on his record. It's all it's all a part of society's plan, that's how I see it. They call prison a revolving door, but they make it the revolving door, cause when you get out there they really don't give you no chance.

ACT I: Scene 1

(Kevenson comes out and sits on the edge of a stool stage right. He wears a putty-grey jumpsuit with eight buttons down the front and a white t-shirt underneath).

Kevenson:

They switched (me) around in fourth or fifth grade,
they sent me to management
I think they were trying to keep me
but everyone in there was bad
they put me in an environment where I was
exposed to gangs
(there were no gangs in the neighborhood where I grew up)

The teacher, a black dude,
he wore glasses, he was laid back
chill
present his work,
whether anybody receives it – he didn't really show too much interest in that part
He don't want to cause nobody no problems I guess

Before I went to management school,
school was fun,
field trips,
girls,
playing basketball

I still wasn't encouraged to try to learn
I did alright you know,
It wasn't that I couldn't
learn
or that I had some learning disability
it was the fact
It wasn't attractive to me

I was always like hyper
so just
sitting
sitting down
in the seat
was hard for me
The way they taught
my teachers back then
didn't teach
like our psychology teacher (now)
you know
you gotta really
catch my attention

I really would really give teachers
a hard time
I would push the teachers
and make them step out of their character
just rebel on purpose
like picking at the teacher
in front of everybody
picking at somebody that's in class
picking at girls a lot
cause I like them and I knew that they liked me
kinda like what people do in college
still do in college
stuff like that

just making a lot of jokes,
just being a clown
It makes it fun and exciting to do something
bad
Police chasing all over school.
You know they are not going to catch you.
It was like
it's like a game of cat and mouse, man
you know
you have to get used to it
and it'll become fun,
but I don't recommend it now.

It's the adrenaline,
you know as a child you played games
like hide and seek
and stick, a game we played was stick,
you line a bunch of rocks up around a stick
everybody draws,
pulls rocks from the stick
whoever makes the stick drop,
they got to chase
everybody in the neighborhood,
it's a game
you carry it over into school
and that makes it more fun cause
when you're young
who don't want to have fun?
who don't want to play games?

But when you're not taught
that you're not
when you don't listen
to the fact
that
school is not a playground,
it's crazy.

I got kicked out of North Carolina schools
I was out of my mother's hands,
(sent) me to South Carolina,
a real bad environment, a drug house almost
I wan't nothing but 14,
I went to school
down there
but it was even badder
there everything went badly
because
I was on my own
really

I made a bunch of bad decisions,
just like all the other class clowns
we all got locked up

Being a class clown it
it's a lifestyle that you carry out into the street
you really get it from the street almost
but it gets developed more in a class environment
when you're in there
with different types of people
and different backgrounds
it's like your shining time,

like American Idol
especially men
we like to be
on the spot,
be the head hancha
As that lifestyle carries into the streets
you begin to lead past
to begin to lead more
people into trouble

It's, I wish you could see it over here
how it is, man.
Come and try
it's just like class
it's still like class
even when we locked up

I don't really hang with a lot of people
I'm like a musician minister here
that's what I do
music ministry,
I don't really hang with nobody besides
some of my brothers
I talk to everybody,
You know, I'm cool with everybody

And I'll sit back and I'll listen
sometimes, and
somebody come in the pod
and try to give instructions
just like the teacher used to do,
and it's a total
unified
rebellion
against them man
and they get cussed out for
no reason,
it's crazy man.

Education is a small part of the life I have to live.

ACT I: Scene 2

(Ladybug sits on a stool on the other side of the stage and begins her spoken word. She wears green pants and a matching green jacket over a light blue t-shirt.)

Ladybug:

Our teacher was on maternity leave at the beginning of the year

(substitute) she was real, laid back, mellow
She give one-on-one attention
She acted like she cared about her students
Not just "OK, you're a student,
You're in my class,
You're here to learn."
She got to know us individually
She took the time to learn our learning habits
whether we did better visually
or through the book
and so was able to
Help us
on a more individual basis
She was a really nice lady

(My first grade teacher)
She was heartless
I mean she did not care about the students
She just was there to teach
and then she was ready to go home
She had a very hot temper
She expected 20 first graders
to stay quiet at all times
She had no understanding
no compassion toward the students

And of course her attitude clashed with mine
And it did cause a few problems
I got in trouble in her class

One time, I flat told her I thought she was an ogre
told her exactly how hateful I thought she was
Of course I spent a few days in in school suspension for that
because the principal did not approve of some of the language
I used from a first grade child

(The teacher) held me back.
She talked my parents into holding me back,
they let me start school when I was four
because of when my birthday was.
She felt it would help me
in the long run.
The other students, my classmates,
started picking on me because I was held back.
I was labeled the "dummy"
They didn't understand why it was done
when they started picking on me
and calling me "dummy"
from that point on I hated school.
I didn't even want to go.

It hurt my feelings.
I go home and cry to mama
To them I be like, "You gotta problem withit?"
I would stand up for myself
And then I go home and cry to mama
"Mama, they picked on me."
It hurt my feelings.

Mama had to bribe me to go to school after that
She would bribe me with a charm a day
The little charm necklaces were in style
with the little, big, ugly plastic charms
and if I made good grades it was a Happy Meal
or something, you know, real special.

I was in ninth grade,
I had this little habit
I thought my friends were more important
than going to class on time.
After so many write ups you would get in school suspension.
When I was sitting (in) in school suspension I (was) like
"You know what?
I'm doing so much better in in school suspension
than I do in a regular classroom;
I make better grades.
I'd do a day's worth of work in two hours.
So I used to purposely get in trouble
so I'd go to in school suspension and get good grades,
because I worked better independently.
I had a pretty cool principal at Mt. Wilson
I explained to him why I would
purposely do it.
It was always little small things
like not getting to class on time,
and I told him "You know I do it so I can go to ISS
and get my work done and be done with it."

So I had three weeks in school suspension
and in two days I had all that work done.
I still had, you know, two and a half weeks left
and they would actually let me come in the office
and answer phones and run errands for them.

(My senior year)
I met who's now my ex-husband.
I was eighteen,
senior in high school
thought I was in love;
boy, was I wrong.
Moved out of my mom's house,
moved in with him.

I got real sick.
In our school if you miss more than nine days
you automatically fail.
In March I wound up quitting.
Dropping out.

My mom she went to the school
and found out I wasn't there
when they called for me and I never showed up
she started asking around
what she could do to get me back in school
get a diploma, and not a GED

That was the first year they had opened Snow Field
an alternative school.
They wound up getting me in.
They gave me the hardship transfer with my dad having cancer.
And rather than having your typical block period
you could go morning, afternoon, or night
I went to the night classes.

You had two to four teachers
you were given your work,
if you needed help you went to the teachers.
It was strictly a one-on-one basis
They didn't allow more than 20 students per time frame.
By doing that I actually made better grades,
because I have a slight learning disability
and in classrooms with a lot of people my attention wanders.
If I had a question (at Snow Field)
teacher come over and she'd sit right beside you
and show you exactly what you needed to do
and if you were having a bad day she was there to listen.
I ended up graduating with honors.
Made my dad real proud.

I wanted to go (to college).
One of the things my ex husband had told me when I got married
"I want you to finish. I'll work three jobs if I have to,
so you can go back to school."
I was wanting to go on and do my RN,
and then wound up getting pregnant and
he didn't want me going back to school fulltime.
He wanted me to work,
but he didn't want me to go back to school fulltime,
so I could spend time with my son.
And then that wound up never happening
I wound up working three jobs while he did nothing.

But I'm getting my education now.
That's the way I look at it.

I've made mistakes
But you live and learn.

I've got my plate full right now.
I'm in Shaw.
You do your two-year associate's degree in business management
a five-year degree in sociology,
I'm also doing cosmetology through Moore Community.

I also took intro to sociology.
It's a lot of work.
It tends to get a little crazy sometimes.
Sleep is kind of a thing of the past.
We'll have two classes on Monday Wednesday
and two classes on Tuesday Thursday
We have Friday nights off.
We get out of classes around 7:00,
get back in our dorms around 7:30-7:45,
have count. I'll do homework.
I'm usually in bed between midnight and two
But it's OK.

The instructors are pretty good,
if you need to talk to them they're willing to stay after class.
We have to stand and wait anyway
to get an escort when the grounds are closed.

Most of the other students are pretty eager to learn,
but you got a few that you know
they catch things a little bit quicker,
and they think they're better than everybody else,
and don't want to help those that struggle.
They'll purposefully tell you things wrong
just so you get a bad grade.
They're like a year ahead of us.
We're all first years.
We had a world civilization test,
we had someone who missed some days
and the girl purposefully told her the wrong things to study
When she went in there
she was completely lost
But for the most part, our class,
we've all got about the same amount of time
we're usually pretty good about helping each other.

Even though I got plenty of time
I'm trying to think about when I go home,
kinda thinking ahead
I have a child to support.

He's six
Straight A student
They want to test him to see if he's academically gifted.
I said, "You go!"

You know on Saturday mornings
we'd get up, we'd eat breakfast, we'd watch cartoons together.
I'd allow him to watch cartoons on Saturday mornings,
and then we cleaned house
I'd cut on the radio and we'd dance as we were cleaning
Half the time he was making a mess trying to clean up a mess
but at least he tried
I taught him
how to take soft toys and toss them at the ceiling fan
and watch them spin.

To me spending time with your children is doing things together,
I was brought up in a close family
and it makes a difference.

If you talk to 90 percent of these women on the compound
they don't have family
some of 'em that are in here
gang related, preteen.
Mama and daddy weren't around much,
parents idea of spending time with their children is taking them to buy
Nautica or Tommy Hilfiger
Or buy em a video game
and plop them down in front of the TV,
so they can go do
what they gotta do.
So they turned to gangs
to get that sense of belonging
You know they killed somebody
or you know drugs
and they wind up in prison.

I've made my mistake and I'm paying for it.
There's a lot of things that I don't agree with
as far as what happened to me
but you know if I can help somebody else,
prevent them from making the same mistakes then
it will be worth it.

Me being in here has made a big impact on my nephew
He's 12 and I told him
that's the age that I started wantin' to run my mouth and
school wasn't important to me.
I wasn't worried about the future.
Things wind up happening you know,
you never know about what your circumstances may be

in three months, three weeks.
Me being here
it's showed him
he's gotta work that much harder.
If I can help one other person
It's worth it to me.

ACT I: Scene 3

(A group of students shuffle into a classroom, all in jumpsuits with white t-shirts beneath, some in black sneakers, some in white, most have a simple black watch on their wrists. Todd greets them all personally, giving a pound to True, Travreso, and Al when they come in and friendly "hey man"s to Michael, Crewdy, and Shoran.)

Todd: Hello, hey, hey, hey, man, hey, hey ...
OK, Circle up.

(Students move chairs into a wide circle. Everyone settles down and Todd starts class.)

So, are we able to tell who's smart? I fulfilled the role of class clown, and 'I'm smarter than you all think I am.' How do you know what's good and not good in school? Do I say that Travreso is a good student and True is a bad student, is it solely up to me?

Shoran: Yes

True: No

Todd: Who told you? Where did you get your sense of smartness from? How do we "know things?"

(He pauses.)

Are there things that we learned in school that are not true?

(Students are quiet. Some watch Todd, some the floor, others look at each other. Todd stands up and walks behind an empty chair. He places his hand on it.)

What color chair is this?

True: Blue

Travreso: Blue

Crewdy: Blue

Todd: Are you sure?

True: *(impatiently)* It's blue.

Todd: So everyone agrees it's blue.
(*The students nod.*)

OK, I'm in charge of the class and have the power to give out grades, whether you earn them or not I will give them to you, and I say the chair is black. You may think it's blue, but you would be wrong.

(*He pauses again.*)

Who is with me?

Michael: No, I'm not with you.

True: No.

Todd: Remember, who wants an A?

(*Todd points to himself with his pen.*)

Travreso: It's blue.

Michael: It's blue, man.

Todd: OK, we're going to have a test, and the test is, what color is this chair?

Shoran: Oh, (*short pause*) OK, it's black.

Michael: It's only black in this class, but after that it is going to be blue

Crewdy: The chair is blue.

Todd: Does that matter?

True: Complete knowledge is never complete.

Todd: YES! The transfer of knowledge and truth. You don't need to go to class anymore. Gold Star. And it is not complete True because?

True: of the man

Todd: Yes, the man, but isn't it more complicated than that? Doesn't it require more than just throwing up our hands and saying "the man?" Believe me, I do that all the time, but we are change agents here people. We are going to think of a different way to run the factory of education so we can make sure folks (*he points to the students*) don't fall through the (*saying wryly*) proverbial cracks of education. So now, what does it mean to be smart?

(*There is no response.*)

I'm going to give out four As. This will be a good place for us to start. Grades.

Grades are the way in which we compete or rather how we stratify the class. Grades tell us who is smart and who is not, right? If I only give out four A's, how can you guys ensure you will get one? Wait, who even wants one?

True: If you're smart, you'll want to be more like yourself.

Todd: Done. A. (*He points down for emphasis.*) Michael should get one cause he looks and talks like me, and I think he is smart. Michael you get an A.

True: Enhance yourself

(*Todd nods to True.*)

Crewdy: You just got to know the material, study.

Todd: A!

Shoran: Be like you.

Todd: Good. A. One more A to get. How do we know who's smart?

Travreso: Be like them (*Travreso nods toward True and Crewdy.*)

Todd: Mirror others in class? Now I was a jackass in school. I sat back there and wouldn't follow the rules. I was the class clown, but that's not what gets you ahead to high school, college, to getting a job. I never studied a day in my life until I went to grad school. We want the best to be more like the teacher. We know the more you're like the teacher, the more you're successful.

Al: Yeah. To be the best. They pound into our heads. That's how you do it.

Kevenson: Everyone wants to be the best that you can.

Todd: Because that's what society says?

Kevenson: Because you want to be better.

Shoran: What society says doesn't matter, it's who you know.

Todd: Being smart, yes, it's tied to social capital. Certain relationships with key people can get you ahead no matter how "smart" you are.

Shoran: You ain't got to be smart to be born with money.

Al: You know who to know.

True: Play the chess game.

Michael: I got to be able to speak the words that you know to be able to connect to you.

Todd: To know a certain lexicon is like the ability to speak a different language. Or

like being able to speak the language of power. Learning the language or the “school game” may be the key to being “smart.” Who is going to tell me what I want to hear and use the language that I use? A better way to ask that question is, who succeeds in school?

Shoran: **People who have** money.¹⁹

Michael: **People who** pay attention.

Al: **People who** obey the rules.

(There is a pause.)

Shoran: Everyone in here’s smart in his own way.

Crewdy: Knowing what you need to know and need to do to get to where you want to be in a given society.

Shoran: Being smart is what society says is smart.

Todd: I’m not saying this class is different. This class is absolutely no different. We can’t escape the fact that those who think like me or use my language I won’t like better.

Al: You express yourself.

Shoran: You’re not policing the class.

Michael: We’re not here for schooling.

Todd: Is there a difference? Schooling is sitting, being indoctrinated. Education is a bit more negotiated. This is about sociology of knowledge, how it is constructed, what curriculum is. What does it look like? Middle class ideals?

Kevenson: Leaves out other people’s point of view.

Todd: How we know that?

Shoran: Because we lived it.

(There is a long pause.)

Todd: What about testing?

Kevenson: Tests don’t really tell you who’s smart and who’s not.

Crewdy: Everybody doesn’t have equal opportunity.

¹⁹ The bold words “People who have ...” from Shoran, “People who ...” from Michael, and “People who ...” from Al were added by me. They remain the only example of words not found in observation and interview notes. I made the addition here for clarification and pace.

Travreso: Everything is based on money.

Michael: Teachers teaching you how to cheat, makes them look good, makes the school look good, money keeps coming in.

Todd: What about IQ?

Kevenson: Student IQ can fluctuate, all the while these kids are getting shot down, destroyed psychologically for being labeled mentally retarded.

Al: Money gets passed down, money and culture.

Todd: So, why are you taking this class?

Crewdy: It goes on my resume.

Shoran: I'm gonna get three hours.

Kevenson: Understanding curriculum.

True: Choice about which district I live in. If I were rich really rich, this wouldn't matter. Education doesn't matter.

Todd: How do you influence something?

Travreso: *(edgy)* You don't.
(There is a long pause.)

True: If you're poor, only way make a difference if you're an outspoken person.

Todd: What does the government want from teaching in correctional facilities?

Travreso: Want to send out some more troops.

Crewdy: Inmates to get out and make some progress get out and not come back.

True: I mean they're doing a terrible job cause 85 percent of the people come back. They got profit in mind. If you was really educating people to get jobs you would provide jobs.
(He slows down.)
Everything is needed to make this one big complete circle and it's ashame they throw crime in there to complete the circle.

Travreso: If you don't cooperate with teachers you may get sent to segregation. It happens just about every day.

Todd: I have things that I have to cooperate with as well. Ms. Sherayko is over me,

like I'm over you. The school is a hierarchy. You don't think calling me down there during class to see why I wanted more pens wasn't about power?

(Todd speaks like Ms. Sherayko.) "Why do you want more pens? I can't give you more pens."

(Todd imitates himself, exasperated.) "O.K."

(He pauses and looks at the class.)

Gotta make sure the product gets out, make sure the factory is working. If school doesn't work you go to prison, if prison doesn't work you go back to school, they put you right back into the factory.

Shoran: I've been here a year and five days I haven't met one person yet that's really compassionate about seeing me change, not a one.
(pause)

True: Knowledge that they would have us know is the knowledge we obtain.
(Lights fade down).

ACT II: Scene 1

(Shoran moves to a desk at center stage and sits down.)

Shoran:

Ma dukes can't do it all
I grew up in a one parent home,
my Dad's been locked up for 18 years,
even when he wasn't locked up he wasn't in my life.
Last time I saw him, before he went to prison,
I was about three-years-old,
and we went to go see him at one of his businesses.
He was a kingpin shark
he was trafficking all the drugs,
he ran the whole Charlotte.
My mama pulled up.
He get at her window,
"Whatchu bring them over here for,
why you comin' over here? Them ain't my kids."
Talking to me and my big brother.
That's what I remember about that.
Last time I seen him.

I was trouble (in school)
I don't know why
I stayed in trouble,

probably trying to prove myself,
be the baddest in school.
When I was in like kindergarten
they had me on half a day schedule
I was so bad
I could only stay
in school
like half the day.
I remember, second grade
I used to shove desks around
when I didn't have my way

I had potential.
I was bad, but I still had A B honor roll, AG
academically gifted.

I remember the baddest person in my grade.
He was the baddest boy.
Everybody was terrified of him.
He was like a little bully,
I was like a ladies man.
The coolest.
Everybody gonna roll with me,
all the girls liked me
cause I was a cute little boy,
had the curly hair,
you know, mom kept me fresh,
she kept me in the best clothes,
I was smooth with it,
but this little boy, everybody scared of him.
No little girls like him
he shouldn't be bad
he should be smooth, you know what I mean?
So he wasn't likin' that.
So one day he come up to me
and we start arguing
and he pushed me
so I punched him in the mouth.
I knocked his tooth out,
so they suspend me.

I come back to school,
he's scared of me now.
Now, I'm the baddest boy.
I got him running from me on the playground.
That felt good to be the baddest boy walking.
To be untouchable.
It felt good to know
nobody really trying to face up to you, you know?
It feel good not to watch your back.
They say when you live

the street life
you always got to watch your back
for other people
and for police
but (it) feel good (not to)
watch your back,
turn around,
look over your shoulder
all the time.

I always wanted to be
the one that outshines
a hundred thousand people.
When I (got) to middle school
everything went down hill,
it just all go away.
My mama started doing bad.

When I got to Sycamore,
School of the Arts
this one girl, Ashley,
a little girlfriend,
I guess you can call it love at first sight,
I had to keep up to keep her.
She got all these boys
sittin' around
eighth and twelfth graders.
So in order to do that
just looks ain't going to get it;
you gotta have something to go along with them looks,
cause that's just like Cinderella.
Cinderella was a po' and raggedy dang thing,
pretty as the devil. PRETTY.
No more beautiful thing walkin'
but then nobody noticed
her until her fairy godmother came through
and laced her up.
And they're like, "Good God almighty, look at her!"
Feel me?

So, this is the same for me.
I was the Prince Charming
but I couldn't be in rags and
be any Prince Charming
They wouldn't notice
me
as Prince Charming.

I be embarrassed
to go out there,
old clothes.

“Shoran got old clothes”—
made sure I wasn’t going to hear.
I started skipping school,
came to the point
where I started selling drugs.
I can’t be in school
and in the streets.
I can’t make money if I’m in school.

I was taking care of my mama,
paying the bills.
But then Ashley left the school.
That’s when everything went downhill
The teachers knew how smart I was,
but I wasn’t thinking about that.
I really had no reason to go now.
I was thinking about Ashley.
I flunked the seventh grade.
They sent me to alternative school.
Alternative school really made me
not want to go to school.

My big brother,
he was still in school.
He got a scholarship to college, two of ’em
for art and playing football,
but he walk down them streets with me all night
He always used to tell me he ain’t never leave my side
We made an oath.
He used to tell me a lot:
“I don’t want you running the streets no more,
want you to stay in school,
get your education.
Leave these streets alone.”

My big brother got killed before I got locked up,
put a real hurtin’ on my family
he was the strength of all of us.
It’s going on four years now
but I still be crying at night,
and I’m a grown man,
I’m 21-years-old,
still be crying at night though about my big brother.

When I was young
I always had—
my mama always used to tell me—
two strikes against me.
You know what I mean?
One, I’m a male,
that’s the first strike.

I'm a Black male,
the second strike,
but she never told me
about a third strike.
She just said I got two strikes against me,
"Don't do this and don't do that."
went in one ear and out the other.
But I see now that the third strike is
I'm a male a Black male and a convicted felon.

I mean I ain't even all the way Black,
I'm Puerto Rican, Indian, and Black,
but you know you got one drop of blood,
got one drop, you're Black.
So that's what society sees me as,
a Black male with felonies on his record
so I can get out of here,
put on a pair of glasses,
pair of slacks, and tie,
cut my dreads off,
try and take it a whole different way.
When I go into an interview
and they get my papers
and they see all these credentials
all this education,
but then they were like
"Ah, what did you do first?"
"Prison."
"Prison? What you in prison for?"

So education alright
it might be good to obtain while I'm locked up,
it's always good to gain more knowledge in anything, you know,
but that don't necessarily mean it's going to help.
They don't care about none of the credentials.
I can be the best man for the job,
but that's all they see right there.
I see people try that
but give 'em a couple months they're back
doing the same thing
because it's all a part of society's plan,
that's how I see it.
They call prison a revolving door,
but they make it the revolving door.
Cause when you get out there
they really don't give you no chance.
I can't see going to flip no burgers,
getting paid five dollars an hour,
getting paid \$200 a week—
that ain't even enough money to pay my rent.
Feel me?

It's really all I see.
The streets.
I'm not saying it's going to last a lifetime.
but it's all I see.
It's sad.
It's just a way of life.

ACT II: Scene 1

C.O.s

(Travreso walks into the dorm and reaches for his chips and soup and can of soda. He turns to the others in the dorm and tells them what has just happened. He is angry but controlled. The others respond to his story as if Travreso is new to this experience with the c.o.s.)

Travreso: I walked to the canteen buy me some chips, soda and some soup, so I'm coming back, I open the door and I heard this Black officer talking about "fucking wetbacks," so I'm like "Yo, what's you mean?" You know what I'm saying? I didn't even tell him that I was walking to my pod, put my stuff up, I came back, "Let me get a grievance I don't like what I heard." He said, "Let's make sure you write my name down and everything." He thought I was joking, you know what I'm saying? "How would you like it if I walked around and said, "fucking niggers" He didn't like it. We went to the sergeant's office, and I told him what happened; he told his officer to step out. He was talking to me. I tell him, "Look man I ain't new at this, I read books, and I know what's going on, so you cannot tell me that if a person spit in your face you're going to stay like this.

(He stands there and does nothing with his arms crossed.)

Now, I know I can't hit him simple fact I know I'm going to HCON. I ain't trying to go to HCON, naw. So, I just tell him what happened.

Shoran: They talk to you like trash; they call you bastards. You can't win here.

Kevenson: If you do something wrong they shout at you; they criticize you. People don't realize the things they do with their lips; they really just don't know.

True: They just feel as if they smarter than you, they know more than you, therefore they feel more powerful than you and that makes them above you, you know, so they just try to attempt to insult your intelligence This prison in particular they treat you like little children; they try to treat you like adults in a childish way by you know it's a way that you say things. I do it, too. The officers they may be doing something wrong, and I will break things down so simple and they get mad, because I'm right, and I may have stepped on a couple of their toes, but at the same time I haven't done anything wrong so, you know, so maybe throw a couple words in there they might not know exactly what it mean. I'm throwing my vocabulary around.

They don't like that. I mean a lack of education is not a write up. I didn't do nothing, I just talking. They can't write me up because they don't understand.

Crewdy: I'm more scared of the c.o.s than anything else; some of them start stuff, pull them out of line, wait for them to say something so then they can lock them up. Feel big, I don't see any other reason. Sometimes the same people, sometimes random. It's usually the same officer, too.

Shoran: Beat somebody down that's what they thrive off of basically, you know? I see most of these people. This won't no life. They ain't got no life. This is their life right here, so that's what they thrive off of, what they live off of.

True: Ego, they try to look good in front of each other, near a captain, say, "Get in line." A lot of them on a power trip, at chow time, punish four guys for one person. They want to punish everybody in line. Try to make everybody a lesson; (they've) got stick and mace. A lot of females, they mad, getting back at something their boyfriend said, they be tripping. It's like it's boot camp or something.

Shoran: They take people down to receiving and beat them, five of them, for saying something smart; I've seen them spray people for no reason; take the mail, they'll cut your lock open to search. When you in school, get in trouble go to time-out, (here), get in trouble, go to the hole, go to segregation, no phone calls, no air – can't go outside – 30 days minimum. In school (they) give you a chance to explain what's going on. (Here) once a statement's made, I can have as many witnesses as I want, it's a no win situation. (They) show you that they're in control; (you can) appeal from seg.

Al: The sergeant that brought me in here,

(Al gestures over his shoulder stage left.)

I swung at him one morning when they spray me. He wouldn't let me go to breakfast. It (was) like real early, like 6:30 in the morning, I jumped up out of bed, you know. I was brushing my teeth. He told me to go back in my room. He lied, said I missed chow call. They hadn't made chow call or anything yet. So I got mad, punched the door. He told me to come downstairs. I was mad. I thought about it: I was fixin' to hit him on my way down the steps. "Aw it ain't even worth it." Then he ran up there, he got up in my face. So, I couldn't let him do that to me. Cause they're right up on me they're like, "just give me a reason, just give me a reason" he had a stick in his hand, so I just started smiling at him, I thought it was funny. I like, "Why you gotta act like this?" I started laughing at him; he got real mad. They took me to office, but they forgot, they only put one handcuff on me. I told him you know "Man, you can lock me up, you can beat me up, it don't matter to me, I'm still doing time. You can't break me. It's all mental to me; you can't break my mind." So he told his officer: "If he says one more word, spray 'im, hit 'im, 'take him down'" that's his favorite word "take him down." "Take him down and make sure (he) stay down." So I started smiling at him again. I don't know which one of them did it, but they sprayed me, and I felt the spray, I (saw) the stick moving up, so I thought (he was) going to hit me, so I swung at one of 'em they didn't know (about the) handcuffs, so I swung. They grab me, threw me

on the ground, sprayed me again.

Shoran: No one's looking out for your best interest. It's a hopeless cause; Rehabilitation. The administration doesn't care if you change, they know you can't do anything about it.

ACT II: Scene 2

(Latoya comes out and sits on the stool where Ladybug sat. She wears the same green pants but a navy blue sweatshirt.)

Latoya:

I'm originally from New Jersey,
My grandmother stays in North Laurinburg, North Carolina.

I liked elementary school in New Jersey, North Carolina.
It wasn't hard.
I had older cousins that was just in first grade
so I already know what's coming
what books we're going to learn out of,
everybody probably has big sisters, big brothers, or older cousins
that know so much.
"I'm going to grow up and be like them,
I'm going to learn, learn, learn, learn, learn, learn."
It was easy.

Your mom or your dad
whoever raised you taught you at home,
like multiplication tables,
your family usually teach you that before you go to school.
My grandmother, my Dad (taught me that).
It was easy.

I came out here in second grade.
I did kindergarten and first grade in Jersey.
Came (to North Carolina) in the second.
Went to school down here into the fifth grade.
In fifth grade I went back to New Jersey.
I come back and forth. I missed my dad,
so I'd go back to Jersey.
I did the fifth and sixth down here,
seventh and eighth I'd go back to Jersey.

Took awhile to get used to the country
it's the country,
no noise,
quiet.

And Newark.

I'm going to say,
Newark is probably the worst part of New Jersey.
It's the heart of New Jersey and
it's always something going on,
sun up to sun down, it's always something going on.
We have a store on every corner, every block.
Down here, you gotto walk a mile to get to the store.
No buses. You can't just jump on a bus
and be like, "OK, take me here."

I had a bunch of cousins when I went to school in New Jersey;
we all went to the same school.
(It was) HUGE.
It was more people,
more people, one teacher,
so you can't get the attention you need,
not that you didn't get any
but you can't,
it's like you have a question, you have to wait
until the next person ask their question,
because they have their hand up before you.

In school you ain't learn nothing, you just learning.
You don't know anything,
I know a little bit from when I was in school.
School, it just get you started. That's all.
It was just to get you started.

Elementary school, middle school was pretty good.
Once you hit high school,
I don't think the teachers care.
In New Jersey it's just like,
Oh wow, they don't care if you graduate or not.
I've had friends who graduated who couldn't read and write.
In New Jersey, you sign in, that's your day,
as long as you sign in, you graduated.

In the tenth grade I went to sleep in all the classes I could.
No problem. I could sleep all day and I could leave when I want.
You left when you like.
If I didn't want to stay in school all day it was OK
I can leave if I want.
There's nothing they can do if you run out the doors
(The) taunt officer('s) not going to run out the school yard to chase you.
You just don't come back.
We have police officers in Laurinburg though
You couldn't sign yourself out unless your mom,
whoever, your guardian called up here and told 'em "OK."
I didn't stay in Jersey long my a tenth grade year,
I didn't like it.

When I came back to North Carolina,
you know,
I learned.
I had to stay awake down here.
I had to learn down here.
Principals, too, made sure you went to school,
because your parents get locked up if your child don't go to school.
And you have to have meetings with your mom or your dad
I had to deal with my grandmother about going to sleep in class,
getting sent to the principal's office for not listening.

But I knew when I went to school I'm supposed to learn.
I'm not supposed to go to class late.
I'm not supposed to go to sleep.
I could pay attention if it was a subject I liked –
I've never liked history.
I've always thought, OK history, it should come up to my history.
Not something that happened before I was born that I cannot relate to.
I struggled through history. I passed it, (but) I struggled.
I just thought: I can't relate to any of this.
My grandmother can't relate to any of this.
This is before my family times.

I mean you have some (teachers) and you learned.
My twelfth grade English teacher was ecstatic
and it was it was fun.
I don't like to just going to class
and just sit there and work.
You know what I'm saying?
I like to learn and talk.

(In 11th and 12th grade) a lot of people do co-op
because you don't have to go to school.
I would work at the Piggly Wiggly
I could sign myself out, because I had to go to work,
(but) only for the last two periods.
I would leave school at 12 o'clock and work
A lot of people do whatever they're going to go to college for,
just get a head start.
The school helps you get a job,
A lot of people do it cause
Hey, you don't have to go to school to make money.
But the only way you get co-op is you have all the classes you need
You don't just get co-op.

(I graduated) Randolph High, May 2000.
I wanted to go to UNC-C but I had already had one child.
I graduated with my son.
My first child was 10 months when I graduated.

When I had my son, it just made me work harder

Because I needed a reason.
A lot of people get pregnant and say,
“Oh, OK, I’m just going to drop out, get a GED.”
That’s when GEDs didn’t amount to diplomas
I figured, OK, I need to get a diploma.
What am I going to tell my child if I drop out of school?
That was my motivation.
The days that I didn’t want to go to school,
that was my motivation to go.
He was my motivation.

My plan was to work and save up some money.
I got pregnant with my second child,
had my daughter,
and then I committed a crime,
came to prison.

I’ve been here four-and-a-half years.
It’s been hard.

I made it.
I go home December the 11th
I missed Thanksgiving, but I’ll be home for Christmas.
I have four wonderful babies at home:
two boys and two girls, three, four, five, seven.
I can’t wait.

I’m ready,
a little nervous. Scared.
Scared.
Things change,
I’m ready take the good with the bad.
I got a stable mind, I’m ready to face new things.

Took a little classes here
I finished (Algebra).
That was a good class.
It taught me how to use calculators,
use a lot of technology.
I love the teacher;
she broke things down.
It was easy.

If you’re in school
at least for the hours in school
you don’t have to deal with (the compound).
It’s a lot of women here.
A lot of us aren’t used to dealing with women.
A lot didn’t grow up around a lot of women.
Women nick and they pick
and constantly gossiping.

If you take classes then when you go back to the dorm,
you have something to concentrate on.
Go to school. Go back to the dorms. Study. Wake up.
It's a new day.

(Others) just watch TV,
or come outside and smoke,
and shoot, everybody meets somebody,
so normally somebody has a friend,
and you just walk around and talk to 'em.
Go to canteen, eat canteen,
sandwiches that they heat up,
chips, cakes, breads, soda, juices, ice cream
There's nothing else to do.

We're not allowed to run to canteen.
We do it anyway, but we're not allowed to.
An officer will probably tell you: "Stop running."
No, I'm not going to stop running, because I'm hungry
So, I get kicked out of line.
I get an attitude because they
don't understand what it's like to be hungry.
Very seldom do the officers understand
what it means to be hungry
Because they can just go up to canteen and go up to the window.
We can't. We have to stand in line.
The line opens at one o'clock, and they close at two-thirty;
We have an hour and a half.
You have 30-40 people in line.
Everybody's not going to get served every time.

I don't go to school (now)
I work on property yard, picking up trash,
get paid nothing,
but hey, if I can do it here I can do it at home.
I get paid 70 cents a day here.
I can work minimum wage.
There's things I don't want to do.
I don't want to flip burgers,
but I will because I need an income.
You know what I'm saying?
On probation, so I have to get a job.
I'm not too good to work at McDonald's.
I picked up trash here so I'm not too good to work there.
I did my upholstery here,
so there's probably a job I could get: upholstery.

I want to get out and go to school, do nail tech.
I want to do nursing
I want to get some experience with nursing,
hands on experience,

probably won't get paid but volunteer work,
nursing home, hospitals.
I'm ready to go to college.

I'm going to Fayetteville, something different,
a little change of scenery,
new faces.

My sister, she's the youngest, she's 21
but she'll keep me on the right track.

She (goes) to Fayetteville State

I have a good family,

I'm not too keen on money,

anything I'll need they'll be there for me.

I'm going to school

(The don't want to see) me come back to prison.

Everybody's motivated.

I'm ready.

(Latoya rises and exits stage right.)

(The lights fade.)

The End.

CHAPTER 4

SCHOOLING TRAPS AND COUNTERPOINTS

Educational Narratives

In this chapter I represent the schooling narratives of Al Chambers, Kevenson, Michael Jordan, Tyte Crewdy, Travreso, and Shoran. I am representing also, moves these storytellers make in the sharing of their experiences in school while growing up and their experiences taking college courses in prison. I am marking the ways in which these men tell their stories and the contrasts they make that may signal a turn or an insight in the telling. Some of these moves are indicative of the ways in which the tellers made meaning of their stories.

I frame the matrix of my narrative analysis with William Labov's sociolinguistic approach to narrative in which a researcher describes, analyzes, and interprets experience using narrative elements. Labov's analysis includes the following elements, an *abstract*, that frames the research with a question; an *orientation* that places the research; *complication*, that accounts for movement in experience; an evaluation, that reflects the researcher's analysis and interpretation of experience;²⁰ the *result* or a description of what "finally" happened; and *coda* which returns the reader to the beginning of the project, or the present, and emphasizes any transformations that may have been a part of the story along the way.

²⁰ Both analysis and interpretation demand a conscious return to one's positionality as authorial responsibility is interlaced with interpretation and representation (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Their Stories in My Story

These narratives are not only my representations of the stories that the students recounted at my promptings but they are performances of telling about lived experience as well. The students' performances manage me as a listener as well as the environment in which their stories are told. "Environment" refers to two distinct elements here: the conditions under which the student and I communicate, for example, the office, the conference room, or the classroom in which we find ourselves, and the discursive and structural confinements in which and with which the students live as inmates.

I want to be careful about the generative possibilities of narrative and acknowledge again the politics of an invitation to tell a story. As Ellsworth (1997) argued, an invitation to dialogue is a political act. I bring my own subjectivities, rules, and expectations to each interview. I want to name these stories as they are represented here as I did my script as artifacts of this research. They reflect particular moments in time. In her coverage of the TRC hearings, Krog frames her stories as always partial. There is the story told she explained and the story untold. These representations capture moments of telling in a constructed albeit special space at a designated time.

In this chapter I appear also as researcher and narrator as I relate some of my experiences in fieldwork and as I relate my narrative to their stories. I share some of the ways the students' stories have affected my life and my thoughts.

Starburst ~ My Story, Part VII

I am in seg. I'm trying to find something to say to the education specialist who walked me over and explained my visit to the c.o. here. I feel awkward and do not know how to make small talk. I never make small talk when I visit the prisons. I play the grateful outsider, naming my intrusiveness in what I am sure must be "a busy day for everyone" – wherever I am. I bend. I perform the gracious, unknowing grad student. I follow their lead always. I walk behind the school administrators, am sticky sweet with words to c.o.s, performing the role of young researcher out to do a job for my

supervisor, the full professor, back at “UNC” (Chapel Hill is implied) who has a contract with Educational Services in Raleigh “to evaluate the Youth Offenders Program.” That is my official line. Along with “Thank you so much for your help today. I am grateful for your time.” On the one occasion I was reprimanded for sharing my Starburst during interviews, I simply played dumb: “Oh. I did not know. I am so sorry.” “I have low blood sugar,” I lied. A c.o.s had found a half dozen in the shoe of one the students I had interviewed. I had not noticed the student took that many as we talked, but I did not care that he did.

Sharing Starburst seemed an easier way to start when I first began visiting prisons five years ago. Nervous and uncertain about the exchange I might have with six different students, excruciatingly aware of my gender, my body, my clothes and my smile, I thought Starburst might break the ice. It did. Or so I think for all of the interviews but one.

When I finished the interviews the educational director or the school principal as she was known on site busted me. “Did you know a c.o. caught so and so with seven Starburst in his shoe on the way back to the dorm?” “No.” Of course I had not. My face warmed with embarrassment and fear, I quickly explained that I have low blood sugar, and had brought them with me, just in case. I offered each student one as we interviewed. “I didn’t notice so and so took that many.” Lame. I was docile, silenced by her authority. A lecture followed and although brief, scared me in such a way that I felt that I could never bring Starburst to a prison with me again. What if they didn’t let me back?

What if they didn’t let me back? Because going back was important for me. I felt it was a duty of some sort, a commitment to do this work, which strangely took me into only about six prisons twice a year. During those visits I met with three or four or six or seven students, student-inmates. I never called them just inmates when I visited or communicated with prison staff. A conscious decision although I’m not sure any of them cared. It was my own little political act, like choosing to refer to the students as only students now, and not student-inmates.²¹

²¹ I want to acknowledge that “student” has its own connotation and stigma, particularly in prison. As Kevenson explained to me early, learning in prison is not popular.

In my most recent round of interviews I asked each student what pseudonym he or she would like. They chose: Al Chambers, Michael Jordan, Tyte Crewdy, and Shoran. One student, who thinks I am incredibly dim, refused to adopt a pseudonym and said that he wanted me to use his real name. I am still undecided about his desire for me to use his real name. I want to honor his request, but I want to protect his identity as well.²²

Grouse Tracks

This tension, this desire to both honor and protect the students I have met, is only a small grain along a shore that seems to be expanding constantly under a low tide that never comes in. The beach only grows wider, and I find myself scanning the receding waves hoping that the next one will come towards me instead of curling back out to sea. My research and the search for meaning in the students' stories expands in the same way. I need contour and boundaries to frame the seascape, the crescent shaped beach in front of me, and the unwieldy tensions beneath my feet. I need a way to capture the landscape of this research and a way to manage the stories that I hear in relation to the discourses that I know.

Along the southeastern coast of South Africa, the Indian Ocean carved a beach that is real. The beach invites long walks and reflection, and early one morning, I run it. At sunrise, before the light changes from fractured light translucent on the waves to soft putty haze that sits in the sky, I take off. I scramble over the steel, blue-gray of ocean boulders, and jog along the shore. I sink deeply into the sand, and I teeter on the sides of my feet until I make my way down to the washed pitch of hard sand where land slides to the water. The sand is more firm but continues to slip away from the soles of my feet. I run 100 yards. Straining for balance and enticing rhythm to come, I notice markings in the sand: bird tracks, beautifully sculpted at an unhurried pace. Deep crisp indentations of what I believe and tell myself must be a grouse. I have seen many since I have been here. A sand

²² During my interview with this student in January 2007, he chose the pseudonym Travreso.

grouse. My foot begins to slide away from my stride and the effort I am keeping even to run distracts me from the morning that is still unfolding. The tracks appear to be the only ones other than the ones I am making on the beach. Another 100 yards. The sand has become too soft now, perhaps because the sun has risen I can no longer see the markings of the waves which I am trying desperately to stay just beyond. I cannot discern the boundaries of where the water has been if I cannot see the markings, and so I only see where it is now—much like the students with whom I meet. I cannot see where they have been. I can only acknowledge the stories that tumble before me like waves. Pressing deep into the sand with my right foot I stride toward another line, albeit imaginary, that will lead me to the boulders on the far side of the cove, my halfway point. As I straighten out, and lean into my stride along what I had thought would be an outstanding stretch of beach for a quick run. I am now debating the amount of effort required to traipse across the sand, I notice the tracks again. Neatly delineated and amazingly right along this new path I am creating with my own feet.

700 yards. My breathing has changed, and I am no longer rocking on the outside of my feet, pitching across the sand. My frustration has subsided, and for the first time since I left the boulders I hear the ocean which has been no more than fifteen feet away—only five at times to my right. I notice the arc of the beach in front of me and the way the early light springs through the waves as they curl under themselves and somersault onto the sand. I watch for the moments when sunlight breaks through the cerulean crest of each wave. Not a morning person by nature I have spent many more hours watching this play of water and light in the hour before sunset rather than the hour after sunrise. This is now my second favorite time of day. To my surprise what I thought was a poor choice, a difficult morning run, is now buttressing my enjoyment of the ocean.

As my pace finally quickens, my body embraces my steps instead of working to reach for them, and I realize that I am running along the tracks of the grouse. I look ahead, over my right shoulder and then my left, and I realize that the tracks reach as far in front of me as they do behind. I feel in a strange way honored to be running along the tracks of a grouse, a much earlier riser than I, and muse about the way nature and people weave in and out of each others' lives. I deliberately cross

over some the tracks and come back to my own line of direction. Making my thought a physical reality energizes me. I feel blessed on this little jog this morning. I watch the boulders at the northeast end of the beach come closer as I approach and feel the damp ocean air on my face and taste its sweet stickiness on my lips. I look down at what I have now decided are the most beautiful tracks ever to have been found on any beach any where, and I am joyful.

And then I realize that I am an idiot. I realize that this stretch of readily navigable, good running sand is the sand that the grouse has been using since I scrambled over the boulders at the southwest corner of the cove, and that it took me a half-mile of heart-pounding, foot-slipping strides to move onto her path. I am not crossing the path of nature in some ephemeral moment. This is the path that the grouse takes every day. I am on her beach. The grouse knew what I could not feel right away even though I saw her tracks in the sand. Like Travreso, True, and Al, the grouse maps my run for me, if I can only remember to pay attention and follow. Trailing their paths keeps me from running frictionless in soft sand. Surrendering to their stories allows me to follow with keener feeling and observation.

With a sense of relief and an abandonment of the pride I felt minutes earlier, I fall into pace with new curiosity and a new-found honor for the beach grouse whose tracks I begin to follow. I travel along the path she has made and find myself both humbled and happy. Embracing the role of un-knower in the stories of the students I interviewed freed me to follow their tellings. I reach the boulders and leap up a small dune, touch the air as if it is an extended hand in tag, and turn, kicking off my right foot, to follow the tracks on my return home. The grouse tracks lead the way.

Seg

So I am in seg and the afternoon is quickly disappearing. We walked over about four o'clock, and I am usually always gone by four o'clock when I visit. I am waiting to interview Al, but he will need to eat his dinner first. They serve dinner at 3:30 in segregation. And so I am sitting in a conference room in seg. Across the wide wooden table is Henry, the education specialist, in a bright polo shirt. He is talking about his children. His son seems to be incredibly adept at playing sports.

The room is narrow, and I nod as I listen, smile and ask empty follow-up questions hoping that Henry will not ask me about myself or what I study. I am afraid that if I begin to talk I will trip over the mental distinctions I try to keep between the evaluation work I am completing and the stories I am gathering about what it's like to be in school as a child, and as a student in prison. The room is damp, and I try not to lean on the table, because I think my bare arms will stick to its surface. If we were both to lean back in our chairs we would touch the walls behind us, although I note that these are not the kind of chairs one could tip back, they are office chairs that swivel. The chairs near the door are plastic. They are green and painted in red through large stenciled letters is the word "INMATE". Two years ago I interviewed True here, and he sat in one of those chairs, hands cuffed behind his back. As we spoke, he leaned forward with his torso to emphasize his points, because his hands were motionless. He talked mostly about seg and how he missed taking classes in the school. His broad shoulders were stooped, and he sat like Papa Bear in Baby Bear's chair.

Eventually, I assure the educational specialist that I am fine to wait for Al by myself, that I have interviewed in seg before and that he can go. Reluctantly, he leaves. Almost immediately a co comes to get me. He tells me that the conference room is needed and that I will interview Al in another room. We walk down a dim hallway with two holding cells on the left. They are open on three sides and at the top. The cells are only half the height of the ceiling which is almost three stories. The bars are jet black. The cells look like animal cages. There is a wooden bench against the wall in each one. The cages are prison to me. They refuse to allow me to look away and only follow the students' tracks into the past. The walls were painted a light shade of yellow but look aged and jaundiced. I decide that the contrast between the black cages and the old paint is what disturbs me, but I know that it's not. What disturbs me is that people are put in those cages like animals.

I follow the c.o. around the corner and notice the control tower in front of me. It sits in the center of the segregation unit. I have never seen it before. From the conference room the bottom of the tower looks like a wall at the end of the hallway. It is in fact a tower almost as tall as the building. I see Al. He is waiting for us by the tower. He seems disappointed or confused. I think he is trying to

place me as I am sure, like most of my visits, that custody never tells the students why they are called to a particular area of the prison. They usually turn a corner or enter a room and see me. This is always awkward and a miserable way to begin a first interview. I have interviewed Al before though, and he seems to remember me as I greet him. He holds his hands so casually in front of him that I forget and do not notice that they are cuffed.

We follow the c.o. counter-clockwise around the base of the tower and as the unit opens up to me, I notice that Polk has created Bentham's panopticon. There it is. four atriums radiate from the tower; each block divided by heavy steel doors that lead to the circuitous corridor we are walking. If segregation were designed on a clock face, at noon and six, long hallways split the unit. The tower stands in the center with a moat of an enclosed hallway around its base. I realize that I have been in a conference room off the hallway at 6 o'clock. As we walk further into the unit, I can see both cell blocks to my right as there is a short foundational wall and then two-and-a-half story windows. A wall of glass rises above me and I see three stories of small individual cells on the other side. The cells all face the tower and huge, industrial lights cast circles of light across the unit.

I glance up at the tower and can see nothing. As I round the corner at 12 o'clock I can see myself in the large convex mirror hanging at one of four points around the tower, so that the c.o.'s can see who's coming and going. I look up again at the tower. It is like looking through black plastic at sunset. If the c.o.s walk across the control room, I can see the faintest outlines of their bodies backlit by the lights in the hallways. We reach the other main hallway and the co leads us into a small room that has the same green plastic chairs stacked in the far corner, a small table against one wall and a sink in the other corner. A black plastic desk chair is on one side of the table and the co takes a green chair off the stack and puts it on the other side of the table. He asks me if I want Al handcuffed behind, and legitimating some sort of relationship, I say, "No, I've interviewed him before." Al and the co speak for a moment and then the co turns to me and says, "Just come and get me when you're finished," and he leaves. I sit down, the windows of the room behind me, and focus on Al.

(August 2006)

Al Chambers

Al's glasses and beard frame his face, which hides a passion for his culture that his words do not. Al's father is Italian and his mother is Mexican. "My mom spoke fluent Spanish and believes that it's very important to keep your culture alive. We're descendants from the Aztecs," Al explained, but "it was hard growing up. Hispanics called me 'white boy' because my father was Italian. I know a lot about my ancient Aztec history that like my mom and my grandma where they're descendants from." That's not the case on his father's side of the family.

My mom, she make sure that we understand where we come from, what they've been through and what we stand for, just like being proud of ... what our families have been through you know to get where we are right now, and the mistakes where people categorized us in one category and how we had to break people from looking at us into that category. That's what makes us. That's what she wants to be proud of, where we came from. You know like, "I've been through this something you can't relate to, I want you to know so you can understand better where I'm coming from."

Family gatherings are important in Al's family, and aunts, uncles, and cousins travel across the country for holidays. Celebrations around the holidays brought family and culture together for Al.

Growing up, Al went to elementary school in California where he says, he "mostly paid attention" and was an "A, B straight student and on honor roll throughout elementary school." He shared that he liked going to school and making people laugh. "I was a clown. I joke around a lot. I pay attention, but I like to make the class laugh. It was fun for me to play the fool sometimes." Al's teachers engaged him and his sense of humor—a dynamic he found did not exist between teachers and students when he moved to North Carolina. "They're very different in California. They speak a little bit of Spanish. They're fun. They're more interactive. They joke with us, making it fun." He explained that in North Carolina teachers were "more (about) getting to the point. Some, more boring. Couple of them were smart. I used to make little jokes in history, but I had a teacher more straight to the point. It (was) different, more like they just want to tell you what you had to know." Al admitted, too, that classes bored him when he first moved, because the curriculum that teachers followed in seventh grade in North Carolina was the curriculum he had completed already in fifth grade in Los Angeles.

Transitioning in the classroom with teachers and in school with students was equally difficult. Al described one class in particular where he was the only Mexican, and when he got in trouble in class the teacher moved him up to the front of the room. “I remember every time she turned around she kept on looking at me, and I don’t know why ... She just looked at me like I don’t know like I was an alien or something ... I guess she wasn’t used to seeing a person that looks like me. Most of my class was white, a couple of black guys.” In California Al’s teachers were Chicanos, Salvadorians, Filipinos, Brazilian, and white, and the students were Chicano, Salvadorian, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Asian. He explained that there were only a handful of Hispanic boys and girls in school.

Al vacillated in his responses from feeling awkward to laughing. “Everybody looked at me. They just wanted me to tell my stories about where I grew up. It’s like everybody like, ‘Oh, you from California. Oh, he’s from LA, so everybody they wanted to talk to me to know what it was like. It just felt a little awkward. I never had people do that before.”

The students with whom Al went to middle school both created a spectacle from his upbringing and taunted him with racist remarks. Al recalled one white boy in particular who repeatedly provoked him by calling out “Yo Quiero Taco Bell” each time he saw him. Al told the boy to stop. “Man, don’t say that. I feel you comin’ at me in a racist way. I appreciate it if you didn’t do it.” But the boy would not leave him alone. “He just standing there thinking it was funny,” Al recounted. “He kept on doing it, so one day I just got mad, and I pushed him, and he didn’t do nothing.” So, Al went to sit down and eat at lunch. While he was eating, the boy smacked him on the back of his head. Al got mad and remembers wanting to hit him with his cafeteria tray, but his friends suggested he leave the tray and go outside to fight. “So we went outside, and I hit him hard with a closed fist. Thump. He turn around and tried to jump up, so I hit him like a little reflex thing.” Al remembered that friends broke up the fight and that his punch left an imprint of the boy’s glasses on his face. A student told someone about the fight though, and the boys went to the office. There they reached an agreement with each other, but just a few days later the same boy made another racist remark.

In high school Al started playing football and immediately found meaning in both continuing a family tradition in athletics and contributing to a team. He played running back and safety on JV, and the latter on varsity. Playing sports, he explained helped him connect to people, too. As an athlete he began meeting a new group of friends. “When I started playing sports I was moved to a whole different crowd of people I liked. I had something to do after school and (felt) like I was actually doing something instead of just sitting around the house.” A part of the “popular” crowd, on breaks between classes, Al remembered that students would gather in a big group. “On break that’s when you can tell who’s cool by what crowd you hung out with. We always gather around, like I hung with a big crowd of people, we like all the popular people.” Al spent his breaks hanging out with friends, talking to girls, and finishing missing homework.

Al’s mom bought a new house in a different district when he was in high school, but Al did not want to change schools. His nineteen-year-old sister stayed in their old house, which was just down the street from his school, and so his mother decided to let him stay there. He explained that his mom would stop by on surprise visits “to make sure that we keep up the house and wasn’t having stuff we weren’t supposed to.”

With strong friendships, popularity, and his sister’s house designated as “the hangout spot” Al found himself “invited to a lot of parties” and modeling fashion trends. Citing his mom’s “eye for fashion” he shared that she introduced him to different styles. From California he had brought his khaki pants and button down shirt look, and his toned down “zoot suits;” switching to baggy clothes, Hiphop style and spiked or highlighted hair, and “stood out from the whole crowd.” He dressed, he says, like he did in California, “kinda preppy type stuff” and saw other students start to copy him. “The way I dressed was different, so like I’ll be doing one thing, and I see people start doing the same thing, so it kinda made me feel special, like I was starting a trend or something.” Al believed his style caught positive attention of teachers, too. “Most of the teachers, they like me, cause I don’t know, I guess they never see anybody like me before cause I kinda stood out from the whole crowd.”

Standing out through his fashion trends garnered Al teacher attention although in a much different way than in middle school where he felt as if the teacher looked at him “like an alien or something.”

In contrast to middle school Al felt also that the teachers in high school treated students more like adults. They pointed out mistakes, offered advice and encouraged thoughtful decision-making. “My high school teachers were more open-minded ... they tried to help me in different ways.” Some of Al’s experiences in high school mirrored past experiences in middle school. Still a student who enjoyed clowning around in class, Al talked a lot and made jokes in class. He rarely fought with others and consequently, school discipline was limited to detentions for hanging out with the popular crowd on breaks and arriving late to class. “I be clowning around with people and got late detentions. I would be talking in class.”

Although the experiences Al shared about clowning around seem to permeate his general school experiences, his use of marijuana as a student was limited and time specific. As a football player at a school that valorized the game, he set rules for himself about when and how to party during the year. Adamantly, he explains that he never smoked marijuana during football season, which is at least four months of the school year. “I started smoking pot ... I never did it while I was playing football. I knew better than that. It’s like during football season, everybody wants to, they trying to do good in school, and they don’t want to do drugs.”

After watching *Half Baked* one day at a friend’s house, Al and his friends started to get high before school. Being high in class made paying attention difficult, and “kinda made (him) slack off a little.” Al explained that he would try to listen in class but then find himself daydreaming about something else. “I started sitting like way back in the class, talking to different girls having different conversations instead of paying attention in class like I used to.”

With a shy smile, Al told me that he didn’t realize that he was smart until he was in prison. He surprised himself as valedictorian of his GED class, moreover, as the graduation speaker. “I was really proud of myself. I didn’t even know what I could accomplish. I realized how smart I actually was.” When the teachers told him he was valedictorian and that he would give a speech at graduation,

Al didn't believe them. "I thought it was a joke." Once they convinced him that he was valedictorian, Al wrote his mother and spent a month writing his speech. "Two days before I had the turn in date where they had to check it, I was still working hard on it. I stay up at night pacing in my room, thinking about it. 'I'm going to word it perfectly.'" Some of Al's motivation to draft a perfect speech stemmed from his desire to represent other Hispanic men. He wanted the opportunity to challenge the stereotypes about Hispanic men and complicate their identities.

There's only so many Hispanic guys here. I wanted to make like a statement letting people know that you know, just cause we Hispanic and some of us don't speak English doesn't mean that we grow up and are not smart, that we're stupid. It's that, "Don't look at us that way," kinda thing. So, I was trying to show em, you know we're not here to just to fill in the profile that we're just trouble makers.

Al encouraged his fellow graduates to regard their accomplishment as a "stepping stone" particularly, graduates who are fathers. "This shows that we can accomplish things even though we're in here," he told them. "Gotta let people know that, some of 'em have kids, 'like you gotta do this for your kids, not for yourself anymore. It's for them. You don't want them to go through what we going through."

He shared that the teachers in prison offer individual attention and "try to work with you a lot. They try to explain it to you before you move on." Taking on a role of tutor inside the classroom and outside in the dorms or dayroom, Al helped others figure out homework, especially algebra.

Some of the students responded to Al, and others did not. Al described some of the students as "hardheaded," "feeling like they have something to prove. They wouldn't try to listen to (the teacher). Ignorance. They won't take the opportunity to listen." For some of them, bringing "their time down" is the only reason they're in school." Impersonating them he said, "I'm a hard gangster. Oh, nobody's going to do this to me. I'm too gangster to be paying attention in school. I'm so hard to be reading this poem." Al explained this response to school to me. He believed that appearing weak to one's friends prevents some men from engaging with what was taught. They don't want to read, because they don't want to be weak. "Just cause they your friends, they feel like if they show that they want to learn now, make 'em feel weak in your eyes ... Just so they don't seem weak, they like,

‘Ah man I don’t know how to read it. I don’t want to read it. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to do that.’”

Asking a fellow student to settle down and listen to the teacher almost instigated a fight one day. The student kept getting up from his chair and ignored the teacher when she asked him to sit down. Students around him could not concentrate, so Al told him he better sit down or he would address things with him back in the pod. He did not sit down and in fact, “he got up. He had a pencil in his hand, so I had a pencil in mine. I thought he was going to try and do something.” He said something to Al at which point the teacher left to get the school officer. Together, Al and the other student convinced the officer that they were only kidding with one another. Later that afternoon, Al talked to him in the pod. He said,

“Man, listen if you’re going to be in school just clowning around I’m going to get moved to another class. I don’t just want to be here wasting my time. I’m trying to do something with my time.” We had a long talk and he understood where I was coming from, so he did calm down a lot. Me and him got along after that.

Al is taking sociology now and likes deconstructing stereotypes and confronting the ones he carries himself. “It opened my eyes to a lot of different races. How just because they’re different colors and come from different backgrounds, the experiences we go through, they’re all similar.” He works to understand his own identity and his current status as someone who is incarcerated. He appreciates his professor for the ideas that he introduced, but also for confronting racism in class. When students teased a Mexican in class about his accent, the professor asked them how many languages they spoke.

In addition to sociology, Al is interested in psychology, advanced math classes, and has found that he likes challenging himself. He plans to go to college to earn a bachelor’s degree. He wants to help children, too. He would like to start an education program about gangs to share with elementary school age children. Familiar with programs that work with kids who are in gangs already, he believes that educating children about gangs before they join them is essential. He explained that kids as young as third graders look at guys in high school and think “Oh man, I want to do that. I want to

be like them.” For Al, his lived experience gives him the street credit he thinks he will need both to connect and to convince children not to get involved with gangs.

People can’t tell me, “Oh, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” I can tell them, “I’ve been in prison. I grew up in East LA—I’m sure ya’ll heard about it—the neighborhood I grew up in, pshhh, it was a rough neighborhood. But if I can manage to break through that, pretty sure all ya’ll can accomplish a lot more than I can.”

At the end of one of his interviews, Al mentioned almost in passing that his father has been “locked up for awhile.” Thinking about his role as big brother to his younger sister and brother, he shared his hope that his incarceration will not affect them negatively. “I didn’t realize how much difference the male figure makes in a kid’s life, but it makes a lot of difference.”

Kevenson

Kevenson laughed when I asked him what school was like growing up. Politely he told me that in fourth or fifth grade “they sent me to management school, people who misbehave. They put me in an environment where I was exposed to gangs.” Kevenson explained that his neighborhood did not have any gangs, and that going to management school was the first time he had been exposed to gangs. “I think they were trying to keep me, but everyone in there was bad.” Only 11 in a class with 13 and 14-year-olds, Kevenson remembered watching guys “send codes, throw gang signs, stack” and girls sitting on the laps of boys in class. He described the teacher as “laid back, chill; He present his work, whether anybody receives it he didn’t really show too much interest in that part you know.” Kevenson thought that the curriculum was inappropriate for the grade level, explaining to me that it was “really so simple.” School was about three hours a day, ending at 12 or 1 o’clock.

Sharing experiences from elementary school, Kevenson interpreted school as a game. Self-identified as a class clown, he said he made a lot of jokes in school. He described an incident at 14 when police chased him around school as “fun and exciting.” “It was like a game of cat and mouse, man, you know, you have to get used to it and it’ll become fun, but I don’t recommend it now.” I

shared with Kevenson that I would have been scared if police chased me around school. He made an analogy between playing in the neighborhood and playing in school.

You know as a child you played games like hide and seek and stick. A game we played was stick. You line a bunch of rocks up around a stick. Everybody draws, pulls rocks from the stick. Whoever makes the stick drop, they got to chase everybody in the neighborhood. Everybody. It's a game and you carry it over into school and that makes it more fun cause you know when you're young who don't want to have fun? Who don't want to play games you know? But when you're not taught that you're not supposed to, I mean when you don't listen to the fact that (you're not) really supposed to do that in school, school is not a playground.

Clowning in the classroom was something Kevenson thought also was connected to the neighborhood. He argued that "being a clown" is something that's developed from spending time in school and in the streets. "Being a class clown, it's a lifestyle that you carry out into the street. You really get it from the street almost, but it gets developed more in a class environment when you're of course in there with different types of people and different backgrounds." He described the attention one receives from joking around as positive. "It's like your shining time, like American Idol."

Kevenson started his narrative about school experiences with management school. He told me that he went to two management schools in North Carolina and then had to move to South Carolina to continue going to school, because he "got kicked out of North Carolina schools. I would push the teachers and make them step out of their character. Ultimately," he shared, "I quit when I was 15." Quietly Kevenson told me that his father "wasn't there."

He talked reflectively about his time in the streets as a young adolescent and the men he knew who were twice his age spending their time on the same corners.

I asked him about school before he went to management school and he smiled, and said school was fun, but that teachers did not encourage him to learn.

Before I went to management school, school was like I mean it was just it was fun. I really I still I wasn't encouraged to try to learn. I did alright in school, you know. It wasn't that I couldn't learn, or that I had some learning disability, it was the fact that I don't know, it wasn't attractive to me. It was, I was always like hyper. I was hyper so just sitting down in the seat was hard for me. You know the way they taught like, my teachers back then didn't teach like our psychology teacher taught us, you know. You gotta really catch my attention.

In an almost immediate turn away from the structure of schooling, he internalized school success as the responsibility of the student. He blamed himself for not being able to sit still in his seat. In his last statement, however, he complicated his assessment by providing contrast to his experiences growing up to the college psychology course he took in prison.

Kevenson took a psychology course and his professor, he explained, was “animated, real energetic about his teachings and you could tell that he was dedicated, and that kinda encouraged me, cause I was interested in what he was saying. He made what he said more vivid.” He credited his teacher’s enthusiasm for making the class an interesting space and motivating him to want to learn. “You can get some teachers who just sit there, and they just like there. They don’t even teach like traditionally, but he was like a radical for what he what he teaches. That kinda inspired me to pay attention, and that’s why I liked it more.”

Although Kevenson enjoys his classes and is much more serious about school now, he said that prison is full of class clowns. Sometimes, he explained, he sits back and watches drama unfold. “I wish you could see it over here—how it’s just like class,” he laughed and said, “it’s still like class even when we locked up. Somebody come in the pod and try to give instructions just like the teacher used to do, and it’s a total unified rebellion against them, man, and they get cussed out for no reason. They ain’t even doing nothing.” Kevenson compared the dynamics he witnessed in school between teachers and students to the relationships he observes between correctional officers and inmates in prison. Although he saw class clowns bridging the institutionalized spaces of schools and prisons, in the scenario he provided here, he compared the professional authority of a teacher to the professional authority of a correctional officer. Instructing the subjugated from a position of authority is what the teacher and c.o. have in common. Although the instructions may be innocuous, as Kevenson suggested, inmates challenge the symbolic representation and the literal embodiment of authority with a response of profanity directed at the c.o.

Kevenson explained that any move to control harnesses the potential for conflict, even when another inmate makes a request. “You get that in class,” he explained. “‘Be quiet’ starts some drama.” He has observed that in prison “to learn becomes unpopular,” so he separated himself from most of the nonsense that takes place and hangs out “with only a few brothers.” “I shelter myself from a lot of people. I don’t want that mind that others have.” Kevenson is committed to his learning and to his music, and self-identified as a “musician minister.” He described his rap as “positive rap, inspirational” and believes that if “you (can) change the mind you can change the person.”

Michael Jordan

Michael walked into the small office with a novel curled in his left hand. While he talked with his hands, I noticed that the book was *Pride and Prejudice*, but not until the end of the interview did he place the book on the desk between us and show it to me. I noticed that his broad shoulders dwarfed the desk between us, as we talked about what school was like for him first as a boy and the degree he earned while incarcerated.

Michael took me back to first grade and explained that when he started school he “actually made bad grades, Ds some Cs.” Sometime during first grade he told me he fell over a fence and broke his arm. In the classroom with his arm in a cast, he needed help, and the teacher gave it to him. With bright eyes he told me, “I started getting so much attention from the teacher. When I made the bad grades they didn’t pay me much attention—‘He don’t care; he’s dumb.’ (The teacher) would have to spend more time with me. (I) couldn’t write with my arm.”

For the first time Michael’s teacher began spending time with him as he worked. She encouraged him and verbalized positive reinforcement. “That’s good, Michael, very good, very good.” Michael explained that her initiation of that relationship and her support as he learned motivated him to do well. “I kept on wanting to impress the teacher ... From that point on someone turned a switch on.” Michael shared with some pride that the school placed him in the talented and gifted program.

Growing up Michael played baseball, and he played it well. His best friends played sports, too. He described his friends in elementary school and middle school as “sports guys, good guys, (who) made good grades.” In high school though, things changed. Michael spent time with new friends. “I veered off to guys (who) didn’t get good grades, skipped. My grades begin to drop down ... I didn’t apply myself once I got to ninth. I figured out I could pass—I always made As and Bs on tests. I just pay attention to the review, be the clown.” In a meeting with his parents in eleventh grade, one of his teachers said to his mother, “I think he’s just bored ... the classes aren’t challenging him.” Although often in classes with academically gifted students, Michael admitted that he didn’t study, that in fact he didn’t do anything the other students did.

Still playing baseball in high school, Michael started to see his teammates surpass his own performance on the field. A self-identified “natural” athlete, he explained that as other players caught up to him, he became “one of the average guys.” “I get by on what I had, get by on the sports field, but everybody caught up.” Both coaches and teachers encouraged him to “stop hanging around doing nothing,” but he would not listen. “I was not concerned about it. I decided not to heed the advice.” Michael’s father, who was an exceptional wrestler in high school, projected his own expectations onto his son and implored Michael to focus. “My dad lived through me in sports,” Michael shared. His father would tell him to “buckle down, work, work, work—you’ll make it.” Although Michael evinced pride and respect for his father and began to see his friends receive scholarships to colleges, he explained, “I wouldn’t listen.”

Michael turned *Pride and Prejudice* over in his hands and shared that he has been incarcerated for 13 years. Placing the book on the desk, he argued: “98 percent of the guys couldn’t (read this). *Wuthering Heights* is difficult. *Grapes of Wrath*, (the) prose, they wouldn’t understand. When I read *The Catcher and the Rye*, Holden, it’s hilarious. I read 1984 ... *Animal Farm*. I read four or five books at a time.” Michael read with his friend Sam. “Classics,” he explained, “were advised. Shakespeare. Work, like this,” pointing to *Pride and Prejudice* on the desk, “*Canterbury Tales*.” Michael’s foray into classic British and U.S. literature is only a part of his self-initiated education in

prison. Making almost straight As, Michael graduated valedictorian of his GED class, and soon after earned an associate's degree. I asked Michael specifically about Sam and this canonical reading they do together, since friendship was not something I heard many students discuss. He explained casually that, "One day I was talking to him, 'What is it with you and these corny books?'" and that Sam talked to him about Luther, an avid reader and scrabble player who graduated from Michigan and is a bit of a literary critic.

Once Michael met Luther, he realized they shared a similar faith as well as a similar commitment to studying the classics. With new seriousness, Michael disclosed that the faith and spirituality he shared with Luther was a significant part of the friendship they shared. "He and I carry ourselves in the way we believe." Michael shared that although his education in prison has been a significant accomplishment for him, that finding salvation in God in prison is the most important thing in his life. "I believe in God, that's probably been the biggest, it has been the biggest part of my life." He attributed his relationship to God with changing him and the things he desired. "It was in me one time to steal. I would take it ... I believe (it's) not education (but) more from God. I believe God has taken it out of me." Michael argued that if you were "compelled to have things," education could not "make you stop wanting" if there was "greed, avarice in your heart ... (Education's) not going to make you stop wanting, that's not taking it out of your heart." Critical of the claims about rehabilitation, Michael believed that the "laws of society are not set up to change you" but are there to demand compliance. For him, compliance does not remove covetous thoughts and behavior, and therefore, "rehabilitation is faulty." Legitimizing his argument with his lived experience, he offered as example, "I'm in situations where I could take, worked in the canteen. Now, I don't do people like that ... I gave my life to Church." In the last two years the chaplain at the prison asked Michael to preach no less than ten times. Michael described these requests as an honor, because he knew that the chaplain criticizes those who preach from a need for their egos: "People are loathe to do that out of pride." Michael distinguished himself from those who preach for themselves versus the Word. His claim to difference between himself and others is repeated in his discourse about education in prison.

Michael identified himself as a student interested in “self-rehabilitation” and others as “uneducated” and taking classes so that “something looks good on their record.”

As a student taking correspondence courses in prison, he delineated carefully the differences he saw in those who participated in education programs in prison and those who take correspondence courses. He argued that only a “small percentage of people care” and that “prison education comes down to the self.” He explained that although education programs are offered, vocational and college classes are not obligatory, and that in many classes, students were present in order to receive honor grade or because a class “looks good on their record.” “They sign up for a class they’re really not interested in anyway.” The correspondence courses were different to Michael, and he described the difference as “self-motivation” versus “needing to take (a class) in order to get promoted.” He believed that a higher percentage of those students who take correspondence courses are “interested in educating themselves further” because those courses “show a person’s initiative.” He explained, “I’m willing to do the work on my own.”

Michael didn’t know a lot of other guys taking correspondence courses in prison, and he separated himself intellectually from those around him. In reference to his reading with Pete and Luther he elevated his erudition and created exclusivity by foreclosing alternative interpretations of the texts. His reference to *Seinfeld* works in the same way. “Very few people understand the humor of *Seinfeld*, they say, ‘this show isn’t funny.’”

Thinking about school growing up, Michael described all the teachers he had in high school as “pretty good,” but remembering composition work in particular he acknowledged differences between himself and other students. Other students made lots of errors whereas Michael made a hundred on the first test. The teacher told the class that because “Michael made a hundred, there’s no curve.” Michael recalled other students “making 50s” on the test. He suggested that “maybe they weren’t taught growing up.” Theorizing about the school experiences students have had after him, whom he sees in prison now, he gestured to teacher student relationships, class size, and testing as frames of interpretation.

When I came through in the 80s I don't think the teachers were as uncaring as they are now, because class sizes are bigger, overcrowded. How much cheating goes on. Teachers are a lot of times are boosting scores. I see the fruits of that with the guys in here. A lot of times I feel out of place. Man these people are uneducated, severely uneducated.

Michael tried to understand the differences he has encountered in prison education and the emotional distance and intellectual distance he feels from many of the other student inmates. He names the need for caring, attentive relationships between teachers and students in school and critiques grade inflation. His comments on the structure of schooling, the teacher-student dynamic, class size, testing and grading are coupled with his aside about cheating and the way he felt most of the students in his GED class brought "the curriculum down." His language of elitism that accompanied his disclosure about the books he read, *Seinfeld*, and the lack of education he observed in prison changes when he refers to other students. Although he believed that they were "severely uneducated," he articulated sadness as opposed to disdain in response to their lack of effort: "The sad part is, they're not going to apply themselves."

Michael plans to become a UNC Tarheel someday. Earnestly, he told me, "I definitely want to further my education." Partial to theology and considering Divinity School, he is interested also, business administration. He and Pete want to get their bachelors' degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Sam, he's the one who really pushed me to think about Carolina. We live for Carolina. He's really pushing me on that." Picturing graduation, Michael shared his desire to make his mom and dad proud of him. "If my mama, if she's still living, she'll see me walk across the stage at UNC." With a smile he imagined his father, who is a big UNC fan, saying, "Man, you going to Chapel Hill." When he is released Michael said that he will have a place to live and family support to go to school. His father will help him financially with tuition. These days Michael spends his time reading.

Tyte Crewdy

Tyte Crewdy sat down in a school desk that faced mine and waited for me to speak first. We talked in an empty classroom on the minimum custody side of a camp. Crewdy told me about school and growing up in a large city in the Midwest. Now 20-years-old, Crewdy explained “when I was little they would say I was bad in school ... I wouldn’t do none of the major projects. The tests with the bubbles I always scored high on them ... it was easy. It was fun, cause all my teachers they tell me that I’m real smart.” With an easy smile he told me he went to at least seven different elementary schools. “I went to like five, six different schools. It was like first I went to a Catholic school, then I went to a magnet school, the neighborhood Catholic school, back to a magnet.” Crewdy went to the public school in his neighborhood, too. “The one in the neighborhood was bad. I don’t know if it’s still open.” He started school at a Catholic school, St. Christopher’s, where all of his family went to school, and all the teachers knew him. Between kindergarten and third grade he changed schools four times, leaving St. Christopher’s for a magnet school because it was less expensive and his mom thought it was a better school. Staying less than a year at the magnet school, Crewdy returned to St. Christopher’s when his “grandmother helped out with money.” He finished second grade there and spent his afternoons at his grandmother’s house with friends as she “lived right across the street from school (and) went to that same church, too.” Crewdy finished third grade at a different magnet school, but changed schools again and went to another Catholic school, St. Mary’s, for fourth grade. At St. Mary’s Crewdy played football and basketball and went to school with his God-brother. Both Catholic schools Crewdy described as terribly strict about uniforms. After fourth grade, he went to Davis, the public school in the neighborhood, and stayed. Davis did not have football or basketball, and Crewdy described the school, the teachers, and the kids as “bad.”

That was a bad school. They (were) on probation, a lot of bad kids in there. People you know from the neighborhood, fighting out there, fighting right after school. As soon as school let out, (there was) a fight, almost every day. It was crazy. It’s like kids ain’t really be no kids. When I was eight, nine, ten, I was already gangbangin’, what we call fun; everybody (was) doing it. You gotta live with (it). That’s life. You’re surrounded. It was like all your friends were in the gang, if you with them, you in the gang, too. 50th to 55th Ashland to Halston that

was my whole neighborhood, and everybody was in the same gang. If your family can't afford to move to the suburbs you're going to be where the gang is.

Although fights occurred daily in school and Crewdy admitted to his own "bad" behavior, like throwing eggs, he doesn't remember any discipline at Davis, and the afternoons of violence and gangbanging simply became a part of his life.

Imagining the dangers Crewdy faced and the risks he took at such a young age, I asked him how he learned about the boundaries of his neighborhood. He explained that older cousins taught him signs and that all the men in the neighborhood were in the gang—brothers, uncles, fathers in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. He did share that one day in first grade when he was seven or eight, he and his older cousin rode their bikes to the store on their way to his stepfather's house. Crewdy's stepfather lived just on the other side of the boulevard. He described his first encounter with gang territory at the store when boys in the store jumped him, cut him and stole his bike.

When he and his cousin got there the store manager said, "You can't bring your bikes in the store, and Crewdy explained that the boys in the store offered to take the bikes outside. "Some young dudes about our age ... greeted us with the nickname for their gang, and they wanted us to say which one we was." Crewdy responded, "Naw, I take my own bike outside," but his cousin let the boys take his bike and then took off for Crewdy's stepfather's house. Crewdy stayed behind and tried to get his cousin's bike back. "They jumped on me. They tried to cut me and stuff." Crewdy revealed that he did not feel the boys cut him when they were fighting, and that not until after the fight when he started walking to his stepfather's house did he notice that his throat was bleeding. In the meantime, his cousin had found his stepfather and Crewdy reported that his "dad and his friend, they (were) coming up the street with the bikes and stuff." His stepfather had found the boys and the bikes and had taken them back. Crewdy named the fight across the boulevard as the moment he understood what the boundaries in his neighborhood meant. "That was the first time I realized like what the boulevard was about."

With the exception of basketball, Crewdy did not share many positive experiences about school. One teacher, however, Ms. Jones became a favorite. An authoritarian and unafraid to hit her students with her ruler, Ms. Jones was Crewdy's third grade teacher at the second magnet school he attended. She motivated Crewdy and her other students with fear and high expectations. Crewdy self-identified as a "bad" kid in elementary school, and offered me the following example of his behavior. "I was bad in elementary school. (Ms. Jones), she used to whoop us. She had a ruler. (You) doing something wrong in class, like let's say I'm throwing paper, or something, talking" she would use her ruler. Although Ms. Jones hit her students with her ruler, for Crewdy she was a favorite, because he "learned a lot in that class." she had a "good class." He explained that, "She ain't treat me bad, but if I did something wrong, she had that ruler, and she'd whoop me. She always like, 'You're good, if you just act good.'" When I asked what else made Ms. Jones one of his favorite teachers Crewdy compared Ms. Jones to his mother. "She was like my mama teaching me or something. She had this thing where you go up there, and you say all your times tables, and then you get a star on a chart." Crewdy explained that a child received a star for each multiplication table he completed, and that "once you finish 'Star 12' you get like a little prize." He shared that sometimes Ms. Jones would "whoop" a child if he did not know his multiplication tables but that mostly she whooped the children or made them "stand in the corner" if they were "actin' up." Compared to St. Christopher's, Crewdy said he liked the smaller classes and the way he switched classes at the magnet school.

Crewdy analogized the no-nonsense, authoritarian style of Ms. Jones combined with her reward system of little prizes to his mother, and remembered positively this structure and pedagogy from his school experiences. He neutralized Ms. Jones' violence with her ruler by citing the limited use of it—mostly when the kids were "actin' up." He assigned to the child the responsibility of being hit by the ruler for not knowing multiplication tables or for misbehaving. He did not, and perhaps could not, critique the structure of punishment and rewards in the classroom, or the ways in which Ms. Jones and the students embodied that structured space, because the dynamics reminded him of his mother. Indeed, in our last interview Crewdy told me that Ms. Jones and his mother were friends.

Outside school in his uncle's basement barbershop is where Crewdy enjoyed learning most. There, starting in first grade his uncle and older cousin spent time joking around with him, spinning him in the chairs, and teaching him math, which remains his favorite subject. "They teach me in a fun way where like I wanted to learn, make me want to learn more about math. To this day math is still my favorite subject, too." By connecting the use of math to the everyday use of money and business, Crewdy's uncle and cousin made the subject useful and interesting. "The way they were teaching me how to do it, I could use it for something." Learning math in the barbershop gave him academic status at school, too. When he told me he would go to school and brag, I expected him to tell that his friends were his audience. To my surprise, he told me that his teacher was. "I could go to school and brag about it. 'I already know this' to the teacher."

In ninth grade Crewdy's family moved to North Carolina, and in high school Crewdy found that he did not have to study to pass his classes. He went to class, often high, paid attention early in the lesson and then fell asleep. "I go to class. I look, she'll do the first problem when she's teaching, after that I fall asleep, wake up, do the homework." In English and history, he rushed to read the assignment, and "try to remember the most important stuff, see something that (meant) something, bold letters, definitions, stuff like that" and then fell asleep. Crewdy remembered high school as fun and enjoyed the freedom of wearing clothes he chose and not uniforms. "It was fun in high school, the gangs, girls, the classes, didn't have to wear uniforms. The teachers some of 'em were alright. I be blitzed. I do homework in class. I passed like easy. They know if I was really trying I make As."

In his free time, he started "rappin' and stuff." His mother had bought a karaoke machine, and he and a couple of his "homeboys battled groups in the neighborhood." Even though he and his friends were into "bad stuff" he told me he chose, like Tupac, to write about what was happening in his life instead of "fake stuff."

In a county jail, Crewdy earned his GED while awaiting trial. He shared that he was surprised during classes that men much older than he were not smarter than he was and in some cases not as smart as he was, when he told his story of schooling. With pride he told me he didn't fail any tests

and that the local paper put him on the front page as valedictorian. Requesting the GED class while incarcerated, Crewdy hoped he could show the court that he was “trying to do better.” His teacher encouraged him through all the tests, and Crewdy said, “helped keep (his) spirits up.” He called Crewdy “young scholar” and would brag on him to others. Crewdy believes that getting his GED may have helped reduce his sentence. “I think it helped me out. I probably would’ve gotten more time.”

Taking pre-calculus through correspondence courses and a sociology class now, Crewdy shared that only some of the students care about class. In minimum security, he was in class with students whose release date is typically between six and twelve months. “They’re in prison, they don’t care about no education, especially when they’re about to go home.” Crewdy saw his sociology class differently though.

It’s interesting to me to learn about the world, why things are the way they are, see things differently, like why people work where they work. Society molds your life for you. Some people (without) a background in sociology, they think that you was just doing what you want to do.

Nonchalantly, he explained that taking classes like sociology might help him look at the world in a different way, so, he said, “I might be able to change my life.” Crewdy was quick to explain though, that education does not prepare people for life. Life is “crazy ... you never know what is going to happen.” Education exists “so people can learn to do other things than what they do.”

As for pre-calculus, Crewdy tried his best to find a quiet place to unravel problems on his own, but he needed help. The dorms were often loud and when he had a question, none of the inmates knew the answer. “I think I’m the only one taking it. I can get the right answer, but I don’t understand it. When it comes to another formula question, I might get the wrong answer. If they could have a video or something like that, better seeing someone doing it.”

Although he was struggling with pre-calculus, Crewdy believed education in prison is “a good thing” and contrasted the time he spent in class with the time a lot of inmates spent just lifting weights and eating. When he was not in class, Crewdy worked on the road crew, which was something he enjoyed because the work allowed him to be “out there in the world.”

Travreso

Energized from a volleyball game he had just played in the yard, Travreso was animated and full of spirit when we met. He spoke with quickness and affect, and after we talked for a few minutes about the game, Travreso explained that only the Mexicans played. He enlightened me about prison athletics, explaining that inmates self-segregated by race. He shared that Blacks, Mexicans, and whites did not even mix when playing volleyball. Mexicans made up the teams on both sides of the net. He talked easily about race, but when I asked him about school growing up, his voice dropped, and suddenly he became serious. He described going to school in Mexico as a fearful experience. He lived and went to school in Mexico until his family moved to California when he was in middle school.

I don't know if they're still doing that, but I remember back in '98, '97, I still remember that they hit you, man, for no reason. Only because you didn't bring your homework. They want to hit you. Or if you talk in class, they want to hit you or pull you by the ears, like you's some donkey or something. They want to pull you by the hair, by the ears, smack you.

Incredulous, he asked, "How do you expect somebody to learn like that? You're going to be scared of the teacher." Looking for contrasting experiences, I ask if Travreso remembered any positive experiences in school in Mexico. He told me unemotionally that "missing school" was a positive experience. He recounted the fun he and a few of his friends would have on the days they jumped the fence at school to go fishing. "We used to skip school and jump the fence, go fishing, that's how we used to kill time, but we got caught like two or three times, man, and our parents whoop us for real." Admitting that he and his friends deserved some punishment for skipping school, he added quickly that his parents did not know what was happening in school. "Everybody was scared ... They didn't understand what we was going through in school. My mom, she said she didn't know. My dad, man, I don't know what happened to him." Travreso cited irrationality as a way to justify his father's failure to intervene in the abuse.

If I got a child and I see somebody hitting my son, ain't no way in hell I'm going to stay like this with my arms crossed, you know? I be like, man, "Who do you think you is? Hit me." You know what I'm saying? "Don't try and hit my son. You try to hit my son?" My dad was

... crazy: "Yeah, if he does something wrong, hit him." Psht. If you love your son, you don't do nothing like that. I'd rather be beat by my parents than somebody I don't even know.

Travreso struggled to make sense of the abuse in school and his father's unresponsiveness. He interpreted his father's complicity with the teacher's abuse as betrayal and abandonment. He reframed the notion of love and commitment to a child as something that offers support and safety, and he vowed to never himself treat his own son in the way his father treated him.

When Travreso moved to California his brothers taught him English rather than his teachers. He said learning from them was easier than learning in a classroom, because he received their immediate attention. "In the classroom, you know, the teacher is always going to be like 'Oh, hold on, she need help first.' But then when you be with your homies, 'Hey, what does this mean?' or 'What should I say?' I'm saying he's going to give all the attention to you." He remembered the inaugural day in the house when only English was spoken for a whole week. He survived, and his four brothers taught him the basics. "My brothers, they half white, half Mexican, they was teaching me everything I needed to know ... I told them I don't want to change my accent. Just tell me what I need to know. The basics and I'll take it from there." Travreso described learning from other family members and Mexicans around him. He learned English spending time with them. "I start hanging around with my other cousins in the streets. They didn't speak nothing but English. And there was Mexicans, too, but everybody was speaking English. Chicanos. And that's how you get used to it."

Travreso talked about race when he told me about the volleyball game and as he remembered living in California, he started to compare the segregation he saw as a boy in California to the segregation he witnessed in prison.

California's like being in prison but you are free. Blacks with Blacks, Mexicans with Mexicans, white with white just like that in school, in the park, anywhere you go. You're not going to see no Mexican with a Black person. You might see every once in awhile but not, I guarantee you, it will be once in a black moon.

I asked, "Once in a black moon?" and Travreso said, "Once in a black moon. Yeah, we get blue moons almost every night don't we?"

Thinking about California and racial segregation, I wonder about Travreso's move to the South. I asked him if he thought racial segregation occurs in North Carolina in the same way. Travreso looked at me as if I was incapable of understanding the specificity of his analogy. Impatiently, he explained: "No, I think it's the same way in prison." North Carolina, he informed me is not the same as California or prison. North Carolina is full of "ugly rednecks" which for Travreso means, racist people who live in the country. He offered the following story as an example of racism in North Carolina. "I remember when I was in 10th grade, Jackson High, man, a white girl won't let a Black person sit with her. 'Naw, somebody sitting here already.' Ain't nobody sitting there yet. Psht. Crazy. I used to sit all the way in the back with my brothers." Travreso was disgusted with the racism he saw from the white girl who lied to the Black student, when she told him the seat next to her was taken.

Thinking about his teachers in North Carolina, Travreso told me he remembered liking his eighth grade math teacher a lot but that he thought he had failed his class. At the end of the term Travreso approached him and offered to pay him to pass him. Travreso said the teacher looked at him and smiled. He said, "You passed. (You're) going to high school."

Travreso started high school at the local public school where he said the teachers were "average." "Like any other teacher, they just go in there and do their job. They weren't really down trying to talk to you. They will help you if you ask for it, if you're serious, but if they see you as a trouble-maker 'forget you,' you know what I'm saying? 'It ain't even worth it.' Although he finished ninth grade, the school expelled Travreso before he completed tenth. The day the school expelled him, he remembered telling one teacher, Ms. Daisy, who had been nice to him, that he was going to change. "I promised one of my teachers, she was my ELPS teacher in grammar, and I promised her I was going to change when they kicked me out ... She was a very nice American lady. She liked me. She cried when they expelled me."

Travreso described the school he went to next, Jackson High, as "the crazy school" a place where he kept to himself and spent time only with his "girl, and his homie, Carlos." At Jackson

though, for the first time, he met teachers who treated him like an adult. Coach McGiveny who was his history teacher took time to talk with him and not down to him. An insider to the school game, the coach spoke candidly and directly to Travreso about skipping class.

He knew that I was skipping class. He just pulled me to the side like, “Today is not the day, you go to your class.” I respect him. But sometimes, I be like, “Hey, I have problems with my girl.” He would come and talk to me, “Man, you need to chill out. Been there. Done that. I’m a grown man; I’m trying to help you out.”

The honesty of his relationship with Coach McGiveny meant a lot to Travreso. His straightforwardness was something he found in a teacher in prison, too.

At Polk Travreso requested placement in the GED class. When he met the teacher he challenged him to be “real.” He asked Travreso if he really wanted to pass his GED, because he didn’t have time for inmates who didn’t; “I ain’t got time to play,” he told him. Travreso assured him that he did want to pass: “I’m for real. I’m serious.” The teacher let him in his class and supported his progress. Travreso responded to his support and willingness to talk to him. “He like always try to talk to you when you’re stressed out.” Travreso described Mr. Kennedy as the only teacher in prison who acted the way he did toward students. Committed to passing the GED and to Mr. Kennedy, Travreso worked hard. “I show him I’m for real; so first time on everything, no second tries, every time I passed my test.” The combination of clear expectations and emotional support from Mr. Kennedy motivated Travreso to work hard. He took pride in his ability to pass the tests for the GED on his first try and that he showed Mr. Kennedy he was “for real.”

Travreso is taking sociology now and has completed computer business applications. He wants to take classes in business administration so that he will be able to open his own shop someday with his brother. Opening his own business where he can paint cars and fix engines is a “dream” he wants to accomplish. “First,” he tells me though, he needs a good job, and a way to “earn (his) money legally.” His family is ready to support him both in school and in finding a job when he is released.

Shoran

Shoran spoke softly and thoughtfully about his school experiences as a boy and his life on the streets. His hair fell across his dark eyes as he spoke, and I received the distinct feeling that he would share with me only that which he wanted me to know. He responded slowly and reflectively to the questions I asked, and asked me more questions than any other student with whom I worked.

Shoran grew up with his mother and grandmother in a large family. In almost whisper he told me that his father was not a part of his life as a child and that he has been incarcerated for 18 years now.

When I asked about school, Shoran said that he was “bad” in elementary school even though he was on the honor roll and enrolled in the academically gifted program. He told me that he shoved desks in the classroom when he got angry and “didn’t have (his) way.” “(The teachers) knew I had potential. I was bad, but I still had A, B honor roll, AG, academically gifted.” In second grade Shoran found himself with lots of friends and girlfriends, but also in class with the school bully whom everyone feared.

I remember the baddest person in my school in my grade. He was the baddest boy. Everybody was terrified of him. Everybody. I don’t think the teachers was you know, (he) wasn’t nothing but a little child, so I wouldn’t think they was, but the rest of them, the little kids, all the kids (were) scared of him though. He was a little bully, I guess.

Shoran identified the “baddest boy” as a “bully” which he compared to his own “bad” self. “I was bad but kind of quiet, too. I was really like a ladies man.” Imagining a 7-year-old laughed “ladies man” I laughed when Shoran told me this. He explained: You know I try to have all the little girlfriends. I (was) the coolest, and everybody gonna roll with me. So, all the girls liked me cause I was a cute little boy, had curly hair, you know mom kept me fresh. She kept me in the best clothes.”

Shoran decided that his popularity annoyed the “baddest boy” who garnered a different kind of attention in school. “I was a ladies man so you know I was smooth with it, but this little boy, everybody scared of him. I don’t think he’s likin’ that cause no little girls liked him, but he shouldn’t be bad, he should be smooth, you know what I mean?” Although he kept his distance from “the

baddest boy” one day he came at Shoran in class. “He come at me and holler at me like I’m everybody else.” The boy pushed Shoran while he was yelling, and Shoran punched him in the mouth, knocking his tooth out. The boy began to cry, and Shoran’s status changed. The school suspended him, but when he returned, he realized that the bully was scared of him now. With surprise and relief, Shoran told me: “Now I’m the baddest boy. I got him running from me and everything on the playground.” Shoran explained that now that it “felt good to be the baddest boy walking ... to know ain’t nobody really trying to face up to you.” Shoran said that being “the baddest” made him feel like a “celebrity” but also “untouchable.” As “the baddest” he achieved new status but he also carved out new safety. “It felt, it feel good not to watch your back, you know? They say when you live the street life, you always got to watch your back for other people and for police, but (it) feel good not having to watch your back, turn around, look over your shoulder all the time.”

With friends and a reputation that kept him safe, Shoran did well throughout elementary school and began sixth grade at the Sycamore School of the Arts. Things were “straight” and Shoran was “doing good” in middle school, but then his mother “started doing bad” and eventually lost her job. Shoran remembered after that everything changed. His style which had been a part of his identity and status even before his fight with “the bully” disappeared. His mom could not afford to keep him in the “finest clothes and all that.” In his first “puppy love” relationship, suddenly not having any of the brand names he usually wore generated a crisis. Shoran felt embarrassed about his change in material status and feared losing his girlfriend, Ashley. “I can’t go (to school) looking like this. I was always wantin’ to keep up in the race. I was like the rabbit though, I can’t be the turtle. I had to be the turtle.” Threatened by his loss of status and by the potential loss of Ashley, Shoran decided he couldn’t “impress her with some old shoes” and keep her. And he had to keep her. Using the fairytale of *Cinderella* as an analogy, he explained to me that for Ashley and his friends to notice him as the Prince that he was.

So in order to do that just looks ain’t going to get it. You gotta have something to go along with them looks. Cause that’s just like Cinderella. Cinderella was a poor and raggedy-dang thing. Pretty as the devil. Pretty! No more beautiful thing walking, but then nobody noticed

her until her fairy godmother came through and laced her up, you know what I mean? And they're like, "Good God Almighty, look at her!" Feel me? So, this is the same for me. I was the Prince Charming, but I couldn't be in rags and be any Prince Charming. They wouldn't notice me as Prince Charming.

Although Shoran identified with Prince Charming, his loss of status places him in relationship to Cinderella. In order to achieve the capital he wanted at school and with Ashley, he had to perform the role of his own fairy Godmother.

As his mother continued to struggle, Shoran started skipping school and working illegally in seventh grade. "I was taking care of my mama and paying the bills." That year Ashley told him that she had to change schools and Shoran responded with disbelief. "I didn't want to believe I (said), 'please, don't change. Don't leave me.'" Eventually, Ashley moved, and school became the last place Shoran wanted to be. "I just started going downhill." He shared that he "had no reason to go" when Ashley left school. He started skipping school and although his teachers encouraged him when he was in school, he did not want to be there. His teachers had a conference with his mother and shared with her the high grades he was maintaining even as he had begun to skip. The interest and support they demonstrated did not reach Shoran. "I wasn't thinking about it. I was thinking about Ashley, and how I didn't want to be there." In time Shoran concluded that he couldn't be in school and in the streets. "I can't make money if I'm in school," and he flunked the seventh grade. He left Sycamore and after a brief stint at a public school, he was sent to an alternative school. Shoran hated the alternative school and spent more and more time in the streets. Looking back Shoran believed that the teacher he knew let him have his way "too much." He described them as "too easy" and wanted them to "give him some authority."

At 13, although he was paying the rent on the house, his mother kicked him out. Shoran learned to feed and take care of himself on the streets and would "sneak in late at night (to) take a shower." His big brother, Trey, his only blood brother, used to walk the streets with him at night before going to school. His company meant everything to Shoran who could not go home. Trey, who had an art scholarship and a football scholarship to college, used to tell him "to stay in school" and

get his education. Trey told him to leave the streets alone, but then fell on “hard times” himself.

Shoran helped him money, but Trey began to work, too. Although they had a plan to leave the streets together, Trey was killed before they could. His death unraveled the family, and Shoran’s younger brother completed suicide within weeks. “(Trey) was the strength of us, for all us siblings, from first cousins to brothers and sisters, he was our strength.”

In prison Shoran took sociology, business computers, and computer applications. He said he would like to study legal theory or science but that as a felon he does not see many opportunities for him out there in the world. The streets are all he sees for now. It is what he knows. And although he does not want it to last a lifetime, for now, “it’s just a way of life.” “It’s really all I see: the streets. I’m not saying it’s going to last a lifetime. Yeah, it’s sad, but it’s all I see. It’s just a way of life.”

Shoran did not believe that the college classes he took would help him post-release, because he said, he is a convicted felon.

I can get out of here, put on a pair of glasses, pair of slacks, and a tie, cut my dreads off, and everything, and try and take it a whole different way. When I go into an interview for like a corporate (job) or something, they get my papers, and they see all these credentials and all this education, but then they’re like, “What did you do first?”

Shoran told me that as soon as the recruiter hears “prison” that he will throw his application in the trashcan, even if he is “the best man for the job.” “They don’t care about any of the credentials ... that’s all they see right there.” He explained that he has seen others try to get a job making a living wage but can’t and return to illegal work. “A few that I saw try to better themselves they didn’t have another choice. Society won’t give ‘em no chance to try and better themselves regardless of education in here ... There ain’t too much I can do out there in the world than what I’ve been doing. I’m just trying to better myself.” Shoran shared his appreciation for learning with me but he was clear about the limited role he believed education has in the lives of Black men with felonies on the record. “(Education) might be good to obtain while I’m locked up. It’s always good to gain more knowledge in anything, you know, but that don’t necessarily mean it’s going to help.”

In our last interview Shoran revealed that he hopes to make some money by rapping. He framed the opportunity to make money to tell his “story on the beat” as “the Millennium’s new hustle.” Although he can’t imagine any easier way to make money, he has no illusions about the likelihood of making it. “I can’t go out there with no help and expect to just make it in the rap game. All this boils down to support. I ain’t got no record deal when I first step out there to the streets.” Regardless of the challenges he will face if he decides to pursue a record deal, in the moments Shoran rapped in our interview, he appeared more content and relaxed than in any other moments we shared. The following rap is one of the two he shared.

Sunny days turn to rain, freedom change to chains
Praying hope for brighter days trying hard to maintain
So many rich fantasies, trap dreams, and murder
So many snake friends into these schemes and burglars
Looking death in the face, with no traces of fear
Don’t care to live another day cause ain’t no happiness here
Only lust and the greed, and jealousy is the rule,
My soul and mine grew up with evil
And the money’s the rule
It ain’t guaranteed to live if I ain’t clutching my tool
It’s just a game how to play and if I slip I lose
All cemeteries and prisons overcrowded with fools
Niggas that won’t stop to listen, they have points to prove
Prayer pray a little faith to the man above
Wish he’d bless me with his grace
And have some mercy on thugs
Now I think about the goals that I wanted to make
My father struggled down this road that I decided to take

Hard times got me blind, I’m dying, but still I’m trying cause I know one day it will be ok
Hard times got me blind, I strive to stay alive but I know one day it’ll be ok
Hard times got me blind and I’m dying but still I’m trying cause I know one day it’ll be ok
Hard times got me blind, I strive to stay alive but I know one day it’ll be ok

With all the crimes and felonies and fatherless families
It was hard for a young Black man to achieve without a father’s advice
To show him wrong from right
To teach him how to be a man, and how to make it in life
So I took to the streets, it was the closest to home
I went out all alone to make it on my own
And I see the money’s easy to get, taking dollars and cents
Cause it’ll help my mama out with the rent
But I grew up too quick on the set with the thugs, only men that showed me love
And taught me how to be tough

Taught me the rules of the game,
How to shoot and name
But could nev'r thug teach me how to be a real man
So I was blind to the fast
My only knowledge was crack
I had dreams of being in college now it's bricks in the trap

Code Yellow

As I leave Al and exit the segregation unit, the vibrancy of the afternoon surprises me. The sun feels warmer and brighter after two hours inside segregation which has no natural light. From the southeast corner where I stand I look across the yard and see only c.o.s positioned at intervals along the main sidewalk that runs about 300 yards from the dining hall to the pods. The yard is empty. There are no trees anywhere, only a small bed of flowers, daffodils.

I walk from the segregation unit down the cement sidewalk toward the main building and master control to exit. I marvel at the layers of communication I negotiate with c.o.s to get through the gate house and into the prison and the total absence of any contact with them on the way out. No one is checking my i.d., calling ahead, or escorting me out. I look hard at the gray walls and wire-laced fences around me. There are two c.o.s at the base of the stairs that lead to the school on the second floor of the main building. They are not watching me.

My mind drifts back to Al whose hand I could not shake when we finished the interview, because it was cuffed. I wonder about the conditions under which we live for someone to feel smart for the first time in prison. Kevenson's observation that learning is unpopular in prison makes me think about the layers of stigma and the threats that accompany the institutional identities the students negotiate. Both Kevenson and Michael spoke about sheltering themselves from a lot of people in prison. I saw the move as exclusivity in their stories, but now I wonder if it was not about establishing safety as students.

When I think about the threats the students face, I find I am least worried about Travreso and Shoran. I am most worried about Tyte Crewdy. Although I know he is 21, and that he has survived gang fights, he is a spry young man and looks only 16. He does not have the broad shoulders and

presence that Michael and Shoran do. As I walk on, I find myself thinking about Shoran, and my irrational hope he will change his mind somehow about returning to the streets. My wish is for his incisive evaluations of cultural capital and hegemony to dazzle the privileged echelons of the academy and corporate America someday. I realize though that if his articulations of power were different, that he might not have the critique I admire.

About 50 yards from the main building, as I am pondering Shoran and whether or not in my next interview with Michael, he will tell me more about Sam and Luther and the books they read, I hear the prison begin to broadcast "Code Yellow" across the compound. The announcement reverberates through my body, and I stop in the middle of the sidewalk unsure of which direction might be the best if I need to hustle out of the way. The announcement is repeated again, and I see the c.o.s at the base of the stairs outside the dining hall take off across the yard. The one stationed along the main sidewalk is already on the move. They are all running for D pod in the northwest corner of the yard. Their belts swing wildly away from their bodies as their sticks and radios, keys, mace and cuffs fly away from their hips and back into their thighs. The weight of their belts misdirects their stride and they struggle to run. They are all gear, and they can not move efficiently at that pace with that belt.

As I watch the sticks swing back and forth against their strides, I wonder how violently they will break up the fight that I know is under way. What I do not know is whether or not the fight is between inmates or between an officer and an inmate. With Al's story fresh in my mind, I fear the latter. Briskly, I make my way past the stairs and the dining hall. At master control I begin my exit with four other women. We wait for the series of mechanized doors to shuttle us through to the lobby and then walk toward the gate house. Each of us signs out with the c.o. and then exits through one last door. On the other side I look up at the razor wire above the gate house. I have left Al behind. And the inmates I will never meet who are crouching under the blows of the officers breaking up their fight. Instinctively, I tell myself that the inmates cannot be Kevenson or Travreso or Shoran. I am relieved that Michael and Tyte are at Morrison, and True at Maury, but then, they are not safe there

either. Only I am safe, outside Polk, on the way to my car that will carry me and these men's stories home.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING MEANING

Interpretations

This chapter includes my analysis and interpretation of the ways in which Al, Michael, Tyte Crewdy, Travreso, and Shoran make meaning of their respective stories. In addressing narrative and the performance of narrative I want to be careful. Although Aretxaga encouraged researchers to use narrative to make meaning of experience and to interrogate relationships of power, I do not believe that narrative produces a single interpretation of experience or always challenges the status quo. As there are spaces in storytelling there are iterations or limitations to interpretations. I represent the following interpretations with the acknowledgement that every story is partial (Ellsworth, 1997; Krog, 2000; Noblit, 1999) and that my positionality dictates that which I am able to hear and understand.

A Story of Redemption

I represent Al's story as a redemption story. Prison education provides Al with an opportunity to redefine himself in the language of "smartness" with the identity of student, and his success as valedictorian and a student in completing college courses gives him hope about the future. His commitment to working with children and going to college provides him with contrastive elements to his story about school growing up. These interests place into relief his choices and experiences as an adolescent and allow him to claim illumination.

Al described his own story as a story of hope. Although he knew that some people in prison were only taking college courses so that they would have something to do in prison, just knowing that

they were taking them gives him hope. He shared in his interviews that he desired to revisit his former goal of earning a bachelor's degree when he is released. He admitted that he has thought about returning to illegal work, but he said he knew that he would end up right back in prison. "Hope," he said, "is the best I can describe (my story). 'Don't worry it will be alright.' I try to shine hope into people, telling people pain and sadness happen to everyone, it's what you make of it.'"

A Story of Discovery

Kevenson who self-identifies as a musician minister now, spent his time as a boy playing neighborhood games and cat-and-mouse with police in school. His difficult experiences in schools in North Carolina and later in schools in South Carolina contrast sharply with his current experiences with his college classes in prison. His laughter about clowning in school growing up is not present when he discusses the clowning he sees in prison now. These changes at the level of engagement with school and at the level of identity performance are significant. I argue that Kevenson uses discovery as a way to make meaning of these, and other, transformations in his life.

Discovery in Kevenson's story manifests itself in moments and reflections of self-discovery. For example, Kevenson reflects on his experience in his current college course in sociology as a way to understand both his enjoyment of the class and his dissatisfaction with other classes he had as a child and adolescent. Compared to his active clowning in school while growing up, Kevenson's critique of the parallels in inmate responses to the authority of c.o.s and student responses to the authority of teachers provides contrast to his own clown behavior as a boy. In prison, no longer interested in participating in clown behavior, he tells me he sits back and watches the drama unfold between inmates and c.o.s. Self-discovery gave him a way to identify and make meaning about these changes.

A Story of Salvation

Many of my questions about Michael's experiences in prison returned him again and again to his experiences in classes for his associate's degree and to his highly intellectualized friendship with Sam and Luther, but he led me to follow his account of a different salvation, one grounded in spirituality and faith and not erudition. Naming spiritual salvation in a narrative is something that only Michael did. He explained carefully to me that his salvation comes from the daily actualization of faith and not from the day the church "saved" him. For Michael, the grace of God and his faith became the way he lives his life and frames meaning about his past. In telling me about his journey in prison chronologically, he was asking me to follow him through his journey. He laid the tracks of the grouse before me, but I was not reflecting on the tracks that I saw.

Preoccupied with his educational history, wrestling with a recorder that was not recording, and absorbed in my own curiosity about his friendship with Sam and Luther in prison²³ I tried to steer Michael back to his disclosure about reading the classics and playing scrabble with Sam and Luther. However, Michael had his own story of salvation to tell, and what I thought later an incredibly difficult tangent to harness in my interview notes was actually the story Michael wanted me to know. I may have been asking about the ways in which education affected his life, but he let me know that I was looking in the wrong direction if I was interested in understanding who he was. Education for Michael was a lens that allowed him to understand his experiences, but he made meaning of his life through his salvation. His story of salvation is the one he wanted me to know and the one through which he makes meaning of his experiences.

A Story of "Keepin' It Real" (or A Story I Cannot See)

Credwy told his story as chronicled events. He led me through his attendance of nine elementary schools and three high schools economically, with scant attention to detail and minimal

²³*Shawshank Redemption* is the only other movie besides *SLAM* that I hoped realistically represented the positive dynamics of social relations in prison.

human drama. He graduated valedictorian of his GED class in the county jail, and shared his pride in this accomplishment. At Morrison he worked on calculus through a correspondence course, and completed a sociology, psychology, and algebra course. In contrast to Travieso, Shoran, and True who deployed systemic critiques of society, Crewdy mentioned only briefly the insights sociology offered him in understanding the ways “society molds your life for you.” He reported this part of the curriculum but kept the idea (or me) at a distance.

When compared to other narratives, his description of social relations seemed sparse. The only account he shared with substantive detail was his experience with Ms. Jones in his third grade class. He focused on her authoritative pedagogy, and in retrospect he decided that she taught “for real.” Her authoritative, maternal style and her rigid system of rewards and punishments became evidence to him that he should take seriously the ways in which he behaved.

Although Crewdy’s immediate surroundings growing up were the most dangerous when compared to the others students I interviewed, he neutralized his own account of the gang activity and daily assaults he witnessed. When I naively suggested that he and his family may have been “lucky” to move from the neighborhood to North Carolina, he dismissed what was my misinterpretation of what he had shared. His neighborhood was not defined by the issues he had shared, he explained. His neighborhood just was. When I asked Crewdy to describe his own story though, he said: “Crazy. Wild. Fast.” Although in his first interview he described life as “crazy” because you “never know what’s going to happen.” I do not see him using “crazy” as a way to make meaning from his experiences. He tended to normalize many of his accounts. There is tension though between the story he performed casually and neutrally for me, and the way he described his life and story “as crazy.”

Struggling to name the story, I remembered the message Crewdy wanted teachers to receive: “They need to teach ’em for real,” and the way he described his rap. One of his homeboy’s who is “really rappin” challenged him to keep his rap connected to his life. “He be like, “Yeah, man, I ain’t going to rap with you, if you’re going to be rappin’ about some fake stuff. You gotta rap about what’s really going on in your life.” Crewdy explained that “at the time (they) were out there doing bad

stuff” but that he started writing about his life. When he rapped for me during our third interview, he evinced pride in keeping the rap real, and when I asked about artists or music that spoke to him about his life, he mentioned Tupac (Tupac Amaru Shakur). He legitimated Tupac’s rap, because “(Tupac) kept it real about his life.” These references to navigation between the “real” and the rhetorical “unreal” or “artificial” emerged from distinct spaces and times—in the classroom and in Crewdy’s rap. I argue that this difference between “real” and “unreal” was important to Crewdy and the way he told his story, particularly since he committed to keeping his own storytelling “real” in his rap. As I think about his interviews and the tensions in his story, I am moved to accept the real possibility that Crewdy’s story also may be A Story I Cannot See.

A Story of Fidelity

I worried most about the way my first two interviews with Travreso went. Although we discussed issues ranging from border politics to favorite teachers, he seemed impatient and at times angry during our interviews. I noticed that when we discussed school growing up, he became upset whenever we discussed high school for any length of time. I decided that his agitation was related to his arrest. Compared to the ways prison experiences informed other stories, Travreso presented his time in prison as a detour. The dreams he wanted to pursue before he was incarcerated remain a part of his plans; he still wants to open his shop. His emotional responses to my questions though, forced me to look at the way I constructed this project. Prison experience is included in these narratives, because I made education central in my questions. By asking about prison education in the framework of narrative, I have implied a chronology of events, even when tellings are anachronistic. I have constructed prison as a part of these stories in the very protocol that I use. Travreso helped me redefine my responsibility and ownership in this work in new ways. However, looking at “detour” as the way he made meaning from his story has limited applications.

In his relationships with others, Travreso appeared to demonstrate a fierce loyalty, whether to fellow Mexicans in prison, to his brothers, or to his best friend, Carlos, while growing up. When we

talked about both politics and racism, he structured our conversations around some constant frames of reference. For example, repeatedly in our conversations about race, Travreso asserted that racism would always be a part of our social reality. His claim never shut down the particularities of our discussion but rather framed the boundaries of the debate. Racism itself, for Travreso, is non-negotiable. His position on imperialist and capitalist power worked in much the same way. Although he offered a moral critique of U.S. imperialism and elitism, he did not debate the structure of power. I argue that this rigidity stems from the ways in which issues of predictability and loyalty influenced his experiences.

Travreso described moments of unpredictability in his life as “crazy.” For example, his father was “crazy” for sanctioning the abuse Travreso endured in school. I chose “A Story of Fidelity” because I want to represent two related ways Travreso makes meaning. First, I argue that he looks for fidelity when he looks for both predictable behaviors—unlike his father’s—and predictable intellectual boundaries, and second, for loyal behavior and decisions motivated by loyalty. His interactions with his fellow inmates and his interaction with the sergeant in prison are examples of these orientations. He makes meaning from his story by using fidelity as a litmus test.

When I asked Travreso how he would describe his own story he said, “painful, man. My story’s painful, you know what I’m saying? Like the prison story is nothing, really. It’s nothing. When I get to thinkin’ about the past, it’s painful. That’s really painful. You think, ‘Why things happen like that?’” Travreso’s search for meaning in past experiences speaks to his desire to understand violations of his expectations. Using fidelity as a way to make meaning allows him to test the predictability of his future expectations—as a way to avoid or prepare for surprises—and to assess the steadfastness and trustworthiness of others’ behaviors.

A Story of the Hustle

Shoran describes his story as a “heart that won’t ever heal.” Between ages 14 and 16 Shoran lost his grandmother to cancer, his blood brother who was killed, his step-sister who was murdered,

his great-aunt who was murdered, and his younger step-brother who shot himself. At eighteen and again at twenty-one he was arrested and incarcerated. His story is full of loss: the loss of life, the loss of shelter, the loss of love, and the loss of his home. His loss is literal in the deaths of his family and in the home that burned down, in the move his first girlfriend made to another school and his mother's refusal to let him come home from the streets. His loss is symbolic as his heart never rests and never heals. It is heavy with grief. Although I could interpret Shoran's story easily as "a heart that won't ever heal," I see him using "the hustle" as the way in which he makes meaning from his experiences. Of course Shoran's "heart that won't ever heal" and "the hustle" are related. When the hustle drives life experiences, there is no space for heart.²⁴

Shoran sees prison education as a hustle by the state and the government. The programs exist so that the criminal justice system can claim rehabilitation. Although he values education and knowledge, he does not believe in the idea that there is a correlation between one's education and the job market, especially for a Black male with a felony on his record. Shoran's rap is a story of the hustle on the streets, and he sees the commodification of rap as the Millennium's new hustle – getting paid easy money to tell your story on the beat. And although he speaks at length with me in our interviews, he asked and he knows that this project is for my "final paper." He views the process of obtaining the credentials I will need to find a job, as a hustle. He wants to help me finish my paper, but he wants to know also if I am going to just sit "in the big office," or if am going to continue to "be active with kids"? He asked me about my tutoring and told me that I needed to work with boys and girls in middle school and not just elementary school. He injected into my life a moral commitment to the children who represent him even as he characterized the credentials of my advanced degree as a commodity.

²⁴ The irony of this relationship was painful to me. Indeed because of the pain I felt, I sought another word to describe this elemental tension in Shoran's story. I asked George Noblit, "What's a word that's worse than irony (that captures this?" George said, "Tragedy." And in doing so he returned me to the first iteration of this work: "Representing Tragedy: Ethnopoetics: The Search for a More Complete Story."

A Note from Michael on Seduction

Although Shoran was clear about what he saw as the pervasiveness of the “hustle” and my role of hustling students for their stories in order to earn the credentials I want, he did not suggest that the students hustled me with their stories. Michael, however, did. And he named seduction as the way to navigate power in social relationships, particularly in prison and particularly with women. Michael cautioned me about trusting the men I interviewed. He explained that a con was always running a “scam” even if he had to wait “a whole year” to benefit from the setup. Using seduction to establish “some kind of relationship” with “female teachers off the streets” and with c.o.s, inmates find that over time, they are “offered” privileges “without ever saying a word.” Michael provided me with an example from his own experience. After spending four years at Foothills, he knew well one of the c.o.s he saw everyday. Before the Christmas holiday, the c.o. approached him, and said, “It’s Christmastime, I’m going to bring you in something to eat.” Michael had never asked for any food from the c.o. and in his telling was still awed by the generative power in their relationship. He warned me also about the standard performance of “gentleman” noting disparities in what James Scott (1992) called public and hidden transcripts. Michael explained:

In general I think that we project our own image on people. If you went out there on the yard right now, they would be gentlemen, considerate, sweetest; no sooner you get out of hearing distance talk about how you look, have guys already taking it in their mind: she asked me two or three questions more, probably get her to write me.

He suggested that any research addressing criminology ought to take place inside the correctional institution and for over a period of months. He argued that the only way researchers would understand the “criminal-type mindset” would be to live in the system.

Only way they could do it, come in and live here. Can’t come in, be here two days, two weeks, two months. You have to come in here and be indoctrinated, institutionalized, to actually understand the being of the con, material, emotional, psychological. You would really be amazed at how you perceive them to be is not really who they are, dealing with guys with criminal-type mindset.

Even though Michael believed that research ought to be performed through an unlikely participant-observer scenario, through his disclosure about seduction, he provided me with his crib notes.

Realistically, I can never prevent the performative element in any of my interviews, but Michael's assessment of inmate behavior gave me another lens for analysis, even if he offered it to me as a part of his own seduction.

CHAPTER 6

YOUNG WOMEN AND PERSERVERANCE

Much like Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, this chapter represents the educational narratives of students and my analysis and interpretations of those narratives. The narratives in this chapter are not part of the other narratives for two reasons—both equally important. The primary reason these narratives are framed in a separate chapter is that the events that constitute these stories about education growing up and education in prison are different fundamentally from the ones I have represented in Chapter 4. Most apparent is the event of high school graduation.

As the events differed so did the tenor of these narratives. I want to caution the reader, given that two women tell these stories, against framing the differences as only gendered differences. The second reason this chapter is distinct from the other narrative chapters is connected to the caution against a gendered reading. I had severe doubts about whether or not the constructions of these narratives would even take place. The technical negotiation of scheduling interviews at the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women (NCCIW) was categorically unmanageable. Mr. Alfaigo, the assistant principal of the school at NCCIW, refused to be managed by the official evaluation of the Youth Offenders Program or by communication from me regarding visits with students participating in the program.

Mr. Alfaigo and I had inauspicious beginnings in March 2006 when I arrived to complete my six interviews for the 2006 YOP evaluation. At the time my hope was that four or five of these women would be interested in follow-up interviews with me. These subsequent interviews, although useful for the 2007 YOP evaluation, primarily would constitute part of my dissertation research.

As I unpacked my notepads and pens last March, Mr. Alfaigo informed me that he would be joining me in the interviews. Surprised at his announcement which clearly was not a question or a statement seeking permission, I stated flatly that for the confidentiality of the evaluation work that I needed to interview participants privately. Mr. Alfaigo assured me that he would keep all that he heard in the interviews confidential and then told me that a staff person was required to be present when someone met with an inmate. Avoiding an argument and needing interviews with the women for the 2006 YOP report, I acquiesced.

As one might imagine, the interviews did not go well. In a room approximately 14 by 14 with 12 children's desks, Mr. Alfaigo sat no less than four feet behind the student and me during the interviews. With the exception of one interview with Michele, the other five all felt rushed and reserved. Mr. Alfaigo wanted what were to have been 30-45 minute interviews completed in 20 minutes. I found myself following the interview questions in order rather than each woman's response, as I try to do, in fear that he might suspect me as an ally for the students. In my field notes I wrote: "Mr. Alfaigo wants to know why DOC contracts with UNC when UNC provides a service? Mr. Alfaigo wants to sit in on all the interviews. I'm agitated by (Mr. Alfaigo) to start off with, he seems suspicious." I failed to establish rapport in any of the interviews and could only elicit one word responses from one participant. Only Michelle's friendly and outgoing personality and willingness to share gave me any hope.

In June I began contacting all the prisons again for the second set of interviews. I was careful to include in each email the following paragraph: "For the benefit of an objective evaluation and in order to maintain the confidentiality of these participants, these students will need to be interviewed alone. Depending on the facility I have interviewed students in empty classrooms, offices, or libraries."

I scheduled interviews with each educational director in June, except NCCIW. My emails simply were never answered, messages never returned, and as time passed the potential days for a site visit would arrive and disappear on the calendar, forcing me to generate new potential days to visit

and ratcheting up my anxiety.²⁵ On July 4th I wrote in an email to a friend: “I am scared about returning to NCCIW when the first round went so poorly there, and stressed that if the second doesn't go well, I won't have a story to translate for women at all.”

Finally, two months later, I secured August 8th as the date I could return to NCCIW. Foggy with medicine from a wretched head cold but absolutely determined not re-schedule, I drove to Raleigh ready to interview four of the six original women I had met in April. I was hoping that with privacy I might be able to establish some rapport. Michelle, Helen, Ladybug, and Latoya were the women with whom I had planned to meet, but that day I met with no one.

On August 8th after I had followed Mr. Alfaigo from the gate house to an empty classroom, he turned to me and said that he would sit in during the interviews “like last time.” After the debacle in April, I had contacted Fritz Henry who had suggested that I have Mr. Alfaigo call him, if anyone at NCCIW needed clarification about the interviews. I gave Mr. Alfaigo a short speech about the importance of the confidentiality of the women and the need to provide “objective” data for the evaluation, and then Ladybug and Latoya walked into the room. Mr. Alfaigo asked them to step back outside. When Mr. Alfaigo began to question my reasoning, I suggested that we call Fritz Henry.²⁶ By invoking Fritz Henry's status I hoped Mr. Alfaigo would reconsider his position. Regrettably, this was not the case. After a brief conversation Mr. Alfaigo ended our discussion and announced that he would not be able to accommodate my needs and that I would have to come back another day. He stepped immediately away from me and into the hallway and told Ladybug and Latoya that there was a “scheduling problem” and that there would not be any interviews.²⁷

²⁵ I used the same language in all my emails, and typically, I offered dates as possibilities for a visit and invited other dates from each institution if the ones I suggested would not work.

²⁶ I explained also that although I had completed the first round of interviews with Mr. Alfaigo present, that this was not optimal and that I had emailed that I would need privacy to interview the women. I decided to avoid what looked like might be a debate for Mr. Alfaigo about confidentiality and “objectivity” and instead deployed the status of Fritz Henry. I wanted also to move away from any discussion about “objectivity.”

²⁷ Abruptly Mr. Alfaigo explained that as he understood things, no one except legal counsel was to meet with any inmate privately. I explained that meeting with students privately was routine and that I had not had problems at Foothills, Maury, Morrison, Polk, or Western Again, I suggested that we call Mr. Henry. Mr. Alfaigo ended our discussion, and said that he would need the warden's permission in order for me to interview the women privately. He asked that I send the interview questions to him electronically so that he could share them with her. I had already emailed him one for the first

Irritated (again) but medicated, I decided not to argue, played his game instead and promised sweetly to send him the email he needed. I returned to NCCIW finally three months later—seven months after my first interviews with Michelle, Helen, Ladybug, and Latoya.

The following narratives represent the interviews I completed with Ladybug and Latoya in April 2006 and November 2006.

Ladybug

Ladybug was in the room almost before I knew it. I was still reeling from the information that I would be meeting with only two of the four women I had been trying to interview for seven months.²⁸ Mr. Alfaigo, who sauntered in with the information, paused for only a moment before he informed me that Helen had been transferred to another facility and that Michelle had been paroled. In my anger I struggled to be present for Ladybug the first few minutes she was in the room. Still recovering from the news Mr. Alfaigo delivered, I absently asked Ladybug how she was doing. Immediately, she launched into the recent events involving her mother who was taking her ex-husband's mother to an event involving Ladybug's son. Ladybug described her mother as more gracious than she, and I inferred that the dismissive and disgusted tone that she used when she mentioned her ex-husband is something more deliberately transferred to his mother. Hearing of her ex-husband and these dynamics for the first time, I said lamely that perhaps the holiday spirit inspired her mother to extend such an invitation. Ladybug and I spoke three days before Thanksgiving. To my surprise Ladybug conceded that perhaps this is so. In this moment I thought of George Noblit and his guidance during his qualitative methods courses. He was careful to remind his new researchers that it

round of interviews—and left. I emailed him three days later, and once a week for five weeks with all my available times to return to NCCIW. Usually this included four if not five days of the week.

²⁸The day I interviewed Ladybug and Latoya was November 22, 2006. The last time I was at NCCIW and interviewed successfully was in April. I was concerned about the length of time in between interviews in regards to rapport mostly, as well as to the content of the interviews. Between August 8, 2007—the day Mr. Alfaigo derailed the scheduled interviews by refusing to allow me privacy with the students—and early November, he failed to respond to any of my requests for visits. Only after an email from Mr. Henry, Educational Specialist of the Youth Offender Program, did Mr. Alfaigo contact me to set up the date of November 22nd. When Mr. Alfaigo told me after I arrived to interview that two of the women, Helen and Michele, were no longer at NCCIW, I did everything I could to hide my fury. I did not want him to experience the satisfaction of having control over my time and my schedule.

is when the recorder is off or when the interview officially ends that people often begin really to talk. The exchange with Ladybug which was both incredibly personal and new information to me was not recorded. I wanted to ask her about her son and her mom all at once, but I needed to gain verbal consent first and ask permission to turn on the recorder. Ethics trumped my curiosity this time.

Ladybug was agreeable, though the moment for discussing her son, his father, and her mother had passed. In contrast to our first meeting, Ladybug smiles warmly and appears relaxed and engaged.²⁹ Ladybug's voice and intonation carries most of her feeling when she spoke, as the glasses she wore made discerning the expression of her eyes difficult. She sat still in her chair at the desk, which was the size of an elementary school child's.

When we talked about school growing up, Ladybug started her story about school in the first grade when the year began with her teacher, Ms. Cullins, on maternity leave. Ms. Saunders began teaching the class instead. Ladybug told me that Ms. Saunders cared about each student, and spent time with each one. In contrast to Ms. Cullins, Ms. Saunders, "cared about her students." "She got to know us individually," Ladybug explained. "She took time to learn our learning habits, you know whether we did better visually or through the book and so she was able to by doing that she was able to help us on a more individual basis." Ms. Saunders was laid back and at ease with the students. Her style with the class sharply challenged Ms. Cullins' whose authoritarian manner and temper dominated the students.

Ladybug spoke with discernable coolness when she described first grade with Ms. Cullins. "(She was) real hateful. I went from making straight As to making Fs ... She expected 20-first graders to stay quiet at all times. She had no understanding at all. She had no compassion towards the students." The investment that Ladybug had experienced with Ms. Saunders was absent with Ms. Cullins, and she observed that Ms. Cullins treated teaching like a job to finish. "She just was there to

²⁹ Ladybug appeared comfortable talking with me, not something I remember at all from the first interview in April – of course, Mr. Alfaigo was sitting four feet behind her in April. She read the consent form and when I reached for a pen to hand to her, she pulled one from her pocket, and commented that she was always "the good student" "ready for school."

teach and then she was ready to go home. She had a very hot temper ... She was heartless. I mean she did not care about any of the students.” Ms. Cullins did not demonstrate the care for the students the way that Ms. Saunders had, and Ladybug was vocal about the way she felt about the difference.

One of the times that I got in trouble in her class I flat told her I thought she was an ogre, and I told her exactly how hateful I thought she was. Of course I spent a few days in in school suspension for that because the principal did not approve of some of the language I used from a first grade child.

As Ladybug tells this story her assessment about Ms. Cullins has not changed. Her coolness did not change into the flushed emotions of a young child as she told her story. She agreed with her own interpretation of events at the time and believed that the language she used is the reason she spent time in ISS, not her evaluation of her teacher’s behavior. She moved to legitimate her opinion when she cited her principal’s concern over her use of profanity at the age of five rather than her condemnation of her teacher. It was only when Ladybug began to speak about what happened next that her tone began to change.

She told me that Ms. Cullins held her back and that after that she “hated school.” “She held me back, ever since then, I resented school.” Ladybug’s coolness disappeared and with residual anger, she told me, “I was labeled the dummy.” Behind her anger I heard pain. Ladybug launched emphasis behind the word, using it as her classmates did against her. The way she said “dummy,” which is a small word that falls from the roof of the mouth, broke a big piece of my heart.³⁰ Her fellow students, she explained, “did not understand why it was done and so when they started picking on me and calling me ‘dummy’ from that point on I hated school. I didn’t even want to go. My mama had to actually bribe me to go to school after that.” As she talked about the students and then returned back to her education in general, a coolness returned to her tone. There was something there in her story of Ms. Cullins that I wanted to call non-negotiable. Her account was not to be read another way. If I were to have asked her if she thought her teacher might have regretted having to work with a newborn baby or if she thought that perhaps her teacher may have been suffering from postpartum

³⁰ Although I did not enjoy school past second grade, my loathing for it did not begin until high school—certainly not as early as the first grade. I am full of sorrow for Ladybug when I think of her terrible experiences beginning at the age of six.

depression, I think I would have violated Ladybug's emotional trust— which was both the woman before me in the interview and the girl as woman remembering Ms. Cullins' class. I did not dare enact this potential betrayal. Ladybug was an insightful and intelligent woman. Plausibly, she knew as an adult and as a mother that these were possibilities. But I found myself bound to her story, and not to Ms. Cullins'. Ms. Cullins remained the villain here for Ladybug and for me. And strangely, I welcome Ladybug's interpretation of the events even when she contextualized the decision to hold her back. "You know it wasn't so much that she held me back, but she talked my parents into holding me back. Because they let me start school when I was four, because of when my birthday was, and she felt it would help me in the long run."

Ladybug started first grade a second time hurt and miserable. She faced taunts from her classmates who called her names. She told me that to get her to even go to school, her mom bribed her with plastic charms—a charm a day. When she received good grades, her mom would reward her with "a Happy Meal or something real special."

I asked Ladybug if she had felt safe at school when the students had treated her badly. She said she felt safe, because she was "deemed somewhat of a bully." She re-categorized herself immediately though and explained the different ways she coped with being held back and the stigma attached to that process. "Well, not really a bully, but I would stand up for myself. It hurt my feelings, but you know, I go home and cry to mama. But to them, I be like, 'You gotta problem withit?' And then I go home and cry to mama, 'Mama, they picked on me.'"

School remained an unhappy place for Ladybug. About 12 she recalled thinking that she "wasn't worried about the future." She said, "I might not do my homework this week, but I'll do better next school year. I'll do better next semester." She continued to feel indifferent and demonstrated little interest in anything related to school. However, by the time she reached high school, friendships with fellow students became spaces of enjoyment in school.

When I was in the ninth grade, I had this little habit: I thought my friends were more important than going to class on time. And so after so many write ups you would get in school suspension. When I go to in school suspension I was sitting there like, 'You know

what? I'm doing so much better in in school suspension than I do in a regular classroom, and I make better grades.

Surprised I shared that I didn't think teachers and principals view ISS as the productive space that Ladybug explained it was for her. She told me then that her principal at Titon High was "cool" and that she explained to him that she started arriving late to class on purpose. "I would purposefully do it. It was always little, small things like not getting to class on time, and I told him, "you know, I do it, so I can go to ISS and get my work done and be done with it. You know I do a day's worth of work in two hours." Eventually, time in ISS transformed into time in the school office. Assigned to ISS for three weeks on one occasion, she remembered that after two days, she had completed all her school work. With two-and-a-half weeks left, "they actually let me come in the office and answer phones for the school and run errands for 'em and things like that." Without a prompt or question from me, she described working in the office as "still being punished."

Although helping in the office does not sound like punishment to me, I was not sure she was speaking to me. Her purpose may have been to let me know that although her principal was "cool" and ISS a place where she could get her work done, she was still subject to the discipline of the school game, school rules and the obedience they demand. Her body, although not contained in ISS, was still routinized in the school, just in a different space. She made a choice about which space she preferred, but she did not escape the structure of school. I wondered also if she was not talking past me or through me to a different audience, one in the compound or perhaps one outside the prison, one of young students beginning their own journeys into high school.

During Ladybug's senior year in high school she moved in with her boyfriend, who is now her ex-husband. "I was 18 ... thought I was in love, you know? Boy was I wrong. But I moved out of my mom's house and moved in with him." That winter Ladybug got sick and after missing more than nine days, she decided to stop going to school. In her school she explained that if a student misses more than nine days, then he or she automatically failed and had to petition the "board of education"

for passing grades. She didn't tell her mother that she had stopped going to school, and only when her mother went to her school to find her did she realize that her daughter had stopped attending.

I wound up quitting and just dropping out. My mom went to the school and of course she found out I wasn't there when they called for me, and I never showed up. She started asking around you know what she could do to get me back in school, where I could get a diploma, and not a GED. And that was the first year they had opened Snow Field. It was a, some people call it an alternative school ... A lot of learning disabled (students) go there, students get classified as 'problem students' or ones who were having babies.

During that time Ladybug's father was dying of cancer, and Snow Field worked to get her enrolled by offering her a hardship transfer. The schedule at Snow Field broke the day into three blocks. Students could attend morning, afternoon, or evening classes. Ladybug chose evening classes and soon received the best grades she ever had. Independent work, individual attention, and small classes made a difference.

You had on average two to four teachers there. You were given your work, if you needed help you went to the teachers. It was strictly like a one-on-one basis. They didn't allow more than 20 students per time frame ... By doing that I actually made better grades, because I have a slight learning disability and in classrooms with a lot of people my attention wanders.

Ladybug cited that working at her own pace with access to a teacher who made herself available to the students helped her realize how well she worked when given the space and time to do so. "I worked better independently. If I had a question, teacher come over and she'd sit right beside you and tell you exactly what you needed to do. And if you were having a bad day, she was there to listen. They were more understanding, and so I went." Ladybug assigned value to both the academic and personal support she received at Snow Field. "I wound up graduating with honors ... my graduation meant a lot to my Dad."

I smiled when she shared this and noted the pride in her voice when she mentioned her accomplishment. I said, "Good for you. That's wonderful!" but felt as if my words hung outside the layers of her story and her grief.

I asked Ladybug if she remembered thinking about college, and she shared quickly that she had. "I wanted to go back to school. That was one of the things when I got married my ex-husband had told me: 'I want you to finish. I'll work three jobs if I have to so you can go back to school.'"

Ladybug explained that she wanted to go to school to become an RN but that she became pregnant with her son. Changing his mind, her husband decided that he wanted her to work and spend time at home with their child, instead of going to school. “I wound up pregnant and he didn’t want me going to back to school fulltime, so I could spend time with my son. And then that wound up never happening. I ended up working three jobs while he did nothing, so it wound up being vice versa.” With a matter-of-factness that surprised me, she said: “But I’m getting my education now, that’s the way I look at it. You know I’ve made my mistakes, but you live and learn.”

As she described her education at NCCIW, Ladybug told me her “plate is full” and indeed it is. Shaw University accepted her into their undergraduate program where she will receive her associate’s degree in business management in a year and her bachelor’s degree in sociology in four years. She was enrolled in the cosmetology program through a local community college as well and already has completed three undergraduate courses, algebra, small business, and sociology, taught at the facility by professors from local universities. She was in school four days a week and did not return to the dorms until well after 7 o’clock at night. She laughed when she told me that “sleep is kind of a thing of the past. We usually get out of classes around 7:00; we usually get back in our dorms around 7:30-7:45; we’ll have count; I’ll do homework, and I’m usually in the bed between midnight and 2:00.” Coursework through Shaw University was on a Monday-Wednesday and a Tuesday-Thursday schedule. Ladybug explained that the students have Friday nights off and that she completed most of her papers and projects on the weekends. “It tends to get a little crazy sometimes, but it’s going ok.” Except for some of the upper-class students in the Shaw University program, Ladybug believed that things were going well. Most of the first-year students in her class supported one another, but she described some of the older students purposefully misleading younger students with incorrect information. “We had a World Civilization test, and we had someone who missed some days, and the girl purposefully told her the wrong things to study for the test, so when she went in there she was completely lost.” Ladybug thought that the upper-class students told the younger ones incorrect information so that they would receive bad grades. “Most of them are pretty eager that I’m

in classes with. They're pretty eager to learn and stuff, but you got a few that, you know, they catch things a little bit quicker, and they think they're better than everybody else and don't want to help those that struggle."

Ladybug wanted to be successful in school, achieving something she felt she had not. "I've got to prove myself. By taking these classes I feel like I'm able to prove myself. I have high expectations for myself to make good grades, because I didn't do it in school." She shared that the teachers in the Shaw program were "pretty good" about staying after class if you needed to talk to them and addressed any issues the students had. The teachers were helpful, and Ladybug liked them "for the most part." However, paying attention was critical in her classes because as she explained to me most of her teachers are "foreign" and "if they get real excited about something they're teaching their accent kicks in and you're like, 'Do what?'"

Although Ladybug told me that she has "plenty of time"—her release date is November 2012—she explained that she's trying to plan and think ahead about when she will go home. "I'm trying to think about when I go home, you know. I have a child to support." Her voice lifted as she began to talk about her son, and she told me that although he had a stubborn streak "a mile wide" he was a straight A student, and that his teachers wanted to test him to see if he was academically gifted. Her pride was evident in her words, and I was left wondering in awe at all she was trying to accomplish while so far away from her son, who was so clearly her light.

Ladybug agreed with me that her story was important and responded that preteens and teenagers ought to hear her story. She supported her choice by citing that, "children really start looking towards their future" then and that "about that age they start getting influenced by other kids and alcohol, and parties and things like that," too. She told me that her incarceration has influenced her nephew. She has spoken candidly to him about the way she felt when she was his age. "I know me being here has made a big impact on my nephew. He's 12; he's that pre-puberty age. And you know, I told him, I said, 'that's about the age that you know I started wantin' to run my mouth, and you know, school wasn't important.'" She told him that she had not thought about her future and

cautioned him about the unanticipated changes life delivers. “I wasn’t worried about the future; I might not do my homework this week, but I’ll do better next school year, I’ll do better next semester.” Ladybug issued a warning as she shared her past feelings with him. “I said, ‘You know, things wind up happening, and you never know what your circumstances may be in three months from now or three weeks from now.’ And so by me being here, you know, it’s kinda showed him, he’s gotta work that much harder. It’s made a big difference on him.” Her nephew represented the audience that she would like to hear her story. She justified her lived experience through the hope that her life was worth living, albeit a life that for now is in prison.

Although I had heard the next message from Ladybug in a similar form from True and Al, the tone of acceptance in her voice made her comments different. With what I can only describe as grace, Ladybug shared, “If I can learn from (my incarceration) and help one other person and some of the choices they may be making, it’s worth it to me. You know, I’ve made my mistake, I’m paying.” Whereas True and Al conveyed their commitment to preventing others from making the mistakes they did and in doing so made meaning from their experiences on the street and in prison, Ladybug makes an additional move in claiming meaning from her experiences. She named her experience in prison as one “worth” enduring if she helps “one other person and some of the choices they may be making.” Although True, Al, and Ladybug all shared their desire to present their stories as warnings to others as a way to make meaning and perhaps engender redemption, only Ladybug justified the experience of her incarceration itself as a valued subjection. She gives this experience freely as an offering to those on paths she does not know or recognize. I told Ladybug that I thought her statement was “profound,” and I asked her if she thought others would have agreed with her. In response Ladybug took the opportunity to educate me about the women she knew in prison. She provides me with a story of women as girls in families that lack attention and care.

Some of ’em that are in here (are) prison, you know, they killed somebody or, you know, drugs. You know, I was brought up in a close family, but if you talk to 90 percent of these women on the compound, they don’t have family, and it makes a difference. Parents, their idea of spending time with their children is taking them to buy Nautica or Tommy Hilfiger, or

you know buy 'em a video game and plop them down in front of the TV, so they can go do what they've gotta do.

Ladybug described the women as girls first but also contextualized the crimes they completed. She introduced issues of development, parenting, and emotional support as a way to elucidate her own position and ability to offer grace from her suffering. She produced as an explanation, "I was brought up in a close family." Her upbringing was rare compared to the childhoods of the women she knows in the compound. She privileged her experiences with family growing up and defined through example her ideas of parenthood. "Spending time with your children is going to the park or going on a picnic, doing things together."

Stories about her son served as bookends for our interview, and Ladybug told me how important spending time with her son was. She recalled with longing the Saturday mornings they would spend together.

We'd get up, we'd eat breakfast, we'd watch cartoons together, and then we cleaned house. You know of course half the time he was making a mess trying to clean up a mess, but at least he tried. I tried to make it fun. I'd cut on the radio, and we'd dance as we were cleaning. I taught him how to take soft toys and toss them at the ceiling fan and watch them spin.

Ladybug missed her son terribly and yet was still capable of calling up appreciation for her own experiences of care as a child and the ones she created for her son. Her story made me wonder if her son was not perhaps her motivation to succeed in prison in the same way that Latoya's first son was her motivation to finish high school.

Latoya

Latoya started school in New Jersey where she was born, but after first grade moved to North Carolina where her grandmother lived, and began school there. Over the next ten years she and her sister moved back and forth between Newark, New Jersey and Laurinburg, North Carolina alternating homes with their father and their grandmother. The schools they attended differed in extraordinary ways. Latoya told her story candidly with an openness that one finds in trusting children. Her

excitement over her return home kept her words tied closely together, and they tumbled into the space between us. Her release date was only 20 days away on the afternoon I spoke with her for a second time.

With an easy smile and big brown eyes she told me that growing up she enjoyed elementary school and middle school. “I liked elementary school. It wasn’t hard. That’s when you need to learn ... to cram as much as you can, and you’re just going to learn, learn, learn, learn, learn, learn.” With older cousins in New Jersey and help from her Dad and grandmother, she explained that what they taught her at home prepared her for the school curriculum. “Normally, you know, your mom or your dad, whoever raised you taught you at home, like multiplication tables. Your family usually teach you that before you go to school. I was taught that before I went to school.” From her cousins, Latoya knew what books teachers used in school and could anticipate what was coming. Her desire to be like her older cousins “that know so much” encouraged her also to learn as much as she could. “Everybody probably has big sisters, big brothers, or older cousins that know so much, so elementary school, it’s like, I’m going to grow up and be like them; so, I’m gonna learn.”

Latoya moved to North Carolina in second grade and stayed until she began the fifth grade. She returned briefly to New Jersey in the fifth grade but completed the year in North Carolina. After finishing the sixth grade in North Carolina, she and her sister moved back to New Jersey for seventh and eighth grade. She shared that although she had lots of cousins in Newark, the reason she kept returning was because she missed her dad. “I missed my dad, so I’d go back to Jersey ... (We) went back and forth.”

Her experiences in Laurinburg, North Carolina where her grandmother lived differed fundamentally from those in Newark. She found adapting to the “country” difficult. “Took awhile to get used to the country. No noise. Laurinburg pretty much is the country. Well, I think all North Carolina’s the country, to me. It’s the country. It took awhile to get used to it. Then I got used to it.” The lack of activity, mobility, as well as the stillness of the “country” led her comparisons between North Carolina and Newark.

Newark is probably the worst part of New Jersey. It's the heart of New Jersey, and it's always something going on, sun up to sun down. It's always something going on. We have a store on every corner, every block in New Jersey. Down here, you gotta walk a mile to get to the store. No buses. You can't just jump on a bus and be like, "Oh, take me here."

Latoya's grandmother had to take her and her sister to the store when she wanted to go, because it was so far, which meant they had to always ask her grandmother to go.

The schools Latoya and her sister attended and the ways in which the teachers and principals treated students differed, too. Latoya described the public school she went to as a child in New Jersey with all of her cousins as "huge." "It was more people, more people, one teacher, so you can't get the attention you need, not that you didn't get any, but you can't, it's like you have a question you have to wait until the next person ask(s) their question, because they have their hand up before you."

Although the school was big in New Jersey, she was with her extended family all day, which she enjoyed. In contrast, the school in North Carolina "broke everybody up" so she was not in school with her sister.

After spending ninth grade in North Carolina, Latoya returned to New Jersey in the tenth grade. In high school the differences between her school experiences became more salient as discipline and attendance issues materialized for her and her friends.

I went back to New Jersey in the tenth grade, but I went to sleep in all the classes I could. No problem. I could sleep all day, and I could leave when I want. When I came back to North Carolina, you know, I learned. I didn't stay in Jersey very long my tenth grade year, because I didn't like it. I came back to North Carolina in the tenth grade.

Latoya explained to me that South Ford High was not a good public school and that she was not learning anything there. Although she admitted to falling asleep in class she said also that the teachers didn't seem to care about students the way that they had in elementary school and middle school. She recognized that although the school failed to care about her sleeping in class and was therefore, easy, the school was also failing her as a student by the same lack of care about her learning.

They cared a lot in elementary school ... I don't think the teachers care once you hit high school. In New Jersey, it's just like, "oh, wow, they don't care if you graduate or not." I've had friends who graduated who couldn't read or write ... You sign in, that's your day—as long as you sign in, you graduated.

Here Latoya acknowledged the lack of care she witnessed at her high school in New Jersey and the consequences of that lack of care. The lack of discipline at the high school she attended affected her friends. She shared with sadness that “two or three friends couldn’t read or write.”

Her experiences at Randolph High were radically different. Primarily, she exclaimed: “I had to stay awake!” She described with surprise the discipline that her teachers and her principal used to keep students paying attention and attending school. “The teachers kept you awake, wouldn’t let you fall asleep. Principals too, made sure you went to school, because they would, your parents get locked up if your child don’t go to school.” Latoya shared that her school contacted her grandmother when she would not listen in class or when she fell asleep in class. Unlike her South Ford High, Latoya found that everyone knew her in her school in Laurinburg, including the school administrators. Scolding the adolescent in herself she told me that she knew she should have been behaving differently in school. “But I knew when I went to school I’m supposed to learn, that I’m not supposed to go to sleep, and I’m not supposed to go to class late.”

At South Ford High she explained, there was “no discipline. No. You left when you like. If I didn’t want to stay in school all day, it was, ‘OK, I can leave if I want.’” Although there was an officer that the students called a “taunt” officer at South Ford, Latoya said that if a student wanted to leave, the officer would not stop him. “(He’s) supposed to stop you from leaving school, but it’s nothing he can do. No, there’s nothing they can do if you run out the doors. They’re not going to run out the school yard to chase you. You just don’t come back.” In contrast, Latoya quickly tells me that at Randolph, they had police officers, not taunt officers. She clarified for me that although she arrived late to class and sometimes slept in class that she never skipped class. At Randolph “you couldn’t sign yourself out unless your mom, whoever, your guardian called up here and told ‘em, ‘OK, she can sign herself out.’” The only times Latoya signed herself out was when she participated in co-op in the 11th and 12th grades. She left just before the last two class periods began to go home and get ready for work. “I would work the Piggly Wiggly, grocery store. I would leave school at 12 o’clock and work. My shift would start at like one o’clock, two o’clock, couple hours of time to get ready.”

Many of the students in 11th and 12th grades participated in the co-op program. Latoya suggested that a lot of students did co-op “because you don’t have to go to school” but then explained that “a lot of people do whatever they’re going to go to college for, just to get a head start with it” and “a lot of people do it cause, ‘Hey, you don’t have to go to school to make money.’” Latoya sounded torn in her assessments of the reasons why students chose to participate in co-op. She swung her justifications from school avoidance to job preparation. Missing school was supplanted by a reason that seemed to legitimate the co-op program. Early exposure to job opportunities echoed what I imagined was the conventional rhetoric around the program. The move from what was perhaps private joy in missing school becomes a utilitarian rationalization for the significance and recruitment of the program. Struggling to navigate the relationship of the co-op program to school, Latoya quotes other students who believed that employment was unrelated to school success. Although I believe Latoya agreed with this observation, she seemed to want to make sure I knew that the co-op program demanded academic achievement. The school helped the students obtain employment, but administrators made sure participants completed all their necessary requirements before they started working.

Participation in the co-op program necessitated that students meet certain requirements. Her specification moved to legitimate the school’s authority over the co-op program and her participation in it. Even though I knew already that not only did Latoya go to school, but that she graduated with her high school diploma, she was careful about providing context for me. I am not sure if this logic of making money without going to school was related to the days when she felt ambivalent about finishing her senior year.

In telling me her story of school, she mentioned her first son only when she spoke of her high school graduation and wanting to go to UNC-Charlotte. Even though she gave birth to her son during the summer between her junior and senior year, she worked backwards chronologically from graduation to her son’s birth. “My first child was 10 months when I graduated. I met all my

requirements. ‘You’re going to graduate.’ But you know when I had my son, it just made me work harder.”

After claiming her graduation, she shared with me that there were days when she did not want to go to school. On those days she explained, when she was not motivated, her fear of disappointing her son became a reason for her to finish. Latoya informed me that although many of the girls whom boys impregnated in high school chose to leave school and study for their GED, the GED was not an option for her. She knew that the status of a high school diploma on the job market was higher than the status of a GED, and so she worked hard to stay in school and graduate.

A lot of people get pregnant and say, “Oh, OK, I’m just going to drop out of school and go get a GED.” No. That’s when GEDs weren’t, didn’t amount to diplomas, and I figured, “OK. I need to get a diploma so that I can, what am I going to tell my child if I drop out of school?” That was my motivation. The days that I didn’t want to go to school, that was my motivation to go to school. I mean he was my motivation.

Not wanting to disappoint her son was the fear that she projected onto her son as motivation.

Living with her grandmother, working at the Piggly Wiggly, and raising her son, Latoya planned to work and save up some money during the year after graduation. “And then I got pregnant with my second child.” Both softly and quickly she revealed, “I got pregnant, had my daughter, and then I committed a crime.”

In prison, Latoya took an upholstery course, introduction to algebra, and started a sociology course. She loved both her upholstery and her algebra class. She described each class as “a stepping stone along the way” to get to where she wants to be. “You gotta go through it to get to where you want to be. You know you got to just, I didn’t want to stay in math, but I’m going to need it in the future, so it’s something I have to take to get out the way, just helping me get to where I want to be.” She credited her teacher in algebra for making the class bearable. “I love the teacher, she broke things down.” She enjoyed the smaller classes, too, explaining that with fewer students, “you get more attention.” Interest and support from the teacher, decipherable lectures, and small classes made school in prison something Latoya enjoyed. Participating in vocational and academic programs kept her

away from some of the dynamics that existed in the compound, too. Classes helped her focus while in prison, and school provided an escape from the rest of the compound.

It's a lot of women here. A lot of us aren't used to dealing with women. Some people did and a lot didn't grow up around a lot of women. Women nick and they pick and constantly gossiping. If you're in school at least for the hours, two hours in school you don't have to deal with it. If you take classes then when you go back to the dorm, you have something to concentrate on. Go to school. Go back to the dorms. Study. Wake up. It's a new day.

Latoya was not enrolled in a fall course because of her December release date, but instead had been working ground maintenance, picking up trash. "I work on the property yard, picking up trash ... get paid nothing. But hey, if I can do it here I can do it at home. I get paid 70 cents here a day. I can work minimum wage." When I asked her about her transition home, she told me she felt both scared and ready. "I've been here four-and-half years. I missed Thanksgiving, but I'll be home for Christmas. I have four babies at home. ... it's been hard. It's over. I made it. I'm ready." Latoya said that she was "a little nervous" and "scared" but that she was ready to "take the good with the bad" and face new things. She wants to get out and go to school, and work as a nail tech as she begins classes at a local community college. Interested in eventually completing the program the college has in nursing, she hopes to find a way to volunteer at a doctor's office, nursing home, or hospital in order to get some experience. "I graduated in 2000, so it's been six years, but I'm ready, because I want to do nursing."

Although Latoya was clear that her family would support her transition home emotionally and financially, she said she had to find a job. She told me that if she could pick up trash in prison that she was not above flipping burgers. "There's things I don't want to do. I don't want to flip burgers, but I will, because I need the income. On probation I have to get a job. I'm not too good to work at McDonald's. I picked up trash here." Latoya knows that her family and especially her sister will help her succeed. "Everyone's motivated," she told me. "(They don't want to see) me come back to prison."

For now Latoya's plans are to move to the city where her sister lives. Her sister is a student at the local university and although the youngest, Latoya explained, "she'll keep me on the right track." She assured me and perhaps more decidedly herself. As we closed our interview Latoya talked about

returning home and her children. Her thoughts were on Christmas and her son's and her daughter's birthdays in May. When I asked if I might follow up with her in a few months, she said, "Yes, and I plan on being in school."

A Story of Warning

Ladybug's experiences with Ms. Saunders and Ms. Cullins in first grade provided her with an early contrast in school and a frame of reference for sympathetic teachers and unsympathetic teachers and school systems. The decision Ms. Cullins and her parents made for her to repeat first grade becomes the point of origin in her educational history. She hated school from that point forward and highlights only those moments with teachers and principals that surprised her. Examples are her teacher at Snow Field who both helped her with her work and listened to her when she had a bad day, and her principal, who understanding her motivation behind her rule-breaking let her work in the office when she finished all of her schoolwork in ISS. Although these experiences connote empathy from the teacher at Snow Field and creativity from her principal, Ladybug maintains her evaluation of school as a space of resentment in her overarching theme. In doing so she provides contrast for the ambitious schedule and personal expectations she holds for herself in prison now.

Ladybug's story is a story of redemption, but also of warning. She hopes universally that one person might benefit from her experiences, but she notes in particular that her incarceration has affected her nephew. Although grace frames her experience of incarceration, her story pivots on the idea that beginning with her nephew she may prevent others from approaching with school indifferently and life naively. Ladybug described her story as one that sets an example. She cautioned her nephew about feelings of indifference in school and hopes that her life experiences may shield someone else from the path she took. She named her disinterest in school for her nephew and follows her disclosure with a caution for him about the unpredictability of life. She made meaning of her story through the example she embodied for her nephew and others she may help.

The college education she is receiving through Shaw University now is something she had wanted to pursue seven years earlier. She values the opportunity to go to school both in contrast to her desire to go before she had her son and in contrast to the feelings she had about school growing up. Her meaning is coupled with her redemption through the warning she articulated to her nephew and the “worth” she hoped her story carries. She positions herself and her story as a warning to others and makes meaning from this move by inviting the imaginary other to consider a different orientation to school and life. As such I name her telling, although imbued with grace, as a story of warning.

A Story of Relational Identity

Although Latoya’s story reflects chronicled events, more than the inner dynamics of events, relationships stir the events themselves. Her story is a story of her roles in familial relationships. She defines the movements in her life by the social actors in her family, including eventually her own son. She makes meaning from these relational experiences (Gilligan, 1982). References to family ground the constant transitions of experience: her Dad, whom she misses whenever she is in North Carolina; her cousins with whom she went to school and spent time when she lived in New Jersey; her sister who traveled back and forth with her and with whom she will live when she is released; and her grandmother who is raising her four children in Laurinburg. These family members anchor her highly mobile childhood in a way that teachers and school administrators do not. Her experiences in school are told through her relationships with her family. Her Dad and grandmother taught her many school subjects before she began elementary school. Her older cousins shared with her what she could expect. The highly structured discipline of her school in North Carolina changes her because of her relationship to her grandmother. The school’s policies affected her grandmother, and so Latoya complied with the expectations of her teachers and school administrators. Her compliance in school is justified in the name of her grandmother and keeping her from entanglement in school policies. She attributes her determination to finish high school to her son. Only in prison does Latoya rationalize

her own compliance in the name of her need for self-discipline. She does not frame her behavior in relation to anyone else but to herself.

Although I have interpreted the stories of Ladybug and Latoya differently, there are shared elements in the stories. Both women as girls name the importance of a high school diploma in comparison to a GED. Ladybug and Latoya pursued successfully the status of the high school diploma. Ladybug graduated from Snow Field with honors, and Latoya graduated from Highland High while raising her son. Latoya's identity as mother motivates her to achieve her goal for her son. Similarly, Ladybug's identity as mother inspires her to pursue all the academic programs available to her in prison. She explained that she is preparing herself for her transition home and the job market, so that she can support her son.

In the interviews with these women, unlike the interviews with the men, neither Ladybug nor Latoya mentioned any illegal activity. They maneuver away from the spaces in their lives in which an offense occurred. As I am not allowed to ask about any criminal activity, I do not know if this move is one of protection of identity or from judgment. In comparison to the men, all of whom mention at some point their respective illegal activities, the women have not incorporated the moments of their illegal actions into their stories. With the exception of Shoran, the men contextualize their illegal work or offense within a framework of projected future success, and therefore, manage potential judgment from me and other audiences. Adjudicating the moments of their own crimes is a way to control judgment and perhaps indirectly their institutionalized identity. I argue that because the women do not make these moves, but do position themselves within their own framework of projected future success, that they may be managing their identities, i.e. stigmatization, in their omitted references to illegal activity.

CHAPTER 7

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Huts on Fire ~ My Story, Part VIII

One more story – one I dreamt.

*A dream: The huts, open on three sides with a strong fourth wall, housed the schools and the gathering spaces in the village. There were two that were identical, and as I stood in one I watched young children listen to their teacher in the other. Sitting on the soft, dirt floor, a class of about nine children listened carefully to their soft-spoken teacher. As I watched, I noticed that as she spoke the children leaned toward her. And when the children spoke she leaned toward them sitting on the very edge of her chair. The sun turned the afternoon sky cobalt blue, and I was lost in the light when I heard the hard canter of approaching horses. From the south, uniformed British soldiers flew into the village and halted between the two huts. Dismounting quickly they set fire to the school, igniting the perimeter in a ring of fire. Guarding their destruction, they stood between the two huts and began to survey the other buildings in the village. I watched hidden behind them, the thatched roof of the school catch and burn. Flames, red, white and climbing went up fast. The children and their teacher turned to see their open walls rise with fire. Surrounded by the imperial soldiers, and ascending flames, they sat. The school burned hot and fast, and I made myself look away, as the children began to burn. The men moved toward the hut in which I hid, and I dove into the straw wall and covered myself alongside village children hiding in the straw. I waited. The soldiers lit the far corners of the building as I watched the embers float from above me to the hot ground and the base of the straw hut burn. *I climbed back through the outside wall with the other children. Soldiers stood between the huts watching for life to run from the village. We had had to wait until they lit the schools on fire*

before we could escape through the flames. Flames engulfed the other school and I saw the teacher stand, her arms raised to the sky before I had to look away again. The children were gone, and she burned. Black smoke and the blue afternoon sky followed us as we fled to the closest town, Topelo. The children and I ran hard around the base of a rising hill and without looking back again away from the dark billowing clouds and death.

(February, 2007)

Identities and Power

In a time where exciting ideas about identity emerge: postmodern, poststructuralist, post-colonial, post-critical, anti-essentialist identities that are shifting, fluid, contextual, splintered, fragmented, and performed, in a world where political scientist and anthropologist, James Scott (1992) discusses public and hidden transcripts, and socio-linguist, James Gee (1999) discusses bi-discursality, how is it that my dream reflects only the master narrative, of total silencing, the brutal and lethal totality of colonialism? Are the children with whom I escaped and am I the shards of shattered community? Humanity? Hope? Running for our lives to Topelo?

How may my words and work about children now men and women, remain open and moveable? Not stagnant and rigid. How might I write about their journeys that complicates the stereotypes that reinforce our master narratives?

In this chapter I explore identity in the students' stories and argue that understandings of identity should be represented in ways that honor the complexity and the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994; 1991) of identity.

Identity in School

The way Kevenson and True shared their desire for attention implicates those who shared their spaces in the classroom. They wanted to connect to someone else, to invite their attention as a part of their identity. One might designate this part as an absent element or an active element in

identity. As these students shared, the consequences of desiring attention affected the construction of positive, negative, and negotiated spaces.

For Kevenson, who saw his identity as a class clown as something that he deployed both in the classroom and on the street, joking around provided him with moments in which he felt significant.

Being a class clown it's a lifestyle that you carry out into the street. You really get it from the street almost, but it gets developed more in a class environment when you're of course in there with different types of people and different backgrounds, and then it's like your shining time, like American Idol.

Kevenson and I laughed when he used American Idol as an analogy. "That's how it is, like you become, you on stage, you like that. You know cause everybody's, especially men, we like to be on the spot, be the head honcho, you want to say." Kevenson explained how much this shining time meant to him in school.

True shared a similar description about his desire to receive attention. When we talked about school, True had trouble making sense of his detentions and in school suspensions but eventually, linked his behavior for his desire for attention.

Now that you know, I look back on it, and I'm older, mature: "Now why was you doing that?" You know, "Why would you even?" I guess, I don't even, why I would, I probably wanted attention. I probably wanted attention so, you know, probably what it was, that was what it was: attention. It was what it was. Attention. That's why a lot of adults they should really give their kids attention. That's good, so they won't be looking for it somewhere else get in trouble in school.

I asked True if he felt that he received the attention he needed from his parents. Less shy than Kevenson, and with a chuckle he told me: "I'm an attention HOG." We laughed together at his honesty and his spirit.

I'm an attention hog. I still am. I love to have attention. I don't think enough wouldn't ever be enough. I love attention. I love to perform. I love to perform. I be rappin' and stuff now. I love I love performing it's just in me. I like attention, not that it, I don't feel incomplete without it you know what I'm saying? I can walk and just be. But that's how I enjoy myself and to watch other people enjoy themselves. I like to see people smile and laugh.

Much like Al's desire to give people hope, True desired to make people laugh and in turn received the attention he wanted. "I can just be me and be friendly and just you know get somebody people's mind off their struggles or downs. And you know for a brief moment, it makes me feel like, it honestly makes me feel good, so I like doing that something I enjoy doing."

For Kevenson and True attention is attached to their desire to feel significant as ultimately they performed as "class clowns" and later as entertainers. For Michael, Travreso and Latoya attention was something that was attached to their identities as students or to their student experiences in the classroom. The identity teachers constructed for Michael and that he adopted early in first grade was that he was a "dumb" child that did not deserve attention. However, Michael's experience with his teacher and subsequently his identity as a student shifted after he broke his arm during the school year.

What stands out to me, when I started school in first grade, I actually made bad grades Ds, some Cs. During the course of first grade, I fell over the fence and broke my arm. I started getting so much attention from the teacher. When I made the bad grade, they didn't pay much attention. "He don't care. He's dumb."

With his arm in a cast, Michael could not write, and the teacher found herself forced to spend more time with him to ease his difficulty in trying to complete assignments. Michael remembered that when she helped him, and he completed his work successfully, that she praised him.

She would have to spend more time with me. Couldn't write with my arm. (She spent) more time around me. "That's good, Michael, very good, very good." I kept on wanting to impress the teacher. I wasn't class clown. I was in TAG. I was silly. From that point on someone turned a switch on ... Education before that (you were) just part of the group, you don't get singled out, don't get individual treatment as long as you're getting along. I got more encouragement, positive reinforcement. "Let me try to do this one right."

Michael believed that the lower grades he received were due to his own laziness. He noted that when his grades improved, he received positive reinforcement and attention at home, too. "I think at first, I was just lazy. Have a reason to apply yourself now. Went home. Mom: "Whoa this is great!"

Although he attributed the attention he received to the new dynamics between his teacher and himself, he did not attribute his previously low grades to the unsupportive dynamic that existed between the teacher and himself before he broke his arm.

Both Travreso and Latoya noted the lack of individual attention they experienced in school. When Travreso moved from Mexico to the United States he explained that his stepbrothers were the ones who taught him English.

My brothers, they (are) half white, half Mexican. They was teaching me everything I needed to know. I told them I don't want to change my accent; just tell me what I need to know: the basics, and I'll take it from there. One day it was just like, you know, ain't no more Spanish in the house. English for like a week straight. ... We got together, psht, they teach me, then I start hanging around with my other cousins in the streets. They didn't speak nothing but English. And there was Mexicans, too, but everybody was speaking English. Chicanos. And that's how you get used to it.

Although the week of only English at home was difficult, learning from his stepbrothers and his older cousins, Travreso told me was much easier than learning English in school. He explained:

In the classroom, you know, the teacher is always going to be like, "Oh, hold on. She need help first." You know what I'm saying? But then when you be with your homies, "Hey, what does this mean?" or "What should I say?" I'm saying, he's going to give all the attention to you.

Both Travreso and Latoya acknowledged their desire for attention as a student. They astutely observed the lack of time teachers had to spend with everyone individually.

Latoya shared that education was harder growing up, than in prison. "It was more people, more people, one teacher, so you can't get the attention you need. Not that you didn't get any, but you can't, it's like you have a question, you have to wait until the next person ask their question, because they have their hand up before you." The small classes at NCCIW provided more opportunity for teacher student interaction, which Latoya believes made a real difference. "Here the classes are a little smaller. You may have ten to twelve people here, so you get more attention."

The desire for attention is a part of student identities, also a part of a larger school identity or identities that are performed and represented at school. Understanding and accepting limited personal contact with the teacher can be difficult for children. The transition from dependent home relationships to independent classroom activities (Dreeben, 2002) is challenging for children. The transition for Latoya left indelible marks her school experiences.

For Shoran, who at an early age enjoyed peer support and attention, the fear of losing his identity at school among his peer group threatened his sense of self and worth among his peers and particularly with Ashley. When his mother started “struggling” he explained that his previously “fresh” wardrobe disappeared. He framed his loss of material status as the potential loss of his relationship with his first real girlfriend. He deployed the classic fairytale, *Cinderella*, as a way to make meaning from his thoughts and experiences at the time. Splintering the identities (Mbembe, 2001) in the tale and the traditional feminist interpretation and critique, Shoran reframed the ways in which audiences typically connect to Cinderella and Prince Charming.

I was a smart little boy you know what I mean. I always play everything with the reverse psychology. I know if (my girlfriend's) friends want me then she gonna want me, and she's gonna stay wantin' me cause she don't want them to have me. So in order to do that just looks ain't going to get it. You gotta have something to go along with them looks. Cause you can't, that's just like Cinderella. Cinderella was po' and raggedy dang thing, pretty as the devil. PRETTY. No more beautiful thing walkin' but then nobody noticed her until her fairy godmother came through and laced her up. And they're like, “Good God Almighty, look at her. Feel me? So this is the same for me. I was the Prince Charming, but I couldn't be in rags and be any Prince Charming. They wouldn't notice me as Prince Charming.

Shoran's identity was fragmented across gender roles and collapsed gender and class boundaries in the tale. This splintering of identities is found in research on subjectivities in post-colonies. Achille Mbembe (2001), among others, argued that the subject in post-colony learns “to manage not just a single identity, but several—flexible enough to negotiate when necessary” (p. 104). Here, Shoran is both Cinderella and Prince Charming. Although traditionally, the fairy tale works as a tale of status mobility through marriage for women when the Godmother transforms the cinder-covered maid in to a bride-to-be—an appropriate marriageable match for the man who is the prince—in Shoran's story, he identified with Cinderella as a maid. The manifestation of class issues for Shoran occurred in his sudden lack of material status and prevented him from identifying with the Prince in the tale.

However, Shoran's past experience as a leader of his social peers made him Prince Charming. In order to navigate this tension, Shoran retold the story of Cinderella where he was the cinder-covered maid who became his own fairy Godmother. He laced himself up so that others would name him as the Prince Charming that he knew himself to be.

Class and perhaps race prevents him from identifying with Prince Charming as the wealthy, white, male monarch. Shoran problematized the gendered assumptions about status by embracing both roles. He challenged relationships of class as well when he reframed *Cinderella*. He complicated his own identity in the process and traditional representations and critiques of the tale. Further, he offered readers a way to revisit the story through the eyes of a boy with a frame of reference that embraces the fluidity of a splintered identity. Shoran's re-telling provides insight into the ways in which a boy might move through the story when he is poor and without capital.

Identity in Prison

Although class dominated Shoran's experiences in middle school, the intersections of his identity as a Black male with felonies on his record foregrounds his interpretations of experience in prison. Black masculinity and thug representations were frames he deployed to make meaning of his identity in prison, and his identity post-release. One of the reasons he told me that he appreciated his sociology teacher was the openness Dr. Martin exhibited with the students.

He didn't come here and be so protective of himself, like you know like he was around a whole bunch of killers and drug dealers or stuff like that, which you really is. He made himself comfortable, and making himself comfortable made me a whole lot more comfortable, you know? And he didn't look at us as no animal or no inmate, like most of these people do. Pshhh. The c.o.s, and, I mean, most everybody that come around.

Dr. Martin provided contrast to the ways in which others typically identified Shoran and those with whom he is incarcerated. He explained that c.o.s and visitors, like myself, see the men as only "inmates" as "animals." He shared that visitors and c.o.s were uncomfortable. They were "protective like they're trying to protect themselves from me, uncomfortable around me. You know if somebody's uncomfortable around me, I'm uncomfortable around them, you know? So, he didn't act like that though." Shoran found that he enjoyed the sociology course he took with Dr. Martin. He shared that Dr. Martin engaged the students and generated discussions around class material. "He got a good conversation going. I could comprehend to him. Even though he was like ah head professor you know, I could understand him a lot."

In my conversations with Travreso, race and identity were ever present. My first interview with him occurred on April 11, 2006, the day after the National Day of Action for Immigrant Justice, which included marches and protests in over 100 U.S. cities. Travreso talked easily about his opinions of U.S. versus Mexican culture, his disdain for U.S. elitism, and his rigid perspective on race relations.

Travreso struggled to understand with all the privilege, and power, and wealth, white people in the U.S. have, why they could not treat others with dignity. He did not understand why white people failed to cultivate a culture of grace, and he believed that racism would always exist. He explained that white people in the U.S. discriminate against Mexicans by calling them “wetbacks.” He observed that white people have money but do not treat others well. Grappling with the differences across Mexican and U.S. culture, he shared, “You rarely see people with cars in Mexico, but we try to treat you right. Then we come here (U.S.) it’s all different. When Mexicans come here, it’s not the same. Americans don’t like Mexicans. White people want all the power.”

Travreso legitimated his observations by telling me that he learned these differences from books he has read and in school from a special history teacher. He told me that he would like to see the U.S. open the border and treat both Mexicans and Blacks with respect. He believed if more people in Mexico understood population projections about race, that then they would understand the hesitancy on the part of the U.S. to acknowledge its history with land in the southern and western part of the country. “If people from Mexico have a book and start reading they’ll have knowledge to know why (whites) and do this. They see the Mexican population growing, projected in a hundred years more than 40% Mexicans: half-white, half-Mexicans. That’s why they don’t want the Mexicans to come over here, open up the border.”

Travreso spoke with candor about the segregation he sees in prison and in society. He does not believe that racism will ever change. He coupled also his perceptions about the rigidity of race relations with his understanding of power. He noted that the privilege whites wield in the United States was related to their majority status. He marveled at the differences he saw between white men

in prison and white men in the real world. Giving me a scenario where he positioned white men in the minority in prison, he explained that they would acquiesce automatically to a request of a Black man.

Black people is going to go for the white people. “Oh yeah, I want you to buy my hygiene. I want you to buy me honey-buns. I want you to buy me cigarettes.” They will not mess with the Mexicans. I’m not saying they will never do that. No, it has happened, but they know the consequences in prison. So, the white man is always going to look at the Black person out in the world like, “Yeah, they ain’t worth it. They good for nothing.” The same with the Mexican. “Yeah, illegals, get them out of here.” Then once they come to prison, then why they be so scared? Why they so scared when they so powerful out in the world? Why you want to change, you know what I’m saying? Why you want to be scared when you’re on top of everybody? Why you want to give your i.d. card to somebody else so he can click and get whatever he wants with your money? Yeah. They know they going to get smacked if they try and do something stupid.

This domination of Black men over white men does not exist out in the world. Travreso used the example of the ubiquitous homeowner who hires a person of color to work his yard to prove this point.

But out in the world what happens? (Mexicans) cleanin’ my yard. So (whites) think they can do whatever they want to do. All they have to do is call 911. “He trying to break in.” Who are they going to believe the white man or the Black man? Or who are they going to believe the white man or the Mexican? Always white man. That’s real life. I grew up in a white neighborhood; I see it out in the world; I see it in prison.

For Shoran who felt targeted by the ways in which c.o.s and others stigmatized people in prison, the intersections of race, gender, (Crenshaw, 1994; 1991) and the status of felony frame his understanding of identity. For although he shared with me that he identified as Puerto Rican, Indian, and Black, he observed that society would see him only as a Black man, and on the job market, as a Black male with felonies on his record.

My mama always used to tell me, when I was young, I got two strikes against me: one, I’m a male, that’s the first strike; the second strike, I’m a Black male. But she never told me about a third strike. She just said I got two strikes against me ... but I see now that the third strike is I’m a male, a Black male, and a convicted felon ... Cause I mean I ain’t even all the way Black. I’m Puerto Rican, Indian, and Black, but you know Dr. Martin our sociology teacher used to teach ... the one drop theory ... you got one drop of blood, got one drop Black blood in you, you’re Black.

Shoran knows that others will name him as a Black male, and although he embraces the diversity of his identity in naming for himself that he is Puerto Rican and Indian as well, he understands the historical and cultural significance of the script that is written for him to embody. Although he told

me he thought he probably failed his sociology class, he succinctly explained the self-fulfilling prophecy to me and the way the concept is connected to systemic disenfranchisement in poor, Black communities.

Dr. Martin taught us about um self-fulfilling prophecy. They stereotype a certain person, and the self-fulfilling prophecy is like, boom, they take it. Like all Black people are going end up with poor education, and working in low paying jobs, and low self-esteem, and all that. But then they do the things that make it that way, like, put them in poor housing, and ... about 90% of one parent home involve Black people, you know what I mean? Straight mom, nobody else, daddy most of the time, he probably locked up away or just gone, things like that. Ma dukes can't do it all.

Shoran related these issues to his own story of loss. Exasperated, he stated, “Man you know if society didn't make it like that, would it be like that?”

In *Shattering Silence*, Aretxaga (1997) argued that the interpretations of narrative provided opportunities to represent social relations and power. She asserted that without narratives people could not interrogate power within social relations—particularly forms of oppression.

As Shoran and Travreso addressed race both politically and individually, they cited their own lived experiences as raced men. They theorized about the power of racism that they had witnessed, too. Although Travreso was aware of the brutal history of the United States, the overt racism he saw in the U.S. challenged his own sense of human decency. He could not explain ethically, morally, why whites in the U.S. treat people of color the way they do. He intellectualized racism as a part of white people's need to maintain power in the U.S.

Shoran worried about the likelihood of his own success post-release in legal work that provides a living wage, but he frames his understanding of racism with the self-fulfilling prophecy. He cited the influences of structural inequities and the compounding effects of diminished or forbidden access to stable, legal work and educational opportunities. His own future struggle for legal work is embedded in larger systemic issues. He applied the self-fulfilling prophecy as a way to make meaning of his own story.

Endowing Narrative with Meaning

In my later interviews I began asking the students about the experience of interviewing itself, and I shared my narrative analyses. To my relief, each student shared that he or she felt that the story I re-represented back to him or her captured what he or she had intended to share.

For Al this moment of exchange generated reflection about his overall story. In a space where his identity as an inmate was ever present, telling his story and talking about the story told, allowed him to reflect on other parts of himself. He shared: “I never looked at myself the way that I did after I talked to you. My little brother looks up to me. I did good in school. I played sports. I was in the popular crowd. I did that. Now, I’m in here.” Although Al returned to the present and his incarceration, his storytelling and my subsequent representation of his story allowed him to reframe his past in a different way. He spoke of his successes in high school with pride and realized that there were things of which he ought to be proud. He is more than the illegal work that led him to prison and his story is more than the domination of his present identity.

For Michael the moments of telling his story yielded an opportunity that allowed him to make new connections about his high school experiences. Looking at patterns in his behavior, he reframed his understanding of his actions.

Through elementary school, through middle school, my best friends played sports. Sports guys, good guys, made good grades in high school. I veered off to guys who didn’t get good grades, skipped. My grades began to drop down, my attendance in school. In baseball guys began to catch up to me. When I played sports, I (had) natural talent, (but) I became one of the average guys.

Michael saw the change of his “good grades” into lower grades mirror the change he experienced on the baseball field from, stand-out athlete to just another team player. Whereas he cited a change in peer group in relation to his drop in grades, he noted that his teammates’ hard work and his lack of work allowed them “to catch up” to his natural ability. He reflected: “All my teachers, coaches said: Stop hanging around doing nothing.’ But I was not concerned about it. I decided not to heed the advice. I’ve never paralleled it until now. I’ve never thought about it.” In the telling of his story about school, he was able to theorize about the changes he experienced in a new way.

Naming Significance

When I began to think about this project as my dissertation and the history I had with other stories from the evaluation work I did, I realized that although I felt the experiences the students shared were important, I was not sure they did. I believe their stories are powerful and have implications for education. In one of my interviews I shared: “One of reasons I do this research is that I want to make schools a better place.” I wanted to make sure I asked these students explicitly if they thought their stories were important. For if they did not care, I do not think I could have engaged in this work. They have more stories to share about their life, their education, in the world and in prison, than what I have represented here, but had they not felt value in my questions, or my interest,³¹ this project would have become merely clinical.

Although the interviews and the process of collaboration over the narrative analyses was never as balanced as I would have liked, I trust that what these students shared with me was that which they wanted to share. The students told me they spoke to me, because they wanted to help me. However, I do not believe the work represented here is the product of un-negotiated space and disclosure. Nor do I believe that I am the sole recipient of their help. They speak to me but also through me to audiences that are outside the walls of their prisons and inside the walls of childhood, poverty, and education. They articulated their desire to help children and adolescents consider another path. They shared their stories with a desire to help.

Gifts of Narrative

Al told me that even if I could not gain access to see him at the prison to which he had applied for a transfer, that I could write him and that he would write back, because he wanted to help. “I feel like it’s something important to you, so it’s kinda important to me, too; helping people out,

³¹ Along with my flawed interpretations, there are moments in my interviews where I clumsily backpedal, where a violation of one of my expectations occurs. For example, when Latoya, who looks as if she is not a day over 16, tells me she has four children, and I show shock and disbelief. Remembering she must be at least 18 for me with be talking to her, quickly I do the math and am ashamed that I have projected my assumptions and gendered, white middle class expectations about age and child bearing on to her. The feminist methodologist in me wants to make each interview a space that produces collaboration as often as possible, but I will never circumvent my own subjectivities and the prejudices within them.

that's kinda in my nature. But if they don't allow you to come over there, you can write a letter and ask questions if you want to. I will write you answers back ... I like to help you out."

In our last interview when I asked Al how he would describe the interviews we had been having, he explained that when he spoke with me, he positioned himself as a speaker for his own story but also for the journeys other inmates.

I'm trying to give you insight from how we look at life from in here. I've been through a lot of experiences status wise. I know what Black people, Mexican, Whites trying to express, some of their feelings as well. I know some smart people in here and artists. Some people in here speak two or three different languages. I thought (people) in here (were) dumb. That they just didn't know what they were doing."

Al's commitment to honor his culture and his identity as Chicano is important. In his relationships with others in prison, Al extends his understanding about the importance of race, identity, and institutionalized stigma. When he spoke to me he said he was speaking on behalf of others he knew as well.

Wanting to "help somebody else" is the reason True said he shared his story with me. He hoped that his story might keep someone else from following his path.

Yes, (my story) is important. It's important that you're asking the questions. I know, I realize that my story's important. You guys got some pretty good questions, really good questions, you know, because I mean maybe you never know who it could help and that's why I'm here. That's why I'm here. Maybe that whatever it is you write, whatever it is I say, could maybe help somebody else. That's why I talk to you when you come and talk. Hopefully, it's gonna benefit somebody if that's one person, somebody, hopefully, they won't come this way. Or you know they're here for a small amount of time, and they don't want to come back, and they can see that education is needed ... when they're young.

True has faith that readers of "whatever it is I write" will respond positively to his story. He hopes that his story may "benefit somebody."

In her interviews Ladybug echoed what True said. In fact, incarceration for Ladybug is an experience worth enduring if she can serve as a warning to someone else. With grace and humility she explained: "If I can help somebody else, prevent them from making the same mistakes I did, you know, then it will be worth it."

Not everyone framed the interviews in this way. Although Travreso thought that “everybody, especially children” should hear his story, when I asked him how he would describe to a friend the time he spent talking with me, he said that he wouldn’t. When I asked him what he would say if a friend asked him what we talked about he said, “nothing ... people don’t need to know your business, you know what I’m saying?” When I followed with another question, intent on eliciting his description of our interviews, he said he would say: “I spoke with a pretty lady.” Shifting uncomfortably in my chair, I asked, “Would you tell them we talked about education?” Travreso shook his head no.

My Commitments

Near the end of my interviews, I asked the students if there was something they wanted to share that I didn’t ask about and if they had any questions for me. My most frequent question was, “What is college like?” and often more specifically, “What is it like at UNC?” Usually if the topic of UNC men’s basketball had not been a part of the conversation already, it would become so. Many times I was asked also about admissions policies for students with records of incarceration. These questions and conversations about college and admissions led me to believe that the students positioned me as and as an “authority” on policies related to schooling and as a “student”—located specifically at *the* state university with a legendary men’s basketball team.

In the imminent loss of my status as student, my care is what just may be the connection that transcends shifts in my identity. Only Michael in his first interview with me named what he saw as my care about this work. He said, “so, you really have a concern about what’s going on.” I did not re-read his comment until seven months after he made it. Although a small statement of only ten words, it returned me to my commitments in the project.

I am indebted to Shoran particularly, whose story I named, “A Story of the Hustle.” He helped me frame the experience of this research in the larger context of identity, my own story, and ideas of social justice. In my last interview with him, after I shared my: “I want schools to be better places” bit, Shoran responded with: “Yeah. It makes plenty of sense. But. Alright, this is to help you

pass right?” Naming my benefit in the project, Shoran returned me to my position and status in higher education. I felt busted. I stumbled, “Well yeah, this is sort of for my final paper.” And he asked, “You get graded on this?” I said: “Yeah, (they’ll) either say ‘OK, good work’ or ‘Go back and keep writing.’” Shoran’s question about my commitment to this work followed. “So when you do graduate are you going to be sitting up in the big office? Or are you going to be interactive, you know, active with the kids, things like that, are you going to be active?” I told Shoran that I helped young children in elementary school with reading and that I would continue to do that work as well as the work I was doing for this project of which he is a part. He thought about elementary school for a moment and then suggested that I work with middle school children, too. “It’s always adolescence when people start rebelling against their parents and stuff. That’s when you gotta take somebody to step in and try and talk to them. That’s when you get around the middle school era.” In reflection, I am both honored and challenged by Shoran’s suggestion, for I am as committed as ever to following the grouse tracks where they lead.

CHAPTER 8

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

... neither have I gone out and picked fights with authority. That's stupid. They're waiting for that. They invite it; it helps keep them powerful. Authority is to be ridiculed, outwitted and avoided.

- Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*

Following the Tracks

In this chapter I present a domain analysis of correctional officers (c.o.s), stories students have shared with me about their interactions with c.o.s, and Michel Foucault's work on the panopticon as a way to deepen understandings about the relationships of power the students describe in the narratives.

Over the years often students mention correctional officers in the flow of their thoughts and tangentially in response to a question I may ask about school, or teachers, or students in prison. Five years ago one of the questions on my interview protocol was "Did you feel safe in school?" and "Do you feel safe now?" Hitch's disclosure about correctional officers taking inmates down to receiving and beating them "for saying something smart" came at the conclusion our official interview in 2001. He leaned forward and said to me "write fast."

They take people down to receiving and beat them, five of them, for saying something smart; I've seen them spray people for no reason; take the mail, they'll cut your lock open to search; when you in school get in trouble, go to time-out, get in trouble (here) you go to the hole, go to segregation, no phone calls, no air – can't go outside – 30 days minimum. In school (they) give you a chance to explain what's going on. (Here) once a statement's made, I can have as many witnesses as I want, it's a no win situation. (They) show you that they're in control; (you) appeal from seg.

Although interested in power and in the relations of power (Foucault, 1995; 1990) between students and c.o.s, I decided with the limited time I had to interview each student, I ought to focus on the stories they shared about their education. So, when I returned to the prisons specifically for my dissertation research my interview protocol emphasized only educational experiences. I left behind any questions that might have generated discussions about the deployment of power, surveillance, and control in prison directly.

As Beth Hatt noted in my proposal defense, the highly structured nature of my protocol limited the kinds of stories I might be able to invite. My biggest challenge in the project in fact has been the relinquishment of control of the emerging content in the interviews. I struggled with my own impatience sometimes when I fail to connect what I heard as a tangential story to the wobbly skeleton of the student's educational narrative. At times I simply failed to follow the student in her or his story. Lost in my own thoughts and ambitions, anxious to produce a meaningful piece of work, I stepped away from the grouse's tracks and tried to match my expectations to the moment—only to find myself trudging through soft sand again and dimly remembering to surrender my need to frame the stories I witnessed in the discourses I have adopted in graduate school, and stumble back to the words that are spoken before me instead of the texts I hear in my head. The move is one of emotional and intellectual recovery when I can remember to make it. I am no longer fighting the shifting sands but breathing deeply, running along the tracks of the grouse.

One area that I have more practice in following than others is content about c.o.s. Repeatedly, students, both men and women, introduced c.o.s into their stories. Most of the incidents they recounted were negative and involved their own struggle for freedom over their own body, freedom of movement, freedom of the most mundane tasks, for example, brushing one's teeth when one wants. For some they crave, too, the freedom from an uneducated environment.

In this chapter I want to take some time to explore the domain of "c.o." – who they are, how they function, and what constitutes their relations with inmates—and to introduce Foucault's notion

of power and relationships. In doing so I will return to the students' stories that have been represented already in the script and narrative analysis. Although the c.o.s are men and women who work in the prisons, they are embodied symbols to the students. As such they use patterned references about the c.o.s to establish a relationship between their referents to the c.o.s and the c.o.s themselves. My domain analysis explores this relationship with the goal of revealing tacit knowledge, the locations of the speaker and his discourse, and his assumptions. Although there is never a one-to-one match between the domain and the referents, analysis provides an opportunity to explore cultural knowledge, (Coffey and Atkinson, 2000). As I navigate the culture around c.o.s, I change my referents where the students I interviewed and the general prison population is addressed. The use of "student" remains my point of reference for the men and women with whom I worked; however, when c.o.s splinter their subjectivity through relations of power and surveillance, I pivot my point of reference. I use in those contexts, "inmates" rather than "students" as a way to invite attention to issues of power and identity.

The Panopticon: Visible and Unverifiable

Jeremy Bentham, who designed the architectural plan of the panopticon in the 1800s, harnessed visibility in his plan as a way to trap the actions of the condemned. Bentham thought that power ought to be both visible and unverifiable. Visible because the inmate will have always before him c.o.s and master control towers; unverifiable because the c.o.s cannot be seen always by the inmates and because the windows of master control are tinted black. The panopticon's power exists in the combination of the "visible" and the unverifiable": "Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201).

According to Michel Foucault, who framed his ideas about the technology and deployment of power using Bentham's design theoretically, the panopticon induces

in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (1995, p. 201)

The panopticon is about the ordering of space, people, and dimensions of contact. The panopticon may be found in spaces that privilege the order of things within their functionality. The panopticon is

a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of center and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. (1995, p. 205)

Effects of the panopticon are therefore, experienced in spaces designed for the organization and distribution of bodies, whether patients, workers, school children, or inmates.

Symbols of Surveillance

The c.o.s are correctional officers, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. When the students use “c.o.” they may be referring to a correctional officer of any rank. Occasionally, a student will name a c.o. by his or her rank, as in Al’s story.

The c.o.s wear heather-navy uniforms, a short sleeve shirt and long pants, and in the winter black jackets and black baseball caps with gold shields. The c.o.’s are armed with mace and a “stick” – a billy club – on a black belt. The mace sits in a small black pouch with a snap on the right and the billy club on the left. A radio receiver sits in another pouch on the right and is connected to a mouth piece that is hooked to the uniform on the right shoulder above a shiny brass nametag. A ring of keys swings heavily from the belt and one can always hear the keys even if you cannot see the officer. All the keys are unmarked. Handcuffs hang near the keys or along the side of the belt. Sometimes the c.o.s keep their cuffs in a separate pouch on the back of their belt next to a pouch for gloves. Most of the c.o.s I have seen are Black women and Black men of medium build. Some of the men and women have young, smooth faces, and others have grayed hair and sideburns, and a slower walk. Captains who are supervisors wear white shirts with black and gold bars, and the few I have seen are white.

Occasionally, I see correctional officers who are visibly overweight. There are smoking areas designated for the c.o.s near the yard and outside the administration building. In the late afternoon during count, or when I leave the school after teaching at night, I have seen c.o.s smoke.

The c.o.s are stationed in the gate house at the prison entrance, they are in the guard towers with rifles, and in the literal panopticon of master control inside the prison at the entrance, at the school, and in each pod (housing unit), HCON, and segregation. They are stationed within eyesight always, at the bottom of stairs, at the end of corridors, in front of elevators, at points along the yard, in the school, and throughout segregation. They are often moving through the lobby leading four or five inmates who are headed outside to work the grounds. The c.o.s follow codes. For example, “Code Yellow” is a code that is announced across prison grounds and throughout the buildings to designate a fight. Code Yellow requires an immediate response from all available c.o.s.

The relationship between the c.o.s and the inmates is a relationship of contact. The contact is negative and primed for confrontation, violence, and abuse. The c.o.s are authoritative, patronizing, antagonistic, and violent verbally and physically. Many are abusive. The c.o.s command inmates to action and document all failures to comply, along with other infractions with a write up. The c.o.s send inmates to segregation with their write ups.

The c.o.s demonstrate to inmates that they are in control. They demand that the inmates line up against the building walls or along the fences in a single-file line before granting permission for movement from one building to the next or from one the dining hall to the yard. To the students, the c.o.s “power trip;” try to impress their superiors; “punish everybody;” “beat,” “spray,” “shout,” and “criticize;” They “start stuff;” make racist comments; take mail; open locks; and “treat (inmates) like children.” The c.o.s “thrive off of beat(ing) someone down.” The c.o.s tell the students they will see them back in prison.

The c.o.s are in positions of uncontested authority. They are condescending and critical. Both the strategy that the students describe the c.o.s use to provoke inmates into a confrontation, and the

total physical control they wield over the bodies of the men and women who are incarcerated makes c.o.s analogous to abusive parents.

In the last five years I have seen the c.o.s friendly only in the gate house. There they speak with prison personnel and other c.o.s as they arrive and leave the prison. On one occasion as I waited to enter the prison, I heard a c.o. laugh in barks at something a woman who worked in the school said to him over the phone. In all my interviews with educational directors for the evaluation work I completed on the program, only one mentioned the c.o.s., and he shared that he wished the same c.o. could work in the school during evening classes. He explained that the current recruitment for the shift is “first available.” He would like consistency and a night school custody officer who could “identify and relate” to the students. The evenings I taught at this particular facility, I introduced myself to the c.o. on duty in the school. I extended my hand and said my name. Only once did a c.o. take it without pause and introduce himself cheerfully in return. He followed his introduction with the advice: “You need to treat them like children.” More frequently, the c.o.s I met in the school appeared puzzled by my introduction, and during breaks and after class used any opportunity possible to assert their authority over the students. Most assume I have never been in a prison before and speak to me as if I am new to work with inmates. Condescending and perhaps fearful themselves of the conditions under which they work, they imply that I ought to suspect and fear the behavior of all the students I teach.

Although the c.o.s are within eyesight in the prison always, they appear in the students’ stories around issues and access to food, often on the way to and from the dining hall or canteen. The regimentation of consumption is linked to the regimentation of movement and the body. Al, Latoya, and Travreso all shared encounters with c.o.s around access to food. Although these incidents are around meal time, they occur throughout the day.

As Scene 2 in Act II in the script from Chapter 3 represented, Travreso and True had encounters with c.o.s who made ignorant remarks or decisions. For Al and Latoya, the interactions they described with c.o.s captures the saturation of surveillance and the encumbrance of self-

surveillance. Prison through the visible and unverifiable (Foucault, 1995) surveillance by the c.o.s controls inmates' bodies at all times and in all spaces.

A Smile for Resistance

For Al, when he awoke too early, before the daily schedule officially began, he was targeted as a body out of place and told to return to bed. He was not allowed to get up early and brush his teeth, and there are consequences for beginning the day before the day begins in prison. The c.o. told him to return to his bunk. In resistance to the order to return immediately to his bunk Al punched the wall. In response the c.o. told him to come downstairs in order to write him up. In prison refusing to obey a command is a violation of a direct order and an automatic write up. Al recounted:

That morning it (was) like real early like 6:30 in the morning. I jumped up out of bed. He (the sergeant) told me to go back in my room. I don't know why. I was brushing my teeth then. He told me they had already made chow call. That I had missed it. They hadn't made chow call or anything yet, and I knew it, so I got mad, punched the door. He told me to come downstairs. I was mad. I thought about it, like I was fixin' to hit him on my way down the steps. "Aw, it ain't even worth it." (Then) he ran up the steps. He got up in my face. So I couldn't let him do that to me.

Al was angry that he could not simply rise at will and brush his teeth to get ready for chow call. The c.o. saw his movement and told him to return to his room. When Al told him he was waiting for chow call, the c.o. lied to Al and said he had missed chow call. Punching the wall signaled to the c.o. that Al disagreed with his command and demonstrated a moment of control that Al exerted over his own body. His gesture only injured himself but threatened and therefore, ruptured the prevailing power in the space he and the c.o. shared. He communicated to the sergeant that although he knew that he might prevent him from going to breakfast, he would not prevent him from punching the door. This violation of the control of the physical, the body, although temporary, jeopardized the control the sergeant exerted over Al's body and movement. When Al punched the door, the sergeant retaliated with another command and the imminent write up.

Al shared that he remembers struggling to decide how to navigate the situation that at 6 o'clock in the morning had escalated from brushing his teeth to an impending write up. Knowing that

a physical encounter would place him in segregation or HCON (High Security Maximum Control Unit), he decided as he was walking down the stairs that hitting the c.o. as well as the door “ain’t even worth it.” But then the c.o. came up the stairs toward Al, violating his space and taunting him verbally and symbolically about the absence of his freedom. With a stick in his hand he invited Al to “just give (him) a reason.” Inviting confrontation is a way for the c.o. to legitimate the physical manifestation of control over the bodies of prisoners. And acknowledging the opportunity to use force against Al re-established the hierarchy of power in prison. Al described the incident as it escalated.

Cause they’re right up on me they’re like, “just give me a reason, just give me a reason.” He had a stick in his hand, so I just started smiling at him. I thought it was funny. I like, ‘why you gotta act like this?’ I started laughing at him. He got real mad, took me in front of the office.

Al explained that on the way to the office the sergeant forgot and “only put one handcuff on” him. He told the sergeant that he could not break him. “Man, you can lock me up; you can beat me up; it don’t matter to me. I’m still doing time, you can’t break me. It’s all mental to me. You can’t break my mind.” Al mocked the c.o. and the system he represented in a move to puncture the face validity of the system itself. He named the control that blankets the prison as ineffective, farcical. Naming the control as farce threatened the c.o. in a different way and in order to re-instantiate his power and invite a situation where he could exert it physically over Al, the sergeant told his c.o.: “If he says one more word, spray him. ... Take him down. Take ‘im down and I make sure (he) stay down (check).”

Al explained that this particular sergeant was known for using the phrase ‘take ‘im down.’ and that at that moment when he heard the serg use “take ‘im down” he started smiling as he had on the stairs. When he smiled one of the c.o.’s sprayed him with mace. As the c.o.s pray him, Al saw one of them raise his stick, and swung out at the c.o.s. The sergeant and c.o. grabbed him, threw him to the ground, and sprayed him again.

So I started smiling at him again, I don’t know which one of them did it, but they sprayed me, and I felt the spray, I (saw) the stick moving up, so I thought (he was) going to hit me, so I swung at one of ‘em. They didn’t know (about the) handcuffs, so I swung. They grab me, threw me on the ground, sprayed me again.

For Al, who tells this story from segregation, the panopticon that reinforces the distribution of power in his incident with the sergeant and c.o. became the literal panopticon in which he was held twenty-three hours a day for four months.

Unlike the direct and observable deployment of power through surveillance and physical force the sergeant and his correctional officer used in their confrontation with Al, a Foucauldian position on surveillance privileges the ways in which power seeps into frames of reference in self-discipline and unknowable surveillance.

Hunger and Canteen Lines

Latoya's description of her one o'clock run to get in line at the canteen always already has present the potential surveillance from and confrontation with a c.o. She never knows if, one, she will be seen running, but always assumes she will, and two, if the c.o. who surveys her dash to get in line, will document her violation of prison rules. She shared: "You know the rules. You know what I'm saying? Thing is there's no consistency here." Although arbitrariness accompanies the potential write up, it never accompanies her thoughts about the surveillance itself. For Al and Latoya, violating the logic of the panopticon is a question of consequence not of subterfuge. Latoya explained: "See our problem is, we know it's the rule, we just because everybody doesn't enforce it, then we can get away with it. But I mean when you get in trouble you know you was wrong." Latoya excuses the c.o.s commands and internalizes total responsibility as someone who honors the dominant rules of the prison. She was angry when she told her story, but she did not use her anger to re-contextualize the write-ups or encounters with c.o.s when she runs to canteen. She dichotomized the experience into rule enforcer and rule breaker even when she acknowledged that the c.o.s did not know "what it means be hungry."

Very seldom do the officers understand what it means to be hungry because they can just go up to canteen and just go up to the window, we can't. We have to stand in line. The line opens at one o'clock, and they close at 2:30, that's we have an hour and a half. You have 30-40 people in line. So I just I learned to bite my tongue.

Latoya did not deploy her hunger and the real possibility of not getting edible food as a justification for her running to canteen, instead she introduced her own hunger to provide contrast to the c.o.'s lack of hunger as a way to invite their empathy.

You're not supposed to run to the store because you can harm yourself. Not all officers enforce it, but some do. You're not supposed to run. That is an escape charge ... So I mean I may be running because I'm really really hungry and I'll run to the store out there, and they write me up, and here I go back to segregation, and I may think "OK, wait a minute now, I shouldn't go to jail for this." But then I shouldn't have broken the law. You know what I'm saying? Cause rules here but laws at home which is the same thing. There's consequences for everything you say and do.

Although she lived in a world of inconsistent and unpredictable write ups, Latoya rationalized the behavior of the c.o.s with the trope of "having a bad day." She cautioned other inmates about interacting with a c.o. on a "bad day" and excuses a c.o.'s write up if she is having a bad day.

"Officers have their days too, they come in, something going on at home, and they're just not feelin' it. They snap at you and they want to argue with you. No different than we do. We have our days, too."

Latoya was a model inmate. She internalized all reprimands she received for running to canteen as her fault, and thus neutralized her accounts of her interactions with the c.o.s. Although she acknowledged the arbitrariness of the write ups, she did not address the lack of consistency among c.o.s as a systemic problem with predictable consequences. She described discipline and control as something individual c.o.s exerted on "bad days." By neutralizing the use of surveillance in this way, she rationalized the deployment of power. In doing so she failed to provide herself with a position from which to speak as a critic. Rather than cite the arbitrariness of disciplinary actions, she justified the system that legitimated all potential disciplinary actions.

Some people call it seg, some people call it segregation, some people call it lock up, it's the same thing. Which is a good thing. I'm not going to say it's a good thing being locked up, because we're already in prison, but it gives us discipline. We have guidelines here like you do at home. You don't follow them, you break the rules, you go to segregation. You pay ten dollars when you go to segregation, but you get out. At home you get locked up, and you end up back here. You know sometimes we may think "OK, this is a little petty. I can't believe I'm going to lock up for this, but then in the long run, it's what I needed because you need discipline. If you don't get it here, you don't get it nowhere.

Segregation is both the panopticon manifest and a reminder to the inmate who falters in his self-surveillance of the consequences of her or his actions under the order of domination in prison. Segregation is a hope on custody's part that the inmate will internalize the message that the prison remains in total control of his body, and that the embodied politic is meaningless in the face of custodial domination. In other words the panopticon is "permanent in its effects." Al's description of the incident between himself and the sergeant who sent him to seg, shuts down any hope of an embodied politic in prison.

Foucault (1995) argued that once a subject is visible and knows he is visible, he "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (p. 203). Technologies of domination, metaphorically and literally, like the panopticon, regulate the body and the self. Structures, mechanisms, and modalities, allocate people, create and reinforce routines, and discipline, with order and evaluation to subjugate and stratify. Subsequently, individuals internalize the routines and discipline, and obey methods of evaluation, normalize self evaluation, and begin to respond in accordance to the exercise of power.

Moments of what one might crudely describe as fighting back in resistance, of not disciplining the body for institutional order or internalized routines, fail to alter the effects of the panopticon because self-surveillance remains. There are consequences for violating the physical the regimented containment of the body. Al could not punch the door without receiving a write up and facing another deployment of control, but he still punched the door. Although he restrained himself from lashing out when the sergeant confronted him on the stairs, he considered hitting him. His internal dialogue kept a part of him hidden from the gaze of the officers. And when he revealed to them that their control of him was incomplete, the officers became angry. He explained to the c.o.s that though they may spray him, they cannot break him. His distanced and dismissive evaluation of the control they "managed" threatened their system of power. He was ultimately violated physically

not for speaking again, which they warned him against, but rather, for smiling. The c.o.s maced him for smiling. For Al's smile was the smile of condescension, a smile from cynic, a resistor, an outlier who mocked the exercise of power itself—a smile that was unreachable, and therefore, maced into temporary submission. The hidden terrain of mental resistance was intolerable to the correctional officers.

My research allows me to utilize incidents that magnify the theoretical and lived positions of the panopticon in one of the sites for which Bentham intended the use, but Foucault's analysis enables us to expand our understanding of the saliency of the panopticon as a technology of domination that is deployed institutionally without discrimination. The control of the body is not limited to confrontations between inmates and c.o.s in a closed correctional facility, indeed includes the youngest and liveliest child in elementary school.

In *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ferguson (2001) explained that, "it is easy for a kid to get in trouble in school. It can happen at any time and any place during the school day. Rules encode the pervasive, all-encompassing power of adults over the movements' of children's bodies through the space of the day and the physical regions of the school" (p. 61-62). Perceived uncooperativeness on the part of the student may elicit a referral slip to "The Punishing Room." Ferguson described an incident between a small, fourth grade girl and the assistant principal that mirrors the parallel between the slightest physical embodiment of resistance to power, like Al's smile, and disproportionate consequences. The assistant principal asked Keisha to retrace her steps up the stairs down which she had just run so that she would ascend them with proper decorum.

(Keisha) obediently walks back down the steps in the direction she had come from and then returns making a silent, demure entrance. But there is the barest hint of parody in her primness which Russell (assistant principal) does not miss. She is acting the part of ladylike decorum rather than sincerely expressing it. He calls her over and begins giving her a proper dressing down. She stands there shifting from foot to foot, looking at him in the eye. This seems to me the correct stance since when children don't look adults in the eye but stare at the ground, the adult is likely to bark, "Look at me when I'm talking to you." He tells her to stand still, which she does. But now she is standing still one leg. So he orders her to stand straight. She puts her feet together, beginning a slight shuffling little dance from foot to foot almost as if to keep her balance. At the same time she is looking at Russell dead in the eye. He says, "Stop that dancing." Though her feet become still, her body sways ever so slightly.

He has had enough. “Okay, you can spend the day in my office. Go and tell Mrs. Tyler (the class she is going to) that you’re going to be with me today. (2001, p. 64-65)

Ferguson used this example to exemplify the policing of the children’s bodies and to introduce performance by children. The temporality of the inversion of power, Keisha’s sway, Al’s smile, is significant here. There are no lasting effects on the system of control deployed through the respective institutions in which Keisha and Al find themselves. There are no permanent changes in the deployments of power in Keisha’s school or Al’s pod. The assistant principal and the c.o.’s still disperse Keisha’s and Al’s body to other institutional sites, to “the office” and to segregation. With a luminiferous gaze, they collectively strip each gesture, sway, and breaking smile, of potential resistance and condemn any movement that is not invited.

I want to pause a moment at this point and suggest that the confrontation that Keisha had with Mr. Russell could have been otherwise. As I lifeguard I yelled frequently at children as they rounded the cement corner of the shallow end in a hot sprint for the cool water of the deep end. Granted my choices were limited: I could command “Walk.” Or the more suggestive, seductive, “Slow down,” or the always effective, “Don’t Run!” – but it never occurred to me to make a child return to his starting point and walk the route he had just run. Perhaps that was because I worked at a site designed for leisure, play, and occasional exercise and not a one of discipline and routinization. The point I want to make is that Mr. Russell had options. The choices he made initiated the deployment of particular modalities of power that resulted ultimately in an oppressive confrontation. And I argue that although the incident between Al and the c.o.s occurred in a different site, that the sergeant had options in his choice of response to Al as well.

Negotiating Communication Routes

As the confrontations that Travieso and True shared indicate, there is a range of response in the power relations that exist between inmates and c.o.s. Although infuriated by the racist slur he

heard a c.o. make, Travreso uses the “communication route” (Foucault, 1995, p. 28)—bureaucratized information that subjugates through the process of objectifying experience for the purposes of control—established by those in authority to challenge the c.o.’s language. Travreso shared the following incident: “I walked to the canteen buy me some chips, soda and some soup, so I’m coming back, I open the door and I heard this Black officer talking about ‘fucking wetbacks’. So I’m like, ‘Yo, what’s you mean?’ You know what I’m saying?”

Travreso chose to take his food to his dormitory instead of confronting the officers the moment he heard one say, “fucking wetbacks.” When he returned he didn’t ask the c.o. what he meant at all, playing by the house rules, he asked simply for a grievance form. The c.o. anticipating the content of the grievance taunted Travreso with the request that he carefully take down the correct information. “I came back,” Travreso said, “‘Let me get a grievance. I don’t like what I heard.’ He thought I was joking, you know what I’m saying?” Realizing Travreso was serious, the c.o. responded to Travreso with: “‘Make sure you write my name right.’ He was teasing me, man.” Travreso used a racial slur as an analogy to amplify his resolve. “‘How would you like it if I walked around and said fucking niggers?’ He didn’t like it,” Travreso explained.

Travreso reasoned that he knew he could not hit the c.o., because then he would go to HCON, and he did not want to go to HCON. He decided to use the communication route established typically to report on inmates. He uses it instead to report on c.o.s. “We went to the serg’s office and (the c.o.’s) talking about ‘I don’t know what ‘wetbacks’ means;’ (The serg) told his officer to step out.” Once Travreso was in the office alone with the sergeant, he asked the serg,

“So you know me right?” “Yes.” “Well, I don’t need this.” I ripped the grievance up and put it in the trashcan so that’s when we started speaking man to man, you know what I’m saying? “Look man, I ain’t new at this, I read books, and I know what’s going on, so you cannot tell me that if a person spit in your face you’re going to stay like this.”

Travreso sat still with his arms crossed. “I was just explaining to him, ‘The racist thing ain’t never going to stop.’ Man, Mexicans they see a Chinese man, they do not look at him like a piece of dirt, they treat him with respect ... They treat you right, because you’re in our country.” In response to

Travreso's comments about race, the sergeant told him his own story about a racist slur during a wrestling match in high school. The serg told Travreso that when he was young, "he used to be one of the best wrestlers in school. He said this white dude called him a 'nigger' and all this and all that, and he went crazy and broke his arm and everything (during a match)." The sergeant encouraged Travreso to moderate his responses to racist language. "Basically, he said, 'Don't let words get to your head ... little things mess your life up.' So I listen to what he said and I stop all that."

Travreso embodies a Mexican identity, a "wetback" to the c.o. and an object of his surveillance. Travreso cannot embody agency. The c.o.s assumed he was joking with them when he requested a grievance form. "He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1995, p. 200). They do not hear him communicating with them as a subject until he uses a racial slur of their embodied politic to garner their attention.

In Travreso's description of his encounter with the c.o.s, he utilized his knowledge of "books" as a contrastive element when he spoke to the c.o.'s sergeant. He distanced himself both from the racist remarks that the c.o. made and from the prison population when he told the sergeant: "I ain't new at this. I read books, and I know what's going on. So, you can't tell me that if a person spit in your face, you're going to stay like this." There was a second critique he offered the sergeant. He had condemned racist slurs, but also he was inviting the sergeant to reflect on the dynamic between inmate and c.o. He acknowledged that in the circumstance where "fucking nigger" was used, he would expect, as he shared, a response. He let the sergeant know that he was choosing to use the system the c.o.s themselves utilized to document his response, intonating, that his choice was just one along a spectrum of choices.

This moment that Travreso and the sergeant shared when the sergeant told Travreso one of his own experiences with racism represents a manifestation of power that comes from an unpredictable space, but as Foucault reminds us "power comes from everywhere" (1990, p. 93) which means exercised in "the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations."

Relations of power are not in position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations. (1990, p. 93)

The way in which Foucault posited the relationships through which and in which power is situated, (albeit temporarily), illuminates the space and discourse on racism that Travieso and the sergeant shared. The sergeant could have told Travieso about his experience on the wrestling mat as a way to mollify his future interactions with racist c.o.s, but Travieso did not interpret the sergeant's storytelling this way. He believed that when he threw away his grievance, that he altered the typical deployment of control in the prison setting. He explained: "That's when we started speaking man to man." He eschewed the communication route that would have reinforced the dominating system of surveillance, and chose instead to candidly speak to the sergeant. The subjectivities of Travieso and the sergeant prime them for the moment they communicate about issues of racism.

Deploying Language

True saw the dynamics between c.o.s and inmates as a game that they play in prison: the treatment of adults like children, and indeed c.o.s have told me to treat inmates like children. True observed blatant condescension in the tone the c.o.s used, but assessed their use of language as careful, and strategic, so that their words would not threaten their position of authority. Their intonations and mannerisms taunted the inmates, but their language remained open to a neutral interpretation.

They just feel as if they (are) smarter than you they know more than you, therefore they feel (more) powerful than you and that makes them above you, you know. So they just try to attempt to insult your intelligence This prison in particular they treat you like little children; they try to treat you like adults in a childish way ... by, psheew, you know, it's a way that you say things.

True did not admit that the c.o.s were smarter than the inmates, and this is an important point. He did not think they were smarter, he argued that they just "feel as if they (are) smarter). Indeed, True participated in the same façade of neutral communication that the c.o.s did. So when he observed

custody procedures that c.o.s mishandled, he used elevated language and reasoning to challenge their mistake. The c.o.'s could not reprimand him for using logic and could not follow the maneuvers and implications he made in his deployment of language. True confessed:

I do it, too. The officers, they may be doing something wrong, and I will break things down so simple and they get mad, because I'm right and I may have stepped on a couple of their toes but at the same time I haven't done anything wrong so you know so maybe throw a couple words in there they might not know exactly what it mean. I'm throwing my vocabulary around. They don't like that. I mean a lack of education is not a write up. I didn't I didn't do nothing I just talking ... They can't write me up because they don't understand.

True knew he was stepping "on their toes" and making them "mad" but backed off or moved on before an exchange became a write up. True explained that their anger came from their inability to critique his explicit logic and language. He shared cleverly that "their lack of education is not a write up." In contrast to Travreso, True seemingly functioned under the radar of the communication routes structured into the oppressive dynamics that exist between inmates and c.o.s. He used language instead as his politics and his ability to re-negotiate implied and inferred meaning from the explicit to maneuver away from bureaucratized power.

However, True followed his small victories over the c.o.s with a reminder to himself to be careful. The joy and success at mocking both the game with which the c.o.s antagonize the inmates and the c.o.s lack of education was framed by True's own reminder to himself about surveillance and the ultimate lack of control he has over his own conditions in prison. "I gotta stop doing that cause I don't want anybody to fight with me."

In these examples the c.o.s deploy force, overt coercion, and antagonism. There is no seduction. The c.o.s are not tricksters who maintain power through subterfuge and ideology. They exert the state's brute force over the inmates. With the exception of Latoya, the students learned to navigate the strategies of the system. True and Travreso introduced knowledge to this system and performed resistance based on the power they believed claims to legitimate knowledge have. When True tossed around his vocabulary because he knew "their lack of education is not a write up" and when Travreso told the sergeant that he read books because he wanted to legitimate his judgment of

the c.o.'s racist slur, they challenged the assumptions the c.o.s produce about the stereotypical inmate. And they signaled that they owned a critique of the power and the system they saw, even as they recognized that they were subject to it.

Although Al used language instead of a physical confrontation as his resistance to the c.o.s who lied to him about chow call, he did not walk away from the incident as True and Travreso did. His language was an explicit challenge to the authority and power the c.o.s executed. He knew that he, too, was subject to the system, but he problematized the idea of power for the c.o.s: "You can lock me up ... but you can't break me ... you can't break my mind." He cited the space where the authority and control of the c.o.s failed. He did not believe as Latoya did that the kind of discipline he witnessed in prison was "needed."

When Latoya shared her stories about prison that involved correctional officers, her emphasis circled back to the system of actions and consequences that manifest themselves in the prison environment. Her discussion about discipline rationalized the use of negative reinforcement in inmate policies. That is to say, she neutralized her negative experiences with correctional officers and focused on the negative reinforcement as a learning opportunity; for example, a write up that sent her to segregation for running to canteen was useful, because the punishment taught her to acknowledge and respond to systems of authority, control and behavior modification. She was subjected to discipline in a system that used punishment as a means of behavioral control, and she internalized the discipline as something that which she "needed." She explained that there were rules in the world, too, and if people didn't learn to follow the rules in prison, they recidivate. Compared to Michael's salvation, although radically different in orientation, Latoya's salvation provided her with a way to make meaning of her experience not only in prison but specifically in her interactions with correctional officers in prison. Framing discipline, which is unavoidable in prison, as a lesson that she needed, Latoya produced justifications that neutralized her negative experiences with c.o.s.

CHAPTER 9

PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION

Everybody knows that the dice are loaded
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed
Everybody knows that the war is over
Everybody knows the good guys lost
Everybody knows the fight is fixed
The poor stay poor and the rich get rich
That's how it goes
Everybody knows

Everybody knows that the boat is leaking
Everybody knows that the captain lied
Everybody got this broken feeling
Like their father or there dog just died

Everybody talking to their pockets
Everybody wants a box of chocolates
And a long stem rose
Everybody knows ...

Everybody knows, everybody knows
That's how it goes
Everybody knows ...

And everybody knows that it's now or never
Everybody knows that it's me or you
And everybody knows that you live forever
Ah when you've done a line or two
Everybody knows the deal is rotten
Old Black Joe's still pickin' cotton
For your ribbons and bows
And everybody knows ...

- excerpt from Leonard Cohen and Sharon Robinson, *Everybody Knows*

For many, many students at Chicago's nonselective high schools, it is hard to know if a decision to drop out of school, no matter how much we discourage it, is not, in fact, a logical decision.

- Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*

Education in the United States

In this chapter I want to introduce ways in which these students frame education in the United States, connections or contradictions they make about driving political forces behind education and their assessment of prison education. These evaluations of education and prison education are representative articulations of the issues that other students shared.

All of the students argued that education is important in securing legal work, but none of them believed that education would secure employment for a living wage. Shoran acknowledged that the process of gaining knowledge was important, but dismissed the idea that the gaining knowledge would help one secure a living wage once an inmate was released. "So education alright it might be good to obtain while I'm locked up. It's always good to gain more knowledge in anything, you know, but that don't necessarily mean it's going to help." Shoran did not speak of education for jobs in terms of training though. He did not see a correlation between capabilities and credentials and the job one receives.

Although Shoran self-identified as Puerto Rican, Indian, and Black, he knows that society sees him as a Black male who has committed felonies. He understood that even if he completed college courses and added depth to his educational experiences that the stigma of felon would follow him into an interview and potential job, or at least a job that pays a living wage.

... That's what society sees me as a Black male with felonies on his record. So I can get out of here, put on a pair of glasses, pair of slacks, and tie, cut my dreads off, you know and everything. And try and take it a whole different way. When I go into an interview for like a corporate (job), and they get my papers, and they see all these credentials and all this education. But then they were like, "Ah, what did you do first?" "Prison." "Prison? What you in prison for?" ... "We're gonna get back at you."

Shoran spoke in contrast here to the class discussions I have observed in prison about employment post-release. He did not tell me that success was predicated on who you know and how you heard

about a job opening. The deployment of cultural capital in the search for legal work is real, however, Shoran did not make the move to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). He deployed the stereotype as a Black, male, felon and the stigma attached to doing time as non-negotiable impediments to his opportunities to gain work. Shoran invites society to acknowledge its complicity in his failure to succeed.

Even though Shoran appreciated the idea of gaining knowledge for the purposes of simply gaining knowledge, he argued having an education doesn't mean that the education will help. He was aware of, as are all of the students with whom I spoke, the cost of living and the kinds of jobs that are available to them. When he said society doesn't give you a chance, he referred specifically to the range of options that were before him. A minimum wage job will not keep an individual from poverty, hunger, and a lack of housing. Having paid for the rent and the bills for his mother at age eleven, Shoran knows that work in the service industry and in particular fast food, will not yield a living wage. Without emotion, he explained to me:

I can't see going to flip no burgers, getting paid five dollars an hour, getting paid \$200 a week or whatever, that ain't even enough money to pay my rent. Feel me. So I really can't see that but then again when I want to go for a \$20 an hour job or something like that, my past is going to hold me back. Feel me. They say, you gotta bury the past, and move on, but how can you when society won't let you.

Whereas Shoran articulated the difficulties of navigating work opportunities when stereotypes prevent targeted groups from achieving viability in the political economy, True believed that the difficulties on the job market were in fact entrenched barriers in a system designed to propagate inequality in the United States.

First thing I come up with is conspiracy. Everything the U.S. is just so, I don't even know. But I mean, to me, they want to pick out the best you know, and they train you, kinda like a boot camp, from elementary they train you all the way up to high school, and to college. And that's how they pick out the best. Then they pick out the best to be lawyers, judges, technicians, or whatever, engineers to build whatever it is they want to get built, and technology. So they raise somebody from a child to make (him) do things like that.

True described a system of control, training, and surveillance in education which he linked to government-directed stratification of the workforce. He argued that the absence of new jobs was the way those in power continue to stratify the workforce.

Travreso's position reflected True's. Travreso referred to the power the government maintained through the sorting and surveillance of testing. "The government see(s) who's smart as hell, because you know the government is the one that gets the grades. So, they check grades and be like, "Oh this one's smart. We want him in there, in the secret agency, things like that." Although Travreso took on the voice of government as he reviews the achievement of the "smart as hell" students, he changed his location as the speaker when he said, "We want him" "in there" rather than "in here." In doing so, he changed the location of power from the first person as a government official to a process that happens outside his negotiated spaces—to power out "there." He could not identify with the power his imagined official used to select the "smart" students.

Democratic Equality, Social Efficiency, Social Mobility

In "Public Good, Private Good: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals," David Labaree (1997) argued that the conflicting goals of the education system in the United States generated a structure of schooling that housed internal contradictions.

From the perspective of democratic equality, schools should make republicans; from the perspective of social efficiency, they should make workers; but from the perspective of social mobility, they should make winners. In the latter view, the individual sees schools as a mechanism for producing neither a democratic society nor a productive economy but a good job. (p. 66)

Labaree used the language of public and private goods to position the arguments of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. He named democratic equality and social efficiency as public goods and social mobility as a private good. He acknowledged that over time the ideas of social mobility, consumer choice, and individual competition have emerged in the dominant discourses around education.

For the students, arguments for social mobility remained compartmentalized as they observed that only those who already had power and privilege were beneficiaries of the discourse. None of the students talked about education as something that was predicated on the ideals of democratic equality, and most of the students represented variations of the social efficiency arguments. For example, Travreso cited the size of the United States and economic growth as the reasons education existed in its form, because “Ya’ll need smart people. This is a big country (to) keep the business growing. How are you going to give a man a bank job that he don’t even know how to do math? You can’t, you just can’t.” Without education, Travreso argued, a person cannot find work.

Pushing the meaning of functionality further, True critiqued and challenged the idea of social efficiency. He designated differences between a functional system of stratified workers, and a system that functions on the denial of or unemployment of some workers.

They got profit in mind. I feel as if they (are) just thinking about themselves, because I mean the economy is in need of jobs right now, you know, and if you was really educating people to get jobs, you would provide jobs. ... So, I mean I think it’s like a hidden agenda, and it’s good to get an education, but like I said, they don’t want everybody get an education. No no no no no somebody’s got to work at McDonald’s somebody’s got to work at the Shell station, somebody’s got to cut grass, somebody got small jobs. If they wanted everybody to be educated, then who would do those jobs? So they knew what they’re doing as far as education. Everybody is not meant to succeed. They don’t want everybody to succeed.

Unlike Shoran, True argued that the system functions to prevent some people from getting an education for sustainable living. They both understand that people do not receive the same opportunities to work for a legal, living wage, but Shoran internalized the conflict and reframed the inequity in the language of choice. In first person, he shared, “I can’t see going to flip no burgers, getting paid five dollars an hour, getting paid \$200 a week—that ain’t even enough money to pay my rent.” In contrast, True framed the power behind political and economic stratification as that which is controlled by the market, the government, and privileged classes. Referring to a third party, he explained, “They don’t want everybody to get an education.”

Additionally, True argued that stratified work and illegal work were both integral parts of the system. He positioned crime as a constitutive element in the functionality of society and prison as a

revolving door. He linked low paying service industry jobs to illegal work and quoted the national recidivism rate to me as a way to buttress the connections he made between systemic control over the political economy and unemployment. He knew stigmatization hindered the likelihood of obtaining legal work at a living wage.

This is just a program that's been going on for years, centuries. Everybody's not going to be successful. They could ... if America wanted to. If they wanted to stop crime they could stop it: drugs, selling ... Everything I feel like is a 360, everything is needed to make this one big complete circle; and it's ashame how they throw crime in there to complete the circle ... It's just crazy. Just imagine the big things we don't know. Things that's going on with America that we don't even know, you know programs, kinda like the *Matrix*, you know, they say people programmed and don't even know it.

True and Shoran read Labaree's "social" mobility as purely "economic" mobility. For them social mobility, like social efficiency, benefits only those individuals who are already positioned as privileged and in spaces of access, opportunity, and valued social capital.³²

Although a skeptic, True held an enduring sense of hope for the future, perhaps because he has a son, perhaps because the hope is easier to bear than the alternative. "It's better since I was locked up. A lot of technology and different things going on and different classes. They have opportunities now, so I just want to make sure my son realizes those opportunities and that I support him and enable him to see the path he can take."

True explained that knowing the way the school systems work, and which districts to live in was important. He credited his class on education and society for teaching him about the disparities among schools. He pledged to use this information when his son starts school.

I have a son. The good thing is that I'll be out before he starts school. I'll start teaching him, help him learn more, what schools to put him in, (if) the school isn't benefiting him. I'll share how the school system's set up to target certain groups of individuals, That it depends on the school and where you stay, determine(s) whether you're successful in life or not.

³² Although Labaree frames social efficiency and social mobility as technologies that socialize and train students for the market and most of the students agree that education helps secure a job, for most of the students all three of these positions still fail. Educational issues are not about just cultivating teachers who care, or an engaging curriculum, or reflective learning around issues of discipline. The education system is about the political economy and class issues, the systemic economic imperialism in the United States, and the colonization of classes.

Prison Education

For Al and Ladybug, prison education provided “hope” and motivation for success post-release. Although skeptical about the connections between prison education and job success in the real world, Travreso believed that the programs were “good” too. He believed that correctional education existed, because “kind” people care about what happens to men and women who are incarcerated.

Shoran shared Travreso’s skepticism about post-release opportunities, but vehemently disagreed with Travreso’s assessment of intent and support for prison education. Shoran did not believe that any genuine support existed for correctional education.

The way I see it, it’s (prison education) all for show, you know, trying to make something look good. Trying to make it look like it’s really a correctional facility, a rehabilitation facility. But in all actuality we already know, it’s a revolving door. The government’s just as crooked as any street person ... They call prison a revolving door but they make it a revolving door ... They say you gotta bury the past and move on, but how can you when society won’t let you?”

True echoed Shoran’s skepticism. He believed that prison education was “something to just look good.” He thought there was value in learning and that classes “taught you what was really going on;” however, he argued “at the same time, it’s hard for an individual to get a job working at Burger King with a felony.” True suggested that courses focused on starting and running a business would be helpful for men and women with felonies on their records. “It could prepare you to start up your own business. It could prepare you for that. Really that’s the route a person that’s been locked up should take. Strive to have their own business.” True asserted that knowing how to start a business would allow “felons” to avoid the stigmatization and high rejection rate associated with completing job applications.

For True and Shoran, education will fail in the battle to overcome the stigma of a “felon.” Both were hard pressed to believe that there was a correlation between the kind or amount of education one received in school growing up, or in prison while incarcerated, and getting a job that

paid all the bills, and their critique of social efficiency included their condemnation of the use of “efficiency.” “Efficiency,” they argued, should not justify the omission workers in the market.

Ultimately, True decided that the kind of education he needed was the kind that would make him competitive in a system of social efficiency.

When you teach me, “This is what’s been going on” education, you enabled me to see things with my own eyes ... (Now) you gotta program me how to build a chair. You just taught me to (be) open minded and see things for what they are, how about, “We’re gonna build a TV, chairs, a whole entertainment system?”

In these statements, True captured the debate that I heard repeatedly among educational directors in the prisons I visited. Some wanted to see the Youth Offender Program expand and provide post-secondary education for more incarcerated men and women. Others argued that college coursework was a waste of time and resources on a population that does not care about school. These particular educational directors believed, “we need more vocational classes”—the kind of classes that would teach True how to build a chair, or a whole entertainment center.

CHAPTER 10

BEGINNINGS

“I read *A Time to Kill* three years ago. It was the first book I ever read. That’s where my love for books started. That’s one good thing about prison, I discovered books.”

- Al Chambers

Receptions

The purpose of this chapter is to share the ideas this research has generated for me. Below I introduce possible analytical and theoretical extensions of this work as well as implications for the field of education and qualitative research. I include messages for teachers from the students I interviewed and complicate claims of collaboration in feminist methodology.

This research motivates me to study the structures, discourse, and pedagogy around alternative schools and management schools. These are areas of reception for school leavers and are hinging spaces for students who have had negative experiences in school. The decisions Ladybug and Travreso, and Kevenson and Shoran made about their educational futures occurred in alternative school. Ladybug, like Travreso, flourished under the attention of her teachers at her alternative school. In contrast, the experiences Kevenson and Shoran had at their alternative schools made them “not want to go to school.” Experiences in the spaces of alternative schools seem pivotal. Coupling interpretations of the ways in which these students positioned their experiences in these spaces along with other work on alternative schools would contextualize these stories in new ways.

Reconceptualizations

Articulating some of these students' stories as counter narratives that address what works and does not work in schools and complicates the identities of the men and women who experience incarceration is crucial future work. These issues collide with these students' identities both in prison and in their stories about school while growing up.

Analytically, this research leads me now to think about the moments in narration when students marked their own re-interpretation of events. The project encourages me to explore discovery in these moments—both the discovery of alternative meanings and the discovery of identities. Mbembe's (2001) work on identity in post-colony directed my attention to issues of subjectivity and action in colonized spaces. In this work I have found that the ideas of identity presented in work on the post-colony and in critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1994; 1991) most helpful. The identities of these men and women are complicated and contingent in time and space, and I am interested in theoretical frames that may expand researchers' understandings about what stories look like in these spaces and what the process of storytelling is like in these spaces. Revisiting the ways in which identities are performed, under what circumstances, and for which audiences is fundamental to any narrative analysis. The analogy Shoran made to the experiences of both Cinderella and Prince Charming when he described his own changes in status and identity remains salient in my understandings of identity. As his own identity splintered, Shoran shattered the traditional feminist critique that I held about the fairytale. His flip challenged my assumptions about the ways in which tales shore up taken for granted critiques of gender and reframed issues of class. The re-arrangement of this story by Shoran gave me the opportunity to re-evaluate my relationship as a feminist to the tale.

Shifting Discourse

The debate about David Labaree's (1997) framework of educational philosophies is one I returned to again and again in graduate school, first as a student, and later as an instructor. For the

students in the Youth Offender Program, the arguments are moot. Neither democratic equality nor social efficiency nor social mobility capture the ways in which the students describe education in the United States. Some students renamed social efficiency as social dis-efficiency, claiming that education systems continued to serve only the privileged. Stratification of the economic market and job opportunities are apparent to these students, but not one of them argued that such stratification produces a society that is functionally efficient. For those who are allocated to spaces without capital, mobility, and privilege, for those who are disenfranchised economically, and oppressed racially, the life they endure is hardly functional. The students challenged the operational definition of “functional” with their own ethos. Even as most prepare for legal work post-release, they refuse to accept the discourse of social efficiency. In their refusal they produced the counter term of social “dis-efficiency.” They are unwilling to accept the ideology of the system even though they plan for their participation in it.

Implications

I want to mention explicitly some implications of this research, by offering some connections to areas I see in the field of education and by introducing some messages the students shared with me, in order that they may be shared with teachers.

Messages for Teachers

Teach for “Real”

These students and hundreds of thousands of students like them are struggling to find a safe and supportive, engaging school setting. The students I interviewed had some specific messages they wanted to share with teachers. The following suggestions represent the themes that emerged from their messages.

Tyte Crewdy implored teachers to teach kids “for real” and “keep the class interesting.” “They need to teach ‘em for real. They’ll learn, but if they know the teacher was for real and not taking no mess, then they would feel like they GOT to learn, or they gonna get a whoopin’.” For

Crowdy, who would take notes and then go to sleep, developing pedagogy that keeps the children's "focus on the teacher" is critical.

Although Al thought that teachers did a "great job" in elementary school, he wanted high school teachers to "teach more real world. (The teachers) gotta let them know it works this way. I never heard the word 'accessory' until I got to prison. I would have looked at it different then. They try to sugar coat things. (Teachers need to be) more realistic." For Al, teachers need to tell students what life is really like. He explained to me that growing up he did not know how the judicial system worked. Telling students what life is really like presupposes knowing what life is really like. That means looking carefully at issues of class, race, gender, and the environments in which children live and learn. This remains a challenge as white, middle-class women constitute the majority of the teaching force employed in the United States.

Avoid Humiliating Students

The message Travreso had for teachers reflected his own abusive experiences in school as a young boy. When teachers see clowning in their classrooms, Travreso argued, they ought to limit discipline to private conversations. If they must address the class, he suggested they do so in a manner that avoids embarrassment. They should not use humiliation as a strategy. They should not embarrass the student in front of the whole class. Travreso instructed:

Take him aside after class and talk to him. There will always be class clowns, but if you embarrass students in front of the class and their peers, for clowning, they will become antagonistic rather than comedians. If the teacher humiliates him, he'll be like, "She doesn't even care about me. So, I don't care about her or this class. F that." If you see somebody doing something he ain't supposed to be doing, don't try and embarrass him in front of the class, just wait 'till after class and support him. Don't make him feel like he ain't nothing. That way you gonna get everybody straight. Cause there's always going to be somebody that's trying to be funny in class. I was one of them at one time.

Travreso suggested that the teacher tell the other students to ignore the behavior and not the person.

"Don't make him feel like shit. 'Oh you ain't nobody.' You know? 'Don't pay him no mind.'

Because then he's going to get mad and really start acting up. 'Oh yeah, f--- the teacher. She don't like me. I don't like her.'" Travreso owned his identity in school as the student who clowning in class,

but he discriminated among responses he received from teachers. When a teacher assumes that clowning means a student *is* a class clown and subsequently, dismisses the part of the child's identity that is also student, she damages the relationship with the child and her teaching. As Travreso shared he did not encounter teachers that gave him an opportunity to be more than a class clown until high school.

Confront Racism (and Sexism, Classism, Ableism, and Homophobia)

Acknowledging discrimination in schools is critical. When Al moved from California to North Carolina, he encountered students who taunted him with racist insults. Subsequent fights followed, and although the administrators treated the violence as something that needed to be adjudicated, they failed to address the symbolic violence and racism directed explicitly at Al. Students should not be fighting, but the failure of authority figures to address repetitive racist taunts in Al's story was a part of the problem and oppression he experienced. Teachers and administrators who intervene in school discipline problems need to confront racial discrimination directly in their adjudication processes.

Ask about a Student's Journey

For teachers who see children who are disaffected, ask about their journeys in school. The terrible experiences Ladybug endured as a five-year-old stayed with her through middle school and high school. Children, like Ladybug, whom a former teacher has traumatized, may show indifference regardless of the care offered to them by teachers who work with them later. Ladybug needed more emotional support, and more freedom to work at her own pace in order to reconnect to an environment that was so toxic so early. Her teachers were unable to assess this need. Ladybug found a productive, albeit non-traditional, space herself when she realized how well she worked when she was sent to in school suspension.

Although these messages are specifically for teachers, I want to return also to the students' wishes to share their stories with children. Both Travreso and Al wanted younger children in elementary school to hear and think about their stories. Travreso hoped that upon hearing a particular

story a child might choose a different path. “Especially elementary and middle school (children), because in high school you’re already grown. Little kids so they can realize – I’m not saying so they can get scared, no – so they can think about it. (When) they grow up, they will (be) like, ‘I ain’t trying to go into (that).’” For True and Ladybug the commitment to help and to guide children along a different path also begins at home. They long for their sons to make better choices than they did, and they want to help them as best they can along the way.

Al dreams of starting a program for little children who may be drawn to gangs in middle school or high school.

If I manage to make enough money and everything like that (I’ll) start programs to help kids ... Most people just want to interact with them after they been in gangs, make a difference like that. I’m trying to start something where people talk like in middle schools. That’s really where everything starts at. They look at guys in high school, “Oh man, I want to do that. I want to be like them.” When I was in high school I feel like it would have made a difference in my life, and a lot of people’s lives.

Al believed that connecting with children at a young age was important. He explained that his story may have been told differently. “If they came to school in like middle school or even elementary school, fourth, fifth grade, like (said), “Hey, this is what your future might look like. If you do this, if you do that, you might do this different. Might help you out now.”

There is a longing in the telling of these hopeful interventions and messages to teachers. The students’ desires for generative moments of contact, that might redirect a child who is following the steps they did, reflect a longing for their own story re-told. In their concern and interventions for other children is a wish to re-write, and to re-tell their own story. They couple the salvation of other children to the alternate tale they craft. They imagine a tale in which they are saved as well. What they speak through their language of saving others, and what they infuse implicitly in their goals for other children is a yearning to shelter and lead the child within themselves: *“I could have taken another path. My story could have been otherwise.”* In the refiguring of their pasts that have no history outside their imagination, I hear the question echoed back to me: where were you when these children suffered?

Morally and figuratively, I choose to imagine myself both as a part of the community in which these men and women first suffered as boys and girls and as a part of the community in which they now find themselves as adults who are incarcerated. Literally, through the representations of their narratives and My Storys, I connect my story to their stories and their stories to stories of other children who suffer.

Research

Correctional Education

The Youth Offender Program provided opportunities for students to experience school in ways they never had before. For all of them going to school in prison was a positive experience. The implications for correctional research seem clear, and the director of the Youth Offender Program in North Carolina is working to expand the budget and scope of the program. Mr. Fritz Henry hopes to increase the minimum age for participation from 25 to 35 and to introduce online courses in all the facilities that currently house the program. Educational Services wants the Youth Offender Program to reach more inmates. As I mentioned in Chapter 9 there are of course debates about vocational and post-secondary education among educational directors in North Carolina and across the country. There is resistance at some facilities and limitations imposed by custody issues at others. For example, the school on the medium security side at Morrison is located on the edge of the compound. There is only one guard tower behind the school building, and since there is no other traffic at night in that area of the compound, custody shuts down the area, so that they will not have to guard the tower. Shutting the school at night means the students lose access to the library, and the school staff loses opportunities to expand their correctional education program.

Feminist Methodology

In the discourses of qualitative research, narrative, fieldwork, and subjectivity, making meaning about what collaboration looks like on the ground is complicated. Meaning is negotiated somewhere between mutual reciprocity and a hustle. Looking at the particular moments of interpreted

collaborative work has significance for the practice of qualitative research, and for the theoretical understandings related to positionality in the field. This research produced layered dynamics of both care and commitment between the students and myself. This interchange was an integral part of the study and provided a window into the issue of collaboration in feminist methodology and qualitative practices.

In closing I want to state that no matter how carefully and thoughtfully I represented these stories, my interpretations are flawed and limited. They are bound by the moments that constituted the research, and as such I invite the reader to play with alternative interpretations.

Appendix 1:
The Students

Name	Gender	Race	Age	Custody
Al Chambers	M	Chicano	21	Close
Kevenson	M	African American	22	Medium
Michael Jordan	M	Caucasian	30	Medium
Shoran	M	Puerto Rican, Indian, Black	22	Medium
Travreso	M	Mexican	21	Medium
True	M	African American	25	Paroled
Tyte Crewdy	M	African American	21	Paroled
Ladybug	F	Caucasian	26	Medium
Latoya	F	Caucasian	24	Paroled

Appendix II:

Interview Protocol

1. Tell about the classes you've taken. How were they? What about the class(es) you're taking now? How's the class going? What's it like to be in class? How are the teachers? the students?
2. What was school like growing up? the teachers? students? principals? classes? discipline?
3. What was elementary school like? the teachers? students? principals? classes? discipline? What are some of your memories?
4. What was middle school like? the teachers? students? principals? classes? discipline? What are some of your memories? How would you compare elementary school to middle school?
5. What was high school like? the teachers? students? principals? classes? discipline? What are some of your memories? How would you compare high school to middle school? Or elementary school? What do you feel are your highest achievements?
6. What's it like to be in school in here? What do other inmates think about school in prison? The classes you're taking? What's school like in prison compared to school growing up? or school out there?
7. Do you think these classes will help you when you're released? What plans do you have for your education? What about support from family? friends?
8. How old are you? Where were you born? How do you identify in terms of race or ethnicity?
9. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want me to know?
10. Is there anything you want to ask me?

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